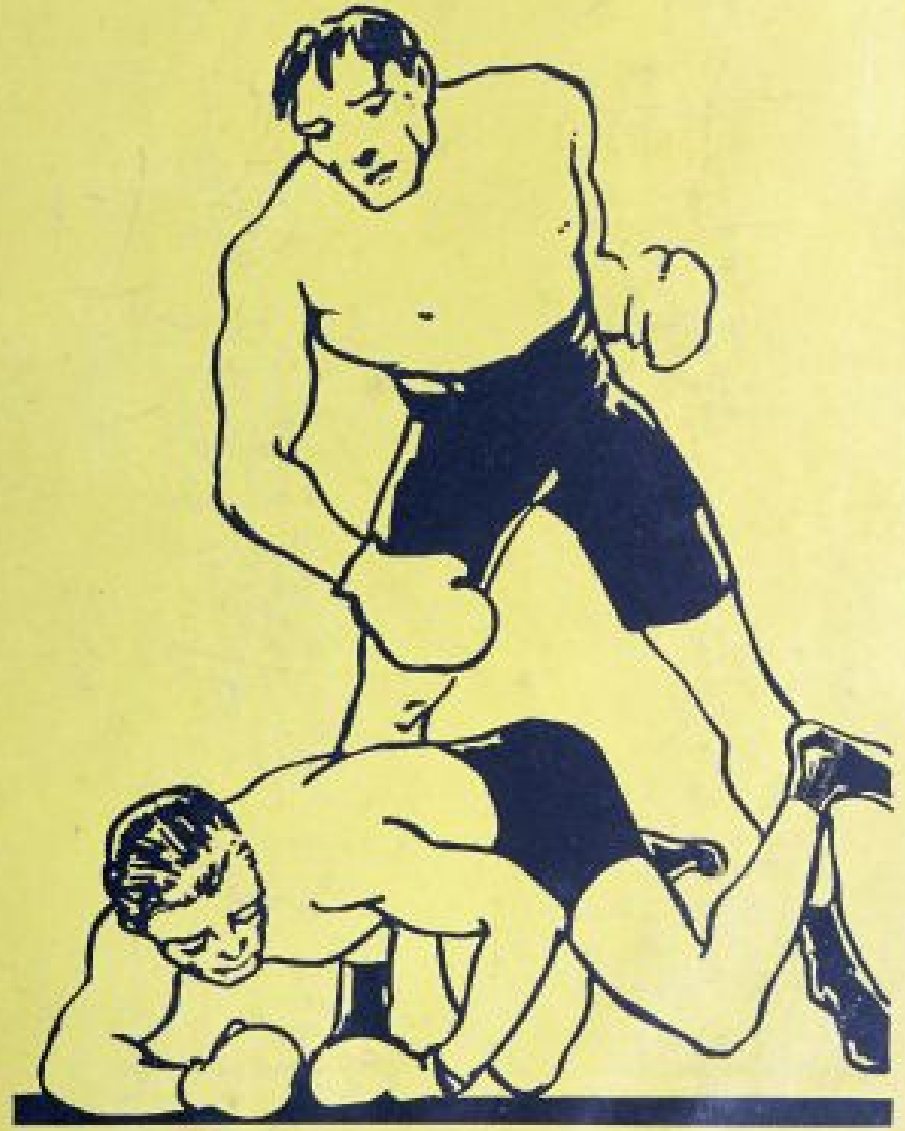
TAKING THE COUNT

CHARLES·E·VAN LOAN



*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a https://www.fadedpage.com administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at https://www.fadedpage.com.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: Taking the Count—Prize Ring Stories
Date of first publication: 1915
Author: Charles Emmett van Loan (1876-1919)
Contributor: Irvin S. Cobb (1876-1944)
Date first posted: November 15, 2026
Date last updated: November 15, 2026
Faded Page eBook #20261127

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

This file was produced from images generously made available by Internet Archive.

TAKING THE COUNT

PRIZE RING STORIES

BY

CHARLES E. VAN LOAN

FOREWORD BY

IRVIN S. COBB

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN AND COMPANY (CANADA) LTD.
215 Victoria Street, Toronto 2, Canada

COPYRIGHT, 1915,
BY GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

Copyright, 1913, 1914, by The Curtis Publishing Company

— — — —

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

FOREWORD
BY IRVIN S. COBB

His full name was Charles Emmett Van Loan, a name to make a mouthful. He signed himself in his private correspondence C. E. Van Loan and in his published writings, Chas. E. Van Loan. But I never knew anybody who knew him but called him "Charley" or more often still, "Van"; and I imagine that to those of his readers who did not know him except as they felt his personality showing through the printed page he was "Charley" Van Loan, nearly always. We employ those shortenings of the proper name only for those we like and for those we love, or for those we feel we would love did we come to know them; they are the slangy diminutives of an universal regard; because no man ever gained an affectionate abbreviation of his baptismal title and kept it who in the estimation of his contemporaries had not earned it by right of friendly conquest. We nickname our geysers, but not our glaciers; the one typifies that which flows, which bubbles, which has motion and sparkle and quickness; the other typifies that which is frozen and slow and hard. What is true of nature's wonders is true of nature's human products. And so Van had to be Van and it is as Van that I love now to think of him. He was Van here; I'm sure he is Van over there on the Other Side where he is gone to be one of the blest brotherhood of those who in life loved their fellowmen and made their fellows happier because they had lived.

My task here is to write a foreword for one of the books of this edition of his collected writings, but it is hard for one who knew him, as I did through a period of years, to deal with any of his works and at the same time forbear saying something on the personal side regarding their creator.

He was so much a man and yet so much a boy. Nor do I appraise this estimate as having a paradoxical sound. He was all the more the man for being so entirely the boy.

It is easy to speak praise of the dead. They cannot answer back for themselves and it ill becomes those who live to refute the kindly word. Nobody ever yet took public issue with an epitaph or gave the loud-voiced lie to the gracious wording of a funeral piece. But of Van Loan dead I can say in all truth what I could have said of Van Loan alive, with none to contradict me: I never knew him to say a cruel thing or any undeservedly

harsh thing of any creature; I never knew him to write a cruel thing or a dirty thing; I never knew him to do a cruel thing. I do not believe he ever thought one. His wit was never barbed with venom; no yellow trace of envy or jealousy or spitefulness underlaid the currents of his mind; no savor of smuttiness ever muddied up in the wake of his smoothly flowing pen. If for those who in the flesh were kindly, were generous, were sweet-tempered, were brave and self-sacrificing—if for those who as they walked this earth, found joy in giving and glory in serving—there is eternal reward hereafter, I know full well where my friend is to-day, and what fellowship he keeps; and in that thought lies my acceptance of the stroke of fate which took him away while still he was lusty and young, and before his work was done.

Being so essentially a red-blooded man, it was natural that he wrote most often of the doings and the sayings of the red-blooded folk, their sports, their pastimes and their pleasures. And how well he did it,—with such a whimsical insight into their pretensions, with such a keen perception of their virtues; with such a marvelous reportorial ability to make you see his creations not as figments of fiction, but as flesh and blood realities, true to type and truly typed, making you feel that when he put words into the mouth of one of his characters of prize-ring, or racetrack, or ball field, or "movie" studio, the words were just exactly the words which that particular character would inevitably speak at that particular time and place. His gift for dialogue has been praised as masterly, and so it was, but to my way of thinking his highest power lay in the art he had of presenting a complete likeness of an individual in a single stroke. Plenty of men can write the Lord's Prayer on a postage stamp. Van Loan had a craftier knack than that—he could paint a portrait in a paragraph.

Take some extracts from this present volume,—for example,—where in the story called "The Spotted Sheep" he introduces you to one of his heroes after this wise:

"Billy Allison was not exactly a black sheep nor yet a white one. Both colors were woven into the fabric of his character, the black spots representing the bad impulses and the white spots representing the good ones . . . a moral snap shot of Billy Allison's soul would have resembled a piece of shepherd's plaid."

Or this one:

"Isidore Mandelbaum did not fight because he loved fighting. A stiff jab upon his prominent nose had no charms for him; a well-timed hook to the point of the chin roused in him no wild enthusiasm for the conflict. Isidore was a gladiator for revenue only. The jingle of the shekels in the box-office made a strong appeal to his nature; the soft rustle of currency was soothing

to his soul. Propose an engagement to the average boxer of Isidore's caliber, and the first question would never vary: 'Who with?' Propose one to Mandelbaum, and he would ask 'How much?'"

Prize fighting is full of Isidore Mandelbaums but it took Van Loan to portray a common type in six short illuminating sentences. And who in fewer words ever summarized more completely a situation than Van Loan did when he wrote:

"The American prize ring has produced hundreds of sports, four or five genuine sportsmen and a genius or two."

But he did not unduly burden his tales with character sketches nor yet make them staccato with dialogue. For descriptions of scenes of action he had a talent which was more than a talent; it was a genius. Read here any one of his accounts of ring battles and you are bound to tingle to the vividness of the bold, accurate drawing of the fight, even as, subconsciously, you marvel at the versatility of the narrator.

Van Loan's stories will live among those who speak our tongue and appreciate our sporting institutions. For that matter, the stories of many a writer will live on after that writer is gone and forgotten. Van is gone, but he will not be forgotten. He still lives, and in the memories of those who loved him, which means a multitude, he always will live.

If I were writing the words which will be carved upon the stone above his grave; if in writing those words I were restricted to but a few words, I think I should write:

"A man's man all over—but children loved him."

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE SPORTING DOCTOR	9
ONE-THIRTY-THREE—RINGSIDE	62
THE SPOTTED SHEEP	91
ON ACCOUNT OF A LADY	122
NO BUSINESS	147
OUT OF HIS CLASS	174
SCRAP IRON	203
THE PEARL BROOCH	242
THE REVENGE OF KID MORALES	267
EASY PICKING	289
FOR THE PICTURES	315

TAKING THE COUNT

THE SPORTING DOCTOR

WHEN the lightweight champion of the world went to his corner after the eighth round, he was puffing badly, and his knees were shaking.

"What are you stalling for, Billy?" demanded "Tacks" McLowrie, the champion's manager, chief second, and adviser. "Why don't you tear into this stiff and show him how to take a joke?"

"I—I ain't stalling," panted the champion. "This is a tough fellow—strong as a bull—can't seem to get started, somehow."

"You copped him nice with that right swing," said McLowrie, realizing that encouragement was needed. "It set him back on his heels."

"Yes, and he laughed at me—didn't hurt him a bit—just as strong in the clinches as ever—I'll get him—when I get started."

"Aw, there's lots of time," said McLowrie soothingly. "Make him lead more, Billy. Pull him out of position, and cross him with the right. Hands hurting you any?"

The champion nodded. In spite of the soft bandages, the old dislocations were bothering him. A fighter, like a baseball player, a short-card dealer, or a pianist, is no better than his hands—and "Billy" Wade's hands were bad. The right, which he had damaged on "Buckskin" Kelly's head two years before, was throbbing painfully.

"Use your left more," said McLowrie. "Keep him away from you. Nix on the infighting; make him box. You've had every round so far."

"Think so?"

"Why, a thousand miles!" Thus do seconds and advisers stimulate confidence at the expense of veracity.

In the other angle of the ring, "Frankie" Brady, a freckled, shock-headed young thunderbolt, was also listening to counsel.

"I knew this sucker wasn't half trained," said "Bo" Brooks, his manager. "Go right after his body; there's where he's weak. Forget that he's got a jaw at all; cave in his belly, and he's yours."

"Leave it to me," said Brady. "Did you hear him when I sunk that right into his stomach? Grunted like a pig. I tell you, he don't like 'em down there!"

"Yes," said Brooks, "and the fellow that does is a fool. He's tired, and he wants to stall. Keep right on top of him all the time—make him fight himself out. Rough him up in the clinches."

Back in the third row of the reserved-seat section, a fattish young man peered through his glasses. He was watching the champion's corner intently, noting every move. He saw the heaving chest, the drawn look about the mouth, and the distress in the half-closed eyes.

"I think Billy has hung it all over Brady so far," said a red-faced man, sitting beside the one with the glasses. "He's a slow beginner you know, Doc."

"My friend," said the fattish young man calmly, "the champion is all through. He shot his bolt in the first six rounds."

"Huh!" said the red-faced man. "He ain't started yet!"

"Take a good look at him, and tell me when you think he's going to get started. In the first place, he's in no sort of shape for a hard fight, and in the second——"

The red-faced man sputtered incoherently as he fished out a thick roll of bills.

"Fifty will get you a hundred if you think so, Doc! Two to one that Wade wins!"

The fattish young man smiled sadly. With thumb and forefinger he extracted several pasteboards from his vest pocket and spread them fanwise, like a hand at whist.

"I'm sorry I can't take you, Joe," said he. "I'm already down—and out."

The red-faced man glanced at the pool-room tickets, and his face grew redder than ever.

"Why, what the—— Say! You got eight hundred bet on him, and you're quitting already?"

The fattish young man solemnly returned the tickets to his pocket.

"Not quitting," said he, "merely conceding that I haven't got a chance. I never allow my bets to influence my judgment, Joe, and I'm afraid in this case that I didn't allow my judgment to influence my bets. There will be a new champion of the world inside of fifteen minutes."

"Bet you ten to one there ain't!"

The young man with the glasses explored his pockets and brought forth some halves, quarters, and dimes.

"Your price is all out of line, Joe," said he; "and, besides that, you're betting on sympathy. I never hedged before in my life, but if you insist—

four dollars and eighty-five cents against forty-eight-fifty that before ten-twenty-one p.m. Frankie Brady will be the lightweight champion of the world."

"Why not five against fifty?"

"Because," said the fattish young man, "I make it a rule never to bet more than I can pay. Four-eighty-five just taps me, Joe, and if you win I'll have to hold out breakfast money."

"All right, shoot the four-eighty-five," said Joe, "but it seems to me that if I had eight hundred iron men bet on a fighter I'd be rooting my head off for him to win instead of waiting for his finish."

"There's no virtue in rooting," said the other, opening his cigarette case. "All the encouragement in the world, vocal or otherwise, won't take the place of stamina."

During the ninth round, Brady landed a solid right-hander to the stomach, and the champion wilted under it. The challenger, aware that his man was weakening, followed his advantage with a vicious streak of infighting. Wade tried to clinch and blanket the pistonlike blows, but Brady would not have it so, and crowded the champion along the ropes, driving in short, punishing jolts to the body. Wade was weak and gasping when the bell rang.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he wailed, when he reached his corner. "I can't seem to get started!"

"You'd better start pretty soon," said McLowrie.

Reddy Burke was swinging a towel in Wade's corner. A sturdy little boxer who just escaped the top-notch flight of lightweights, he had attached himself to Wade's fortunes in the capacity of sparring partner, and the boys were inseparable companions.

"Aw, go git him, Billy!" said Burke. "He ain't got a thing. Tear his block off!"

The tenth round saw the champion on the floor twice, and the second time he took nine seconds before rising.

The fattish young man nodded at the red-faced one during the interval between the tenth and eleventh rounds.

"Smelling salts and brandy," said he. "It's about over. Good-by, Billy Wade."

The red-faced man did not answer. His lower lip was trembling, and there were tears in his eyes.

"I know how you feel, Joe," said his friend. "I hate to see him whipped, too, because he's been a great little fighter; but—they all get it sooner or later."

"He ain't fighting his fight!" groaned Joe. "If he only had a flash of his old form—just a flash! Doc, he used to *murder* fellows like this Brady. There wasn't a lightweight that could stand up to him at infighting; but Brady's licking him at his own game. What's wrong with him? Can he be doped or something?"

"Yes," said the fattish young man; "doped with alcohol and nicotine. The stamina isn't there. That was all that ever made Billy Wade a champion. He's lost it, and now he's a mark for a second-rater. Too bad!"

The sting of brandy in his throat, and the pungent odor of aromatic spirits of ammonia in his nostrils, the champion was helped out of his corner at the beginning of the eleventh round. His arms hung like leaden weights, and he shuffled rather than walked to the middle of the ring. Brady rushed to meet him, smothered a last dying flurry in a clinch, and the crowd rose to watch the passing of one of the blue ribbons of the athletic world. After the third knock-down, Tacks McLowrie picked up a sponge and fingered it thoughtfully. Reddy Burke snatched it from his hand.

"Not that way!" said he fiercely. "He's a champion yet, and a champion never quits!"

Billy Wade did not quit, nor was the sponge thrown into the ring. Brady measured the reeling figure carefully, plumped a right-hander home under the heart, and followed it with a short hook to the chin. This time Wade did not attempt to rise, and Frankie Brady's first act as a champion was to carry the defeated man to his corner, where he placed him gently upon his stool.

"Poor old scout!" said Brady. "He gave me a tough battle."

"Yah!" sneered Reddy Burke. "You was lucky to catch him out o' condition! Wait till we get you again, that's all!"

Brady grinned, and, recalling his ring manners, shook Wade's limp right hand. Then the advance guard of hero worshipers poured through the ropes and surrounded the winner, patting him on the back and showering him with florid compliments.

"Oh, you Brady!"

"Didn't I tell you he'd be soft for you?"

"Hooray for the new champion!"

The fattish young man pulled out his watch.

"Not quite eleven minutes," said he coolly. "Joe, I'll trouble you for that forty-eight-fifty. I'm going to need it."

It was some time before the arena was cleared. The fattish young man climbed upon his chair and watched the defeated champion as he was assisted toward the dressing room. His arms dangled at his sides, his shoulders sagged, and he was mumbling to himself:

"Couldn't get started—don't know why—Brady can't hit hard enough to stop me."

The fattish young man took the pool-room tickets from his pocket, tore them small, and tossed the bits into the air.

"Serves me right!" said he. "It'll be a lesson to me."

II

In every college class there is one beloved youth who wins the engaging pseudonym of "Sport."

Arthur Phelps had been "Sport" Phelps from his grammar-school days. Happy-go-lucky, irresponsible, open-handed, and generous to a fault, whether his own or another's, the name clung to him through medical college.

The poker-playing freshmen soon discovered that Phelps would draw four cards to an ace, or stand a back-raise upon a pair, no matter how small. This is not a system which recommends itself to those who desire to profit at cards, but it is very certain indication that the man who follows it gambles because he loves the game and not because he has any great desire to win.

A brilliant student when he felt there was need of study, Phelps managed to squeeze through the medical course and pass his final examinations. The winning of a diploma did not seem to interest him nearly so much as the winning of several bets at seven to five—Phelps on the short end—that he would be "plucked" by the examining board.

His average was not particularly high, apropos of which he remarked:

"Three deuces beat aces and kings—not very much, fellows; but just enough to take the pot. Send in."

He gave an elaborate dinner to the losers, who presented him with a loving cup which was almost silver, addressed him ceremoniously as "Doctor," and grieved very much at parting with him, for Phelps had announced that he was going West to "establish himself in the profession."

Time was heavy upon his idle hands in the Western city, and an empty office is a lonely place in which to wait for a practice. Phelps joined a few

clubs of the sort where cards are played and checks passed underneath the table, thus circumventing the house committee and the strict rules against gambling upon the premises. He came to spend a great deal of time at auction bridge, which he found a permanent investment, for he could never resist the temptation to "kick" a strong bid.

His associates, idle young men for the most part, welcomed him joyfully as "Doc." Some preternaturally grave young men with pinfeather whiskers are "Doctor" to their intimates, and rather insist upon this form of salutation. The only difference which a diploma made in Arthur Phelps was that he ceased to be "Sport" and became "Doc."

Absence from office during office hours is not good for a budding practice, nor does it help a practice which shows no signs of flowering. Unfortunately for Phelps, he had an assured income—not as large a one as he would have liked, perhaps, but still enough to keep the wolf at a respectful distance. Lacking the spur of necessity, he fell into careless habits of life and of mind. He did not worry over the fact that his date book was a blank, and that the steady plodders who stayed in their offices were building up paying practices.

Doc Phelps was a drifter, in danger of becoming a moral derelict and a victim of fatty degeneration of the ambition. He was idle, and the worst thing about an idle man is that he is seldom fit to choose his amusements. Anything which involved physical exercise was out of the question, for he had the short breath of the cigarette smoker, and every muscle and tissue in his body was overlaid with soft, unwholesome fat. A brisk run up a single flight of stairs was enough to set his heart to drumming, so he chose sedentary amusements and took as much of his pleasure as possible sitting down.

The city in which he was located was the logical center of the boxing world, and Phelps, interested in all forms of sport, fell into the habit of driving his runabout out to the different training camps to watch the men at work. It was a pleasant way to pass an afternoon, and certainly a better one than sitting in a leather chair at the club, playing bridge at five cents a point and taking a drink every fourth hand.

The boxers came to know this amiable loafer with the double chin, the glasses, and the ready smile, and as time went on, they honored him with their friendship, and gave him their confidence. All the members of the Queensberry brigade are not seasoned and sophisticated; many of them are honest, earnest youngsters, simple and direct as children and untutored as Hottentots. Doc Phelps found them entertaining, and their quaint philosophy of life interested him.

One day "Laddy" McGrath, a preliminary boy of more than ordinary ability, showed Phelps a badly swollen right hand.

"These bum trainers around here have been fooling with it, Doc, but they don't seem to do it much good. I hurt it six months ago, and it hasn't been right since."

Phelps made a careful examination of the hand.

"When do you fight again, Laddy?"

"Next week—the Washoe Kid."

"H'm! Well, if I were you, I'd cancel that date, son. You've got two dislocated joints here, and if you keep on boxing with your hand in this shape, you'll have to quit for keeps pretty soon. I can fix this up for you, but what it needs most is rest. Come to my office at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I ain't got no dough, Doc."

"Who said anything about money? Do you want that hand fixed up or not?"

"I sure do," said the boy. "I'll be there, Doc."

That was the beginning of Phelps' pork-and-bean practice, as he called it. Laddy McGrath, his right hand as good as new and his nose slightly remodeled so that he could breathe with his mouth closed, was a walking, talking advertisement of the virtues of his friend, Doc Phelps, and the other preliminary boys flocked to him with their troubles. Broken hands, sprained thumbs, flattened noses, and the various mischances of battle—they took them all to the sporting doctor, and he patched them up. Not the least of his treatment was the sound advice which he gave them, explaining simple hygienic principles in words of one syllable.

"The Doc is all right," said the pork-and-bean fighters. "He always tells you why you ought to do things, or why not, and he knows how a feller can keep in shape. Some gambler, too! He'll bet 'em as much money as they'll take whenever he thinks he's right."

It was Phelps' habit of betting them as much money as they would take which put a serious crimp in his bank account—wiped it out altogether, in fact. Like many followers of the boxing game, the Doc was a firm believer in supporting a champion as long as he bore the title, and the Brady-Wade battle laid him low for several months, during which period his bets were small. But it was only because they had to be, and compulsory virtue does not strengthen the flabby tissues of the soul.

"It'll be a lesson to me," said he; but in his heart he knew that the lesson would not last beyond the lean period.

Another young man might have learned a profitable lesson from that battle, but it is the hardest thing in the world to convince an ex-champion that he is entering into the physical decline which leads to the Queensberry scrap heap. A prima donna may admit that she has lost her top notes; a matinée idol sometimes drops gracefully into character parts, but the passing of a champion is a thing which must be demonstrated upon his stubborn jaw. Defeat wrought in Billy Wade nothing but a wild, unreasoning rage and the firm belief that he was the victim of a widespread conspiracy.

"Here's all the papers hollering that I'm through—down and out," said he to Tacks McLowrie. "You'd think I had whiskers a foot long, the way these sporting editors pan me. Brady is afraid to fight me again—says I'll have to wait, eh? All right. Go get any of these lightweights for me; I'll meet 'em all. After I've trimmed up the bunch, Brooks and Brady won't have a chance to give me the go-by. The public will force that stiff to fight me again!"

So Tacks McLowrie, who was no intellectual Sandow himself, stepped into the open market and hawked the services of the late lightweight champion of the world. Promoters were perfectly willing to give Wade matches, because he was a drawing card; but they pointed out to McLowrie that he was no longer in a position to demand the promoter's right eye as a bonus, a piggish habit into which champions' managers have fallen.

"Well, that's all right!" fumed Wade. "What we want is the fight. I want to show these knockers where they get off."

Tacks made the first match with Eddie Mahoney, a dazzling boxer who had been trying for several seasons to jab his way to a championship. Wade had beaten him before quite handily, and with the bright light of the championship still in his eyes, he held Mahoney cheaply and refused to train as if for a hard match.

"I got him before in a punch, didn't I?" was his argument. "Watch me do it again."

Honest training is hard work, and Billy was fond of long, black cigars, cocktails, late hours, and other energy destroyers. He liked to have people pat him on the back and tell him how great he was, consequently he haunted the places where people of this sort could see him. A few runs on the road, a week of boxing with the faithful Reddy Burke, and Wade announced himself as ready to put up the battle of his life.

Eddie Mahoney ran rings around the ex-champion for fourteen rounds, and then fought him to a standstill in the remaining six periods, winning the

decision with but one dissenting voice, and that came from the loser's corner.

The sporting pages commented that Wade was indeed far gone when a cream-puff boxer like Mahoney could stand and fight with him, toe to toe, and mourned the downfall of a once great two-handed fighter. Billy Wade took violent issue with these statements.

"I wasn't in shape," said he. "I didn't half train."

He did not train for his next fight either, and in this case the sponge was thrown into the ring.

"He fights like an apple woman," said the critics. "Two fast rounds and he blows up."

At the end of a year, Billy Wade was the joke of the lightweight division. He had honest friends who begged him to retire while he had a shred of reputation left, but Billy shook his head. He was too stubborn to make a public acknowledgment of failure, and conceited enough to believe that he could win back his place as the idol of the lightweight brigade. Each time he was defeated he had a new excuse, and, though he promised faithfully to train for his next opponent, he never did it. Training was hard, dry work, and meant no cigars and no cocktails, and Billy Wade had reached the point where he leaned heavily upon stimulants.

He quarreled with Tacks McLowrie over a division of the spoils, and they parted, Tacks hitching his wagon to a rising star of the middleweight constellation, whereupon the loyal Reddy Burke remarked that he never did like that stiff McLowrie nohow, and expressed the opinion that badly made matches had been responsible for all of the trouble of the past year.

"I'll lick a few fellows, and then I'll get going," said Wade.

"Sure you will!" said Burke.

One morning, Doc Phelps, who had just finished treating a cauliflower ear, looked up to see Billy Wade in the doorway, with Reddy Burke close behind him. The ex-champion was heavier than a lightweight has any right to be, and he was puffing at a fat, oily cigar.

"Good morning, Doc," said he. "I think I met you once over to Doyle's. These pork-and-bean kids tell me you're a bear when it comes to fixing up bad hands. I want you to see if you can do anything with these. I've got a fight next month—only ten rounds—and I want you to patch me up for it."

"All right, Billy," said the doctor. "Come in, Burke. Now, then, let's have a look at 'em."

The ex-champion removed his overcoat, tossed his gold-headed cane into a corner, and extended his hands. Phelps examined them minutely,

whistling between his teeth.

"Ouch!" said Wade, as the doctor pressed hard upon the back of his right hand.

"Tender, eh? How in the world do you fight with your hands bunged up like this?"

"Well," said Wade, "I have to pull a lot of punches to keep from hurting 'em, that's a fact."

"Yeh," said Reddy Burke, "that's why we didn't stop the dago last month."

Phelps released Wade's hands, and leaned back in his chair.

"I'm going to talk straight to you, Billy," said he. "You want the truth, I suppose?"

"Shoot!"

"All right. I'm going to ask you a question: Are you making these cheap matches because you need the money?"

"No!" said Billy shortly. "I can live the rest of my life if I never see a boxing glove. I got some dough laid away."

"Then what is your excuse for not quitting? Why are you fighting third-raters with your hands in this shape? Don't you know that any tramp lightweight in the country can lick you now unless you drop him inside of two rounds? Why don't you get out of the game?"

"Say!" exploded Reddy Burke. "We come here to get our hands fixed up, not to be interviewed, see?"

Phelps smiled, and lighted a cigarette, ignoring the satellite.

"That's one trouble with you, Billy," said he. "You've been letting people string you. You'd rather hear a lie than the truth because it's easier to listen to. Now I'm a doctor, and you've come to me for treatment. Part of a doctor's job is to tell people the truth, whether they like it or not. The carpenters left a hole over there for people who don't care to listen."

He paused and beamed upon Reddy.

"See what you get for horning in?" said Wade. "Go ahead, Doc. Get it all out of your system. Shut up, Reddy!"

"That's better," said Phelps. "Now, then, you won't train any more; you're full of poison, your hands are in terrible condition, and you're a wreck at twenty-three years of age. You've got every physical excuse for quitting, and you don't need the money. Why do you stay with it, Billy?"

The boy took his cigar from his mouth so that it would not interfere with a remarkable flow of profanity.

"I'll never quit until I get another wallop at that stiff of a Brady! There's a guy that I'll train for—I wouldn't care if it was a year! If I ever get him in the ring again——"

"Leave it to us what we'll do to'm!" said Reddy Burke.

"Ah!" said the doctor softly. "So that's the bug under the chip, is it? Do you really mean what you said about training for a year?"

"Doc," said Wade earnestly, "there ain't anything I wouldn't do to get that fellow in the ring with me again. He ain't a champion of the world, and you know it. You can tell it by the way he picks the soft ones and side-steps the real fighters. I can lick him, I tell you!"

"Not the way you are now," said Phelps. "Peel off that coat and vest; I'm going to look you over."

"Yeh," said Reddy Burke. "Let him take a slant at you, boy. You're sound as a nut."

The physical examination was a long one, and when it was over the doctor announced himself as satisfied.

"There's nothing organically wrong with you," said he.

"What did I tell you?" cackled Reddy. "Sound as a nut!"

Phelps shook his head.

"Billy," said he, "you're about the worst wreck of a fine piece of fighting machinery that I ever saw—and I get to look at quite a few of 'em. You're twenty-three, and you've been fighting six years. By rights, you should be just beginning, but as a matter of fact you're nearer thirty than twenty—physically I mean—and you'll be forty in a couple of years if you keep on at the pace you're traveling. You're full of nicotine and alcohol, you've got a lot of rotten teeth in your mouth, you're clogged up with soft, unhealthy fat, and your hands aren't worth a damn as fighting tools. If you had deliberately gone about to destroy your physical efficiency, you couldn't have done a finer job. As you stand now, I wouldn't give a nickel for you."

Billy Wade rubbed his fingers over the back of his right hand, and there was silence in the room for perhaps fifteen seconds.

"If that's straight goods," said he, "there ain't much more to do but haul me to the boneyard."

"Rats!" said the doctor. "I've heard everything else about you, Billy, but nobody ever accused you of being a quitter. All the game fights in the world aren't pulled off in a ring. You need to be made over again from the ground up. It'll be the toughest battle of your life, old son, but the main point is that you can win if you'll stay with it."

For the first time since the loss of the championship, Wade virtually admitted retrogression.

"Do you think I can come back, Doc?"

"I know it. Whether you do or not is a matter that is up to you. You'll have to be cleaned out from top to bottom—all the poison that you are loaded up with must be eliminated. Those hands must go into plaster casts, and stay there for a month or six weeks, and then we'll tackle the rebuilding process. It won't be any joke, but if you're as game as I think you are, I can send you back in shape to flail the everlasting daylights out of Frankie Brady—yes, even a better man than he is. I agree with you that he's not much of a champion. You can do this, or you can take the easy way, and go on being licked by every pork-and-beaner in the country. With your hands the way they are now, you won't last more than six months. Think it over, Billy. It's up to you."

The ex-champion studied the pattern of the carpet for some time, but at last his head went up, and he thrust out his hand.

"You've got a customer, Doc!" said he.

"Two of 'em," said Reddy Burke. "Because I'm with the old champ at every jump in the road."

"That's the right spirit," said the doctor. "We might as well begin eliminating poison now. Hand me that cigar case of yours. You won't have any further use for it."

"Aw, say!" pleaded Wade. "I've got to have my smoke after dinner, Doc!"

"Not after dinner or any other time. If you mean business, we'll chop the tobacco and booze right here. I want you to get your teeth fixed up first; you've got some rotten cavities there that would poison a dog. Everything that gets into your body has to go through your mouth, so we'll begin the cleaning-out process at the port of entry. When you get the tartar off your teeth, those spongy gums will harden, and they won't bleed so easy—— By the way, what do you drink, mostly?"

"Oh, anything that the gang is drinking," said Wade, reluctantly surrendering his cigar case.

"Conviviality is your trouble, eh?" mused Phelps. "In that case, the farther you can get from the bright lights the better. I know a man who's got a ranch about eighty miles from here and thirty miles from nowhere. He's been after me to pay him a visit and bring some friends along. It would be a great place for you because you wouldn't be tempted to sit up nights or fill yourself with booze. How does the idea strike you?"

"Fine!" said Reddy Burke. "Listen to me a minute, Billy. We'll call this ten-round fight off, see? Then we'll take to the woods without tipping it to a soul where we're going, or why. You can do all this work under cover."

"Why under cover?" asked Phelps.

"Because," said Reddy, "when we get this bird primed to fly again, the less people know about this rebuilding stunt the better. We can get two to one for every dollar we want to put up."

"By George!" said Phelps. "There's something in that!"

IV

"Doc," said Fred Haynes, the proprietor of the Sundown Ranch, "now that our distinguished guests have retired, would you mind explaining this latest lunacy of yours? Why are you hooked up with a dead one like Billy Wade?"

The men were sitting on the veranda of the ranch house, overlooking a broad sweep of California hills, sepia and silver in the moonlight. Close at hand was the loom of giant sycamores, and the intervals of silence were filled with the whisper of running water.

"Great place you've got here, Fred," said the doctor.

"Don't stall, Doc! Answer the question. I know that you're a bug on fighters, but I always gave you credit for picking live ones. Why Billy Wade? He's been licked by everybody since he lost the championship. I think I could clean him myself."

"That's why I brought him here." A touch of seriousness was in Phelps' usual bantering tone. "Fred, this fellow is one of the greatest fighting machines in the world, gone all to smash through ignorance and neglect. He's not fought out, and he's not burned out like so many of 'em; but his hands are in awful shape and he's full of poison. He thinks he can come back— —"

"They all do," grunted Haynes.

"He thinks he can come back," repeated Phelps patiently, "and I'm going to help him. To-morrow I'm going to give him a light anæsthetic, reduce those dislocations, force the joints back into position, and put both hands in plaster casts. Then I'm going to start in to get rid of the poisons and the broken-down tissues by a general stimulation of the eliminative organs. I'll clean out his skin with protracted warm baths, and I'll flush him with good, clean drinking water. I'll reduce the unhealthy fat around the abdominal viscera and heart and then— —"

"Rave on, little one, rave on," said Haynes soothingly.

"Light exercise will burn up that fat," repeated Phelps, "and he can be doing that while his hands are in the casts. I'll put him on a properly balanced diet—all energy-producing foods and no sugars or starches; he'll sleep in the open air and go to bed with the chickens——"

"I've got a tintype of him doing it," said Haynes. "Billy Wade won't stay here ten days. He's a city boy; I know the type. His feet will get to itching for sidewalks, and he'll miss the pink sporting extras. The simple life will bore him stiff, and he'll beat it. Bet you fifty dollars he doesn't last two weeks!"

"I'll take that bet," said Phelps.

"But what's the idea? What's it all for? Are you getting a chunk of money from him?"

"Come to think of it," said the doctor, "I *am* entitled to a fee for this. There isn't any arrangement about money, though."

"Well, then, what have you got up your sleeve?" persisted Haynes. "You're not doing this out of charity, or because you think you owe something to your profession."

"No-o," said Phelps. "You might say I'm taking it on purely as a sporting proposition. It's this way: Billy wants to get another crack at Frankie Brady. Frankie isn't a great lightweight by any manner of means, but he's the champion of the world just the same. He's such a poor fighter that I bet eight hundred on Wade when they met last year. I thought Billy's stamina would carry him through. You remember what a ripping, slashing little devil he used to be? He won all his fights because he could set a terrific pace and hold it. That's stamina—energy. That's what Billy has lost, and, without it, anybody can whip him. The general opinion is that when a man's stamina goes back on him, he's through for good. I believe that theory is wrong—in this case, at least. Billy is only a kid yet, and if I can get him cleaned out and trained and his hands in shape so that he can hit with 'em again, I'll guarantee that he'll lick all the Frankie Bradys that you can pile into a ten-acre lot!"

"Oho!" said Haynes. "I'm on, Doc. You're going to make a clean-up in the betting!"

Phelps' round face flushed slightly.

"Not that, either," said he, "though it can be done, Fred. I want to make this boy over again—physically. In a way, I've taken a liking to him. He's too fine a piece of machinery to be allowed to go to smash. I'm going to

reform him—that's it! Laugh and show your ignorance! It can be done, as sure as you live."

"I wasn't laughing at that," chuckled Haynes; "only it strikes me that you're a beautiful specimen to be preaching physical regeneration to athletes—a cigarette-smoking, booze-fighting ball of butter like you are! 'Do as I say, but not as I do,' eh?"

"Huh!" snorted Phelps, slightly nettled, for the shot had gone home. "I don't have to depend upon my physical condition to make a living, thank the Lord."

"No," said Haynes, "and a mighty good thing for you. When you get to handing this boy a sermon on the evils of rum and tobacco, he's liable to come back at you with the line, 'Physician, heal thyself.' I would, if I were in his place. You're smoking too many of those rotten Turkish cigarettes, Doc. They'll get you."

"Oh, you go to the devil!" said Phelps. "Let's have one more high ball and go to bed."

It is no simple matter to uproot one habit overnight, but to alter the whole current of a life is really a serious undertaking, and one to be approached with extreme caution.

For several years, Billy Wade had done exactly as he pleased, with no one to offer advice or issue orders. Tacks McLowrie had endeavored to "handle" him, after the crude fashion of managers, but had retired after colliding with a will stronger than his own. Softened by indulgence and spoiled by an overdose of his own way in everything, Billy Wade entered upon the regenerating process with no appreciation of the hardships entailed.

At first the novelty of the thing interested him, but at the end of the third day the plaster casts upon his hands became irksome, the long days and the dark, quiet nights bore heavily upon his nerves, and he missed his cigars and cocktails more than he would have thought possible. At every turn, he was met by a fattish, good-natured taskmaster, who regulated his life to the last detail and would not compromise by so much as an inch.

"Nothing ever happens here but just morning and night," complained the victim, sure of one faithful ear into which he could pour his troubles. "The Doc won't let me eat anything but the things I don't want, and he's got my hands sewed up in a pair of stone gloves so that I can't even deal a deck of cards. If he don't loosen up on me a little bit, I'm going to beat it back to town."

"Aw, stick a while longer," advised Reddy Burke. "All the boys that got their hands fixed up had to wear them things. I ain't stuck on associating with cows and chickens myself, but I'd give the sawbones a chance if I was you."

"I think I was a sucker to pass up that Johansen for ten rounds," said Wade. "There's one guy I *can* lick."

"And what would it get you?" argued Reddy. "Johansen is only a pork-and-beaner. Brady is the bird we're after. You better stick, Billy. I think this sawbones knows what he's doing."

"I'll stay till Monday," said Wade. "This place has got my goat."

On Sunday, a neighboring Mexican brought the mail from the nearest town. The three visitors hurled themselves hungrily upon the packet of newspapers. The flaring headlines on the sporting pages, the baseball scores, the week-old news added the finishing touch to Billy Wade's feeling of isolation from the world.

"I've had enough of this," said he to Reddy. "I'm going to tell the Doc to-night. He'll be sore, but if I pay his bill that ought to satisfy him. I'd go off my nut if I had to stay in this place another week."

Doc Phelps saw more through his thick glasses than most people imagined. He had observed Wade's growing nervousness, his sudden flashes of irritation, and his long periods of sullen quiet, and when the fighter came to him after supper, plainly feeling for an opening, the doctor was prepared.

"There's a little article here that I want to read to you," said he. "Do you know Bill Horton!"

"Uncle Bill?" said Wade. "I should say I do! He's one of my best friends. There's one sporting writer that knows the game from top to bottom. When Uncle Bill says a thing is so, you can go put a bet on it."

"Can you?" asked the doctor. "Then listen to this," and he began to read aloud. This was the opening paragraph:

> "Billy Wade has canceled his date with Johansen, and disappeared from his usual haunts, leaving no address behind him. He made no explanation or excuse and none was necessary. In all probability, this marks the passing of one of the great figures of the Queensbury world. In the history of boxing, there has never been a more sudden or complete downfall of a champion. For nearly a year Wade's friends have been trying to persuade him to retire, but with the stubbornness which always characterized him, Billy refused to listen. It is another victory for wine, women, and song, but never has this dangerous combination wrought more havoc than in the case of the former lightweight champion of the world. His friends believe that he has at last come to a realization of his physical condition, and given up hope of regaining the stamina which won him a high place in the affections of the sporting population. His career should serve as a warning to all ambitious young men who are tempted to try their speed on the primrose path."

Doctor Phelps paused, and glanced at Wade.

"Did Uncle Bill say that—honest?" asked the fighter.

The doctor passed him the paper, and Wade glanced at the headlines and verified the signature.

"I thought he was my friend!" said he bitterly. "It just goes to show that they all take a kick at you when you're down!"

"Billy," said Phelps, "your real friends are the men who tell you the truth, every time. Uncle Bill has put your case in a nutshell. You've gone a long way down the wrong side of the hill, but if you're game and patient and willing to work, you can get back to the top again. You're tired of this place, and you want to go back to town. You want to smoke your head off, and take a drink once in a while. Your will power is just as weak as your body. Now it's up to you. Are you willing to stand the gaff and give me a chance to prove that this article is all wrong, or shall we pack up and go back to the bright lights and let everybody say, 'I told you so?'"

"It sounds easy," was the sulky response, "but I notice that you take a drink whenever you want one, and you've always got a cigarette in your mouth. You talk to me about being game and standing the gaff! Why, Doc, you don't know what it's like to want to take a drink or a smoke and not do it!"

There was a long silence, broken only by the rustling of the newspaper as Billy twisted it in his fingers. Somewhere near at hand, a rocking-chair ceased creaking.

"That may be true," said Phelps slowly, "but I'm not a fighter, and you are. You make a living by keeping yourself in good physical condition; I make mine by keeping other folks in shape."

"What difference does that make? Nicotine is a deadly poison; you told me so, but there's more nicotine in those coffin nails that you smoke than in cigars. Booze will play hell with my liver and kidneys, but you drink twice as much as I ever did. It's all a question of will power, you say, and easy if you make up your mind. Seems to me, if it's such a cinch, you'd quit, yourself!"

Silence followed this outburst, and after a time Phelps heard a low chuckle. It proceeded from an open window, making it plain that Fred Haynes was an invisible listener.

Shall we say that the words of an angry boy cut through the fat, and reached Arthur Phelps' soul? Shall we say that he was shamed into a desire to rid himself of two bad habits, in order that he might set a right example to a patient? No; this is not a Sunday-school tract. The truth is often nearly as

good as a lie. It was Haynes' chuckle that did the work. It reminded Doc Phelps of the fifty-dollar bet, and he knew that if Billy Wade went back to town Haynes would laugh out loud. So he spoke up immediately.

"Look here, Billy," said the doctor, "you're a sport and I'm a sport, and we like to go through with things when we start 'em, don't we? All right. Now I want to see you a champion again, and I can make you one if you'll stick. You try it for two more weeks, and I'll agree to take this cleaning-out process with you, just to show you how easy it is. No cigarettes, and no booze. Are you with me!"

There was no answer.

"Of course," added Phelps shrewdly, "if you're willing to admit that Uncle Bill's dope is correct and that you can't come back, and you're going to quit without making a fight, that's another matter. Some other fellow will lick Brady."

"Oh, rats!" said Billy Wade. "I'll stick for two weeks more, but I wish I had these things off my hands!"

Half an hour later, Fred Haynes came out on the porch, and found the doctor sitting there alone, puffing reflectively at a cigarette.

"Throw that thing away!" commanded Haynes sternly. "That's a nice way to swear off. You talked me out of winning a fifty-dollar bet, but I'm going to see to it that you live up to your side of the contract. Hand over the rest of those coffin nails."

"By George!" ejaculated Phelps. "I lit one without thinking. Force of habit."

"Your will power is just as weak as your body," quoted Haynes. "You've gone a long way down the wrong side of the hill, Doc, but if you're game and patient——"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Phelps.

"At that," said his host, "I think you'll find it worth while. And if you could get rid of some of that unhealthy fat—light exercise will burn it up, Doc—you wouldn't look so much like a Brownie. Not sore, are you? Well, good night."

V

For the first three days of the second week, the ranch house was anything but a pleasant habitation. One of the long winter rains set in, and the "inmates," as Haynes persisted in calling his guests, were cooped up indoors with their unhappiness.

Billy Wade continued to fret about the plaster casts. He also complained bitterly of the food, and attributed his sleepless nights to the hardness of his bed—which was the best one in the house. He took a certain malicious satisfaction in the misery of Doc Phelps, who was suffering acutely from nerves and a physical craving for the things which he had so lightly renounced. Reddy Burke mooned about the premises with the air of a martyr, and even Haynes was affected by the atmosphere of gloom. There were times when a carelessly dropped remark produced an effect not unlike that which follows the tossing of a piece of raw meat into a bear pit.

"It's a swell little party, Doc," said Haynes, on the third night, after Wade and Burke had retired. "Did you hear what your patient said about the grub? Considering that this isn't a hotel, and that he isn't being charged anything for it——"

Doc Phelps, who was sitting by the open fire with his head in his hands, grunted, but made no other comment.

"Old man Job got too much credit," mused Haynes.

"Eh—what's that?"

"They say Job was a patient man," explained Haynes; "but in my opinion Noah had him skinned to death. Be a good fellow, Doc, and ask me why."

"I'll bite," said Phelps wearily. "What's the answer, Mister Bones?"

"Well, that time when it rained so long, wasn't Noah shut up in the water wagon with a lot of hyenas and things, and wasn't one of his sons a drinking man? I'm for the fellow who said that Ham never should have been let into the ark!"

The doctor grinned in spite of himself.

"I'm sorry, Fred," said he, "but this period of mental depression is part of the cure. I've started it, and I'm going through. It won't last much longer."

"Bully for you, old horse!" said Haynes. "I don't care a whole lot for this fighter of yours, Doc, but if this treatment straightens you up, I guess I can put up with the hyenas a few days more."

The next morning the sun came out, and the sufferers crept into the open. There is no tonic like clean California air, washed by a long rain. Reddy Burke pranced like a colt.

"Come on!" he challenged. "Let's take a hike over the hills!"

"Go on, Billy, it's what you need," said the doctor.

"I will if you'll go, too," said Wade.

It was a tired, sweaty trio which returned at noon, but peace had been declared somewhere on the road, and there was no squabbling over the lunch table. The doctor complained of being stiff and sore—and small wonder, for they had walked him ten miles at a brisk pace!—so Reddy Burke, who knew all the tricks of the training camp, gave him an alcohol rub, after which the doctor fell asleep in the hammock. That night Billy Wade slept ten hours without turning over in bed, and even Phelps awoke with a breakfast appetite—something which he had not known in years. The turning point had been reached.

"Now, Billy," said the doctor, "we'll begin taking off that fat. Road work in the morning, shadow boxing and rope skipping in the afternoon. I want you to get up a good sweat twice a day, and I think I'll do some sweating myself. I sleep better when I'm tired."

There ensued the regular routine of light training, and at the end of ten days Haynes had three clear-eyed, sunburned, and ravenous boarders, who ate everything in sight three times a day and yawned shamelessly over the supper table.

"Say, why can't you fellows keep awake?" he complained. "Doc, I hope I may choke if you haven't got a jaw-bone, after all! I thought it was only a jowl and a dewlap. The fat is melting off you in streams."

"Yes, and maybe I don't feel better for it!" crowed Phelps, passing his fingers along the angle of his jaw.

"Yeh," said Reddy, "keep following us on the road, Doc, and we'll make a featherweight of you. I'm feeling a little bit of all right myself these days. When we start the boxing, I'll give the old champ here an awful ride. Hey, Billy, do you remember that day at Sheehan's place when I dropped you with a right hook?"

"You bet!" said Wade.

"I always had a notion," continued Reddy, "that with just us two in a barn somewhere, I could lick you. Somehow I never could fight in public, but I'm a wolf in private. Why is that, Doc?"

"I don't know. Jack Jeffries couldn't fight in a ring, but he used to give Jim the toughest battles of his life."

"Maybe it comes from knowing a guy and not being afraid of him," said Reddy. "Hurry up and get those things off Billy's hands. I want to give him a trimming."

"We'll take the casts off when the soreness is all gone," said the doctor, "and you needn't worry about the fighting. You'll get enough of it, I promise

you. We're not going to gamble on Billy's condition; we're going to *know* what he can do."

"What are you figuring on?" asked Haynes. "A real fight is the only test."

"We'll give him three real fights," said the doctor. "First, we'll train him for a six-round go, and then we'll let him rest for a few weeks. Then we'll shape him up for ten rounds, and the last time we'll send him to a finish."

"To a finish!" said Reddy. "With me?"

"With you," said the doctor.

