

WINNING THROUGH



By FRANK RICHARDS

“I’VE got it!” howled Skip.

He grinned joyously.

Every fellow in the Pound stared at him. There were nine or ten Fourth-form fellows in the junior room: among them, Skip’s chums, Tom King and Dick Warren. They all stared at Skip.

Why Skip Ruggles looked so joyous was quite a mystery. For two or three days, the fattest and most fatuous fellow at Felgate School had been looking downcast, dismal, dolorous, and almost desperate. For Skip was in trouble—not a new experience for him, for Skip was born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. But this time it was serious. His pals, King and Warren, were worried almost to tears about it. Study Four always stood together: the trouble of one was the trouble of the other two. But what could they do? Skip was due to pay the substantial

sum of thirty shillings at the tuck-shop by Saturday, or else—!

Skip had run up that account almost unconsciously. Skip liked tuck, and plenty of it. So long as Mrs. Gudge permitted him to run on, on tick, Skip was not likely to stop. Now the chopper had come down. Skip had been told, firmly that unless that account was settled by Saturday, the matter would be reported to his form-master.

Willingly would Study Four have clubbed together, to save Skip from a report to Mr. Charne. But Tom King’s financial resources were limited to half-a-crown: Warren’s to sixpence. Skip had a penny—he still had it, because it was a bad one! By no arithmetical means could half-a-crown, sixpence, and a penny—especially a bad one!—be made to add up to £1 10s. 0d.

Skip was going to be reported to Charne. Charne, no doubt, was going

to send that bill home to Mr. Ruggles. Skip was booked for one row with Charne, and another with Ruggles senior. It worried Skip: and it worried his pals. It almost made them forget that the annual Fair was on, at Hodden. Three shillings would have seen Study Four through at the fair on Wednesday afternoon—but for that worry about Skip. As it was, they were in no mood for fairs.

So why Skip burst in the Pound, with a crumpled hand-bill clutched in a fat hand, and his plump face wreathed in joyous grins, was perplexing. Why he announced, in a happy trill, that he had “got” it was another mystery. Certainly he had not “got” the required thirty shillings.

“What the dickens—?” began Tom King.

“Mad?” inquired Warren.

Skip emitted a joyful chuckle.

“I tell you I’ve got it! It’s all right! Look at that!”

Skip uncrumpled the hand-bill, and held it up. The juniors stared at it. It was one of the handbills advertising Hodden Fair. Why Skip derived joy from it not a fellow could understand. In large letters, printed across the bill, was the name:

CHARLEY THE CHICKEN.

In smaller type was the statement that Charley the Chicken was prepared to take on all comers in the boxing ring at Hodden Fair: and that his manager would pay two guineas in cash to any local champion who stood up to Charley for four rounds with the gloves on.

“See that?” grinned Skip.

“What about it?” demanded Tom King.

“That’s it!” explained Skip. “That’s

where the money’s coming from.”

“Eh?”

“You see what it says!” Holding up the hand-bill in a fat left hand, Skip traced the words with his fat right. “Two guineas prize to the chap who stands up to their boxer for four rounds. Easy money, what? You fellows know that I can box——!”

“You—box!” said Tom, almost dazedly.

“Suffering cats and crocodiles!” murmured Dick Warren.

“Well, I’m going in for that two guineas prize!” said Skip. “It will pay the thirty bob I owe at the tuck-shop, and leave something over for a spread in the study——!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” yelled every fellow in the Pound.

Skip stared round in surprise. He saw no reason for that sudden outburst of merriment.

“Look here, what are you sniggering at!” he exclaimed.

“Ha, ha, ha!” shrieked the Felgate fellows.

“I tell you I’m going to box that chap at the Fair, and win that two guineas——!” howled Skip. “I’ll jolly well show you——!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The Pound echoed with mirth. King and Warren were Skip’s chums, but they could not help joining in the yell. Indeed, a stone image might have laughed. Skip Ruggles fancied many things. He fancied that he could play cricket. He fancied that he could play soccer. He fancied that he could run, and swim, and box. But he had these fancies all to himself. Nobody else at Felgate shared them. And the bare idea of Skip standing up to a pugilist—any pugilist—for four rounds, or four



“Look here——!” roared the indignant Skip

seconds for that matter, was more than enough to evoke such “inextinguishable laughter”, as greeted Vulcan when of old he played head-waiter on Mount Olympus.

