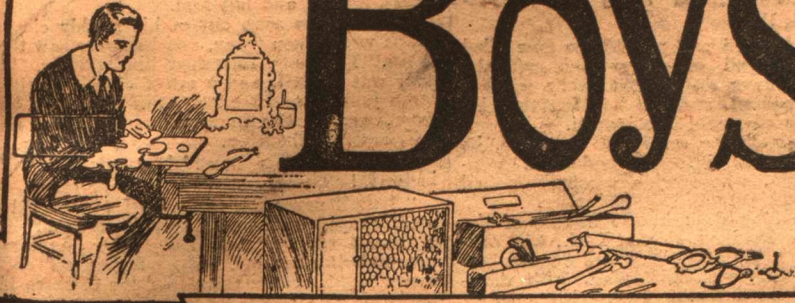


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No. 288. Vol. VI.

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**SONS
OF THE
TIDE-WAY.**

by **DAVID
GOODWIN.**

Both boys hung for a moment from the gunboat-sills, dangling over the black water. Then, relaxing his grip, Fairfax plunged down, feet foremost, into the racing tide.

(This is only one of the many exciting incidents in David Goodwin's great new story of barge-life. Now is the time to commence reading it.)

HARRY JANE
28



The Cliveden Caterers

A Laughable Complete School Tale.

By CHARLES HAMILTON.

The 1st Chapter.

Poindexter, Neville, Flynn & Co., Caterers.

"GUESS it's a big thing," said Lincoln G. Poindexter.

And Dick Neville and Micky Flynn nodded assent.

The three chums known in the Fourth Form at Cliveden as the Combine were seated round the table in No. 4 Study, talking business.

Lincoln G. Poindexter, the American chum, who prided himself upon being "business from the word go," had proposed the new scheme in the first place, and his chums had taken it up eagerly.

"For it was, as Poindexter declared, a 'big thing.' It was a bigger thing than Pankhurst and Price, the Old Firm, had ever thought of; and, besides, it meant huge profits in cash—if all went well. And with the business ability of Lincoln G. Poindexter at the head of the concern, it was bound to go well—at least, in Poindexter's opinion. In his own language, he guessed they were 'going to make things hum, some.'"

"You see, this is how it works out," said Poindexter, drawing pen, and ink, and paper towards him, and scrawling down calculations in a way comprehensible only to a Fourth-Former. "Suppose we take an average of thirty chaps spending their money in the tuckshop every week. Each chap spends various amounts, but we'll take an average of two shillings a week for each chap. That makes sixty bob—otherwise, three pounds."

"Faith, and it's a lot of money!" said Micky Flynn. "But suppose they don't spend as much as that?"

"Well, we must take an average. That average is as good as any other to start calculations upon. Given three pounds spent every week by the Fourth Form at the tuckshop, the question arises: Could the Fourth Form at Cliveden obtain better value for its money by abolishing the middleman and dealing direct with the manufacturer?"

And Lincoln G. Poindexter, a little proud of the way he had put it, leaned back in his chair and looked at his chums.

"Faith, and it's a janus ye are!" said Flynn. "Sure, we shall be savin' money hand over fist, intirely!"

"It looks like it," said Dick Neville cautiously. "But we want to look into it before we start investing cash. Can we get at the manufacturer?"

"I guess so. That's as easy as rolling off a gate. I know of one over in Carbury, where old Dawson gets a lot of his stuff. Of course, he would be just as willing to deal with us as with Dawson. We couldn't send him a retail order, but if we ordered things wholesale, we get the wholesale price, and so we come in on the ground-floor, as we say in Chicago. Three pounds worth of tuck is supplied to old Dawson at the tuckshop for about thirty bob, I reckon, and we could get it at the same figure. That leaves a clear profit of thirty bob."

Micky Flynn's eyes glistened.

"Faith, and then we could afford to sell the stuff at half-price!" he exclaimed.

Poindexter sniffed.

"Ass! Where does the Co. come in? We've got to make a working profit, or it's no good taking the trouble to run a Co."

"That's it!" said Neville. "And all profits can be further invested in the business; and it may grow to be a regular Whiteley's in time. I don't see why, in the long run, we shouldn't start supplying footballs and cricket-bats and things, as well as tarts and lemonade."

"I guess that may come in time," said Poindexter, with a nod; "but at present we'll stick to the catering. Since the school shop was closed for repairs, old Dawson in the village has been putting up his prices, and it's time something was done. Now, Poindexter, Neville, Flynn & Co., Universal Providers, will fill a long-felt want."

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

"We shall supply goods of a first-class quality at a price that will leave us a margin of honest profit," said Poindexter. "That's the way to run a successful business. Every-

body can depend on our tarts being fresh, and the ginger-pop being the right thing, and the cakes a little softer than rocks. If you fellows decide to go in for it, I guess I'll bike over to Carbury this afternoon, and make arrangements with the manufacturer."