Billy Wade rose and side-stepped about the room, swinging his bandaged hands in short, vicious circles and hooks.

"You'd better get ready, kid," chuckled the ex-champion, "because I'm going to make you think a grizzly bear is after you!"

"Huh!" sneered Burke. "You're the fellow that had better be in shape!"

VI

Billy Wade's mysterious disappearance was a nine days' wonder in the athletic world, and whenever material ran short, the sporting writers fell back upon it as a topic, and all sorts of wild guesses and rumors found their way into print. Wade was in a sanitarium; Wade was married, and living upon a farm in Wisconsin; Wade was in Australia; Wade was dead.

Since everybody's guess is nobody's certainty, the real truth was not even suspected, much less revealed. Nobody hinted at his "coming back"; everybody took it for granted that the former champion had gone the way of all fighting flesh. Billy Wade slipped into the past tense, and after six months he was no more than a memory. Tacks McLowrie's middleweight was slashing his way to a title, a new white hope had been discovered, and not yet exposed as hopeless, and attention was diverted from the lightweight division. Frankie Brady was on tour with a burlesque troupe, and, unless rumor wronged him, more interested in a certain strawberry-blond actress than in risking his crown against any worthy opponent.

Joseph Porsano, a shrewd young man who managed a "club" and promoted boxing contests, received a letter one day which caused him to rub his nose thoughtfully for the better part of half an hour, during which time he read the letter again. Then he closed his desk, packed his valise, and departed from the city. The end of Porsano's railroad journey was a small town in an interior county, where a trim, brown young man with eyeglasses was waiting on the depot platform.

"Hello, Doc!" said Porsano. "You're looking fine. I wouldn't have known you. Where's the front porch and the double chin?"

"Gone," said Phelps.

"You look as if you might be this mysterious lightweight you're trying to put over on me. Where do we go from here?"

"Jump in the runabout," said the doctor, "and I'll tell you all about it as we go along."

They were well into the open country before Porsano began to ask questions.

"In the first place," said the promoter, "who is this kid? Has he ever done any real fighting—with good ones, I mean?"

"Some," said Phelps. "I didn't tell you who he is because I know how strong you fellows are for publicity, and we're under cover with our man. It's Billy Wade."

"The devil you say!" ejaculated the astounded Porsano. "Billy Wade! Do you mean to tell me that he's been here all the time?"

"Ever since he dropped out of sight."

"The old stuff, eh? He's trying to come back?"

"Not trying, Joe. He's done it."

The promoter shook his head.

"Don't fool yourself, Doc. A beaten champion never comes back. The last time I saw Billy Wade fight, a bantamweight could have licked him. No, Doc; they never come back."

"They never went at it the right way," argued the doctor. "Joe, I've taken that boy all apart and put him together again. You remember how bad his hands were? I put 'em in plaster casts for five weeks, and now you can't tell that there was ever anything wrong with them. He hasn't had a drink in seven months—or a cigar. He's been working every day and going to bed at nine o'clock. If ever a fighter had a systematic and scientific renovating, Wade's the boy. They never come back, eh? Well, wait till you see him; that's all."

"You can't tell anything by looking at 'em," said Porsano. "I've seen forty of 'em. They look all right, and they train all right, but when you get these broken-down fighters into the ring they blow up. It's nerves as much as anything else. A battle shows 'em up."

"That's why you're here," said Phelps. "I'm not going to ask you to take my word for anything. Remember Reddy Burke?"

The promoter nodded.

"One tough little rat," said he. "If he'd fight in the ring like he fights Wade in the training quarters, he'd be a topnotcher."

"Well," said the doctor, "he fights Wade to a finish to-morrow. They've already gone six and ten rounds, and Billy trained for each go just the same as for a real battle. He wore eight-ounce gloves for the last one because we couldn't take a chance on hurting his hands; but to-morrow the gloves will be regulation size, and it will be the toughest fight you ever saw in your life. I'm not going to tell you any more; keep your eyes open and use your own judgment."

"It listens well," grinned Porsano. "Seeing is believing with me, and I'm getting so now that I knock off about fifty per cent for eye trouble. What's your plan? Who do you want to spring him on?"

"Frankie Brady."

"You say it easy, Doc. There's a lot of good lightweights who want that fourflusher. Bo Brooks won't make a match unless he has all the best of it—money and every other way—and Frankie won't fight anybody but a dead one."

"That's the reason he'll jump at Billy," said the doctor. "So far as the money is concerned, we should worry? They can cut it any way they like or they can have the whole works. We'd be tickled to death to make it winner take all, but I suppose Brooks will insist on a long end, win, lose, or draw. If Billy Wade could go back four years and fight the way he did when he was licking such men as Buckskin Kelly, Lew Peters, and the Tonopah Kid, how long would Frankie Brady last with him?"

"About as long as a cigarette," said Porsano.

"You think you know something about a fighter, Joe? You can tell when a man's in shape? Fair enough. I'm going to put you in Reddy Burke's corner to-morrow afternoon, and he'll be under your orders. He'll fight to instructions, and I want you to make him lick this poor old has-been—if he can. You can hold Reddy back and make a long fight of it, or you can send him in to mix—use your own judgment. You've got a good little fighter in your corner; see what you can do to my man. To-morrow night, if you can't see a way to win a pot of money at two to one, I'll send you to an oculist. Tie on your hat, Joe, because I'm going to step on this old boat and find out if she can still do sixty miles an hour."

VII

The final test had none of the earmarks of a festival; every man who was present was there on business. The only witnesses were Haynes, referee;

Phelps, chief second and adviser in Wade's corner; Porsano, ditto in Burke's corner, and Don Felipe Ortega, present by special favor in the capacity of timekeeper.

"You know, Doc," confessed Porsano, as the quiet group moved from the house toward the ring, which was pitched behind the barn, "yesterday I thought this fight to a finish might be a hippodrome. I've been watching Wade and Burke, and they're both as nervous as cats. The way they act, you'd think they were going to fight a duel."

"Yes," said the doctor. "I didn't sleep much last night—thinking about it. We've all worked hard to make this boy over again. We feel certain that he's right, Joe, but you never know how much stamina is in a man until you pump it all out. At ten rounds, he fought like a wild cat; to-day he may have to go twenty or thirty, and he's against a tough game. Reddy has been with him four years, and Billy has never yet dropped him for the full count. If he passes this test, we can send him against anybody and feel certain of him."

"I see you haven't got any towel swingers," said Porsano.

"No," said Phelps. "Many a fighter is mauled and manhandled to death in his own corner by a lot of numskulls who won't give him a chance to breathe. A tired man wants air—all the air he can get. A minute of relaxation and deep breathing does him more good than all the rubbing and kneading and slapping that you can give him."

The customs of the ring were observed, even to the weighing-in, and Joe Porsano, really an excellent judge of physical fitness, opened his eyes wide as the bath robe slipped from Wade's shoulders.

The slight roll of fat about the waist had disappeared, and the frontal overhang had given way to horizontal ridges of muscle. Between the neck and the knees Wade did not carry a spare ounce; to look at him was to get the impression of a machine built for speed and endurance and then stripped to the running gear. The greatest change of all was in the boy's face. There was no sullenness in the clear eyes, nor about the mouth; every feature seemed sharpened and refined, leaving no trace of the puffy, pasty ex-champion of the year before.

"One thirty-one!" exclaimed Porsano, looking at the bar. "You've got him down too fine, haven't you?"

"Naw, we ain't!" said Reddy Burke. "That's his fightin' notch, see? Load him up with more weight than he needs, and he'd have to burn it off in a fight. It's them burned-up and broken-down tissues what clogs a guy's blood and makes him slow down. We ain't carryin' no excess fuel."

"Where do you get that stuff?" asked the promoter, smiling.

"From the Doc," said Reddy. "Believe me, that feller knows something about training. I always had a notion that the more weight the better. The Doc says that's bunk. He's got me down to where I'm six pounds lighter than a straw hat, but all of it is fighting weight, and I can go faster and last longer than I could before. You watch me root into the old champ; he'll know that he's been to a barbecue."

Fred Haynes, acting as referee, called the boys to the middle of the ring.

"Shake hands," said he. "No hard feelings?"

Billy Wade put his arm around Reddy's neck.

"I'm coming after you, old kid," said he.

"You won't have to get out no search warrant," grunted Reddy. "I'll meet you somewhere on the way."

"All set?" asked Haynes. "Go to your corners. Ring the bell, Ortega!"

Don Felipe, one eye glued to the doctor's stop watch, smote violently upon a small anvil and the battle began.

Billy Wade darted out of his corner, head down and hands low at his sides, ready to slam with either one the instant he got within range. Reddy Burke, looking like a freckled little cinnamon bear, trotted to close quarters without hesitation, and the gloves began to fly. For three minutes there was no sound but the scraping of shoes upon canvas, the thud of body blows, and the sympathetic groans of Don Felipe Ortega.

"How long can he stand that kind of going?" asked Porsano of his charge after the round was over.

"That's what we're going to find out," said Reddy. "I got in a couple of pippins to the slats."

"Keep right after him," said Joe. "That sort of pace will crack him if anything will."

"Right!" said Burke.

But Wade did not crack. He crowded a whole battle into each round, and Porsano, watching the other corner narrowly, saw no signs of distress. He fought in his old-time style, a headlong, crouching attack directed at the body, with an occasional vicious overhand chop to the head.

After the tenth round, Reddy began to weaken. His body from chest to belt was red and blotched, and his lower lip was split. Wade's right eye was slowly closing, in spite of all the doctor could do, and his nose was bleeding freely—evidence that the battle had not been entirely one-sided.

"Gee, but he's—got a lot—behind those short punches!" wheezed Reddy, at the end of the thirteenth round. "Some fighter yet—ain't he?"

"You bet," said Porsano. "I've seen enough to convince me, Reddy. You'd better quit."

"Who, me?" and the little fellow fairly bristled. "Why, the champ never knocked me out yet! If I can land a couple—on his chin——"

When Don Felipe struck the anvil at the beginning of the seventeenth round, Doc Phelps yelled across the ring to Porsano:

"Look out for your man, Joe! I've turned the wolf loose!"

"If he can fight any faster than he's been fighting," said Porsano, "he *is* a wolf!"

Billy Wade fell upon his tired sparring partner like a fury, battering down his guard and clubbing short, savage punches into the body. Reddy wavered, gave ground, and dropped his hands at his sides. Like a flash, Wade switched the attack to the jaw—two hooks and a swing, and down went Reddy Burke, a tangle of arms and legs. Billy dropped on his knees beside him and took the red head into his lap.

"Old pal, you ain't hurt, are you? I didn't mean to wallop you so hard—on the level! Doc! Come and look at him! He's out yet!"

It was three minutes before Reddy opened his eyes.

"What come off?" he mumbled.

"He got you, my son," said the doctor, passing the smelling salts under Reddy's nose.

Billy Wade leaped into the air, cracked his heels together, and emitted a succession of piercing yells.

"I never flattened him before in my life!" he shouted. "Now bring on your Frankie Bradys!"

"Yes," said Reddy, sitting up, with a twisted grin, "if you'll stick one on Brady's chops like the one you just pinned on mine, there won't be much to it. Why, you old champ! I didn't think you had it in you!"

"Well, Joe, what do you think?" asked the doctor.

Supper was over, and the three older men were sitting upon the porch in the moonlight. The late antagonists were squabbling amiably over a game of seven-up in the dining room.

"You're managing him?" asked Porsano.

"No," said the doctor. "I've taught him how to manage himself. I can't appear in this thing; I'm only his physician."

"Well, you've done a mighty fine job. He fights exactly as he used to, except that he's got more zip than he ever had. Frankie Brady won't be much more than a light lunch for him now. The only trouble will be to make the match. I'll go back to town and sort of spill the news that I've heard from Billy and that he wants just one more match. No need to say why; they'll all figure that he's broke and needs the money. That'll be enough to start the sporting writers after him; those fellows have written themselves into the belief that Billy Wade can never come back; half of 'em have had him buried. It ought to look like a soft thing for Brooks and Brady; if it doesn't, we can make it worth their while. If I hook 'em for a battle, you ship Billy into town about ten days before the fight and let him do a little road work and some light boxing—just enough for a stall. No need to uncover him to any one; it would hurt the odds."

"You're thinking of betting on him?" asked Haynes.

"*Am* I? This is one place where I'd hock the crown jewels and mortgage the family plate!"

Later, when Haynes and Phelps were alone, the former asked a question.

"You'll make a clean-up on this fight, won't you, Doc?"

"I've made it already," said the doctor. "A clean-up mentally, morally, and physically. As to the betting, I don't believe I'll do any."

"What? You don't mean to say you'd pass up a cinch like this?"

"That's the idea. Do you know what they call me in town, Fred? 'The sporting doctor.' It's a bad combination. A man can't be a sport and a doctor at the same time; he's bound to neglect one practice for the other. I've been a sport, and it didn't get me anything; now I'm going to try being a doctor."

"Why this sudden change of heart?"

"I don't know as I can explain it to you," said Phelps, "because I hardly understand it myself. You know how I handled this boy Wade. First, I cleaned him out physically, but I knew that it wouldn't last unless I cleaned him out mentally and morally as well. I took that kid off by himself and preached to him; I showed him that clean living and manliness and decency were worth more than just a means to an end—such as licking Brady, for example. And I talked so much to him along those lines that I guess some of the sermons struck in on me. For the first time in a number of years, I'm fit physically, and it has had a certain effect upon my mental processes. It's a humiliating confession to make, Fred, but I haven't been much of a success as a physician for the simple reason that I was too busy being a sport. That was another habit. I've gambled ever since I can remember; I pitched pennies when I was in short pants. I learned more poker in the high school

than anything else. I supported half the tight players in my class at college, and it never got me a thing worth having. I'm done."

"But—this is a cinch. It's easy money."

Phelps yawned.

"I never did like cinches," he said. "It was always the excitement and the element of chance that hooked me. And easy money never did me any good."

"I think you're a chump," said Haynes.

"I think I have been," was the unruffled response, "but I'm going to be a regular nine-to-twelve and two-to-five doctor for a change."

"More power to you!" said Haynes.

VIII

Frankie Brady, lightweight champion, sat in his corner, working the padding off his knuckles.

"He *looks* good," said Brady doubtfully.

"Didn't Jeff look good at Reno!" asked Bo Brooks. "Take it from me—they never come back. All you got to do is to stick a few good hard wallops into his pantry and leave him for the sweeper."

"Uh-huh," said Brady. "The poor sucker ain't even got a manager. And only one man in his corner. Reddy Burke! What does he know about handling a fighter?"

"Bob Fitzsimmons used to do that one-man-in-the-corner stunt," said Brooks. "Said they was in his way."

Billy Wade, introduced as the former lightweight champion of the world, drew a scattering volley of cheers, mixed with hoots and catcalls. The Roman populace with its ready thumb was no more cruel than the average crowd which attends a boxing match. Wade, the short-ender in the betting, had shown nothing in his brief period of training unless it was an inclination to avoid careful inspection. The consensus of opinion was that he was only a shell and that five rounds would see his finish.

Frankie Brady was received with vociferous applause, acknowledging the same with a curt nod of his tousled head. Just before the bell rang, a trim, bronzed young man with glasses left Porsano's private box, and shook hands with Wade.

"Eat him alive, old boy!" said the doctor.

"Leave him to us!" said Reddy Burke. "We're going to take that guy apart a joint at a time. Look at him, Doc! He's got a lot of fat to burn up, eh?"

Billy Wade introduced himself to Frankie Brady with a whirlwind attack which made the champion dive into a clinch. The sensations he experienced may be duplicated at the cost of tackling a mule's hind legs or attempting to hug a thunderbolt. There was no holding those brown shoulders, no blocking those driving fists, and the champion extricated himself from the storm center and retreated, ducking and side-stepping. Wade clung to him like a shadow, driving Brady into corners, hammering him out of them, and mauling him along the ropes. The spectators, who had settled down to watch the feeling-out process, were startled into loud yells.

"Break him! Break him!" cried Brady to the referee, hanging on for dear life.

"Break yourself!" said the official. "You're holding; he ain't."

"Four-flusher!" said Wade, hammering his right fist under the champion's heart. "I'm going to make you jump out of the ring!"

At the end of the round, Brady hurried to his corner with a wild light in his eye.

"Stay right with him," said Brooks. "He's trying to win in a couple of rounds. It's his only chance. The faster he fights, the sooner he'll blow up. Hang right to him!"

"*You* made this match!" said Frankie Brady. "I didn't want to fight till Thanksgiving."

History was repeating itself. This time it was Frankie Brady who had failed to train for a hard battle.

"Aw, can that!" growled Brooks. "Go in there and jab his head off. He can't last, I say!"

Brady tried to follow instructions, but no left jab could have held Billy Wade at arm's length. He was determined to come to close quarters, and, once there, he addressed himself to the champion's stomach with a resounding tattoo which sent that agitated young man flying from one angle of the ring to the other. Uncle Bill Horton, who had seen many things but who had never before witnessed the second coming of a champion, stroked his chin, dictating mechanically to the telegraph operator at his elbow.

"Wade puts in solid right to body, and follows with left to same place—Brady hanging on—Wade rushes champion to ropes, landing right, left, and right to body without a return—Brady clinches, and takes severe punishment—Wade's round."

"Don't let him get at you in the clinches," cautioned Brooks. "Block those short ones."

"I can't hold him," panted Brady. "He's strong as a bull."

"Box him, you fool! Stay away for a while. He can't last."

Brady tried all the wiles of the seasoned campaigner. He jabbed, and he ducked, and he tried to "stall," but he could not smother the headlong attack of the challenger. Wade shed stinging left jabs and right swings with an impatient jerk of his head, walking through them to close quarters. He would not be tricked into sparring at long range, but when he got inside Brady's guard he attacked with tigerish ferocity. Hitching his shoulders and dropping his knees together, he sent in short, crashing drives below the rib line, lifting every ounce of his weight and all the strength of his legs into each jolting blow.

Until the sixth, each round was a repetition of the first. Early in that period, Wade knew that Brady was weakening fast. He felt his body sag as he fell into a clinch. Immediately Billy concentrated his attack upon the jaw, the first gun being a wicked overhand right, delivered from a crouch. It struck a trifle high, but it smashed Frankie Brady's nose as flat as a postage stamp and knocked him sprawling on his back. He was up at once, running desperately, but Wade chased him into a corner, feinted for the first time in the fight, and then crossed the right fairly upon the chin.

Before the referee had marked the passing of the first second, Uncle Bill Horton was dictating the following message which was to shake the sporting world from center to circumference:

"Wade by a knockout in sixth."

IX

Doctor Phelps sat in his office, cleaning out an inkwell for which he hoped to have use in the future. The door opened and in came Reddy Burke and the lightweight champion.

"You ought to stuck with us after the fight!" said Reddy. "Talk about champagne! You could have had a bath in it!"

The doctor looked at Billy Wade.

"Not a drop," said the champion. "That's on the level. You know how it is after a fight—you got to cut into the grape to show you're a good fellow. The gang got me and took me out, that's all."

"And we got ten weeks on the P. & B. circuit—a thousand a week!" chortled Reddy. "We're going away to-night, so we want to see you and fix

up that bill."

"Bill?" repeated the doctor. "Oh, never mind that. There isn't going to be any bill."

"Nothing doing with that kind of talk!" said the champion sternly. "Who was it fixed me up? Who was it made me win this fight?"

"That's all right," said Phelps. "Maybe I got as much out of it as you did."

"How much did you bet, Doc?" asked Reddy.

"Not a cent."

"I told you he wasn't going to bet!" said Billy. "And I had a hunch that you'd run out on the bill. You wouldn't refuse to take a little present, would you, Doc?"

"No," said the doctor, "I wouldn't refuse."

Billy Wade drew a small jeweler's box from his pocket, and opened it.

"You'll never find a better one than this, Doc," said he, "and I want you to wear it to remember me by. You made me win a tougher fight than was ever pulled off in a ring—yes, and a better one, too."

"I know, Billy," said the doctor. "I know, because I won the same fight myself."

Some people claim that a five-karat, blue-white diamond, set in platinum, is vulgar. Doctor Arthur Phelps, whose practice is increasing daily, says that the rays from such a stone dazzle the eyes of a patient, and allow him to charge more than his services are really worth.

But he may be joking about that.

ONE-THIRTY-THREE—RINGSIDE

CHARLES FRANCIS HEALY, known to all the world as "Young Sullivan," sat on the edge of his bed and stared incredulously at Billy Avery, his manager, press agent, and bosom friend.

"Naw," said Healy, shaking his head, "you don't mean that, Billy. You're only kidding."

"It ain't what *I* mean, Charles," said Avery, discouragement showing in the dispirited droop of his shoulders and the flat tones of his voice. "It's what Badger means that cuts the ice. I talked to him for four hours—the obstinate mule!—and that's the very best we get—one-thirty-three at the ringside."

"But, man alive," wailed the little fighter, "that's murder in the first degree! He'd be getting me in the ring so weak that a featherweight could lick me!"

"Yes," said Avery, "and he knows that as well as you do. That's what he's playing for—a cinch."

"The public won't stand for it!" stormed Healy.

"The public be damned!" said Billy Avery, unconsciously quoting another and greater public character. "It stands for anything—everything. We're on the wrong side of this weight question, Charles. Badger has got the champion, and it's just our confounded luck that Cline can do one-thirty-three and be strong. Cline won it from Fisher at one-thirty-three ringside, and Badger says that every man who fights Cline for the title must make the same weight—the lightweight limit."

"Huh!" snarled Healy. "There ain't any such thing as a limit! I notice that they called 'Young Corbett' a champion after he licked McGovern, and Corbett couldn't get within a city block of the featherweight limit! They make me sick! It's the champion that makes the weight limit—not the rules!"

"All true," said Avery; "and that's exactly why we're up against it. Cline can do the weight. Badger opened up and talked straight off his chest, Charlie. He says he isn't anxious to fight us because he's got softer matches in sight where Cline won't have to take a chance. He thinks that this weight restriction will stop us bothering him with challenges and chasing him

around the country with certified checks and things. I hollered like a wolf for one-thirty-five at three in the afternoon, and he only laughed at me. 'We're not fighting welters, this season,' he says. 'One-thirty-three ringside, or nothing. Take it or leave it.' The Shylock!"

"Well, leave it, then!" said Healy angrily. "If Mike Badger thinks I'm sucker enough to cut off an arm and a leg, just to get a fight with that hunk of cheese that he's managing, he's got another guess coming. I'll go into the welterweight class first!"

"Y-e-e-s," said Avery slowly, "and there isn't a welter in the country today that would draw a two-thousand-dollar house. I suppose we'll have to go back to the six and ten-round no-decision things, splitting the money even, and agreeing to box easy! Yah! A fine game, that is!"

"I suppose you think I ought to grab this fight with Cline?" It was more than a question; it was an accusation.

"Well," said the business manager, looking at the ceiling, for he had no wish to meet Young Sullivan's eyes just then, "the bank roll ain't very fat, Charlie. We could use a few thousand, you know, and there's more money in losing to Cline—don't get excited, kid; let me talk—than we could get by winning from a flock of pork-and-bean welters. That fight would draw forty thousand if it draws a cent. If you *win*—and it's no cinch that Cline will be as good as he was two years ago—we can clean up a fortune the first year, like shooting fish!"

"If I win!" said Healy bitterly. "I tell you, it'll *murder* me to get down to one-thirty-three! I'd have to cut the meat right off the bone to do it. You know I made one-thirty-five for Kelly, and it was all I could do to outpoint him in twenty rounds when I should have stopped him with a punch!"

"The loser's end ought to be eight thousand, at least," said Avery, still looking at the ceiling. "And in case you don't get him, you've got a fine alibi—the weight stopped you. It was your stomach that bothered you in the Kelly fight, remember that."

"See here, Billy," said Charles Francis, "you want me ta fight Cline, don't you? Even at one-thirty-three?"

"We need the money," said the manager simply.

"I'll gamble you!" said Healy, producing a silver half dollar. "Heads, I fight him; tails, I don't. Will you stick by it, Billy, if it comes tails?"

"Sure!" said the manager. "Will you go through with it if she comes heads?"

"It's a promise!" said Healy.

The coin spun, flickering, in the air, struck the carpet, and rolled to the fighter's feet.

"Heads!" he groaned. "I lose, Billy!"

Whenever a sporting writer had reason to rake over his vocabulary for the sort of an adjective which should best fit Mike Badger, manager of "Biddy" Cline, the choice usually lay between two words. The scribes who liked Mike selected "astute." The other said he was "obstinate." Both were right.

To be absolutely fair in the matter, Mike was neither better nor worse than any other manager. Only wiser. When he made a business contract, he was prudent enough to demand at least seventy-five per cent the best of the bargain, and tenacious enough to hold out until he got it. Mike simply did what the other fellows would have done if they had been given the opportunity, and every one knows what an unprincipled course that is to pursue. One fight promoter, hoping to secure certain concessions and smarting under Mike's steady refusal to recede from the original proposition, burst out thus:

"Ain't you got any sportsmanship in you at all?"

"Not a stitch," answered Mike. "Sportsmanship and business are two different things. I'm a business man, and you know my terms. I've got something to sell—buy it or let it slide."

In the "good old days," which some of the scarred bare-knuckle veterans still mourn with sorrowful pride, a fighter needed no business manager for the excellent reason that fighting was not then a business. It was a habit. With the era of large purses and profitable theatrical engagements came the shrewd business man, and Mike Badger was the shrewdest of them all. He could smell a five-dollar note farther than a bird dog can smell a glue factory.

A champion is the greatest asset a wise manager can have—and vice versa. The very word, "champion," is a valuable trade-mark. It means easy money, free advertising, and, last and most important, the right to dictate terms. Every ambitious fighter dreams of winning a title some day; the man who has one dreams only of keeping it until the last dollar has been squeezed out and then retiring undefeated.

It is because of the financial value of this trade-mark that championships are so carefully guarded. It is easier to hale a multimillionaire before an investigating committee than it is to get a champion of the world into the

ring with a fighter who has an even chance to defeat him. All sorts of tactics are used in order to side-step dangerous matches. Managers of heavyweights, lacking poundage restrictions, often bid the ambitious challenger good-by until such time as he has secured a reputation, fondly hoping that in the process he will be soundly licked and eliminated. Managers of bantams, feathers, and lightweights insist that husky aspirants shall "do the weight, ringside." Many a man has saved his title by starving an opponent for a week before a match. The old-time bare-knuckle warriors sneer at this sort of thing. They were used to making matches, "give or take ten pounds," but, as has been pointed out, they were not business men. The slogan, "May the best man win," has been changed to "May the best-managed man win."

Biddy Cline was a great little fighter—probably the greatest at his weight that the ring had seen during his generation. He was no boxer, but a sturdy, willing, courageous chap, who began fighting when the bell rang and continued to fight as long as the other man could stand in front of him. His record was black with knockouts, though Biddy was not the typical one-punch fighter. His victims succumbed to the cumulative effect of a thousand blows as well as the terrific pace they were compelled to travel. It was a very strong lightweight, indeed, who could play Cline's game with the champion and hear the gong at the end of the fifteenth round. Biddy's best fighting weight was slightly below one-thirty-three, he had held the championship for three years, and, under Mike Badger's careful guidance, expected to hold it for three years more.

Charles Francis Healy had been a large, sharp thorn in the champion's side for some time. He was a dashing, sensational performer, a clever boxer, a hard, clean hitter, and a tremendous finisher—the very ideal of the average fight follower. He had beaten nearly all the men whom Cline had defeated—most of them in shorter fights—but this was only natural, as Healy's best fighting weight was close to one hundred and forty pounds. When he trained below one hundred and thirty-eight he was sacrificing strength and stamina, and one hundred and thirty-five pounds at three in the afternoon was the lowest notch he had been able to make with any degree of safety. In spite of this, Billy Avery challenged the champion once a month with clocklike regularity, and was as frequently informed that the holder of the title had other pressing matters on his hands. The end of Avery's campaign had been the private conference with Badger and the latter's ultimatum:

"One-thirty-three, ringside, or no fight."

Then, with the hardihood of a man who gambles when he knows he cannot afford to lose, Healy had risked certain defeat on the flip of a coin.

The match was made with a tremendous thrumming of journalistic tomtoms, and sporting America sat up cheerfully, for this was the one great fight it really wished to see. When the articles of agreement were drawn up—a queer document, half legal, half sporting in its phraseology—Mike Badger dropped a large fly in Billy Avery's ointment. It came with the dictation of the forfeiture clause—Mr. Badger speaking:

"For weight, five thousand dollars; for appearance——"

"Hold on, there!" yelled Avery. "Who ever heard of a weight forfeit of five thousand dollars?"

"You did—just now," said the imperturbable Mike, with a grin. "I'm going to make it an object for your man to do one-thirty-three. I've had fighters forfeit their weight money on me before this."

Avery argued and Healy glared across the table at Biddy Cline, who glared back, such conduct being customary in the presence of newspaper men; but Mike was firm as Gibraltar.

"Here's the point, gentlemen," said he, ignoring the sputtering Avery. "I don't want this man to come into the ring weighing a ton. This fight is to be for the lightweight championship of the world, at the lightweight limit. If we are overweight, we shall expect to forfeit five thousand dollars. If Avery's man can't do one-thirty-three, I want to know it now. If he *can* make it, why should he object to a large forfeit! Come on, Avery. Now's your chance to spring some of those certified checks you've been flashing around the country so recklessly!"

In the end Mike Badger won out, as was his habit. Billy Avery had the added worry of knowing that his entire fortune, as well as the sweepings and scrapings of Healy's bank roll, was forfeit unless the challenger reached the lightweight limit.

"We're hooked," said Avery gloomily, when he was alone with his warrior. "If the weight forfeit had been a thousand bucks or so, we could have let it slide and still made money; but now it's one-thirty-three or bust!"

"Bust is good!" said Healy. "We bust if we don't, and we bust if we do. You might have known that Badger would slip one over on you somehow. A fine mess you've got us in, Billy!"

"Me?" exclaimed the manager, virtuously indignant. "Say, what's the matter with you? Who offered to toss the coin? Whose idea was that?"

"Shucks!" growled Healy. "I only did that because I knew you intended to make the match anyway."

"You took a chance——"

"Yes; and so did Steve Brodie," interrupted the fighter. "He ought to have had his head examined for doing it, and I'm worse, because Steve had a chance to win and I haven't. I was kind of figuring on forfeiting my weight money if I saw I couldn't get that low without trouble; but now I've got to hang up my hat in a Turkish bath joint for a week before that fight, and I'll be as weak as a kitten! You're one swell manager, you are!"

"And you're a grand squealer," said Avery. "Your own proposition and now you blame me."

Thus, with mutual reproaches and a general disarticulation of family skeletons, the challenger and his manager set out to secure training quarters for the coming event, the shadow of which loomed dark about them.

II

"Can Healy do the weight and be strong?"

This momentous question agitated every sporting center in the country. It was discussed as far away as London, Paris, and Melbourne. Men wrote about it, talked about it, argued about it; and all agreed that the outcome of the match hinged upon the correct answer, and nowhere was there such uncertainty as in Healy's training camp. There were only two men who really knew, and they were not committing themselves. Even the trainer was excluded from the daily weighing process.

The newspaper men urged that the public had a "right to know"; spies from the other camp nosed about daily; betting men begged the lowdown and on-the-level; curious ones sought to satisfy their curiosity; close personal friends went away disappointed. Billy Avery would talk about everything but the weight, and when that subject was mentioned, he became an oyster, gripping tight the pearl of information. Healy had but one answer: "See Billy about it."

The best judges had no chance to form an opinion, for they never saw Healy stripped. Whenever he appeared in the gymnasium he was loaded down with sweaters and woolens.

Public opinion was divided. Half the fight followers inclined to the belief that Healy could not make the weight and was therefore secretive; the other half pointed out that Avery might be preparing an unpleasant surprise for the opposition.

"He's keeping Cline guessing," said the optimistic ones. "If he couldn't make the weight, he'd have been a fool to post five thousand bucks."

At the end of three weeks Mike Badger received a telephone message from Billy Avery. He hung up the receiver with a hard little edge of a smile, for he had been expecting something of the sort.

"They're on the run, Biddy," he remarked to his champion. "Avery wants to see me to-night—on the strict Q.T. I knew that big sucker couldn't do the weight, or anywhere near it!"

"Did he say so?" asked the literal Cline.

"Bonehead!" retorted Mike. "He didn't have to *say* it. What else could he want to see me about! I'll call the turn now—he wants to rat out on their forfeit. A swell chance he's got!"

"Serves 'em right for going around the country trying to make a rum out of me!" said Cline feelingly. "Hand it to 'em good, Mike!"

"That's the best thing I do," remarked Mr. Badger.

The real heart-to-heart business of the fighting game is transacted without witnesses, and it shrinks from publicity. The newspaper men were not invited to attend the moonlight conference of the managers, and the meeting was as secret as if they had been preparing to dynamite a national bank.

"Hello, Mike!" said Avery. "Have a cigar?"

"Thanks! Well, out with it! What's on your mind?"

"I wanted to have a chat with you about this weight proposition," said Avery.

"Haven't you got a copy of the articles of agreement?"

"Yes," said Billy.

"Well, if I remember," said Badger calmly, "it says there that the men are to do one-thirty-three, ringside. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"That's all there is to it," said Badger. "Have you just found out that Healy can't get down that low!"

"He can get down there, all right," said Avery, "but it'll weaken him pretty bad. Chances are it won't be a very good fight. Can't we get together somehow and—and give the people a run for their money? Suppose we should come in a pound or so overweight. You wouldn't grab that forfeit, would you?"

"Why wouldn't I?" asked Badger grimly. "That's business, ain't it? A contract is a contract, and it ain't my fault that you went into this thing without knowing whether your man could do the weight or not. You came to me and asked me for this match. I wasn't anxious to make it, but I turned

down some good theatrical offers and signed up. You mustn't expect me to lose money on your mistakes. My dough is posted, and I'm going to carry out my part of the contract. You must do the same thing. I wouldn't let you come in a pound over, or an ounce over. One-thirty-three, ringside, and you'll do it, or I'll claim your five thousand."

"Looking for a cinch, ain't you?" sneered Avery.

"You bet I am; and if you had a champion you'd be looking for cinches, too! Now, I'm going to tell you something else: Don't pull any of that moth-eaten stuff about breaking a hand or an arm or a leg, and having to call off the match. I won't stand for it. I'll claim your appearance money, and I'll show you up from one end of the country to the other."

"Won't you listen to *reason*?" begged Avery.

"I haven't heard any, yet," said Badger, "and, what's more, I've said all I'm going to. Better have your man down to weight if you want to save that forfeit. I never make any agreements on the side, and when I sign my name to a thing I go through. Good night."

Avery went home, talking to himself. Healy was waiting for him.

"What luck?" asked the fighter anxiously. "Would he do business?"

"Of course, he wouldn't! He's got us, and he knows it. Shylock was a piker beside this guy!"

"I can break my leg," suggested Healy hopefully.

"Yes, and he'll send out a flock of doctors to examine you, and they'll all be from Missouri. It'll take something more than a lot of bandages and a crutch to get by this bird. He'll snatch our appearance money and put us in Dutch all over the country."

"But we've got to do something!" There was a note of desperation in Healy's voice. "Typhoid fever might bring me down to weight; but it's a cinch sweating won't do it. One-thirty-nine to-night, and I've done enough work already to sweat an elephant to a shadow. I simply *can't* make it, and that's all there is to it. You know what the doctor said—that this excess baggage is due to natural growth. It's in the bone and muscle, and it won't come off! Why the devil didn't we think of that before we got hooked in so strong?"

"Give me a chance to think," said Avery. "I may dig up a way to wriggle out of this match and save the appearance money, anyway. You tear into the hay and leave it to me."

"I wish you'd done your thinking before we made this match!" sighed Healy.

"There you go again!" mumbled Avery. "Always putting it up to me! Didn't you toss a coin, and——"

"I've heard all that before," said Healy. "By the way, there was a man here to see you about eight o'clock. Says he'll be back about ten."

"Another nut!" growled the manager.

"Not this fellow," said Healy. "He looks like class, and he's got a letter for you—from Jim Quinn."

"Quinn!" said Avery. "Holy cat! I wish Jim was here! He might think of some way to get us out of this jam."

Promptly at ten o'clock the stranger returned. He was small, neatly dressed, of middle age, and wore a close-trimmed beard and nose glasses. He presented Quinn's letter without comment:

> DEAR BILLY: I don't know how you're fixed on the weight proposition, but the last time I saw Healy he was falling away to a mere cartload, and I don't think he can do one hundred and thirty-three ringside without the aid of a saw. On the chance that you've got a bad match on your hands, I am sending Mr. George Harden to see you. George is an expert in his line, knows how to keep his mouth shut, and you can bank on anything he tells you being right.
>
> Of course if Healy can do one hundred and thirty-three without weakening himself, you won't need Harden. If he can't, put Harden on the job. I can't explain here, for obvious reasons, *but Harden can make your man a winner, and save you the weight forfeit*. Wire me three days before the fight whether I can bet on Healy or not. Yours in haste,
>
> JAS. QUINN.

Billy folded the letter and placed it in his pocket.

"This listens well," said he slowly. "What's the idea?"

"The idea is that I can put your man in the ring as strong as he is now and save you the weight forfeit. It'll cost you five hundred dollars."

"It would be worth it," said Avery. "My boy is having trouble getting down to weight. We didn't figure that he has put on several pounds by growth and development, and it's coming off hard."

"I'll take him the way he is," said Harden, "and make him weigh one-thirty-three—on any scales they pick out."

"A fake?" demanded Avery suddenly.

"Yes, and a darned good one," said Harden.

Avery shook his head.

"Mike Badger is a pretty wise bird," said he. "He's seen the chewing-gum trick and the little chunk of lead, and all that. I'd hate to try and get by him with a weight-stealing device."

"Has he seen this, do you think?" asked Harden, drawing something from his pocket.

"What is it?" demanded Avery, staring at what appeared to be a stiff black thread in the palm of Harden's hand.

"Nothing but an innocent little piece of horsehair," said the visitor quietly. "Do you think he's seen that?"

"Horsehair is a new one to me," said Avery. "How does it work?"

"That's *my* business," said Harden. "Leave me alone with your weighing machine for a few minutes and I'll give you a demonstration."

"Fair enough!" said Avery, leading the way.

Three days before the fight Billy Avery presented himself at the office of the promoter of pugilistic events—a wise young man of Hebraic extraction.

"Moe," said Billy, "have you made any arrangements about the scales the men are to weigh in on?"

"Not yet," said Goldstein. "Why?"

"Well, this is a special occasion," said Avery, "and I want a pair of scales that there can't be any question about. I've got a lot of money up and I can't afford to take chances."

"You don't want to use your own, do you?" asked Moe slyly.

"No, and I don't want to use Mike Badger's, either!" snapped Billy angrily. "We're going to be at weight, right enough, but we'll just barely make it and that's all. It'll be so close that there won't be any fun in it, and that darned Shylock says that if we're an ounce over he'll grab the five thousand. Now, I wish you'd write a letter to some reputable hardware concern and ask 'em to send you a brand-new weighing machine to be used at the ringside. They probably have an expert, too, and they might be willing to send him along. I want the scales tested by a government official and balanced by a man who hasn't the slightest interest in the fight either way. I'm not going to monkey with 'em myself, and I want Badger to keep *his* hands off. There ain't much that fellow wouldn't do for five thousand bucks! Is that a fair proposition?"

"As fair as a June day!" replied Goldstein. "I'll write a letter to Messmore & Jones immediately."

Avery smoked a cigar while the letter was written, and after that he chatted about the coming fight, the advance sale, the probable "cut," and kindred topics. When he rose to go, he picked up the envelope containing the letter.

"I'll drop this in the mail chute when I go out," he said.

The next day the office boy brought Mr. Goldstein a neatly engraved business card, bearing the name of a firm of national reputation as manufacturers of scales. In the lower left-hand corner appeared these words:

"Presented by Mr. Henry C. Darling, Western Representative."

Goldstein tossed the card over to Mike Badger, who happened to be present.

"Let's see what he wants," said Goldstein.

"Mr. Henry C. Darling" proved to be a dapper little person, with a close-cropped beard and nose glasses. He spoke with the crisp, incisive tones of a business man, and Mike Badger, surreptitiously running his thumb nail over the pasteboard which he held, was impressed. An engraved card, to ninety-nine men out of one hundred, is a convincing argument; an embossed trade-mark in three colors in the upper corner clinches matters.

"Mr. Darling—Mr. Badger," said Goldstein.

"I beg pardon—I didn't quite catch the name," said the visitor. It had to be repeated, and even then it was evident that it meant nothing to the Western representative, who turned immediately to Goldstein.

"I happened to be calling on Mr. Messmore when your letter arrived," said Darling. He produced Goldstein's letter and laid it upon the desk. "Mr. Messmore suggested that as you needed an expert, it was more in my line than his. I will be very glad to accommodate you. If you will tell me where you wish the scales delivered and when, the details will be attended to."

"I wouldn't want to take up your time— —" began Goldstein.

"Oh, that's all right!" chirruped Mr. Darling. "It will be a pleasure to do it, I assure you. As a matter of fact, I am—ah!—rather interested in the manly art myself. My son is an amateur boxer—you may have heard of him? Peter C. Darling, Chicago Athletic Club? No? Only sixteen years old, but clever as they make 'em! I like to see a good bout when I can."

"Of course!" said Moe. "Why not?" He reached into his desk and brought forth a ticket. "Here's a box seat for the show Friday night."

Mr. Darling fairly gushed thanks as he put the ticket carefully away in his pocketbook.

"Very, very kind of you, I'm sure!" he said. "Now, it is understood that I am to furnish a new weighing machine which shall be tested and certified correct by the Board of Weights and Measures on Friday afternoon. I will then take charge of it myself and deliver it at the fight pavilion that night. Is that satisfactory?"

"Suits *me*!" said Badger, thumbing the card.

Mr. Darling paused at the door, and there were traces of nervous hesitation in his voice when he spoke.

"May I suggest—ah—that the name of my firm—or my own name—does not appear in the newspapers?" he asked. "This is—ah—rather an unusual service, and——"

"I understand!" said Moe heartily. "You'll be kept under cover, all right. Only three people need to know who you are—the other one is Avery."

Mr. Darling seemed immensely relieved.

"If you are interested in seeing the scales tested," said he, "come to the Bureau of Weights and Measures at four o'clock on Friday afternoon."

"I'll be there," said Mr. Badger. "Moe, you notify Avery."

Mr. Goldstein looked after his visitor with a grin.

"Ain't it funny what some people will do for a free fight ticket?" he remarked. "There's a traveling man whose time is worth money, yet he's willing to go to fifty dollars' worth of trouble to get a twenty-dollar seat! Can you beat it?"

"It saves paying him a fee," said the frugal Badger. "And did you get that about not wanting his name in the paper? I'll bet he's a deacon in a church or something, when he's home!"

III

The official testing of the scales took place on schedule time. The shiny, new weighing machine—of the portable platform variety—balanced to a hair. Mr. Badger almost precipitated a fight by remarking over and over again that an ounce might mean five thousand dollars, and every time he said it Avery snarled.

"Now, gentlemen, if you are satisfied," said Mr. Darling, "we will ask that the scales be placed under lock and key here until I shall call for them this evening. I guarantee that they will not be out of my sight from that time until you are ready to use them. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly!" said Mike Badger, and Billy Avery mumbled something under his breath.

"Well, old top," chuckled Badger to Avery, as they left the room, "my man is under weight. How's yours?"

"We may have to sweat him a bit," answered Avery shortly, "but I'd cut off one of his legs before I'd let you have that five thousand!"

"Cut off his head, instead," suggested Badger pleasantly. "He never uses that when he fights!"

"You make me sick!" growled Avery.

The weight of the contender was still a mystery, but there was an unconfirmed rumor that Moe Goldstein—sworn to secrecy—had been present at the Healy camp on Thursday afternoon and had seen the challenger raise the beam at one hundred and thirty-four pounds. This may have had something to do with the flood of Healy money which appeared as if by magic.

Shortly after the doors of the fight pavilion were opened an express wagon drove up to the main entrance and the weighing machine was carefully unloaded, under the personal supervision of Mr. Henry C. Darling. Moe Goldstein, who was standing in the door, cheerfully contemplating the long line of humanity stretching away from the general-admission window, waved his cigar at Darling and grinned.

"You're here early enough, I see!" remarked the promoter.

"Better early than late!" said Mr. Darling. "Is there a room where we can lock this thing up until it's wanted? I have made myself personally responsible for it."

"Put it in the first dressing room," said Moe. "You can't lock the door, though, except from the inside."

A few minutes later the "Western representative" was alone with the weighing machine, behind a locked door. In two seconds he had the wooden platform unshipped and set aside, exposing the levers underneath. These levers, sensitive to the touch as human ingenuity can make them, are V shaped and meet in the center, forming an X, the short lever passing underneath the long one.

Mr. Darling whipped a black horsehair from his pocket, tested it carefully for strength, and then bound it about both arms of the short lever, some three inches above the point of contact in the center. Instead of tying the hair in a knot, he fastened it with a dab of beeswax, replaced the floor of the platform, weighed himself carefully, nodded approvingly, and left the room. The entire operation had consumed less than a minute. The next time that Moe Goldstein looked in that direction Mr. Darling was standing in front of the closed door, like a sentinel on guard.

Two tremendous roars announced the entry of the gladiators, naked, save their socks and bath robes. Behind them came four strong young men, carrying the weighing machine, Mr. Darling trotting behind and urging them to handle it as they would a crate of eggs.

Biddy Cline, grinning in his corner, looked up at his manager.

"Here's where we get that five thousand!" he said.

In silence and breathless curiosity the house waited the weighing-in ceremony.

Mr. Henry C. Darling, fussy and important, fluttered about like an old hen, commanding every one to stand back while he demonstrated that the scales balanced to a hair. At a signal, the fighters rose from their corners and climbed through the ropes, their handlers trooping after them.

"Stand back, everybody!" chirped Mr. Darling. "We must have room here! Stand back! You observe that the scales balance perfectly. I will set the bush poise exactly at one hundred and thirty-three pounds—no more and no less. On the dot. So! Now, then, gentlemen, who goes first?"

Charlie Healy, who had been removing his socks, slipped his bath robe from his shoulders and stood forth, naked.

"Might as well get it over with!" he said.

Mike Badger, his thin arms folded over his flat chest, flashed a keen, appraising glance at the challenger, as if anticipating the verdict of the scales. Healy's face was lean and leathery, and his cheek bones stood out prominently, but he had not the haggard, drawn appearance of a man who had sapped his vitality by making an unnatural weight, and his muscular armament bulked large under his smooth, pink skin.

"In great shape!" thought Badger. "But he's heavy, good Lord, he's heavy! He ain't anywhere near one-thirty-three!"

Healy stepped gently upon the scales and dropped his hands at his sides. Mike Badger bent forward, his gimlet eyes fixed upon the notched beam. He expected it to rise with a bump, instead of which it trembled slightly, rose half an inch, and remained there, quivering.

"Just exactly!" chirruped Mr. Darling. "Next!"

Charlie Healy threw his hands over his head with a wild yell of triumph.

"By golly, I made it! I made it!" he shouted; and then, as if carried away by an excess of feeling, he jumped six inches in the air and alighted upon his heels with a jar that made the weighing beam leap and rattle, and brought a sudden, sharp strain upon the concealed levers—enough of a strain, let us say, to snap a strand of horsehair and allow it to fall to the floor. Healy's action was natural enough, but it was his jump which roused Mike Badger to action and crystallized his suspicion. He had seen that sort of thing before.

"No, you don't!" howled Mike. "You ain't going to put anything like that across on me! I want to look at those scales!"

The "Western representative" bristled with sudden anger, strutting about like an enraged bantam rooster.

"Preposterous!" he said. "Examine them yourself!"

He pushed the weighing machine over toward Badger. Mike removed the wooden platform in a twinkling and bent over the levers. That was the reason he did not see Mr. Darling place the sole of his foot upon a dab of beeswax and the horsehair which clung to it, thus removing the only bit of evidence.

Sweating and swearing, Mike Badger sought earnestly for wads of chewing gum or other extraneous matter, after which fruitless quest he demanded that Healy weigh again. By this time the challenger was in his corner, calmly partaking of a bowl of beef tea.

"Well, I should say we won't weigh him again!" said Avery. "You've examined the scales, and they're all right. My man has got a pound of beef tea in him by now. He made the weight at the time set, and we won't weigh again. Ain't that right, Goldstein?"

The promoter nodded.

"Go on and weigh your man, Badger," he said. "The crowd is getting restless."

"But I tell you we've been jobbed!" wailed Mike. "Why, *look* at that fellow! He's as big as a house!"

"Forget it!" growled Avery. "My boy has been at weight for the last three days! You saw him weigh yesterday, didn't you, Moe?"

"That's right, Mike," said Goldstein.

"I dare you to put him on the scales again!" raved Badger. "I'll give you a thousand dollars if you'll weigh him *now*!"

"And him full of beef tea? I should say you would! G'wan and get your champion on there!"

