

UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER XIII

STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF A SPARRING-PARTNER

I

SALLY'S emotions, as she sat in her apartment on the morning of her return to New York, resembled somewhat those of a swimmer who, after wavering on a raw morning at the brink of a chill pool, nerves himself to the plunge. She was aching, but she knew that she had done well. If she wanted happiness, she must fight for it, and for all these months she had been shirking the fight. She had done with wavering on the brink, and here she was, in mid-stream, ready for whatever might befall. It hurt, this coming to grips. She had expected it to hurt. But it was a pain that stimulated, not a dull melancholy that smothered. She felt alive and defiant.

She had finished unpacking and tidying up. The next move was certainly to go and see Ginger. She had suddenly become aware that she wanted very badly to see Ginger. His stolid friendliness would be a support and a prop. She wished now that she had sent him a cable, so that he could have met her at the dock. It had been rather terrible at the dock. The echoing customs sheds had sapped her valour and she felt alone and forlorn.

She looked at her watch, and was surprised to find how early it was. She could catch him at the office and make him take her out to lunch. She put on her hat and went out.

The restless hand of change, always active in New York, had not spared the outer office of the Fillmore Nicholas Theatrical Enterprises Ltd. in the months of her absence. She was greeted on her arrival by an entirely new and original stripling in the place of the one with whom at her last visit she had established such cordial relations. Like his predecessor he was generously pimpled, but there the resemblance stopped. He was a grim boy, and his manner was stern and suspicious. He peered narrowly at Sally for a moment as if he had caught her in the act of purloining the office blotting-paper, then, with no little acerbity, desired her to state her business.

“ I want Mr. Kemp,” said Sally.

The office-boy scratched his cheek dourly with a ruler. No one would have guessed, so austere was his aspect, that a moment before her entrance he had been trying to balance it on his chin, juggling the while with a pair of paper-weights. For, impervious as he seemed to human weaknesses, it was this lad's ambition one day to go into vaudeville.

“ What name? ” he said, coldly.

“ Nicholas,” said Sally. “ I am Mr. Nicholas' sister.”

On a previous occasion when she had made this announcement, disastrous results had ensued; but today it went well. It seemed to hit the office-boy like a bullet. He started convulsively, opened his mouth, and dropped the ruler. In the interval of stooping

and recovering it he was able to pull himself together. He had not been curious about Sally's name. What he had wished was to have the name of the person for whom she was asking repeated. He now perceived that he had had a bit of luck. A wearying period of disappointment in the matter of keeping the paperweights circulating while balancing the ruler, had left him peevish, and it had been his intention to work off his ill-humour on the young visitor. The discovery that it was the boss's sister who was taking up his time, suggested the advisability of a radical change of tactics. He had stooped with a frown: he returned to the perpendicular with a smile that was positively winning. It was like the sun suddenly bursting through a London fog.

"Will you take a seat, lady?" he said, with polished courtesy, even unbending so far as to reach out and dust one with the sleeve of his coat. He added that the morning was a fine one.

"Thank you," said Sally. "Will you tell him I'm here."

"Mr. Nicholas is out, miss," said the office-boy, with gentlemanly regret. "He's back in New York, but he's gone out."

"I don't want Mr. Nicholas. I want Mr. Kemp."

"Mr. Kemp?"

"Yes, Mr. Kemp."

Sorrow at his inability to oblige shone from every hill-top on the boy's face.

"Don't know of anyone of that name around here," he said, apologetically.

"But surely . . ." Sally broke off suddenly. A grim foreboding had come to her. "How long have you been here?" she asked.

"All day, ma'am," said the office-boy, with the manner of a Casabianca.

"I mean, how long have you been employed, here?"

"Just over a month, miss."

"Hasn't Mr. Kemp been in the office all that time?"

"Name's new to *me*, lady. Does he look like anything? I meanter say, what's he look like?"

"He has very red hair."

"Never seen him in here," said the office-boy.