"Good!" said Neville.

"Faith, and it's a good idea, intirely!" said Flynn. "We shall be bestowin' a boon and a blessin' on the Fourth Form at Cliveden, and rakin' in a decent little profit, and teachin' old Dawson a lesson about puttin' up his prices, and showin' the Old Firm that they aren't of much account in the Form, anyway!"

"I guess so. Of course, Panky and Price are out of this. We're not going to have them boning the idea, or trying to run the show. I guess not! They can come in as customers if they like. But this firm is to be known as Poindexter, Neville, Flynn & Co., and the committee of management will be composed of Poindexter, Neville, and Flynn. Managing-director, Lincoln G. Poindexter. Superintendent, Richard Neville, Esquire. General manager, Michael Flynn, Esq., of Castle O'Flynn. No others admitted."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is it settled, then?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then I'll buzz off," said Poindexter, getting up from the table.

"But what about the tin?" said Neville.

"You can't run a business of this kind without capital, you know."

"Oh, that's a secondary consideration, intirely!" said Poindexter, in an airy way.

"You see, most businesses are run on credit now. You take goods on tick, and sell them at a profit, and then settle with the chap who supplies you. On that system you can run a business for nothing, and make a fortune without putting any capital into it. All you want is business ability."

"And sure, we've heaps of that!" said Micky Flynn. "I don't mind takin' the business in hand and running it myself—"

"I should mind, I guess," said Poindexter.

"In a case like this, you can't do better than rely upon a keen American business man. We may require some working capital. How much can you raise?"

He went through his pockets, and Neville and Flynn followed his example. Poindexter had five shillings. Neville had ninepence, and Micky Flynn turned out a French penny, a piece of sealing-wax, and a ball of twine.

"Faith, and it isn't much of a contribution to a big business," he remarked rather ruefully. "But sure, I'll put in as much business ability as ye like."

"I guess I can do that. I'm off to Carbury now; and when I've made all arrangements, we'll put up a notice to the effect that the Cliveden Combine are starting in business as caterers. I think the thing will go off with a swing. But until then, mind, not a word to a soul!"

"Right you are!" said Neville.

"Faith, and it's as dumb as an oyster I'll be!"

And Poindexter was soon scudding away on his bicycle to take the first steps to set Poindexter, Neville, Flynn & Co. up in business as caterers to the Fourth Form at Cliveden.

The 2nd Chapter.

Pankhurst is Diplomatic.

"HALLO, Puntodger! Whither bound?" It was Pankhurst of the Fourth who asked the question.

Poindexter, as he pedalled through the big gateway, passed the two red-headed youths who were lounging there and chatting. The ground was too bad for football, and Pankhurst and Price had nothing particular to do that afternoon, and so, of course, they were ripe for mischief.

Poindexter made no reply. He pedalled on, and Pankhurst and Price stooped simultaneously and scooped up snow from the drift beside the gate.

"Let him have it!" murmured Pankhurst.

"Quite so!" grinned Price.

The two snowballs flew at the same moment. One of them burst on the back of Lincoln G. Poindexter's neck, and the other on the side of his head.

"Ow!" roared Poindexter.

He swayed on his machine, but he pedalled right on, and he was out of range before the Old Firm could gather fresh snowballs.

"Something's on," said Pankhurst, with conviction. "He wouldn't take it so quietly if he wasn't up to something, Pricey."

"Quite so."

Pankhurst was looking thoughtful. Poindexter disappeared down the road, and the auburn-haired chums turned back into the Close. Micky Flynn was punting a footer along the gravel path, and Pankhurst stopped the ball. Micky came panting up.

"Faith, and give me my ball, ye omadhaun!"

"Hold on a minute. Poindexter's just gone out—"

"Sure, and I know he has. Gimme my ball?"

"Where has he gone?"

"To Carbury. Are you goin' to gimme that ball, ye spalpeen?"

"Certainly. But what's he gone to Carbury for?"

"To deal direct with the manufacturer, of course—I mane," broke off Micky, remembering rather late that the affair was a dead secret—"I mane he hasn't gone there to do anything of the sort. That is to say, mind ye're own business, ye grinnin' gossoons, and gimme my ball!"

"What manufacturer?" asked Pankhurst.

"Howly mother av Moses! Will you gimme that ball?"

"Of course. But what is Poindexter—"

"You can't worm it out of me, Panky. It's a dead saecret. And now gimme that ball."

"Here you are," said Pankhurst; and he kicked the ball, and gave it to Micky—full on the nose, and the Irish junior sat down on the gravel with a bump.

"Arrah!" roared Micky Flynn. "Faith, and I'm kilt intirely!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Old Firm walked away, and Micky picked himself up and rubbed his nose. But Pankhurst and Price soon left off laughing. They realised that they were on the scent of something, though they could not guess what, and they were eager to learn more.

They were always "up against" the Combine, and a half-holiday when it was impossible to play football was just the time for going on the warpath.