Mr. Henry C. Darling, still bristling in a quiet, gentlemanly manner, stepped forward to adjust the plummet on the notched bar, but Mike swept him aside.

"That'll be about all for you!" he said brusquely. "I'll attend to this myself!"

And Billy Avery was so well pleased with the turn of events that he allowed Mike to weigh his own man. The bar did not rise for Cline. He was safe by a full pound and a half.

He was far from safe after the fight started, however. Biddy Cline, tough little battler that he was, found himself as helpless as a toy in the hands of

the challenger. In the clinches, which was Biddy's specialty, Healy worried him and tossed him about like a rag doll.

"This guy is strong as a middleweight!" panted the champion, after the third round. "See the way he hauls me around? It's a job, Mike, as sure as you live!"

"We can't help it now," said Badger. "You've got to lick him if it kills you!"

Let it be placed to Biddy's credit that he did his honest best to follow out instructions. He set a slashing, whirlwind pace, fighting with the desperation of one who feels his laurels slipping away from him; but Healy met him considerably more than halfway, and after the tenth round the most rabid Cline sympathizer in the house was forced to admit that the end was only a matter of time.

The championship of the world passed in a spectacular manner toward the end of the fifteenth round. Cline, knowing that he had been badly beaten thus far, summoned every ounce of his reserve strength and hurled himself upon the challenger in a hurricane rally, hoping to turn the tide with one lucky blow. Healy, cautious, cool, and steady as a boxing master, waited until the opening came, and then shot his right fist to the point of the chin. The little champion reeled, his hands dropped at his sides, and a vicious short left hook to the sagging jaw ended the uneven battle.

Biddy Cline took the long count for the first time in his life, and a dapper gentleman in a box seat smiled through his nose glasses and played with a bit of horsehair in his pocket. Such a trivial thing had changed the pugilistic map.

According to custom, the conqueror offered his hand to the conquered before he left the ring. Biddy would have taken it, but Mike Badger restrained him.

"Don't shake with him!" said Mike. "You've been licked, but by a welterweight."

"You think anybody will believe that?" cackled Healy.

"I'll make 'em before I'm through," said Mike grimly.

IV

The new champion ceased in the midst of the pleasant duty of inscribing his name and title upon photographs.

"Badger!" he said. "What does he want, Billy?"

"Don't know. He's coming right up."

Mike Badger entered and helped himself to a chair. “You’re a nice pair of burglars, ain’t you?” he demanded.

“You’re a sorehead,” said the new champion cheerfully. “Are you still harping on that weight business? Everybody in the country is giving you the laugh!”

“Oh, you think so, do you?” said Mike. “I’ve been doing a little detective work lately. That fellow—that Darling—I’ve been on his trail, and I know all——”

“I didn’t have a thing to do with him,” protested Avery quickly. “Goldstein wrote a letter to a hardware firm and——”

“And *you* posted it,” said Mike. “Remember that? I happened to keep his business card, so yesterday I wired his firm asking for information. Here’s the answer.” He tossed a telegram across to Avery.

“It says there,” remarked Mr. Badger, “that no such man is known to the concern. It was a smooth trick, Billy, but it won’t do. I’m going to show you fellows up from one end of the country to the other, and I’ll never quit hounding you until you give us another match—at the proper weight. And, what’s more, we still claim the championship.” He picked up one of the new photographs and read the inscription scornfully. “Lightweight champion of the world!” he said. “You ain’t a lightweight any more’n I am!”

“Well,” said Charlie Healy softly, “they’re still pointing me out on the street as the man that licked Biddy Cline! That’s good enough for me.”

THE SPOTTED SHEEP

BILLY ALLISON was not exactly a black sheep nor yet a white one. Both colors were woven into the fabric of his character, the dark spots representing the bad impulses and the white spots representing the good ones. The mixture was fairly even. The dark spots were very dark and the white spots very white; so that a moral snapshot of Billy Allison's soul would have resembled a piece of shepherd's plaid.

Billy avoided any struggles with his conscience—and barred himself from taking credit for the white spots—by doing always and under all circumstances the first thing that came into his head. This system is not to be recommended to other young men with more money than they know how to spend.

"Billy is a queer proposition," said old Mr. Hawley, who had been Henry Allison's business associate and best friend. "I can't seem to make him out. There's a fine lovable streak in the boy, but it lays right up against a streak of downright cussed worthlessness. What makes me so mad is that Billy can do a nice thing in as nice a way as anybody. Look at that little guttersnipe he picked up in the street with a broken leg! But the worst of Billy is that, after he's done something to make you proud of him, he whips right round and does something to make you ashamed—something that makes you want to give him a good cowhiding. It's all Henry's fault. He never should have left so much money to the boy without tying a string to it somewhere. It'll be the ruination of Billy—if it hasn't been already."

The case of the newsboy with a broken leg throws a strong light on one of Billy's whitest spots. He appeared at the door of Mercy Hospital one evening with a ragged little bundle in his arms.

"Get a curve on you!" he commanded briefly. "This kid has a broken leg."

It was pointed out to Mr. Allison that the Receiving Hospital was the place for a newsboy with a compound fracture below the knee. Billy interrupted angrily.

"You ring up Fred Hayes," said he, "and tell him that Billy Allison wants him as quick as he can possibly get here. Don't forget—Billy Allison. That'll fetch him on the run. . . . It's all right, kid. We'll have you fixed up in three shakes of a lamb's tail. Leg hurting you much?"

"Naw; o' course not!" grunted the small sufferer with sarcasm. "I wisht you had it for a minute! I wisht—— Oh, gee!"

Doctor Hayes responded to the emergency call—it is rather an unusual thing for an eminent bone specialist to leave his dinner to set a gamin's leg—and he thought he read the situation at a glance.

"How did this happen, Billy?" said he. "Speeding again? You'll kill somebody one of these days if you're not more careful."

"Nix, doc; nix!" The patient had been listening. "You got him wrong. The guy what busted me leg tore out a mile a minute—he beat it. This sport comes along and picks me up."

"Oh!" said Doctor Hayes, and looked hard at Billy, who blushed and mopped his thick eyeglasses with his handkerchief.

"Rats, doc!" said he, much embarrassed. "I couldn't leave the kid there in the street—might have had to wait an hour for an ambulance; and—well, say, did you ever see a gamer little rooster in your life, doc? Not a whimper out of him, by George! Not a tear! I'd like to believe I'd act as well in a similar fix."

"You wouldn't," said the doctor, who was a truthful soul.

"I know it," said Billy quietly. "Maybe that's why I admire gameness in others."

As he was placed on the operating table in the surgery the boy opened his eyes.

"Look here, doc, are you going to put me to sleep?" he demanded.

"For a little while, sonny."

The boy looked at Billy Allison.

"Will you be here when I wake up, sport?" he asked. "This is new stuff to me. Stick round."

Billy thought of his engagement with a lively lady who graced the vaudeville stage, but something in the boy's eyes held him.

"Yes, kid; I'll be here," said Billy.

The newsboy drew a deep breath.

"All right, doc," said he. "Shoot the piece!"

While the interne was administering the anæsthetic Doctor Hayes, gowned and rubber-gloved, sought further information.

"What do you want done with him after I get him fixed up, Billy? Shall we send him home?"

"What do you think I am?" said Billy. "A piker? Keep him here, of course! Give him that front room with the windows—the one I had the last time I took the jag cure. See that he has everything he wants—special nurse and all."

"Philanthropy is something new for you, isn't it?" asked the doctor.

"Philanthropy be damned!" said Billy hotly. "My dad was a philanthropist. One in the family is enough. Haven't I told you that I like this kid because he's game? The best in your old hospital is none too good for him; and he'll get it or I'll know why!"

"Well, if that's the way you feel——" said the doctor. "I suppose you know that you're doing a foolish thing, Billy. Nobody knows who hurt the boy; but you brought him to the hospital, and if one of those thieving ambulance chasers gets hold of this you may be sued on suspicion. I've known shyster lawyers to do worse things than that. The man who drives an automobile is fair game."

"Let 'em go as far as they like," said Billy. "I've got all the insurance piled on to that car she'll carry—liability and otherwise. I should worry!"

"I'm merely suggesting how it will look to the boy's people," said the doctor.

"I'll take a chance on the kid," said Billy.

While the event was fresh in his mind Allison retained his interest in his protégé, calling at the hospital four times during the first week. During this period the gameness of Jakey Rosenblatt was Billy Allison's favorite topic—so much so that he bored all his friends and acquaintances with his enthusiastic recitals.

Incidentally the doctor's suspicions were confirmed when Billy met Mannie Rosenblatt, Jakey's eighteen-year-old brother. Mannie was considerably less than friendly and he fixed that amateur philanthropist with a cold and suspicious stare.

"If I didn't know Jakey wasn't a liar," said he, "I'd think you was the guy that run over him. I don't get you at all. What are you doin' all this for? What's the idea?"

"What's the idea of what?" asked Billy.

"All this swell hospital stuff! The kid could have gone to the County Hospital for nothing."

"Cheese it, Mannie!" said Jakey reprovingly. "Don't you know real class when you see it?"

"Well," said Mannie sullenly, "I don't get him; an' I declare myself now —I won't be stuck for no hospital bills."

"You needn't worry," said Billy. "It shan't cost you a cent."

"It hadn't better!" said Mannie ungraciously, and departed, leaving Billy midway between amusement and exasperation.

"Don't pay any attention to him, mister," said Jakey. "Mannie, he says that nobody don't never do anything for you for nothing, and he's wondering what the comeback will be. He's all right when you get to know him, Mannie is. And, say, you ought to see him scrap! He's a bear!"

"So I should judge," was Billy's dry response.

Allison's interest in the youthful Rosenblatt soon waned, as did most of his fads. It died a natural death before Jakey was able to leave the hospital, and soon afterward the newsboy and his suspicious brother were forgotten; there were so very many other things to claim Billy's attention.

II

Old Mr. Hawley had complained about the terms of Henry Allison's will, but there were others who found no fault with that document—automobile agents, exclusive tailors, café owners, waiters, actresses, and certain astute and furtive gentlemen of the sporting fraternity—left-handed beneficiaries of the Allison Estate through the open hands of the heir.

The automobile agents found that Billy would usually buy a new car if it could be tuned up to beat his most recent purchase; the tailors noticed that he never mentioned prices while selecting fabrics, and respected his reticence save when rendering their quarterly statement; the café owners counted the nights of his appearance as bright ones; the waiters forgot to bring the change and went unrebuked; the actresses loved him for his pelf alone—poor Billy was not attractive in a physical sense, being undersized and near-sighted; and the sporting gentlemen sheared him remorselessly, caring nothing for the color of his fleece.

"Of course," said they to Billy, "you can't win without taking a chance, and any man who takes a chance is liable to lose once in a while. One good thing—your money is circulating, ain't it? That's better than burying the bank roll in a tin can and letting it get moldy."

"There's something in that!" said Billy.

The sporting gentlemen carefully neglected to mention that it is also possible for a man to lose without taking a chance of winning. Black Jack

Logan and his friends were experts at arranging speculative transactions of this sort.

They had introduced Billy to a horseman who owned a mare that could not possibly lose, but had somehow managed to achieve the impossible when Billy backed her heavily to win. They had put him in touch with a reformed professional gentleman who, through sheer love of the cards, had allowed himself to be persuaded to deal a few private sessions at faro bank in defiance of a state law against games of chance, which law was in no way violated. They had led him to a roulette wheel, which was so extensively wired for electrical control that the authorities were later unable to split it up for kindling wood. They had played bridge and poker with him when a wink or a cough from the dealer presaged a miracle. It was, they agreed, a shame to take the money, but a greater shame not to take it.

One evening, while Billy Allison was dining with the blonde—third from the left end of the line—four men surrounded a small table in the back room at Terry's Tavern—four rascals who could not possibly look so bad as they really were and made it a point not to try.

Black Jack Logan—otherwise Alexander B. Kirkman, Sing Sing 12378—might have passed for a member of any one of the honorable professions; and very often did so. George—Kid—Smalley, innocent and youthful in appearance, hid a world of wicked experience behind a smooth and boyish countenance. Edward—Fatty—Emerson, whose specialty was impersonating retired brewers and small-town bankers, had all the earmarks of a solid citizen. And Peter—Three-Card—Davis knew how to smile and smile and be a villain still.

"Now that we're all here," said Fatty Emerson, "what is it to be this time?"

"A phony prize fight," said Black Jack Logan.

Emerson shook his head.

"Too old," said he. "That's almost as bad as a fake foot race. Everybody in the world is on to it."

Logan laughed.

"Fatty," said he, "I'm surprised at you! You've been on the turf long enough to know that the old games are the best games. It's only when you try something new that the sucker gets leery. You can still sell gold bricks on the New Jersey marshes; and last week Shelly McGuire was pinched for spieling the nuts inside the loop in Chicago. He would have got rich if the bulls had let him alone. People are afraid of the new games, but they fall for the old ones."

"Who's the sucker?" asked Emerson.

"Young fellow round town," said Logan.

"Father left him money," said Smalley.

"A barrel of it," supplemented Davis.

"Boob?" asked Emerson.

"The worst in the world," said Smalley.

"Doesn't know a thing," said Davis.

"How do we pull it?" asked Emerson.

"The same old way," said Logan. "You're the only one of the bunch he hasn't met at one time or another. You'll have to be the small-town sport, with a rube champion in tow. We've got your man picked out already. By the way, Kid, did you dig up the other fighter?"

"Not yet," answered Smalley; "but I've got a line on the very man we want."

"That's the tough part of the frame-up," said Emerson. "The worse the rube fighter is, the better. It's the one who's going to lose that must have class."

"Ever hear of Young Sullivan?" asked Smalley.

"Seen him fight lots of times," grunted Fatty. "With proper handling he'd be right up in the first flight. He'll never be a champion, but it'll take one to stop him."

"He's the bird," said Smalley.

"You don't mean to tell me you can ring him in on a thing like this?"

"In a minute!" said Smalley. "Sullivan pulled off a fake here six months ago—lost a decision to Denver Danny Shea to get a return match and make a clean-up. The papers got on to it and the promoters had to bar him. He's so flat right now that he'd listen to any proposition, murder included, for a fifty-dollar note. Leave it to me."

"How much will this boob bet?" asked Emerson.

"If he's got a limit we haven't struck it yet," said Logan. "I'm figuring to take him for the big bunch this time."

"It listens well," said Emerson critically. "Now about the details——"

A week later Billy Allison, killing time at one of his clubs, was summoned to the telephone.

"This you, Billy?" said a voice. "Logan speaking. Going to the fight tonight?"

"I hadn't thought of it," said Billy. "Yes; I guess I'll be there. I usually take in all the scraps."

"Good!" said Logan. "Meet me at the Swinton at six. We'll have dinner and go out to the pavilion together. . . . No, Billy; you're my guest this time. I insist. . . . Oh, forget it! I've got box seats—complimentaries."

"Pretty easy for you!" said Billy. "They make me pay for mine. I'll be there on the dot."

The second preliminary event was in progress when Logan and Allison arrived at the ringside. A fat gentleman, rather overdressed and plentifully decorated with off-color diamonds, was the sole occupant of the box. He made room for the newcomers and Billy thanked him.

"'Sall right," said he. "Keep the change."

There was silence until the end of the round, when the fat man grunted disgustedly:

"They've got an awful gall asking ten dollars for a show like this! In my town they'd throw a pair of tramps like these fellows out of the ring."

"Maybe the main event will be better," suggested Billy.

"Duff Ryan and Kid Wilson?" snorted the fat man. "A couple of applewomen could beat 'em! Why, say, there's a boy cleaning out my saloon that can lick 'em both in the same ring!"

"He's wasting time cleaning out saloons then," said Logan, nudging Billy. "Ryan and Wilson are two of the best welters in the country."

"Huh!" said the fat man scornfully. "I'd like to bet my kid can lick either one of 'em with a punch, and he's only a lightweight at that!"

"You're overlooking a fortune then," said Logan. "Lightweights who can whip welters are mighty scarce in this country at present."

The fat man became boastful.

"Welters!" he scoffed. "Say, he can lick middleweights! He's done it lots of times, right in my place. This boy has never had a professional fight in his life—never seen the inside of a ring. As for training, he wouldn't know the meaning of the word unless you showed it to him in a dictionary; but I'll bet he could step in just as he is and lick all these fellows. Yes, sir; give him a close shave and a shampoo and he'd be ready!"

"I don't see how he can do it," said Billy skeptically.

"Well, my money says he can! Here's my card—Al J. Wenger, Wines and Liquors, Wholesale and Retail. Drop in if you're passing through my town. You'll be treated right."

"I'm sure of it," said Billy.

"I'd bring the kid down here," continued the fat man, "if I thought I could get any kind of a match for him. I've talked with some of the sports and the promoters, and they all say he wouldn't be a drawing card without a reputation. They wanted him to fight some of these pork-and-beaners first; but if I can't get a good man for him I'll pass it up."

Kid Wilson planted his justly celebrated right cross on the point of Duff Ryan's jaw in the ninth round and the evening's entertainment was over. Logan chuckled as he climbed into Billy Allison's runabout.

"Queer bird, that saloon keeper," said he. "The joke of it is that this fellow he was talking about may be a real fighter at that—a comer. I'd like to discover a lightweight who could lick welters and middles! Do you know how much I could make with him in a year?"

"Couldn't say," answered Billy. "Quite a sum, I suppose."

"Not less than seventy-five thousand dollars," said Logan calmly.

"Whew! So much as that?"

"That's the lowest estimate. I've half a notion to write this roughneck saloon keeper and tell him to bring his man down here. We can look him over in private—have him spar with a few good boys; and if he's any good I can get him a match with a man where he'll be a short-ender in the betting."

"Fine!" said Billy enthusiastically. "Here's the card. Get in touch with this fellow and let me know how it comes out."

"You bet I will! I want your opinion of him, Billy. Mind you don't say a word about it to any of your friends. It's like a quiet tip on a race horse—tell your bosom pal and you've told the whole town! You've no idea how information of this sort circulates, and this is one melon we want to keep to ourselves."

"If it's ripe," said Billy.

"Of course," said Logan. "A green melon is the only one you can afford to be generous with."

As Logan was preparing for bed that night the telephone rang.

"Yes, this is Jack. . . . Nice work, Fatty. . . . Oh, hook, line and sinker! Didn't we tell you he was easy?"

III

"Well, Billy, what do you think of Wenger's lightweight champion?" Logan and Allison were standing on the sidewalk outside the door of a private gymnasium frequented by boxers and their satellites. They had just witnessed the tryout of Mr. Wenger's battling janitor.

"Think of him!" ejaculated Billy. "Why, he's a dub—a joke! He doesn't know the first thing about boxing—or fighting, either, for that matter. I believe I could stop him in two rounds myself, cigarette heart and all!"

"I believe you could, Billy," said Logan. "Where Wenger ever got the idea that this fellow is a fighter is more than I know. If he ever whipped any middleweights he did it with a bung starter when they were looking the other way. Well, the stuff is off. I wouldn't ask anybody to give him a match on the strength of the showing he made to-day."

The street door opened and Mr. Al J. Wenger appeared, fat, cheerful and buoyant as ever.

"Well?" said he with a rising inflection, his manner challenging an adverse verdict.

"I'm sorry, Wenger," said Logan. "That boy isn't a fighter. He doesn't know his right hand from his left."

Wenger snorted loudly.

"What can you tell about him, just seeing him once?" said he. "He ain't a cream-puff boxer, if that's what you mean. He don't know anything about sparrin' for points, and they told him he wasn't to hurt this boy. Then he hadn't ever had any gloves on before, and they bothered him— —"

Wenger paused, and Logan shook his head and turned away. The fat man whirled suddenly on Allison.

"What do you think about him?" he demanded.

Billy tossed his cigarette into the gutter and smiled at Wenger.

"I could be arrested for telling you what I think of him," said he pleasantly. "Any pork-and-beaner in the country could make him jump out of the ring."

Mr. Wenger's round face suddenly became purple.

"A lot you know about fighters!" he cried. "You take one look at my boy and tell me he ain't any good, eh? He'll jump out of the ring, will he?" Wenger plunged his hand into a pocket and drew out a thick roll of bills, which he waved excitedly under Billy's nose. "I'll bet you any part of what's here you can't find a lightweight that'll lick him in a real fight! Any part of it, if you know so much! Now then, put up or shut up!"

"Grab him!" prompted Logan softly. "It's like finding the money."

"I don't want to rob you," Billy began.

Wenger hooted scornfully.

"Don't let that bother you! You ain't a-goin' to rob anybody, Clarence! Here's my bank roll, and there's plenty more where this comes from that

says my boy can lick any lightweight in the country. We don't bar anybody. We ain't afraid of anybody. There ain't anything yellow about us but our money. If you've got any sporting blood now's the time to show it. Put up or shut up!"

"It's a cinch!" whispered Logan. "Don't let him get away with it!"

"I don't intend he shall," said Billy coolly. "As I understand the proposition, I have the right to nominate any lightweight I please?"

"Anybody at all!" exclaimed Wenger, ostentatiously thumbing his roll of currency.

"Public fight?" questioned Billy.

"I don't care," blustered Wenger. "My boy'll fight in a barn, down a well or inside a Saratoga trunk! Any old place where there's room enough for the other fellow to fall will suit him fine."

"Better pull it off in private," suggested Logan. "It wouldn't do to have the newspapers get hold of it!"

"Right you are!" agreed Billy. "The papers have had enough fun with me already."

"A private fight goes," assented Wenger.

"Very well," said Billy briskly. "Mr. Wenger, if you will count that money you are waving round so carelessly I will post a certified check to cover it. Inside of two days I will notify you of my selection."

"Fair enough!" said Mr. Wenger heartily. "Fair enough! I guess you're a true sport after all."

"I feel more like a burglar," said Billy.

Mr. Wenger laughed loudly.

"You don't think very much of my boy," said he; "but you may change your mind about him later. Well"—and Wenger offered his hand with a great show of cordiality—"an even break; and may the best man win!"

"May the best man win!" repeated Billy.

An hour later Logan and Allison sat at lunch in a downtown grill. Billy's usually cheerful countenance wore an expression of annoyance.

"Cheer up!" chuckled Logan. "You don't look to me like a man who has just picked up ten thousand dollars."

"Confound it, that's just the point!" fumed Billy. "Who would have thought the chump would bet so much? I wouldn't mind taking a few hundred away from him just to teach him a lesson, but ten thousand! Whew!"

"Cold feet?" asked Logan, eying Billy over the rim of his glass.

"You know better than that. I never have cold feet on a betting proposition," boasted the lamb.

"I beg your pardon," said Logan.

"It's only that I hate to bet that much money on a cinch," explained Billy.

"I wouldn't let that bother me," said Logan. "You'll pardon me, Billy, but I'm an older man than you are and I've seen more of the world. If they have invented any method of keeping a fool and his money together I haven't heard of it. This man Wenger might as well lose his ten thousand to you as to some one else; for lose it he will. He's one of the kind that's born every minute. . . . By the way, have you thought of any good lightweight you can get? You'll want a topnotcher, you know. There's no sense in taking chances."

"I was thinking you might suggest some one," said Billy.

Logan gave a very fair imitation of a man in deep thought.

"I'd hate to advise you, Billy," said he at length. "Then, again, I don't know what fighters are in town. How would it do if we called up Smalley—you remember that little chap we met at the race track? Smalley has a line on all the pugs and his advice would be invaluable. Speaking of him, why wouldn't it be a good idea to have Smalley make the arrangements for you? If you should go to a fighter and hire him to take part in a private scrap the first thing he'd do would be to run to the sporting editors with it. They're all crazy after publicity—every one of 'em. You want to keep this fight under cover, don't you?"

"You bet!" said Billy fervently. "When can we get hold of Smalley?"

IV

"I ain't what you might call a partickler guy, Smalley. The reg'lar run of the cards is good enough for me; but this is the first time I ever has to sneak up an alley and put on me trunks in a horse's bedroom. It ain't any of my business, of course; but what's the idea of pulling off this hippodrome in a barn?"

The light of a single lantern flickered on the walls of a box stall and picked the speaker out of the darkness, throwing his battered features into strong relief.

Young Sullivan could never have been considered handsome; one hundred battles had not improved his appearance. There was a deep dent

where the bridge of his nose should have been; one eye was slightly askew, giving to half of his face an oriental aspect; and his left ear was of the cauliflower variety, though more closely resembling a sun-dried abalone. Minor marks of conflict lay thick between brow and chin; for he who by brute force hammers his way to prominence is hammered in turn, and Young Sullivan had dodged very few right counters while pounding out a career.

By reason of this contempt for punishment he was known as one of the stumbling-blocks in the lightweight division—a dogged youngster who would take a dozen heavy blows without flinching for the sake of handing one; and Sullivan's single punch usually evened the score.

"Why all this soft-pedal stuff?" persisted the fighter. "You ain't afraid of a pinch, are you?"

"Of course not," answered Kid Smalley, who, after the fashion of all chief seconds and handlers, was stripped to his shirt sleeves. "Certainly not. We just want to be sure it's private—that's all."

"I don't blame you," grinned Young Sullivan. "You wouldn't want any witnesses if you was rolling a drunk or cracking a safe, and this is going to be worse. Private, eh? Well, you can't make it any too private for me. It wouldn't do me repitation any good if the gang heard that an unknown knocked me out in a punch. Who's the sucker?"

"You want to know too much," said Smalley curtly. "You'll get your dough as soon as it's over—one hundred bones for taking a slap on the jaw. That's good enough for you, ain't it?"

"Good enough if you say so. I ain't prying into your business. I just wanted to know—that's all."

"Curiosity has killed better men than you," said Smalley. "You go through with the program; that's all you've got to do. Remember now—no boxing and no stalling. Pull it off just the way you rehearsed it. The other fellow is so bad that if the fight should go a couple of rounds even a blind man could see it was a frame. We've got to do it quick. Get in there; swing wild a few times, poke your jaw into one, and flop. Don't get up at the count of ten either. Don't get up at all. We'll carry you to the corner and work on you for a while, and then——"

Sullivan interrupted eagerly:

"I'll open me eyes and say: 'Who threw that brick?'"

"You're a great little actor," sneered Kid Smalley; "but this is no comedy part. The less you say the better."

"Oughtn't I to have a alibi?" asked the fighter anxiously. "Can't I say something about holding this bird too cheap and never training a lick for

him?"

"That would be fine!" was the sarcastic rejoinder. "Lovely! Here, I've told the sucker that you're in the pink of condition and ready to put up the fight of your life—and you'd make me out a liar for the sake of an alibi! Listen to me and get this through your thick head—if you can: You're not paid for making any explanations—savvy? You're paid for taking a poke on the jaw and doing a Rip Van Winkle. After this fellow lands his right swing you're cast for the part of Sleeping Beauty. Do you get me?"

The ring has its traditions and they die hard. One of them provides that for every defeat there must be a plausible excuse. Lack of training, a broken hand, a crooked referee, a chance blow—those are the staple explanations of the loser.

Young Sullivan sighed and drew a soiled sweater over his bare shoulders.

"You're the doctor." He spoke heavily and with bitterness. "But, all the same, somebody ought to alibi for me—getting put away by a stiff like this!"

"Leave it to me," said Smalley soothingly. "Your spotless reputation shan't suffer. I promise you that. Making an alibi that will stick is the best thing I do. Now then, professor, if you're ready we will proceed to the slaughter."

"Yeh; let's get it over!" growled Young Sullivan.

Smalley picked up a bucket and a large towel and led the way out of the box stall. As they stumbled down a dark passageway the fighter fired the last hopeless shot in defence of his professional reputation.

"Couldn't I say I was doped?" he asked.

"No!" hissed Smalley. "You can't say anything!"

He found a doorknob in the dark and a flood of light burst on them. The ring had been pitched in the center of a large, bare room, which at the first glance seemed to be empty; but as Smalley entered there was a sudden bustle in a far corner and Mr. Al J. Wenger appeared, escorting his champion. The latter, a low-browed, shock-headed youth, looked neither to the right nor to the left, but shuffled awkwardly in the wake of his fat sponsor.

Mr. Wenger had dressed his managerial part with great care. A pink silk undershirt adorned the upper part of his person; a bath towel was draped about his neck; his lavender-striped trousers were rolled above his shoetops, and from a hip pocket peeped the glass stopper of a bottle of smelling salts.

At the same time four men, who had been conversing in low tones, left another corner and moved toward the ringside, where they took seats.

Young Sullivan paused long enough to favor his antagonist with a ferocious scowl, which was returned with interest; then he crawled through the tapes. His glance next fell on the four men seated outside the ring; and he remained standing, staring at them until Smalley pushed him into his chair.

Immediately Mr. Wenger busied himself with the time-honored preliminaries of battle. He shook the new gloves out of their pasteboard box, examining each one with great care. He fingered the soft bandages on Young Sullivan's hands and pronounced them satisfactory. He sliced an orange and offered a bit of it to his gladiator, who refused it with scorn; and he tied a small American flag in his corner of the ring.

These maneuvers would have amused Young Sullivan had he seen them, but he was still staring at the four spectators.

Kid Smalley, engaged in "breaking" the new gloves to take the stiffness out of them, received a sharp poke in the ribs.

"Say," whispered Young Sullivan, "which one is the sucker?"

"The fellow on this end," answered Smalley.

The fighter showed his teeth.

"Nix!" said he. "You can't hand that to me. How long do you think I've been round this town, not to know a con man like Logan when I see him? If he's mixed up with a frame it ain't on the sucker end, Smalley. I know Three-Card Davis too; so you might as well tell me, because I'll find it out anyway."

Kid Smalley, realizing the truth of this remark, surrendered at discretion.

"It's the shrimp with the glasses," said he. "The fellow with the stop watch is a pal of his. We let him act as stakeholder and timekeeper so as to make it look good."

"Oh, that's it!" said the fighter. "Well, I just wanted to know."

"Now that you know," growled Smalley, "you'd better forget it. Some things ain't healthy to talk about."

Young Sullivan grunted—a noncommittal sort of grunt, which might have expressed assent, doubt or defiance. After that he sat staring straight in front of him. When the time came he extended his hands for the gloving process, but what aid he rendered in the operation was purely mechanical.

Having finished with his man Mr. Wenger stepped briskly across the ring to the spectators.

"Still think you've got a cinch, do you?" said he to Billy, who nodded in reply.

Wenger drew out another roll of currency.

"Here's the stuff that talks!" said he.

Billy shook his head.

"The bet is big enough as it stands," said he. "Not another nickel!"

He held to this in spite of Wenger's bluster and sarcasm and Logan's whispered advice.

"You're a hot sport!" said Wenger. "You say you've got a cinch, but you're afraid to bet on it!"

"Not afraid," corrected Billy; "merely unwilling. My man is ready, Wenger. Don't delay the game."

"Cold feet!" growled Smalley to Young Sullivan as Wenger retreated to his corner, still waving his roll of bills.

"Huh!" remarked Young Sullivan.

Three-Card Davis rose, removed his hat and coat, and ducked under the ropes, with a finger crooked at each corner—the mark of the referee the world over.

The fighters advanced to the center of the ring for their instructions—Wenger's champion open-mouthed and curious; Young Sullivan apathetic and preoccupied, meditatively squinting at vacancy over the referee's shoulder.

"No claim of foul will be allowed unless the man is disabled," finished Davis. "Go to your corners!"

"All set?" called Freddy Van Pelt, amateur timekeeper and stakeholder. . . . "Time!"

At the word Mr. Wenger's champion stepped cautiously out of his corner. He had been assured and reassured that no harm could come to him; but in spite of this comforting thought there was something disconcerting in the sinister expression on the professional's face—something alarming in his steady, flat-footed advance, chin low on his breast in battle crouch, left hand well extended, and the annihilating right fist held far back, like a thunderbolt in leash.

"Don't stop to shake hands!" yelled Mr. Wenger. "This ain't no pink tea! Pile right into him, boy! Fight him off his feet!"

The unknown hesitated for an instant; then, spurred on by a roar from his corner, hurled himself blindly at his antagonist. In the same instant Young Sullivan took two quick steps—one forward, the other slightly to the left—

and with the second step came a thudding impact of bone and leather against an unprotected jaw. Mr. Wenger's champion reeled and then toppled slowly backward, striking the floor with a crash.

"There, you crook!" snarled Young Sullivan, menacing the referee with a doubled fist. "Call that a foul—if you dare!"

Three-Card Davis did not call it anything. His nimble brain was racing to adjust itself to altered conditions, but as yet speech was beyond him. He could only gape at the limp figure stretched at full length on the floor.

In the astounded silence there rose the somewhat too cheerful voice of the official timekeeper, counting off the seconds as prescribed by the late Marquis of Queensberry.

"Eight—nine—— He's out! You win, Billy; and here's the money! Hooray!"

"I say, Wenger," called the winner as he stuffed the working capital of the Logan-Emerson combination into his pocket, "I owe you an apology. He didn't jump out of the ring—there wasn't time. . . . Great Scott, Freddy! Wenger's out too!"

V

Henri, head waiter at Tortoni's, was far too polite to arch his eyebrows at sight of a sweater and a cauliflower ear; so he bowed low to Billy Allison and led the way swiftly to a private room. On the other hand Young Sullivan had never before met a head waiter face to face; so the surprised interest was mutual.

Billy gave the order as briefly as possible, and when they were alone he came quickly to the business at hand, speaking a language the fighter could understand.

"Kid," said he, "there was a queer kick to that little show of ours the other night—a few things I haven't been able to figure out. The way some of my friends acted after that knockout rather surprised me. You'd have thought they suspected me of putting one over on Wenger."

Young Sullivan gaped incredulously.

"Ain't you wise to it yet?" he demanded.

"Wise to what?"

"Gee, but you are easy!" exclaimed the fighter. "Why, I thought you'd tumble to it the minute it came off. Didn't you know that you was up against a frame?"

"A frame!" ejaculated Billy. "Why, man alive, I won! How could it have been a frame?"

Young Sullivan laughed.

"Sure, you won," said he; "but the way they had it fixed up I was to take a poke on the jaw and go out. Then you'd have lost, and——"

"They!" repeated Billy. "Whom do you mean by 'they'?"

"That whole crooked outfit—Logan and Smalley and Davis. The fat guy and the other fighter was in it too."

"Not Logan!" cried Billy. "Why, it can't be! I've known him for years——"

"And it's cost you money," supplemented the fighter. "Don't tell me it can't be when I know it is! They're crooks, I tell you—all of 'em; and Logan's the main finger of the bunch—the boss. The others are cappers and steerers. Why, listen: Smalley, he comes to me and says they've got a sucker ribbed up to bet on a fake fight. I was to get a hundred for going out——"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Billy. "They told me it would be better if Smalley made all the arrangements."

"That would keep us from getting together," said Young Sullivan. "They didn't take any chances on you waking up and crossing 'em. You let 'em run the whole proposition, didn't you? Pretty easy for 'em—pretty easy, boy!"

Billy's tottering egotism did not need the final touch of mingled pity and contemptuous familiarity in the fighter's tone. The wreck of his self-esteem was complete. For years he had deemed himself wise, in the slangy tenderloin sense of the word—wise in the things not worth knowing and the ways not worth traveling.

Yes, Billy Allison had thought himself wise; but it had remained for a low-browed, thick-skulled fighter to show him the extent of that wisdom, and to make him see himself as he appeared to others—"a sucker ribbed up to bet on a fake fight!" Billy Allison a sucker!

Another man, confronted with a revelation so humiliating, might have buried his head in his hands and groaned; but there was nothing of the theatrical about Billy. He merely removed his glasses and polished them with his handkerchief, blinking near-sightedly the while.

"Well, wouldn't that frost you?" he murmured. "Wouldn't that frost you?"

"You got to learn some time," said Young Sullivan consolingly. "You won't be such a soft mark for the next bunko game."

Billy continued to blink and polish his glasses. Another angle of the matter was forcing itself on his consideration—another thing to be explained.

"I gave Smalley five hundred dollars the night before the fight," said Billy slowly. "He was to give it to you if you won. He held that out, of course?"

"Sure, he did!" was the disgusted reply. "The only deal I had was one hundred if I lost."

"Oh!" said Billy. "Then you didn't get——"

Young Sullivan laughed harshly.

"I didn't get a thing out of it but the exercise," said he—"not a copper cent!"

Billy put on his glasses and regarded the fighter steadily. Young Sullivan avoided his gaze.

"Did you need the hundred?" asked Billy.

"Sure, I needed it!" said Young Sullivan. "You don't think I'd have framed to go out to a dub unless I was broke?"

"Why did you change your mind?" demanded Billy. "What made you double-cross that outfit? There must have been a reason."

"There was," said the fighter. "You don't remember me, I guess."

"Oh, yes, I do!" protested Billy. "I've seen you fight lots of times."

Young Sullivan threw out his hand in an impatient gesture.

"Before that. No; you don't remember me, but maybe you ain't forgot that kid with the broken leg—three years ago in Mercy Hospital? Well, I'm his brother—I'm Mannie Rosenblatt."

Mr. Hawley had often said that nothing Billy Allison might do could surprise him, but he disproved the truth of this statement by appearing at his club twenty minutes ahead of his luncheon schedule with news of a startling nature.

This is the latter portion of the monologue with which he regaled the cronies of the late Henry Allison:

"'And,' says he, 'if you don't mind, I think I'd like to take an active interest in the business from now on. I'm through fooling,' he says—'and I'm through for keeps! What time shall I show up in the morning?'"

ON ACCOUNT OF A LADY

WHEN great men fall out they send for Associated Press reporters and all the world knows about it the next morning; but when the little fellows quarrel the news travels slowly and arrives late, bringing with it unquestionable proof of the large percentage of liars in the average community.

For instance, if Fighting Sammy Dugan had been a champion of the world and Whitey Wilson a challenger for the title, sharp-nosed reporters would have had the whole truth out of one of them at least; but Dugan and Wilson were not great men. They were only preliminary boxers of the sort known as pork-and-beaners, and that they should quarrel at all was something of a joke. When reporters are not sufficiently interested to be curious, first explanations stand unchallenged, and because of this the theory of professional jealousy went unquestioned.

The report was correct as to the jealousy, but it was not of the professional variety. It was the real old green-eyed sort, which nothing but the Eternal Triangle has ever been known to produce. There was a lady mixed up in it—as there has been in nearly all the serious trouble since the apple and the snake—and in this particular case it was the brown-eyed one who presided over the cash register at the end of T-bone Riley's lunch counter.

T-bone, so called because he served the best T-bone steaks in the world for thirty cents—this was before the increased cost of living became a burning issue; probably T-bone's steaks are thinner now—was a philanthropist in his own peculiar way. He fed all the preliminary fighters whether they had any money or not.

"And why shouldn't I?" asked Riley. "Where are these pork-and-beaners going to eat if they don't eat with me? If a fighter don't eat reg'lar he can't fight; and me, I like to see good fights. I'm what you call a patron of the arts, I am; and when these birds ain't got any dough I put 'em on the slate till they get some. They always settle. I haven't lost a nickel on 'em, because they ain't the kind of people that'll skin a friend."

There had always been a great deal of social freedom and personal liberty at Riley's. A man ordered his steak—rare, medium or well done—and ate his cocoanut-custard pie with his knife, if such was his custom, and

nobody said anything about it. If he had the price, he paid. If he did not have the price, he held up two fingers as he went out and Riley made another entry in the dog-eared memorandum book which he called his slate.

T-bone's place was headquarters for fighters, pool sharks, racetrack touts, tinhorn gamblers and pinfeather clerks with sporting tendencies. Sometimes a rank outsider dropped in, but not often; for Riley had a way of discouraging the sort of trade he did not want. We will let the Dis-and-Dat Kid, the king of the pork-and-bean brigade, describe an instance:

"I'm in Riley's—see?—chuckin' a feed into meself. In comes a Clarence boy an' sets down beside me. He tipped his mitt de minute he took off his dicer. T-bone himself is behin' de counter because one of de regular waiters is out on a toot. T-bone gives dis Clarence party a set-up an' asks him what will he have.

"'Name it, cully!' says T-bone.

"'Who do you t'ink you're talking to?' says Clarence, some peeved. 'Don't be so fresh!'

"Den he orders a steak, medium, hashed brown, an' Java. Right away he begins to holler. He hollers about de paper napkins an' he hollers about some egg on his fork.

"'Dat's all right, cully,' says T-bone. 'We don't charge you for dat. We t'row in de egg wit' de steak—see?'

"Pretty soon de bread don't suit Clarence. He wants French bread, an' he wants it split open an' toasted. An' he don't t'ink de butter is on de level. T-bone is good an' sore by dis time.

"'You got de wrong number,' he says. 'De Astor Grill is furder up de street. Dis is Riley's joint.'

"'Joint is right!' says Clarence.

"By-an'-by de steak comes off de fire an' T-bone slides it along de counter. Clarence takes one gash at it wit' his knife an' hollers murder.

"'Call dis medium?' says he. 'It's bleedin'!'

"'So'll you be in a minute!' says T-bone; an' he grabs dat steak by de tail an' wallops Clarence on de jaw wit' it. Down he goes for de count, an' T-bone comes out from behin' and puts de boots to him proper.

"'Now,' says T-bone, jammin' de dicer on Clarence's head an' turnin' him round so's he could get one more good kick at him, 'don't you never let me ketch you in here no more! Out!!'

"Did he go? Oh, no; I guess not! He on'y jumped over t'ree guys because he couldn't spare de time to go round 'em. De gall of him—pullin'

dat highbrow stuff on Riley!"

This was the atmosphere of T-bone's establishment in the old days before prosperity came. Riley did well in spite of his peculiar credit system—or because of it—and opened a bank account when his hip pocket could no longer accommodate his savings. He bought a diamond ring—not even an expert could have told there was anything the matter with the diamond unless he put it under a magnifying glass—and later he allowed a fluent salesman to sell him a cash register.

Riley did not need a cash register any more than he needed a diamond, but he had to spend the money on something. Then, of course, he had to have some one to manipulate the machine; so he hired a brown-eyed girl named Myrtle Schmidt.

Myrtle's presence at the end of the lunch counter shocked and amazed the regular patrons and for a time freedom of speech suffered greatly. The habitués became self-conscious, but gradually this feeling of restraint wore off and they voted Myrtle a "good feller." By this they meant that she laughed at their witticisms, listened sympathetically to their hard-luck stories and was not in the least stuck up or haughty.

Fighting Sammy Dugan and Whitey Wilson were two of T-bone's star boarders. Together they had risen from obscurity, making names for themselves by virtue of the talent that was in them. When Sammy fought, Whitey was sure to be in his corner; and when Whitey fought, Sammy assisted with counsel and advice. They were bosom friends and had gone through many lean periods side by side.

Sammy could make the lightweight limit if pressed—Whitey scaled a few notches below him; but the exact poundage of a pork-and-beaner is never an important matter. Professionally speaking, they were very evenly matched, Sammy's slight pull in the weight being offset by a longer reach. Both were rushing, tearing battlers of the slambang school, and the Queensberry followers had long cherished the hope of seeing them matched in a ten-round encounter. The fight promoter had often broached the subject to the boys, always with the same result:

"Nix! Whadda we want to fight for? We're pals!"

Sammy was not at all a bad-looking boy. He had crisp curly hair, snapping dark eyes, a fair nose, a good chin, and he bore few scars of battle. Whitey was less fortunate. His hair was straw-colored; his eyes were a pale, faded blue; his complexion was heavily shot with freckles, and he had a tin ear that stood out from his head like a doorknob.

Sammy might have won his way into the second flight at a beauty contest; Whitey would have been disqualified at sight. They were the David and Jonathan, the Damon and Pythias, of the pork-and-bean brigade, and their friendship was a sermon on brotherly love.

Then Myrtle came to T-bone Riley's to operate the cash register, and her flying fingers rang up trouble for the young gladiators.

"Oh, gee! A skirt!" said Sammy, his mouth full of rice pudding. "A skirt working for Riley! Well, whadda you think of that?"

"I think she's a queen!" said Whitey.

"I wonder if she knows who we are?" said Sammy. "I see her givin' me the once-over a while ago."

"Aw," said Whitey, "maybe she was lookin' at me."

"At you!" scoffed Sammy. "If she was she was wonderin' how a feller could have a face like yours an' keep his health!"

The rivalry began in fun, but the jest was short-lived. In fairness to Myrtle it must be set down here that she was in no way to blame. She was the sort of girl who smiles easily because of good teeth and a dimple, and she did not realize that danger may attend the practice. She smiled on everybody, for she wished to be on good terms with everybody.

She was amused, though not impressed, when Whitey brought her a remarkable document, which he called his record. It was laboriously penwritten, with many inky flourishes; and the knockouts Whitey had administered were heavily underscored in red. Candor compels the statement that no mention was made of the knockouts scored against Whitey, thus bearing out Mark Twain's contention that no man can write an autobiography without becoming a liar of the first magnitude.

"How int'resting!" said Myrtle. "What is it!"

"It's me record," explained Whitey. "It tells who I've fought and all about it. I wrote it out for you. Some day when I'm a champion, you might want to take a look at it."

"Oh, very well," said Myrtle, who had not the slightest idea as to what this amazing screed might be. In the same accommodating spirit she accepted a worn pair of boxing gloves from Sammy.

"I hung it on Battling Watlington with these," said the donor modestly. "They might come in handy to stick up in your room somewhere. Take it from me, this Watlington is one tough guy! He gimme a fierce battle; but in the sixth round I tore into his pantry, an' when he dropped his guard—bang! goes the big right hook on his chin—an' he was through for the night. Sure

you can have 'em! Souvenirs, you know. This blue ribbon is to hang 'em up with."

Myrtle thanked Sammy as prettily as she knew how, but in her heart she regarded the gloves as nasty things and dropped them into a convenient ashcan on the way home. The same ashcan, by the way, received Whitey's record.

Whitey witnessed the presentation of the gloves, and his heart burned under his ribs. Why had he not thought of that? There remained nothing but to belittle Sammy's gift, which he proceeded to do at the first opportunity.

"There's some awful bad fighters round here," said Whitey to Myrtle, apropos of nothing.

"Yes?" said Myrtle, seemingly much interested, but really not knowing what else to say.

"Uh-huh! This Battling Watlington, he's a terrible piece of cheese. Awful! Can't fight fast enough to get up a sweat; and they say he takes a shot in the arm once in a while. Sammy was all puffed up when he knocked him out; but if he'd a took my advice Watlington wouldn't have lasted two rounds. 'Tear into him, Sammy!' I says. 'He can't hit hard enough to break a promise. Root into him an' make him quit!'

"If it had been me an' that Watlington had lasted six rounds I wouldn't have done no bragging—and I wouldn't have saved the gloves, neither. If I'm going to give anybody a souvenir it's got to be gloves that was in a real fight. Now Kid Cassidy—you saw him in my record, didn't you?—there was some fighting wolf; but I never did know what become of them gloves." And so on.

Mischief of this sort, once afoot, travels rapidly and finds advance couriers to clear the way. Split-tooth Durkee, retired bantamweight pork-and-beaner and all-night waiter at Riley's, assisted matters materially when he repeated to Sammy a portion of the foregoing conversation with embellishments of his own.

"Whitey's doin' you dirt with the chicken at the cash register," said Split-tooth.

"How so?" demanded Sammy.

"Now listen! I ain't no trouble maker," said Split-tooth virtuously; "and, anyway, you got to promise not to bring me into it. My fighting days are over—see?"

"You're declared out," said Sammy. "Tell me what he did."

"Well," said Split-tooth, "to begin with, he says you ain't never licked no regular fighters like he has. He tells her you was all swole up over knocking

out Battling Watlington—a feller that couldn't fight himself out of a paper bag!"

"Did Whitey say that? What's he knocking me for?"

"Oh, that ain't all. He says he made you win all your fights by bein' in your corner an' tellin' you what to do. He says you'd have quit three or four times if he hadn't been behind you—— Wait, now! Don't get excited. Remember, I'm out of this. I'm only tellin' you as a friend, Sammy!"

Split-tooth was nothing if not impartial. The next day he had some interesting information for Whitey—as before, insisting on protection. There should be no closed season for the man who says:

"I'm your friend and I think you ought to know this."

"Sammy was pannin' you to Myrtle," said Split-tooth.

"He was!" ejaculated Whitey. "Why, the dawg! What was he doing that for?"

"To put you in bad, of course. You know what he told her? He said he hadn't never fought you because he was a kind-hearted guy and he didn't want to show you up before the public."

Here Whitey gurgled incoherently.

"Yes; he said you was only a harmless kind of nut that had kidded yourself into thinkin' you could fight. He told her he could put you out cold in four rounds any day in the week, and if he didn't do it he'd donate his share of the purse to charity. He said he could lick you and make you like it—them's the words he used—make you like it! Gee! You ain't sore, are you, Whitey? I told you because I thought you ought to know what was coming off behind your back. I've always been your friend, ain't I? Well then, keep me out of it."

II

The secretary and matchmaker of the club which promoted boxing contests looked up from his desk to greet Whitey Wilson on the point of exploding with wrath and suppressed emotion.

"Aw, Whitey!" said he. "What's new?"

"I want you to get Sammy Dugan for me on the fifteenth of next month. I'm going to lick that fourflusher until he yells for the police. I'm going to hand him a trimming that will——"

"Hello!" said the matchmaker. "Have the Siamese Twins had a falling out?"