The truth shone coldly on Sally. She blamed herself for ever having gone away, and told herself that she might have known what would happen. Left to his own resources, the unhappy Ginger had once more made a hash of it. And this hash must have been a more notable and outstanding hash than any of his previous efforts, for, surely, Fillmore would not lightly have dismissed one who had come to him under her special protection.

"Where is Mr. Nicholas?" she asked. It seemed to her that Fillmore was the only possible source of information. "Did you say he was out?"

"Really out, miss," said the office-boy, with engaging candour. "He went off to White Plains in his automobile half-an-hour ago."

"White Plains? What for?"

The pimpled stripling had now given himself up whole-heartedly to social chit-chat. Usually he liked his time to himself and resented the intrusion of the outer world, for he who has chosen jugglery for his walk in life must neglect no opportunity of practising: but so favourable was the impression which Sally had made on his plastic mind that he was

delighted to converse with her as long as she wished.

"I guess what's happened is, he's gone up to take a look at Bugs Butler," he said.

"Whose butler?" said Sally mystified.

The office-boy smiled a tolerant smile. Though an admirer of the sex, he was aware that women were seldom hep to the really important things in life. He did not blame them. That was the way they were constructed, and one simply had to accept it.

"Bugs Butler is training up at White Plains, miss."

"Who is Bugs Butler?"

Something of his former bleakness of aspect returned to the office-boy. Sally's question had opened up a subject on which he felt deeply.

"Ah!" he replied, losing his air of respectful deference as he approached the topic. "Who is he! That's what they're all saying, all the wise guys. Who has Bugs Butler ever licked?"

"I don't know," said Sally, for he had fixed her with a penetrating gaze and seemed to be pausing for a reply.

"Nor nobody else," said the stripling vehemently. "A lot of stiff's out on the coast, that's all. Ginks nobody has ever heard of, except Cyclone Mullins, and it took that false alarm fifteen rounds to get a referee's decision over *him*. The boss would go and give him a chance against the champ, but I could have told him that the legitimate contender was K-leg Binns. K-leg put Cyclone Mullins out in the fifth. Well," said the office-boy in the overwrought tone of one chafing at human folly, "if anybody thinks Bugs Butler can last six rounds with Lew Lucas, I've

two bucks right here in my vest pocket that says it ain't so."

Sally began to see daylight.

"Oh, Bugs—Mr. Butler is one of the boxers in this fight that my brother is interested in?"

"That's right. He's going up against the lightweight champ. Lew Lucas is the lightweight champ. He's a bird!"

"Yes?" said Sally. This youth had a way of looking at her with his head cocked on one side as though he expected her to say something.

"Yes, sir!" said the stripling with emphasis. "Lew Lucas is a hot sketch. He used to live on the next street to me," he added as clinching evidence of his hero's prowess. "I've seen his old mother as close as I am to you. Say, I seen her a hundred times. Is any stiff of a Bugs Butler going to lick a fellow like that?"

"It doesn't seem likely."

"You spoke it!" said the lad crisply, striking unsuccessfully at a fly which had settled on the blotting-paper.

There was a pause. Sally started to rise.

"And there's another thing," said the office-boy, loath to close the subject. "Can Bugs Butler make a hundred and thirty-five ringside without being weak?"

"It sounds awfully difficult."

"They say he's clever." The expert laughed satirically. "Well, what's that going to get him? The poor fish can't punch a hole in a nut-sundae."

"You don't seem to like Mr. Butler."

"Oh, I've nothing against him," said the office-

boy magnanimously. "I'm only saying he's no licence to be mixing it with Lew Lucas."

Sally got up. Absorbing as this chat on current form was, more important matters claimed her attention.

"How shall I find my brother when I get to White Plains?" she asked.

"Oh, anybody'll show you the way to the training-camp. If you hurry, there's a train you can make now."

"Thank you very much."

"You're welcome."

He opened the door for her with an old-world politeness which disuse had rendered a little rusty: then, with an air of getting back to business after a pleasant but frivolous interlude, he took up the paper-weights once more and placed the ruler with nice care on his upturned chin.