"Blessed if I know what he meant by dealing direct with the manufacturer," said Pankhurst. "If Micky Flynn wasn't talking out of his hat, there's something on. But what sort of manufacturer did he mean? Manufacturer of what?"

"Give it up."

"We may get something out of Neville—"

Price shook his head doubtfully.

"He's closer than Flynn. He's one of those confoundedly close North-country chaps, and you'll never get much out of him."

"Not without being diplomatic," said Pankhurst loftily. "But I shall do it diplomatically. There he is, going into the gym. Come on!"

And the Old Firm cut across and intercepted Dick Neville. They stopped him at the door

of the gym. Pankhurst nodded in a friendly way.

"I hope it's going all right," he ventured. Dick looked puzzled.

"What's going all right, Panky?"

"Why, Poindexter's dealing direct with the manufacturer, you know," said Pankhurst automatically. His tone implied that he knew all about it, and Dick Neville stared in amazement.

"You—how did you know?" he gasped. Pankhurst laughed airily.

"Oh, you couldn't expect to keep it in the remark. You're not quite up to the form, you know."

"Anyway, it's our idea," grunted Neville. "If you chaps think of starting anything of the kind, you'll come in second."

"Oh, I don't know," said Pankhurst, deriding more than ever what the "idea" was.

"We could run it better than you could, know."

"I don't know anything of the sort," said Neville warmly. "We are going to supply stuff at a good deal below current prices, get just a narrow margin of profit and make the Co. pay. Our motto will be 'class quality at a margin above cost price.'"

"Good idea, too," said Pankhurst, amazed, but trying to conceal it. "Oh, we should run the show on the same lines. You couldn't do it. You haven't the ness ability. They'd probably work off the stuff on you. Besides, it's our idea, and begin anything of the sort we shall do you heavy, I warn you."

And Dick Neville walked away with a blank. Pankhurst and Price stared at one another blankly.

"Do you know what he was talking about, Pricey?" asked Pankhurst.

"Haven't the faintest idea."

"I haven't either. He thinks we know about it, and I hoped he would run on tell us—"

"Quite so."

"But he didn't," said Pankhurst. "We mind; we're on the track, and we've only to keep our peepers open. Puntodger's gone to Carbury—"

"To deal direct with the manufacturer," said Price.

"Exactly. When he comes back, he'll deal direct with the manufacturer, I suppose," said Pankhurst, rubbing his forehead. "Then he'll have to deal direct with us. Wait for him in the bike-shed."

"Ha, ha! Quite so!"

And they did.

The 3rd Chapter.

In the Hands of the Foe.

LINCOLN G. POINDEXTER came in with high spirits. The expression upon his face seemed to say that he had had a highly successful interview at Carbury. He dismounted from his bicycle at the gateway, wheeled the machine into the Close. His journey had taken up the afternoon, and it was quite dark now.

A light gleamed hospitably from the window of No. 4 Study as Poindexter wheeled his machine towards the bike-shed.

He knew that his chums were preparing in the study, ready for his return, and he pretty sharp set after his ride. He wheeled the bike into the shed, and jammed it on the stand, and the next moment he was rolling the floor in the dark, in the grasp of shadowy forms.

"Hold him, Pricey!"

"Quite so!"

Poindexter struggled fiercely.

"Lemme gerrup! Ow! You're squawking, you dummies!"

"Keep quiet, then!"

"I guess—"

"Sit on his head, Pricey!"

"Quite so!"

Poindexter gasped helplessly under the weight of the Old Firm. He hadn't had the slightest suspicion of the ambush, and he had fallen blindly into it. Price sat on his head, and Pankhurst lighted a bicycle-lantern, the light glimmered upon the scene.

Poindexter was still struggling, and Pankhurst, standing the lantern on a bench, saw his chest.

"Now, then, quiet—sit tight, Pricey!"

"Quite so!" gasped Price. "Ow-w-w-w!"

Price sprang up with a fiendish yell. His arms lashed out, and one of them caught Pankhurst across the face, and hurled him to one side. Poindexter jumped up, gasping for breath.

"You utter ass!" yelled Pankhurst. "What did you do that for?"

"Ow-w-w-w! He—he bit me!"

"Well, you should have sat tight. Catch him!"

Poindexter had made a spring for the door. Pankhurst made a spring after him, and seized him by the shoulder. They closed, struggled, and went down with the chest of the Old Firm underneath.

"Oh! Come here, Pricey! Buck up, ass!"

Price rushed to the rescue. He collared American junior, and dragged him off. Pankhurst plumped him down, and Panky pronounced rolled over on him and sat on his chest as Poindexter struggled vainly under the two of them.

"Now, then, are you going to give in?" demanded Pankhurst.

"I guess not, you scallywags!" panted Poindexter.

"Get a can of cycle-oil, Pricey, and pour it down his neck!"

