

It is an old saying that red hair means pluck Ginger Dan, in this sparkling boxing story, proves the old adage to be true in his case, at any rate!

THE FIRST CHAPTER A Friend In Need.

THE big motor-lorry bumped sharply as it swerved over the railway-bridge, and a round object rolled from its precarious perch in the rear of the van on to the long grass.

There was a yelp and a snuffle, and another object launched itself from the same narrow resting-place. It, too, sprawled forward, but being more prepared for the shock, recovered itself, and an amazingly grimy rough-haired sheepdog revealed itself.

He trotted back to where the first object had fallen, and, thrusting his muzzle forward, licked at a hand which had just been raised to its owner's forehead.

"Gee winkins, Bill, that was some bump!"

Billy evidently thought so, too, for he squatted in the thick grass and snuffed his sympathy.

"Still, no bones broken!"

Very leisurely the speaker arose to his feet, and stretched his arms above his head. He was a ragged, tattered youngster, with a cheeky, freckled face, and a shock of red hair.

He had boarded that particular lorry just outside Banbury with the fond hope of being carried to London. It had been very comfortable under that loose tarpaulin sheet, and

he had forgotten the precariousness of his perch, with the result that he had dropped off into a half doze, which the swift swerve and bump had rapidly broken.

If Ginger Dan had any other name, he did not know what it was. A waif of the high-ways, he was half gipsy, half vagrant, and the only friend in the world he had was seated at his feet in the presence of Bill, the lurcher sheepdog.

A keen, clever forager was old Bill, the sort of animal who could nip over a fence and remove a chicken without so much as permitting a squawk to arise from that feathered throat. As for rabbits, Bill's pace was distinctly deceiving, for he could trundle himself over the ground with greyhound-like speed when it came to the point, as many furry victims testified.

But it was getting winter-time now, and Ginger Dan, knowing the need of secure shelter, had decided to head Londonwards in common with others of his type.

"Where the dickens are we, Bill?"

Bill did not know, and obviously did not care. He arose, stretched himself, and awaited the decision of his young master. Finally Dan decided to follow the spume of dust that was all that was left of the lumbering furniture-van.

It was getting dusk now, and he footed it along the grass beside the road at a fair pace.

He was hungry, but that was nothing unusual. He was also thirsty, but a brook which he met with removed that want, and also helped him to make a slight toilet.

Finally, somewhere about seven o'clock, Dan found himself walking along beside a high wall, and, as he neared the gateway, the murmur of voices came to his ears; youthful voices, and obviously angry ones.

Dan halted and listened. The voices were coming from the other side of the wall, and Dan, being blessed with an amazing bump of curiosity, decided that it was necessary for him to inquire into these occurrences.

"You wait here, Bill!" he said to the dog.

A quick leap and a heave up saw him looking over the top of the wall. Below him, facing each other, were a couple of youths about his own age. One of them, a broad-shouldered, heavy-jowled fellow, was leaning forward in a threatening attitude, and his voice, very harsh and strident, came to Ginger Dan's ears.

"You've got to do what I tell you, or I'll make you pay for it."

"But I can't do it—I can't, Howard! Uncle Dick has forbidden us to go anywhere near the Crown Inn again, and I'll get into trouble if I'm seen there."

"Who's going to see you? All you've got to do is to take this letter and hand it over to Sam Drake, and wait for an answer!"

The burly-shouldered speaker reached out and grabbed the other youngster by the arm, twisting it forcibly.

"You hear me? You've got to deliver this letter!"

"I say, don't—don't! You're hurting—you're hurting me!"

The slimmer figure seemed helpless in the grip of the broad-shouldered, towering bully, and in the quick struggle which followed, he was soon brought to his knees.

"Are you going to take the letter or are you not?"

"All right, Howard, I—I'll take it! Give it to me!"

With a half sob, the slimmer youngster

arose to his feet, nursing his wrenched arm. The other, with a short laugh, slipped his hand into his pocket and produced an envelope.

"You sheer off right now! I expect Sam Drake will be up at the inn waiting for you. Don't forget you've got to bring an answer."

They turned and headed towards the trees on the right. Ginger Dan watched them until they had vanished, then, with a puzzled look on his face, he slid from the wall and dropped into the road again.