II

Fillmore heaved a sigh of relief and began to sidle from the room. It was a large room, half barn, half gymnasium. Athletic appliances of various kinds hung on the walls and in the middle there was a wide roped-off space, around which a small crowd had distributed itself with an air of expectancy. This is a commercial age, and the days when a prominent pugilist's training activities used to be hidden from the public gaze are over. To-day, if the public can lay its hands on fifty cents, it may come and gaze its fill. This afternoon, plutocrats to the number of about forty had assembled, though not all of these, to the regret of Mr. Lester Burrowes, the manager

of the eminent Bugs Butler, had parted with solid coin. Many of those present were newspaper representatives and on the free list—writers who would polish up Mr. Butler's somewhat crude prognostications as to what he proposed to do to Mr. Lew Lugas, and would report him as saying, "I am in really superb condition and feel little apprehension of the issue," and artists who would depict him in a state of semi-nudity with feet several sizes too large for any man.

The reason for Fillmore's relief was that Mr. Burrowes, who was a great talker and had buttonholed him a quarter of an hour ago, had at last had his attention distracted elsewhere, and had gone off to investigate some matter that called for his personal handling, leaving Fillmore free to slide away to the hotel and get a bite to eat, which he sorely needed. The zeal which had brought him to the training-camp to inspect the final day of Mr. Butler's preparation—for the fight was to take place on the morrow—had been so great that he had omitted to lunch before leaving New York.

So Fillmore made thankfully for the door. And it was at the door that he encountered Sally. He was looking over his shoulder at the moment, and was not aware of her presence till she spoke.

"Hullo, Fillmore!"

Sally had spoken softly, but a dynamite explosion could not have shattered her brother's composure with more completeness. In the leaping twist which brought him facing her, he rose a clear three inches from the floor. He had a confused sensation, as though his nervous system had been stirred up with a pole. He struggled for breath and moistened his lips

with the tip of his tongue, staring at her continuously during the process.

Great men, in their moments of weakness, are to be pitied rather than scorned. If ever a man had an excuse for leaping like a young ram, Fillmore had it. He had left Sally not much more than a week ago in England, in Shropshire, at Monk's Crofton. She had said nothing of any intention on her part of leaving the country, the county, or the house. Yet here she was, in Bugs Butler's training-camp at White Plains, in the State of New York, speaking softly in his ear without even going through the preliminary of tapping him on the shoulder to advertise her presence. No wonder that Fillmore was startled. And no wonder that, as he adjusted his faculties to the situation, there crept upon him a chill apprehension.

For Fillmore had not been blind to the significance of that invitation to Monk's Crofton. Nowadays your wooer does not formally approach a girl's nearest relative and ask permission to pay his addresses; but, when he invites her and that nearest relative to his country home and collects all the rest of the family to meet her, the thing may be said to have advanced beyond the realms of mere speculation. Shrewdly Fillmore had deduced that Bruce Carmyle was in love with Sally, and mentally he had joined their hands and given them a brother's blessing. And now it was only too plain that disaster must have occurred. If the invitation could mean only one thing, so also could Sally's presence at White Plains mean only one thing.

"Sally!" A croaking whisper was the best he could achieve. "What . . . what . . . ?"

"Did I startle you? I'm sorry."

"What are you doing here? Why aren't you at Monk's Crofton?"

Sally glanced past him at the ring and the crowd around it.

"I decided I wanted to get back to America. Circumstances arose which made it pleasanter to leave Monk's Crofton."

"Do you mean to say . . .?"

"Yes. Don't let's talk about it."

"Do you mean to say," persisted Fillmore, "that Carmyle proposed to you and you turned him down?"

Sally flushed.

"I don't think it's particularly nice to talk about that sort of thing, but—yes."

