

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

HERBERT JENKINS

Table of Contents

<u>THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT</u>	1
<u>HERBERT JENKINS</u>	1
<u>I</u>	1
<u>II</u>	9
<u>III</u>	14
<u>IV</u>	17

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

HERBERT JENKINS

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- I
- II
- III
- IV

I

"MR. DOULTON, Sir. Very important," Rogers had carefully assimilated his master's theory of the economy of words, sometimes even to the point of obscuring his meaning.

Taking the last piece of toast from the rack, Malcolm Sage with great deliberation proceeded to butter it. Then, with a nod to the waiting Rogers, he poured out the last cup of coffee the pot contained.

A moment later the door opened to admit a clean-shaven little man of about fifty, prosperous in build and appearance; but obviously labouring under some great excitement. His breath came in short, spasmodic gasps. His thin sandy hair had clearly not been brushed since the day before, whilst his chin and upper lip bore obvious traces of a night's growth of beard. He seemed on the point of collapse.

"He's gone disappeared!" he burst out, as Rogers closed the door behind him. Malcolm Sage rose, motioned his caller to a chair at the table, and resumed his own seat.

"Had breakfast?" he enquired quietly, resuming his occupation of getting the toast carefully and artistically buttered.

"Good God, man!" exploded Mr. Doulton, almost hysterically. "Don't you understand? Burns has disappeared!"

"I gathered as much," said Malcolm Sage calmly, as he reached for the marmalade.

"Pond telephoned from Stainton," continued Mr. Doulton. "I was in bed. I got dressed, and came round here at once. I " he stopped suddenly, as Rogers entered with a fresh relay of coffee. Without a word he proceeded to pour out a cup for Mr. Doulton, who, after a moment's hesitation, drank it greedily.

Rogers glanced interrogatingly from the dish that had contained eggs and bacon to Malcolm Sage, who nodded.

When he had withdrawn, Mr. Doulton opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again and gazed at Malcolm Sage, who, having superimposed upon the butter a delicate amber film of marmalade, proceeded to cut up the toast into a series of triangles. Apparently it was the only thing in life that interested him.

For weeks past the British and American sporting world had thought and talked of nothing but the forthcoming

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

fight between Charley Burns and Bob Jefferson for the heavyweight championship of the world. The event was due to take place two days hence at the Olympia for a purse of £40,000 offered by Mr. Montague Doulton, the prince of impressarios.

Never had a contest been looked forward to with greater eagerness than the Burns v. Jefferson match. A great change had come over public opinion in regard to prize-fighting, thanks to the elevating influence of Mr. Doulton. It was no longer referred to as "brutalising" and "debasing." Refined and nice-minded people found themselves mildly interested and patriotically hopeful that Charley Burns, the British champion, would win. In two years Mr. Doulton had achieved what the National Sporting Club had failed to do in a quarter of a century.

Long and patiently he had laboured to bring about this match, which many thought would prove the keystone to the arch of Burns's fame, incidentally to that of the impresario himself.

"And now he's disappeared—clean gone." Mr. Doulton almost sobbed.

"Tell me."

Malcolm Sage looked up from his plate, the last triangle of toast poised between finger and thumb.

In short staccatoed sentences, like bursts from a machine-gun, Mr. Doulton proceeded to tell his story.

That morning at six o'clock, when Alf Pond, Burns's trainer had entered his room to warn him that it was time to get up, he found it unoccupied. At first he thought that Burns had gone down before him; but immediately his eye fell on the bed, and he saw that it had not been slept in, he became alarmed.

Going to the bedroom door, he had shouted to the sparring-partners, and soon the champion's room was filled with men in various stages of déshabillé.

Only for a moment, however, had they remained inactive. At Alf Pond's word of command they had spread helter-skelter over the house and grounds, causing the early morning air to echo with their shouts for "Charley."

When at length he became assured that Burns had disappeared, Alf Pond telephoned first to Mr. Doulton and then to Mr. Papwith, Burns's backer.

"I told Pond to do nothing and tell no one," said Mr. Doulton, in conclusion, "and when I left my rooms my man was trying to get through to Papwith to ask him to keep the story to himself."

Malcolm Sage nodded approval.

"Now, what's to be done?" He looked at Malcolm Sage with the air of a man who has just told a doctor of his alarming symptoms, and almost breathlessly awaits the verdict.

"Breakfast, a shave, then we'll motor down to Stainton," and Malcolm Sage proceeded to fill his briar, his whole attention absorbed in the operation.

A moment later Rogers entered with a fresh supply of eggs and bacon. Mr. Doulton shook his head. Instinctively his hand had gone up to his unshaven chin. It was probably the first time in his life that he had sat at table without shaving. He prided himself upon his personal appearance. In his younger days he had been known as "Dandy Doulton."

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

"The car in half an hour, Rogers," said Malcolm Sage, as he rose from the table. "When you've finished," he said, turning to Mr. Doulton, "Rogers will give you hot water, a razor and anything else you want. By the time you have shaved I shall be ready."

But don't you see Think what it " began Mr. Doulton.

"An empty stomach neither sees nor thinks," was Malcolm Sage's oracular retort, and he went over to the window and seated himself at his writing-table.

For the next half-hour he was engaged with his correspondence, and in telephoning instructions to his office.

By the time Mr. Doulton had breakfasted and shaved, the car was at the door.

During the run to Stainton both men were silent. Mr. Doulton was speculating as to what would happen at the Olympia on the following night if Burns failed to appear, whilst Malcolm Sage was occupied with thoughts, the object of which was to prevent such a catastrophe. "They're sure to say it's a yellow streak," Mr. Doulton burst out on one occasion; but, as Malcolm Sage took no notice of the remark, he subsided into silence, and the car hummed its way along the Portsmouth Road.

Burns's training-quarters were situated at Stainton, near Guildford. Here, under the vigilant eye of Alf Pond, and with the help of a large retinue of sparring-partners, he was getting himself into what had come to be called "Burns's condition," which meant that he would enter the ring trained to the minute. Never did athlete work more conscientiously than Charley Burns.

As the car turned into a side road, flanked on either hand by elms, Mr. Doulton tapped on the wind-screen, and Tims pulled up. Malcolm Sage had requested that the car be stopped a hundred yards before it reached "The Grove," where the training quarters were situated.

"Wait for me here," he said, as he got out.

"It's the first gate on the right," said Mr. Doulton.