"Just as well you weren't with me, Bill," he said to the dog. "I don't think you'd have sat still and watched that rotten bit of bullying! But I find it isn't always advisable to interfere in other folk's business. Not in private grounds, anyway, where you can be locked up for trespassing!"

He moved on up the road, and presently he came to a high gateway with a lodge on the left. Just as he passed the gates a figure appeared on the drive, and came out into the roadway.

Ginger Dan glanced at it, and recognised the ruffled countenance of the slimmer youth, who had been bullied by his companion. The youngster walked up the road at a quick pace, and Ginger Dan and Bill followed him.

After a quarter of a mile they reached the outskirts of a little country town, and finally Ginger Dan saw the youngster halt outside the lighted windows of an inn.

When Dan reached the inn, the youngster was seated on a wooden bench beside the lighted porch.

Dan had a chance to see the face now, and he rather liked it, although it was thin and delicate-looking. There was a troubled expression on the countenance, and it was evident that the youngster was ill at ease.

Dan shuffled up to the form, and seated himself at the other end of it. Bill, after a preliminary look at the second seated figure, had settled himself, dropping his nose between his paws.

"Nice night, ain't it?" Dan remarked.

"Not so bad!" came the reply.

"What town is this?" Dan asked.

"Stapleale."

Dan sidled a little nearer to his slim companion.

"Any place here where they gives a night's lodging and grub away free?" he asked.

A chuckle came from the listener.

"I don't think there are many places like that in the world, are there?" he said.

Dan laughed, and his companion, eyeing the grimy, freckled face, decided that there was something very taking about that smile.

Dan explained how he had left his pack under the sleep-inducing tarpaulin of the van.

"Hard luck!" said the listener. "What are you going to do?"

"Oh, I'll be all right! Something always turns up for me!" said Dan, the optimist.

The stranger slipped his hand into his pocket and produced half-a-crown.

"If—er—this—this could be any good to you," he began.

Dan hesitated before replying.

"Can I do anything for it?" he asked at last.

He thought that this might give the youth a lead, but it failed in its object.

"No; that's all right!"

Dan took the half-crown, spat on it, and slipped it into one of the many pockets of the strange assortment of garments which he wore.

"Mebbe they'd give me a bit of bread and cheese here?" he remarked, rising to his feet.

"Oh, yes, they could do that!"

Dan slipped into the low-roofed passage and found himself in a sanded bar-parlour



Ginger Dan hauled himself up the wall to look over the top. His face clouded with anger at the sight of a burly youth bullying a youngster

of the inn. He crossed boldly to the bar, rapped on the counter, and, when the rosy-checked maid came forward, voiced his wants.

"Chunk of bread and cheese, miss, and a glass of milk," said Dan.

There were three other men in the bar, two of them hulking-looking fellows, and the third a lean, wiry lad, some two or three years older than Dan. The latter was wearing a sweater, and Dan noted that he was also wearing a pair of running-pumps.

There was something about the look of the trio which made Dan place them at once. He knew all professions, and the marks of these men's trade were unmistakable.

"Bruisers!" Dan thought, eyeing the gnarled ear of the man nearest him.

The girl brought his food. He paid for it, pocketing the change, then slipped out of the inn again and seated himself beside his companion.

Bill shared in that repast, receiving the crust and a portion of the milk. Dan had just completed the meal when a wheezy Ford

car swung round to halt in front of the inn, and a stout figure in a check suit stepped out of the vehicle.

Dan's companion rose to his feet, and, as the stout man came into the light from the porch, he stepped forward.

"Hallo, Mister Ralph Westerbrook! How are you this evening?"

The stout man spoke in a gruff, would-be-hearty manner, but there was something wrong in his tone.

The youngster produced the letter which Howard had given him, and handed it to the man.

"Howard asked me to give you this, and he—he wants an answer."

The burly man took the note, glanced at it rather suspiciously; then, stepping into the porch, he opened the envelope, and Dan saw the heavy face change as Mr. Sam Drake read the contents. A look of complete satisfaction crossed the fat countenance, and crushing the note into a ball, Sam Drake thrust it into his pocket.

"Very good, Mister Ralph, very good! You can tell your cousin that everything's O.K.!"

He turned and stalked into the inn, and Dan noted that Ralph looked after him with an air of deep dismay.