A feeling of desolation overcame Fillmore. That conviction, which saddens us at all times, of the wilful bone-headedness of our fellows swept coldly upon him. Everything had been so perfect, the whole arrangement so ideal, that it had never occurred to him as a possibility that Sally might take it into her head to spoil it by declining to play the part allotted to her. The match was so obviously the best thing that could happen. It was not merely the suitor's impressive wealth that made him hold this opinion, though it would be idle to deny that the prospect of having a brother-in-lawful claim on the Carmyle bank-balance had cast a rosy glamour over the future as he had envisaged it. He honestly liked and respected the man. He appreciated his quiet and aristocratic reserve. A well-bred fellow, sensible withal, just the sort of husband a girl like Sally needed. And now she had ruined everything. With the capricious

perversity which so characterizes her otherwise delightful sex, she had spilled the beans.

“But why?”

“Oh, Fill!” Sally had expected that realization of the facts would produce these symptoms in him, but now that they had presented themselves she was finding them rasping to the nerves. I should have thought the reason was obvious.”

“You mean you don't like him?”

“I don't know whether I do or not. I certainly don't like him enough to marry him.”

“He's a darned good fellow.”

“Is he? You say so. I don't know.”

The imperious desire for bodily sustenance began to compete successfully for Fillmore's notice with his spiritual anguish.

“Let's go to the hotel and talk it over. We'll go to the hotel and I'll give you something to eat.”

“I don't want anything to eat, thanks.”

“You don't want anything to eat?” said Fillmore incredulously. He supposed in a vague sort of way that there were eccentric people of this sort, but it was hard to realize that he had met one of them. “I'm starving.”

“Well, run along then.”

“Yes, but I want to talk . . .”

He was not the only person who wanted to talk. At the moment a small man of sporting exterior hurried up. He wore what his tailor's advertisements would have called a “nobby” suit of checked tweed and—in defiance of popular prejudice—a brown bowler hat. Mr. Lester Burrowes, having dealt with the business which had interrupted their conversation a few minutes before, was anxious to resume his re-

marks on the subject of the supreme excellence in every respect of his young charge.

"Say, Mr. Nicholas, you ain't goin'? Bugs is just getting ready to spar."

He glanced inquiringly at Sally.

"My sister—Mr. Burrowes," said Fillmore faintly.

"Mr. Burrowes is Bugs Butler's manager."

"How do you do?" said Sally.

"Pleased to meecheer," said Mr. Burrowes. "Say . . ."

"I was just going to the hotel to get something to eat," said Fillmore.

Mr. Burrowes clutched at his coat-button with a swoop, and held him with a glittering eye.

"Yes, but, say, before-you-goleinme-tell-ya-somef'n. You've never seen this boy of mine, not when he was feeling *right*. Believe me, he's there! He's a wizard. He's a Hindoo! Say, he's been practising up a left shift that . . ."

Fillmore's eye met Sally's wanly, and she pitied him. Presently she would require him to explain to her how he had dared to dismiss Ginger from his employment—and make that explanation a good one: but in the meantime she remembered that he was her brother and was suffering.

"He's the cleverest lightweight," proceeded Mr. Burrowes fervently, "since Joe Gans. I'm telling you and I *know!* He . . ."

"Can he make a hundred and thirty-five ringside without being weak?" asked Sally.

The effect of this simple question on Mr. Burrowes was stupendous. He dropped away from Fillmore's coat-button like an exhausted bivalve, and his small mouth opened feebly. It was as if a child had sud-

denly propounded to an eminent mathematician some abstruse problem in the higher algebra. Females who took an interest in boxing had come into Mr. Burrowes' life before—in his younger days, when he was a famous featherweight, the first of his three wives had been accustomed to sit at the ringside during his contests and urge him in language of the severest technicality to knock opponents' blocks off—but somehow he had not supposed from her appearance and manner that Sally was one of the elect. He gaped at her, and the relieved Fillmore sidled off like a bird hopping from the compelling gaze of a snake. He was not quite sure that he was acting correctly in allowing his sister to roam at large among the somewhat Bohemian surroundings of a training-camp, but the instinct of self-preservation turned the scale. He had breakfasted early, and if he did not eat right speedily it seemed to him that dissolution would set in.