Walking slowly away from the car, Malcolm Sage examined with great care the road itself. Presently he stopped and, taking from his pocket a steel spring-measure, he proceeded to measure a portion of the surface of the dusty roadway. Having made several entries in a note-book, he then turned back to the car, his eyes still on the road.

Instructing Tims to remain where he was, Malcolm Sage motioned to Mr. Doulton to get out.

"This way," said Malcolm Sage, leading him to the extreme left-hand side of the road. Turning into the gates of "The Grove," they walked up the drive towards the house. In front stood a group of men in various and nondescript costumes.

As Malcolm Sage and Mr. Doulton approached, a man in a soiled white sweater and voluminous grey flannel trousers, generously turned up at the extremities, detached himself from the group and came towards them. He was puffy of face, with pouched eyes and a moist skin; yet in his day Alf Pond had been an unbeatable middle-weight, and the greatest master of ring-craft of his time; but that was nearly a generation ago.

In agonised silence he looked from Mr. Doulton to Malcolm Sage, then back again to Mr. Doulton. There was in his eyes the misery of despair.

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

The preliminary greetings over, Alf Pond led the way round to a large coach-house in the rear, which had been fitted up as a gymnasium. Here were to be seen all the appliances necessary to the training of a boxer for a great contest, including a roped ring at one end.

"He was here only yesterday." There was a world of tragedy and pathos in Alf Pond's tone. Something like a groan burst from the sparring-partners.

With a quick, comprehensive glance, Malcolm Sage seemed to take in every detail.

"It's a bad business, Pond," said Mr. Doulton, who found the mute despair of these hard-living, hard-hitting men rather embarrassing.

"What'd I better do?" queried Alf Pond.

"I've put the whole matter in Mr. Sage's hands," said Mr. Doulton. "He'll find him, if anyone can."

A score of eyes were turned speculatively upon Malcolm Sage. In none was there the least ray of hope. All had now made up their minds that Jefferson would win the fight by default.

Slowly, and methodically Malcolm Sage drew the story of Burns's disappearance from Alf Pond, the sparring-partners occasionally acting as a chorus.

When all had been told, Malcolm Sage gazed for some moments at the finger-nails of his left hand.

"You were confident he would win?" he asked at length.

"Confident!" There was incredulity and wonder in Alf Pond's voice. Then, with a sudden inspiration, "Look at Kid!" he cried "look at him!" and he indicated with a nod a fair-haired giant standing on his right.

Malcolm Sage looked.

The man's face showed the stress and strain of battle. His nose had taken on something of the quality of cubism, his right eye was out of commission, and there was an ugly purple patch on his left cheek, and his right ear looked as if a wasp had stung it.

"He did that in one round, and him the third. Kid asked for it, and he got it, same as Jeff would," explained Alf Pond proudly, a momentary note of elation in his voice. There was also something of pride in the grin with which Kid stood the scrutiny of the others.

"Do you know of any reason why Burns should have left his room?" Malcolm Sage looked from one to the other interrogatingly.

"There wasn't any," was Alf Pond's response, and the others nodded their concurrence.

"He knew no one in the neighbourhood?"

"No one to speak of. A few local gents would drop in occasional to see how he was getting on, and then a lot o' newspaper chaps came down from London." There was that in Alf Pond's tone which seemed to suggest that in his opinion such questions were foolish.

"Did he receive any letters or telegrams yesterday?" was the next question.

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

"Letters!" Alf Pond laughed sardonically. "Shoals of 'em. He'd turn 'em all over to Sandy Lane," indicating a red-headed man on the right.

"He wasn't much at writing letters," said Sandy Lane, by way of explanation.

"His hands were made for better things," cried Alf Pond scornfully, and the sparring-partners nodded their agreement.

"Did he turn over to you the whole of his correspondence?" asked Malcolm Sage, turning to Sandy Lane.

"Sometimes he'd keep a letter," broke in Alf Pond, "but not often. Sort of personal," he added, as if to explain the circumstance.

"From a woman, perhaps?" suggested Malcolm Sage, taking off his hat and stroking the back of his head.

"Woman!" cried Alf Pond scornfully; "Charley hadn't no use for women, or he wouldn't have been the boxer he was."

"He was quite himself, quite natural, yesterday?" asked Malcolm Sage.

"Quite himself," repeated Alf Pond deliberately; then, once more indicating Kid, he added, "Look at Kid; that's what he done in one round." There was in his tone all the contempt of knowledge for ignorance.

Malcolm Sage resumed his hat and, taking his pipe from his pocket, proceeded to stuff it with tobacco, as if that were the only problem in the world. On everything he did he seemed to concentrate his entire attention to the exclusion of all else.

"No smokin' here, if you please," said Alf Pond sharply.

Malcolm Sage returned his pipe to his pocket without comment.

"Now, what are you going to do?" There was challenge in Alf Pond's voice as he eyed Malcolm Sage with disfavour. In his world men with bald, conical heads and gold-rimmed spectacles did not count for much.

"How many people know of the disappearance?" enquired Malcolm Sage, ignoring the question.

"Outside of us here, only Mr. Papwith," was the response.

For fully a minute Malcolm Sage did not reply. At length he turned to Mr. Doulton.

"Can you arrange to remain here to meet Mr. Papwith?" he enquired.

"I propose doing so," was the reply.

"You want to find Burns, I suppose?" Malcolm Sage asked of Alf Pond, in low, level tones.

Alf Pond and his colleagues eyed him as if he had asked a most astonishing question.

"You barmy?" demanded the trainer, putting into words the looks of the others.

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

"You will continue with the day's work, as if nothing happened," continued Malcolm Sage. "No one outside must know that "

"But how are we going to do that with Charley gone?" broke in Alf Pond, taking a step forward with clenched fists.

"Your friend here," indicating Kid, "can pose as Burns," was Malcolm Sage's quiet reply, as he looked into the trainer's eye without the flicker of an eyelash.

"You, Mr. Doulton, I will ask to remain here with Mr. Papwith until I communicate with you. On no account leave the training-quarters, even if you have to wait here until to-morrow evening."

"But " began Alf Pond; then he stopped and gazed at the sparring-partners, blinking his eyes in stupid bewilderment.

"Have I your promise?" enquired Malcolm Sage of Mr. Doulton.

"As far as I am concerned, yes," was the response, "and I think I can answer for Papwith. It's very inconvenient, though."

"Not so inconvenient as having to explain things at the Olympia to-morrow night," remarked Malcolm Sage drily. "Now," he continued, turning once more to Alf Pond, "I suppose you've all got something on this fight."