"Worse than that!" said Whitey bitterly. "He's been going round making cracks that he could put me out in four rounds. Make it any distance you want—four, six or ten; if I don't stop him I won't ask for a nickel! Not a nickel!"

"But suppose he doesn't want to fight you?"

"He'll have to!" squealed Whitey. "He can't get away. I'll fight him in the street—anywhere! You can lock us in a cellar and drop the key down a well! I'll git him——"

"Easy! Easy!" said the wise official. "Don't get excited. Never give away anything that you can sell, Whitey. If there's a real grudge fight in sight let us stage it, and we'll all make some money. What started the trouble between you?"

"He's been lying about me!" said Whitey. "He's been tellin' all over town that I only think I can fight——"

"And you won't think so long!" a third voice cut into the discussion.

Fighting Sammy Dugan stood in the doorway. After the initial outburst he ignored Whitey and addressed himself to the matchmaker, speaking with labored politeness.

"Greetings and salutations!" said he. "Sign up this windbag for me. I'll fight him—winner take all; and if I don't make him jump out of the ring I won't ask for a cent."

"Me—jump out of the ring!" screamed Whitey. "He better look out I don't make him jump out of the ring!"

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" said the matchmaker. "Don't start anything here. Shake it up, boys; but don't spill it. Save it for the fifteenth. Now about the purse——"

"Any old way suits me," said Sammy.

"Winner take all!" suggested Whitey.

"One hundred dollars—winner take all," said the matchmaker. "Is that satisfactory?"

"I'd fight him for nothing!" said Sammy.

"That's what you'll get!" said Whitey.

"This is the real thing," reflected the matchmaker. "What a pity the reporters aren't here! They could make quite a story out of this."

Later in the day they did make quite a story out of it under headlines proclaiming the sundering of friendship's bonds and the dissolution of a partnership. Professional jealousy was mentioned as the contributing cause, which explanation appealed to the sporting humorists and they made merry

with the topic. Whitey was interviewed by a representative of a morning paper—a great honor, which almost overwhelmed him and made him nervous and voluble.

"Say, print this, will you?" said he. "Put it in the paper that I'm going to fight this Dugan just to show him up—see? Just to let the public know he never was any good! Don't forget that.

"Here's another thing you can put in—better write it down so you won't forget it—I'm going to meet him coming out of his corner and if I ever take a backward step I hope I don't get out of the ring alive. Got that? I'm going to hit him so hard that it will make his grandfather's head ache. I'm going to ——"

"Yes, yes!" said the reporter soothingly. "I know you are; but what's it all about? What started the row? You used to be pals, didn't you?"

"Sure!" said Whitey excitedly. "Sure, we did! That's what gets my goat. I've cut up my last dollar with Dugan many's the time; and now he's going round knocking me to everybody. I don't want to talk about him for fear I'll forget myself; but put it in the paper that I say Sammy Dugan's a rat—Whitey Wilson says so! Got that? He's got a streak of yellow in him as wide as Main Street! Don't forget that."

The reporter did not forget, and Split-tooth Durkee saw to it that a copy of the paper containing this remarkable interview was handed to Myrtle Schmidt, who read the article with wide eyes.

"Mercy sakes!" said she. "They must have had a quarrel!"

"Yeh," grinned the diminutive Durkee; "it does kind of look as if they've parted doll-rags." He stepped closer and lowered his voice insinuatingly. "And I'll bet you don't know what it was about or nothing. Oh, no! P'fessional jealousy! That's a hot one—that is! Say, you could tell these reporters a thing or two—couldn't you, kid?"

"Miss Schmidt to you if you please!" snapped Myrtle. "And I couldn't tell anybody anything, because I don't know anything. What's more, I don't want to know! If anybody mixes me up in a fuss like this they'll be sorry. I attend to my business, and I'll thank you to attend to yours!"

"Just as you say," leered Split-tooth wickedly. "Just as you say, girlie. You don't need to get sore about it. Nobody's trying to mix you up; but it's kind of queer when two old pals bust up like this and——"

"The cook is calling you!" interrupted Myrtle. "And you keep away from this end of the counter—do you hear? Bother me once more and I'll speak to Mr. Riley!"

Split-tooth snarled as he moved toward the range.

"Goin' to holler to T-bone, eh?" he muttered to himself. "She ain't had no use for me since the night I ast her to go to a movin'-pitcher show. Bawled me out good! I wonder who she thinks she is? Too stuck up for common people—yes, sir! Coming right up! German fried, wasn't it? There you are, sport!"

III

On the eve of battle, as the sporting writers so happily phrase it, the Wilson-Dugan match divided interest with the main event—an elimination contest in the White Hope division. All the world loves a grudge fight—sad commentary on our boasted civilization—and for days the reporters had bombarded their readers with articles on the approaching combat between the Siamese Twins of the pork-and-bean brigade—"side-kicks once, but strangers now," as one sporting writer put it.

Professional jealousy was still the only explanation offered, and at T-bone's place there was but one topic of conversation. The White Hopes were forgotten—it transpired later that they deserved to be—in the discussion of the relative merits and abilities of Fighting Sammy Dugan and Whitey Wilson.

On the night before the fight there came to Riley's one Ed Faraday, a sporting writer who tossed a nimble quill for an afternoon paper. He was seeking a T-bone, rare, French fried potatoes, apple pie and coffee. The hour was late, patrons were infrequent, and Split-tooth Durkee, having delivered Faraday's order to Saginaw, the night cook, lingered to gossip.

"Some fight to-morrow night," said Split-tooth tentatively.

"Those big hams?" said Faraday. "No chance—I could lick 'em myself."

"Naw—not them. Whitey and Sammy."

"Oh!" said the sporting authority. "Yes; if this grudge-fight talk is on the level it ought to be a hummer."

Split-tooth grinned knowingly.

"Don't worry," said he. "It's on the level all right."

"How do you know?"

"Never you mind how I know," said Durkee mysteriously. "P'fessional jealousy! Where do you get that stuff? You're supposed to be wise. You've been round and seen a lot of things come off. What is it that makes most of the trouble between pals, eh? What is it that makes a man want to lick his best friend? P'fessional jealousy? Bah! Ain't there no other kind of jealousy?"

"You don't mean to tell me there's a skirt in this!" said Faraday, pausing in the act of spearing a pickle.

"You've been asleep at the switch a long time, but you're waking up now," said Split-tooth. "A skirt! You've said it all. Pity you didn't know about it before you wrote that bunk about p'fessional jealousy. Gee! That handed me a laugh!" Durkee moved away from the counter.

"Say, come back here!" Durkee paused uncertainly. "Come here!" repeated Faraday. "You don't mean to tell me that Whitey and Sammy busted up over a girl?"

"I don't mean to tell you nothing," said Split-tooth. "Do you think I want to get in bad with a couple of lowbrows that have got me shaded on the weight?"

"Oh, come on!" pleaded Faraday. "I'd treat it as confidential—honest, I would. I wouldn't tell a soul where I got it."

"Nothing doing!" said Split-tooth firmly. "Why, you got a nerve to ask me! You eat here a good deal—you could 'a' seen it with your own eyes."

Faraday struck the lunch counter with his open hand.

"The girl at the cash register!" said he.

"Go to the head of the class!"

"What's her name?"

"Myrtle Schmidt."

"How old is she?"

"Nineteen—say, what are you trying to do? Interview me? Nix! You've seen her, ain't you? Brown eyes, kind of dark complected, weighs about the featherweight limit, been working here about two months—— You ain't going to write anything about this, are you?"

"No—of course not!" said Faraday with sarcasm. "I'm just gathering this information for the census bureau!"

"Well," said Split-tooth with a sigh, "if you're going to spill it in the paper it ain't my fault. I can't stop you. All I ask is that you leave me out of it—see? I don't mind tellin' you a few things you ought to know—out of friendship—but I don't want no comeback. I can't go on the floor and mix with these rough-and-tumblers, and I ain't going out of my class to oblige anybody."

"Mum's the word!" promised Mr. Faraday. "Now then, how did it start!"

IV

Fighting Sammy Dugan sat on a rubbing table in one of the tiny dressing rooms underneath the bleachers of the boxing pavilion, swinging his heels and listening to the roar of the multitude. From time to time he inclined an ear to the earnest words of the Dis-and-Dat Kid, his chief second and adviser.

"Now remember, Sammy, don't git mad! Never mind standin' toe to toe an' slugging until somebody drops. Let Whitey fight dat way if he wants to. Wear him down wit' dat left an' den wham him wit' de right. Remember your reppitation, an' — —"

The door banged open and T-bone Riley entered, a thundercloud on his brow. He held a pink sporting extra in his hand, which he thrust under Sammy's nose.

"You're a fine pair of mutts—you and Whitey!" said he. "Look what you done!"

Sammy glanced at the paper and his jaw fell. A double row of black type three columns wide smote him with all the force of a blow between the eyes.

DUGAN AND WILSON TO BATTLE FOR LOVE OF
BEAUTIFUL GIRL!

"Wha—what's this?" stammered Sammy, aghast.

"Mighty innocent, ain't you?" sneered T-bone. "I'll tell you what it is! It's my notion of a dirty trick! Here's a girl that's all right in every way—behaves herself like a lady, never mixes up in nothing and ain't looking for publicity. A couple of bum fighters get to quarreling over her and between 'em they cook her up a press notice like this. Listen while I read you a sample."

T-bone cleared his throat and read as follows:

"'The little god of love will referee to-night's battle between Fighting Sammy Dugan and Whitey Wilson, erstwhile friends, but now bitter enemies and rivals for the hand of Miss Myrtle Schmidt, a petite brunette beauty of this city.' Wha'd'ye think of that—eh? 'Rivals for the hand!' Say, do you think she'd marry either one of you tramps?"

"Marry!" gasped Sammy. "Nothing like that. And they've even got her name! Oh, if I can get the fellow who spilled this, Riley, I'll murder him!"

"You're sure you didn't?" questioned T-bone.

"I've never mentioned her to a soul!" cried Sammy. "What do you take me for?"

"Well, somebody spilled it," said T-bone, "and now it's all over town. Whitey says he didn't do it."

"I wouldn't put it past him to do anything," said Sammy.

"That's what he says about you."

"He does? Oh, wait till I get him in the ring! Say, Riley, do you think she'll be sore?"

"Sore!" T-bone laughed unpleasantly. "No; she'll be tickled to death to have her name mixed up with a couple of cheap fighters! A nice girl wouldn't mind a little thing like that at all! I haven't seen her. She's on the late shift to-night; but I'd advise you to keep away from the joint until she cools out."

Half an hour later Sammy Dugan and Whitey Wilson stood in the center of the ring, blinking in the glare of the arclights, ostensibly listening to the referee—an honest, conscientious soul—who droned monotonously about many things, none of which was new.

Said Sammy, glowering at Whitey:

"What did you get that put in the paper for?"

Said Whitey to Sammy:

"I didn't. You did it yourself—nobody else knew."

"You did!"

"I didn't!"

"You're a liar!"

"You're another!"

Said the referee, extending his arms and diving between the combatants:

"Here! None of that! Can't you wait till the bell rings?"

Thus, with an added cause for grievance, they waited for the clang of the gong.

The honest and conscientious referee said it was a draw, and three thousand lay brethren applauded that just decision wildly. Then they fell back in their seats, hoarse, hysterical and happy. For once a grudge fight had justified its press notices. As a matter of fact, there was nothing else for the referee to do. With both men on their feet at the end of the battle—dazed, battered and staggering, but still on their feet—he had no choice.

He could not have awarded a decision on scientific points. There were no scientific points. He could not have declared either man a winner on aggressiveness. Both had been as aggressive as wildcats. In the matter of

knockdowns honors were fairly even. Whitey had taken the count six times and Sammy five. As to punishments inflicted, there was little to choose. Sammy had a broken nose, but Whitey had lost a tooth. Sammy's mouth resembled a badly bitten damson plum, Whitey had a mouse under his left eye. Sammy had a lump on his jaw, but Whitey had a split lip.

"And as for blood," said the referee, ruefully regarding his soft white shirt, "between 'em they shed enough of it to free Ireland!"

No sooner had the two soggy gloves been hoisted in the air than Sammy dashed out at one angle of the ring and Whitey hopped through the ropes at the other, thus violating all tradition. After a drawn battle it is customary for the gladiators to linger as long as possible, leaving the ring separately in order that the applause may be sustained. Two such precipitous exits were never before witnessed in that arena.

"Say, you gotta have dat nose fixed up," said the Dis-and-Dat Kid to Sammy in the dressing room.

"Plenty of time," mumbled the disfigured gladiator. "I shaded him in every round, didn't I?"

On the other side of the partition Whitey's handlers besought him to allow them to reduce the mouse by the simple and expedient method of lancing it with the blade of a penknife.

"To-morrow!" said Whitey impatiently. "Where's my pants?"

It was a great race and Sammy Dugan won it by half a block. He burst into Riley's place out of breath, disheveled and perspiring freely. Split-tooth Durkee grinned behind the coffee boiler, and Myrtle stared stonily over the cash register. She had put on her hat and coat, and her bag dangled from her wrist. Her nose and eyes were suspiciously red.

"They give it a draw," panted Sammy, "but I win a mile! Say, I want—to tell you—I didn't put that piece in the paper. It was Whitey did that—and ——"

This declaration was interrupted by the accused, who hurled himself into the room, also breathless and perspiring.

"Don't you believe him!" he cried. "'S a lie!"

"Oh, you're both here, are you?" said Miss Schmidt coldly. "Well, I just want to tell you one thing: I wouldn't waste my time on hoodlums like you. I wouldn't look at you outside of this place. I wouldn't speak to you! You're trash, that's what you are—trash!" Her voice grew suddenly shrill. "The idea of you dragging me into the newspapers like this—a couple of lowdown hoodlums like you! My fiancé is going to be in town to-morrow. He's a

brakeman on the railroad, and he's bigger than both of you put together. Just wait till he catches you—that's all!"

She had stepped round the end of the counter and now swept out into the street, banging the door behind her. The battle-scarred gladiators looked at each other blankly. After a time they became aware of Split-tooth Durkee, who was grinning at them from a safe distance.

"She's quit her job," said Split-tooth cheerfully—"Says she couldn't hold up her head in this joint again. And say, if what she tells me about this brakeman is right you better leave town now. He's bigger'n a house!"

Sammy and Whitey exchanged glances of deep concern.

"If that's the way it is——" said Sammy tentatively.

"We better stick together," said Whitey.

They shook hands.

"We can lick him if he's as big as Jim Jeffries!" said Sammy.

"You're whistling!" said Whitey.

They shook hands again.

"You're a tough bird, Whitey, old boy!" said Sammy. "I'd rather fight a champion than take you on again."

"I never got such a lacing in my life as I got from you," said Whitey, thoughtfully stroking the mouse under his left eye.

"Say, what started it anyway?" asked Sammy.

"Why," said Whitey, "Split-tooth, over there, he said that you was knocking me to her."

"He told me the same about you," said Sammy.

They considered the situation gravely, turning this information over and over in their minds. Then they looked at Split-tooth, who squeaked and backed suddenly into a pile of plates, sending them crashing to the floor.

"Nix! Nix!" he begged. "Ain't we always been friends?"

"You go round one end of the counter and I'll go round the other," said Sammy.

"He can't get away," said Whitey.

When T-bone Riley dropped in he found Saginaw in sole possession of the premises, which bore every appearance of having been visited by a cyclone.

“What’s happened here?” asked T-bone, estimating the damage with a practiced eye.

“A whole lot of things,” said the night cook: “Your cashier has quit. Sammy and Whitey are friends again. It was Split-tooth that got that piece put in the paper. He’s in the Receiving Hospital.”

“Outside of that every little thing is all right?” asked T-bone.

“So far as I know,” said Saginaw.

“Fair enough!” said T-bone Riley.

NO BUSINESS

MR. PATRICK TIERNEY, alone in his art gallery on the sunrise side of San Francisco Bay, swabbed up a few drops of beer left upon the bar by the last customer and hummed a snatch of a sentimental ballad.

Sentiment would have seemed out of place in Mr. Tierney's establishment, for the walls were plastered thick with photographs and halftones of gentlemen with cauliflower ears and ingrowing noses. All the personages thus represented were more or less known to the sort of fame that blossoms large upon the pink pages of great religious dailies, and Mr. Tierney himself was a walking encyclopedia of information regarding these battered gladiators—a sort of a Who Whipped Who in Point Richmond.

He could trace a champion at any weight to his obscure beginnings and brighten his history with anecdote and personal reminiscence. He had an uncanny faculty for picking winners and comers, and to leave it to Tierney was to get the last word on anything connected with the ring or its followers.

It was Tierney who pulled Young Kilroy off the brake-beams and started him onward and upward; it was Tierney who took one look at the loudly heralded unbeaten Australian champion and mortgaged his property to bet against him, thereby cashing in handsomely at odds of two for one; it was Tierney who three days before the McCloskey-O'Shay fiasco advised his friends not to back either man, and chuckled astutely when all bets were called off at the ringside. Because of these things, and many more, people listened when Tierney talked. They said he "knew something," and if there were times when he kept this knowledge to himself, turning it to financial account, they credited him with wisdom. Fattening a bank balance is no sin in any community.

The swinging door opened and two men entered. The first was small and compact, with the alert air of a fox terrier, and he wore a checkered suit of violent pattern. The second was tall and solemn and quietly dressed. Both hailed Tierney in familiar fashion.

"Well, how's the ole burglar?" said the small man. "Long time I no see you!"

"Patrick," said the other, "I greet you!"

" 'Lo, Cricket! 'Lo, Deacon!" grinned Tierney, extending a freckled paw across the bar. "What's new on the other side of the Bay?"

"Not a thing!" answered the newcomer addressed as Cricket. "Didn't see you at the fight last Tuesday night, Tierney."

"A fat chance!" said the proprietor, setting out the bottles. "A fine, fat chance! Catch me layin' off to watch Hogan take a nap. Hogan! And him with a nose that shouts out loud that his name is Isidore Mandelbaum! He quit, didn't he?"

"He did that little thing," replied the Deacon gravely. "His friends say a right hook on the jaw sent him bye-bye, but I know better. He got up as soon as the referee stopped counting."

"Wasn't hurt a bit," supplemented the Cricket.

"He's a puzzle to me," continued the Deacon. "Week before last he went all round Young McGraw like a cooper round a barrel. On the form he showed that night he could have whipped a world's champion. Last Tuesday night he quit to a dub. I can't figure him at all."

"I can!" Tierney slapped his hand on the bar. "He ain't worth two whoops in—Petaluma!"

"He's fast," murmured the Cricket.

"And clever as they make 'em." This from the Deacon.

"And he can hit with both hands—hit hard too." Tierney took up the thread. "He's got everything a fighter ought to have—everything but the heart and the stomach. He'll never fight for the pure love of fightin', understand me? Put an Irish heart in him, make him train a little bit now and then, an' you'd have a champion—no less."

"He handed that big squarehead from the revenue cutter an awful trimming," said the Cricket.

"An' why? Because he knew the sailor was too slow to hit him with a buggy whip! Put a man in front of him that he knows he can lick, an' Isidore is a demon. Give him a tough boy that he ain't sure about—one that'll rough it with him an' step on his feet in the clinches an' shove him round the ring—an' pretty soon you'll see him pickin' out a soft spot to fall on. Oh, I know him like a book! The kick of a mule in either hand, but the heart of a cottontail rabbit! Not worth that!" And Tierney snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"If you could only find a way to make him fight, eh?" This was the Deacon's contribution.

The Cricket snarled. “You can’t make that fellow do anything! The only part of the fighting game that he likes is the split-up in the box-office. When he works on a percentage of the house you can see him counting the gallery between rounds and figuring how much is coming to him. And he never misses it very far either.”

“Nevertheless and notwithstanding,” argued the Deacon, “he can fight if he wants to.”

“That’s the point!” cried Tierney. “He ain’t wantin’ to.”

“ ‘A bird that can sing and won’t sing ought to be made to sing,’ ” quoted the Deacon.

“He ought to be shot!” growled the Cricket.

“Our little friend here,” explained the Deacon, “but a couple of centuries on Isidore last Tuesday night. The memory lingers.”

“You know it does!” burst out the Cricket. “I’d like to be down to weight again and take it out of his hide!”

Patrick Tierney made a clucking noise with his tongue and slid the cloth over the bar a few times before he spoke. Then: “You can’t lick him yourself,” said he, “but you might get him licked good and plenty.”

“How?” demanded the Cricket eagerly.

Tierney glanced toward the door and lowered his voice.

“I’ve got a lad here, sort of under cover. I was figurin’ on springin’ him pretty soon. He’s the roughest two-handed mauler you ever saw. Name’s Callahan, an’ he’d rather fight than eat. He’d give Isidore an awful cleanin’.”

“Yes, if he’d stay and take it!”

Tierney emitted a dry chuckle.

“Leave that to me,” said he. “Tell Isidore you’ve got a sucker for him an’ he won’t train a minute. Make the cut seventy-five-twenty-five, an’ Isidore’ll stick round quite a while—for the long end.”

“But how good is this Callahan?” asked the Cricket.

“Good enough to make you open your lamps, my son. Come over tomorrow afternoon an’ I’ll have him put on the gloves with some of the gang. If you don’t say he’s the roughest walloper in seven counties, the joint is yours, cash register an’ all!”

“Fair enough!” said the Cricket.

“It listens well,” said the Deacon, nodding gravely. “Patrick, another small libation upon the altar of friendship and we’re on our way!”

Tierney stared at the swinging door until it ceased to vibrate behind his guests.

"A bird that can sing and won't sing ought to be made to sing," he mused. "An' that's true. This bird knows all the notes, but is there a way to make him like music, I wonder?"

II

Isidore Mandelbaum did not fight because he loved fighting. A stiff jab upon his prominent nose had no charms for him; a well-timed hook to the point of the chin roused in him no wild enthusiasm for the conflict. Isidore was a gladiator for revenue only. The jingle of the shekels in the box-office made a strong appeal to his nature; the soft rustle of currency was soothing to his soul. Propose an engagement to the average boxer of Isidore's caliber, and the first question would never vary: "Who with?" Propose one to Mandelbaum, and he would ask: "How much?"

Isidore, acting as his own manager for economical reasons, preferred to battle for a flat sum—so much in the hand, win, lose or draw, before he entered the ring. If he felt he could win without trouble or danger, well and good. If the evening's entertainment was not to his liking Isidore would stumble into an easy swing, stop the glove with his jaw and remain upon the floor until the referee signaled "Cease firing." For this inglorious trait he was called a quitter, and his intimates often remonstrated with him for what they were pleased to term his lack of gameness.

"Gameness is good—when it gets you something," Isidore would argue. "For a big long end I can be as game as anybody, but on a win, lose or draw proposition it ain't worth while. Why should I get my face knocked off me when all I get is just so much?"

"But every time you quit it goes as a knockout on your record!"

"The only record I keep," Isidore would reply calmly, "is a bank book. Those knockouts are in there, too, but they don't show."

"You'll never get to be a champion if you let all these dubs lick you."

Isidore had a counter for that lead.

"A champion has to cut his money in two with some bum of a manager. In the end he ain't got anything. Small profits and quick returns is better."

So, dead alike to ambition and shame, Isidore Mandelbaum went his devious way, fighting like a world's champion one week and like an inebriated apple-woman the next. It was all the same to Isidore. He was, as he often said, a business man in a business that was no business.

This is why he was deeply interested in a proposition submitted by Cricket Cassidy, a former lightweight of great renown, but now doing the best he could, who met Isidore by carefully arranged accident one evening.

"Well, and how's Kid Hogan and all the other Hogans?" asked the Cricket.

Isidore regarded the Cricket with a shrewd, beady eye, but read nothing more than cheery good nature in Cassidy's countenance.

"All right, I guess," said Isidore.

"How's business?"

"Business is bad," admitted Isidore. "Rotten bad. You saw that fight last week? Here I am winning all by myself and making a chopping block out of this Swede—and then I come to in my corner with the smelling salts under my nose."

"Tough luck!" said the Cricket. "He's a dangerous guy, that Swanson. Always got a kick left in him."

"Like a government mule!" agreed Isidore fervently. "And, would you believe it, they say I quit!"

Cricket was not one of Isidore's intimates, and to the public at large Kid Hogan did not tell all his business, holding that to be bad business. Cassidy, who had seen the battle under discussion, and had watched Isidore bob up at the count of ten and walk steadily to his corner without so much as a tremor of the knees, clucked sympathetically.

"You don't say!"

"But I do say! And for that," wailed Isidore—"for that they have canceled two dates on me. I suppose I should stay in there and be knocked dead! Business is bad, sure."

"I think I know where you can pick up some soft money."

Isidore was on his guard at once.

"I don't split with anybody!" said he quickly. "It ain't business, and why should I when I make my own matches and do my own managing? No split!"

The Cricket laughed.

"Forget it! I'm not looking for anything. I thought I could put something in your way, that's all, but if——"

"Well," said Isidore cautiously, "I can always listen."

"All right, listen to this: Over at Point Richmond they've got a roughneck named Callahan. The railroad men think he's a wonder because

he's won a couple of bar-room brawls. I heard about him and went to see Tierney. You know Tierney?"

"Everybody knows Tierney," said Isidore impatiently. "Go on."

"Well, Tierney says Callahan is a false alarm, and that the first fairly good boy he meets will lick him in a round. Tierney says he's muscle-bound and can't get out of his own way. Tierney thinks that Young Morrissey could put Callahan away in jigtime."

"Young Morrissey!" sneered Isidore. "Didn't I lick him three times?"

"Of course, but don't you see what a cinch that makes it for you?" argued the Cricket. "Tierney says he would rather have you, on account of your punch. Now you write Tierney and make this match—he's got a piece of the fight club over there—and you demand a percentage basis. Make it seventy-five and twenty-five, or eighty-twenty. It'll be just the same as finding it, and——"

"Say, wait a minute!" Isidore was a business man, with all a business man's suspicions. "Where do you come in on this and what do you get out of it?"

"Bonehead!" cried the Cricket. "The betting, of course. What else? The railroad men and the town sports will bet their shirts on Callahan. Me and Tierney will clean up all the loose dough in town!"

"And Tierney will bet on me?" demanded Isidore.

"Sure he will! He says Callahan won't lay a glove on you—too slow and telegraphs everything. Tierney says it will be the softest money that ever went hunting a home. You might even bet some yourself."

"I never bet," said Isidore firmly.

"Well, think it over. Tierney is already trying to get in touch with Young Morrissey. Of course he won't be such a safe betting proposition as you, but——"

"I'll write him to-night!" said Isidore. "You—you're sure you don't want anything, eh?"

"Not a thing but the betting privilege!" laughed the Cricket. "Say, you don't think anybody in the world is on the level, do you!"

"In this business—no," answered Isidore Mandelbaum, simply and truthfully. "They got to show me."

"That's right, kid," agreed the Cricket. "Take no chances."

"Just Pat Tierney, Point Richmond—that'll get him, will it?" asked Isidore.

"Care of the Golden Gate Saloon. Yes."

"Much obliged," said Isidore. "I'd do as much for you."

"I'll bet you would!" said the Cricket heartily.

III

Once more Patrick Tierney was alone with his art gallery and engaged in the thoughtful occupation of polishing the bar with a damp rag. To him came the Deacon, as solemn as usual, but with a faint flicker in his eye.

"Patrick," said he, "I hope I see you well."

"You do if your eyesight ain't failin'," answered the proprietor, hospitably reaching for a bottle.

"If you insist," murmured the Deacon, helping himself sparingly. He lifted his glass.

"Here's success to crime!" said he.

"Success!" echoed Tierney. "And how's it going?"

"Great! Immense!" The Deacon coughed noisily as he set down the glass. "Patrick, a gift horse is a sacred animal and I always did like cooking whisky, but what do you make that stuff of? Fusel oil or just plain vitriol? Wow! I feel like a new man—purified by fire, as it were!"

"A-ah, where do you get that?" grumbled Tierney. "That's the regular bar whisky."

"I have not the slightest doubt of it. Synthetic hooch, made of something almost as good. Guaranteed to remove corns, warts, wens or bunions, as well as the lining of the human stomach! And that's not all that ails it either!"

"Every man to his own taste," said Tierney sullenly. "They like it over here. What's the news?"

"Briefly, and in words of one syllable," said the Deacon, "the tip got round town that Isidore was framed up for a benefit with an inferior person named Callahan. The impression prevailed that Isidore could not lose—wouldn't be allowed to lose. In short, a lead pipe. You know how it is. Pick three men, swear 'em to secrecy, pledge their sacred words of honor that it goes no farther, and all San Francisco is wise by night. The same end might be served by hiring the front page of a morning paper, but our method was cheaper. We picked the right men to tell, Patrick."

"Sure. And then?"

"Then the Mandelbaum money began to make its appearance in the pool rooms. It came in bunches, bundles, bales. Never have I seen it respond more nobly. How these surethingers do climb aboard when they think

they've got a cinch, eh! All in the world that they want is one hundred per cent the best of it. Give 'em that much of an edge and they'll bet you until the cows come home. We could have placed a lot more."

"Could you now?" said Tierney. "Well, well!"

"How's Callahan?"

"Trained to the minute. In the pink o' condition, as the sportin' reporters say, though pink is no color for a fightin' man."

"And confident of victory, eh? You know they always say that too."

"Confident is no name for it, Deacon, no name for it. He was tellin' me last night what he's goin' to buy with the long end."

The Deacon nodded approvingly.

"That's the spirit! Our friend Isidore will be pained, not to say shocked and grieved. He hasn't trained a lick for Callahan."

"Tell me now," said Tierney, "did he ever train in his whole life? If so, they kept word of it from me."

"His notion of vigorous training would be to run around the block once after a hearty meal," said the Deacon. "Tell your boy to rough it with him from the start, haul him all over the ring, lay on him in the clinches—anything to get him tired. Then when he begins to puff—bang! bang! in the pantry, and Isidore will fold up like a wet towel."

"I'll do that," said Tierney.

Calm and untroubled by any hint of impending disaster Isidore Mandelbaum came to the slaughter. He brought with him—no, for they paid their own way—two more or less faithful retainers, Mush McManus and Gopher Gallegher, born respectively Marcus Cohn and Meyer Goldstone. With characteristic caution Isidore timed his arrival with the opening of the doors of the pavilion, for he had agreed to a percentage basis and was interested in the paid admissions. He took his stand at the main entrance, where he assisted the ticket-taker to handle the reserves, and also kept him from passing in his friends for nothing. Marcus and Meyer performed a like office at the gallery door.

When the time came for him to dress for the ring Isidore called Meyer Goldstone to the main entrance and left him there on guard.

"Aw, w'at's t' matter witcha?" snarled the ticket-taker. "T' house is full, ain't it?"

"Sure!" said Isidore cheerfully. "But there might be some standing room left. Keep your lamps on this bird, Meyer." So saying, Isidore picked up his suitcase and departed for the dressing room.

Most boxers require more valeting than a prince of royal blood, but attendants cost money, and Isidore would pay no man to lace his shoes and help him on with his trunks. He dressed without assistance and sat down on the rubbing table to wait the call. The last preliminary bout was under way, and Isidore knew he would not have long to wait. As he sat there, crossing and uncrossing his bare legs, unseeing eyes fixed on the wall in front of him, was he, perhaps, thinking of his unknown opponent, wondering what he was like, speculating on the power of his punch? Ah, no.

"The house," thought Isidore, "will run twelve hundred. Sixty per cent to the management—the robbers! Forty for us to split. Four times two is eight, four times one is four. Four hundred and eighty dollars, and seventy-five per cent of that again makes—yep! three hundred and sixty." And his smile was the smile of a young man without a worry in the world.

Suddenly the door opened with a crash and a large man stood framed in the aperture—a large, wide man with freckles, a sandy mustache and a gray sombrero yanked down over steely blue eyes. Isidore looked up, startled, and his first impression was an unpleasant one; he knew instinctively that he was not going to care for this person. The man hesitated an instant, then he stepped inside and closed the door behind him.

"A couple or three words with you, young feller!" said he gruffly.

"You got a nerve, busting in like this," Isidore began, but the words died away. The big man's coat was unbuttoned, and as he bent forward it swung away from his body far enough to show a silver star upon his vest. The star bore the words "Deputy Sheriff." "I—what can I do for you?" asked Isidore politely. "I ain't done nothing, I assure you. I'm a stranger here, and——"

"It's what you're going to do to-night that counts."

"To-night?" stammered Isidore. The man's words were ominous; his manner positively threatening.

"Don't stall. You got me the first time. You fought Bill Ladd over here last April, didn't you?"

"Well?" Isidore's mouth was dry.

"And you quit like a dawg, didn't you?"

"Mister," said Isidore earnestly, "that's all a mistake. They told you wrong. I never quit in my——"

The large man laughed coarsely.

"Tell that to the marines!" said he.

"But, mister——"

"Shut up till I get done! You could have won that fight in a walk, but you laid down after you had Bill Ladd licked—laid down for one measly little poke on the jaw. Them that bet on you didn't get a run for their money. The sheriff of this county was one of 'em, sonny, and he hasn't forgot it. He framed up a little surprise party for you. You're going to fight on the square to-night, understand? No stalling and no quitting. If you don't win you'd better be knocked out so cold that it'll take a doctor an hour to bring you to—and the doctor'll be at the ringside too. Lose this fight, and you'll go to jail for three months. Quit, and you'll be with us for six months. *Sabe?*"

"But—but you can't——" The words came in a series of dry croaks.

"Oh, yes, I can! Obtaining money under false pretenses. Conspiracy to defraud the public." The man rolled these formidable phrases under his tongue with too evident relish, and there was a certain grim assurance in his manner that strangled argument. "Don't you tell me what can't be done. You know what happened to Kid Banks, don't you? Six months on the rock pile, making little ones out of big ones. His lawyers cost him a thousand, and then couldn't do anything for him. He thought he could pull off a fake fight in this county. The sheriff is a bad *hombre*. When he goes after a crook he gets him good." The large man felt in his pocket and drew out two shining steel circlets, which jingled as he handled them. "You better win to-night, sonny, or——" The sharp click of the handcuffs completed the threat.

Isidore moistened his lips with his tongue.

"And—if I win, what?"

The big man grinned.

"All off. Bygones will be bygones. Nothing doing. But if you lose——"

"Mister," said Isidore in a husky whisper, "I give you my paralyzed word of honor I never had the intentions of losing this fight!"

Marcus and Meyer entered the dressing room together. "Callahan is in the ring already," said Marcus. "Where's the bucket and things?"

The large man turned at the door and looked at Mandelbaum.

"I'll be at the ringside," said he with significance. "Close to your corner." Then he went away.

"Who was that big stiff?" asked Meyer. "Has he got a bet on this fight, or something?"

"No," said Isidore briefly and unhappily. "I have."

"How much?" demanded Marcus, suddenly interested.

"Six months!" said Isidore.

IV

Isidore sat in his corner and stared at his opponent. For the first time a new element had entered his calculations. Callahan looked hard as pig iron. He also had the appearance of physical fitness, and none of the nervousness to be expected in a novice making his initial appearance against a seasoned gladiator. He chatted and laughed with his seconds as they laced his gloves, and not once did he so much as glance at the opposite corner. These things were not lost on Isidore.

"This guy," said he with conviction, "has been there before. He ain't worried or anything. Maybe I should have trained for him."

"Ho!" said Marcus. "You can lick all these near-fighters without no more than a clean shave!" It is the duty of a second to hearten his principal. Isidore glanced along the ropes, and there sure enough was the large man, chatting with a companion who wore a neat Van-dyke beard and spectacles.

"The doctor!" thought Isidore. Then bitterly: "They ain't leaving me a single out!"

The principals were presented to the audience, and Callahan received a tremendous ovation, to which he responded by bobbing his bullet head as he swaggered back to his corner. Isidore was hooted unmercifully, his usual reception when fighting away from home. Several aspiring youths shambled into the ring and were introduced by the Master of Ceremonies as desiring to "meet the winner," after which they shook hands formally with Callahan and Mandelbaum. An impatient uproar beat down from the gallery:

"Git to business!"

"Bring on the raw meat!"

"Hey, Callahan! You know!"

The Master of Ceremonies waved his pudgy arms over his head.

"Order, please!" he bellowed. "Must have order!"

A bull-necked man shed coat, vest, collar and tie, rolled up his sleeves and clambered heavily through the ropes. It was Butch O'Connor, the referee. He strode to the middle of the ring and beckoned the fighters to him. Callahan approached, grinning cheerfully. Isidore's face wore a serious expression. He had forgotten the three hundred and sixty dollars.

"Cheer up!" bantered Callahan. "The worst is yet to come!"

"That's for you to find out!" snapped Isidore venomously.

"The proper spirit!" commented Butch. "Listen now!"

He droned through the familiar instructions, gave the customary warnings, and the fighters nodded and returned to their corners. Isidore, resting one glove lightly on the topmost rope, heard the Master of Ceremonies bawling the announcement—heard, but took no heed. Isidore was looking at the big sandy man. The sandy man was showing something to his bearded friend—something which he held cupped in both hands. Through his fingers Isidore caught the glint of bright metal. Both were laughing.

"Let 'er go!" howled the Master of Ceremonies.

"Bong!" said the bell.

Callahan shot out of his corner as if released by a giant spring. He rushed at Isidore, aimed a savage right uppercut for the chin, missed by a matter of inches and floundered into a clinch, managing to step on Isidore's feet as he did so. The sheer force of his attack swept Isidore backward toward his own corner.

"Aw, don't fall all over the ring that way!" he complained, wriggling free and escaping into open territory. "Make a nice clean fight of it!"

"I'll clean you!" snarled Callahan, and rushed again. Isidore side-stepped neatly, and peppered him with stinging left jabs, but for all visible effect he might have been prodding a brick wall. Callahan bore in close, bent on roughing it, and again Isidore jabbed and side-stepped. Immediately a shrill voice was uplifted at the ringside:

"Stay with him, Callahan! Wear him out!"

Isidore turned his head slightly and his astonished gaze fell upon Cricket Cassidy's face, purple with enthusiasm and vocal exertion. And the Cricket had said that Callahan was easy, asking nothing for himself but the betting privilege! Would he bet on one man and cheer for another? Never. Of a sudden Isidore Mandelbaum felt very sick indeed, and Callahan was trying to make him sicker, in the same place. A glove thudded below Isidore's floating ribs into the unarmored region known as the pit of the stomach.

"Thatta boy!" howled the Cricket. "Downstairs!"

There was no time to meditate upon this bit of treachery or what it might portend. Isidore set himself solidly upon his large flat feet and began to fight. Other questions, and they swirled in his brain, must wait; Callahan would not. So the round ended in a fierce give-and-take in the middle of the ring. Isidore, because of his cleverness at evading punishment, had a shade the better of it, and the crowd whooped joyously at the bell.

"Hey! Don't lose your head an' try to out-slug this guy!" cautioned Meyer Goldstone. "Rough stuff—that's his dish! Box him, Izzy, box him!"

"I been framed," grunted Isidore. "They jobbed me!"

"Who jobbed you?" asked Marcus Cohn, busy with a towel.

"Everybody!" said Isidore.

"Well, don't lose your head," warned Meyer. "Box him. Don't slug."

But Callahan would not box. He insisted on fighting with both hands at all times. The pretty art of feinting for openings interested him not. When Isidore sought to clinch he was jarred loose by a terrific tattoo upon his midsection. This was hardly beneficial. A young man in perfect condition may weather such an attack for a time, but Isidore, alas! was not in perfect condition. His habits were exemplary, but they did not include the long runs on the road which make for endurance or the physical exercises that strengthen the abdominal muscles. Plainly there were only two ways to stop the epigastrial bombardment: the first was to run; the second, to fight Callahan away from close quarters. Isidore remembered the large sandy man and chose the latter.

The last minute of the second round was a thrilling session for the spectators, but this time the honors were with Ireland. Isidore managed to plant two right hooks on Callahan's left eye, almost closing it, but just before the bell rang Callahan retaliated with a whizzing uppercut that sent Isidore reeling, and his legs played him queer tricks as he walked to his corner. His brain was whirling, but he saw one thing clearly: the sandy man was scowling at him and fingering something in his coat pocket.

"Didn't see that one!" gasped Isidore, while Marcus and Meyer plied towel and ice water desperately. "Tough, ain't he?"

In the other corner Callahan regarded his handlers with a lopsided smile.

"Who d' hell told me this boy couldn't hit?" he mumbled thickly. "A coupla inches lower down, an' fa-a-re-thee-well. He near tore me roof off!"

It was in the third round that Isidore ducked into an uppercut, blocking it with his nose. To his other troubles was added acute pain. After that it became a fight, *sans* art, *sans* science, *sans* everything but the spirit that must have moved the cave men to combat. Callahan and Mandelbaum, two men as unlike as unlike can be, met in the middle of the ring and reverted to first principles, but instead of clubs and stone hatchets they used their fists, while the spectators howled as their shaggy ancestors must have howled at the sight of human blood. At such a time one sees how easily the veneer of civilization peels off the soul of man.

Callahan forgot everything but the dark, sneering face in front of him. Isidore, dazed and shaken, but of superior intelligence, remembered but one thing—the sandy man with the handcuffs.

At long intervals each was in his corner, gasping, incoherent, deaf alike to entreaty and advice. It was a real fight of the sort seldom seen between professionals these days, and for the time the crowd forgot to be partisan. If the boys in the gallery did not love Isidore they at least respected him for what they called his gameness. After each round they looked at each other and said:

"Well, watta you t'ink of dat, hey?"

There came a time when darkness enveloped Isidore and swallowed him up. One instant he had been standing toe to toe with Callahan, fighting like a fury; the next he was falling, falling, falling through a bottomless black void. After an eternity of oblivion the gloom lifted slightly, and Isidore found himself huddled up on his hands and knees, underneath the ropes, staring at a red pool on the white canvas. As from a great distance he heard a singsong voice calling "Six!"

Nauseated and dizzy, Isidore lifted his eyes from the pool, and there below him, at less than arm's length, was a large man with a sandy mustache and steely blue eyes that glared up at him from under the brim of a gray sombrero. He seemed angry about something; vaguely Isidore wondered why.

The man's lips moved; Isidore tried to catch the message, but could not.

The distant voice chanted "Seven!"

In his benumbed brain an idea began to shape itself: Isidore knew only that the large sandy man was the key to a tremendous situation in which his future was involved. But what was it? Isidore shook his head, hoping that it would clear; the sandy man misunderstood the motion. He thrust his closed fist out over the ring floor, and as the fingers opened Isidore caught a glimpse of silver. Money? No, a silver star. The bright flash of the metal struck a beam into his muddled brain; memory returned to him. Six months in the county jail! A thousand dollars, and the lawyers couldn't do anything!

"Eight!"

"You know what you'll get if you quit!" The sandy man was making a megaphone out of his hands.

A dull roar filled the air. It was the gallery celebrating in advance of Callahan's victory. Callahan? Yes, he must be somewhere in the vicinity. Isidore Mandelbaum, who had never known the true meaning of gameness, heaved a sigh that was also a groan and, turning himself about, prepared to rise. He balanced himself on both hands, waiting, and as he waited the last shred of mist cleared from his brain. "Nine!"

Half a second now. Isidore remembered something he had heard about Bob Fitzsimmons in his fight with Corbett—no, not Corbett. It was Hall, at New Orleans. Isidore came up slowly, just as the referee's finger poised on the final down stroke that would have marked the end of the fight. His open hands dangled at his sides. He reeled this way and that, his right arm swaying at his hip. His eyes were fixed in a glassy stare; his lower lip drooped ludicrously. He was such a pitiable spectacle that Callahan dropped his gloves to laugh.

Seven minutes later Callahan became aware of a strong smell of ammonia and opened his eyes. All about him were stern faces and accusing eyes.

"Wha—wha's happened?" he muttered.

"What happened!" cried the man who held the bottle of smelling salts. "You thought he was out, but he was only stallin' to get your guard down! He knocked you dead in the eighth round—that's what happened!"

V

Patrick Tierney sat in the back room of the Golden Gate Saloon, alone. The San Francisco contingent had departed, jubilant, save for a small man in a checkered suit and a tall man whose usually somber countenance wore an added gloom. Point Richmond had retired for the night.

A creaking footfall broke the silence; it was that of a large sandy man trying to walk on his toes.

"Well, Pat," said he, "I've got to hand it to you! It worked like a charm. Who would have thought he was as game as that, eh?"

"He had to be," said Tierney succinctly. He drew out a thick roll of bills and counted off a certain sum.

"You cleaned up, did you?" asked the large man.

Tierney nodded.

"Here and across the Bay," said he. "Most of it over there though." He handed some bills to the sandy man, who counted them carefully, for he knew Tierney. Then he tucked them in one vest pocket, while from the other he drew a small silver star and from his coat a pair of handcuffs.

"Guess I won't have any more use for these," said he.

"No," said Tierney, recovering his property. After a time he laughed silently, rocking back and forth in his chair.

"The bird didn't like music any too well," he chuckled, "but between us we found a way to make him sing the notes!"

OUT OF HIS CLASS

THE young man upon whom Nature has bestowed barely enough forehead to keep his hair out of his eyes should shun highbrow society and all forms of art. The game is hopelessly beyond him, the cards are "stacked," and he loses even when he wins. In proof of this statement, we respectfully refer the reader to the following passages from the life of the eminent Mr. Joseph O'Malley.

O'Malley was not always eminent, but owed his rise in life to a jaw of chilled steel, a heart that knew fear only by reputation, two malletlike fists, and the ability—as well as the inclination—to hit with them at any time and from any position. Many have claimed credit for discovering this wonderful fighting machine, but it was the sporting editor of the "Daily Avalanche" who set Joseph's youthful feet on the road to fame and fortune. The sporting editor did not realize it at the time, and therefore deserves none of the credit he has been claiming; he merely thought he was playing an extremely rough practical joke on an unsuspecting tramp fighter. Seeing that he still poses in print as O'Malley's Columbus, it might be just as well to tell the real truth about that discovery.

The hour was late, his copy was all in, and the sporting editor of the "Avalanche" was about to quit and call it a day when the narrow chute leading to his seven by nine sanctum was blocked by two figures. The first was that of a bright-eyed but grubby little man in a stained and shapeless suit of loud checks. The pattern was thickly dotted with tiny holes burned in the cloth, and these established the status of the visitor at once—a "blind-baggage tourist," a traveller contributing nothing to the upkeep of the right of way. His flat-brimmed brown derby hat was smooth and shiny and reflected the light like a polished shell. A dingy red necktie, a rhinestone pin and a thirty-five-cent cameo ring completed the picture.

Hovering in the wake of this shabby pilot was a bullet-headed boy with a tremendous shock of straw-colored hair, one cauliflower ear of amazing proportions, and a decided cast in his left eye. His clothing was, if anything, more disreputable than that of his companion—a cap, a sweater, and a seven-dollar suit, and all had seen hard wear under varying weather conditions.

"Sportin' editor?" briskly asked the grubby one, stepping forward.

"Yes," answered the newspaper man, eying his callers with a chilling lack of interest.

"Pleased to meet you!" exclaimed he of the loud checks, wringing the sporting editor's limp hand. "My name's Arthur—*Lew* Arthur—an' I'm managin' this boy here. Shake hands, Joe!"

The bullet-headed youth bashfully offered a dirty paw and retreated to a position at his manager's flank.

"We're lookin' for a crack at some of these lightweights, Joe and me," cheerfully continued the spokesman. "We don't bar nobody. First come, first served; 'at's us. To look at him, you wouldn't think he's the fightin'est little fool 'at ever pulled on a glove, but he is, pal, he is! Yes, sir, mingle is his middle name——"

"What's the rest of his name?" The sporting editor's tone and manner were not encouraging, but the grubby young man ignored them.

"O'Malley—Joe O'Malley, an' say, you ain't got no idea what a devasticatin' bear cat he is when he hears 'at bell ring! He fights just because he loves it, pal; it's meat an' drink to him, yes, an' tapioca puddin' too. Chuck him in the ring wit' anybody—the tougher they come the better he likes 'em—leave him there six, ten, *twenty* rounds, an' I give you my paralyzed word of honor, pal, it's just the same's sendin' a hungry guy to a banquet! He eats it, Joe does, an' he ain't never found nobody yet that could make him back up. First time I seen him step, I pegs him for a comin' champion o' the world. 'At's why I hooked up wit' him as manager——"

"Yes, yes," said the sporting editor, glancing at the devasticating bear cat, who met his eyes with a sheepish grin and then looked suddenly away in two directions at once, "but he hasn't any record——"

"No record!" ejaculated Mr. Arthur, with well-feigned amazement. "Didn't we rock Kid Swiftly to sleep in Gol'field? Didn't we knock Young Dutchy dead wit' one punch? Didn't we git a draw wit Groniger in his own town? No record! Why, pal, where you been all this time?"

"Right here, but I never heard of O'Malley before you blew in and began three-sheeting him all over the place. I never heard of the boys that you say he's licked. I suppose you want to get him a match—is that the idea?"

"Pal," said the little manager earnestly, "you're a *mind* reader—you ain't no sportin' editor. I not only *want* to git him a match, but I *got* to git him a match or we don't eat. Ain't that so, Joe?"