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Name

Address

"We shall supply goods of a first-class quality at a price that will leave us a margin of honest profit," said Poindexter. "That's the way to run a successful business. Every-

The 4th Chapter.
The Lost Paper.

"FAITH, and what's the matter wid ye intirely?"
Collided with a motor-car?" asked Dick Neville sympathetically.

Poindexter was indeed looking rather dishevelled as he entered No. 4 Study. One of his eyes was slightly discoloured, there was a splash of red on his nose, his face was muddy and his hair ruffled, his clothes dirty, and his collar torn out, and his necktie streaming over his shoulder.

Neville and Flynn stared at him—and no wonder! Poindexter sank into a chair and gasped.

"I've been through it, I guess!"
"You look like it!" said Micky. "Have a cup of tea, old dear?"
"I guess so."

Poindexter drank the tea and pulled his chair up to the table. He was feeling very done up, but he recovered himself as tea proceeded.

"But what on earth's the matter?" asked Neville. "How did you get into that state?"

"It's the Old Firm!"

Neville looked glum.

"Panky knows all about it," he remarked.

"I guess not, or he wouldn't have laid for me in the bike-shed to get on to the wheeze," said Poindexter. "He doesn't savvy yet."

"But—he led me to suppose—the horrid bouncer! He was only pulling my leg all the time, then!" exclaimed Neville excitedly.

Poindexter grinned.

"I guess so! They're not on to the wheeze, but they're on the track. It cost me five bob to stand a feed to Fish and King to get out of their clutches, or they'd have had the paper."

"What paper?"
"The list of things Jones & Co. are sending us. Jones & Co. are the manufacturers in Carbury who supply Dawson's shop. They're a good firm, and I've made jolly good terms with them, I guess. If the list had fallen into Pankhurst's hands, I guess he would have known the whole game from start to finish."

"My hat, it's lucky he didn't, then! Let's have a look at it!"
"Here you are!"

Poindexter thrust his hand into his breast-pocket and drew out several papers. The one he sought was not among them, and he felt in his pocket again. Then he went through his other pockets, his face growing very serious.

Neville and Flynn watched him anxiously.
"You haven't lost it!" exclaimed Neville.
"Faith, and sure ye—"

"It was in my breast-pocket," said Poindexter, beginning to be alarmed. "I had it there safe enough. They can't have taken it; we licked them, and left them on the ground. They can't have it!"

"Perhaps you dropped it in the rumpus."
"I—I might have."
"Faith, and they'll find it then—"

Poindexter jumped up.
"It was very dark there," he said; "only a cycle-lamp, you know—if I've dropped it, very likely they wouldn't see it. Let's go and have a look."

Careless of the tea on the table, the chums of the Fourth rushed out of the study, and dashed downstairs. They left the study door open in their haste, and did not see or care that two fat juniors, coming along the passage, stopped, looked in, and grinned gleefully at the sight of sausages and bacon on the table. The Combine were thinking only of the lost paper.

They scudded down the stairs, bolted out into the Close, and tore round to the bicycle-shed.

It was in darkness.
Pankhurst and Price were gone. Had they found the paper? If so—But the Combine would not think of it. It was certain that Poindexter had lost it in the struggle, and if the Old Firm had found it, the game was up.

Poindexter struck a vesta as they entered the shed. He held up the match, and it glimmered on the bicycles, and on something white that lay under a machine near the wall.

The American junior uttered an exclamation.
"There it is!"
Neville picked it up. Poindexter struck another match, and Neville unfolded the paper,

and saw that it was a long, type-written list of goods.

"That's it, I guess! They never saw it!"

"I suppose not!"

"They wouldn't have left it there if they had. It just dropped—you see, it was rather big for my pocket, and no wonder it fell out—and it was pretty shadowy here. They never saw it!"

"Ha, ha! They'd be willing to kick themselves if they knew!"

"I guess so."

Neville glanced at the paper again. The list of goods was a long one, and it was headed:

"Goods to be delivered to Master Poindexter, at Cliveden College, on Thursday."

"Then they're coming to-morrow," said Neville eagerly.

"I guess so. The sooner, the quicker, you know—especially now the Old Firm's on the track."

"Right! We'll start the new tuckshop to-morrow, and if that doesn't make the Old Firm take a back seat, I'll eat my topper!"

And, greatly relieved by the discovery of the lost paper, the Combine left the shed, and returned to the School House. There was a sound of knives and forks going merrily as they came up to their study.

They entered quickly, and found Fish and King sitting at the table and enjoying a good feed. Most of the eatables had disappeared, and the fat faces of the juniors were shining with satisfaction, showing where the eatables had gone. The Combine stared at the two gluttons of the Fourth, almost petrified.

Fish looked round with a greasy grin.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he said. "We couldn't get a pass down to the village to-night, Punt, so we thought we'd accept your invitation to a feed in this study."



Poindexter wheeled his machine into the shed and jammed it on the stand, and the next moment he was struggling fiercely in the grasp of two shadowy forms.