"Something on it!" cried Alf Pond; then, turning to the sparring-partners, he cried, "He asks if we've got somethink on it!" He groaned, "We got our shirts on it. That's what we got on it, our shirts," and his voice broke in something like a sob.

"You had better post someone at the gate to tell all enquirers that Burns is doing well and is confident of winning," said Malcolm Sage to Mr. Doulton, "and keep an eye on the telephone. Tell anyone who rings up the same; in fact" and he turned to the others "as far as you are concerned, Burns is still with you. Do you understand?"

They looked at one another in a way that was little suggestive of understanding.

"Did Burns wear the same clothes throughout the day?" asked Malcolm Sage of the trainer.

"Course he didn't!" Alf Pond made no effort to disguise the contempt he felt. "In the daytime he used to wear flannel trousers an' a sweater, same as me, except when he was sparrin', then he put on drawers. Always would have everythink same as it was goin' to be, would Charley seconds, referee, timekeeper. Said it made him feel at home when the time came. Quaint he was in some of his ideas."

"Then from the time he got up until bedtime he wore the same clothes?" queried Malcolm Sage, without looking up from the inevitable contemplation of his finger-nails.

"No, he didn't." Alf Pond spat his boredom at these useless questions into a far corner. "He was always a bit of a nib, was Charley. After he'd finished the day's work he'd put on a suit o' dark duds, a white collar, a watch on his wrist, an' all that bunko. Then we'd play poker or billiards till half-past eight, when we'd all turn in." The look with which Alf Pond concluded this itinerary plainly demanded if there were any more silly questions coming.

"Now I should like to see Burns's room."

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

Malcolm Sage and Mr. Doulton followed Alf Pond upstairs to a large room on the first floor, as destitute of the attributes of comfort as a guard-room. A bed, a wash-hand stand, and a chest of drawers comprised the furniture. A few articles of clothing were strewn about, and in one corner lay a pair of dumb-bells.

The windows were open top and bottom. Malcolm Sage passed from one to the other and looked out. He examined each of the window-ledges.

"Are these the clothes he wore when he got up?" he enquired, indicating a sweater and a pair of flannel trousers that lay on a chair.

Alf Pond nodded.

Swiftly Malcolm Sage felt in the pockets. There was nothing there. A minute later he left the room, followed by the others. Descending the stairs, he passed along the hall and out on to the short drive, accompanied by Mr. Doulton and Alf Pond.

Half-way towards the gate Malcolm Sage stopped.

"You will hear from me some time to-day or to-morrow," he said. "Do exactly as I have said and, if I don't telephone before to-morrow evening, go to the Olympia as if Burns were to be there. You might have sent out to my car a pair of drawers and boots in case I find him."

"You're going to find him then?" Alf Pond suddenly gripped Malcolm Sage's arm with what was almost ferocity.

Malcolm Sage shrugged his shoulders.

"If you do as I tell you, it will help. By the way," he added, "if you have time, you might put twenty-five pounds on Burns for me. Mr. Doulton will be responsible for the amount. Now I want to look about me," and with that Malcolm Sage walked a few steps down the drive, leaving two men staring after him as if he had either solved or propounded the riddle of the universe.

For some minutes he stood in the centre of the drive, looking about him. Stepping to the right, he glanced back at the house, and then towards the road. Finally he made for a large clump of rhododendrons that lay between the road and the house.

Motioning the others to remain where they were on the gravelled drive, he walked to a clear space of short grass between the rhododendrons and the hedge bordering the road.

Going down upon his knees, he proceeded to examine the ground with great care and attention. For nearly half an hour he crawled from place to place, absorbed in grass, shrub, and flower-bed. Finally he penetrated half into the privet-hedge that bordered the road.

The sparring-partners had now joined the other two on the drive, and the group stood watching the strange movements of the man who, in their opinion, had already shown obvious symptoms of insanity.

Presently Malcolm Sage emerged from the hedge, in his hand a long cigar, round the centre of which was a red-and-gold band. For fully a minute he stood examining this with great care. Then, taking a letter-case from his pocket, he carefully placed the cigar in the hinge, returned the case to his pocket, and rejoined the group of wide-eyed spectators.

"Found anything?" enquired Alf Pond eagerly.

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

"Several things," replied Malcolm Sage.

"What?" The men grouped themselves round him, breathless with interest.

"By the way," said Malcolm Sage, turning to Alf Pond, "does Burns happen to smoke long Havana cigars with red "

"Smoke!" yelled Alf Pond in horror. "Him smoke! You blinkin' well barmy?" he demanded, looking Malcolm Sage up and down as if meditating an attack upon him. "I'd like to see the man who'd so much as dare to strike a match here," and he glared about him angrily, whilst the sparring-partners shuffled their feet and murmured among themselves. There was just the suspicion of a fluttering at the corners of Malcolm's Sage's mouth.

"I'm afraid Pond is rather excited just at present," said Mr. Doulton tactfully. By now he had entirely regained his own composure. "Burns is a great lover of tobacco, and Pond takes no risks. You were saying that you had discovered several things?"

Again the group of men drew closer to Malcolm Sage, their heads thrust forward as if fearful of missing a word.

"For one thing, Burns left his room last night to meet a woman by "

"It's a lie!" cried Alf Pond heatedly. "It's a lie! I don't believe it."

"A rather dainty creature, small and well dressed. She was accompanied by several men, one of them rather stout, very careful of his clothes, and an inveterate smoker. The others were bigger, rougher men. They all came in a car, which arrived after the motor bicycle, which in turn arrived later than the small car."

The sparring-partners exchanged glances, whilst Alf Pond stared.

"Subsequently they drove off in a very great hurry. Incidentally they took Burns with them; but against his will. On the way down the girl was in the tonneau; but on the return journey she sat beside the driver. As Burns was in the tonneau, it was no doubt a precaution."

"I don't believe a word," interrupted Alf Pond. "He's makin' it all up."

Without appearing to notice the remark, Malcolm Sage turned and walked towards the gate, Mr. Doulton following a step in the rear.

"Liar!" growled Alf Pond, as he turned towards the house. "Ruddy liar!" he added, as if finding consolation in the term. "He'll never find old Charley."

"Tell me, Sage, were you serious?" asked Mr. Doulton, as they reached the gate.

"Entirely."

"I'm afraid poor Pond thought you were making game of us," he added apologetically. "Do you mind explaining how you arrived at your conclusions?"

"Behind that clump of rhododendrons," began Malcolm Sage, "there is written a whole history. The marks of boots, or shoes, with very high heels suggests a woman, the size and daintiness of the footwear tell the rest. As Burns appeared, she stepped towards him. Her very short steps indicate both fashionable clothes and smallness of stature."