"Going now?" said Dan.

Ralph had already moved away from the seat as Dan called to him.

"Yes, I'm going back home."

"Well, mebbe I'm going your way."

Dan fell into step beside the slim youngster, and Bill, with a doggy moan, followed. For the first hundred yards or so, Ralph did not speak, but finally he turned to Dan.

"You don't happen to know that man, do you?" Ralph asked.

Dan shook his head.

"Well, he's—he's a skunk!" Ralph broke out almost involuntarily.

"I don't like skunks!"

Again there was a silence, and the two youngsters plodded on quietly together; then Ralph, obviously at his wits' end, came to a halt.

"Look here!" he said. "I don't know who you are, but I like the look of you. I'm in

no end of a mess, and I want someone to help me."

It was only then that Dan broke his silence.

"I guessed that," he said; "for, you see, I happened to look over the wall when that cousin of yours put the ju-jitsu grip on you."

"You—you saw?"

"Yes; that's why I followed you."

Ralph stared for a moment through the dusk at the freckled face, then he caught Dan's arm. His fingers tightened on the ragged sleeve, and a murmur of amazement came from his lips.

"I say, by James, you've got some muscles!"

And, indeed, under that tattered sleeve there were muscles of steel, and Dan, bending his arm, allowed the great biceps to rise like a ball.

"Phew! You must be as strong as a bull!"

"Oh, I'm strong enough!" Dan returned. "Look!"

Before Ralph was aware of his intention, Dan gripped the youngster's middle with one hand. Next minute Ralph was high in the air over the ragged vagrant's head; then, as gently as he was lifted, Ralph was placed on the roadway again.

"My hat!"

Ralph's gasp was half-admiration, half-awe. Dan chuckled.

"You've got to be pretty strong when you're on the roads," he said. "All sorts of fellows try to put it across you, and you've got to be able to hold your own."

Ralph leaned forward.

"Can you—can you box?"

"I can scrap a bit," said Dan.

Ralph came nearer to him.

"Did you ever hear of a chap called Battling Sid Blake?"

"No; can't say I have!"

"Well, he was in the inn while you were there, along with his two seconds."

"Oh, you mean that chap with the running-pumps on? I remember him all right."

"Well, it's like this, Dan. Mr. Sam Drake is Battling Sid's manager, and there's going to be a fight at the town-hall at Staple-vale on Saturday. My uncle, Captain Wester-

brook, has arranged the programme, and we have a local chap called Tom Berry, who's been matched against Battling Sid."

Ralph Westerbrook was all eagerness now. He had gripped Dan by the arm. They moved on, pacing down the dark roadway together, with Bill trotting contentedly at their heels.

"Tom Berry is a good boxer, and my uncle thinks he'll win, and so do a lot of other people about here. I know there's been a heap of betting going on over the event, and I'm afraid that my cousin Howard is playing a double part."

"Can't say I liked the look of him," said Dan.

Ralph drew a breath through his set teeth.

"He's a bully, but he's too strong for me," he returned. "Uncle has caught him at one or two fishy tricks already, and has warned him that if he is seen associating with Sam Drake again he would be thrown out. That's why he made me take the letter to-night."

"What's at the bottom of it all?" Dan asked.

"I'm not quite sure," Ralph returned; "but I think that Howard is going to get at Tom Berry. I believe the fight will be squared, and all the folk in these parts will lose their money."

"More fools they for betting on fighting," said Dan. "I've got no time for people who chuck their money away on that sort of game."

"Neither have I," Ralph said. "But it seems a shame that Howard and that skunk Sam Drake should play a rotten trick on everybody."

He turned towards the freckled-faced vagrant by his side.

"Tom Berry's coming round to our place to-night. Uncle's got a gym rigged up, and he's been training there. I wonder if I could manage to slip you in and let you meet uncle?"

"Don't mind slipping in anywhere, so long as I get a supper and a roof," said Dan.

"All right, leave it to me. I can fix you up a bed over the garage, and the gym is next door to it. By James, I don't know if we'll be able to work anything, but I've got an

idea at the back of my mind that something will come out of this."

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Foul Play I

GINGER DAN was seated on the edge of a cot in a little room above the garage when a low whistle, sounding from the foot of the stairs, brought him to his feet.