"My word," said King, "we've enjoyed it! There wasn't what you'd call enough; but as there's the feed to come to-morrow as well, we don't mind."

"You—you don't mind?" gasped Poindexter. "You've scoffed our tea—and you don't mind? I guess we mind! Oust 'em!"

"Here, hold on! Ow!"

"My word! Ow—oh!"

But the "ows" and "oh's" of Fish and King were not regarded. The Combine seized them, dragged them off their chairs, and yanked them to the door.

There, three boots helped them through the doorway, and the fat juniors rolled on the linoleum in the passage.

"Our tea's wolfed," grunted Neville; "they may as well have what's left, though!"

There was nothing left but some warm water and milk. Neville took the jugs, and jerked their contents over the two juniors, as they staggered up.

Fish and King yelled and bolted, and went down the stairs three at a time. And the Combine, somewhat relieved, closed the door of their study.

The 5th Chapter.
In the Secret.

"HA, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"My only hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

roared Pankhurst.

"He, he, he, he!" shrieked Price.

"Did you ever—"

"No, I never—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Pankhurst and Price were in their study. Pankhurst was stretched in the east chair,

laughing like a hyena. Price was sitting on the table, cackling away like an alarm clock.

The Old Firm were in convulsions.

It was the joke of the season to them, and they were enjoying it.

Pankhurst wiped the tears from his eyes at last.

"So that's the wheeze!" he sobbed.

"They're going to start in the catering line! And they think we don't know anything about it! Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!"

"Goods to be delivered to Master Poindexter on Thursday!" murmured Pankhurst.

"And a list of 'em. One hundred tarts, one hundred scones, one hundred cream puffs. My Aunt Matilda, it makes me feel hungry to think of it!"

"Quite so! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Caterers, by Jove! And they've left us out of it. If we come in, we come in as customers—I don't think!"

"Oh, dear!" Price calmed himself at last.

"But what was the idea of leaving the paper in the bike-shed, Panky? We didn't have time to half read it through."

"We didn't want to, kid. We only wanted to know what was up. And I left it in the bike-shed, my son, because I can look ahead further than you can, my pippin. You trust your uncle, Pricey, my boy!"

"Quite so!" said Price. "But I don't see—"

"Pointpusher is bound to miss the paper, and go to the bike-shed to look for it. If he couldn't find it—"

"Oh, I see!"

"Time you did, my son. Now, he'll find it—I shoved it under a bicycle to give the impression that we hadn't touched it—and he'll be satisfied that two young gentlemen about our size don't know anything about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So they'll go ahead with the catering," grinned Pankhurst; "and we shall go ahead with the opposition. They couldn't let us into the little game, so it becomes our bounden duty, as heads of the Fourth Form at Cliveden, to bust the little game up for them, and knock the whole scheme sky-high."

"Quite so!"

"Let the goods be delivered to Master Poindexter on Thursday," grinned Pankhurst. "I fancy we shall find some way of getting at them—what?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Especially as they're not on their guard, my son. And when they come to open their tuckshop, and start catering—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There will be a surprise in store for the tinned-beef Combine, I imagine."

And the auburn-haired chums laughed in chorus.

The 6th Chapter.

Pankhurst Improves the Tarts!

THE next day there were five juniors at Cliveden who were extremely pleased with themselves. They were, of course, the Combine and the Old Firm. The Combine were pleased because everything was going swimmingly, and their rivals knew nothing about the scheme. The Old Firm were pleased because everything was going swimmingly and they knew all about the scheme.

But Panky and Price were careful to keep their satisfaction a secret. It was not time yet to let their rivals know they were "on" the scheme. They chuckled in private to a great extent, but when they met the Combine they looked as solemn as owls.

After morning school, the Combine returned to their study, instead of going out into the open air for exercise as usual. They had important matters to settle. They conned over the list from Messrs. Jones & Co., and, however they looked at it, it was satisfactory. The goods were being supplied at wholesale prices, and Messrs. Jones only needed to know that Lincoln G. Poindexter was the son of Mr. Poindexter, the American millionaire, to trust him to any extent.

Lincoln G. had obtained credit to the extent of three pounds; and for three pounds, Messrs. Jones had supplied as much as the juniors could have purchased retail at the tuckshop for double the money. The amateur caterers were set up in stock for a fortnight, if the goods sold only at the usual rate.

By that time the tarts and buns would be pretty stale, true; but Poindexter confidently predicted that the cheapness and quality of the goods supplied would bring a rush of custom that would clear the stock out in a few days.

"We have calculated on a basis of two bob weekly from the Fourth-Formers," he remarked. "We did that as an average. The average might only be a shilling a week, but never mind that! The other Forms won't be prohibited from dealing with us; and they're pretty certain to come at first, anyway, out of curiosity. If we get regular customers in the Fifth and the Sixth, we're made men!"