The fighter grinned sheepishly and nodded.

The sporting editor also grinned, for an idea had come his way—a practical joke in the making, with O'Malley on the receiving end.

"How would you like to take a crack at Dynamite Danny O'Brien?" he asked.

"Anybody at all, pal!" cried the manager. "As the Colonel says, dee-lighted! Hey, Joe?"

"Uh, huh," assented O'Malley.

"Danny's a tough boy," said the sporting editor.

"Tough boys is right where we live!" boasted Arthur.

"He's been stopping all these pork-an'-beaners in a round or two."

"Git him for us, pal, 'at's all we ask!"

"He hits like a mule kicking."

"So do we. You don't *know* this boy, pal. He kin trade slams wit' any of 'em."

"Nobody has ever made O'Brien back up."

"I like to have 'em fetch it right to me," said O'Malley suddenly, and as suddenly subsided.

"See?" cried his manager. "What did I tell you, hey? He jus' *loves* it, Joe does! He don't git no fun out o' fightin' 'less they fights him *hard*."

"Then he'll have a perfectly lovely time next Friday night," said the sporting editor with a trace of grimness.

"And you'll fix it with the club?"

"I'll telephone the promoter in the morning. He's got an office in the Commonwealth Building—fifth floor. Better take your boy round there at noon. No, never mind thanking me."

The sporting editor watched the grubby little manager herd his fighter down the passage and into the elevator. "Another hobo with a meal ticket," thought he. "Another tramp trying to break into the game. Oh, well, there's only one thing about a meal ticket: it's no good till it's punched. And this one will get *some* punching!"

Now, Danny O'Brien was a local product who had fought himself out of material by reason of the roughness with which he handled his opponents. Not quite good enough for the first flight, he had devastated the second and third, and a match with him had come to be regarded as a round-trip ticket to dreamland. There was no competition for the doubtful privilege of meeting him under the shaded arc lights. He had no science, no knowledge of boxing, and felt that he needed none. He used his left hand only to create openings for his deadly right, which had earned for him the name of Dynamite Danny. He was more than pleased to meet the unknown O'Malley in a six-round encounter, and came to the fray confident of its conclusion—

so confident that he had not annoyed himself with the slight detail of training. Why train when all his fights ended inside the three-round mark?

What happened to Dynamite Danny is a matter of history and also of accurate record. The latter may be found in the vest-pocket annuals, but not under the name of O'Brien. See O'Malley.

When the bell sounded Dynamite Danny went briskly to work, as was his wont, and just as briskly there sprang to meet him a trim, flat-muscled little thunderbolt under an immense thatch of straw-colored hair. "Huh!" thought Danny, who was accustomed to cautious opponents. "This guy don't know who I am—he ain't afraid, nor nothing!"

O'Brien introduced himself by means of a right hook aimed at the jaw. The blond unknown ducked, suffering a glancing blow upon his cauliflower ear, countered with a stiff, digging jolt under the heart—and the battle was on. And such a battle! The irresistible force had encountered the immovable obstacle, each possessing elements of the other. Dynamite Danny set his teeth and whaled away with his deadly right; Joe O'Malley set his teeth and met it—and a little bit more. The straw-colored hair rocked and tossed under the brutal assault; O'Brien's mid section quivered under a responding tattoo. No ground was given and no quarter asked; it was five rounds of savage fighting crowded into one, and when the bell struck the boys apart and sent them to their corners the spectators leaped to their feet and yelled themselves hoarse. The grubby little manager, deftly plying a sponge, caught the sporting editor's eye—and winked.

It was in the third round that Dynamite Danny began to weaken. He had found a man whom he could not hurt with his right hand—a man who had been hurting him with both hands and who seemed willing—yes, even anxious—to hurt him some more. The instant that the sting went out of Danny's blows, O'Malley swarmed all over him, beating down his wavering defense with a shower of jolting hooks and swings. O'Brien began to retreat.

"Oh, you bear cat!" shrilled the little manager. "You devasticatin' bear cat! Rock him to sleep! 'At's the stuff!"

The round ended with O'Brien on the run, striving to cover himself from a blinding storm of punishment. The house was in a terrific uproar, but O'Malley went calmly to his corner, not acknowledging his ovation by so much as a grin.

"Watch his eye, you fool, and block some of them punches!" Thus O'Brien's chief adviser.

"But the sucker—don't hit where—he's looking!" grunted Dynamite.

The battle ended early in the fourth round—ended with the local terror doubled up on the canvas and struggling to rise, but taking great care not to struggle successfully. Dynamite Danny knew when he had had enough, and in addition he was ill in the region of his stomach.

"Great little fighter, that towhead!" said the reporters. "Who dug him up?"

"I did," modestly replied the sporting editor of the "Avalanche." "I liked his looks, and asked the club to give him a tryout. Shouldn't wonder if he amounted to something some day. Let me have one peek at 'em, and I can tell, as a general thing."

The sporting editor of the "Avalanche" has told this story so often that he now believes it himself.

II

Cranking the film rapidly, we next see Joseph O'Malley adorned with purple, fine linen, and precious stones. But for the magnificent cauliflower ear we might have some difficulty in recognizing him as the same person, and if we watch him long enough we shall surprise a look of blank amazement in that wandering left eye, for there are times when O'Malley has trouble in recognizing himself and is dazed by his sudden elevation to affluence.

We see also the little manager, grubby no longer but otherwise unchanged, full of conversation and supporting a diamond stud more noticeable for its size than the limpid, water-white purity of its color.

Our two friends have come up in the world, and Joe O'Malley is a Celebrity now. His manager has to remind him of the fact several times a day. Having disposed of all competition, Joe stands alone as challenger for the lightweight championship, and while Carsey, the champion, doubles and twists and endeavors to evade the issue, O'Malley is about to enjoy a brief vacation from the arena.

"Ten weeks in vaudeville at seven-fifty a week—oh, I'm a poor manager, eh? Yeh, rotten. I don't know a thing about gittin' the dough w'ile the gittin's good!" Lew Arthur set fire to a perfecto, hung his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and beamed upon his meal ticket. Joe grunted. It was not a grunt of happiness.

"Aw, there you go again!" exclaimed Lew.

"Why not fight some of these guys?" whined O'Malley. "There's Kelley an' Young Whalen an'——"

"Dubs!" interrupted the manager. "Bums! You couldn't git nothin' for meetin' 'em, an' you'd only make yourself cheap. They's just one match we want now, an' that's wit' Carsey for the championship. He don't want to meet us, but the public'll make him. All we gotta do is keep on challengin' an' yellin' murder—Carsey'll have to fight us some day. While we're waitin', here's this vaudeville engagement, an' pretty soft, *I* call it. Lemme talk, will you? I'm the manager, ain't I? Well! The show business ain't half as bad as you think. You don't have to *do* nothin' when you git out there on the stage. We git the dough for lettin' the yaps *see* you, 'at's all. An' you'll have a nelegant time—lots of chickens wit' the troupe."

"Huh!" sneered O'Malley. "Chickens!"

"Now, don't be turnin' up that busted beezer of yours so proud an' haughty. You ain't no prize beauty, but they ain't collyflower ears enough in the world to pertect a guy that drags down seven-fifty a week—less his manager's cut. Some doll'll make a play for you, sure, an' don't you fall too hard, Joe."

"Ah-h, quit kiddin'!"

"You think it's a kid? All right, little Bright Eyes, stick around and see!"

There were two "girl acts" with the show, and some of the members of the Transatlantic Beauty Chorus were frankly interested in the seven-hundred-and-fifty-a-week recruit to vaudeville—but not for long. The Devasticating Bear Cat appeared twice a day, as per contract, struggled through his fifteen minutes of bag punching, shadow boxing, and sparring, made his nervous, jerky bows in response to the applause, and hurried, perspiring freely, to his dressing room. He made no friends and scraped no acquaintances. The Montressors and De Veres and Le Clairs decided that he wouldn't do, not with any amount of fixing.

"A scared little small-town hick, that's all he is! I smiled at him this afternoon, like I'd smile at anybody on the same bill, and what do you think? The poor fish blushed all over!"

"Solid ivory, but they say he can fight."

"Well, he ought to be able to do something! His act is a joke!"

"And the billing says he gets fifteen hundred a week for it. Of course, that's press-agent bunk——"

"No matter what it is, it's too much."

"Mme. Lorenze put up an awful squawk about having to follow him on the bill."

"Well, can you *blame* her? Imagine trying to put a vampire act across with a lot of lowbrows walking out on you! I guess you'd holler too. The lowbrows only come to see him, and when he's done that's the end of the show. What do they care for the emotional stuff? Last night poor old Lorenze died standing up. It was terrible!"

"She says she'll cancel her contract if they don't change her."

The distinguished foreign artiste and Original Vampire—if one believes the press agent and forgets Delilah, Salome, and Cleopatra—complained so bitterly that the house manager called at O'Malley's dressing room. His very entrance was apologetic.

"Say, Joe, would you do me a favor?"

"Maybe," was the laconic response.

"Would it be asking too much of you to change places with Lorenze? A lot of people come to see you and leave after your act is over—they crab her sketch. She's all worked up about it, Joe, and—well, you know how women are."

"Sure," said the fighter.

"And you'll change with her?"

"Why not? Makes no difference to me."

Two minutes later a middle-aged female whirlwind swept into O'Malley's dressing room and all but fell on his neck. It was so grand of him, so generous, so noble, so—so——

"Cheese, lady, cheese!" stammered the Devasticating Bear Cat. "Where do you get that stuff? I ain't done no thin' to rave about; honest, I ain't!"

No, nothing to rave about, but it often happens that the smallest acts entail the largest consequences. It was because he surrendered his place on the bill that O'Malley's unwavering right eye fell upon Miss Vyvyan Delorme, born Sadie Jones.

Miss Delorme "supported" Mme. Lorenze—at least so she wrote her family in Kansas City. She went on with a tray at the beginning of the act, murmured "Oui, madame," twice, and gently faded from view. But that was not all—heavens, no! While the Original Vampire was vamping the chinless hero out of house and home, Miss Delorme waited in the wings—waited until she saw the poison vial slip from madame's fingers. This was the sign that the star was dead and therefore had no more use for the center of the stage. It was also Vyvyan's cue to rush on, pick up the vial—and scream.

That scream brought the curtain down, and also brought Miss Delorme's salary up from twenty-five to forty dollars a week. There was Art in that grief-stricken outcry—Art, and a shrill, penetrating note which caused many a tired business man to wake with a snort and a gurgle. And, as we have said, there was fifteen dollars per week in it; without the scream Miss Delorme would have been cheating them at twenty-five.

Vyvyan was a plump little blonde creature of the kittenish type, but she did not purr when stroked. She scratched. Those who saw only her blue-eyed baby stare and overlooked her somewhat bulging forehead would have been deceived in her, for this little bit of human fluff was ambitious and not quite a fool. She yearned to be a great emotional actress—a stage vampire for preference—but she appreciated the obstacles in her path.

To begin with, she realized that she was not of the ideal and accepted vampire type—tall and willowy, with somber eyes and midnight hair. The midnight hair might easily be managed, but how about the somber eyes and the slender figure? Then there were the clinging gowns, without which no vampire ever goes forth to vamp. Clinging gowns, Vyvyan knew, would make her look more than ever like a pat of fresh dairy butter. The outlook was a discouraging one, but Vyvyan was artist enough to keep on hoping for the best, and while she hoped she made a few tentative experiments in vampiring on her own amateur hook, using stage hands as subjects.

The keynote of the vampire's character, as Vyvyan saw it, was power to attract the opposite sex. Her first subject, a large, handsome brute with an overhanging cornice of a jaw, had responded to treatment so warmly and with such evident enthusiasm that Vyvyan had been forced to flee from him. This was proof that she possessed the power of attraction, but as Vyvyan had no desire to be kissed against her will she decided to alter her system somewhat. Instead of merely fascinating them, why not influence men for good?

Miss Delorme's attempts at benevolent vampiring failed because of the singular boneheadedness of the stage hands who were her subjects. Stage hands, Vyvyan discovered, were not possessed of souls.

Vyvyan had never met any prize fighters. She pictured them as savage, beetle-browed giants on the Bill Sikes order, with hamlike hands and coarse voices. She was, therefore, surprised to find that the challenger for a world's championship was a slim youth whose expression in repose was one of apologetic timidity. Joe looked so meek and frightened and utterly out of place on a vaudeville bill that he seemed the ideal subject for benevolent vampiring and soul awakening.

Vyvyan studied this quaint creature through several performances and decided that he would not be likely to misinterpret her efforts in his behalf. More than that, he seemed lonely and in need of a friend.

Twice daily O'Malley waited in the wings for the finish of the vampire's act, and though Vyvyan stood so close to him that he might have touched her, no words passed between them—none might ever have passed had not Miss Delorme lost patience and stepped on the fighter's toes—a clumsy method of introduction but better than nothing. It gave her a chance to apologize very sweetly. "'S all right," mumbled O'Malley, coloring under the blue-eyed and childlike scrutiny. "'S all right—didn't hurt me none."

"Oh, but I can't imagine what made me so—so clumsy!"

There was no reply. Evidently Joe could not imagine either. During the long silence which followed, Mme. Lorenze, on the stage, writhed and contemplated the poison.

"Don't you think she's *wonderful*?" whispered Vyvyan, her lips almost brushing the cauliflower ear.

"Yeh. A nut, too."

More silence.

"My cue is coming in a minute," said Vyvyan, desperately trying to create conversation.

"Well, so long. Knock 'em dead wit' that yell."

Is it any wonder that upon this occasion the fifteen-dollar-a-week scream held a keen note of vexation?

The next day the little manager announced that he was going West on business "for the firm."

"I'll chase this rabbit Jim Carsey, an' challenge him in every town where he hangs up his dicer. If all the papers git to yowlin' at him, he'll have to notice us—have to fight or retire. Well, good-by, you matinée idol, an' don't let none of these dames kidnap you!"

"A swell chance!" grunted O'Malley. "A-a-a swell chance. Why, they's only one *real* girl wit' the whole troupe, an' she don't work in no chorus, I'll tell you that."

III

Speeding the film once more, we catch glimpses of the little manager flitting from town to town, snapping at the heels of the champion, annoying him with challenges, bombarding him with certified checks, threatening, blustering, bluffing.

There are also glimpses of a remarkable progress in the benevolent vampiring line; close-ups of an inquisitive, kittenish blonde exploring the depths of a young man's being, sweeping out the dusty corners of his soul, selfishly testing her power over him in a dozen different ways.

Slowing the film to normal, we discover our lightweight Samson purchasing lobster for his Delilah at the hour of 11 p.m. He is conversing with her in low, earnest tones, as follows: "Honest, kid, it ain't such a bad game as all that. You don't know nothin' about it; that's why you knock so hard."

"I know it is brutal and degrading—and it is not worthy of you, Joe."

"Not worthy? Why, say, listen here——"

"It *is* brutal!" said Miss Delorme.

"Oh, well," said Joe, with a sigh, "maybe it is—for them that loses."

"And not worthy of you," insisted Vyvyan, pressing her advantage.

"Maybe it ain't," admitted Joe slowly. "I never thought about it that way."

"Don't you realize that beating another man—with your fists—has its effect on you?"

"Why, sure, girlie." Joe fingered his cauliflower ear and smiled like a cross-eyed angel. "Sure it's got an effect. A guy can't block 'em all."

"Oh, you don't understand! I mean the *moral* effect!"

Joe shook his head hopelessly.

"I don't git you at all. My morals are pretty good. They got to be. I never had a drink in my whole life. I don't smoke——"

"You're talking about habits," corrected Miss Delorme, "not morals."

"Well, habits, then," said Joe; "an' listen, girlie, you're gettin' to be a habit wit' me, an' one I don't never want to break. I'd like to think it was a habit that'd stay wit' me for keeps. How about it?"

"Surely you're not referring to that again?"

"Again an' yet. Why not? Ain't a feller got a right to ask for what he *wants*? You've done a lot of talkin' about the fightin' game—it's bad an' brutal an' all that, but suppose I got my dough some other way? Runnin' a saloon, for instance? I got a dandy chance to git in wit' a sport in San Francisco—a fifty-fifty split just for the name over the door. What if I should retire from the ring? Would that make any difference?"

Miss Delorme took time out for reflection. This was soul-awakening with a vengeance: this was swaying a strong man; this was benevolent

vampiring, raised to the nth power. Being only a weak woman, she sparred for time.

"Do you really mean that, Joe? Really and truly?"

"You bet I mean it. Is it me or is it the game that you don't like?" There was an earnest light in the fighter's eye; the unmistakable ring of sincerity in his voice.

"Why—why, I suppose it's the—the game," whispered Vyvyan.

"Keno!" cried Joe, and would have said much more had not a messenger boy appeared at his elbow.

"Telly gram for d' nex' champ!" said he, grinning. "Dey tells me at d' joke box I kin find youse here. Sign, please."

O'Malley signed, tossed a quarter to the boy, and opened the yellow envelope. He stared so long at the message that Miss Delorme coughed resentfully. She could not know that her companion had suddenly come in sight of the promised land, and in his lingering glance was a hail and a farewell. His lips moved as he spelled out the words. At last he placed the telegram on the table and fixed his right eye steadily on Miss Delorme. "Say that again, will you?"

"Say what again?"

"What you said just now—that it's only the game that's wrong, but I'm all right—wit' you."

"Of course it's wrong."

"Don't side-step. The game is wrong if you say so—I'm givin' you that much the best of it, but—*am I all right?*"

"I suppose so."

He reached for her hand across the table, honest affection shining in his right eye, incoherent phrases trembling on his lips—and those who would laugh should remember that this fluffy little creature was the first good woman who had ever paid the slightest attention to Joe O'Malley.

"Gee, kid, that's great! That's——"

"Oh, Joe! I've been looking everywhere for you!"

It was Conley, the press agent of the theater, wild-eyed and breathless.

"All the papers have been ringing up, trying to get in touch with you on this Carsey thing. I've asked the reporters to meet us at my office. Come on quick!"

"T'ell wit' the reporters," said Joe calmly. "T'ell wit' the papers. T'ell wit' *you*. Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Busy!" gasped the press agent. "With a story like this in sight?" He looked appealingly at Miss Delorme, who came immediately to his rescue, seeing also the chance to extricate herself from an uncomfortable situation.

"You mustn't keep the reporters waiting, Joe," said she.

The fighter blinked a few times before a comprehending light dawned upon him.

"Well, I must be a bonehead!" he exclaimed. "I pretty near forgot you was in the show business too!"

"A big story, Joe!" urged Conley. "Get a move on you!"

O'Malley rose and beamed fondly and foolishly upon the lady of his love.

"*I'll* give 'em a story! I'll give 'em a *whale* of a story! You stick here, an' I'll be right back. Don't go 'way."

He disappeared in the wake of the press agent, head up and shoulders squared, his attitude that of a young man about to make history. Miss Delorme looked after him, wondering uneasily. Had she said anything which a very stupid youth might misunderstand? And if she had, what was the length and breadth of that misunderstanding? Men are such idiots!

After a time she picked up the telegram and read it.

Got Carsey hooked twenty rounds November guess I'm a poor manager back tomorrow.

LEW.

Miss Delorme decided not to wait. It was a very thoughtful and troubled little vampire who walked to her hotel alone that night.

"Oh, he couldn't have meant *that*!" she assured herself. "He only asked me if he was all right, and I said that I supposed so. How could he twist that into a promise?"

But when she recalled the earnest light in Joseph's right eye she trembled. The boy might be fool enough for anything!

In the meantime O'Malley was facing a quick-firing battery of sporting writers in Conley's office.

"Well, Joe," said the spokesman, "you've got Carsey hooked up at last. This ought to make you the next champion of the world."

"No, I guess not," answered O'Malley, steadily enough.

"What?"

"You ain't afraid of this bird, are you?"

"What you giving us, Joe?"

"Oh, he thinks he's a kidder!"

O'Malley listened to all the comments. He blushed painfully, but did not waver.

"Listen, you guys," said he at length. "I ain't scared of Carsey. Anybody that says I am is crazy. I know I kin lick this four-flushin' champion. He knows it. Everybody knows it, but—there won't be no fight. I'm goin' to git married an' retire from the ring."

IV

Joe was quite right about one thing—it was a whale of a story. It jarred the sporting world profoundly, and well it might—a challenger and logical successor to a championship retiring in the very shadow of the goal. The thing was unbelievable, preposterous, without rime, reason, or precedent.

The hero breakfasted alone in his room at the hotel, and as he toyed with a porterhouse steak he glanced over the morning papers and blushed to find his romance flung abroad across seven columns. "Well," said he to himself, "they sure give her a mess o' publicity. I bet she never got a write-up like this before in her life. Wonder why she didn't wait for me last night? Have to ring up pretty soon and find out——"

The door slammed open and Lew Arthur bounced into the room, barking incoherently. Most of his language was of the sort which suggests itself to that sort of man in times of stress.

"Hello, Lew," said Joe, pausing with a bite of steak halfway to his mouth. "What's the idear of all the fireworks?"

"Idear!" shouted the little manager, hurling his suit case across the room. "Oh, I s'pose you don't know! Of course not! What's the idear of you runnin' out on this fight after I git Carsey hooked?"

"I ain't runnin' out," protested Joe. "I got a right to retire, ain't I?"

Lew exploded again.

"Don't talk like that," warned O'Malley. "I may have done somethin' to myself, but I ain't done nothin' to you."

"You *ain't*? Listen, you cock-eyed, lop-eared quitter, you! You ain't done nothin' to me, hey! Who was it took you when you was a bum an' made a man of you? Who was it went hungry in Pueblo so't you could eat an' keep your stren'th? Who split his last dollar wit' you, many's the time? Who put you where you are now? Who went out an' chased Carsey till he signed up? Me, you white-headed, white-livered coward, *me*! An' now, wit' a championship in plain sight—a fortune just waitin' to be grabbed off—who

throws me down for a skirt he ain't known but a few weeks? That's gratitude, that is!"

"But, Lew, *she* said——"

"Yeh, there it goes! *She* said! How about me? Don't I count in this anywhere?"

"Not in any of my marryin' arrangements, you don't."

"But, Joe, won't you listen to reason?"

Joe listened to a rap on the door instead.

"Who's there?"

"Belcher of the 'Evening Star.' I've got important news for you, O'Malley."

Belcher was a brisk, dapper young man with an air of assurance.

"Good morning, O'Malley. Now, this young woman, this Miss Delorme—by the way, there's no mistake about the name, is there?"

"It's Vyvyan Delorme. Well?"

"You say that she is going to marry you?"

"Sure. That's old stuff. You got in here to tell me some important news; make good."

"I'll do that little thing," smiled Belcher. "I have just come from Miss Delorme. She tells me that there has been a mistake of some kind."

"Mistake?" repeated O'Malley. "Mistake?"

"Rather an unfortunate one for her," continued Belcher. "She says that she never even thought of marrying you—says she wouldn't marry you if you were the last man in the world: says you ought to be sued for coupling her name with yours in any way—and is that news enough for you?"

It was. The invincible O'Malley leaned forward over the breakfast table, gasping as if from a heavy blow.

"Hey? What's that?"

"Well," explained Belcher, "she was hysterical and pretty much shot to pieces when I saw her, but it seems that she blames you for putting the wrong construction on some simple thing she said to you last night. She insists there was never any talk of marriage. Is that true?"

"Yes," said O'Malley slowly; "yes, that's true. There wasn't any *talk* about it, but—I thought she knew what I meant."

"That's where you slipped up," said the reporter. "She called you some pretty hard names, but perhaps it's just as well not to pass 'em along."

"Go ahead, pal." It was the little manager speaking. "Go ahead. Give him the other barrel. It's comin' to him."

"Well, then, she called you a cross-eyed little beast——"

"That's a lie!" cried Joe. "A dirty lie!"

Belcher pointed to the telephone.

"Call her up!" said he curtly. "After you've had a talk with her, you might want to apologize to me."

Joe glared at the newspaper man, but found no comfort in that, so he turned to his manager.

"Ring her up, kid," said he, "an' git it straight."

O'Malley got it straight, and from the shoulder. Half a minute was enough for him. As the receiver slipped from his fingers he turned toward the newspaper man and tried to smile.

"You had it right. I was wrong, an'—an' I'm sorry for what I said. Is that enough?"

"Plenty," answered the reporter, "and if you don't mind my saying so, I'm sorry too. I had no idea it would hit you so hard."

"Hard!" groaned O'Malley. "It's a knockout!"

Belcher was soon on his way to catch an edition, and as the door closed behind him the toughest little man in the lightweight division took the full count with his face among the breakfast dishes. Lew Arthur, on the couch, watched him shrewdly and chewed a dead cigar.

"You fell too hard, Joe," said he at last. "Too damn hard, an' that's why it hurts so much. Everybody gits it one time or another. There was a girl in Butte once—but never mind that. I know how you feel. You fell too hard."

The broken gladiator looked up suddenly.

"She told me just now she never cared a snap for me, one way or the other. Then why was she foolin' wit' me? *She* started it—I did. What did she do it for, Lew?"

The little manager tossed away his cigar and leaped to his feet.

"That's it! What for? Now you're gittin' some sense. You're beginnin' to use your bean, Joe. This dame—it was her put the notion of retirin' into your head, wasn't it?"

O'Malley nodded.

"She let you think that if you retired she'd marry you, hey? An' you, like a boob, fell for it?"

O'Malley nodded again.

"Then, as soon as you made good on the retirin' thing, this dame threw you down so hard that you bounced ten feet in the air—that's right, ain't it? Why, you poor stiff, don't you see it *yet*?"

"No," said O'Malley, with a hopeless shake of his head. "No, not yet."

"An' they say ivory is scarce!" The little manager leaned across the table and lowered his voice to an impressive whisper; his stern gaze caught and held O'Malley's vacant and mournful stare. "Listen, Joe! You didn't think I was goin' to let 'em slip one over on us, did you? I should say not! I been watchin' out for just such a play. Your little friend, Miss Delorme—I've got a line on her. I've had her looked up, an' who do you think she is, Joe?"

O'Malley shook his head stupidly, and Arthur snorted with disgust.

"You're a bright boy, you are! I guess I got to come right out an' tell you! This dame was planted wit' the troupe to git you out of the way. She was *planted*—why, a blind man could see it, Joe! She's Carsey's cousin, that's who she is—*Carsey's cousin!* Now do you begin to git the angle?"

And after a time, through the mists of wrath and humiliation, Joe O'Malley began to get the angle.

V

Speeding the film for the last time, we arrive at the fifteenth round of the battle for the lightweight championship of the world. We see the level rays of the setting sun as they strike across the open-air arena; we see the waiting thousands, tense in their seats, leaning forward in their eagerness to miss nothing; we can almost hear the click and rattle of the telegraph instruments at the ring side and the muttered comment of the experts.

We see the two fighters struggling in a corner of the ring. Carsey's back is against the ropes. He is drooping and weary, intent only on protecting his ribs from further assault, and as he blocks and covers he watches for a chance to slip out into the open where there is room to run. O'Malley pens the champion in the angle of the ropes, battering him back and forth with savage lefts and rights. Carsey, the dancing master of the lightweight division, the old fox, the ring general, the champion of the world, has made one match too many.

O'Malley shifts and drives a crushing left-hander under the champion's guard, and Carsey's hands fall at his sides; a spasm of pain twists his features; he bends forward, helpless. The challenger leans towards him and grins through a smear of blood; his lips move; he is whispering something to Carsey. The next instant a dark-brown glove flashes upward from

O'Malley's hip, and in exactly ten seconds by the timekeeper's watch there is a new lightweight champion of the world.

Carsey did not recover consciousness for twenty-five minutes. When his eyes opened he was in his dressing room. His chief second was passing a green bottle underneath his nostrils. Carsey pushed it away.

"I'm all right now," he said thickly.

"Welcome to our city!" said the chief second, forcing a smile. "That was an awful uppercut he handed you. It would have knocked out a heavyweight. Tough luck, old boy, tough luck!"

Carsey mumbled unintelligibly and twisted his head from side to side, groaning.

"Oh, your neck ain't broke," babbled the chief second as he plied the sponge. "It only feels like it was. One thing I'd like to know, Jim. What was it he said to you just before he knocked you out?"

Carsey frowned and his eyes closed.

"He did say something, that's right. Let's see. I was in the corner, tryin' to get out. He nailed me with the shift. I knew I was done for then."

"You kind of fell into him, wide open, and he said something to you," prompted the other.

"Oh, yes! '*Here's one for your cousin*.' That's what he said."

"Your cousin! What did he mean by that?"

The former lightweight champion of the world shook his head wearily.

"You can search me!" said he. "I never had a cousin in my life!"

SCRAP IRON

"WHAT'S in a name?"

It was a woman who asked that question, and if Romeo had been more of a fighting man he could have answered it. Enrico Mustolini was never heard of outside the Eighth Ward, but as Iron Mush Murphy he took the whole town by storm. Let us examine into this matter of names.

It is well known that the followers of three professions, operating mostly after dark, often forsake their baptismal appellations. From time immemorial actors, safe blowers and boxers, moved by varying impulses, have sought the shelter of the alias. Thus Michael Donohoe becomes "Richard Montclair"; Bill Jones blossoms, not too openly, as "Frisco Red"; and Isidore Finkelstein chooses the *nom de guerre* of "Battling Clancy."

To tell the truth about the matter, Enrico Mustolini had never given any thought to the question of an assumed name. In the barns and back alleys where most of his unremunerated fighting had been done the preliminaries had not included an introduction of the principals. If it had been necessary to address Enrico at all, "Wop" had sufficed. The mothers of defeated gladiators frequently mentioned him to the police as "the tough one of them dago kids."

Beyond argument Enrico Mustolini was tough. He was a product of the toughest school in town, the streets and alleys of the Eighth Ward. Giacomo Mustolini, head of the family, owned a junk shop and left his wife in charge of it while he scoured the outlying portions of the city for rags, bottles and sacks. The two sons, Enrico and Antonio, ran wild as razorbacks from the time they could walk.

Enrico, or Henry, as he preferred to call himself, was a swarthy youth, set solidly on a pair of stocky legs, and in his sturdy body there lived again the soul of some swashbuckling ancestor. Henry loved a quarrel, and fought for the fun of the thing. Tony, eighteen months his junior, was slender of build, dreamy of eye, and had never shown any liking for street brawls. He was a better runner than fighter, but when cornered he gave battle with the savage fury of a frightened cat.

If Henry regretted this softness in his brother's character he said nothing about it. Since his tenth year he had done most of the fighting for the

Mustolini family, and the general average was nothing to blush for, even in the Eighth Ward, where fighting averages ran high.

Because it is human nature to admire in others the qualities that we lack, Tony boasted that nobody could make his brother's nose bleed, and Henry gloried in Tony's cleverness and the fact that he could "read newspapers, and everything, in wop and American."

Henry was not even clever at his specialty. Head down and arms working like brown pistons he went joyfully into action. The science of attack was a closed book to Henry; and as for defense, such a thing had never entered into his calculations. He offered an open and seemingly indestructible countenance to his enemies, and while they tried to break his nose or close his beady eyes he wore them down with a terrific rib bombardment which none but the extremely fit could endure for long.

"No use hittin' that wop in the face," said the Eighth Ward warriors. "Might just as well pound a fire hydrant. What's he made of, anyway?"

Such notable talent for trouble cannot be concealed. Henry Mustolini learned, no matter how, that preliminary boxers made a great deal of money —sometimes as much as twenty dollars a night, just for a little fighting— and he set about to prove if these things were true.

With the faithful Tony at his heels he haunted the pavilion where the weekly boxing matches took place, and his great chance came when a pork-and-beaner defaulted at the last minute, leaving a gap in the program.

"Want to go on, kid? All right, hop into these trunks and I'll hustle you a pair of shoes."

"Well, what does he get?" demanded Tony, even then showing faint glimmerings of the managerial instinct.

"Ten if he wins, five if he loses. Hurry up, now!"

A few moments later the terror of the Eighth Ward found himself inside the ropes and blinking down at a sea of curious and expectant faces.

Henry was not exactly frightened, but Tony, who had followed him into the ring, seemed to be having a nervous chill.

"Fi-five dollars ain't so m-much," murmured Tony through chattering teeth; "and that other guy is b-big as a house."

"Forget it!" ordered Henry crisply. "I'll tear the belly outa him. And how can he hurt me—with them pillows on his hands?"

At this juncture a lordly individual bent over Henry and in a hoarse and highly flavored whisper demanded to know his name. That was the time for

the alias, but no such thought entered Henry's head. He answered truly; and Foghorn Finnegan was very much surprised.

"Henry—what? Come again wit' that, kid!"

"Mustolini—Henry Mustolini."

Now, as a general thing professional announcers are long on noise, short on memory, and witless as a megaphone. Foghorn Finnegan was no exception to the rule. He offered himself a muttered rehearsal, gave up in disgust, seized Henry firmly by the elbow, dragged him to the middle of the ring and held up one hand. When silence came Foghorn shattered it with his heavy roar:

"Kid Musty, gen'elmen! Kid Musty! One hunnerd and thirty-three pounds!"

That night as the Mustolini brothers walked home, keeping time to the clinking of ten silver dollars in Henry's pocket, they spoke of Finnegan's error.

"That big bum got your name wrong," complained Tony.

"I don't care," said the fighting man. "I got the dough—and one name is as good as another."

In this Henry was wrong. Kid Musty fought three times, but roused no great enthusiasm on the part of the public. It was T-Bone Riley, patron of the arts and friend of all the pork-and-beaners, who suggested an alias more in keeping with Henry's peculiar gift for assimilating punishment.

"Kid Musty! That's no name for a fighter. What you want is something that'll hit 'em right in the eye when they see it in the papers; something that tells what kind of a bird you are. Now you'll never be clever, but you've got 'em all cheated at one thing: You can let a man wear himself out hitting you in the mush. Must be made of iron. . . . By golly! I've got it! Iron Mush! How's that for a name?"

"Iron Mush Mustolini?" suggested Henry, hopefully.

"Naw! Iron Mush Murphy! Take a regular fighting name while you're taking one!"

Iron! There seems to be something enduring in the very sound of the word. Linked with a name or a title, the effect is irresistible. The Iron Duke, the Iron Chancellor, Iron Man McGinnity—these are names which are remembered, names which have stood the test of time. T-Bone Riley builded better than he knew.

Kid Musty had been nobody; Iron Mush Murphy rapidly became a local celebrity. The name caught and held public fancy; it had in it the element of distinctive novelty. More than all else it was descriptive. As T-Bone Riley said, it meant something. Perhaps it should be explained that, in the patois of the profession, to mention a man's mush is to mention his face. Similarly, the nose becomes a beezer, and the eye a lamp. Americanisms, yes; but it was Dickens who called a fist "a bunch of fives."

Assuredly the name Iron Mush meant something, and Henry added to that meaning every time he entered the ring. His opponents, finding his countenance absolutely unprotected, addressed themselves to it with more of vigor than intelligence, and when they wearied by reason of their exertions Henry rocked them to sleep with a tremendous tattoo aimed at the point where the ribs leave off and the stomach takes on. Henry became a drawing card. Nobody wanted to see him box, but everybody wanted to see him stop uppercuts and swings with his face. On a jaw of chilled steel and features tough as teak Henry Mustolini built up his fortunes.

After his seventh engagement Henry purchased a Turkey-red bathrobe, a pair of apple-green trunks and a badger haircut. He had taken thought and decided that his future was to be one of violence. When a pork-and-beaner buys a bathrobe he confesses himself the victim of ambition. The fighter who enters the ring wrapped in an overcoat has never aspired to a main event.

Henry began to show himself on the local Rialto, posing in front of cigar stands or loafing about the entrances to pool parlors. He learned to talk out of the corner of his mouth and to smoke cabbage-leaf perfectos. If he had dared he would have carried a springy bamboo cane.

About this time Henry was approached by several gentlemen of elegant but precarious leisure who were desirous of attaching themselves to his fortunes in a managerial capacity. They painted the future in glowing colors and laid great stress on the money they could get for Henry, while thinking only of the money Henry could get for them.

On one of these occasions Tony was a listener. "And all you'll have to do is fight," urged the applicant. "I'll 'tend to everything else; and if I don't grab you more dough'n you ever saw before, you can call me a liar. What do you say?"

Henry wavered, for he was tempted, but Tony saved him.

"He says nothing doing," remarked Tony. "Henry's got a manager already. I'm looking out for him."

"The hell you are!" snarled the disappointed one. "Mush never said nothing to me about it."

"He's just made up his mind. Ain't you, Henry?"

"Yeh," nodded the gladiator, dazed by this exhibition of quick thinking on Tony's part. "Yeh, Tony's me manager. He can read and write, and everything. Yeh, nothing doing."

II

Tony Mustolini had just turned seventeen when he assumed the responsible position of manager and business dictator for Iron Mush Murphy, and never was fighter more faithfully served. No manager ever worked harder to thrust his charge into the public eye and keep him there; none ever showed a keener scent for an unattached dollar.

It was Tony who decided that Henry was underpaid and successfully bluffed the promoters by threatening to take their drawing card elsewhere; Tony who dictated weights and terms; Tony who haunted the sanctums of the sporting editors with fearful and wonderful photographs of the Iron Mush in action; Tony who discovered that the four-round route was a bit short for a battler of Henry's type and eased him onward and upward into the ten-round class; Tony who issued bold challenges to champions and near champions; Tony who worked like a Turk while Henry decorated the Rialto; and it was Tony who insisted that a certain amount of training must be done.

"Ten rounds is a long ways," said Tony. "You got to train for these babies now."

"I can go out to Doyle's," said Henry.

"Nix!" said his manager. "You'll train at home. We can rig up some kind of a ring out in the barn."

"But I got to have somebody to spar with," objected Henry; "and out at Doyle's there's always a gang——"

"Too much gang," interrupted Tony with firmness. "And we won't pay no sparring partner, either. I'll box with you myself."

"You!" ejaculated Henry. "Think you can kid me?"

"I'm not kidding," said Tony. "If these boneheaded boys can learn to box, so can I."

He was as good as his word. In order to save the upkeep of a sparring partner the thrifty Tony became one himself. Being intelligent and adaptable he soon mastered the rudiments of attack and defense, but he was not content to remain a mediocre boxer. Tony studied the methods of the

cleverest performers of the day. From a featherweight champion he learned something of the use of the straight left, which is in itself attack and defense; from a middleweight he got the knack of whipping in a right uppercut; from an English lightweight he studied the defensive value of elbows and forearms as applied to infighting; and from the Old Master himself he borrowed the trick of "letting his head roll with the punch."

Naturally an agile youth, exercise gave Tony the speed and spring of a panther; constant practice taught him accuracy. His shoulders broadened, his chest deepened, he took on weight where weight was needed; and Henry Mustolini, watching this miracle develop before his eyes, expressed surprise and admiration.

"Tony," said he, "I never would have thought it, but you're getting to be a regular fighting guy. You are, on the square. I can hit most of these birds, but I can't hit you; and you got that straight left up me nose all the time. . . . Why don't you step out and trim some of these dubs?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Tony. "One fighter in the family is plenty."

Henry argued the point, citing ring history to prove that one family had produced two champions, but Tony shook his head. He would box, but he would not fight.

"When you was a little kid," said Henry, "they used to say you was yellow, and I licked 'em for it. You could always put up a good fight when they got you in a corner. What ails you, Tony? You ain't scared of getting hurt, are you?"

"I don't know as it's that, Henry, but I never liked to get my face messed up."

"It would take a mighty good man to mess your face up now," admitted Henry with critical approval. "A mighty good man. I don't know as I could do it meself. You got as neat a left hand as anybody, and there's a kick in it when you let it fly. Your right cross is a darb. . . . No, don't laugh! I'm telling you straight. You don't need to be scared of any of these preliminary tramps. Why don't you be game and take a chance? You might like it same as I do."

"You always did like it," said Tony. "That's the difference."

Henry was not satisfied to let the question drop, and often revived it, but no amount of persuasion could induce Tony to consider a real battle, though the ramshackle barn behind the junk shop witnessed many an encounter that might easily have been mistaken for the genuine article. It was after one of these spirited sessions with the gloves that Henry renewed the argument.

"I don't get you at all, Tony. I'm supposed to be a dead tough mug, and hard game, but you rip into me like a champion going after a dub. You gimme all the battle I want, kid, fight me all over the place, but you won't even take on a soft one. . . . That last round—whew!"

"Aw," grinned Tony, "you just stall when you box with me. You never really cut loose."

"You think not?" demanded Henry. "You stung me with that uppercut—made me good and sore. I forgot all about having any brother, see? The rest of the round I was after you, and I'd 'a' hurt you if I could, I got plenty close enough to cave in your slats, but I never hit nothing but elbows and forearms and gloves; and all the time, wham! wham! I'm getting them short, jolty ones in the belly. . . . Tony, that's the kind of fighting that licks guys. If you'd tear into these other fellows the way you tear into me there'd be nothing to it."

"You might just as well quit talking about it," said the younger brother. "There's nothing doing."

"You won't fight?" asked Henry.

Tony shook his head, and there was a long silence. The iron-faced gladiator was slow in his mental processes, but reasonably thorough. Ever since he could remember he had taken violent issue with those who had called Tony a coward. He had silenced those youthful accusers, but he had never been able to silence a whisper in his own heart. It spoke to him clearly in that uncomfortable silence.

"I'd murder anybody else for saying it, Tony," said Henry at last, "but I think you've got a streak after all."

"Well," said the other, trying to laugh it off, "you'll admit I'm a good manager, won't you?"

"All the same"—and Henry wagged his head sorrowfully—"I think you're yellow. A bird that can fight and won't fight—why, what else is he but yellow?"

"If there was anything to fight for——" began Tony.

"There's always something to fight for!" cried Henry in a sudden rage. "There's the dough, for one thing; and there's showing the gang that you've got the guts! . . . But what's the use? If you're born with a streak you'll have it all your life, and maybe it ain't your fault. I'll never bother you about it again, Tony. I won't ask you to get into the game no more—not as long as I live."

It is worth recording that he kept his word.

The Iron Man, as they finally came to call him, never became a topnotcher—there were a dozen clever men between him and the title—but for four years he served as a stumblingblock in ambition's path, and many a hopeful lightweight, his eyes fixed on the first division, stubbed his toes and fell. Some of course did not fall. Perhaps the thing which kept the Iron Man in the second division was his lack of speed. He was not fast enough on his feet to corner the "dancing masters." These outpointed him and sparred their way to bloodless victories, but woe to the wallowing battleship type of gladiator who elected to stand toe to toe with Henry and exchange body blows!

"Anybody can jab him in the face and run away," said T-Bone Riley, "but whenever they wade in and mix it with this dago their name is pants!"

Thus, in his leisurely, flat-footed fashion, Henry came to the end of his fourth professional year, the possessor of at least one great distinction: He had fought one hundred and forty-six battles and never once had he been knocked off his feet. Clever men had cut him to ribbons time after time; celebrated knockout artists had bounced their pet blows off that chilled-steel jaw; awkward, shuffling maulers of his own type had battered him from belt line to eyebrows—but nobody could say that he had dropped the Iron Man to the floor. Some had staggered him; some had dazed him for a few seconds, but no referee had ever lifted his hand to count over Henry. This was his pride and the thing that he never failed to mention soon after being introduced to a stranger. It was Henry's one legitimate claim to greatness, and he realized it.

"They can hit me as hard as they want to," he used to say, "but they can't hurt me. I guess I'm some tough bird!"

Tony capitalized this unique record, even going to the length of compiling statistics for publication in the newspapers. He continued to act as Henry's sparring partner at home and abroad—the Mustolini brothers once got as far East as Denver—and built up quite a reputation as a shrewd matchmaker and a careful business manager. Those who watched Tony's work with the gloves were impressed with his skill. Some predicted a bright future for him inside the ropes.

"Well," Henry would say, "you know how it is; some likes the game and some don't. Tony, he's as game a kid as ever lived, don't make no mistake about that, but—he ain't like me. No; we're kinda different; been that way ever since we was kids. I was always the fighting one of the family. They all had their cracks at me, but nobody ever knocked me down.

"What do you think of that, hey? Some tough baby, me!"

But constant dropping wears away stone; the pitcher that continues to go wellward will one day meet disaster; and no iron man ever carried all his rivets with him to the grave. It is only a matter of time.

Out of the East came young Martin O'Day, adventuring on the gold coast in search of a reputation and Western money. He was red-headed, low-browed, dish-faced, slant-jawed, flat-nosed and built like a baby-grand piano. Nothing was known of him save that he could make one hundred and thirty-three pounds, and was "open to meet the world" at that weight. He looked like a fighter, he claimed to be a fighter, and he demonstrated that he was a fighter by stopping Butch Brown in three whirlwind rounds. During those three rounds he never took a backward step.

The Mustolini brothers were spectators that evening.

"What do you think of him?" asked Tony after the victor had left the ring.

"Go git him for me," growled Henry. "He's made to order."

There was no trouble about getting O'Day. His date book was full of blanks and his pockets were full of air. The match was made for ten rounds and advertised as an added attraction.

"Another set-up for Iron Mush," said the ring fans. "He eats these rough sluggers."

Henry received his customary ovation as he climbed slowly into the ring, covered from head to heel by his old red bathrobe, now stained and worn. The Iron Man could safely count on the cheers of half the spectators. The others usually sat in silence, hoping against hope to see him whipped. They had nothing against Henry, as the saying goes, but he had been entertaining them for a long time and perhaps they were a bit tired of him. Some people like variety.

When the fighters went to the middle of the ring for their instructions the redhead grinned cheerfully at Henry, who gave him smile for smile.

"Hello, wop!"

"Hello, Irish!"

"They tell me you're an iron man," said O'Day tauntingly, "and got your start in a junk shop. Think you'll ever go back?"

"Not to-night," answered Henry.

"Me," said O'Day—"I got my start licking Eyetalians."

"Is that so?" Henry was never clever at repartee.

"Yeh, it's s-s-so." O'Day prolonged the sibilant aggravatingly. "You're going back to that junk shop when I'm through with you, too. . . . What's scrap iron bringing these days?"

"Here!" growled the referee. "Cut that out! Save it till the bell rings!"

Back in his corner Henry expressed his opinion of O'Day.

"Fresh mick, ain't he?"

"Don't let him talk to you," cautioned Tony. "He's trying to get your goat."

"Fat chance!" sneered Henry, and then the gong clanged. Once more the men met in the middle of the ring.

"Scrap iron!" laughed O'Day, and went to work at his trade, head down and both gloves flying. Henry met him halfway, for this was exactly the sort of battle he loved. He had small respect for the sort of opponent who pecked at him with a long left jab and then ran away. The Iron Man planted himself solidly on his large flat feet and replied to the hurricane of short-arm jolts with a succession of rib-tearing punches, some of which might have been heard in the top row of the gallery.

The redhead did not yield an inch under fire, but leaned forward valiantly to his guns. Head to head, shoulder to shoulder, fist to rib the issue was joined, and the house came up with a mighty roar of encouragement and approval. This was no pink-tea dancing contest; this was a real fight—the matching of punch with punch—stamina with stamina—the supreme test of courage. In such a battle there can be but one ending.

Five hundred men tell their wives that they attend boxing contests solely because they enjoy a scientific exposition of the art of self-defense. Of the five hundred, one man may be telling the truth; he may enthuse over a clever bloodless encounter for points. But the four hundred and ninety-nine leap to their feet to cheer a savage exchange of blows meant to hurt. After all, the fight's the thing!

And of the four hundred and ninety-nine paid admissions there may be twenty men sufficiently keen of eye to separate the damaging blows from the ones that are blocked or missed, and to analyze the trend of battle. The whole story of the fight between the Iron Man and the redhead was plainly written across the first three minutes of the engagement, but few were cool enough to read the message.

Henry had but one style of infighting, and in the past it had served him well. He preferred to spread his elbows rather wide and rip his body punches

home with a swinging motion, his gloves traveling in an arc. The man who does this must leave his flanks unprotected at least part of the time.

O'Day, bending slightly from the waist, held his elbows close to his sides and shot both fists straight forward to the mark. Henry displayed more motion than his opponent, but half his short, clubbing swings were blocked by elbows and forearms, while O'Day, inside the attack, was making every punch tell. Henry was receiving exactly twice as much punishment as he inflicted. The gong found the men still in the middle of the ring, battering away at each other with all the strength in their bodies.

"I'll get him!" grunted Henry as Tony bent over him with an iced towel.

"I got him!" said O'Day to his chief second. "I'll lick him at his own game—infighting!"

"This'll never go ten rounds!" chuckled the gallery. "It can't!"

"Don't swing so wide," advised Tony. "He's inside you all the time. Cover up more and shoot 'em straight!"

"I'll 'inside' him if he stays with me long enough," said Henry.

The second round was a repetition of the first. Toe to toe, shoulder to shoulder, hammer and tongs they went at it again, to a sound as of carpets being beaten. For another three minutes they pivoted in midring, and this time the round seemed a long one to Henry. The steady exchange of one blow for two was beginning to take effect.

"Step round more!" urged Tony. "Open him up!"