Bill had been accommodated on a strip of ragged blanket near to the bed, and Dan turned, nodding his head to the dog.

"You just stay right there, Bill," he said. "You've got comfortable lodgings, and don't go and lose 'em."

The dog looked after his master, but made no effort to follow him, and Dan, hurrying down the flight of stairs, found Ralph Westerbrook waiting for him in the doorway.

"Come along, Dan!" Ralph said. "Uncle has just gone into the gym along with Berry. I've told him about you, and it's all right."

Dan followed his friend across the dark space and into a galvanised-roofed shed, which was lighted by a couple of powerful electric lamps, and was laid out as a small gym.

There was a roped-off space in the centre, and on a seat near to the ring was a broad-shouldered, military-looking man in a dinner-jacket suit. He was smoking a cigar, and, as Dan and Ralph entered, he rose to his feet.

"This is Dan, uncle," Ralph said, introducing the waif.

Captain Westerbrook, after a long, hard glance at the grimy, freckled face, nodded.

"Pleased to meet you, Dan!" he said, in a kindly voice.

Dan touched his forehead.

"Same to you, sir," he replied, and the captain laughed.

"Ralph has been telling me that you are something of a pocket Hercules, eh," said Captain Westerbrook, "and that you can box a little?"

They chatted together for a few moments, and Captain Westerbrook put one or two shrewd questions to Dan, which he answered readily enough.

Presently the door of the dressing-room opened, and Dan saw a sturdy, well-knit youngster come out in a sweater and shorts.

He was followed by an older man, and behind them came Howard. He was also in a sweater and gym shoes, and was carrying a pair of boxing-gloves.

Captain Westerbrook introduced Dan to the newcomers, and it seemed to Dan that Howard's eyes fixed on him in a rather hard stare. Dan returned the look with one of his usual open smiles.

"You can look after my nephew, Howard, Dan," said the captain. "He's going to have two or three rounds with Tom Berry. This is the last night of Berry's training, for he meets a very tough nut in the person of Battling Sid on Saturday, and I just want to see how he shapes."

Howard withdrew a pace, shaking his head.

"I don't want anyone to look after me, uncle," he said. "I can do all that for myself."

Captain Westerbrook's brows drew together in a half-frown, but he did not make any comment, and Howard, sliding under the ropes, seated himself in one corner and began to draw on his gloves.

Tom Berry went across to the opposite corner, where his older companion proceeded to help him to adjust the gloves on his hands.

Dan was leaning against the ropes, and suddenly Ralph saw him slide under them and go across to Howard.

"Might as well let me do that much for you, mister," Dan said, reaching out for the tapes.

It seemed to Ralph that Dan took a very long time over it, for finally Howard snatched his hands away from Dan's fingers.

"That's all right! Don't bother about me," he said.

Dan glided out of the ring, and came up to where Ralph Westerbrook was standing.

"I told you he was a beast," Ralph said. "I should not bother about him, if I were you."

Dan's eyes were curious as he looked at the youngster.

"Oh, I ain't offended, Ralph!" he said. "In fact, I'm very interested in cousin Howard—and his gloves!"

There was a significance about the latter part of the sentence which Ralph missed.

Captain Westerbrook, who had gone into the dressing-room for a moment, reappeared now and came towards the ring.

"Are you ready, Berry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, then come along, Howard! Just let's see what you can do."

The two youngsters went out and shook hands, then dropped into a guard.

Dan saw at once that Howard was by no means inexpert at the game; he had a good guard, and seemed a powerful, hefty sort of fellow.

The two boxers began to spar, and presently Howard made a quick attack. Berry contented himself with countering and smothering the blows for some time, and gave ground round the ring.

Then his manner changed, and he began to fight back. He was a fairly good boxer, with a long reach and a good left, but to Dan, who had been in many training camps, he lacked that quick footwork which marks the real professional pug.

The heavy padded gloves did very little harm, and the two boxers pommelled each other with right good will till the first round came to an end.

So far, Howard had used his left glove only for punching, keeping his right for guards and counters.

But as soon as the second round started Howard took the battle into Berry's quarters immediately.