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

"And the man who was careful about his clothes?"

"He stood behind a holly-bush with an umbrella "

"But how did you know?"

"He had been leaning upon it, and there was the mark where it had sunk into the soft turf up to the point where the silk joins the stick. A man who carries an umbrella on a kidnapping adventure must be habitually in fear of rain none but a well-dressed man would fear rain.

"Then, as he had a cigar in his hand with the end bitten off, it shows the habitual smoker. He was only waiting for the end of the drama before lighting up. His height I get from his stride, and his size by the fact that, like Dumpty-Dumpty, he had a great fall. I'll tell you the rest later. I'm afraid it's an ugly business."

"But the girl riding beside the driver?" burst out Mr. Doultton, bewildered by the facts that Malcolm Sage had deduced from so little.

"At the edge of a side-road there is invariably a deposit of dust, and the marks where they all got out and in are clearly visible. The hurry of departure is shown by the fact that the car started before one of the men had taken his place, and his footsteps running beside it before jumping on to the running-board are quite clear. I'll ring you up later. I cannot stay now." And with that he hurried away.

"Back along your own tracks, Tims," said he on reaching the car. He then walked on to the main road.

With head over right shoulder, Tims carefully backed the car, Malcolm Sage signalling that he was to turn to the right.

Instructing Tims to drive slowly, Malcolm Sage took his seat beside him, keeping his eyes fixed upon the off-side of the road. He stopped the car at each cross-road, and walked down it some twenty or thirty yards, his eyes bent downwards as if in search of something. At the end of half an hour he instructed Tims to drive back to London at his best speed.

II

That afternoon in his office Malcolm Sage worked without cessation. Both telephones, incoming and outgoing, were continually in use. Telegraph girls and messenger boys came and went.

Gladys Norman had ceased to worry about the shininess of her nose, and William Johnson was in process of readjusting his ideas as to lack of the dramatic element at the Malcolm Sage Bureau as compared with detective fiction and the films.

About three o'clock a tall, clean-shaven man was shown into Malcolm Sage's room. He had a hard mouth, keen, alert eyes, and an air suggestive of the fact that he knew the worst there was to be known about men and acted accordingly.

With a nod Malcolm Sage motioned him to a seat. Six months before he had saved Dick Lindler from the dock by discovering the real criminal in whose stead Lindler was about to be charged with a series of frauds. Since then Malcolm Sage had always been sure of such "inside" information in the bookmaking world as he required.

"How's the betting now?" enquired Malcolm Sage.

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

"Nine to two on Jefferson offered; and no takers," was the reply. "There's something up, Mr. Sage; I'll take my dying oath on it," he said, leaning across the table and dropping his voice.

"Any big amounts?" enquired Malcolm Sage.

"No, that's what troubles me. The money's being spread about so. The funny thing is that a lot of it is being put on by letter. I've had a dozen myself to-day."

Malcolm Sage nodded slowly as he filled his pipe, which with great deliberation he proceeded to light until the whole surface of the tobacco glowed. Then, as if suddenly realising that Lindler was not smoking, he pulled open a drawer, drew out a cigar-box, and pushed it across, watching him closely from beneath his eyebrows as he did so.

Lindler opened the box, then looked interrogatingly at Malcolm Sage.

"Didn't know you smoked the same poison-sticks as the 'downy One,'" he said, picking up a long cigar with a red-and-gold band, and examining it.

"Who's he?"

"Old Nathan Goldschmidt, the Jew."

"I'm sorry," said Malcolm Sage; "that should not have been there. Try one of the others."

Lindler looked across at him curiously.

"Personally, myself," he said, "I believe he's at the bottom of all this heavy backing of Jefferson."

Malcolm Sage continued to smoke as if the matter did not interest him, whilst Lindler bit off the end of the cigar he had selected and proceeded to light it.

"Several of his crowd have been around this morning trying to load me up," he continued presently, when the cigar was drawing to his satisfaction. "Must have stayed up all night to be in time," he added scathingly.

"Have you seen Goldschmidt himself?"

"Not since yesterday afternoon."

"Does he usually carry an umbrella?"

Lindler laughed.

"The boys call him 'Gampy Goldschmidt,'" he said.

"You really think that the Goldschmidt gang is backing Jefferson?"

"They've been at it for the last week," was the response. "They know something, Mr. Sage. Somebody's going to do the dirty, otherwise they wouldn't be so blasted clever about it."

"Clever?"

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

"Putting on all they can on the Q.T.," was the response.

"Find out all you can about Goldschmidt and his friends. Keep in touch with me here if you learn anything. Incidentally, keep on the water-wagon until after the fight."

"Right-o!" said Lindler, rising; "but I wish you'd tell me "

"I have told you," said Malcolm Sage, and with that he took the proffered hand and, a moment later, Dick Lindler passed through the outer door. As he did so, he almost collided with Thompson, who had just jumped out of Malcolm Sage's car and was dashing towards the door. Thompson rushed across the outer-office, through the glass-panelled door, and passed swiftly into Malcolm Sage's room.

"It's the car right enough, Chief," he said, making an effort to control his excitement. "I picked it up outside Jimmy Dilk's. There were three men in it."

Malcolm Sage nodded, then, opening a drawer, produced a sealed packet.

"If I'm not back here by half-past four," he said, "ring up Inspector Wensdale, and ask him to come round at once with a couple of men and wait in the outer-office. Give him this packet. There's a letter inside. If he's not there, get anyone else you know."

Thompson stared. In spite of long association with Malcolm Sage, there were still times when he failed to follow his chief's line of reasoning.

"If I telephone or write cancelling these instructions, ignore anything I say. Do you understand?"

"I understand, Chief," said Thompson.

Malcolm Sage picked up his hat and stick and left the room.

Tims, who had been waiting at the outer door, sprang to his seat and, almost before the door of the car had closed, it jerked forward and was soon threading its sinuous way towards Coventry Street.

Five minutes later Malcolm Sage pressed a bell-push on the fifth floor of a large block of flats known as Coventry Mansions. The door was opened by a heavily-built, ill-favoured man. In response to Malcolm Sage's request to see Mr. Goldschmidt, he was told that he couldn't.

"Tell him," said Malcolm Sage, fixing his steel-grey eyes upon the man in a steady gaze, "that Mr. Malcolm Sage wishes to see him about something that happened last night, and about something more that is to happen to to-morrow night. He'll understand."