"We may get all Cliveden dealing with us, from the First Form to the Sixth," said Neville hopefully. "It really all depends upon pleasing the first customers, and we can do that by—"

"By supplying first-class goods at a low price, and strict attention to business."

"Faith, and ye speak like a handbill, Punt-dodger, darling."

"It's time to draw up the notice on the subject, I guess. It must be posted up in the hall directly after afternoon school, so I will

take it in my pocket ready. Now, how shall it go?"

"Begin with 'Notice,' in big letters—"

"Look at this: 'Notice! Messrs. Poindexter, Neville, Flynn & Co., Caterers—"

"Faith, and why not universal providers? It sounds grander."

"But we're not universal providers yet. We don't want fellows coming in and ordering bicycles and furnished maisonettes."

"Ha, ha! No!" said Neville. "Caterers will do. We are caterers, and it's always a good idea to put as much truth as possible in an advertisement. Go ahead!"

"Messrs Poindexter, Neville, Flynn & Co., Caterers, have much pleasure in announcing the opening of their new establishment in No. 2 box-room. They guess that by strict attention to business—"

"Ha, ha! This isn't a guessing competition, is it?"

"Well, they reckon by strict attention to business to—"

"Rats! They intend by strict attention—"

"Oh, very well! They intend by strict attention to business to make the business boom, and to induce all the Forms at Cliveden to rally round them!"

"Good!"

"Then, 'Support home industries!' in large type! 'Messrs. P., N., F. & Co., have entered into engagements with a first-class wholesale firm for the supply of grub—"

"Not grub—"

"I guess that's what we're dealing in at present."

"It doesn't sound well. Make it comestibles."

"I don't suppose the youngsters will know what comestibles are."

"You can't use grub in a manifesto, old chap; it's vulgar."

"Well, then, for the supply of tuck. Tuck's a good word, and they will know what it means. Messrs. P., N., F. & Co., hope, by supplying first-class goods at a shade above cost price to merit the custom of the inhabitants of Cliveden, and by strict attention to business—"

"You've got that in."

"It's a good sentence, though."

"Faith, and I don't see why it shouldn't go in twice, Dicky, darling."

"It sounds rather rotten twice over, though."

"I guess we can think of something else."

"And by close attention to the requirements of their numerous customers to merit a continuance of their kind patronage, for which they return many thanks."

"Who return many thanks?"

"We do—the firm."

"You make it sound as if the customers did."

"Oh, it's no good being hypercritical! I guess that's a jolly good notice."

"Oh, all right!" said Neville. "After all, they will know what we mean, very likely."

And so the notice was written out, and when the juniors went into the class-room in the afternoon, Poindexter had it folded up in his pocket, all ready to post up on the notice-board when lessons were over.

Everything was certainly going swimmingly. Poindexter had asked permission of his Form-master, Mr. Lanyon, to use the box-room for the new tuck-shop, and good-natured little Mr. Lanyon had consented. After all, it was a good idea the boys had, if it worked well—though that was a rather extensive "if."

During afternoon lessons the juniors in the class-room heard the sounds of a heavy box being carried upstairs, and the Combine looked at one another with grins of satisfaction.

"The goods are delivered!" murmured Poindexter.

"Faith, and ye're right, Puntdodger, darling. They'll be all ready for us to open shop after school—"

"Hush, Panky is looking at us!"

"Faith, but—"

"Shut up!"

The juniors waited eagerly for the termination of the afternoon's lessons. All three members of the Combine received lines for inattention to work, but little they cared for that. A little later in the afternoon Pankhurst was in hot water. He received permission from Mr. Lanyon to refill the inkpot in his desk from the big bottle kept in the cupboard beside the fireplace. And in filling the inkpot, he contrived somehow to upset the bottle, and his cuffs and hands were smothered in ink.

"My hat!" exclaimed Pankhurst.

Mr. Lanyon blinked at him through his glasses.

"Dear me, Pankhurst, how very clumsy! You will take twenty lines for being so excessively clumsy, Pankhurst!"

"Yes, sir," said Pankhurst meekly.

"Put the bottle away, and go and wash your hands at once. Dear me, your shirt-cuffs are inky, too. Change your shirt as well, Pankhurst."

"Yes, sir."

"Cack-handed ass, isn't he, Pricey?" murmured Neville.

But Price only grinned. He did not believe that Pankhurst had been so clumsy as he appeared.

Pankhurst left the class-room. He hurried away and washed his hands; but that occupied him about half a minute. Then he tore away to the housekeeper's room.

"If you please, have the things arrived for Poindexter?" he asked meekly.

"Yes, Master Pankhurst. The box has been taken up to No. 2 Box-room," answered the housekeeper unsuspectingly.

"Thank you, ma'am!" said the delighted Pankhurst.

He tore off to No. 2 Box-room. There, sure

enough, was a huge packing-case addressed to Master Poindexter, Cliveden College, and bearing the name of Jones & Co., Carbury, in stencilled letters on the outside.