"Not on your life!" said Henry. "One of us is going to back up first, and then there'll be plenty of stepping round!"

A portion of this prophecy was fulfilled toward the end of the fourth rib-rending session. The thunder from the gallery suddenly took on a new note. It could hardly have grown louder, but it jumped to a higher pitch and became a shrill clamor, which seemed to have in it an expression of triumph long deferred. Slowly but surely the Iron Man was giving ground. Henry did not step away from his task, he did not stop fighting for an instant, but inch by grudging inch he was retreating toward the ropes.

It was the beginning of the end. O'Day knew it, and put a few extra pounds behind the short straight jolts that he was driving into Henry's unarmored section. Tony Mustolini knew it and twisted a damp towel in his fingers as he crouched outside the ring, his eyes on a level with the canvas. The reporters knew it and made hasty notes. Everybody knew it but Henry.

"I'll get him yet!" he gasped when he came to his corner.

"What did I tell you?" panted O'Day as he dropped into his chair. "He's licked now—and I haven't hit him above the shoulders once! He's gone!"

Henry was not gone, but Henry was going. For the first time in his life he had found an opponent who ignored his chilled-steel jaw and was whipping him at his own game. In vain Tony begged him to cover up and play for a single finishing blow. Henry shook his head. He was in the condition so aptly described as "punch drunk."

"The best he'll ever get is a draw," said he three minutes later, which was the same as admitting defeat.

"He's weakening fast," was O'Day's report, "but I'll say this for him—he's a game dago!"

The sixth was a cruel period for Henry, but he managed to weather it somehow. His gloves seemed to weigh a ton apiece; his shoes seemed made of lead; every swing of his tired arms cost him an effort; every blow that found his battered stomach cost him excruciating pain; but he continued the unequal struggle with all that remained of the famous Iron Man—his blind fighting instinct and his brute courage. He was barely able to gasp when he rocked back to his corner.

"Draw—sure. One tough—bird!"

"He can't stop you," said Tony, and knew that he lied.

The seventh round saw the end of the contest and the making of an interesting bit of ring history. Henry fought till the last ounce of strength was gone and then he began to stagger. Quick as a flash O'Day switched the point of attack and whipped a savage uppercut home to the unprotected jaw.

Henry reeled against the ropes; his legs bent under him and his hands dropped to his sides.

It was then that the redhead proved himself a ring general. Nothing so plainly stamps the real class of a fighting man as the manner in which he goes about the delivery of the master stroke. The bungler, dazzled by the prospect of early victory, loses his head and rushing in tries to beat his victim to the floor with a flurry of wild swings, none of which finds a vital spot. The craftsman takes his time.

O'Day stepped back, measured the distance with a cool and practiced squint, located the target, and stepped in again swiftly. The blow that ended the fight came all the way from his knee, and the padded fist crashed home just below and in front of the left ear. The Old Master himself could not have done it better, though the chances are that he might have been a bit more merciful. The Iron Man collapsed in a huddle of arms and legs, rolled over on his side, quivered a few times and was still. O'Day took one look at

his work and started for his corner, tearing at the glove lacing with his teeth. The referee was already counting the ten seconds that marked the passing of championships, the ending of dreams, and the beginning of stern realities.

Five minutes later Henry was able to leave the ring. Those nearest the aisle leading to the dressing room saw the tears streaming down his cheeks and laughed at him.

"He seems to take it to heart," said one reserved-seat patron to another.

"Oh, well, he gets paid for it," said the other.

Hoarse and breathless the gallery gave Henry hail and farewell.

"It was a long time coming to him," said the dollar customers, "but when he got it he got it good! . . . Some fight!"

Tony bolted the door of the dressing room behind him. Then kneeling beside the rubbing table he put his arms about Henry's heaving shoulders and tried to comfort him.

"Don't take it so hard, old kid," whispered Tony. "It's tough—it's awful tough, I know, but the best of 'em get it some day. It's part of the game. I'll make another match with this fellow——"

Henry shook his head.

"No," he mumbled; "no more matches. I'm through. I been knocked out; licked first, and then knocked out. I can't beat that guy. This is my finish—good-by, ole Iron Man!"

"Don't talk like that," begged Tony. "You didn't train much, but the next time——"

Once more the broken gladiator shook his head.

"There won't be no next time. You don't understand, Tony. I been stopped, put out. They won't call me the Iron Man no more. It's me for the junk shop, like he said before the fight."

"He said it after the fight, too, Henry. It was when I got you back to the corner. He came over to shake hands, but you—you didn't know it. And he stood there and laughed. 'There's your brother!' he says—loud, so the newspaper men could hear. 'Put him in a sack and lug him back to the junk shop. Scrap iron is worth a few cents a pound, anyway!' That's what he said, Henry. You ain't going to let him get away with stuff like that, are you?"

"How can I stop him?" wailed Henry. "He told the truth, at that. I feel all busted up in little pieces. Scrap iron, that's what I am now—scrap iron!"

Very few modern gladiators retire to private life without first receiving the silent hint of empty chairs in the reserved-seat section. They pull off their gloves only when assured that the public will no longer pay to watch the last flickering of the flame of youth.

Henry Mustolini exchanged one distinction for another; he quit the ring while still a drawing card. There were other matches in prospect; the first knockout registered against him had revived interest in his remarkable career; and there was a general demand for a second meeting with O'Day. It came from the ring patrons who had missed the first encounter and therefore felt themselves defrauded.

"Nothing doing," said the pieces of the Iron Man.

Tony argued and expostulated, but could make no headway against the stubbornness that was one of Henry's characteristics.

"They'll say you're a quitter."

"Let 'em."

"They'll say you're afraid of O'Day."

"Well, that's all right."

Tony thought that it was all wrong, but in time he accepted the situation with as much grace as he could muster, and made a round of the newspaper offices bearing the news that the Iron Man had fought his last fight.

"You see," he explained, "we always figured to quit when somebody came along and stopped us. We don't have to fight if we don't want to; we got ours and we're going to hang onto it. Our record is good enough to quit on—one hundred and forty-seven fights, and only one knock-down. Where can you beat that?"

In the meantime the red-headed thunderbolt who scrap-heaped the Iron Man reaped the reward of the victor and had the Rialto all to himself. O'Day purchased a ready-made suit of an eye-aching plaid, some startling neckwear, a cheap cameo ring, a cane with a handle of imitation ivory, fashioned to represent the head of an alligator, and patent-leather shoes with uppers of mustard-colored cloth. After winning two more battles in whirlwind style he took himself out of town in search of further conquests.

After O'Day's departure it was thought that Henry would emerge from his retreat and adorn the cigar stands and pool-parlor entrances as of yore; but this was an error. Literally, as well as figuratively, the Iron Man had gone back to the junk shop, and there buried himself among the bottles and the

sacks. No amount of coaxing could make him show himself on the street; he would not even attend the weekly boxing contests.

"If I went," said he to Tony, "they'd call me 'Scrap Iron.' Yeh, him and the newspapers hung that name on me—hung it on so it'll stick. I'll never get rid of it. I guess I'll help the old man wit' the business. It's all I'm good for now."

A fair amount of pride is a blessing, and too much of it is a curse, but the man who suddenly finds himself stripped of the last shred of self-respect is indeed to be pitied. In his simple, elemental fashion Henry had taken great pride in the title of Iron Man; losing it he felt that he had lost everything that made life worth living.

Tony, watching his brother closely, became alarmed. He knew the mental collapse that often follows years of solid punching about the head, and he tried hard to rouse Henry from his lethargy. Tony found him one day sitting among the empty bottles and spelling out the press notices of his past.

"You got to quit this, Henry," said he. "It ain't doing you any good. You're letting yourself get all out of shape."

"What do I want to stay in shape for?" asked Henry dully.

"So's to be healthy, for one thing. Come out to the barn and put the gloves on with me. It'll stir you up."

Henry protested, but Tony finally gained his point, and from that time on the brothers boxed daily, though nothing was ever said about a return to the ring. When properly stung Henry would lower his head and show flashes of his old form. He seldom mentioned O'Day by name, but the redhead was often in his thoughts.

"If somebody would only lick that guy," he would say, apropos of nothing, "I'd feel better about it. But he's winning right along. They're touting him to be champion some day. It was in the paper."

"If he gets to be champion," suggested Tony, "so much the better for you. We can say it took a champion to stop you."

"But I want him licked!" cried Henry. "Licked! It's about the only thing I do want!"

"Well," said Tony, "he'll get it one of these days. They all do."

"And that's the truth," said Henry mournfully, and would have continued the conversation along those lines, but Tony wisely changed the subject.

Six months later O'Day returned to town wearing two diamonds of the sort that looks best by electric light, and the haughty manner of a conquering

hero. He brought with him a brisk, weasel-faced little man who answered to the name of Spider Foley, and who lost no time in informing the newspaper men that he was O'Day's manager and would soon make the redhead a world's champion. He also stated that O'Day was ready to box any lightweight at any time and under any conditions, but the real truth he told to Michael Callahan, the local promoter of glove contests.

"No," said the Spider, "we ain't here hunting a real fight. Of course, if we can pick up something soft that's different. I'd let my boy go on and spar an exhibition or kick over a set-up, but nothing tougher than that. He's as good as matched with Young Daly now, and if we lick Daly the old champ will have to take notice of us. So we ain't taking chances. If your folks here want to see O'Day, show us money enough, find something soft and we'll talk business. Your Iron Man is barred."

"Our Iron Man has quit," said Callahan. "I'm hearing that he's gone just a little bit daffy."

"O'Day thought he might want a return match," said Foley, "and he barred him because we don't want to have to train for anybody until we take on Young Daly. . . . Well, who can you get for us! And it better be ten rounds. O'Day ain't enough of a boxer to show up well in less."

Callahan inquired among the local pork-and-beaners, but found them lacking in enthusiasm. The wrecker of the Iron Man was greatly respected, and none of the local lightweights wanted his game. With one accord they began to make excuses. Soapy Brodie mentioned a wounded thumb and blamed a medicine ball. Waterbury Holmes thought the short end of the purse was too short. Dangerous Doyle needed a month in which to train. Callahan had nearly abandoned hope, when a human sacrifice walked into his office.

"Hello, Tony," said the promoter. "Haven't seen much of you lately, but I can give you the answer now. O'Day won't fight your brother again."

"I don't want him to," said Tony, "but—how about me?"

"You!"

"Me," was the calm reply. "Why not? It's a set-up you're after, ain't it? O'Day is the card, no matter who he meets. And then there's a lot of people round this town who have always wanted to see me in the ring. I'll give 'em a run for their money—while I last. . . . Speaking of money, how much is the loser's end?"

An hour later Spider Foley heard the good news, and O'Day, who had accompanied his manager to Callahan's office, grinned as he listened.

"It's bound to draw like a mustard plaster," said Callahan, "because it's the Iron Man's brother, and he's a natural-born set-up—never had a fight in his life. We can talk it up in the newspapers and make it look like a case of Italian revenge——"

"And there might be something in it, too," said O'Day. "That manager dago ain't stuck on me—much. I saw it in his eye the night I stopped his brother. . . . Oh, well, all I ask is that you have him searched for a knife before he gets into the ring!"

"Bunk!" exclaimed Callahan. "Tony ain't after revenge; he's after the short end. He always was a wolf for the coin. He told me so himself. Said he knew I wanted a set-up and he didn't mind taking one on the jaw for a piece of money. Tony's a business man."

"Well," said O'Day, "his brother was some fighter, at that."

V

When the familiar red bathrobe bobbed down the aisle with Tony Mustolini inside it there was a cheer from the gallery. It came from those who had loyally supported the Iron Man during his long campaign. They would have cheered Henry, too, but he was not among the shirt-sleeved attendants.

"If I should show up," he had explained to Tony, "they'd 'Scrap Iron' me to death. I got to see this battle, kid, but it'll be from 'way up under the roof. And I never was no good as a second anyway. . . . Whatever you do, Tony, don't let that guy get at your belly. He'll tear you in two!"

So when Tony's curly head ducked under the ropes the Iron Man was in the very top row of the gallery, his sweater rolled up to his ears and his cap pulled low over his eyes. He dared not cheer for fear of inviting recognition, and he did not know how to pray. He was very uncomfortable.

When the time came for introductions Tony whispered something in Finnegan's ear, and that worthy gentleman listened carefully and did his best to look intelligent. Foghorn's voice was as clear as ever, and his ideas as clouded. He muttered a rehearsal as he led Tony to the middle of the ring.

"Scrap Iron Murphy, gen'elmen!" he bellowed. "Scrap Iron Murphy!"

Now O'Day's remark at the close of the battle with the Iron Man had been given wide publicity by the newspapers, and a roar of laughter came from the packed house. The redhead, in his corner, looked up suddenly, and

a grin split his homely countenance. Henry, safe under the roof, dodged as if a blow had been aimed at him. Foghorn Finnegan began to smile, for he perceived that he had said something clever.

"What did Tony do that for!" Henry asked himself. "Is he trying to kid me—or what?"

O'Day was wondering along the same lines, and following his usual custom he exchanged words with his opponent under cover of listening to the referee.

"Say, wop, where do you get that scrap-iron stuff?"

"Say, Irish," countered Tony, "that's advertising. I'm in the junk business. After the fight come down and climb on the scales. I'll make a price on what's left of you—bum diamonds and all. They're junk if ever I saw any."

And then, without waiting to hear O'Day's retort, Tony turned to his corner. The referee grinned as he signaled the timekeeper. Before the gong rang Tony took a comprehensive survey of the gallery, but he could not locate Henry. "Pretty cool for the first time out," said the experts. "Look at him counting the house!"

Whang!

O'Day left his corner at a shuffling trot. He had not thought it necessary to do much training for a set-up, and was therefore anxious to win in a hurry. Infighting was his specialty, and he planned to get close to his man and stay there. To his intense disgust he discovered that Tony had no inclination to play an opponent's game, but seemed to prefer long-range sparring.

O'Day hesitated an instant and then charged, but ran plump into an extremely workmanlike left jab, which threw him off his balance and spoiled the direction of his opening shot. O'Day struggled to close quarters, but suddenly found both arms scientifically pinned by a clinch. When he ripped out of that embrace a short right hook came from nowhere and rocked his bullet head on his shoulders. A cheer dropped from the gallery.

"Aw, come on and fight!" growled O'Day.

"Come on yourself!" replied Tony through set teeth. "I'm right here."

He was not there when O'Day rushed in with a full-arm swing, and before the redhead could recover his balance his nose, mouth and eyes were full of stinging left jabs. O'Day's first round was a succession of short savage rushes; of blows that were blocked; of swings that went wild; of baffling clinches and wasted effort. Tony, bright-eyed and alert, and having the twin advantages of faster footwork and longer reach, found much use for his straight left jab, and when the round ended there was a thin streak of

crimson on O'Day's chin. The cheering was all for Tony. Expecting nothing of the Iron Man's brother, the spectators were agreeably surprised and told themselves that the battle would be a good one—as long as it lasted.

"Yeh, he's clever," admitted O'Day to Foley; "but one good poke'll take all the speed outa him."

"You got a nice lead," said Tony's chief adviser. "Play him careful. Box him, that's the stuff!"

For the next five rounds Tony boxed, while the spectators marveled aloud at the value of the talent that had been hidden in managerial soil. O'Day did everything in his power to make the elusive Italian stand up and fight, but Tony jabbed and side-stepped and clinched and jabbed again, and never once did he risk an even exchange of solid blows. The redhead's face offered mute evidence that Tony's left hand had a sting in it, and somewhere in the sixth round it occurred to O'Day that training was a very good thing, though he blamed the flattened condition of his nose for the shortness of his breath.

"He's beginning to grunt," said Tony in his corner. "I'll trade him a few next round."

"Don't be a sucker!" warned his advisers. "Box him. Take a decision."

The seventh opened up much as the other rounds had done, but Tony seemed to be gradually increasing the pace. For more than two minutes he boxed with O'Day, and then suddenly stepped close to his man and opened a vicious short-arm assault on his stomach. The first blow that landed was a jolty right-hander with all Tony's weight behind it, and it hurt O'Day; but he rallied instantly and replied in kind.

Now it had been no trick to pump both fists into Henry's stomach, but O'Day soon proved to his own satisfaction that landing solidly on Tony's midsection was quite another matter. Tony was not swinging his blows, but shooting them straight as arrows; what was more, he was timing them accurately and blocking shrewdly with his elbows. The redhead was a stubborn fighter, but no fool. There was a very serious expression on his battered countenance as he went to his corner at the end of the round.

The pavilion was in such a tremendous uproar during the minute's cessation of hostilities that a small riot in the gallery attracted little attention—such a riot as might be caused by the sudden descent of a strong man from the top row, via the heads and shoulders of the populace. It was Henry Mustolini, battling his way to the ringside, and as he advanced he gave tongue:

"Clean him, Tony! Clean him, kid!"

The redhead cast a sullen eye over the excited audience. It was his left eye. The other was closed to a purple slit. He drew breath in short, sobbing gasps, and even in that moment of stress he found something unpleasant to say:

"A set-up—hey? . . . You're a—hell of a—manager!"

Somebody bounced through the ropes in the other angle of the ring. It was the long-lost Iron Man, and he hurled himself upon his brother and would have kissed him but for the interference of the handlers. These wisely decided that it was no time for consanguineous affection. Henry's yell followed Tony as he answered the summons of the gong:

"Clean him, kid! Clean him, kid! Clean him for me!"

O'Day, breathing like a leaky accordion, but game as any wind-broken badger, met Tony somewhere near the middle of the ring; and this time no tantalizing left hand plumped into his face. For seven rounds Tony had been fighting cautiously, assuring himself of every possible advantage. He opened the eighth with a reckless two-handed assault on O'Day's red and laboring stomach. It might have been the sight of Henry, wild-eyed and eager; it might have been the knowledge that his man was weakening fast; at any rate Tony tossed science outside the ropes and offered O'Day the one thing he had been praying for—an even exchange of the sort that had whipped the Iron Man.

O'Day flinched under the first blow, but lowered his tousled thatch, set his teeth and called up his heaviest guns for a counter attack. It was do or die quickly with him now, and he knew it. Had he gone into that toe-to-toe encounter fresh and strong, the outcome would have been problematical, but O'Day was bringing to that open market a very sick stomach and a fatal shortness of breath. There was nothing wrong with his heart, however, and as he stood forward to his bitter task the house rose with a yell. Above the mighty chorus one voice soared like the blast of a cracked bugle:

"For me, kid! For me!"

Tony made no pretense of blocking O'Day's blows or timing his own; he simply fought as fast as his fists could fly. The first solid thump that landed under Tony's heart shook him to the knees; the second one did not hurt so much; the third he scarcely felt. In point of blows delivered it was nearly an even thing; in point of punishment inflicted it was anything but a fair exchange.

One man had trained on electric lights and rich food; the other had been through a long and careful preparation for just such an encounter as this. One man was floundering on his feet; the other was putting the strength of

his unshaken legs into his punches, and lifting them home with murderous effect.

At the end of a long, long minute O'Day began making futile attempts to block those tearing short-arm jolts. A little later he folded both arms across his tortured stomach, bent forward from the waist, and threw up his bullet head with a sudden jerk, butting Tony squarely upon the bridge of the nose. It was a deliberate foul—the last resort of a fighter made desperate by punishment. It was the first time Tony had ever been fouled; pain and rage made him a maniac.

A blind unreasoning instinct told Tony to continue the attack on O'Day's body, and savagely he obeyed. Head down, stomach covered, O'Day retreated before the doubled fury of that assault.

It was no part of his plan to unfold his arms and reply to it. Toward the end of the round, when Tony had worn himself out, he would— —

"Tony, the jaw! The jaw!"

The words seemed to come from a great distance. Over and over and over again he heard them, until at last they began to convey a message to Tony's dazed brain. It was then that he saw, none too clearly, the trap into which he had fallen—the foul that had tricked him into losing his head and wasting his strength.

He sensed in the crouching retreating figure before him something more than defense; O'Day, badly hurt and nearly at the end of his string, seemed to be waiting, waiting. And then, even as he flailed away at his staggering foe, Tony felt elbows through his gloves and became aware of the lowered guard and the unprotected downturned face.

"Tony, the jaw!" This time the message came clear as a bell.

O'Day, head bent and watching warily with his one good eye, saw Tony's black shoes shift suddenly upon the canvas, the left foot advanced, the right one drawn back; he caught the flash of a wet glove dropped to a level with the right knee. He realized what was coming and tried to lift his tired arms to protect his face, but even as they started to move, something flicked his left wrist ever so lightly, something traveling swiftly from below —and that flick of the wrist was Martin O'Day's last definite impression of the one battle that he will never forget.

The full-arm uppercut that smashed his jaw and ended his career picked him clear off the floor and then dropped him miles deep in oblivion.

When O'Day recovered consciousness the first thing he saw was an extended hand; the first thing he heard was the even pleasant voice of Tony Mustolini. He refused the hand, but Tony's jocular remarks lingered with him for many a day.

"Don't forget the number, Irish. Highest price for junk of all kinds. Bring your diamonds along and weigh in."

Here a sneering face thrust itself over Tony's shoulder.

"Going to be a champion, hey?" taunted the Iron Man. "Scrap Iron, hey? Scrap Iron yourself, and see how you like it!"

"Gittuhell away from here!" screamed Spider Foley. "Ain't you done enough to him? Can't you see his jaw is busted smack in two?"

Later the Spider was more diplomatic. Hat in hand he sought Tony in the dressing room.

"Listen," said Foley, "I am a man of few words, but them words I mean. I thought I had a champion of the world on my staff, but you licked him—licked him good. Chances are, the doc says, you ruined him for life. 'S all right. No hard feelings. Now I got no use for a loser, but if you'll put yourself under my pers'nal management I'll ab-so-lutely guarantee to make you the lightweight champion of the world inside a year. Yes, sir, champion of the world! What do you say?"

"Nothing doing," said Tony. "Henry and me, we bought the old man out last week. We're in the junk business——"

"The junk business!" cried Foley. "But you could be the champion! You licked O'Day——"

"Sure I did," said Tony; "but I licked him as a favor to Henry, here. Didn't I, old boy?"

"Ain't it the truth!" grunted the Iron Man. "You did something else too, kid. You showed 'em that all the Mustolini boys are game guys! Come on, let's go home!"

THE PEARL BROOCH

MISS KITTY MAHONEY saw it first. It was in Sol Solomon's window on Upper Main Street.

As the pearl brooch plays an important part in this story, it might be just as well to describe it. It was about the size of a silver half dollar, and of the circular design known as a sunburst. From its center tiny pearls radiated in graceful curves, said center being marked and accentuated by a diamond almond as large as the head of a pin.

When Miss Mahoney's eyes fell upon this gem of the jeweler's art it was reposing chastely upon a square of black velvet, flanked on one side by a rubber-handled revolver and upon the other by a collection of ancient coins. Beside the velvet was a card, upon which was written: "A Genuine Bargain!"

"Oh, see that pearl thing!" cried Miss Mahoney. "Don't you think it's elegant, Mr. Beaver? I always did love pearls."

Oscar Beaver squinted critically along his five-cent cigar, shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and replied heavily:

"Uh-huh!" he said. "Sure!"

Mr. Beaver was not a brilliant conversationalist. Physically and mentally, he was constructed along heavy, durable lines. Words came from him reluctantly and in small instalments. Just because a young man does not talk with the thoughtless abandon of a parrot, it does not necessarily follow that he cannot think. Oscar Beaver was thinking deeply and with all the concentration at his command. There returned to his memory a chance remark dropped by Miss Mahoney half an hour before:

"My birthday is next month. On the tenth."

Even a very stupid young man might have traced some subtle connection between that statement and the voluble admiration of the pearl brooch.

Miss Mahoney noticed his preoccupied air, and as they moved away from the window she said:

"Mr. Beaver, I wouldn't wish to have you think for a minute that I'm like some girls, hinting around for a birthday present. I hope I got too much pride for that. But wasn't that a lovely piece of jew'lry?"

"Uh-huh!" said Mr. Beaver. "Sure was."

During the rest of the evening Mr. Beaver was more silent than usual, and at eleven o'clock, when Mr. Solomon was closing up for the night, he had a caller.

"What do you get for that pearl thing in the window?" demanded the visitor abruptly.

"Vich pearl thing?" asked the proprietor.

"That round thing with the diamond in the middle of it."

"Oh, dot sunburst!" said Mr. Solomon, suddenly beaming with enthusiasm. "Ah, my friend, dot is a real bargain. Genuine pearls. No imidation stuff. No gold plate. All good goods. I give you my word."

"Nix!" said Mr. Beaver shortly.

Mr. Solomon sighed.

"To you," said he, and his smile would have melted ice. "I make the price forty-seven dollars. If I should let you have it for forty-six I lose money. Wait, my friend, I show it to you. You know real pearls when you see 'em, and——"

"Uh-huh!" said Mr. Beaver as he vanished through the front door.

"Hey! Come back!" wailed Mr. Solomon. "Take it for forty dollars!"

Oscar Beaver did not hear him, and it would have made no difference if he had. Seven dollars one way or the other mattered little, and it was the first question which lingered in the young man's mind as he swung down the street.

Forty-seven dollars! So far as Oscar was concerned, the price of the pearl brooch might as well have been forty-seven hundred. It would have made the possession of the trinket no less remote.

When a young man wrestles heavy packing cases at twenty-five cents an hour, and has a mother and two small sisters to support—and does it—there is very little left in the pay envelope for pearl brooches.

Forty-seven dollars! And Miss Mahoney's birthday was on the tenth of next month. Oscar Beaver walked down the street, turning the pearl brooch over and over in his mind—always with the price tag attached. Plainly the thing couldn't be done short of a miracle, and Oscar Beaver had small acquaintance with miracles. Miss Kitty Mahoney was the nearest thing to one which had ever come into his dull life. Forty-seven dollars! Oscar Beaver shook his head. No, it couldn't be done.

The next morning he had no appetite, and his mother questioned him anxiously:

"Don't you feel well this morning, son? You ain't touched your fried mush."

"Aw, I'm all right," said Oscar stolidly.

"Where was you last night?" asked the mother. "Out with the boys?"

"Naw!" said the son. "I was just walking around."

"Maybe you didn't get enough sleep," suggested Mrs. Beaver. "It was late when you got in."

"Uh-huh!" said Oscar.

Mrs. Beaver looked after him as he left the house, his lunch pail in his hand.

"I hope he ain't going to be sick," she said. "He's been acting kind of funny lately. It ain't like him not to relish his food. If he should get sick now — —"

Illness is a luxury which no young man can afford at the rate of twenty-five cents an hour.

If any one had told Mrs. Beaver that her son was "going with that Mahoney girl," she would have been amazed and very possibly indignant.

"Oscar is a good boy," she used to boast to the neighbors whose sons were not held up as models of thrift and deportment. "He's as steady as an old, married man. Never any beer, never any gambling, never any foolishness with the girls. Every Saturday night he brings his envelope home to me, sealed up just the way he gets it at the window. He wouldn't spend as much as a five-cent piece on himself without asking me first. Ever since the old man died he's been just that way, and he's better to the kids than his father ever was. That's the kind of a boy to have!"

The neighbor women agreed with Mrs. Beaver to her face, but shook their heads behind her back.

"It ain't human nature," Mrs. Slattery used to remark, "A boy's a boy, I say, and you can't make an old man out of him. He's bound to have his fun some time, as sure's you're born, and Oscar ain't going to be a slave to his mother all the days of his life. It ain't human nature."

But self-denial, if practiced constantly, in time becomes a habit of mind as well as of body. The reliable Oscar, six years deep in a rut, accepted his lot with all the phlegmatic patience of a beast of burden. The thing had to be done, and that was all there was to it.

The men at the wholesale house where he worked once tried to alter Oscar's views. They took him to task because of his habit of disappearing on Saturday nights with his pay envelope unopened.

"It's about time this guy bought a drink," announced Jerry Gavigan, a teamster, and the bully of the stable gang.

"Buy your own drinks," growled Oscar.

One word hurried on to another, each one harder than its predecessor. Finally Gavigan crossed the line between wind and war with an epithet calculated to stir the fighting spirit in a Turk. Larry Delaney, stable boss, and expert in such matters, described the fight by rounds in two short sentences:

"They was only two blows struck. Oscar hit Jerry, and Jerry hit the floor."

Gavigan was taken to the hospital with a broken jaw and three loose teeth. Oscar went home to his mother with the seal on his pay envelope unbroken. He explained to her that a packing case fell on his right hand and bruised the knuckles.

II

After that affair Oscar had a certain amount of fighting to do. His swiftly won reputation carried with it an obligation understood by young men of his kind. Just as every Western killer of note became a target for lesser bad men in search of fame, so did Oscar's men in search of fame. It amounted to something to whip the man who had whipped the redoubtable Gavigan, and Oscar met the aspirants as they came, though without enthusiasm. He never moved an inch out of his way to find trouble, but he never retreated an inch when trouble came to find him. Patient, slow to anger, and of very few words, he would wait until it became certain that the only way out led through battle. Then he would lower his head and charge like a bull, his right fist cocked and primed at his side. He seldom had to hit a man more than once.

Oscar knew nothing of scientific boxing, and cared less. When he fought his only idea was to have it over as soon as possible, and the element of personal dislike never entered into his conflicts. After some time he came to feel a grim satisfaction in his prowess, for fighting was almost his only recreation. His fame spread over the East Side and reached San Fernando Street and the haunts of the railroad men.

It was Miss Kitty Mahoney who gave Oscar the first hint of his growing reputation. It happened at the Switchmen's ball, where he met the young woman.

"You ain't the Mr. Beaver that's such an awful fighter, are you?" demanded Miss Mahoney, with an arch smile.

Oscar's face turned the color of Flemish sunset.

"Aw, I've had a few mix-ups, I guess. Nothing much."

"I think it's simply terrible for men to fight," cooed the young woman, one eye upon Charlie Kitts, who had brought her to the ball. Charlie was hovering in the background, glowering at Oscar, restrained from violence only because of the discretion which is the better part of valor.

"Aw, I never go looking for it," muttered the hero uncomfortably. "I never start nothing."

"But you wouldn't let anybody run over you?" suggested Miss Mahoney sweetly.

"Huh-uh!" said Oscar.

That evening Charlie Kitts was treated to a lesson in feminine tactics. Having brought Miss Mahoney to the ball, he had every right to expect a monopoly of her company, instead of which he was forced to stand aside and watch that lively young woman trying all her wiles upon another youth, and that youth a "tough guy" and a fighter.

At midnight Charlie took a firm grip on his courage, and shouldered his way to Miss Mahoney's side. She was busily engaged in conversation with Mr. Beaver, who was replying in monosyllables.

"Come on, kid!" said Kitts abruptly. "Let's get outa this."

"But I don't want to go home yet," said Miss Mahoney, pouting. "It ain't late, is it?"

"Late enough," said Charlie sourly. "You know I got to go to work at five in the morning. Come on!"

Miss Mahoney suddenly slipped her hand through the crook of Oscar's elbow, and that young man's whole body stiffened with pleasurable surprise.

"You go if you want to," she said calmly. "I'm going to stay. Mr. Beaver'll see me home. Won't you?"

"Sure thing!" said Oscar. "Sure thing!"

"Going to make a fool of me, are you?" snarled Kitts. "Got a new guy on your staff, eh? Well, all I got to say is——"

Oscar Beaver stepped forward, but Miss Mahoney clung to his arm.

"You boys behave!" she cried shrilly. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Mr. Kitts, to be starting something right here on the floor before everybody?"

"Aw," said Oscar, "he won't start nothing." Then to the outraged Kitts: "Beat it!"

Charlie beat it. He explained afterward that it was only his respect for the lady which kept him from assaulting Oscar upon the spot.

Thus young Mr. Beaver came to regard himself as Miss Mahoney's "steady company." It was his first experience of the sort, and therefore very serious.

Kitty Mahoney was not without expert knowledge of young men and their ways with a maid. She had tripped lightly through many affairs; but Oscar Beaver, so strong, and yet so simple—yes, even bashful to the point of timidity—was a new type to her. The young men whom she had known were not overtimid. Most of them had attempted to kiss her—too soon—which is to say that they took advantage of the very first opportunity which presented itself. There is in such matters a time limit which should be decently observed, and Miss Mahoney had a stinging rebuke for those who failed to observe it.

"Quit that, freshie. I ain't that kind of a girl. I don't let a man kiss me until I'm acquainted with him."

It seemed to Miss Mahoney a remarkable thing that Oscar Beaver had never presumed to put his arm about her waist, never once tried to kiss her. Remarkable and aggravating. She amused herself by putting him through his paces after the fashion of a performing bear, and it pleased her that the undefeated champion of the East Side and the terror of San Fernando Street should hold her in such respectful awe, obeying her lightest whim. She experimented with him after a scientific method all her own. The hint about the pearl brooch came under the head of an experiment. Miss Mahoney, having dropped the seed and called attention to it, waited the outcome with hopefulness.

"Hey, kid," said Larry Delaney to Oscar, "want to make fifty bucks?"

"Quit your kidding," said Oscar, exploring the contents of his lunch pail.

"This is no kid," said Larry. "This is on the level. Do you want to make fifty bucks?"

"Well," said Oscar, selecting a corned-beef sandwich, "I guess I could use the change! What's the idea?"

"On the ninth of next month," explained Larry, "there's going to be a big benefit performance at the Grand Theater. Some fellow is sick or dead, or something, and his lodge is giving a blow-out to get some coin. Steve Slattery is going to be there."

"Slattery, the fighter?"

"There ain't but one Steve Slattery, is there? To make it a good drawing card, Steve offers fifty bucks to any man who can last four rounds with

him."

Oscar looked up, his mouth open.

"Me!" he said, tapping his breast with the remains of the sandwich. "Me get up there on the stage with a regular fighter? Not on your life!"

"Why not?" argued Larry.

"I never had a glove on in my life."

"What difference does that make? You wouldn't be expected to do anything but keep him from knocking you out. If you stick the four rounds you get the dough. That's soft enough, ain't it?"

"It is—the way you say it," mumbled Oscar.

"Fifty bucks is a lot of money for one night's work," said Larry. "If I was as husky as you are I'd take a chance."

"Uh-huh!" said Oscar.

When the one-o'clock whistle blew, Oscar went to work with a germ planted deep in his mind. Forty-seven from fifty leaves three.

III

That night he went walking with Miss Mahoney. When a young man has no money in his pockets it is not considered safe to walk in the direction of the bright lights and the ice-cream parlors; but Oscar allowed Miss Mahoney to lead him toward Upper Main Street. She paused under the three golden balls.

"Why, it's still there!" she exclaimed. "I was afraid somebody might have come along and bought it."

"Uh-huh!" said Oscar.

"I wonder if it's so awful expensive?"

"Forty-seven dollars." Oscar blurted out the words before he thought.

"Oh!" said Miss Mahoney. And she squeezed Oscar's arm.

Once more Mr. Solomon had a late caller.

"About that pearl thing," said Mr. Beaver. "There ain't much chance for you to sell it before the tenth of next month, is there?"

Mr. Solomon elevated his shoulders and wiggled his fingers.

"Make me a deposit," he said, "and I put it in the safe until you come after it. Shall I put it away for you?"

"M-m-well," said Mr. Beaver slowly, "don't put it away exactly. Just kind of hold onto it for me. Forty-seven bucks, wasn't it?"

Mr. Solomon was a student of human nature. Pawnbrokers usually are. Through the shop window he had observed Miss Mahoney earlier in the evening. He regarded the pearl brooch as sold—and for the top price. He could afford to hold it at the figure.

Several days passed. Once more Oscar Beaver and the lady of his affections were taking the evening air, slightly tainted by the proximity of a glue factory.

"There's going to be a fine show at the Grand next Thursday night," said Miss Mahoney. "Everybody I know is going."

"Uh-huh!" said Oscar.

"Charlie Kitts wants me to go with him." There was an unmistakable accenting of the last word in the sentence.

"Is that guy still sticking around?" asked Oscar.

"I want to go the worst way, but I don't want to go with him."

Oscar saw that his hand was called.

"I'd take you myself," he said, "but I got a date for next Thursday."

Miss Mahoney pouted.

"If that ain't the meanest thing!" she said.

"Aw, what do you want to go see a boxing match for?" demanded Oscar. "It ain't no place for a lady."

"But all the girls are going," persisted Miss Mahoney. "There's going to be singing and dancing and a regular vaudeville show. I'll bet you're going with another girl!"

"Quit that stuff!" growled Oscar. "You know better."

"You said you had a date," said Miss Mahoney.

"Well, I have. But it ain't with no girl, take it from me."

"And you can't take me?"

Oscar shook his head.

"Not a chance; I would if I could, but I can't."

"You could break that old date if you cared anything about me!"

"That's just the reason I can't break it."

"Pshaw! I don't believe it!"

"Don't, then."

"Would you be mad if I went with some one else?"

"Not mad at you."

"A girl likes to go to a show once in a while. I ain't been to a show since I—since I don't know when."

"I wish you wouldn't go to this one."

"But why? What's the matter with it?"

"I can't tell you why, but I wish you wouldn't, that's all."

"You're just jealous—that's all the matter with you."

"Of Kitts? Where do you get that stuff? Forget it!"

"You ain't got the right to dictate who I shall go with!"

"I ain't trying to. I'm just asking you not to go next Thursday night."

"Suppose I don't go with Charlie Kitts?"

"Don't go with anybody. Stay at home."

"Huh! That ain't any fun. I haven't been a single place for weeks, and when I've got a chance to go somewhere you kick about it. Don't you think that's selfish?"

"Maybe. But I don't want you to go. I'll tell you why afterward."

"Tell me now."

"I can't."

After a conversation of this sort, what more natural than that Miss Mahoney should make up her mind that Oscar's unreasonable request was based upon a dog-in-the-manger policy? His failure to make any explanation fought heavily against him, and there might have been an open rupture had not Miss Kitty remembered, just in the nick of time, that Oscar had taken the trouble to price the pearl brooch. That meant something. It is inadvisable to quarrel with a "gentleman friend" upon the eve of one's birthday, as every young woman knows.

Because of this, Oscar Beaver was allowed to go away thinking that he had won his point. In her feminine way, Kitty Mahoney was something of a strategist.

IV

Steve Slattery sat in his dressing room at the Grand Theater while one of his satellites laced his fighting shoes. Through an open door came the braying of vaudeville vocalists, the whang of an orchestra, and the rapid clatter of clog steps. Stage hands stole glances at the star of the evening, for Slattery was a great man—in the provinces. Once he had almost whipped a champion. Steve's manager entered, carrying a pair of boxing gloves.

"How 'bout him?" demanded the fighter.

"A tapioca," said the manager, whose name was Kahn. "Something soft. Says he's never been in the ring before. All he's got to wear is a bathing suit and rubber-soled shoes."

"You never can tell about these four-round exhibitions," said Steve oracularly. "They're liable to slip over a ringer on you any time."

"No chance," said the manager. "This is just one of those rough guys. I've picked most of the padding out of these gloves."

"Fair enough," said Slattery. "Now for the bandages. Did you get that tea lead?"

A judicious mixture of adhesive tape and tea lead—tin-foil has also been used—put on a fighter's hand by an expert amounts to something very like brass knuckles. When, in addition to this, the padding is removed from certain portions of the glove, a blow jars heavily and cuts like a knife. Slattery was taking no chances, even though the management guaranteed the fifty in case it should be required. It was his reputation he was thinking of. He grinned as he watched Kahn's deft fingers at work.

"Hey, don't put on too much of that stuff," said he.

"We should worry!" said the manager. "What do you care what happens to this guy?"

"I ain't worrying about him," said Steve; "but if you get on too much of that stuff I might break my hands."

Slattery occupied the star dressing room. Away down the other end of the corridor, in a five-by-seven coop, Oscar Beaver, considerably more than half naked, and pink with embarrassment, nervously listened to the advice which Larry Delaney poured into his ears:

"Don't get it in your head that you can hurt this fellow, and, whatever you do, don't mix with him. Clinch as much as you can, and cover up your jaw. Listen to that!"

A great roar came from the male portion of the audience.

"That's Steve," said Larry, "He's going to punch the bag and a few stunts first. Better get out into the wings now, and, remember, don't look at the crowd. You might get stage fright." Oscar moved along the narrow passageway like a man in a dream. Then for what seemed like a very long time he waited between high canvas walls, listening to the quick, drumming thud of a punching bag. The sound died away at last, and he heard a voice announcing the "event of the evening, a four-round bout between Steve Slattery, the pride of the Pacific coast, and an unknown."

"G'wan!" hissed Larry in his ear. "Get out there!"

Oscar stumbled forward; a bright light shone in his eyes, and a wave of warm air, heavily laden with cheap perfume, almost choked him. He was on the stage for the first time in his life.

A young woman in the third row caught her breath sharply, and her escort chuckled nervously.

"Why, look who's here!" he sneered. "I don't wish your friend any bad luck, but he's got an awful nerve going up against a real scrapper."

"Can't we get out?" whispered Miss Mahoney. "I want to go home."

"And have everybody laughing at you?" said Mr. Kitts. "I guess not!"

"And to think I've been going around with him!" murmured the young woman.

"You oughta be more careful of your company," said Kitts. "Remember, I told you——"

Still in a trance, Oscar was shunted down toward the footlights, and introduced as "The Unknown." There was prolonged cheering, not unmixed with catcalls and howls. Many friends of Oscar's victims were in the house.

The excitable Delaney, stripped to undershirt and trousers as is the custom of seconds and advisers, a sponge in one hand, a bucket in the other, and a bath towel draped over his shoulders, jerked his head toward the small ring.

"Git in your corner!" he said.

Oscar found himself sitting on a stool, a rope chafing the back of his neck. Delaney was fumbling with the gloves—great, clumsy affairs, with many layers of padding over the knuckles. Across the way the same office was being performed for a thick, hairy man who had an unpleasant smile.

A third man beckoned from the middle of the ring, and Oscar advanced, obeying a vicious prod from Delaney.

"What are they doing now?" quavered Miss Mahoney.

"The referee is tellin' 'em about the rules," said Kitts.

But this is what Kahn was saying to Oscar:

"Take a brace, you big stiff! We ain't going to kill you—not in the first round, anyway. And if you lay down Steve will lick you in the dressing room. Understand?"

Oscar nodded.

Soon afterward a bell rang, and Oscar went forward to meet the thick, hairy man, who, instead of beginning to fight, circled about him with his left hand advanced. Oscar turned, too, as if on a pivot. Suddenly, and without warning, something hard and heavy caught him squarely on the bridge of the

nose, and drove his head back until it seemed that his neck must snap under the strain. For an instant the pain blinded Oscar, but when his eyes cleared there was the hairy man, dancing in front of him. Oscar shook his head and plunged forward. Again his head snapped back on his shoulders, and he felt a warm flow upon his lips.

"That's it, Steve!" said the referee. "Cut him to pieces with your left, and then cross him with the right."

Slattery closed in, and began shooting his leaded left with pitiless accuracy. Every jab went straight to the mark, for Oscar did not know enough to cover or clinch, and the professional gave him no time to set himself for the only punch he knew—a right swing. In two minutes the undefeated champion of the East Side was reeling from one side of the ring to the other, blind, dizzy, choked with blood, and all but helpless.

"It's a bum show!" grunted Slattery to the referee. "I'll let him go another round."

When the bell rang Oscar started for the wrong corner, but Delaney sprang after him and towed him back to his own stool.

"What's the matter with you?" snarled Larry. "Why don't you clinch? Get those gloves up over your face. He'll murder you if you don't."

Oscar mumbled something through thick lips.

"Can't hit him!" said Larry. "Nobody thought you could, but that's no reason why you should stand up there like a cigar-store Indian and let him jab the face off you! Duck, you fool! Lay all over him, and clinch. It's your only chance."

Oscar's head was still humming when Delaney pushed him into the middle of the ring for the second round, but he remembered enough of Larry's sermon to save him for the first thirty seconds. He staggered to close quarters, and, holding on with one arm, flailed wildly with the other, while Steve grinned and the gallery roared. Then a snapping uppercut drove him backward to the ropes, and once more the professional went to work with his left. Toward the end of the round, when Oscar was rocking and stumbling like a drunken man, Kahn nodded at his fighter.

"That's enough," he said. "Finish him!"

Oscar heard the words, and understood. Through a red mist, he saw Slattery steady himself, his right hand poised. When the glove moved Oscar ducked his head, guided only by the blind instinct of self-preservation. The punch, with every ounce of Slattery's strength behind it, caught him two inches above the left ear, and sent him reeling across the ring and against the ropes.

Women screamed, and the gallery shouted:

"Knock him out, Steve! Stop him, Slattery!"

But Slattery stood still in the middle of the ring, his right hand dangling at his side, and a queer, twisted expression upon his ugly face. Obeying a sign from his manager, he advanced and the men were locked in a clinch when the bell rang.

"You're all right!" crackled Larry Delaney hysterically. "He can't hurt you with the right hand."

"Can't hurt me!" mumbled Oscar. "Feel that lump on my head!"

There was a disagreement in Slattery's corner also.

"I told you not to put so much of that stuff on my hands," growled Steve. "I busted my hand on that big stiff! It's all your fault, too."

"You only think it's broke," said Kahn.

"I wish you had it instead of me," said the fighter. "I've busted my hands often enough to know. I copped him right on the top of that thick head of his. Wow—but it hurts!"

"You can stop him with your left," urged Kahn. "You don't need your right for a bum like this fellow."

"It's easy for you to talk," grumbled Slattery.

Oscar's stage fright was wearing away by degrees, and in the third round he actually blocked a few of the cutting lefts which Slattery shot at his battered features, and essayed several giant swings, which, though they missed the mark by a foot or so, made him friends in the gallery. He paid for his temerity with a rapidly closing eye and several new cuts. At the end of the round he walked unsteadily to his corner, and the gallery cheered him.

"O-o-o-h!" shuddered Miss Mahoney. "I can't bear to look at him! Isn't it horrible?"

"Slattery's only fooling with him," said Kitts, hopefully. "He'll never let him last the next round. He can't afford to."

The final round opened like a whirlwind. Stung by the taunts of the gallery, Steve rushed in like a preliminary fighter, stabbing, ripping, and uppercutting with his left. Oscar clinched repeatedly, but once Slattery caught him under the chin in the break-away and dropped him to the floor. Kahn began to count rapidly:

"One, two, three, four——"

"No, you don't!" said Oscar thickly, stumbling to his feet.

"Have I got to kill you?" panted Slattery. "Why don't you be reasonable and lay down?"

"Because you can't make me!" said Oscar.

The theater was in an uproar. Men rose in their seats and howled advice. Women covered their faces and peeped through their fingers, squeaking hysterically. Battered, bruised, and loose at the knees, Oscar staggered about the roped inclosure, wide open to every attack. His hands were at his sides, for he was too weak and dazed to lift them. Long before he had ceased to feel the pain of the blows that had rained upon his face. He was conscious only of the impact as the leaded knuckles drove home.

"Quit, you fool!" said Kahn. "You'll be murdered!"

A slight rocking motion of the head was the only sign that the boy heard and understood.

When the bell rang he was hanging upon the ropes, helpless; and Slattery, who had fought himself into utter exhaustion, was pecking away at his face with weak lefts.

A third time Mr. Solomon had a late caller—a young man with two black eyes, the right one tightly closed, and variously held together with sticking plaster. So awful was the apparition that language forsook the pawnbroker.

"Got that pearl thing?" asked the battered one through puffed lips.

"I give you my word," said Mr. Solomon, "I wouldn't have known it was you. What happened?"

"Had a fight," mumbled Oscar. "Hurry up and gimme that thing. I want to go home."

He produced two twenty-dollar gold pieces and some silver. Mr. Solomon, exclaiming to himself, hastened to obey.

On the night of the tenth of the month Oscar Beaver crossed the small lawn in front of the Mahoney residence. Raw beefsteak and pink courtplaster had done something for him, but not enough to risk the lights of the parlor. What he had to say would be said on the front porch—in the dark—and the fingers of his right hand clutched a small plush box.

His foot was on the lower step when he heard voices, and through the open window came the smooth tones of Mr. Charles Kitts:

"Of course if I'd ha' known about it in time, I wouldn't have taken you to the show. I know how you feel about it."

"Never mention his name to me again," said Miss Mahoney. "The idea of him mixing up with prize fighters, and then having the nerve to come around here! The idea!"

“I’d have to want fifty dollars pretty bad to take what he got,” said Mr. Kitts. “Did you see his nose?”

“Yes,” said Miss Mahoney, with a laugh. “Didn’t he look too funny for any use?”

Oscar Beaver removed his foot from the lower step, and backed slowly away into the darkness.

Mr. Solomon, protesting violently that the thing couldn’t be done, took the pearl brooch back at thirty dollars. It is now in the window, and Miss Mahoney has often called Mr. Kitts’ attention to its singular beauty. So far Mr. Kitts has been able to compromise on a basis of ice cream soda and a trip to the moving-picture show.

Oscar Beaver has promised his mother that he will never fight again, and the chances are that he will keep his word.