Three or four wild swings of the right just missed their target by inches; then, in a corner of the ring, Howard brought off another terrific swing. His bunched fist caught Tom Berry just above the eye, and the local boxer fell back against the post for a moment.

Howard tried to smash his right into the face again, but Berry ducked, and they clinched, swaying back into the centre of the ring.

"Here, stop a moment—stop a moment!"

Captain Westerbrook's voice sounded, and, darting under the ropes, he ran into the ring, separating the combatants.

A stream of blood was pouring from Tom Berry's brow, and a gasp of dismay came from Ralph.



Ralph gasped in awe at Ginger Dan's strength as he felt himself gently lifted high in the air. "My hat!" he exclaimed, "you must be as strong as an ox!"

"I say! That's jolly serious!"

Tom Berry was hustled into his corner, and Captain Westerbrook and the other man examined the injury carefully.

Howard had crossed to his own corner, and was waiting there with folded arms.

"I'm afraid that's settled you, Berry," the captain said at last. "You've a very nasty cut there."

"No, sir, I'm all right—I'm all right!"

"Oh, no, you're not! What do you say, Smith?"

Smith, Tom Berry's trainer, shook his head.

"I reckons the captain's right, Tom. It's blinking hard luck on you, lad. That's a nasty cut, and will require a stitch or two to get it right."

It was, indeed, an ugly wound, for the skin had been cut for an inch or two, and the blood was pouring down Tom Berry's face.

Howard, slipping the gloves between his knees, drew them off, and, tucking them under his arm, he came across the ring.

"I—I'm very sorry," he began. "I—I hope I haven't hurt you?"

"That's all right, Mr. Howard," Tom Berry said; "accidents will happen."

He looked very pale and distressed, and Harry Smith's face indicated that this feeling was shared.

Ralph had darted into the dressing-room, and he returned presently with some sticking-plaster and bandages, and Captain Westerbrook carried out a rough first-aid to the luckless local boxer.

"Better take him along to see Dr. Parkin at once," he said to Smith. "It's most unfortunate, for, of course, the slightest blow on the wound will open it again, and that means a big handicap on Saturday."

Dan seemed to be very interested in Howard. He had watched the heavy-jowled fellow, and now, when Howard slipped away from the ring towards the dressing-room, Dan sidled after him. He saw Howard stoop over a box and fumble in it for a moment. One of his gloves was dropped into the box, and another glove was lifted out of it deftly.

Then Howard came back to the little group round Tom Berry.

"Can't understand how it happened, uncle," Howard Westbrook said. "I didn't think I was punching very hard, and the gloves are quite all right."

He held them up for inspection, and the captain examined them.

"Yes; they seem all right," he agreed.

Tom Berry and the trainer disappeared into the dressing-room for a moment, then reappeared in their every-day clothes, and left the gym.

"It's very bad luck," Westbrook said to Dan. "For with that injury to his eye, I'm afraid Berry has no chance against this fellow, Battling Sid Blake, on Saturday."

Ralph looked at Dan, and the freckled-faced youth shrugged his shoulders.

"He'll have a nasty black eye by to-morrow morning, sir," Dan said. "And it'll show up proper in the ring on Saturday. Battling Sid will make a mark of that eye of his."

He shuffled his feet for a moment.

"I suppose you ain't got the chance of putting anyone else in Berry's place?" he asked.

Captain Westbrook laughed.

"Oh, yes; I could put in anyone else I liked," he said. "But there's not anyone in Staplevale who has a snowball's chance against this fellow Battling Sid."

Dan stretched his supple arms.

"I'm in Staplevale, ain't I, mister?" he said. "What about trying me out?"

Howard, who had been seated on a chair

beside the ring, arose now and came forward.

His uncle turned to him.

"Do you mind giving this chap a round or two, Howard?" he asked.

Howard looked at Dan, looked at the ragged clothes and the distinctly cheerful countenance, and—fell into the trap. For some reason or other, Howard seemed to resent Dan's presence there in the gym; perhaps it was because he seemed so friendly with Ralph.

"Just as you like, uncle!"

"All right! Go along, Ralph; take your friend into the dressing-room and get him ready."

Dan shook his head.

"I don't want no sweater, mister. I'm all right as I am."