Pankhurst looked at it gleefully. Then he looked at his watch.

"I'm safe for ten minutes," he murmured.

"That ought to be enough—I can get this case open, and fastened up again, and never a sign of it—and a little ink and quinine in the tarts, and scones, and buns. Ha, ha, ha! I rather think the Combine won't do such a roaring trade as they anticipate, first go-off! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Pankhurst was busy for the next quarter of an hour.

Mr. Lanyon, who was an absent-minded gentleman, forgot the junior's absence till he returned to the class-room. Then he blinked at him.

"Dear me, you have been a long time, Pankhurst!"

"Have I, sir?"

"Go to your seat."

Pankhurst went to his seat. He was very quiet and attentive during the remainder of the lesson. The Combine hardly glanced at him. They had no suspicions. A wild desire to burst into a roar of laughter seized Pankhurst every minute or so; but he heroically controlled it.

The 7th Chapter.

A Rush of Customers.

"DISMISS!" came the welcome order at last, and the Fourth Form were free. Poindexter, Neville, and Flynn were the first out of the class-room, and they hurried to the notice-board in the hall.

Poindexter drew out the written notice from his pocket, and felt for a pin. His action at once attracted attention, and there were a crowd of juniors round him at once.

"Hullo, Punt! What's up?"

"This notice," replied Poindexter cheerfully.

"But what's it about?"

"Can't you read?"

The notice was pinned on the board. An ever-increasing crowd of juniors gathered round it, and it was read aloud by half a dozen fellows at once, amid growing interest and excitement.

"NOTICE! Messrs. Poindexter, Neville, Flynn & Co., Caterers, have much pleasure in announcing the opening of their new establishment in No. 2 Box-room. They intend, by strict attention to business, to make the business boom, and to induce all the Forms at Cliveden to rally round them."

"SUPPORT HOME INDUSTRIES!"

Messrs. Poindexter, Neville, and Flynn had entered into engagements with a first-class wholesale firm for the supply of tuck, and hope by supplying first-class goods at a shade above cost price to merit the custom of the inhabitants of Cliveden, and by close attention to the requirements of their customers to merit a continuance of their kind patronage, for which they return many thanks.

(Signed) LINCOLN G. POINDEXTER, RICHARD NEVILLE, MICHAEL FLYNN.

"My only single aunt!" said Pankhurst.

"Is this an exercise in tautology, Punt?"

"I guess it's a business notice."

"And you're really starting a tuck-shop in the box-room?" said Panky, with an air of innocent wonder.

"I guess so."

"Faith, and sure we'll knock ye sky-high this time, Panky!" said Micky Flynn. "This is where the Combine comes out strong."

"Yes, rather," said Dick Neville emphatically. "Gentlemen, the new establishment will be open at half-past five. Roll up in your thousands."

"Yes, rather," said Fish greedily. "I say, is it honest Injun about the shade above cost price?"

"I guess so."

"What are you charging for a twopenny tart?"

"Three-halfpence."

"And it's just as good?"

"Faith, it's exactly the same as the shop article, and better!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess it's up to the mark," said Poindexter. "And penny buns are two a penny, and fresh as daisies. Butterscotch, half usual price, toffee the same, and liquorice ditto. Roll up and see."

And the Fourth Form decided to roll up. Fish and King had not yet been able to get away to the village for their feed, and the school shop was closed for repairs, and they had five shillings burning holes in their pockets. Other juniors were eager to sample the stuff at the new establishment. Gatty declared that the Combine couldn't make it pay, but that was no reason why they shouldn't have all their stock bought up while prices were so low. Philpot, the cad of the Fourth, and the amateur Shylock of the Form, was already revolving in his mind how he might buy up quantities from Poindexter & Co., and retail them at higher prices when the Combine had gone "bust."

In short, the interest in the new venture was great and general.

And it was not only in the Fourth, either, that it existed. The Fifth Form were not above saving an honest penny by patronising the new cheap firm.



The Combine, vainly resisting, were overborne by the rush, and went sprawling among their goods; and then their revengeful customers pelted them with tarts and buns and scones and cakes till Poindexter & Co. were in a state that was absolutely indescribable.

Crane and Cuffy, of the Fifth, read the notice, and grinned over it, and decided to give the new establishment a look-in, and they strolled along at half-past five with several other Fifth-Formers. At half-past five, the stairs up to No. 2 Box-room were crowded. Fourth Form, and Third Form, and Remove elbowed one another there, crowding to the opening of the new tuck establishment.

The box-room door was open, and the juniors crowded in. The new shop wore a very business-like aspect.

A counter had been formed, extending right across the room. It was built up of a row of boxes and trunks, with planks laid on the top to make a level surface. Over the planks tablecloths were spread, presenting a very white and neat appearance.

Behind the counter were the Combine, in their shirt-sleeves, their sleeves rolled up, and with white aprons on. They looked business-like and busy.