THE REVENGE OF KID MORALES

THE records of the old Spanish mission at Santa Barbara prove that he was christened Manuel Carlos Rodriguez, but it was not under that mouthful of musical syllables that he rose in the world, the first Mexican pugilist of prominence. We now have several swarthy battlers—some of them very good ones and some very bad—but it was Manuel (pronounce that Mon-well, please) who blazed the new trail and demonstrated that a Mexican does not always need a knife when he goes to war. Like the average drug clerk, Manuel had something just as good, if not better. His right hand carried the anæsthetic when delivered from any possible angle—uppercut, hook, cross, jab, or swing. If all Mexicans were similarly gifted our champions would hail from the sister republic, and Sheffield would be forced to find a new market for her cutlery.

Manuel Carlos began fighting at the mature age of seven, not because he liked it but because he attended a public school where the "railroad Irish" predominated. "Licking the greasers" was a daily diversion, and Manuel furnished his share of the entertainment for at least five years, when he discovered, quite by accident, that he could strike a harder blow with his right hand than any other boy in the school.

"Toughie" Gallegher, the champion of Anacapa Street and the beach section, gave Manuel the opportunity to make this important discovery. Toughie was fourteen, and large for his age; Manuel was twelve and correspondingly small, but this earned him no sympathy. He was the only "greaser" in sight, and Toughie was spoiling for a fight. Manuel had learned by bitter experience that running away was useless; it only postponed the evil day and added to the punishment when caught, so he sullenly took off his coat and faced the inevitable.

Toughie, safe in the knowledge that he could end the fight whenever he saw fit, prolonged the agony cruelly. He toyed with his small opponent, jabbing him first in one eye and then in the other, between whiles paying attention to his nose and mouth. Manuel fought with the desperation of a cornered tabby cat, but his frantic rushes and ineffective swings brought nothing but hilarious applause from the audience.

At last Toughie paused, and looked upon his work, well satisfied with himself. Manuel's eyes were puffed, his nose was trickling gore, and his lips

were split.

"You're a game little greaser, anyway," said Toughie magnanimously. "Here, see if you can hit me once." He dropped his hands at his sides, thrust out his chin, and braced himself, legs wide apart.

Manuel doubled up his right fist into a ball, and hurled himself forward, striking with every ounce of strength in his lean little body. Toughie saw the blow coming, and drew back his head, just far enough to bring the point of his chin into violent contact with the brown fist. He had intended to make Manuel miss, and kick him on the shins before he could recover his balance, but the Mexican was a poor judge of distance, and overshot the mark; the blow which should have landed back of the ear caught the champion of Anacapa Street fairly on the point. Toughie Gallegher staggered backward and went down like a log. Manuel stood astride of him for an instant, his eyes flashing and his teeth bared. When he saw that his tormentor was unconscious, all the pent-up rage of five years boiled over in his soul. He threw himself upon the prostrate bully and began mauling him with both hands. I regret to say that he used his finger nails as well, and when the other boys dragged him away, screaming and swearing by turns, he had left his permanent mark upon Toughie's face in the shape of a deep twin furrow from the outer corner of the left eye to the chin.

"An' the nex' fella what go to fight me," yelled Manuel hysterically, "I keel him! I tear the eyes out! I keel him; you see if I don'!"

That was Manuel's first victory. He paid for it with a dozen unmerciful whippings, for Toughie was bent on wiping away the disgrace of that knockout, but he could not beat out of Manuel's head the memory of that moment when he saw the redoubtable Gallegher flat in the grass.

The time soon came when Toughie thought twice before going to war with the little Mexican. Billy Willis, a retired lightweight of local reputation, taught Manuel to box. The boy picked up the rudiments of the game as a pigeon picks up wheat. He had all the lithe, catlike grace of the men of his blood, which, under instruction, developed into a fast, tricky defense, and coupled with the tremendous power of his right-handers, made him cock of the walk. At eighteen he ruled over the beach district like a czar.

At nineteen he weighed one hundred and twenty-five pounds; Toughie Gallegher weighed one hundred and ninety and drove a truck when sober. There are some who remember how Manuel pulled that overgrown lout from the driver's seat and thrashed him in the middle of State Street for all Santa Barbara to see.

From this matinée performance it was but a step to the ring. Billy Willis took his protégé to Ventura, where, under the name of "Kid Morales," he won a fierce seven-round encounter with an unknown featherweight from Los Angeles who had been tempted from home by the promise of a soft mark.

"If this greaser is *soft*," said the victim, "what are the hard ones like? He's got a kick like a mule!"

Kid Morales received nine dollars as his share of the purse, and bought his mother a shawl and a pair of shoes with the money. His next little journey was to Oxnard, where he fought the lightweight champion of the beet fields, and whipped him in three whirlwind rounds. People began to point him out on the street, and speak of him as "Kid Morales, the fighter." Manuel bought a new suit of clothes for eight dollars, and tasted the sweets of public recognition.

Inside of a year he fought a dozen battles, winning nine of them by knockouts, and losing but one decision on points. Unquestionably a clever manager might have made a champion out of him by taking charge at this period of his development, but Billy Willis liked whisky too well to be very much interested in anything else, and allowed Manuel to degenerate into a typical pork-and-bean preliminary fighter—a young man without a trade or desire to work, no horizon beyond the next cheap fight, and no prospects save the immediate dollar. This was a pity, for Manuel had many good points, but good points are always the ones soonest blunted by idleness. A steady job would have made another man out of Manuel.

Between fights he lounged about the street corners, smoking cigarettes and talking about himself. If his word was doubted he was always ready to furnish proof, and because there was no one to tell him that he was throwing away salable material Manuel wasted at least ten thousand dollars' worth of hooks and swings in barrooms and back alleys for which he received nothing—not even credit.

Worse than all else, he developed a taste for raw whisky, and when he "had an edge on" was inclined to be vindictive and quarrelsome. In one of these ugly moods he disagreed with Billy Willis, and, after whipping his manager very thoroughly, Manuel drifted away from the home town, determined to fend for himself in the future, and give no man a cut of his earnings. His mother heard from him occasionally—always with a money order inclosed—and by the blue slip she knew that Manuelito had been fighting again.

Kid Morales played his lone hand for two years with varying fortunes. He would not train faithfully—as a matter of fact, he did not know how—

but he was always willing to fight, and this made him popular with certain managers who were quick to take advantage of Manuel's lack of business instinct. As a general thing, he asked but two questions about a match —"When?" and "How much?"

One morning Kid Morales was sitting in the outer office of a successful fight promoter, waiting to borrow two dollars on the strength of his last victory. At last he was admitted to the sanctum of the great man.

"Hello, Morales!" said the promoter—call him Smith for short. "You're the very fellow I've been wanting to see. Sit down."

Kid Morales sat down and turned his sombrero over and over in his hands. He had never before been asked to take a chair in the inner office—his business was usually transacted standing.

"Kid," said Smith, "can you do the lightweight limit?"

"Sure!" answered the fighter. "For a long time I don't make weight, but I think I can do her all right."

"How'd you like a main event?" asked Smith.

"Weeth who?" demanded Morales, surprised into caution.

"Charlie Duffy," said Smith, eying Morales shrewdly.

"Ho!" said Morales. "That fella he leeck Yo'ng Murphy an' Keelpatrick, an' that bunch?"

"He's the one," said Smith. "Tough guy. Do you want him?"

Morales lighted a cigarette, blew a puff into the air, waved his hands airily, and smiled.

"I fight anybody, everybody," he said, with a grin. "Fightin', she's my business. What I care, eh? How much I get for it?"

"Two hundred and fifty."

"Win, lose, or draw?"

Smith nodded.

"Ha!" chuckled Morales. "I fight weeth ol' Jim Jaffray for that much coin!"

"Good!" said Smith. "I've been after Duffy for the last six months, and now he says he'll take the July date, but because he's going to fight in San Francisco in September he won't take on either Peterson or Dunn. They're pretty tough birds themselves, and Duffy has been side-stepping 'em, but he says I can pick any one else, and it will be all right. If you are sure you can make the weight, you'll get the match."

Kid Morales glanced down at the slight bulge in his waistline.

"I got little belly on me," he said modestly, "but she come right off soon as I go on the road a few times."

"No more booze now," warned Smith, "and ease up on those cigarettes. You go out to Mahaffey's place, and tell him I sent you there to train. I'll pay your expenses, you furnish your own sparring partner."

"All right," said Kid Morales.

That afternoon Smith wrote a letter to Duffy's manager, from which a paragraph might be quoted:

> He is a Mexican and a sort of a tramp, but he has won three fights in the town—all with bums—and he should be a fair sort of a card, though, of course, Duffy would draw, matched with any one. Duffy ought to drop him inside of five rounds, as Morales takes no care of himself, and has never really trained for a fight in his life. Better come on here as soon as you can, and make a bluff at working to stimulate the interest. We don't want to make it look too easy.

II

Kid Morales, quartered at Mahaffey's road house, assured of three meals a day, and two hundred and fifty dollars after the fight, allowed nothing to worry him. Duffy, he knew, was a prominent contender for the lightweight championship, a fast boxer, a tremendous punisher, and a clean finisher, but these things did not disturb the Mexican. He was to get as much for losing as for winning, and two hard years had knocked the last spark of ambition out of his soul. In all probability Duffy would win, but two hundred and fifty dollars would buy a suit of clothes and unlimited whisky and cigarettes, and after the money was gone there would be other fights. Kid Morales wasted no time in laying plans for the future.

Charlie Duffy came to town, wearing diamonds and an air of confidence.

"A Mexican?" said he, with a sneer. "Whoever heard of a game greaser? I'll make this one quit in three rounds."

Manuel read this statement in the morning papers and showed his white teeth above the rim of his coffee cup.

"I don' know where thees fella get off to make cracks like that," said he. "I never queet in my life. Plenty fellas goin' leeck me, maybe, but nobody goin' *scare* me. No railroad Irish goin' scare me, anyhow," he added, as an afterthought. "I been raise' weeth that gang."

The newspaper men, quick to scent a "grudge fight," egged each man on, taking a mischievous pleasure in stirring up personal feeling. Kid Morales repeated his remark about railroad Irish, and on the day before the fight matters had advanced to such a pass that Duffy was promising to make the

"greaser" show the yellow and jump out of the ring, while Morales was stoutly maintaining that the only men who had ever quit to him were Irish, and therefore not game.

The men met for the first time at three o'clock on the day of the fight—the hour set for the weighing. Duffy's lip curled as Manuel dropped his bath robe and stepped on the scales. He took note of the great, driving muscles in the smooth brown back and the trim waist, for Kid Morales was in condition for the first time in two years, and had every external appearance of a man fit for a hard battle. In this respect the Mexican had the advantage, for Duffy, satisfied that he would be able to win without extending himself, had put in less than a week's work, and was soft and short of breath.

Duffy was well versed in the Fitzsimmons' method of overawing an opponent, since known as "goat-getting." He lost no time in beginning the operation.

"Well, Kid," said Duffy pleasantly, "I hope you ain't going to quit to-night. The people want some sort of a run for their money, you know. Be as game as you can, and try to stick for three rounds, anyway."

Kid Morales nodded soberly.

"I never queet yet," he said. "I never see the Irishman could *make* me queet, either."

"Take a look at me!" said Duffy.

"I look at you to-night," said Morales. "W'at you tryin' to do? Talk yourself into winnin' thees fight, no?"

The newspaper men chuckled, and Duffy's face flared brick red. He started to splutter, but his manager, with a fine eye for dramatic effect, leaped between the men and hustled Duffy away.

"Charlie might have jumped him right there," said the manager afterward. "He's awful hot-headed, and when he gets his Irish up he ain't got a lick of sense."

"You didn't seem to scare him much," said a newspaper man to Duffy, as the latter was hurrying into his clothes.

"Aw, he was scared white!" answered the fighter. "Wait till I get a poke at his chin and you'll see him run like a rabbit."

"Maybe he will and maybe he won't," said the reporter. "Don't let anybody tell you that this brown baby isn't dangerous, because he is. Watch that right hand all the time, because if he gets you with it, you'll know that you've got a fight on your hands."

"He couldn't hit me with a buggy whip!" boasted Duffy.

At nine o'clock Kid Morales, escorted by his trainer and two seconds, entered the dressing room at the fight pavilion. In his coat pocket there was a pint flask of whisky—as yet untouched. The seconds might provide the spring water and the smelling salts; Kid Morales clung to the stimulant which had carried him through many a hard fight.

While he was slowly removing his clothes and preparing for the ring, a bustle on the other side of the low partition announced the arrival of his opponent.

"Gee, but I feel like a champion!" said a loud voice, which Morales had no trouble in identifying as Duffy's. "It'll be a short fight, boys. I'm going to drop this greaser in three rounds, sure!"

"Don't pay any attention to that!" growled Mahaffey, the chief second. "He's only tryin' to buffalo you, Kid. Forget it!"

Then up spoke Duffy's manager, his voice pitched to reach the unseen audience.

"Nobody likes this guy," said he cheerfully. "He's only a Mexican, and he ain't got a friend in the house. Pile into him at the tap of the gong, and give him all the rough stuff you've got. They wouldn't do anything to you if you should happen to *kill* him. It wouldn't even be manslaughter. Tear his black head off, Charlie!"

"Hah!" said the fighter scornfully. "He won't take more than one good punch without quitting. If he'll stay and mix it with me, I'll murder him in the ring."

"Send the bum back to the brake-beams, where he figures," urged another voice. "He's got a nerve going up against a real fighter!"

"I'll send him to the hospital!" snarled Duffy. "Same as I did that fellow in Milwaukee. Fractured skull, he had, didn't he?"

"Concussion of the brain," corrected the manager. "He ain't right yet, that guy. Never mind the hospital, Charlie. Send this greaser straight to the *morgue*. Here's one time when you can cut loose, and hit just as hard as you want to without being afraid of gettin' pinched. Make it the morgue for his!"

Kid Morales heard every word. He was not exactly frightened, but the reference to the morgue did not please him. His stomach felt uncomfortably cold, and he remembered all the things he had ever heard about Duffy's tremendous punishing power. Something prompted him to reach for the pint flask.

"She make me fight better," said Morales.

"Might as well be drunk as scared to death," said Mahaffey, under his breath. "If you listen to what this Duffy says, he'll talk you out of a chance

to win. That's the way he beat Young Murphy—kept kidding him until Murph dropped his guard and went in wild, and then—bang! Here! What ye tryin' to do? Drink all of that stuff? Leave a little for politeness!"

A little later Kid Morales found himself in the ring. The chill had gone from his stomach, and the faint tremors from his knees; the alcohol was doing its work.

Duffy was borne in on a wave of cheers. He did not offer to shake hands. Kid Morales, remembering the morgue, kept his seat, and a buzz went through the house.

"They're sore at each other," said the ringsiders. "They won't shake hands. It ought to be a peach of a fight."

When the men went to the center for instructions Duffy offered a suggestion.

"Warn this greaser about a foul," said he. "They tell me that whenever he's taking a licking he fights dirty."

"I'll warn you both," said the referee. "I will allow no technical claim of foul unless one or the other of you is hurt. Fight as long as one arm is free, and protect yourselves in the break. Go to your corners."

III

Kid Morales went slowly to the center, crouching slightly, his left extended at full length. Duffy walked over in the most unconcerned manner in the world, and without a shadow of a feint shot his left glove to Manuel's face. The Mexican clinched immediately, and Duffy brought his lips close to Manuel's ear.

"Now, then, you Mexican hairless dog," said he, "are you going to *fight*, or are you going to quit?"

Morales hurled Duffy from him, but as he went the white boy ripped home with a stinging short uppercut which rattled Manuel's teeth, and the crowd cheered. The blow did not travel more than six inches, but the force with which it impinged on Manuel's chin inspired that young man with a healthy respect for Duffy's hitting power, and caused him to wonder what would happen if the Irishman ever "pulled one from his hip" and landed it in the same place.

The men sparred for several seconds, and then Duffy drove a left to the body. Morales' guard went down, and over came the right hand, a clean blow, delivered with crushing force. Manuel ducked and took it on his forehead, but even so he was almost knocked to the floor. He staggered

backward, but recovered in time to clinch as Duffy pressed in to follow his advantage.

"See him hanging on!" yelled Duffy to the referee. "He wants to quit already!"

"Break!" ordered the referee, but Manuel clung until the official was forced to go between the fighters, when he skipped nimbly out of danger.

"I knew you had a streak!" taunted Duffy, advancing again. "Come on and fight, you yellow-hammer! Don't quit in the first round. Give the people some sort of a run for their money!"

"Don't listen to him!" bawled Mahaffey. "Take your time and cop him with that right!"

"Fight! Fight!" roared the crowd. "Go on and fight!"

Duffy ended the round in a series of rushes, Morales blocking with elbows and forearms, and covering his jaw with his left shoulder. Not once during the first round did he attempt to land a blow. For the first time in his ring career, Kid Morales was afraid. Here was a man against whom his defense availed little; a man who could hit him when he wanted to and knew how to hit hard. Manuel thought of the boy in the hospital in Milwaukee, and hunched his left shoulder higher than ever.

In his corner Manuel pleaded for the bottle, and Mahaffey gave it to him with a sarcastic grin.

"You couldn't be fightin' any worse," said he. "Perhaps the booze will give ye a little courage."

In the second round Duffy succeeded in feinting Morales wide open to the right swing, and the Mexican went down with a thump. He found himself at the count of three, and opened his eyes. Duffy, leaning upon the ropes, was looking down at him and laughing.

"Stay there, you dog," said the Irishman. "Go on and quit. You've got an excuse."

Slowly Manuel hauled himself to his knees. His better judgment told him to remain on the floor. His brain was whirling and his limbs were numb; there was a dull ache at the back of his head. All the life had been knocked out of him by a single blow—it was a new experience and an unpleasant one.

"Come on; get up. I dare you!" said Duffy.

"Seven—eight—nine——"

Manuel got on his feet, and began to run, Duffy pursuing him with both hands flying. Luck favored the Mexican. A buzzing right-hander barely

grazed his chin, and before Duffy could recover his balance, Morales had both arms pinned at his sides, and was hanging on for dear life. He clinched until the referee tore him away by main strength, blocked another swing, and clinched again. He was still hugging Duffy when the bell rang, and the very shingles on the roof rattled to the hoots and jeers of the crowd.

"Can he hit?" asked Mahaffey, with professional interest, as he waved the smelling salts under Manuel's nose.

"Hit!" gasped the Mexican. "I see him start that one. I'm wide open; I can't go in; I can't go back. Bam! He catch me on the jaw. I think the roof she fall in."

"Why don't you do some fighting yourself?" demanded Mahaffey. "Get in there and take a chance."

"I ain't started weeth him yet," said Manuel.

"Better start quick, then," said Mahaffey, with a wink at the newspaper men.

"One more little shot and I begin!" said Manuel.

Another scalding swallow of liquid courage and he was on his feet, walking none too steadily, to the middle of the ring.

"Are you going to fight now?" asked Duffy, as he circled about his prey.

"Yes, maybe I fight now," answered Manuel.

"Good news!" said the Irishman. His left glove shot forward, straight as the drive of a piston. Manuel's head jerked backward, and he was conscious of a sickening pain at the bridge of his nose—a pain which spread until his very teeth ached and his eyesight became blurred. A warm stream trickled down over his chin.

"Greaser blood, eh?" said Duffy. "Why—it's *red*! They told me it was yellow. Let's draw some more of it and see!" He struck again before Manuel could leap to a clinch.

"Where's that right hand of yours?" inquired Duffy.

"She's here," said Manuel.

"You boys quit talking, and do some fighting!" ordered the referee. "Break there, Morales!"

"Well, he talk weeth me," said Manuel, slipping out of the clinch and retreating, his gloves held high, his elbows protecting his stomach.

"Get a fire ax and open the greaser up," suggested a ringsider. "He's tied up in a knot like a tarantula!" By defensive tactics Manuel reached the end of the third round without further damage. The crowd was in an uproar, and

Mahaffey had a message from Promoter Smith which caused Manuel to blink his eyes.

"The boss says," remarked Mahaffey, "that if you don't do some fighting in the next round he'll have you thrown out of the ring, and you won't get a cent."

"But," expostulated Manuel, "he says he pay me—win, lose, or draw."

"He won't pay you anything unless you *fight*!" said Mahaffey. "You haven't taken a punch at this fellow in three rounds, and all you're doing is running and covering up. Mind now, unless you do something you'll be thrown out of the ring. What's more, Smith never lets up on a fellow that dogs it and spoils a show for him. He'll queer you and chase you out of the business. Now, get busy!"

If Manuel was entirely lacking in ambition, he was not without a keen appreciation of the silver fruits of his toil. Minus the two hundred and fifty dollars there would be no comfortable period of idleness, no new clothes, less whisky, and fewer cigarettes.

Manuel's first wild impulse was to rush out of his corner, and stake everything on a whirlwind exchange of blows. Then he remembered the two jaw punches, and the overhand right on the forehead and his valor oozed away. Why mix it with a man who favored that style of fighting? Manuel knew that if he could get at Duffy's jaw with his right hand, the battle would not be quite so one-sided, but he had noticed that no matter how careless the Irishman seemed to be, his left shoulder was always well hunched to cover the vulnerable spot. If he could only get that shoulder down——

The crowd cheered derisively when Manuel left his corner.

"Why don't you fight, Morales?"

"Yellow as a canary bird!"

"Give him a little more booze and a knife!"

"Come on!" begged Duffy. "Ain't you got any nerve at all? Take a chance!"

And, by way of encouragement, he proceeded to jab Manuel's battered nose. Manuel began to use his left, hooking and jabbing cautiously, but there was no steam behind the effort, and Duffy laughed at him. The men in the audience slipped on their automobile coats and edged over toward the aisles.

"A rotten show!" was the general verdict.

The round was half over when Duffy found an opening for a right uppercut, and whipped it in like a flash. It had speed, and it was a showy punch, but that was all, for Duffy was not "set" to lift his weight into the

blow, yet the Mexican flopped forward to his knees, his head resting upon the floor. The referee took one disgusted look, and began to count.

"He ain't hurt; he's quitting!" bawled Duffy, waving his hands at the crowd. "I didn't hit him hard enough to break an egg!"

Manuel heard him distinctly, and his small, black eyes flashed fire. He had all he could do to repress a grin. Once more he pulled himself together, and at the nine count he came unsteadily to his feet, eyes vacant, jaw sagging, reeling like a drunken man—as indeed he was.

"Good night!" said Mahaffey, with a snort. "Pipe his knees. And that didn't look to me like a hard punch, either."

Some such thought flashed through Duffy's mind at the same time. Possibly he had been mistaken about the force in that uppercut. He swung again, Manuel dodged awkwardly, and stumbled into a clinch, his legs wide apart and quivering, and his head rolling from side to side.

"Gee!" grunted Kid Morales. "That one, she shake me up!" His eyes were half closed to a beady glitter, every muscle was relaxed, and he seemed helpless.

"Yes, and I'll shake you up worse the next time!" said Duffy.

"Break!" ordered the referee. "Let go, Morales!"

Manuel cautiously disengaged his right hand, and stretched his arm at full length, the glove slightly higher than Duffy's head. By such a motion a fighter sometimes signifies his intention of breaking "clean," and Duffy so interpreted it. He dropped his guard instantly, and stepped back, sneering.

What followed came so swiftly that no warning yell could reach Duffy's ears. As the Irishman's left glove fell at his side, Manuel stiffened from heel to shoulder, the great back muscles leaped under the skin, and down came the right hand like a slanting thunderbolt, full on Duffy's unprotected jaw. It was half hook, half swing, a blow which would have felled a Sharkey, and wrapped in that brown glove was Manuel's hope of two hundred and fifty dollars—the new clothes, the whisky, the cigarettes, and the long, comfortable period of idleness.

Duffy toppled forward upon his face, and never twitched a muscle while the referee counted him out.

IV

In the dressing room Kid Morales drank the rest of the whisky, and listened to an indistinct mumbling on the other side of the partition.

"But—what *was* it? What happened?" a querulous voice was asking over and over.

"You dropped both hands—like a sucker," said Duffy's manager, "and the greaser copped you on the jaw. Didn't I *tell* you to watch out for his right hand? He stalled like he was hurt, and you fell for it."

"I'll fight him again!" wailed Duffy. "There ain't a greaser on earth can lick me, Tommy! You know it!"

Many fists drummed on the door.

"The newspaper boys," said Mahaffey. "They want to see you."

"Sure!" said Kid Morales, regretfully examining the empty flask. "Let 'em come in."

The victor sat on the edge of the rub-down table, and received congratulations modestly—or as modestly as a man may when clad only in a pair of fighting shoes.

"What do you want to say about the fight?" asked one of the reporters.

"You want to know?"

"Sure thing!"

"You put it in the paper, w'at I say?"

"You bet we will!"

Manuel raised his hand.

"Everybody be quiet!" he said. On the other side of the partition the muttering died away, and each word carried straight into the hostile camp.

"Listen!" said Kid Morales. "You think maybe I hit that fella pretty hard, no? Bah! I jus' rap him easy—like so!" He made a languid pass through the air with his right hand. "I jus' hit him once in all the fight. You ask me w'at I got to say. I tell you: *Duffy, he queet like a yella dog—he queet!*"

EASY PICKING

"Old Bird" Bennett was not a prophet, nor in any way related to one; nevertheless, he was considerably without honor in his home town. Worse than that, he was out of a job, and there were those who talked of tarring and feathering him and riding him upon a rail.

His was not a case of talent passing unrecognized. The small matter of a business arrangement with another gentleman of the gloved legion leaked out and became common scandal, whereat the outraged public arose and howled like a wolf in the snow. The Old Bird was at once placed upon the black list until such time as the fight fans should forget that he had allowed "T-bone" Riley to stay ten rounds and take a bloodless decision over him. When a man bets two to one on his excellent judgment and loses because of prearrangement on the part of his favorite, he is apt to recall the circumstances for some time.

"Just my luck!" whined Old Bird, with bitterness. "T-bone has to go and get his nose wet and pull a George Washington on me!"

Old Bird had often feelingly referred to himself as the unluckiest fighter living, and the last turn of affairs had gone far to convince him of the truth of the statement. With just a tiny bit of luck, he might have been the lightweight champion of the world instead of the king of all pork-and-beaners and the toughest trial horse in the Queensberry stable.

Old Bird was a pugilistic fixture. Some years before he had fluttered into town from nowhere, unannounced by any press agent, and carrying his credentials in his right hand.

It so happened that Peter Mulcahey, fight promoter and friend of all deserving battlers who were inclined to be reasonable about money matters, was grooming Tommy Derrick, a promising pork-and-bean performer, for the main-event class. Mulcahey, a shrewd judge of a drawing card, believed that one more hollow victory would put Derrick in line for higher honors, but the local pork-and-bean boys, valuing their health, refused to appear in the rôle of a stepping-stone. At this juncture, Old Bird furled his dusty wings in Peter Mulcahey's outer office, and announced his willingness to "meet any one-hundred-and-thirty-three-pound boy in the world." The odd thing about it was that he meant it.

Peter Mulcahey was relieved. The gods of sport and good business demanded a sacrifice, and here was one, ready to hand, clamoring to be offered up for the nominal sum of twenty-five dollars. Old Bird was elected without a dissenting vote, and the club press agent referred to him hopefully as "a rising lightweight of the Middle West."

Old Bird trained as much as two whole days, and, having been advanced a small sum for living expenses, entered the ring full of mince pie and stern determination. He had never heard of this man Derrick, never seen his picture in the *Police Gazette*, and consequently did not think much of his prowess. Tommy Derrick entertained similar sentiments regarding Old Bird, a condition of affairs ripe for surprises.

The result of that battle was a severe disappointment to Peter Mulcahey, for his local star set with great suddenness, never to rise again. Mr. Nobody from Nowhere waded through Tommy Derrick with a succession of right swings mostly fetched from the hip, and Tommy went direct from the ringside to the hospital, where he remained until his ribs grew together again. Old Bird was immediately matched with another pork-and-beaner with like result, barring the hospital bill. In six months Bennett established himself as the best third-rater in the West, and Peter Mulcahey graduated him into the main-event class, where men are paid in three figures instead of two.

Old Bird whipped every second-rater whom he could hit with his right hand, and passed on into the first division, where he met what he called hard luck, and the wisest of the ringside critics called "class." He took a few draws because of his aggressiveness, scored one famous knockout, and lost four decisions on points. The great difference between a first-class fighting man and a second-rater lies in speed; the top-notchers were too fast for Old Bird. He could not hit them; he was a selling plater against stake horses.

Peter Mulcahey stuck to him nobly, and at last secured for him a match with the Old Master, the negro champion, last of that great galaxy of lightweight stars of the nineties. The Old Master no longer had the fire of youth, the vitality which had carried him through one hundred battles, but he retained his marvelous cleverness, and Old Bird's chance for a world's championship disappeared in a blinding flurry of jabs, jolts, hooks, and uppercuts which left him dazed and battered at the end of twenty rounds. From beginning to end, Old Bird never ceased swinging his pulverizing right at that lean, brown jaw; not once had he been able to hit the mark. The Old Master made him miss by a fraction of an inch, and Bennett blamed his luck when he should have given the negro credit for remarkable judgment of distance.

"Yo' pretty *strong*, white boy," the Old Master mumbled to him in the eighteenth round, "but thass all—yes, thass all. Some day yo'll hit somebody with that right swing an' knock him up in the gallery."

That night marked the top of the grade for Old Bird. After that his way led downhill. Before very long, he found himself established as the trial horse for all newcomers—the younger men with championship aspirations. If he whipped them, people said it was to be expected; he got little credit, and less money. If they whipped him, they passed on to better matches. Old Bird Bennett was the official stumblingblock in the lightweight path, and the fate of a stumblingblock is to be kicked by every traveler who passes that way.

It was during the period of his decline that Old Bird made his business arrangement with T-bone Riley. T-bone was no embryo champion, and the match was made as a "filler." Old Bird should have whipped him in three rounds without a minute's preparation, and, this being the general opinion, Bennett ruled the favorite at two to one. His admirers were grateful for the sudden influx of T-bone money, and snapped it up hungrily. Then Old Bird went into the ring, and boxed like an inebriated fishwife. T-bone stabbed him for ten sickening rounds without a return. The referee saw his duty, and did it like a man, the gallery roared murder, and still all would have been well, had not T-bone celebrated his victory in a manner to muddle the intellect and loosen the tongue. He told all he knew. It was not much, but it was enough.

Honest confession is said to be good for the soul, but some people who have given it a trial claim that it is bad for business. The reporters heard about it, of course, and the next day a great moral wave swept over the pugilistic community. Old Bird's picture was in all the papers, together with the announcement that Peter Mulcahey had barred him as an undesirable citizen and a faker.

Old Bird made it his business to hunt up his loquacious friend Riley, and when he found him the ten-round decision was speedily reversed, but T-bone's broken jaw did not mend matters—it only made them worse. It was as if Bennett had pleaded guilty to the indictment.

Having been accustomed to fight whenever he ran short of funds, Old Bird soon found himself in a nasty predicament. He might have gone to work, of course, but no man who has ever fought a champion of the world for twenty rounds is likely to do that sort of thing unless there is no other method of obtaining three meals a day.

After a precarious few weeks, during which time Old Bird learned that the friends of a man's prosperous days seldom follow him into an eclipse, he became a sparring partner, working for board and lodging and fifteen dollars

a week. He boxed with men whom he might have beaten in a punch, and the knowledge was gall and wormwood to him. While other boys fought, he squatted in the corner, nursing a towel and telling himself that he could lick "the both of 'em" in the same ring. Sometimes he told himself the truth, for Old Bird had never lost his annihilating right-hand swing, and when he hit a man squarely with it the floor came up and bumped him.

Old Bird went regularly to call upon Peter Mulcahey, but that moon-faced philanthropist had but one answer for him:

"Not yet; the paper boys won't stand for it."

"Aw, they've stood for lots worse frames!" said Old Bird, one day. "You know they have!"

"*I* know it, but *they* don't," said Peter. "There wasn't anybody to get drunk and tell 'em. You was advertised by your loving friends, and now you've got to lay dead until it blows over. See?"

"But I can't wait always!" Bennett expostulated. "I'm gettin' to be a *old* guy, and what fighting I do has got to be done pretty quick." (He was almost twenty-seven, which is a green old age for a pork-and-beaner.) "Couple more years and I'm *through*."

"You might go somewhere else and try your luck," suggested Peter.

"A swell chance!" said Old Bird sarcastically. "I ain't got no dough, I ain't got no manager, I ain't got nothing. If I just had a manager now—wit' money—aw, what you laughin' at? Worse fighters'n me has had managers!"

II

Then, out of a clear sky, the manager with money put in an appearance. Joe Terry, a local sporting man, returned from a campaign through the Northwest, and lost no time in locating Old Bird.

"I understand you're in bad around here," said Terry.

"Worse than that," said Old Bird dejectedly. "Just because I boxed a feller easy and lost a decision on points, they took my cue out of the game. By the looks of things, I'll have to get me a sandbag and start sticking people up on the dark streets."

"I know a better way than that," said Terry. "Perfectly legitimate, too. We can cop all the money in Oregon."

"I never knew they had any money in Oregon," said Old Bird. "That's a farmer State, ain't it?"

"That's why they've got money," said Terry. "Every one of those apple growers has got an automobile and a bank roll."

"Well, go on; go on! Spring it!" urged Old Bird impatiently.

"There's a little place up there called Parkerton," said Terry, "and every man in the town is a sport. They've got a kid named Arthur Cullen—a lightweight—and they think he can lick anybody in the world. He's cleaned all the farmer boys in that section, put out a few mill hands, and licked a few tramp fighters that they brought in for him. I saw him fight a fellow from Seattle last week, and those apple tossers were offering three and four to one on Cullen. I took a little of the short end on general principles, but my man fought like a lobster. The point is this: Why can't you go up there under an assumed name and go to work in a livery stable or something——"

"Me? Work?" There was reproach in Old Bird's tone. "What do I know about horses?"

"Well, of course it wouldn't have to be a stable job," said Terry soothingly. "Anything would do so long as it's work. You couldn't go up there as Bennett, the fighter, because the first thing they'd do would be to look up your record, and then they wouldn't give odds. Maybe they wouldn't even let Cullen fight you. If you should drift in there like a bum out of a job and go to work, they wouldn't suspect anything, and you could get into a few rough-and-tumble fights, just to get the town people to talking about you. They'll do the rest because they are always on the lookout for somebody to fight Cullen. You show up bad in your training—box like a hayseed, and get knocked down a few times—and they'll bet their heads off at two and three to one. I'll come along and grab every dollar in sight, you biff this apple picker once on the chin, and we cut the money even. How does that sound to you?"

"Fair enough," said Old Bird. "How much money will you bet?"

Joe Terry unbuttoned his vest, and brought out a small, black wallet, from which he extracted four one-thousand-dollar bills. He spread them out on the table and looked at Old Bird.

"Where did you say this place was at?" asked the fighter.

III

The big-town sports are apt to sneer at their brethren in the villages, but nowhere does the sporting spirit burn with whiter, fiercer flame than in the small centers of population. The little-town sports buy the annual record books, and study them with great care. Their knowledge lacks the personal element, but it is astonishingly complete from a statistical standpoint. They are familiar with the performances of the athletic idols of the past and present; they know the name of the horse which holds the quarter-mile

record; they can tell offhand how many rounds Sullivan and Kilrain fought for the championship, and they can reel off a dizzying string of big-league batting averages. They are not given to betting blindly, but once convinced that they have a "good thing," they produce the bank roll and bet until nothing but the woolen string remains.

Parkerton was a very sporty little town, as the new waiter in Wade's Restaurant observed. He went about his duties with a supercilious air, but, though his nose was slightly tilted, his eyes and ears were alert, and he learned many things of an interesting nature. His proud spirit rebelled against his menial task, but he comforted himself with the reflection that it would not last long. It was hard work to conceal his contempt for these "small-town jays," but he did the best he could, and cast about him for an opening.

On the third day of Old Bird's martyrdom, a quiet, clear-eyed youth entered the restaurant, and ordered liver and bacon. The young man wore a small diamond upon his finger, and another one in his tie, and, after he had gone, Old Bird found a silver quarter upon the table.

"You know who that was?" asked the cook, with the air of one about to impart startling information.

"Nah," said Old Bird.

"That was Art Cullen," said the cook, pausing to note the effect.

"What *of* it?" asked Old Bird woodenly. "What did he ever do?"

"You never heard of Art Cullen, the fighter?" demanded the cook, in amazement.

"No; and nobody else ever did," said Old Bird. "Who did he ever lick?"

"He's licked everybody he ever fought," said the cook. "Fred McGilligan, Johnny Nash, Young Nelson, Kid Dickey, and a whole raft of lightweights. Guess you've heard of Kid Dickey, ain't you? He's from Portland, and a tough boy. Cullen put him out in three rounds."

"Why don't he go and lick some *real* fighters?" said Old Bird. "I never had a glove on in my life, and I'll bet he can't lick me, even."

"Huh!" sneered the cook. "You wouldn't be a mouthful for that boy! He'd just hit you once, and you wouldn't know nothing for an hour."

"Wouldn't I?" said Old Bird, with a grin. "I can scrap a little myself."

"That's what they all say," remarked the cook. "They all think they can fight until this boy gets at 'em, and then they change their minds. He's a hum-dinger, I tell you!"

"He's a farmer, that's what he is!" said Old Bird.

"Well, they're goin' to get a good man to come up from San Francisco to try him out," persisted the cook. "Billy Gillis, or Mike Baldwin, or some of them good boys."

Old Bird, who had knocked out Gillis in one round and Baldwin in five, laughed scornfully.

"You can laugh if you want to," said the cook; "but don't get the idea that this boy Cullen ain't a fighter. Jim Dabney—he runs the pool room, you know—says that Cullen can hit harder than any lightweight he ever saw, and he's seen lots of 'em. Jim used to live in Denver. He ought to know."

An indignant knife-handle tattoo summoned the new waiter to the front of the house and ended the conversation, which was just as well, for he had something to think about. If the local sports were planning another match for Cullen, there was no time to lose. Old Bird had not been favorably impressed with Terry's suggestion that he should take part in a street fight for the sake of the advertising. He had all the seasoned fighter's distaste for giving away that which he might sell. Besides, he believed he knew a better way.

The next day Cullen, accompanied by three friends, entered the restaurant. Old Bird set his chin at an aggressive angle, and sauntered over to the table, fumbling in his pocket as he went.

"What have you got to-day?" asked Cullen of the new waiter.

"This!" said Old Bird, and tossed a twenty-five-cent piece upon the table. "You was in here yesterday and left this by your plate. If you did it by accident, all right; but if you thought you could slip me a measly two-bits on the side, you've got another think coming. See? No apple picker like you can hand me anything!"

Cullen looked up in some surprise, and his friends stirred uneasily in their chairs.

"Why, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings," said Cullen quietly. "I thought——"

"What do I care what you thought?" snarled Old Bird. "Just because you've licked a few tramps, you think you're a big feller around here, don't you? You keep your two-bit pieces, and buy a new hat. You need it. You a fighter! I never had a glove on in my life, but I'll bet I can take you out in the street now and show you up!"

Cullen's face grew red, more from embarrassment than anger.

"Pshaw!" said he. "I'm sorry you feel that way about it. I wouldn't have done it if I had known—honest I wouldn't. You oughtn't to get sore about a little thing like that——"

"What I said goes!" interrupted Old Bird. "I can lick you, bare knuckle, with the gloves, rough-and-tumble—any old way. I'd just like to show you where you get off!"

Cullen looked at his friends, and smiled sheepishly.

"I don't fight for fun," he said, at length. "I quit that a long time ago."

"Backing up, are you?" sneered Old Bird. "I thought so. You don't look like a game guy to me!"

"Hold on!" said one of Cullen's friends. "There's a way to settle this. If you think you can fight, Art here will give you a match and you can have it out in the ring and get some money for it. Is that all right, Art?"

"Sure," said Cullen. "Any time."

"You're on!" said Old Bird quickly. "Gimme two weeks to train in, and I'll knock the swell head off this guy. I got to have that long to get used to fighting with gloves on."

"That's all right," said Cullen. "Take as long as you want."

That night there was but one topic of conversation in Parkerton. The tough waiter at Bob Wade's place had been looking for trouble, and was about to find it. The situation made a strong appeal to Parkerton's sense of humor.

"It was rich!" said Clay Eaton, one of the restaurant party. "This tough guy comes up and bawls Art out about a tip. Wanted to go in the middle of the street with him. Then Frank Pierson suggested making a match of it, and the waiter says he'll have to have two weeks to get used to fighting with gloves on his hands! Can you beat that? Art's pretty mad at this bird, and he's liable to go at him strong. He's never walloped a fellow as hard as he could yet, and what he'll do to this hasher will be plenty! I wouldn't miss it for an acre of apple trees!"

The humor of the situation broadened and deepened when "George Williams"—the new waiter's name—went into active training. His "road work" consisted of a leisurely two-mile stroll, and in the afternoons, clad in a bathing suit and rubber-soled tennis shoes, he plunged about the back room of the town gymnasium, stabbing the air with awkward lefts and swinging his right ponderously.

"Say, what d'you call that stuff?" asked the local sports.

"Shadow boxing!" panted George Williams. "It makes you clever and fast on your feet." To prove it, he gave an exhibition which would have disgraced a bogged hippopotamus, and the sports laughed and winked behind their hands.

Williams announced that he would be pleased to box with volunteers, and Dan Lacey, a bookkeeper, put on the gloves with him, and almost knocked him out in the second round.

"You hit too hard!" puffed Williams, feeling his jaw. "A sparring partner ain't supposed to try and kill a man!"

"You ought to have told me sooner," grinned Lacey. "Come on; I won't hit you hard again."

"I got enough for to-day," said Williams; and that night it was all over town that Dan Lacey had made the tough waiter quit with a tap on the jaw that would not have broken a window-pane.

The next day a well-dressed stranger arrived from the south, and announced that he was in the market for unimproved real estate. Abe Augustine, who dealt in lands, showed the visitor several promising bits of property, and almost sold him ten acres in an adjoining valley. Almost, but not quite.

"What do you do here to amuse yourselves?" asked the stranger, who said his name was Penfield.

"Going to have a prize fight next Thursday night at the opera house," said Augustine. "You ought to stay and see it. It won't be much of a fight because it'll be too one-sided. We got a kid here that can knock the socks off any lightweight in the Northwest."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Penfield. "I'd like to see him work."

"I'll take you over to his place this afternoon," said Abe obligingly. "He sure can step some."

Penfield watched Cullen go through his stunts with an experienced eye, reserving his opinion until the finish.

"Well," said Abe, "what do you think of him? Ain't he pretty nifty with his hands?"

"Too slow to suit me," said Penfield. "He's wide open all the time, and he has to set himself for every punch. I don't like him."

"I'd like to bet you that he wins," said Abe, with an eye to business.

"I may take some of that after I've seen the other man," replied Penfield. "Almost anybody ought to lick this Cullen."

"Bet you two to one he wins!" said Abe suddenly.

"Show me the other boy first," said Penfield cautiously.

"I guess he's over at the gymnasium," suggested Abe. "What say we go there now?"

"I don't mind," said Penfield.

Williams, despite his awkwardness and his other failings, seemed to make quite an impression on the stranger.

"Now, that's my notion of a fighter!" said Penfield heartily. "He hasn't had the experience, of course, and he isn't very clever, but he's determined, and I like the way he swings that right hand. He'll stop Cullen if he hits him."

"Bet you two to one!" said Abe.

"How much?" asked Penfield, reaching for his pocketbook.

That night the news sped about town that there was some easy money at the Parkerton House, and there was an immediate scramble to reach it first.

Penfield did not seem particularly anxious, but it was possible to talk him into backing the short-ender, and that was all Parkerton wanted to know. It was not, Penfield explained, that he regarded Williams as a good fighter, but that, in his opinion, Cullen was a very bad one. Local pride was injured by this argument, and avenged itself by piling up the dollars on Parkerton's pride. Penfield covered it slowly and at times with some show of reluctance.

"You fellows may know more about a fighter than I do," he would remark, "but I think I'm a fair judge, and I can't see this Cullen at all. He didn't show *me* anything."

"Better watch him Thursday night," suggested the local sports. "He may show you something then."

"I'll do that," said Penfield. "And don't you overlook this boy Williams. He may be green, but his heart is in the right place. He looks like a fighter to me."

On Wednesday night Joe Terry issued his orders.

"We've got a barrel of money up," said he, "and I want this Cullen knocked out. On a decision, we'd be sure to get the worst of it. And when you crack him, let it be on the jaw. Give 'em no chance to call a foul."

"What's he look like?" growled Old Bird. "I never saw the sucker except in his street clothes."

"He ain't a bad boy at all," said Terry. "Boxes well, but he's awfully slow. You can time him with that right hand of yours and knock him into the middle of next week."

"Think anybody's onto us?" asked Old Bird anxiously.

"Not a soul!" chuckled Terry. "They think they're putting one over on me, and every time they look my way they have to laugh. Oh, you can trust these small-town boobs to trim you for the last cent you've got! Why, one of 'em was in this afternoon, wanting to bet two hundred against my watch and

pin! They think I'm so foolish that I oughtn't to be trusted with money. That hash-house quarrel of yours was a clever stunt. They're all looking for a grudge fight."

"Another thing," grunted Old Bird, "we better be ready to vamp on that midnight train. You never know how these small-town guys will take a trimming. As soon as I cut loose they'll tumble that something has been slipped over on 'em, and they may turn nasty."

"I bought the tickets the day I got to town," said Joe.

IV

Every sport in Parkerton stood up and yelled when Cullen walked out on the stage and entered the ring. Percy Hoskyns, the leader of the town orchestra, waved his fiddle bow and struck up "Hail to the Chief."

When Old Bird appeared, he was greeted with a generous cheer and a great deal of laughter. He had discarded the bathing suit and the tennis shoes, and was correctly garbed in ring attire. He looked out over the flaring gas jets which served as footlights, and grinned.

"Do your laughin' early, you rubes!" he muttered. "You won't feel so fresh in a little while."

Joe Terry strolled upon the stage and inspected Cullen's bandages and gloves. He explained that as he was backing the other man he could not afford to take chances. A Portland saloon keeper had been imported to act as referee, and Jim Dabney, master of ceremonies, introduced him in a ten-minute speech which dragged in the climate, the bumper apple crop, the increase in real-estate values, and the glorious future of Parkerton. The true Western booster never overlooks an opportunity for advertising.

"Duke me, kid!" said Old Bird to Cullen, when the two men appeared for instructions. Cullen was plainly surprised, but he smiled frankly and extended his glove.

"No hard feelings," said he. "May the best man win!"

"That's the dope!" said Old Bird.

When the bell rang, Old Bird danced out of his corner with the alacrity of a man going to work at a favorite trade. He feinted three times with his left, skipping in and out, and then lunged forward behind a straight jab aimed at Cullen's nose. The apple picker jerked his head aside without moving his feet. Old Bird's left lead whistled between shoulder and ear, and he floundered, wide open and helpless, into a terrific smash over the heart. Old Bird clinched, grunting with pain and astonishment. The men who can

"slip a punch with the head" are scarce; a one-armed man might almost tick them off on his fingers. Still, it might have been an accident. Old Bird decided that it could not have been design; no apple picker ever learned Kid McCoy's tricks!

Again Old Bird circled cautiously and lashed out with a straight left; again Cullen whipped his face out of the way, and this time the trip-hammer right buried itself to the wrist in the soft roll of flesh just below the rib line. It was a savage blow, and for an instant Old Bird was very sick. He tried to hang on for a few seconds, but Cullen drove him into the open with half a dozen rasping rights and lefts which sounded like the drum solo in a Sousa march.

Old Bird hopped ten feet away, and prepared to box at extreme long range. He wanted time to think, time to readjust his opinion of this rube fighter. He had expected to surprise Cullen; Cullen had surprised him. More than that, Cullen had hit him as hard as he had ever been hit in his life, and Old Bird remembered, with regret, that he had done very little real training for this rural picnic. He was in no condition for a long, hard battle. Infighting seemed to be the rube's specialty; Old Bird decided to continue the engagement at full-arm range. He had no stomach—or, rather, too much stomach—for any more of those short smashes below the rib line. A man in first-class condition could not hope to survive many of them; a man untrained and soft about the midriff would find them plain murder in the first degree.

Old Bird made up his mind to pin his hope on the big trump which had taken so many pugilistic tricks—the one-way ticket to dreamland. He would feint the farmer open to a tremendous right swing, and knock him through the ropes and into the orchestra pit.

Old Bird began to spar carefully, endeavoring to draw Cullen into position. The apple picker's eyes twinkled; he noted that Bennett was carrying his right hand low and well back toward the hip.

"What you got there?" asked Cullen. "Why don't you shoot your sixteen-inch gun once and let's see if it's any good!"

"Come on and fight!" growled Old Bird.

"Anything to be obliging!" said Cullen, and came in like a sunbeam.

Before Old Bird could get his deadly right into action something extremely solid bumped him under the chin, and he felt the soles of his feet leave the floor. The next point of contact was the back of Old Bird's head. He was not knocked out, but for an instant it seemed that the milky way had moved into the Parkerton Opera House. It was the third time in his life that

Old Bird had been knocked flat with a single blow and the first time that it had been done with a punch which he did not know was coming. The bell ended the round at the count of eight, and Old Bird rocked back to his corner.