“Look here——!” roared the indignant Skip.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Can’t I box?” yelled Skip. “Think I can’t stand up to him for four rounds? Why, it’s money for jam.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Skip Ruggles glared at laughing faces. Skip, at least, believed that his financial problem was solved. True, there were two or three fellows in the Felgate Fourth who might have stood up to Charley the Chicken for the requisite rounds. Tom King, the best junior boxer at Felgate, was one of them. Skip Ruggles, emphatically, was not. Only Skip was unaware of it.

“I tell you——!” bawled the indignant Skip.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Yah!” snorted Skip. And leaving it at that, Stanley St. Leger Ruggles stamped out, banging the door after him with a terrific bang, and leaving the Pound almost rocking with merriment.

II

“Eureka!”

It was Tom King, in Study Four, who repeated the celebrated exclamation of Archimedes when the big idea came along.

Dick Warren looked at him inquiringly.

“What——!” he began.

“That ass Skip——! You remember his gas in the Pound yesterday——?”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Well, Skip’s a funny ass,” said Tom, laughing too. “He doesn’t know that he couldn’t box a stuffed owl, let alone a live boxer. But what about me?”

“You!” repeated Warren.

“I’ve heard about that Chicken chap,” said Tom. “He’s only a young fellow, but pretty hefty. They’re drawing crowds with his challenge to all comers. Nobody’s bagged that two guineas so far. But——Look here, I’ve stood up to Perkinson of the Fifth, in the gym. Suppose I take it on——?”

Dick Warren whistled.

“Mind, I don’t say I could pull it off,” said Tom. “But——I might! And if I did, there’s the thirty bob, and some over. It would see Skip through. I might get a bit knocked about——.”

“No ‘might’ about that,” said Warren. “You would! They’re not giving guineas away if they can help it. Tom, old man, you’d be asking for it.”

Tom King nodded. He knew that. But he was going to act on that bright



“You fellows coming?” asked Skip with dignity

idea, all the same. He was going to see Skip through his spot of bother if he could.

“I’ll try it on, Dick,” he said, resolutely. “If I get some hard knocks, I’m not made of putty. We’ve got to back up that fathead Skip somehow——.”

There was a tramp in the passage, and a fat face looked into the study. That fat face wore a frown.

“You fellows coming?” asked Skip, with dignity.

Skip was in shorts, revealed by his open overcoat. He had his gym shoes under his arm. Evidently, Skip had prepared himself for the fray. That

Wednesday afternoon he was going to do or die! Homeric laughter in the Pound, the day before, had had no effect on Skip Ruggles, unless to spur him on. Skip was going to "show" them!

His chums grinned at the fat figure which almost burst the shorts.

"You're going?" asked Tom.

"Didn't I say so?" sniffed Skip. "I'll jolly well show them whether I can box or not. Besides, I want that two guineas. Haven't I got to pay Mrs. Gudge's bill or go up to Charne about it?"

"You can't box that bruiser, you fat ass!" yelled Dick Warren.

"Yah!" retorted Skip. "Look here, are you coming with me or not?"

"Oh, we'll come! Somebody will have to carry your body home."

"We're coming," said Tom King, laughing. "If you don't pull it off, old chap, I'm going to try my hand, see?"

Skip stared at him. He shook his head.

"Not much use you trying, if I can't pull it off," he said. "After me, mind! It's my idea to bag those guineas, not yours. My turn first."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" said Skip. "You'll see!"

It did not take Tom King long to change. Equipped like Skip, with a coat on over his shorts, and his gym shoes in his pockets, he went down with Skip and Warren. The three did not go alone, when they started to walk to the fair ground on Hodden Heath. Bullinger, and Reece and Preece, and a dozen other Fourth-form men, followed on, with grinning faces, to see the fun of the fair: the very funniest item of which was going to be Skip Ruggles standing up to Charley the Chicken.

III

The big tent was crowded when the Felgate party arrived. Charley the Chicken was already seated in his corner in the roped ring. He was smiling as he talked to the referee, who had a paper in his hand with a list of names on it: the most recent additions to which were S. St. L. Ruggles and T. King. Skip gave the pugilist quite a careless glance: Skip had confidence in himself, which really was an essential quality in a boxer: it was just too bad that Skip lacked all the other essential qualities. Tom King eyed Charley with a much more careful scrutiny.

"Looks tough!" murmured Dick Warren.

"He does—he do!" agreed Tom.

Charley was quite a young fellow, only a few years older than Tom. But he did look rather "tough". He had a cheery good-humoured face, and a twinkle in his eye. His challenge to all comers was undoubtedly drawing custom: and he seemed to be enjoying it. But his smiling good-humour did not indicate that he wasn't a hard hitter: and Tom, eyeing him, did not feel quite so confident as his fat chum. Anyhow Tom was going to do his best: and no fellow could do more than that—if the prize was not won before his turn came.