He began to remove his nondescript clothing. There was a coat, a couple of waistcoats and two shirts; all of them of a very ragged description. Howard's nose was tilted into the air as Dan completed his undressing and stood at last in a warm, woollen under-vest.

"Carry all your wardrobe with you, I suppose?" he sneered.

Dan nodded.

"You bet! I find it easier," he returned.

Ralph brought a pair of gloves to Dan, and the waif slipped them into position. Captain Westbrook had taken Howard's gloves, and he helped his nephew to adjust them over his wrists.

Ralph provided Dan with a pair of light gym shoes, removing the heavy Army boots which the waif wore. Then, at a signal from Captain Westbrook, Dan and Howard faced each other in the ring.

Howard was champion of his school, and was by no means a bad boxer, but he seemed to be incapable of doing anything against that red-haired, quick-moving waif.

For three long minutes Ginger Dan led Howard a grim dance. Again and again the long, supple arm would shoot out, tapping Howard on chest and shoulder and head. The quick, slipping footwork and amazing dexterity of the counters and headwork kept Howard guessing all the time.

Finally the black-haired fellow lost his

temper and, throwing all science to the winds, went for Dan hammer and tongs, trying to smash through that amazing guard.

Dan gave ground for a moment or so, then, realising Howard's intention, he blocked one vicious swing, and, measuring the distance, sent in a left hard on Howard's throat.

It did not seem a very powerful punch but its effect was amazing, for Howard, staggering against the ropes, tilted clean over them and landed on his back with a thud which knocked all the wind out of his body.

"Hope I ain't hurt him, sir?" Dan said.

Ralph had run to his cousin's assistance, but Howard was already drawing himself to his feet.

His face was bloodless, and, with an angry snarl, he snatched the gloves from his fists, throwing them on to the floor.

"I've had enough of this!" he rapped out, and stalked off out of the gym, banging the door behind him.

Captain Westerbrook went across to Dan, and put his hand on the waif's shoulder.

"I'm quite satisfied," he said. "We'll keep this secret between us. If you're ready to meet Battling Sid Blake on Saturday, you'll have a chance."

He nodded to his nephew.

"Bring Dan across to the study after he's had a clean up," he said. "We'll have a chat over things."

As soon as the captain had left the dressing-room, Dan crossed to the locker where Howard had dropped the glove. He found it, and brought it over to Ralph.

"Feel that!" Dan said.

He was indicating the padded part, where the knuckles of the hand rested. Ralph ran his fingers along the leather, and a quick gasp of surprise broke from his lips; for inside was a hard lump.

"An old trick," Dan commented, "and a darned rotten one! It's plaster of Paris. You can cut a fellow's face open with a glove like this."

"Then you—you think that Howard did it on—on purpose?"

"Not much doubt about that," Dan returned soberly. "He meant to mark Tom Berry so that Battling Sid would have an

easy job on Saturday. A punch on Tom Berry's eye in the first round would have blinded him, and he would have been an easy victim then."

Ralph took the glove and slipped it under his coat.

"You leave this to me, Dan," he said. "Uncle will hear the truth about Howard at last!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER

Ginger's Great Fight I

THE town-hall at Staplevalle was filled to overflowing, and prominent among the spectators was Mr. Sam Drake and his group of followers.

Mr. Drake had been very busy that day laying the odds against the local man. Something had happened to Berry, although what it was no one could quite say. He had vanished from his cottage, and rumour had it that he had been staying with Captain Westerbrook over the Friday night; but nobody was absolutely certain.

The preliminary events in the programme were fixed to start at eight o'clock, and the main contest of the evening was billed to take place at nine-fifteen. At nine o'clock the ring in the centre was cleared, and the M.C. appeared with a slip of paper in his hand, and began to make his announcement:

"A ten-round contest between Battling Sid Blake, of London, and Captain Westerbrook's nominee——" Here the M.C. halted, and glanced round the assembled audience. "I have to announce that, owing to a slight accident, our lad, Tom Berry, is unable to take the ring; but Captain Westerbrook has found another to take his place—Ginger Dan, of Nowhere."

There was a stir from the dressing-room on the left, and a group of figures appeared, to walk down the passage between the seats. A ginger-haired youngster was in their midst, and he climbed on to the platform, slipping under the ropes.

The M.C. pointed to him.

"This is Captain Westerbrook's nominee, Ginger Dan," he announced.