A sudden look of apprehension in the man's eyes seemed to suggest that he at least understood. He hesitated for a moment, then, with a gruff "Wait there," shut the door in Malcolm's Sage's face. Three minutes later he opened it again and, inviting him to enter, led the way along a passage, at the end of which was a door, which the man threw open.

Malcolm Sage found himself in a darkened room, from which the light was excluded by heavy curtains. For a moment he looked about him, unable to distinguish any object. When his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he saw seated in an arm-chair a man with a handkerchief held to his face.

"Mr. Goldschmidt?" he interrogated, as he seated himself in the center of the room.

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

"Well, what is it?" was the thickly spoken retort.

"I came to ask your views on the fight to-morrow night, and to enquire if you think the odds of nine to two on Jefferson are justified."

There was an exclamation from the arm-chair.

"If you've got anything to say," said the thick voice angrily, "get it off your chest and clear out!" he added, as an afterthought. "What do you want?" the voice demanded, as Malcolm Sage remained silent.

"I want you to take a little run with me in my car," said Malcolm Sage evenly. "Fresh air will do your nose good."

"What the " the man broke off, apparently choked with passion, then, recovering himself, added, "Here, cough it up, or else I'll have you thrown out into the street! What is it?"

"I want either you, or one of your friends, to come with me to where Charley Burns has been taken."

There was a stifled exclamation from the chair, then a howl of agony as the hand holding the handkerchief dropped. At the same moment three men burst into the room. Malcolm Sage's back was to the door. He did not even turn to look at them.

Somebody switched on the light, and Malcolm Sage saw before him the puffy face of a man of about sixty, in the centre of which was a hideous purple splotch that had once been a nose. A moment later the handkerchief obscured the unsavoury sight.

"What's all this trouble about?" shouted one of the men, advancing into the room, the others remaining by the door.

Slowly Malcolm Sage turned and regarded the three men, whose appearance proclaimed their pugilistic calling.

"I was just asking Mr. Goldschmidt to be so good as to accompany me to where Charley Burns is " "

He was interrupted by exclamations from all three men.

"What in blazes do you mean?" demanded he who had spoken, a dark, ill-favoured fellow with a brow like a rainy sky.

"I will tell you," said Malcolm Sage. "Last night Mr. Goldschmidt, accompanied by certain friends, went to Burns's training-quarters to keep an appointment made in the name of a girl friend of Burns. He came out quite unsuspectingly, was overpowered, and subsequently taken in Mr. Goldschmidt's car to a place with which I am unacquainted, so that he shall not appear at the Olympia to-morrow night."

He drew his pipe from his pocket and proceeded to fill it. His air was that of a chess player who knows that he knows he can mate his opponent in two moves.

"It's a lie!" roared one of the men, whilst Goldschmidt shrieked something that was unintelligible.

"You drove out by way of Putney Hill, Esher, and Clandon Cross Roads. You backed the car to within two hundred yards of 'The Grove,' where you all got out with the exception of the driver. You then entered 'The Grove,' taking cover behind a large clump of rhododendrons."

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

"And that's a lie!" choked Goldschmidt.

"By the way," continued Malcolm Sage, "your fair friend drove out in the tonneau; but returned seated beside the driver, and one of you was nearly left behind and entered the car after it had started."

The men looked at one another in bewilderment.

"You Goldschmidt, carried an umbrella," continued Malcolm Sage, "and took cover behind the holly bush; but you came out a little too soon, hence that nose. Burns was playing 'possum. You were rather anxious for a smoke too. I am a smoker myself."

A stream of profanity burst from Goldschmidt's lips.

"You see I am in a position to prove my points," said Malcolm Sage calmly.

"Oh! you are, are you?" sneered the spokesman, as he moved a little closer to Malcolm Sage, "and I am in the position to prove that we're four to one."

"Three to one," corrected Malcolm Sage quietly. "Your friend," indicating Goldschmidt, with a nod, "is scarcely "

He was interrupted by a stifled oath from the armchair.

"Good old Nigger!" murmured one of the men by the door.

"Well, and what about it?" demanded Nigger.

"If Burns is delivered over to me within two hours, unharmed and in fighting trim, and a cheque for £1,000 is paid to St. Timothy's Hospital by noon to-morrow, there will be no prosecution, and I will not divulge your names. If not, during the next twenty-four hours, London will probably have its first experience of lynch-law."

With that Malcolm Sage struck a match and proceeded to light his pipe.

"That all?" sneered the man. "Ain't there nothing else you'd like?"

"I cannot recall anything else at the moment," said Malcolm Sage imperturbably, as he looked across at the fellow over the top of the burning match.

"You dirty nark," burst out the man by the door, who had hitherto remained silent. "A pretty sort of stool-pigeon you are."

"Spyin' on us, wasn't you?" demanded Nigger, edging nearer to Malcolm Sage.

"It's ten minutes past four," remarked Malcolm Sage coolly, as he glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Oh, it is, is it?" was the retort, "and in another hour it'll be ten minutes past five."

"I have to be back at my office by half-past four." Malcolm Sage looked about for some receptacle in which to throw the spent match.

"You don't say so." Again Nigger edged a little nearer; but Malcolm Sage appeared not to notice it.

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

"Well, I may as well tell you that you don't leave here until eleven o'clock to-morrow night, see?"

There were murmurs of approval from the others.

"Then, perhaps, you will send out and buy me a tooth-brush," was Malcolm Sage's quiet rejoinder.

III

Never had the Olympia seen such a crowd as was gathered to watch the fight between Charley Burns of England and Joe Jefferson of America. Never in its career of hybrid ugliness had it witnessed such excitement.

For thirty-six hours the wildest rumours had been current. Charley Burns had broken down, run away, committed suicide, and refused to fight. He had broken a leg, an arm, a finger, and had torn more tendons than he possessed. He had sprained ankles, wrung withers, been overtrained, had contracted every known disease in addition to manifesting a yellow streak.

The atmosphere was electrical. The spectators whispered among themselves, exchanging views and rumours. The most fantastical stories were related, credited, and debated with gravity and concern.

If some ill-advised optimist ventured to question a particularly lugubrious statement, he was challenged to explain the betting, which had crept up to six to one on Jefferson offered, with no takers.

The arrival of the Prince of Wales gave a welcome vent for pent-up excitement. Accustomed as he was to enthusiastic acclamation, the Prince seemed a little embarrassed by the warmth and intensity of his greeting.

The preliminary bouts ran their course, of interest only to those immediately concerned, who were more truly alone in the midst of that vast concourse than some anchorite in the desert of Sahara.