“Whazzat?” said Mr. Burrowes feebly.

“It took him fifteen rounds to get a referee's decision over Cyclone Mullins,” said Sally severely, “and K-leg Binns . . .”

Mr. Burrowes rallied.

“You ain't got it *right*,” he protested. “Say, you mustn't believe what you see in the papers. The referee was dead against us, and Cyclone was down once for all of half a minute and they wouldn't count him out. Gee! You got to *kill* a guy in some towns before they'll give you a decision. At that, they couldn't do nothing so raw as make it anything but a win for my boy, after him leading by a mile all the way. Have you ever *seen* Bugs, ma'am?”

Sally had to admit that she had not had that privi-

lege. Mr. Burrowes with growing excitement, felt in his breast-pocket and produced a picture-postcard, which he thrust into her hand.

"That's Bugs," he said. "Take a slant at that and then tell me if he don't look the goods."

The photograph represented a young man in the irreducible minimum of clothing who crouched painfully, as though stricken with one of the acuter forms of gastritis.

"I'll call him over and have him sign it for you," said Mr. Burrowes, before Sally had had time to grasp the fact that this work of art was a gift and no mere loan. "Here, Bugs—wantcher."

A youth enveloped in a bath-robe, who had been talking to a group of admirers near the ring, turned, started languidly towards them, then, seeing Sally, quickened his pace. He was an admirer of the sex.

Mr. Burrowes did the honours.

"Bugs, this is Miss Nicholas, come to see you work out. I have been telling her she's going to have a treat." And to Sally. "Shake hands with Bugs Butler, ma'am, the coming lightweight champion of the world."

Mr. Butler's photograph, Sally considered, had flattered him. He was, in the flesh, a singularly repellent young man. There was a mean and cruel curve to his lips and a cold arrogance in his eye; a something dangerous and sinister in the atmosphere he radiated. Moreover, she did not like the way he smirked at her.

However, she exerted herself to be amiable.

"I hope you are going to win, Mr. Butler," she said.

The smile which she forced as she spoke the words

removed the coming champion's doubts, though they had never been serious. He was convinced now that he had made a hit. He always did, he reflected, with the girls. It was something about him. His chest swelled complacently beneath the bath-robe.

"You betcher," he asserted briefly.

Mr. Burrows looked at his watch.

"Time you were staring, Bugs."

The coming champion removed his gaze from Sally's face, into which he had been peering in a conquering manner, and cast a disparaging glance at the audience. It was far from being as large as he could have wished, and at least a third of it was composed of non-payers from the newspapers.

"All right," he said, bored.

His languor left him, as his gaze fell on Sally again, and his spirits revived somewhat. After all, small though the number of spectators might be, bright eyes would watch and admire him.

"I'll go a couple of rounds with Reddy for a starter," he said. "Seen nim anywheres? He's never around when he's wanted."

"I'll fetch him," said Mr. Burrows. "He's back there somewheres."

"I'm going to show that guy up this afternoon," said Mr. Butler coldly. "He's been getting too fresh."

The manager bustled off, and Bugs Butler, with a final smirk, left Sally and dived under the ropes. There was a stir of interest in the audience, though the newspaper men, blasé through familiarity, exhibited no emotion. Presently Mr. Burrows reappeared, shepherding a young man whose face was hidden by the sweater which he was pulling over his

head. He was a sturdily built young man. The sweater, moving from his body, revealed a good pair of shoulders.

A last tug, and the sweater was off. Red hair flashed into view, tousled and disordered: and, as she saw it, Sally uttered an involuntary gasp of astonishment which caused many eyes to turn towards her. And the red-headed young man, who had been stooping to pick up his gloves, straightened himself with a jerk and stood staring at her blankly and incredulously, his face slowly crimsoning.

III

It was the energetic Mr. Burrowes who broke the spell.

"Come on, come on," he said impatiently. "Li'l speed there, Reddy."