It did not look like being won easily. Several local lads, from Hodden and Fell, who fancied themselves as boxers, had put in their names, and one after another, as their names were called, they mounted into the ring, but the luckiest of them survived only two rounds. Charley, still smiling, demolished them one after another, with ease and grace, to cheers from the crowded audience. His smile grew broader when, at length, the name of

Ruggles was called, and Skip popped up like a jack-in-the-box. From the audience came mingled cheers and laughter.

Skip donned the gloves, and faced up to his tough opponent valiantly, when the bell rang. Why the audience laughed he did not know. Perhaps they expected him to burst all over the ring at the first punch.

But Charley was a good-tempered boxer. He did not burst Skip all over the ring. He grinned cheerily as he danced round him, administering light punches here and there, Skip whirling round after him and making vain efforts to land a single tap. In about a minute Skip's breath, always short, failed him. Perspiration bedewed his plump face. He plunged wildly after Charley, but never seemed able to reach him. Suddenly something jarred on his fat little nose. He was too dizzy even to realise that it was Charley's right. Skip sat down, with a bump that almost shook the tent.

"Man down!" chuckled Reece.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skip sat and panted. Charley, grinning, waited. The referee, in a gurgling voice, counted. Skip made frantic



Skip sat and panted

efforts to get on his feet. But at each effort he plumped down again, amid yells of laughter from the audience. The count went on to ten: but it might have gone on to twenty or thirty, without much benefit to Skip. Skip was a fixture. He had to be helped out of the ring, gurgling for wind.

"Urrrrrrrrggh!" was Skip's only remark, as Warren helped him on with his coat.

The last name in the list was called: "T. King!"

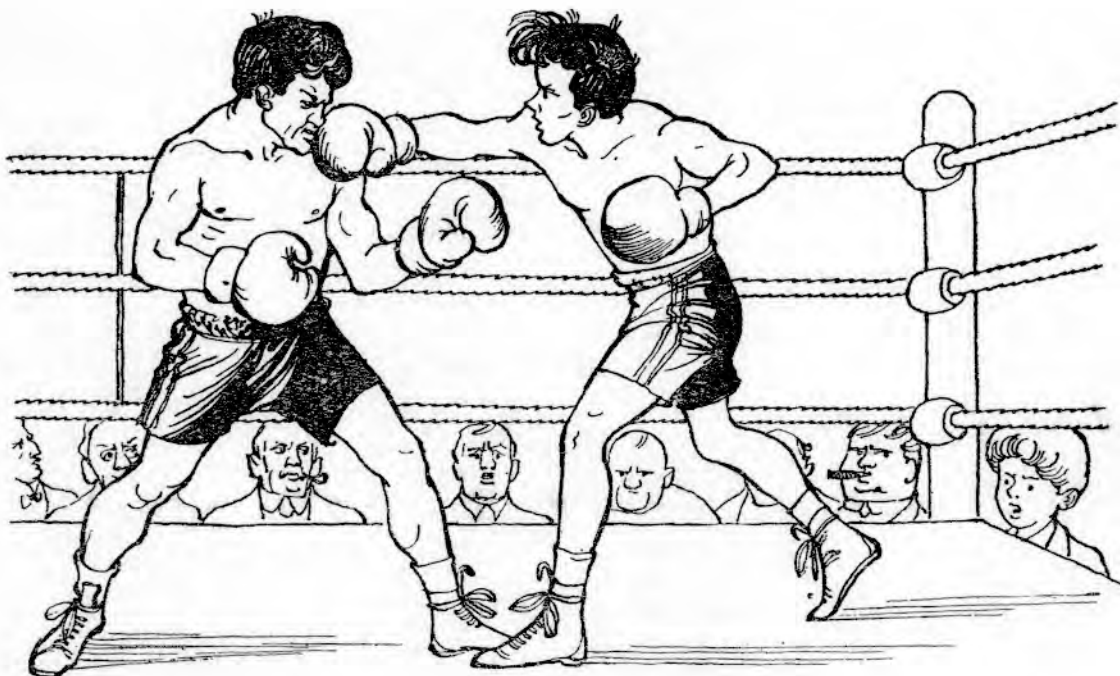
Skip sat gasping and panting, and mopping a fat brow. But everyone else had his eyes on Tom King, as he threw off his coat and clambered into the ring.

IV

Bump!