The heat was unbearable, the atmosphere suffocating. Men smoked their cigars and cigarettes jerkily, now indulging in a series of staccatoed puffs, now ignoring them until they went out.

Slowly the time crept on as by the bedside of death. If those ridiculously bobbing figures in the ring would only cease their caperings!

"Break! Break!" The voice of the referee suddenly split through a "pocket" of silence. Everyone seemed startled, then the curtain of sound once more descended and wrapped the assembly in its impenetrable folds. The gong sounded the beginning and the end of each round, and so it went on.

Mr. Papwith sat in the front row near the Prince. Smiling, smiling, for ever smiling. He was a dapper little man, with a fiery, clean-shaven face, and a fringe of grizzled hair above his ears that gave the lie to the auburn silkiness with which his head was crowned. Next to him was Mr. Doulton, who chatted and smiled, smiled and chatted; but his eyes moved restlessly over the basin of faces, as if in search of an answer to some unuttered question.

At length the preliminary bouts were ended. As the combatants had arrived unheralded, so they departed unsung. Although no one appeared to be watching, a sudden hush fell over the assembly. The dramatic moment had arrived. A few minutes would see the rumours confirmed or disproved. Men, seasoned spectators of a hundred fights, found the tension almost unbearable.

The M.C. climbed through the ropes and looked fussily about him. He appealed to the spectators for silence

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

during the actual rounds and for the discontinuance of smoking. A black cardboard box, sealed as if it contained duelling-pistols instead of gloves, was thrust into the ring. Men took a last fond draw at their cigars and cigarettes before mechanically extinguishing them.

All eyes were directed towards the spot where the combatants would appear.

The referee turned expectantly in the same direction. A group of men in flannels and sweaters was seen moving towards the ring. Among them was a sleek, dark-haired man in a long dressing-gown of bottle green. It was Joe Jefferson.

Suddenly a great roar burst out, echoing and re-echoing continuously as the group approached the ring and Jefferson climbed through the ropes.

Then came another hush. A second group of men was observed approaching the ring. There was a shout as those nearest recognised Alf Pond among them. It developed into a roar, then died away as if strangled, giving place to a hum of suppressed inquiry. Everyone was either asking, or looking, the same question.

"Where is Burns?"

Alf Pond and his associates moved to the ringside as if bound for a funeral.

Their gloom seemed suddenly to pervade the whole vast concourse. Men talked to one another mechanically, their eyes fixed upon the group.

There was a strange hush. The men reached the ringside and stood looking at one another. The audience looked at them. What had happened?

None seemed to notice three men moving down the opposite gangway towards the ring. The man in the centre was muffled in a heavy overcoat that reached to his heels, a soft felt hat was pulled down over his eyes. One or two spectators in their immediate neighbourhood gave them a hasty, curious glance.

Suddenly Alf Pond gave a wild whoop and, breaking away from his fellows, dashed towards the three strangers. In a moment the overcoat and muffler were thrown aside and the hat knocked off, revealing the fair-haired and smiling Charley Burns.

Gripping Burns's hand, Alf Pond broke down. Tears streamed down his battle-seared features, and he sobbed with the choking agony of a strong man.

Then suddenly everything became enveloped in a dense volume of sound. Men and women stood on their chairs and waved frantically, madly, anything they could clutch hold of to wave. The whole Olympia appeared to have gone mad. Noble peers, grave judges, sedate generals and austere philosophers acted as if suddenly bereft of the restraining influences of civilisation and decorum.

Hugged and fondled by his seconds, Burns reached the ring and climbed into it. The black cardboard box was opened, the men's hands bandaged, the gloves donned. Still the pandemonium raged, now dying down, now bursting out again with increased volume.

Jefferson and Burns shook hands. The referee stood in the middle of the ring and, with arms extended aloft, appeared to be imploring the blessing of heaven. The crowd, however, understood, and the great uproar died down to a hum of sound.

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

Then for the first time it was noticed that, in place of the habitual smile that had made Burns the idol he was, there was a grim set about his jaw that caused those nearest to the ring to wonder and to speculate.

Charley Burns's "battle-smile" had become almost a tradition.

"If he'd only fight more and box less," Alf Pond would say complainingly, "he'd beat the whole blinkin' world with one hand."

Suddenly a hush fell upon the assembly, a hush as pronounced as had been the previous pandemonium. The referee took a final look round. Behind Burns, Alf Pond could be seen sponging his face over a small bucket. He was once more himself. There were things to be done.

Almost before anyone realised it the gong sounded; the fight had begun.

"Look!"

A shout broke involuntarily from Alf Pond, as he dropped the sponge and gazed before him with wide-staring eyes.

"He's fighting!" he cried, almost dancing with excitement. "Did ever you see the like, Sandy?" But Sandy's eyes were glued upon the ring. His hands and feet moved convulsively he was a fighter himself.

Discarding his traditional opening of boxing with swift defensive watchfulness, Charley Burns had darted at his man. Before anyone knew what was happening his left crashed between Jefferson's eyes, a blow that caused him to reel back almost to the ropes.

Before he could recover, a right hook had sent him staggering against the ropes themselves. For a second it looked as if he would collapse over them. Pulling himself together, however, he strove to clinch; but Burns was too quick for him. Stepping back swiftly, he feinted with his left, and Jefferson, expecting a repetition of the first blow, raised his guard. A white right arm shot out to the mark, and Jefferson went down with a crash.

The timekeeper's voice began to drone the monotonous count; at eight Jefferson gathered himself together; at nine he was on his feet.

Once more Burns was upon him, and Jefferson saved himself by clinching. It was clear that he was badly shaken.

Three times during the first round Burns floored his man. The onlookers were mad with excitement.

Back in his own corner, Charley Burns was sitting, a hard set look in his eyes, his jaw square and firm.

Alf Pond fussed about him like a hen over a chick.

"Shut up, Alf! I know what I'm doing," said Burns sharply.

"He knows what he's doing," repeated Alf Pond ecstatically. "Hear that, Sandy? He knows what he's doing, and so does Jeff, I'll lay a pony to a pink pill," he added.

Once more the gong sounded; once more Burns sprang up and darted at his man. Jefferson tried first to dodge and then to clinch; but without avail. He was unnerved. His strategy and tactics had been planned in view of Burns's usual methods; but here was an entirely different man to deal with a great fighter.

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

Twice more Jefferson went down, taking a count of nine on each occasion. He seemed to share with the spectators the knowledge that there would be no third round.