Ginger Kemp started like a sleep-walker awakened; then recovering himself, slowly began to pull on the gloves. Embarrassment was stamped on his agreeable features. His face matched his hair.

Sally plucked at the little manager's elbow. He turned irritably, but beamed in a distrait sort of manner when he perceived the source of the interruption.

"Who—him?" he said in answer to Sally's whispered question. "He's just one of Bugs' sparring-partners."

"But . . ."

Mr. Burrowes, fussy now that the time had come for action, interrupted her.

"You'll excuse me, miss, but I have to hold the watch. We mustn't waste any time."

Sally drew back. She felt like an infidel who in-

trudes upon the celebration of strange rites. This was Man's hour, and women must keep in the background. She had the sensation of being very small and yet very much in the way, like a puppy who has wandered into a church. The novelty and solemnity of the scene awed her.

She looked at Ginger, who with averted gaze was fiddling with his clothes in the opposite corner of the ring. He was as far removed from communication as if he had been in another world. She continued to stare, wide-eyed, and Ginger, shuffling his feet self-consciously, plucked at his gloves.

Mr. Butler, meanwhile, having doffed his bath-robe, stretched himself, and with leisurely nonchalance put on a second pair of gloves, was filling in the time with a little shadow-boxing. He moved rhythmically to and fro, now ducking his head, now striking out with his muffled hands, and a sickening realization of the man's animal power swept over Sally and turned her cold. Swathed in his bath-robe, Bugs Butler had conveyed an atmosphere of dangerousness: in the boxing-tights which showed up every rippling muscle, he was horrible and sinister, a machine built for destruction, a human panther.

So he appeared to Sally, but a stout and bulbous eyed man standing at her side was not equally impressed. Obviously one of the Wise Guys of whom her friend the sporting office-boy had spoken, he was frankly dissatisfied with the exhibition.

"Shadow-boxing," he observed in a cavilling spirit to his companion. "Yes, he can do that all right, just like I can fox-trot if I ain't got a partner to get in the way. But one good wallop, and then watch him."

His friend, also plainly a guy of established wisdom, assented with a curt nod.

"Ah!" he agreed.

"Lew Lucas," said the first wise guy, "is just as shifty, and he can punch."

"Ah," said the second wise guy.

"Just because he beats up a few poor mutts of sparring-partners," said the first wise guy disparagingly, "he thinks he's someone."

"Ah!" said the second wise guy.

As far as Sally could interpret these remarks, the full meaning of which was shrouded from her, they seemed to be reassuring. For a comforting moment she ceased to regard Ginger as a martyr waiting to be devoured by a lion. Mr. Butler, she gathered, was not so formidable as he appeared. But her relief was not to be long-lived.

"Of course he'll eat this red-headed gink," went on the first wise guy. "That's the thing he does best, killing his sparring-partners. But Lew Lucas

Sally was not interested in Lew Lucas. That numbing fear had come back to her. Even these cognoscenti, little as they esteemed Mr. Butler, had plainly no doubts as to what he would do to Ginger. She tried to tear herself away, but something stronger than her own will kept her there standing where she was, holding on to the rope and staring forlornly into the ring.

"Ready, Bugs?" asked Mr. Burrowes.

The coming champion nodded carelessly.

"Go to it," said Mr. Burrowes.

Ginger ceased to pluck at his gloves and advanced into the ring.

IV

Of all the learned professions, pugilism is the one in which the trained expert is most sharply divided from the mere dabbler. In other fields the amateur may occasionally hope to compete successfully with the man who has made a business of what is to him but a sport, but at boxing never: and the whole demeanour of Bugs Butler showed that he had laid this truth to heart. It would be too little to say that his bearing was confident: he comported himself with the care-free jauntiness of an infant about to demolish a Noah's Ark with a tack-hammer. Cyclone Mullinses might withstand him for fifteen rounds where they yielded to a K-leg Binns in the fifth, but, when it came to beating up a sparring-partner and an amateur at that, Bugs Butler knew his potentialities. He was there forty ways and he did not attempt to conceal it. Crouching as was his wont, he uncoiled himself like a striking rattlesnake and flicked Ginger lightly over his guard. Then he returned to his crouch and circled sinuously about the ring with the amiable intention of showing the crowd, payers and deadheads alike, what real footwork was. If there was one thing on which Bugs Butler prided himself, it was footwork.