The cheery smile which crossed Dan's freckled face and the grin which accom-

panied the awkward bow brought a roar of approval from the crowd.

After a little delay, Battling Sid and his seconds appeared, and the foxy-looking, tough boxer glanced hard across the ring at the ginger-haired, cheery youngster opposite him.

The preliminaries were carried out; then "Time!" went, and the two lads stepped out to face each other.

The fight that followed was one of the finest that Staplevalle ever saw.

Battling Sid Blake, a tried boxer, knew just what was expected of him, and he waded in to register a quick victory. But he found himself faced by a lad who could swallow punishment by the cartload, and come up for more.

If Battling Sid had been wiser he would have played with his man, instead of trying to overwhelm him by sheer strength of arm.

In the first round Battling Sid went for his young, unknown opponent hammer and tongs, and under the fierce fusillade Dan gave ground. He took a terrific drubbing, and it seemed as though Battling Sid could do just what he liked with the red-headed, square-shouldered youngster.

Now and again the professional pug would drop back a pace and grin savagely; then he would close, and a terrific hurricane of blows would rain on Dan's head, body, and shoulders.

The audience had been taken somewhat aback by the sudden announcement made by the M.C., and now, when the fight was in progress, and they were watching Ginger Dan receive what looked to them like a severe dressing-down, murmurs began to pass from lip to lip.

The gong which brought the first round to an end saw Ginger Dan turn, and, hurrying to his chair, sprawl there, while Smith and Ralph, and another second attended to him.

Captain Westerbrook was in a seat close to Sam Drake, the bookie, and that individual leaned forward and grinned across at the man in evening-dress.

"Like to make a little bet, Captain Westerbrook?" Sam's raucous voice broke out. "I'll give you three to one that your man doesn't last another three rounds!"

Westerbrook turned quietly.

"You would lose your money," he said.

"Your man hasn't got plaster of Paris in his gloves to-night, Drake!"

The bookie fell back in his seat, his jaw dropping, and the look which came into his furtive eyes made Captain Westerbrook turn away and smile grimly to himself.

His shot had told, and there was a hard look in the captain's eyes as he raised them towards the ring again.

He saw Ginger Dan's mop of crisp curls emerge from under the huge sponge which Smith was using. The freckled face was still smiling, although there were one or two ugly bruises on it, and Dan's cheery eye caught Captain Westerbrook's gaze. The waif of the road smiled, and Captain Westerbrook caught his breath sharply.

"By James, you're a game lad, and you're not nearly done yet!"

"Seconds out! Time!"

Into the ring again went Dan, and the same grim, slogging tactics were carried on by Battling Sid.

The bruiser's blows hurt, but did not harm, for Dan was always just able to check them or time them so that, although they landed easily enough, the sting was taken out of them.

And yet it was a case of always beating a retreat with those terrible fists of the pro battering at him on rib, chest, and head.

Round and round the ring they went, Sid's fox-like face intent and furious as he tried all the tricks that he was master of. Yet, although he pommelled Dan unmercifully, never once did he send that sturdy figure off its feet.

And so for five terrible rounds the battle waged, and at the end of that time Ginger Dan's youth and stamina came to the front.

In the sixth round Dan, bruised but indomitable, found his second wind, and began to fight back at his opponent.

Two fierce rallies, which brought the audience to their feet, marked the opening of the round, and from a clinch Dan broke away to distance; then, as Battling Sid launched at him again, Dan swung a shattering left full into his rival's battered face.

It was a pile-driving punch, and Battling Sid rocked under the impact. Dan leaped in,



As Battling Sid rocked on his feet, Ginger Dan leaped in, and a right hook, beautifully timed, went home on the point of the bruiser's chin.

and a right hook, beautifully timed, went home on the point of Battling Sid's jaw.

Battling Sid went down with a thud on to the canvas-covered boards to roll over on his back; and Ginger Dan, falling back a pace, heard the steady count of the timekeeper.

"Eight, nine, ten!"

The vast town-hall seemed to ring to the roar of delight which went up as Dan walked back to his corner.

Sam Drake had risen to his feet, and was leaning under the ropes, glaring at Dan. Dan bent his head, and whispered.