On rising the second time he seemed determined to change his tactics. He rushed forward, fighting gamely, apparently in the hope of getting a lucky knock-out blow. Without giving an inch, Burns threw off the blows and, feinting with his left, crashed his right full on the point of his opponent's jaw.

Jefferson's hands fell, and for a second he stood gazing stupidly before him; then his knees sagged and, with a deliberation that seemed almost intolerable, he crashed forward on his face, one arm outstretched as if in protest.

Again the timekeeper's voice was heard monotonously counting. Burns turned to his corner without waiting for the conclusion of the count. He knew the strength behind that blow.

IV

Later that night, just as Big Ben was taking breath preparatory to his supreme effort, Malcolm Sage was seated in his big arm-chair smoking a final pipe before bed, and turning over in his mind the happenings of the day and the probable events of the morrow.

His train of thought was suddenly interrupted by a hammering at the outer door of his chambers, followed by the sound of loud and hilarious voices as Rogers answered the summons.

A moment later the door of the sitting-room burst open, and there flowed into the room Charley Burns and his entourage, all obviously in the best of spirits. In the background stood Rogers, with expressionless face, looking towards his master.

Malcolm Sage rose and shook hands with Burns, Mr. Doultton and Mr. Papwith, Alf Pond and his assistants.

"Sorry, Mr. Sage," cried Burns, with a laugh; "but the boys wouldn't wait, although I told them calling time was four till six," and he laughed again, the laugh of a man who has not a care in the world. He also gripped Malcolm Sage's hand with a heartiness that made him wince. The others in turn shook hands in a way that caused Malcolm Sage to wonder why America had not long since ceased to be a Republic.

The men dropped into chairs in various parts of the room, and Rogers, who had disappeared at a signal from Malcolm Sage, now returned with a tray of glasses, syphons, and decanters. Soon the whole company was drinking the health of Malcolm Sage with an earnestness which convinced him that on the morrow there would be trouble with Colonel Sappinger, who lived above and cherished Carlyle's hatred of sound.

"And now, Mr. Sage," said Alf Pond, "we want to know how you found Charley. He won't tell us anything. Wonderful, I call it," he added, and there was a murmur of assent from the others, as they proceeded to light the cigars that Rogers handed round.

"It was not very difficult," said Malcolm Sage, stuffing tobacco into his pipe from a terra-cotta jar beside him. As he applied a light to the bowl the others exchanged glances.

"From the first," he continued, "it was obvious that some message, or letter, had been conveyed to our friend Burns." He gazed across at the champion, who looked uncomfortable.

"As he had not mentioned the fact to any of his friends," continued Malcolm Sage, a little slyly, "it seemed obvious to assume that there was a lady in the case."

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

Alf Pond looked reproachfully at Burns, who reddened beneath the united gaze of seven pairs of eyes.

"That the appointment had been for the evening," proceeded Malcolm Sage, "was obvious from the fact that Burns disappeared in the blue suit he always changed into after the day's work."

Alf Pond looked across at Mr. Doulton, nodding his approval of the reasoning.

"It was Kitty, or I thought it was," burst out Burns. "She said something terrible had happened and that she must see me," he added.

Kitty Graham was shortly to become Mrs. Charley Burns, but during the period of training she had been rigorously excluded from all intercourse with her fiancé by order of the autocratic Alf Pond.

"The meeting was arranged for the further side of the large clump of rhododendrons, which acted as a screen," continued Malcolm Sage. "When Burns arrived there, he saw a girl standing a little distance away. Before he could reach her, however, he was seized and a chloroformed pad held over his mouth. The suddenness of the attack dazed him; he did not struggle, but held his breath; he "

"How the blazes did you know that, Mr. Sage?" burst out Burns.

"You are always a quick-thinker in the ring," said Malcolm Sage, "and you were a quick-thinker then. You smelt chloroform, held your breath and thought. It was a sort of instinctive ring-craft."

"But you " began Burns.

"There were no marks of a struggle where you were seized. You probably realised that your only chance lay in letting the enemy think you were losing consciousness."

Burns nodded.

"Seeing that there was no sign of trouble," continued Malcolm Sage, "the principal in this little affair stepped out from where he had been taking cover just at the moment when Burns broke loose and let out. Movement has always a primary attraction for the eye, and Burns got this man full on the nose and ruined it. He also sent him clean into the privet-hedge, where he collapsed."

"Who was it?" demanded Alf Pond fiercely.

"There were, however, too many of them for Burns," continued Malcolm Sage, ignoring the question. "They had planned the attack very carefully, each clinging to a limb. Soon they had him unconscious and bound in the car. Then they turned their attention to their leader."

"Yes; but how did you find Burns?" asked Mr. Doulton eagerly.

"I didn't," said Malcolm Sage. "They showed me where he was."

"But " began Mr. Papwith, whose shiny clean-shaven face, normally suggestive of a Turner sunset, now looked like a conflagration.

"After half an hour's fruitless effort to track the car down side-roads, I returned to London as fast as my man could take me," proceeded Malcolm Sage, "and I immediately set enquiries on foot as to the betting on the Stock Exchange, at Tattersall's, the National Sporting Club, and other places. By three o'clock that afternoon I knew

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

pretty well who it was that had been laying heavily against Burns. That simplified matters."

Alf Pond and Burns exchanged admiring glances.

"As you know, for more than a week previously the betting had made it clear that heavy sums were being laid on Jefferson. In the course of ten days it had veered round from 5 to 4 on Burns to 9 to 2 against. As there were no rumours detrimental to his condition or state of health, this could only mean that a lot of money was being put on Jefferson. I found out the names of the principal layers and the amounts. I discovered that all were extremely active with the exception of one. That I decided was the man with the umbrella."

"Who's he?" demanded Sandy, whose mouth had not ceased to gape since Malcolm Sage began his story.

"The man Burns knocked out. He had been leaning rather heavily on the handle whilst taking cover behind a holly-bush, and the metal cap at base of the silk was clearly marked on the ground. He was also holding an unlit cigar in his hand, which he left in the hedge. By great good chance this was recognised by someone I happen to know as a brand smoked by a certain backer of Jefferson."

"Wonderful! " broke in Alf Pond, with intense earnestness.

"So you see, I had quite a lot to help me. I was searching for a well-dressed man "

"But how did you know he was well-dressed?" queried Mr. Doulton.

"His footprints showed that he wore boots of a fashionable model," explained Malcolm Sage. "He also carried an umbrella, even on an occasion such as this.