The adverb "lightly" is a relative term, and the blow which had just planted a dull patch on Ginger's cheekbone affected those present in different degrees. Ginger himself appeared stolidly callous. Sally shuddered to the core of her being and had to hold more tightly to the rope to support herself. The two wise guys mocked openly. To the wise guys, expert connoisseurs of swat, the thing had appeared richly

farcical. They seemed to consider the blow, administered to a third party and not to themselves, hardly worth calling a blow at all. Two more, landing as quickly and neatly as the first, left them equally cold.

“Call that punching?” said the first wise guy.

“Ah!” said the second wise guy.

But Mr. Butler, if he heard this criticism—and it is probable that he did—for the wise ones had been restrained by no delicacy of feeling from raising their voices, was in no way discommoded by it. Bugs Butler knew what he was about. Bright eyes were watching him, and he meant to give them a treat. The girls like smooth work. Any roughneck could sail into a guy and knock the daylights out of him, but how few could be clever and flashy and scientific? Few, few, indeed, thought Mr. Butler as he slid in and led once more.

Something solid smote Mr. Butler's nose, rocking him on to his heels and inducing an unpleasant smarting sensation about his eyes. He backed away and regarded Ginger with astonishment, almost with pain. Until this moment he had scarcely considered him as an active participant in the scene at all, and he felt strongly that this sort of thing was bad form. It was not being done by sparring-partners.

A juster man might have reflected that he himself was to blame. He had undeniably been careless. In the very act of leading he had allowed his eyes to flicker sideways to see how Sally was taking this exhibition of science, and he had paid the penalty. Nevertheless, he was piqued. He shimmered about the ring, thinking it over. And the more he thought it over, the less did he approve of his young assistant's

conduct. Hard thoughts towards Ginger began to float in his mind.

Ginger, too, was thinking hard thoughts. He had not had an easy time since he had come to the training camp, but never till to-day had he experienced any resentment towards his employer. Until this afternoon Bugs Butler had pounded him honestly and without malice, and he had gone through it, as the other sparring-partners did, phlegmatically, taking it as part of the day's work. But this afternoon there had been a difference. Those careless flicks had been an insult, a deliberate offence. The man was trying to make a fool of him, playing to the gallery: and the thought of who was in that gallery inflamed Ginger past thought of consequences. No one, not even Mr. Butler, was more keenly alive than he to the fact that in a serious conflict with a man who to-morrow night might be light-weight champion of the world he stood no chance whatever: but he did not intend to be made an exhibition of in front of Sally without doing something to hold his end up. He proposed to go down with his flag flying, and in pursuance of this object he dug Mr. Butler heavily in the lower ribs with his right, causing that expert to clinch and the two wise guys to utter sharp barking sounds expressive of derision.

"Say, what the hell d'ya think you're getting at?" demanded the aggrieved pugilist in a heated whisper in Ginger's ear as they fell into the embrace. "What's the idea, you jelly bean?"

Ginger maintained a pink silence. His jaw was set, and the temper which Nature had bestowed upon him to go with his hair had reached white heat. He

dodged a vicious right which whizzed up at his chin out of the breaking clinch, and rushed. A left hook shook him, but was too high to do more. There was rough work in the far corner, and suddenly with startling abruptness Bugs Butler, bothered by the ropes at his back and trying to side-step, ran into a swing and fell.

"Time!" shouted the scandalized Mr. Burrowes, utterly aghast at this frightful misadventure. In the whole course of his professional experience he could recall no such devastating occurrence.