"Didn't have to use a glove containing plaster of Paris, either, Mr. Drake!" The bookie slunk away.

In a third-class compartment a very tired but very contented youngster was leaning back in the corner as the train drew

out of Staplevalle on the following Monday.

He was still wearing his tattered garments, but there was a little wad of Treasury notes tucked away in one of the inside pockets, and Ginger Dan, bruised and battered though he was, smiled a smile of perfect contentment.

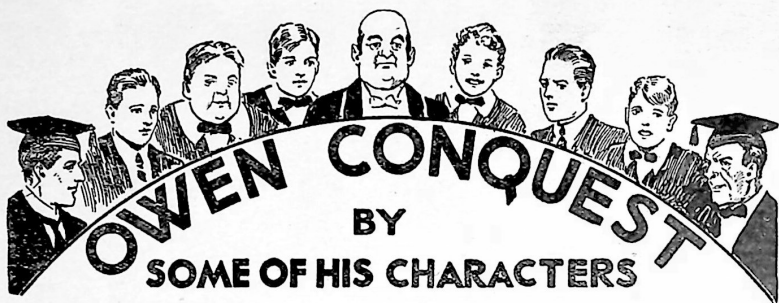
There had been a painful scene in Captain Westerbrook's study on the previous evening, where Howard, confronted by that faked glove, had been forced to confess the evil plot he had concocted with the rascally Drake.

The train swung on, and Dan, settling himself in his seat, closed his eyes.

"I don't mind if I'm bumped off another old furniture van," he murmured to himself. "Strikes me them bumps are lucky!"

And Bill, in the guard's-van, with a huge mutton bone with which to console himself, no doubt endorsed that sentiment.

THE END



*Candid Criticisms of popular Owen Conquest by
some of his well-known Rookwood Characters*

JIMMY SILVER. What do I think of Mr. Conquest? Well, the best way I can think to put it is that in writing up our adventures and misadventures in his inimitable style he has certainly lived up to his name! The only criticism I can offer is that he devotes too much space to Tommy Dodd and the inhabitants of that quite unimportant home for half-wits known as the Modern House.

TOMMY DODD. Owen Conquest? He's tip-top, A1 and O.K., and several other things I haven't time to mention! I've just one complaint to make: He devotes far too much space to that mouldering, decrepit old asylum for the feeble known as the Classical House!

CYRIL PEELE. My feeling is that it's high time Mr. Conquest revised his ideas. Anyone with half an eye can see that he dwells too much on those soft idiots Silver and Dodd instead of concentrating on the live wire that all the readers are constantly yearning to read about. I refer, of course, to myself!

RICHARD DALTON, ESQ. I have nothing to say against Mr. Conquest using me so frequently in his stories, but I feel I have a legitimate grievance in protesting against the irreverent way in which he calls me "Dicky." This habit of his makes it quite hard for me to preserve discipline at times. Only yesterday, when I called out Mornington's name in class the young rascal had the temerity to reply "Yes, Dicky?" The roar of laughter which

greeted Mornington's act of exuberance was only equalled by the other kind of roar which Mornington emitted shortly afterwards!

JOHN MACK. Wot I says is, Mr. Howen Conquest's orlright. But I strongly hobjects to 'im makin' me drop my haiteches, which is a thing I never 'ave been in the 'abit of doin' an' 'ope I never shall!

TUBBY MUFFIN. To tell you the truth, I consider Mr. Conquest has got many faults. Why, his yarns bristle with inaccuracies! Take me, frinstance. Any reader who didn't know me would imagine I was fat, flabby, fatuous and fond of food; whereas, as a matter of fact, I am manly, muscular, mean of measurement and, in food requirements, satisfied with a very small minimum! Put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Owen Conquest!

MARK CARTHEW. Owen Conquest? He's the so-called gentleman who regularly describes me, I believe, as the "cad of the Sixth." Well, you can tell Mr. Conquest from me that if ever he comes to Rookwood, there'll be one at least who won't stand up and cheer; you'll find him in my study!

GEORGE BULKELEY. It's easy to tell from the way he writes that Mr. Conquest is one of the best. Give him my respectful compliments and tell him that if ever he comes to Rookwood he's assured of a right royal welcome!

ROGER MANDERS, ESQ. Mr. Owen Conquest? Bah!