On the counter were piles of tarts, heaps of buns and scones, mountains of cake, arrays of lemonade and ginger-beer bottles.

"My hat," said Pankhurst, "what a show! It makes me feel hungry."

"Quite so."

"But I don't think we'll start just yet, Pricey."

"Ha, ha! No."

"Well, this looks all right," said Greene. "What price these twopenny tarts, Punt?"

"Three-halfpence."

"I'll start with a couple."

"These cream puffs are about my mark," said Crane. "Shove 'em over. I'll owe you the tin till to-morrow, Pintpoker."

"No credit in this establishment," said Poindexter tersely. "We can only sell at such bed-rock prices by dealing for the ready cash."

"What are these rabbit pies like?" asked Fish.

"Try 'em, and see."

"My word, these tarts do look ripping!" King. "I'll begin with tarts."

"Cash, there!"

"Walk up, gentlemen! This is the shop, and everything a shade above cost price, and better than you can get it over the way."

"I guess so."

"Faith, and this is where you can get value for your money. Every article guaranteed to be better than those sold in the village at the price."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Walk up, gentlemen!"

And the gentlemen did walk up. First-class goods at little more than half-price tempted everybody, naturally, and for minutes the Combine did a roaring trade.

But suddenly there came a wail of anguish from King, who had jammed nearly a whole tart into his mouth as a beginning.

King was seen to jump up, and eject the contents of the tart in the most emphatic manner, and then to rub at his mouth with his handkerchief.

"Oh!" he roared. "Ow-w-w-w!"

"What's the matter?"

"What are you making that row about?"

"This rabbit pie is all right!"

"Ow-w-w-w-w!"

"What's the trouble?"

"I guess—"

"Ooooooh!" sputtered Crane, of the Fifth, spitting out the ruins of a cream puff, his growing scarlet. "You young villains!—you—you—"

"What's the matter with you, Craney?"

"Your tricks on me!" roared Crane.

"Tricks!" exclaimed Poindexter, in bewilderment. "What do you mean? I guess the cream puffs are all right."

"You—you—you—"

"Ow-w-w-w-w!" wailed Green. "I'm poisoned! I—I—I—I'm poisoned!"

A dozen voices were blending in furious clamations. The Combine looked on in less bewilderment.

They hadn't the faintest idea what was the matter, but certainly their customers seemed to be growing frantically excited, and to be falling foul with the tuck.

"What's the matter?" yelled Poindexter desperately. "The grub's all right."

"Faith, and it's ripping, and better than—Ow!"

"Try it yourself, then," howled Crane, reaching over the counter, he grabbed the junior by the hair with one hand, and jammed a cream puff into his mouth with the other.

"Br-r-r-r-r!" gasped Flynn. "Leggo! I'm poisoned!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Pankhurst. "I don't like their own grub."

"Quite so! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's a trick!" roared Crane. "Throw us here with a yarn about selling things to make us eat this filthy stuff."

"Ow! I'm poisoned!"

"We'll make 'em sit up, then! Have a counter over!"

"Good! Give 'em socks!"

"We'll teach 'em to play these tricks on us. Go for the beasts!"

And there was a furious rush of customers, not in the sense that the Combine desired, but flimsy counters were upset at once, and goods of Poindexter, Neville, Flynn & Co. were flying right and left. The Combine, vainly sisting, were overborne by the rush, and sprawling among their goods; and then revengeful customers pelted them with tarts, buns and scones and cakes, and lemonade and ginger-beer over them, till Poindexter & Co. were in a state that was absolutely indescribable.

Resistance was impossible. They were overwhelmed, and it all happened in a few minutes. Poindexter & Co., with most of their stock trade plastered about their persons, lay gasping, bewildered, dazed. Pankhurst and Pricey shrieking with laughter. They had not had their little joke to go so far this, but it was excruciatingly funny.

"There!" gasped Crane, at last. "I thought that will put an end to your little tricks, bit. That'll teach you not to poison a Fifth-Former!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pankhurst. "You're not poisoned. A little ink and quinine will do you any harm!"

"Eh? Do you mean to say they put ink and quinine in the grub?"

"No; they didn't—I did!"

"What?"

"You!" yelled fifty voices.

"Yes, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quite so! Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Old Firm whipped out of the room and fled before Poindexter & Co. and the excited customers could make a move.

Poindexter & Co. received little sympathy. All Cliveden yelled over the joke; and, on top, when they had recovered a little, the Combine could not help laughing, too. Most of the goods were spoiled, and the amateur caterers decided to give up the business; but the Firm came nobly to their aid when it came settling accounts with the wholesale firm that had supplied them. But, though the caterers' business was dropped like a hot potato, the Combine were not suffered to forget their fortunate venture, and for a long, long time Cliveden fellows shrieked over the adventures of the Cliveden Caterers.

THE END.

(A Tale of Harry Brandon and Shrimps the Actors, next week.)