"What did he do that with?" mumbled the veteran, as he nosed the green bottle.

"A little short left hook," said Terry. "It didn't travel more than ten inches. For the love of Mike, watch out for this guy. He ain't as soft as he looks."

"Tell me something I don't know," muttered Old Bird. "I never even saw him start that last one. It was a beaut!"

"He's got a bad body punch there," cautioned Terry. "You ought to stop those."

"You didn't see any of 'em get by me, did you?" retorted Old Bird. "Help me out of the chair now; I'm going to stall that I'm hurt, and cop him with my right."

The bell rang, and Terry fairly lifted Old Bird to his feet and pushed him into the ring. He did not seem to want to go, and the apple growers shouted with laughter at the spectacle which Old Bird presented as he wabbled toward the center of the ring. His hands were open and swaying at his sides, his head rocked drunkenly on his shoulders, and his shoes dragged along the floor. It was a trick which he had learned from the Old Master, who in turn had learned it from Bob Fitzsimmons. Cullen, waiting for him in the middle of the ring, dropped his guard and looked appealingly at the referee. As he did so, the Old Bird led his big trump and led it from his hip. Out of the corner of his eye Cullen saw it coming and ducked his head. A matter of two inches saved him from annihilation. The big trump would have taken the trick had it not been for the sudden downward movement of Cullen's head; as it was Old Bird's glove caught him squarely on the cheek and sent him head over heels into a corner of the ring.

The Parkerton sports came up with a howl of rage.

"Foul! Foul!"

"What kind of fighting do you call that?"

"He hit him when his hands was down!"

"Dirty work! Rotten! S-s-s-s! Bo-o-o-h!"

The Portland saloon keeper knew his business. He began counting at once, walking toward Cullen as he did so. At three that young man was sprawling on his back; at four he began to collect his arms and legs; at seven he was waiting, both gloves and one knee on the floor. The referee marked

the seconds with his right arm, while with the left he repulsed the impetuous charges of Old Bird, who was dancing about like an angry fox terrier, ready to dash in with the finishing blow the instant Cullen should come to his feet. At eight the local warrior turned his head toward his corner and his left eyelid flickered perceptibly. Had Old Bird seen this, perhaps he would not have rushed in so recklessly as his opponent straightened from the floor; perhaps he might have re-remembered that there is no copyright on a "stall."

Old Bird charged with his right hand drawn back like a scythe, head forward and chin jutting well out over his chest; Cullen came from the floor with one bound, and a left hook came with him all the way. It stopped under Old Bird's chin, a skyrocket exploded in his brain, once more the stars passed in swift review, and then came thick, black darkness, impenetrable and enduring.

Light and reason returned simultaneously. Old Bird found himself reclining on a sofa in the star dressing room and a mild-faced old gentleman was putting some bottles back into a black satchel.

"Feel better now, son?" asked the doctor kindly.

"I feel worse!" mumbled the veteran. "What's the matter with my mouth?"

"You've got four broken teeth," said the doctor; "but it might have been your neck, so you can't complain."

"But I had him licked!" protested Old Bird. "He was down, wasn't he? And I went in to clean him, and——"

"And he hit you with one that he fetched from China!" snapped Joe Terry. "You're a wise guy, you are! He wasn't hurt at all; you copped him away up on the cheek bone, and he worked the stall right back. Only he got away with his, and you didn't. If this guy is a sucker, I don't know where you get your wise ones!"

There was a commotion at the door, and the victor entered, followed by Jim Dabney, the Portland referee, and as many of the local sports as could find standing room. They seemed very cheerful.

"How are you, Bennett?" asked Cullen, offering his hand.

Old Bird stared at the farmer fighter with open mouth, and Joe Terry drew in his breath with a whistling sound.

"Huh?" gurgled the defeated warrior. "What's that?"

"Oh, we smoked you out," grinned Dabney. "I had my suspicions you was a fighter the minute you hit town. When you started training I wasn't so sure, but when your friend here began to bet, I thought there was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere. This afternoon a few of us boys began comparin'

notes and countin' up bets, and then we knew that there was something doing. I got the files of the *Police Gazette* for five years up in my place, and we pawed through 'em until we found out what we was up against. Turned out all right, though, and I guess the odds were about right, eh, boys? What do you think of our little rube fighter? Pretty good, ain't he?"

"If he'll sign a contract with me," said Terry, "I'll make him the next lightweight champion; that's how good I think he is."

"You're a little bit late, friend," said Jim Dabney. "We may be hayseeds up here in Parkerton, but we know a fighter when we see him. I've got this boy tied up for ten years, and as soon as the apple crop is in I'm going to take him down to San Francisco and get a chance to bet some money on the short end for a change."

"Apples!" sniffed Terry scornfully. "I wouldn't monkey with all the apples in the world if I had a fighter like that on my staff!"

Old Bird said no more until he was hoisting himself into an upper berth on the southbound train.

"Hey, Joe!" he whispered.

Terry grunted in reply.

"A feller told me once," said Old Bird, "that all the wise guys in the cities came in from the small towns. He sure said an armful then, didn't he?"

FOR THE PICTURES

JOHN—"GRIZZLY"—GAVIN, middleweight champion of all the world, and the most distinguished knocker-out of his generation, squirmed on a chair in the star dressing room of the Imperial Vaudeville Theater and tried to do two things at once, but with indifferent success, for Nature had designed him on simple and elemental lines.

The champion was attempting to give an interview to a representative of the press—giving it as a cow gives milk, by having it wheedled out of her in driblets—and at the same time he was endeavoring to make safe and cautious double-entry into a pair of purple silk tights—quite an undertaking for a man unacquainted with high-browed reporters and unused to fleshings of any sort.

Gavin did not wish to offend the interviewer, who was young enough to denounce himself as a "special writer" and seemed sensitive about it; neither did he wish to split the tights, which were new and dangerously thin, and the mighty intellect which had dragged John Gavin from a machine shop to the very pinnacle of fame was vibrating rapidly between two points of distraction. Those who have never been bombarded with personal questions while struggling with a new pair of purple silk tights can never appreciate the delicacy of the situation.

"Er—Mr. Gavin," said the journalist hopefully, "would you mind telling the readers of the *Morning Messenger* what you think of the theatrical business? I mean how does the stage appeal to you from the standpoint of a pugilist?"

"Rotten!" growled the champion as he carefully eased a bulging calf into its silken sheath. "Rotten!"

The interviewer brightened perceptibly. Here, he told himself, was something worth while.

"You mean, then," said he eagerly, "that the moral influence of the theater is—is——"

"Moral influence, hell!" grunted Gavin. "I don't know nothing about moral influence. I ain't no preacher, and I ain't no knocker either."

"But," said the perplexed youth, "you just said the stage was rotten."

"Any business," remarked the champion, "is rotten when you want to be doing something else. I'm a fighter, I am; and I'd rather step four rounds with Cock-eyed Mahoney than make a fool of myself in front of an audience. But my manager signed a contract and it's up to me to deliver. Me, I think the show business is rotten."

"I see. Your criticism is based on purely personal grounds."

"Yeh. I guess so. Write it up any way you like. You'll do it anyhow."

The young man looked rather bewildered, but caught his breath and tried a new tack.

"Mr. Gavin," said he, "would you mind telling me why they call you 'Grizzly'? Is it because you fight like a bear?"

"If I fought like a bear," said the champion, "I would have been licked long ago. All a grizzly can do is to get you into a clinch and hug you to death. That ain't fighting."

The champion rose and surveyed his purple legs, examining their reflection in the mirror and nearly twisting his head off in order to secure a rear view.

"Then why do they call you 'Grizzly'?"

"Because I'm so hairy. They hung that name on me out West, and it'll stick, I guess. That's why I have to wear these fool things. And my chest—say, if I had 'Welcome' worked on it I could lay down on my back and pass for a door mat." Again the champion studied his reflection in the glass, running the tips of his fingers over his silken thighs. "They feel kind of smooth and nice, at that," said he, half apologetically, but with a trace of pride. "Cotton is good enough for anybody; but silk—well, silk is class. You got to admit it—silk is class. . . . Anything else you want to ask me?"

"Why, yes. Some of the boys in the office want to know how long it will take you to whip Mr. Summers. This isn't for publication, you understand. I—I think they might make some bets."

Grizzly Gavin grinned from ear to ear.

"Yeh. They might—if they knew. Listen: If I knew the answer to that question I'd win myself wealthy, snow-balling the right round in the mutuals. It's sure to be a big betting fight, and I'd get rich."

"You're confident of beating him, of course?"

Gavin stopped grinning and his brows wrinkled into an ugly scowl.

"Confident? Say, as sure as you're setting there, I'll tear his block off! I'll fix that jaw of his so he can't wag it at no more newspaper men in a

hurry! I'll knock him kicking like a shot rabbit—you can bet your last nickel on it!"

"They say that Mr. Summers is very scientific."

"Yeh," said Gavin with great scorn. "All them fighters that can't stand a good wallop, they have to be clever. They run, and they duck, and they sidestep, and they poke at you with a straight left that wouldn't dent a derby hat, but when it comes to real fighting—huh, they ain't there!"

"I gather, then, that you haven't a very high opinion of Mr. Summers."

"Don't gather the pot till all the chips is in. Swifty Summers is no soft proposition, and no push-over. He's licked some tough men. He's fast on his feet, he's clever, and he's tricky as the devil. And when he gets an opening for that right hand there ain't no cream puff in the glove when it comes across. There's a kick in it—a good kick. He's no cinch, but I'll tear into him so hard that he'll never get a chance to set himself and land with his right. I'll run him ragged, and if I can stop him in the first round I'll do it. There's one thing you can say about me if you want to—I never yet let a man stay a minute longer than I could help. I don't believe in stalling to give the crowd a run for its money. I'm out to win, and win quick. That's why they come to see me fight I'll be right on top of Summers the minute that bell rings."

"May I quote you as saying that?"

"Sure, quote me! Why not? Everybody knows that's my style of fighting. I go to 'em and trade slams till they drop. That's how I got my title, and by the way, the championship belt is in the trunk there. It cost a thousand bucks—all solid gold where it ain't silk ribbon, and that diamond ain't no phony stone, either. Want to see it?"

"I'd be delighted," murmured the reporter. "I never saw a championship belt before. I—I am not attached to the sporting department. I write special articles——"

"Yeh," said Gavin dryly as he bent over the trunk. "I kind of thought you wasn't no sporting editor when you first come in. . . . Now, this belt was presented to me by—oh, well, read for yourself what it says. Pretty good from the guys in a man's home town, eh?"

II

The American prize ring has produced hundreds of sports, four or five genuine sportsmen and a genius or two. Swifty Summers, christened Alexander Kittredge Duncan, was neither a sport nor a sportsman, but he came very close to the last classification. The proof is in the fact that though

he flourished more than a few years ago his record remains green—if not fragrant—in the memories of those who have followed the ring and ringsters for a decade or so.

Summers was the first real captain of the padded-mitt industry; the first pugilist to recognize the dollar-and-cent possibilities of the profession of fisticuffs. We have had many "price fighters" since his day, but not one of them could have taught Summers anything new in the use of the double or triple cross, or the knack of taking an unfair advantage of an opponent while making it seem perfectly fair to a referee, or the crowning art of scooping in the loosely held dollar of commerce. From time to time a great many men thought they were "managing" Summers' business affairs, but when the loot was divided they discovered that they had been in error. There was never a "manager's cut."

Starting with a fair education, Summers read books and newspapers and made a careful study of men. He could talk easily and entertainingly on any topic of general interest, and with such choice of vernacular as to be understood by a bank president or a safe blower. He looked like a gentleman, there were times when he acted like one, and he dressed with the quiet but elegant taste of a pork packer's grandson.

Lady interviewers listened to his soft, well-modulated voice and went away to rave inkily about his intelligent brown eyes, his perfect poise and the charm of his personality. Unquestionably Swifty Summers was a very smooth article. When on dress parade he might have borrowed a graduating class from the president of a female seminary; but stripped down to his warped and twisted soul he was as unscrupulous as a scorpion, and fully as dangerous. There was not a trick in his trade which he did not know and use, and sometimes he invented new ones, as was the case in his first important ring battle.

Said Cock-eyed Mahoney, the Fighting Stevedore, to his chief second: "He's a nice-spoken lad, this Summers, an' I kind o' hate to muss'm up. When we was in that first clinch he whispers to me how his father is in the gallery, and asks me not to show'm up too bad before the old man. I think I'll box easy for a few rounds, then go git'm."

"Nix!" advised the chief second. "You ain't no boxer, and he is. Tear into him!"

"No-o," said Mahoney; "he ast me like a gentleman, and I'll let'm stay a while—on account of his old man. I'll go easy at first."

While Mahoney was going easy he bumped into a right hook coming hard. When he recovered consciousness he was a sadder, madder man, but

not nearly so mad as he was later when he ascertained that Summers was an orphan.

Now Grizzly Gavin and Mahoney were friends in spite of three hard battles, and Gavin knew the story about Swifty's old man. He had heard other stories as well, and was resolved not to listen to any proposition from Summers, in the ring or out of it; but it often happens that the man who will not listen to conversation will lend both ears to the soothing rustle of greenbacks. Four days before the battle for the middleweight championship of the world Joe Wells entered Gavin's training quarters with a message from the enemy. Wells was Gavin's manager, caring no more for money than a Circassian beauty does for her hair.

"Summers wants to see us to-night," said Wells.

"Leave him tell his troubles to a policeman!" growled Gavin, who was irritable. Most men are irritable after a long siege of training.

"He's got some proposition about making a barrel of dough," continued Wells. "He wouldn't tell me what it is, but he says it's a cinch. He wants to talk it over with you and see what you think about it."

"Huh! Figuring on some kind of a frame, eh?"

"He says not. Says the fight has got to be on the level, and here's the angle I don't get. Here's his message: 'You tell that big stiff of a Gavin that he can clean up fifty thousand dollars on the side—fifty thousand without betting a cent or posting a nickel—and he'll get it no matter which one of us wins.'"

"'No matter which one of us wins!'" repeated Gavin. "I don't get the angle either. Fifty thousand dollars—and no betting to be done. I don't get it."

"He says it won't take five minutes to explain the whole business, and then you can take it or leave it. It wouldn't do any harm to listen, John."

"Yeh, but suppose we're seen talking together. Right away the papers would yell that we were framing the fight. You know, and I know, that we wouldn't frame nothing; but Summers would frame his own brother. It would look bad."

"He thought of that. He said that at ten o'clock sharp he'd drive by here in a closed hack and pick us up down at the railroad crossing."

"And the hack driver would spill it, sure!"

"Now listen, John. You ought to know that a hack driver never spills nothing. He's wise. It's part of his trade to keep his mouth shut."

"I don't care," said the champion. "I can't take chances on any newspaper talk."

"No," said Wells, "I guess you're right, John. . . . Fifty thousand bucks, whether you win or whether you lose. . . . It sounds like new stuff."

"Look here," said Gavin suddenly, "if you're so crazy to know about it why not meet the hack and tell Summers to get out. The hack can drive on, and me and you and him will have a chat—down the railroad track where it's quiet."

"Keno!" exclaimed the manager. "Might as well find out what he's got, eh?"

"Yeh," grunted Gavin. "And if he makes any funny cracks at me I'll just poke him one for luck. You tell him so."

At five minutes after ten the champion eased himself out of the back door of his training quarters, traversed an alley, skulked round two corners and arrived at the railroad crossing. The night was quite dark, but Gavin had no trouble in recognizing Summers, who stepped from underneath a tree to greet him. The challenger was far too clever to annoy Gavin with a sartorial display; he wore a thick sweater, dark trousers, rubber-soled shoes and a cap. His conversation was also suited to the occasion.

"How're you, champ? You look pretty fit."

"Never you worry about me," snapped Gavin. "I'm fit enough to knock your head off."

Summers laughed.

"When you worked in the machine shop," said he, "you quit when the whistle blew. You didn't carry your tools with you all the time. Let's not quarrel till we get paid for it."

Gavin grunted and led the way down the railroad track, followed by Summers and Joe Wells. When he had gone two hundred yards he faced about suddenly.

"Now talk," said he, "and talk quick. What have you got?"

"The softest thing in the world," replied Summers. "I've got a line on a man who can take moving pictures of this fight."

"Moving pictures?" asked Gavin stupidly.

While it may seem incredible to the youngsters, accustomed to a motion-picture theater on every downtown block, there was a time, and not so very long ago, when the amazing future of a giant industry was safely locked

inside a few strange-looking cameras; and even the men who carried them had but a faint conception of their commercial and artistic possibilities. Most of those men are now millionaires many times over.

"Moving pictures?" repeated Gavin again.

"That's it. You remember they took moving pictures of the Carson fight?"

"Yeh," said Gavin, "I heard about it."

"Well," said Summers, "they've learned a lot since then. This fellow—his name's Isaacs, and his cousin controls a string of theaters all over the country—tells me he's prepared to handle the picture end without our putting up a nickel. He says if the fight is a good one he can guarantee that our bit won't be less than a hundred thousand, cold. That's on a percentage basis, of course. The fight club might have to be cut in on a piece of the dough, but the big chunk splits three ways—just you and me and Isaacs. How does that sound to you?"

"Reasonable," chirped Joe Wells. "They made a barrel of dough out of the Carson pictures—I know that."

"And these pictures will beat the Carson pictures all hollow," said Summers. "They've made improvements in the camera."

"Yeh," said Gavin shrewdly, "it listens fine; but what does this here Isaacs mean when he says 'if it's a good fight'?"

"Why," smiled Summers, "a good fight from a picture standpoint. Lots of action——"

"There'll be action enough," growled Gavin. "There's always action when I fight."

Summers proceeded, calmly ignoring the interruption:

"Action, and it'll have to last long enough so the film'll be worth charging a dollar to see. Now, for instance, if one of us should be dropped cold in the first round the pictures wouldn't draw—the show would be too short, understand?"

"You bet I understand," sneered the champion. "Come on, Joe. We might have known this crook would spring something like that. I won't frame for nobody, dough or no dough!"

"Just a minute!" pleaded Summers. "That 'dough or no dough' stuff sounds great, but it's foolishness. You ain't such a money getter that you can afford to pass up fifty thousand bucks. Mike McCue had the title for three years before you licked him. Where's Mike now? Working in a lumber yard in Sacramento! Mike was a spender when he had it; you're blowing yours

now. Don't be a fool, Gavin! Have you got fifty thousand salted down anywhere? Have you got twenty-five? Have you got enough to live soft the rest of your life? You bet you haven't—and neither have I! Here's fifty thousand for you and fifty thousand for me; and the beauty of it is we don't have to do anything wrong to get it. We can box a nice exhibition for a few rounds and then cut loose in earnest, and they'll think we've only been feeling each other out. Fifty thousand bucks, as sure as death and taxes! . . . Do you want to go back to the machine shop when you're through fighting?"

"No-o," said Gavin, who had been thinking of Mike McCue sweating in the lumber yard at three dollars a day. "No-o, but if I fall for this what'll keep you from trying to slip one over on me?"

Summers turned to Wells with a gesture of disgust.

"No wonder he needs a smart business manager!" complained the challenger. "What will I get if I win this fight? Five or six thousand dollars at the outside; and for that I'd toss away a fortune!" He whirled and confronted the champion. "Ain't we both interested in the pictures? Use your head, Gavin, use your head!"

"Yeh," retorted Gavin, "it's my head that tells me your word ain't good for a nickel!"

"So that's it?" cried Summers angrily. "My word ain't good, eh? Well, I'll make it good with the fairest proposition you ever listened to!" He fumbled in a hip pocket, brought out a leather bill fold and opened it. "You don't trust me, Gavin, but I'm going to trust you. Here's a thousand-dollar note—oh, strike a match and look at it! It ain't Confederate money! A thousand-dollar note—and it's yours if I try to slip anything over on you. Put it in your pocket, and if I don't live up to any agreement we might make you can keep it. And you're to be the judge. I'll leave it to you when the fight is over. Is that fair or not?"

John Gavin stood with head lowered, twisting the bit of paper in his fingers. The silence lengthened until it became almost painful. He was the middleweight champion of the world, but never before had he held a thousand-dollar note in his hands.

"Where is this Isaacs?" he asked at last without looking up. "I—I guess Joe ought to have a talk with him."

"He'll be at the Occidental Hotel to-morrow morning," said Summers. "All he wants is a promise that the fight'll last at least four rounds. It's a straight business proposition with him. He can't go to a lot of expense to take some pictures that won't draw."

Gavin tucked the note in his fob pocket.

"It's a go," said he slowly, "and I'll hold this piece of dough as a forfeit. We'll box four rounds for the pictures, but—watch out for yourself in the fifth!"

"The same to you!" grinned Summers. "It's a real old knock-down-and-drag-out after the fourth round—and may the best man win!"

He held out his hand and Gavin took it.

"That'll be me," said the champion. "Yeh, I'll shake on it!"

III

A battle for a world's championship is hedged about with a tremendous amount of pomp and circumstance. The dignified preliminaries have changed very little in twenty years. The great and the near-great must be introduced to the impatient multitude, and so must every tin-eared, dent-nosed, light-weighted gladiator wishing to "challench d' winner." A cat may look at a king, and on the day of a championship event the lowly pork-and-beaner may grasp the hand which grasps a title.

The gloves must be examined by the referee, by the principals, by the chief seconds and trainers, by the towel-swingers and bottle-holders and all others considering themselves interested. Photographs must be taken showing champion and challenger crouched and scowling at each other, the referee posed in the exact center, trying hard to look like the great man he feels himself to be. These things, and many others, always happen when a championship is in the balance.

John Gavin sat in his corner, grim and silent, wearing his professional face. Preliminaries always annoyed the champion. While he waited for the clearing of the ring his eyes wandered to the pine platform where the motion-picture camera was located. It was the first one he had ever seen, and Gavin studied it curiously. Out of that insignificant box was to come the money which should erase the machine shop from his future calculations —"fifty thousand sure, maybe seventy-five," Isaacs had told Joe Wells. Gavin found himself pitying Mike McCue, whose championship had vanished and left no lucrative film record behind; and with a vague feeling of uneasiness he remembered that many of his friends were betting on him to win inside of four rounds. He knew that by abandoning his usual thunderbolt style of attack he was betraying a public confidence, but, as Joe Wells had pointed out, the gamblers wouldn't give him a cent of their winnings, and a man had a right to feather his nest deep and soft while feathers were flying.

In the opposite corner sat the challenger, noticeably pale and evidently nervous, but nodding and smiling in response to the shrill greetings of friends and backers. It is only the thick-skulled, unimaginative, old-style type of bruiser, fighting always with his hands and never with his head, who endures the final agony of waiting without feeling the strain. Tiny beads of sweat dampened Summers' forehead; his hands were in constant motion; his feet shuffled over the canvas. Not once did he glance in the direction of the motion-picture camera.

"Look at him!" said Wells to Gavin. "Scared stiff, and spitting cotton!"

"Don't fool yourself!" grunted the champion. "I seen him in three fights, and he always looks like he's licked before he starts. He's cool enough when he gets going."

The great moment arrived at last. The men, stripped to trunks and shoes, stood in their corners while the announcer bawled his way through the time-honored formula. Gavin, hairy and broad-shouldered as a gorilla, the true type of fighting man, bulked large when compared with his slender, flat-muscled opponent. High on the pine platform a sleek, oily, full-jeweled person began turning a crank, and a second later the gong cut through the tense silence.

Gavin shuffled rapidly to the center, head down and right hand poised as if to annihilate his opponent with one mighty swing. Summers met him and immediately began dancing in and out, feinting with light lefts. Gavin rushed, there was a flurry of smothered blows and they clinched. Summers' lips did not move, but his head was on Gavin's shoulder and the champion caught the message, low and reassuring.

"Make it look good, champ! Four rounds—for the pictures. You rush me and I'll block."

Gavin backed out of the clinch and rushed, his guard held low. As he plunged in, ready to swing, Summers took one lightning step forward and to the left, and as he did so he whipped his right fist across, backed up by one hundred and fifty pounds of bone, muscle and sinew. Gavin saw the blow coming, and in that astounded fraction of an instant he realized that he had been tricked into leaving his jaw wide open to the same vicious swinging hook that had finished poor, generous Mahoney. He saw it coming, and that was all. Before he could duck his head or raise his shoulder Summers' famous knockout punch crashed home on the point of his chin, and Gavin dropped like a log, face down on the canvas.

There followed an interval of blackness and oblivion, and then the prostrate gladiator became aware of a terrific volume of sound beating in on

him from four sides of the ring—the wild hysterical yelling of men who see a championship changing hands. A new note struck in, clear and sharp, very close to Gavin's ear:

"Eight!"

Then Gavin knew where he was and remembered what had happened to him. He struggled to his knees, but the sunlit arena swung in dizzying circles before his glazed eyes and there was no strength in him anywhere—nothing but weakness and a sickening sensation of nausea. He knew that he must be on his feet inside of two seconds, but his numbed brain could not transmit its commands to the sprawling limbs. Gavin dropped forward, supporting most of his weight on his hands, and in this position he heard the count reach nine.

Had his very life depended on his getting to his feet he could not have tried harder, but the paralyzing effect of that treacherous blow was not to be thrown off by a sheer effort of the will. If Gavin had succeeded in rising he would have been an open target before as merciless a fighter as ever lived, but the champion did not think of this. He only knew that he must be on his feet before the count reached ten. . . . Now if he could just get that right knee off the canvas.

A hand slapped him smartly on the shoulder and three words came to him: "Ten—and out!"

The fight was over; and Gavin had sold the championship of the world for a thousand-dollar note, which was good, and the word of a man whose word he had said was not good. He collapsed on his face and Summers picked him up and carried him to his corner.

The new champion looked down through the ropes at a white, wide-eyed young man who seemed to be trying to say something. It was Joe Wells, stunned by the sudden catastrophe to his own personal fortunes. As Summers placed the defeated fighter on his stool Gavin's eyes opened and he looked up at the man who had tricked him out of his title.

"Oh, you dog! You dog!" muttered Gavin.

Then Summers did a very clever thing. He put both arms round Gavin's neck and bent close over him. Those who were in a position to see the little tableau thought the winner was whispering words of comfort to the loser; certainly the pitying smile on Summers' face seemed to indicate something of the sort.

But this is what he was saying: "If you squeal, you big hairy stiff, this crowd'll hang you, and your manager too! If you want to get out of this place alive you'll keep your trap shut!"

Even in his shaken and befuddled condition John Gavin realized that the advice was sound. In attempting to fool the public he himself had been fooled, and dared not lift unclean hands against his partner in crime. Summers had played it very safe.

High on the pine platform, black against the westering sun, the sleek and oily Mr. Isaacs continued to turn the crank of the motion-picture camera; and as he cranked he smiled.

Perhaps he smiled because his pockets were full of winning tickets; perhaps he smiled because the film magazine of the camera was empty—had been empty all day. Mr. Isaacs was not a photographer; he was a cross between a confidence man and a sure-thing gambler. He had taken chances from time to time, but he had never taken so much as a snapshot in all his life.

IV

The San Francisco that used to be was the winter Mecca of American sports and sporting men. There is a new San Francisco now, keeping open house for all the world and making the stranger feel his welcome as he feels it nowhere else, but the race tracks, the wide-open pool rooms, the gambling houses and the great world's championship battles are things of the past. They have vanished as completely as the deep-sea-going hacks, the cable cars that used to trundle up Market Street, and the wooden buildings that once lined that great thoroughfare.

The good old days may have been bad old days—shockingly bad when judged by the strict, Middle-Western standard of morality—but many a grizzled San Franciscan mentions them with a faint sigh of genuine regret. There was always something doing in old San Francisco, especially in the gay winter season, when the ponies were running and the town swarmed with turf followers.

What wonder, then, that Swifty Summers pointed his keen nose in the direction of the Golden Gate? The second year of his championship had been kind to him. He had defended his title three times without even having his hair mussed and had completed a successful theatrical tour. All his pockets were bulging with unspent money, and well he knew what city made the highest bid for men of his kidney. He started for San Francisco, fully intending to jostle the bookmakers into the bread line.

It often happens that the man who handles his own crooked game wisely proves himself a fool when he attempts to beat the crooked game owned and backed by the other fellow. Summers, a fox in the roped arena, was a goose

in the betting ring. In the simple but expressive language of the track, the champion was a sucker for the horses.

Intent only on making a killing and confident that his exclusive inside information would cause great financial distress on Bookmakers' Row, Summers handed over to the block men the larger portion of the money that he had pried out of the effete East. The killing did not materialize and he then plunged wildly to recoup. Five as good-as-guaranteed tips went wrong one after the other, and the champion awoke to the fact that he must return to his own game.

Indolent by nature, Summers had promised himself a winter of soft living and easy money. He had no wish to undergo the weary grind of training for a hard fight; he felt that he had earned a rest. Before his bank roll grew thin he had been almost discourteous to the boxing promoters. These had urged the claims of an extremely tough youth named Dugan, a Coast product who had blazed his way to prominence, leaving a trail of battered middleweights in his wake. Summers had insisted that Dugan "get a reputation"—an excuse much used by champions when wishing to sidetrack a dangerous climber.

One rainy afternoon at the race track Summers was learnedly discussing mud runners with Omaha Slim, and keeping a wary eye on the betting ring. While thus engaged he caught a glimpse of a back and shoulders that seemed strangely familiar to him.

"Just like I'm tellin' you," Omaha was saying; "them dinky-legged beetles go good in the slop. You saw Amphion win the last race. Now on a dry track that dawg wouldn't have been one, two, nowheres. His legs would have hurt him, and——"

"Hold on a minute," interrupted Summers, shifting his position. "Ain't that John Gavin over there, with his back to us?"

"Yeh, that's him. He's round here a lot this winter."

"What's he doing?"

"Not much of anything. He's on the toboggan for fair. I guess he never got over that quick trimming you handed him. Kind of broke his heart, they say. Broke him every other way too. Yeh, he's round here, bettin' with the dollar books, doin' the best he can, same as the rest of us."

"He chased me all over the country last year," said Summers, "hollering for a return match. I let him holler."

"He won't be chasin' anybody now," said Omaha. "He's got some trouble with his back—rheumatism, maybe. And he wears a big pair of

black-rimmed cheaters, so I guess his eyes ain't what they used to be. They go quick when they go, these tough sluggers, don't they?"

"You bet. Then he's quit fighting?"

"Quit fighting everything but booze. He could have had a match with Dugan last September, but he passed it up. Prob'ly thought Dugan was hard game. Yeh, John was a good ole wagon, but he done broke down."

"Tough luck," said Summers; and nearly meant it.

Later in the afternoon he managed to contrive a meeting with the former champion. Summers expected hard words, and was even prepared to block a wild swing for his jaw, but Gavin greeted him with a mildness almost pathetic. His spirit seemed quite broken.

"Why, hello, Swifty! They told me you was here. How's things?"

"Fine," said Summers, making a swift survey of his victim.

Gavin needed a shave, a cleaner collar would not have hurt his appearance, and the suit that he wore was downright shabby.

"You look it," said Gavin. "Buy you a drink?"

Swifty accepted the invitation, and ordered a glass of sherry, but Gavin demanded his own private bottle and poured out a very stiff jolt.

"Here's luck!" said he, and gulped it down without blinking.

Summers watched him curiously out of the corner of his eye.

"Have another?" asked the champion. "I'll take a cigar this time."

Again Gavin poured a staggering libation and hurried it on its way.

"Hitting that stuff awful hard, ain't you?" queried Summers.

"The doctor tells me to lay off, but—I can stand it," answered Gavin; and as if anxious to prove his assertion he slopped out a third drink, filling the glass to the brim. "Things going fine with you, eh? Well, I wish't I could say the same. I ain't been doing much this last year—gone stale or something. But there's a battle or two left in me yet."

"Sure there is!" agreed Summers.

"You know, Swifty," said Gavin, becoming confidential after his third double portion, "that was a rotten dirty trick you played on me, and it left me in a fix where I couldn't say a word. Not a word! I fired Joe Wells, though. Yeh, I got rid of him. He oughta known that fellow Isaacs was the bunk."

"The film turned out bad," explained Summers quickly.

"But Isaacs cashed a lot of tickets in the pool rooms afterward," said Gavin. "Oh, I'm wise enough—now. You—you want to know what made

me the sorest?"

"Go ahead!" grinned Summers. "Get it off your chest."

"You wouldn't fight me again. You wouldn't make a return match. I—I thought I was entitled to one. And that stuff you handed the reporters about not having to bother with a man you'd licked in a punch—that was pretty raw too. That hurt. Yeh, you gimme all the worst of it when I was chasing you for that return match."

Gavin was reaching out to pour himself another drink, but Summers laid his hand on John's wrist.

"Maybe I was saving you for this winter," said he softly.

Gavin peered incredulously through his black-rimmed spectacles.

"Saving me? Quit your kidding!"

"But I might be kidding on the square!" persisted Summers.

"You couldn't even kid on the square!" Gavin spoke bitterly. "You won't fight me again, and you know it!"

"How much of a gate would we draw?"

"Fifteen thousand anyway, maybe twenty. The town's full of money this year. . . . But you don't mean it."

The champion patted Gavin on the shoulder, and his smile was friendliness itself.

"The reason I get away with things," said he, "is because nobody ever knows just what I mean. It's a good system. Can you put yourself in shape—some kind of shape?"

"I'd jump out of my coffin to get in shape to lick you!"

"Well," said Summers, "don't go to too much trouble on my account, old boy. I'll see you in a few days. And in the meantime cut that stuff out. Booze ain't any good to train on."

Summers walked away, but from the edge of the betting ring he glanced back toward the bar. He was in time to see Gavin swallow another large drink.

That night Andy Cullen, promoter of boxing contests, accepted an invitation to dine with Summers.

"He wants to talk business," thought Cullen as he hung up the receiver. "The bookmakers have got his dough and now he'll be reasonable."

The exact nature of the business that Summers wished to discuss proved somewhat of a surprise to Cullen.

"You want to fight Gavin again! But Gavin's all in—down and out. The fight wouldn't draw flies!"

"You're a smart fellow," grinned Summers. "You're ace-high with the newspaper men. You can make it draw."

"How?"

"By playing it up as a grudge fight. Everybody remembers how he hollered two years ago—how he chased me all over the country. To be candid with you, I didn't want to fight him then. Maybe I was a little lucky to stop him with a punch, and I didn't want to take chances on him again. It's different now. You get Gavin to come out with a challenge and a good strong statement burning me up for not giving him a return match. That'll start everybody to talking, and at the right time I'll get sore and call his bluff."

"All fine as silk," interrupted the promoter, "but Dugan is the man they want to see you fight. Gavin is drinking himself to death. He kills about a quart a day out at the track. Now, Dugan——"

Summers rapped gently on the table with his closed fist and his brown eyes grew hard as moss agates.

"Nothing—doing—on—Dugan. I told you that before. I don't mind telling you something else: I won't train for a hard fight. I'm the champion, I'm the one they want to see, and I intend to dictate terms. Gavin is the only man I'll meet. A daylight fight, and moving pictures. I'll stall along for seven or eight rounds, then I'll drop him right in front of the camera. That knowledge ought to be worth something to you—in a betting way. Now, do you want the match or not?"

"Oh, hell!" grumbled Cullen. "If you insist on robbing a graveyard I might as well be the undertaker!"

"That's talking sense. Now get hold of Gavin and break the news to him. The split will be eighty-twenty."

"That's an awful short loser's end," objected Cullen.

"It's plenty long enough for Gavin. Man alive, have you seen him lately? He looks like a bum. Oh, yes, one thing more."

"What's that?" demanded Cullen suspiciously.

"Gavin had better do his training up in the mountains, where too many wise people won't see him. I think he'll try hard to get into shape for a fight—he believes he owes me a licking; but trying and doing are two different things. Ship him to some mountain resort where he'll be out of the way. We don't want everybody in the world to know that we've picked a dead one."

"You're a wonder!" exclaimed the admiring Cullen. "You think of everything, don't you?"

"I figure all the angles," was the modest reply.

V

Mighty indeed is the noble institution known as the press.

Two days later John Gavin, assisted from his sarcophagus by Mr. Cullen's clever press agent, let out a ferocious and defiant roar, which echoed and reëchoed among the sporting pages. Summers, said Gavin, was afraid to fight him again—had been dodging him for two years. He had won the title with a lucky punch, and had proved that such was the case by refusing to make another match. Summers, said Gavin, was a fluke champion.

The fluke champion, when interviewed about the matter, managed to convey the impression that he was not fight-hungry, but stated that should this hunger develop there were others whose claims took precedence of Gavin's.

Gavin replied with a double-column blast; and the great unenlightened public began to sit up and rub its eyes, demanding to know what all the noise was about. The effect of this campaign was to stimulate interest in the former champion and create a desire to see the question settled with fists rather than linotype machines. For a solid week Summers and Gavin fought each other all over the keyboards of sporting-department typewriters, at the end of which time the champion descended from his high horse, and articles of war were signed, witnessed and put away in Cullen's safe.

Gavin went to the mountains while Summers crossed the bay, establishing his training camp at Alameda. For weeks the daily doings of the gladiators were recorded in the public prints. Both men, said the scribes, were making ready for the fight of their lives. On the eve of battle they were reported to be "in the pink of condition" and "fit as fiddles," though what a fiddle looks like when it is fit is one of the things that "no fellah can find out."

Summers was a topheavy favorite in the pool rooms at odds of two to one. The racetrack gamblers covered the short-end sympathy bets, and pooh-poohed the idea that Gavin might come back. Pugilism was not their game, but they had seen Gavin paying heavy court to his private bottle, and cheerfully bet twos to win ones. No man, they said, could fight a hard draw with John Barleycorn and knock out Swifty Summers all in the same season.

It was a foregone conclusion that the only way the grizzly could regain his title was to drop the champion for the count.

Gavin arrived in San Francisco at eleven o'clock in the morning on the day of the fight. The men were to weigh in at noon at a pool room on Eddy Street, and when the former champion and his handlers arrived the place was packed to the doors and the overflow blocked the sidewalk. There was little curiosity as far as Summers was concerned; most of the sporting men had visited his training camp and were satisfied with his condition. Gavin they had not seen, and they swallowed the newspaper reports with a grain of salt. They wanted to see the challenger, stripped to the skin, on the platform of the weighing machine. The sidewalk crowd gave Gavin a cheer when he appeared, grim and tanned and sullen, a cap pulled low over his eyes and the collar of his heavy sweater rolled up till it covered his ears. They saw no more of him than the tip of his nose and the straight line of his mouth, and they got nothing out of him, though they patted him on the shoulders and slapped him on the back and showered him with good wishes.

Gavin elbowed his way straight to the entrance, looking neither to the right nor the left. He knew that the shoulder-patters and back-slappers would give Summers the same welcome they had given him, and in his simple honest heart John Gavin hated a hypocrite. Just as he crossed the threshold the clatter of hoofs, the rattle of carriage wheels and loud cheering announced the arrival of the champion.

A grievous disappointment was in store for the lucky ones in the inner room. They saw John Gavin make the weight—they saw his lean sunburned face with the skin drawn tight over the cheek bones and the angle of the jaw, and they saw his bare legs. They wanted to see his shoulders and chest, his back—and, most of all, the muscles covering his stomach, if any. But John climbed on the platform clad in a soft gray shirt, which covered him completely from neck to knees: and the bar, set at the prescribed notch, did not even quiver. The most disappointed man in the room was Swifty Summers, hurriedly divesting himself of his clothing, pretending a lack of interest but furtively watching every move that Gavin made.

"He's a pound or so under," thought the champion. "Now is he in condition or has he been taking mud baths to get the belly off him? Hell! He can't be in condition!"

Not a word passed between the fighters, and it was remarked afterward that Gavin never even so much as looked at Summers. Summers noticed this, and it added to his slight feeling of uneasiness. Men who are about to

fight a grudge fight do not exchange pleasantries while weighing in, but it is seldom that a challenger loses a chance to size up a champion.

For the second time in his life Gavin sat in his corner and looked at a motion-picture camera. To be exact, he looked at a whole battery of cameras, for film will buckle and Cullen was taking no chances. Gavin scowled and nursed the bulge of his right glove in the cup of the left, was thinking of Mr. Isaacs—Mr. Isaac and the camera that did not shoot because it was not loaded. Gavin's chief second nudged him.

"Hey! Wake up! They want you for the snapshots! Lemme have that bathrobe."

Gavin shook his head and marched to the middle of the ring, completely covered from neck to heels. Not since he entered the arena had he shown anything but his ankles, and this prolonged exhibition of modesty was more than a nervous man could bear.

"Going to wear that thing all the afternoon?" sneered the champion. "Afraid to take it off, or what?"

Gavin did not even turn his head in Summers' direction. He seemed to be giving all his attention to the fussy little photographer. He kept his opponent under tension to the very last instant, then tossed his bathrobe behind him and drew a deep breath, his great hairy chest rising almost to his chin. Several thousand citizens drew a deep breath with him, letting it out in low whistles of amazement and admiration, for if ever a fighting man looked fit it was John Gavin that day.

Summers knew condition when he saw it, and here was a miracle—a broken-down, tippling has-been suddenly returned to his prime. The lean flanks, the hard ridges guarding the abdomen, the powerful shoulder muscles rippling under the hairy skin—this was the Gavin of two years ago—Gavin, or a counterfeit that would have deceived the élite.

Yes, it was the physical shell of John Gavin; but what was inside it? And how had he managed to turn back the clock? As they fell into fighting pose the challenger looked the champion straight in the eye and grinned.

"I got you where I want you now," said John. "Right where I been trying to get you for two years. Look me over!"

"Look you over!" answered the quick-witted Summers. "I'll knock you over, same as I did before!"

"When you used to be a pool shark, trimming suckers," said Gavin, "did you carry your cue with you all the time? We're here to get our pictures

took, not to fight. You'll get all the fighting you want in a few minutes."

"Gentlemen! Gent-lemen!" murmured the referee.

When the gong rang it was the old Gavin who came charging out of his corner, bent on fighting his old fight—a human battering ram hurrying into action at close range. Summers had been given a moment in which to think, and he had decided on a plan of battle based on the assumption that the challenger was nothing more than the hard-looking shell of his former self. How could a man drink a quart of whisky a day and come back—in five weeks? The thing was an impossibility!

"He looks good," Summers had said to his seconds, "and it's a cinch he's worked hard, but he can't last. I'll keep away from him for a few rounds, and when he begins to slow up I'll pick him to pieces at long range."

The plan was a good one, but before the fight was ten seconds old Summers realized that it would be extremely difficult to keep away from Gavin for any length of time. The champion feinted and danced, sidestepped and turned, twisted and dodged, but Gavin was always there in front of him, hammering away with both fists. Summers ducked into a clinch, but was glad to duck out of it again. He prided himself on the strength of his arms, but he might as well have tried to pin the pistons of a locomotive as to smother those short-tearing jolts to his midsection. Gavin was too strong to be handled in the clinches, and the punishing power in the few long-range body blows that crashed through the champion's guard warned him not to stand and play for an opening through which to shoot his famous right hook.

Driven into a corner, Summers tried to clinch again. This time Gavin almost cracked his ribs in a crushing embrace, holding him long enough to ask him two questions:

"Thought you was picking on a cripple, hey? What do you think of your cripple now?"

Having asked his questions Gavin hurled Summers halfway across the ring and renewed the attack. Round and round they went, Summers retreating under cover of a hurried and harmless left jab, Gavin crowding him closely, and finding time to talk to his man between flurries:

"You fought me to reform me, hey? . . . Thought I was hitting the booze pretty hard? . . . So did everybody else. . . . Guess that's the reason you didn't bother to train. . . . Looked pretty soft to you, didn't I? . . . Well, I'm the hardest soft guy you ever saw!"

"What's he talking about?" demanded Summers' chief second when the round was over. "I never saw him talk in a fight before."

"He's put one over on me somehow," mumbled the champion. "I don't know how, but he's done it."

"He ain't put nothin' over on you yet. He can't hit you. You'll lick him, sure."

"Yes," said Summers, "I'll lick him, but—I wished I'd trained harder for this bird!"

Eminent experts agree that the champion's only chance to retain his title came early in the second round. Gavin slipped and left an opening for his jaw, and when Summers saw it he forgot all about his agreement that there should be eight rounds of film—forgot everything but the opportunity to extricate himself from a dangerous situation. Quick as a flash Summers set himself and let fly with his main battery, putting into the shot everything that he had or was or hoped to be. It was the sort of right-hand punch that makes and unmakes champions, it was beautifully timed and perfectly executed, it went straight to the chin, and it dropped John Gavin to his knees.

The referee began to count, marking time with his right hand and holding Summers at bay with his left. Gavin shook his head, like a swimmer coming to the surface after a dive. Then he looked up at Summers skirmishing in and out, his right hand poised for the finishing blow; and as he looked, Gavin's mouth curved into a scornful grin. He gathered himself together as a sprinter gathers himself for a crouching start.

"Just wanted to see if you could hurt me, Swifty. . . . You can't; it ain't in you. Now look out for yourself!"

He came to his feet with a rush, diving straight at Summers, who stood his ground and aimed a short uppercut at Gavin's chin. The uppercut missed connections, but Gavin's right fist did not. It crashed home just below the rib line, and it sent the champion reeling backward to the ropes, sick and dizzy.

Very few world's champions have lost their titles without making a desperate attempt to hold them. Summers was tricky and unscrupulous; he took the best of it whenever he could and disdained the even break; but underneath all his treachery and meanness was the heart of a fighting man. The tide of battle had turned against him with a swiftness almost incredible, but with the ropes chafing his back the champion made his stand, fighting as he had never fought in his life. Time after time he rocked Gavin's head with rights and lefts, putting into them everything that the damaging body blow had left him, and taking a savage beating in return. Just before the bell rang Gavin landed another pile-driving punch below the rib line and Summers'

knees bent under him. He would have slipped to the floor had not Gavin hauled him into a clinch.

"You're licked," said John, "but I ain't through with you yet. Die game —for the pictures!"

As far as Summers was concerned the fight ended then and there. He went to his corner whipped and knowing that he was whipped. He could never hope to hit Gavin any harder than he had hit him in the second round, and Gavin had stayed down only five seconds.

It was in the third round that Gavin added insult to injury. He had just flattened Summers' nose with an overhand swing, and was holding the champion on his feet with his face turned to the camera so that the blood would show.

"I musta looked pretty bad to you that day at the track," said Gavin. "Glasses, and a lame back and everything. Yeh, I practiced looking bad for a couple of months before you showed up. I knew you wouldn't fight me again unless you thought I was all in. You fell for it. . . . All right, referee. He's hanging on; I ain't."

And later:

"The only way to catch a crook is to play him crooked. . . . There's real fillum in these cameras to-day. . . . Turn your head a little so they can get a picture of how pretty you look!"

With half a minute remaining, Gavin shot a short ugly hook through Summers' wavering guard and knocked out three of his most cherished teeth. The champion flopped limply into a clinch and received his final bit of astounding information:

"Burnt sugar and water looks a lot like booze. . . . Pours like booze, too, but it don't do you no harm. . . . If it did I'd be dead now. . . . Yeh, I guess the bartender that made my private stock'll win him some dough to-day!"

Summers' chief second waved the bottle of smelling salts back and forth under the champion's battered nose.

"He's murderin' you," said the adviser. "Can't you mix it or nothing?"

"Burnt sugar!" groaned Summers. "Burnt sugar and water!"

"Hey, have a sniff o' this!" ordered the chief second. "Your mind is wanderin'!"

Toward the end of the fourth round the crowd began to yell at the referee to stop the fight. Summers was barely able to remain on his feet and Gavin

was playing with him, hitting him at will as he wabbled wearily along the ropes.

The referee glanced doubtfully at Andy Cullen, huddled up in his ringside box, a life-size portrait of woe too deep for words. Cullen had bet more money than he cared to think about, but he owned a third of the motion pictures, and a clean knockout might enhance their value and put him even with the world again. The promoter shook his head slightly, and the referee sidled over to where Gavin was alternately thumping Summers in the ribs and holding him on his feet to keep him from falling.

"Gwan, John!" muttered the official. "Gwan, finish it! He's out now—out on his feet!"

Gavin glanced at the battery of cameras and grinned.

"Come on, champ," he whispered. "This is where you get it good—for the pictures!"

He backed Summers clear across the ring, halting him close to the ropes and directly underneath the lenses, jolted him once or twice to straighten him up and then pinned his arms at his sides.

"Hey, you guys up there!" bawled Gavin, addressing the photographers. "Got plenty of fillum left, have you? None of them boxes empty? . . . All right. Git this, all of you; it's going to be good!"

He released Summers, stepped quickly away from him and back again, feinting savagely at the sore ribs with his left hand. Summers dropped his guard and bent forward, and as he did so Gavin's right glove swung full and clean against his chin. The champion of the world plunged head first through the ropes, breaking one telegraph instrument and knocking three reporters and one special writer out of their chairs.

"There you are!" grinned the new-old champion as he looked down on his work and saw that it was good. "That ought to make a swell finish—for the pictures!"

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Taking the Count—Prize Ring Stories*, by Charles Emmett Van Loan.]