Tom hardly knew how it happened. For a whole minute, he and the Chicken had been circling round one another, with scarcely a tap delivered. Very likely his series of easy victories had made the Chicken careless: and in his view, the Felgate junior was only another schoolboy to be polished off. At all events, Charley the Chicken, with a left swing, laid himself open, unguarded, to a stunning jolt: which Tom King, quick as lightning on the uptake, saw and delivered with promptness and despatch. There was more force in Tom's right arm than the Chicken could possibly have anticipated: or he certainly would have exercised more care. As it was, that jolt went home with all Tom's strength and weight behind it, and the Chicken, equally to his own surprise and that of the audience, went over and thudded down. Tom's own surprise was as great, as he saw the boxer on his back.

There was a roar in the crowded tent.



—and then came his chance—his right hooked to Charley's jaw, and the boxer spun

Cheers woke the echoes. Dick Warren fairly yelled. Even Skip ceased to pant for a moment, and joined a fat bleat to the cheering. The Chicken staggered up. He was not smiling now. His face had hardened, and his eyes glinted. But that jolt had told: for the remainder of the first round, the Chicken backed and dodged, refusing close quarters. And it was plainly a relief to him when the bell went.

Dick Warren welcomed Tom into his corner with a joyous grin, and sponged his heated face. Tom had not turned a hair.

“Keep it up!” breathed Warren. “That’s the stuff to give ’em! Keep it up.”

Tom nodded and smiled. He was going to keep it up—if he could!

He couldn’t. In the second round the Chicken was not careless. He was as

watchful as a cat. He seemed like elastic on his feet, as he danced round the Felgate junior. Tom looked for another opening, without finding one. But Charley found some. Twice, thrice, and yet again, the boxer came in, and Tom rocked on his heels. But every time he eluded the finishing punch which the Chicken was evidently anxious to hand out. If not quite so good a dancer as the Chicken, he was amazingly quick and active on his feet. Charley pressed him very hard: and Warren, in his corner, watched with an anxious eye—and the audience were silent and almost breathless. Truth to tell, it was only the bell at the end of the round that saved Tom King.

But it saved him: and the brief rest on the stool in his corner gave him new life. He was promptly off the mark for the third round. That round was rather

in the nature of hammer and tongs. How many punches the Chicken delivered, and how he stood up to them, Tom King never knew. Again and again only quick foot-work saved him from finis. But he did stand up to them: and though at the end of the round he had a feeling of having been under a lorry, he was still on his feet at the sound of the bell.

"Good man!" whispered Warren. "Stick it out, old chap—only one more round, and you can stick it—by gum, I believe you could beat him, and chance it."

Tom smiled faintly. He couldn't beat the Chicken: but he did think he was good for one more round. He was going to stick it somehow. There was a buzz in the crowded tent, as he came up gamely for the fourth and last round.

The Chicken came on hard. He meant business this time. He had to finish Tom in that round, or own up that the schoolboy had passed the test. And for a long and awful minute, Tom King was on the retreat all the time, taking punishment at almost every step. He couldn't have counted the punches he collected. His jaw was numb: one of his eyes was closed: and he wondered whether he still had a nose. But he fought on gamely. The seconds seemed to crawl. Would he never hear the bell? Was this going on for ever? Still he kept his feet, and kept his head, and stalled the Chicken off. Then suddenly, almost on the tick of time, Charley came in with right and left, and he tottered. But he did not fall: a swift

side-spring saved him, and then came his chance—his right hooked to Charley's jaw, and the boxer spun. A moment more, and Charley was on him like a tiger, but——!

Pong!

It was the bell.

"Hurray!" roared Dick Warren. It was the end of the fourth round: and Tom King was still on his feet. He had won through.

V

"Dashed queer!" said Skip, thoughtfully.

They were in Study Four. Dick Warren was helping Tom King to doctor his damages, which needed some doctoring. They had walked home the richer by two guineas: and Skip's account at the tuck-shop had been paid: he was no longer in peril of that report to Mr. Charne. Skip was satisfied, so far as that went. But he was not so satisfied with the way things had gone at Hodden Fair.

"Queer!" said Skip, blinking seriously at his chums. "But I know how it was. You got through all right, Tom, and I'm jolly glad you did, but, you see, I'd worn him down. You wouldn't have had an earthly but for that. Dashed queer that you should get through, when I didn't! But I'd worn him down! I fancy that was how it was! What do you think?"

The reply of Tom King and Dick Warren was not in words. Words were wasted on Skip. They kicked him simultaneously.

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