The audience was no less startled. There was audible gasping. The newspaper men looked at each other with a wild surmise and conjured up pleasant pictures of their sporting editors receiving this sensational item of news later on over the telephone. The two wise guys, continuing to pursue Mr. Butler with their dislike, emitted loud and raucous laughs, and one of them, forming his hands into a megaphone, urged the fallen warrior to go away and get a rep. As for Sally, she was conscious of a sudden, fierce, cave-womanly rush of happiness which swept away completely the sickening qualms of the last few minutes. Her teeth were clenched and her eyes blazed with joyous excitement. She looked at Ginger yearningly, longing to forget a gentle upbringing and shout congratulation to him. She was proud of him. And mingled with the pride was a curious feeling that was almost fear. This was not the mild and amiable young man whom she was wont to mother through the difficulties of a world in which he was unfitted to struggle for himself. This was a new Ginger, a stranger to her.

On the rare occasions on which he had been

knocked down in the past, it had been Bugs Butler's canny practice to pause for a while and rest before rising and continuing the argument, but now he was up almost before he had touched the boards, and the satire of the second wise guy, who had begun to saw the air with his hand and count loudly, lost its point. It was only too plain that Mr. Butler's motto was that a man may be down, but he is never out. And, indeed, the knock-down had been largely a stumble. Bugs Butler's educated feet, which had carried him unscathed through so many contests, had for this single occasion managed to get themselves crossed just as Ginger's blow landed, and it was to his lack of balance rather than the force of the swing that his downfall had been due.

"Time!" he snarled, casting a malevolent side-glance at his manager. "Like hell it's time!"

And in a whirlwind of flying gloves he flung himself upon Ginger, driving him across the ring, while Mr. Burrowes, watch in hand, stared with dropping jaw. If Ginger had seemed a new Ginger to Sally, still more did this seem a new Bugs Butler to Mr. Burrowes, and the manager groaned in spirit. Coolness, skill and science—these had been the qualities in his protégé which had always so endeared him to Mr. Lester Burrowes and had so enriched their respective bank accounts: and now, on the eve of the most important fight in his life, before an audience of newspaper men, he had thrown them all aside and was making an exhibition of himself with a common sparring-partner.

That was the bitter blow to Mr. Burrowes. Had this lapse into the unscientific primitive happened in a regular fight, he might have mourned and poured

reproof into Bugs's ear when he got him back in his corner at the end of the round; but he would not have experienced this feeling of helpless horror—the sort of horror an elder of the church might feel if he saw his favourite bishop yielding in public to the fascination of jazz. It was the fact that Bugs Butler was lowering himself to extend his powers against a sparring-partner that shocked Mr. Burrowes. There is an etiquette in these things. A champion may batter his sparring-partners into insensibility if he pleases, but he must do it with nonchalance. He must not appear to be really trying.

And nothing could be more manifest than that Bugs Butler was trying. His whole fighting soul was in his efforts to corner Ginger and destroy him. The battle was raging across the ring and down the ring, and up the ring and back again; yet always Ginger, like a storm-driven ship, contrived somehow to weather the tempest. Out of the flurry of swinging arms he emerged time after time bruised, bleeding, but fighting hard.

For Bugs Butler's fury was defeating its object. Had he remained his cool and scientific self, he could have demolished Ginger and cut through his defence in a matter of seconds. But he had lapsed back into the methods of his unskilled novitiate. He swung and missed, swung and missed again, struck but found no vital spot. And now there was blood on his face, too. In some wild *mêlée* the sacred fount had been tapped, and his teeth gleamed through a crimson mist.

The Wise Guys were beyond speech. They were leaning against one another, punching each other feebly in the back. One was crying.

And then suddenly the end came, as swiftly and unexpectedly as the thing had begun. His wild swings had tired Bugs Butler, and with fatigue prudence returned to him. His feet began once more their subtle weaving in and out. Twice his left hand flickered home. A quick feint, a short jolting stab, and Ginger's guard was down and he was swaying in the middle of the ring, his hands hanging and his knees a-quiver.

Bugs Butler measured his distance, and Sally shut her eyes.