"I had to look for a well-dressed man who always carried an umbrella, and who smoked large and expensive cigars and, most important of all, whose nose had been smashed out of all recognition."

"But how could you tell I got him on the nose?" demanded Burns, leaning forward eagerly.

"There was quite a pool of blood beneath the hedge," explained Malcolm Sage. "He was probably there for some minutes while his friends were making sure of you, Burns. Blood would not have flowed so generously as a result of a blow from the fist except from the nose."

"You're a knock-out, that's what you are, Mr. Sage," said Alf Pond, with admiring conviction. "I'd never have thought of it all," he added, with the air of one desiring to be absolutely fair.

"Finally," continued Malcolm Sage, "there was the car. It was a large car, a defect in one of the tyres enabled me to determine that by a steel rule. It was obviously heavily laden and the near back-wheel was out of track. This fact, of course, was of no help on the high-road, where other cars would blot out the track; but if I could show that someone who had been heavily backing Jefferson had a nose badly damaged, and a car with a near back-wheel out of track in just the same way that this particular wheel was out of track, and that its tyres were the same as those of the car that drew up outside Burns's training-quarters, then I should have a wealth of circumstantial evidence that it would be almost impossible to confute.

"From a friend at Scotland Yard I obtained the number of the car belonging to the man whom this evidence involved.

"As Stainton is off the Portsmouth Road, I telephoned to the Automobile Association patrols at Putney Hill Esher, and Clandon Cross Roads. I was told that on the previous evening this particular car was seen going in the

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

direction of Guildford. These patrols take the numbers of all cars that pass. As it had not passed Liss, where the next patrol is stationed, it was another link in the chain."

"Well, I'm blowned!" The exclamation broke involuntarily from Kid.

"As the patrols go off duty at dusk, I could get no further help from them," continued Malcolm Sage. "I sent a man to watch Jefferson's training-quarters, although I was fairly certain that he and his party were in no way involved."

Malcolm Sage went on to narrate his call upon Nathan Goldschmidt, carefully omitting any mention of the name or address. His hearers listened with breathless interest.

"I concluded that they had taken their prisoner to some lonely, empty house," he explained, "but there was not time to search all the empty houses in the home counties, so the man with the damaged nose had to come with me in my car, and his friends followed in his."

"But how did you manage it?" gasped Mr. Papwith.

"At first they showed fight," said Malcolm Sage, "and threatened to keep me prisoner until after the fight."

"Gee!" exclaimed Kid.

"I anticipated some such move, and had instructed my people that unless I were back by half-past four, they were to deliver certain packets to the editors of well-known London papers. In these packets was told the story as far as I had been able to trace it. This I informed them."

"What did they say to that?" asked Mr. Doulton.

"They insisted that I telephone countermanding my orders; but as I explained that I had told my man Thompson he was to disregard any telephone message, or written instructions, he might receive from me, they realised that the game was up. I also informed them that Inspector Wensdale and two of his men were waiting at my office in anticipation of a possible hold-up."

"Well, I'm blessed," exclaimed Alf Pond. "If you ain't It."

"I pointed out," continued Malcolm Sage, "that whereby producing Burns they would have a fight for their money, if the truth became known not only would their bets most likely be forfeited, but they would probably have to go to law to recover their stake-money. I further pledged Mr. Doulton, Mr. Papwith, and Burns not to take legal action. I rather suspect that in this I was technically conspiring to defeat the ends of justice."

"But weren't you afraid they'd do a double-cross?" asked Burns.

"They heard me instruct one of my assistants that unless I were back by nine o'clock that evening, the notes I had written and addressed were to be delivered. Incidentally the inspector was present, unofficially of course."

"You oughter been in the ring with a head like that," said Alf Pond sorrowfully.

"We found Burns fairly comfortable in the wine-cellar of an empty house near Ripley. They had left him food and water and beer. In all probability on awakening tomorrow morning, had we not found him, he would have discovered the door unlocked and himself no longer a prisoner." Malcolm Sage paused with the air of one who has told his story.

THE MISSING HEAVYWEIGHT

"But why did you keep Papwith and me at Stainton until late this afternoon?" enquired Mr. Doulton.

"In the first instance, to be in charge and to see that Burns's disappearance was kept secret. It was obvious that every endeavour would be made to put a lot of money on Jefferson before the fact became known. This would lead to rumour, and later to enquiry. Subsequently I decided that you were both better out of London, as you would have been interviewed and bound to give something away, in spite of the utmost caution."

"And now, Mr. Sage," said Mr. Doulton, "who are the scoundrels?"

"I have promised not to give their names," was the quiet reply.

"Not give their names?" cried several of his hearers in unison.

Malcolm Sage then proceeded to explain that unless the gang had seen a loop-hole of escape they would not have thrown up the sponge. Had exposure been inevitable in any case, they would have brazened it out, knowing that, whatever happened to themselves, Burns could not appear at the Olympia. The knowledge that their identity would not be divulged tempted them to risk the loss of their money. "Apart from this," he added, "the details I was able to give seemed to convince them that they had either watched or given away."

"You must remember that they have lost enormous sums of money," Malcolm Sage went on, "and there will be another £1,000 for St. Timothy's Hospital. It was further understood that, if I could discover anyone of them had inspired a covering bet, I was released from my promise. This is why the odds got to six to one. Incidentally they ensured the defeat of their man. When Burns entered the ring to-night, it was to fight, not to box."

"That's true," said Alf Pond, nodding his head and reaching for another cigar. "He never fought like it before in all his puff."

"And where were you last night?" enquired Mr. Papwith of Burns.

"In my bed," said Malcolm Sage, "and my friend Inspector Wensdale of Scotland Yard and I slept here. Burns has never been out of Wensdale's sight until we handed him over this evening."

"I've been having police protection," laughed Burns.

"Still, you didn't oughter have gone two days without doing anythink," said Alf Pond.

"Oh! I had a bit of sparring with Mr. Sage," said Burns, "in spite of the glasses. If you want to see some pretty foot-work, Alf, you get him to put the gloves on."

"I knew it," cried Alf Pond, with conviction; then, turning to the others, "Didn't I say he oughter been in the ring?"

And Malcolm Sage found relief from the admiring eyes of his guests in gazing down at the well-bitten mouthpiece of his briar.

"But why did you let me think that Jefferson and his crowd were in it?" enquired Burns, with corrugated brow.

"Well," said Malcolm Sage slowly, "as I had put twenty-five pounds on you to steady Pond's nerves, I didn't want to lose it."

And Alf Pond winked gleefully across at Mr. Doulton.