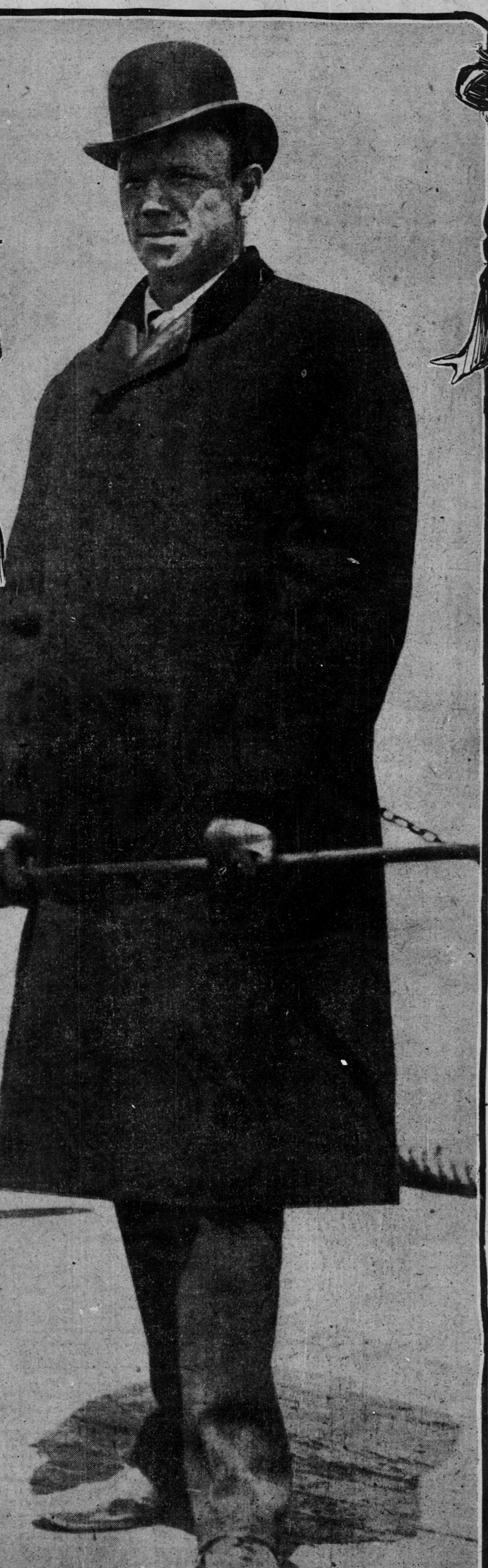
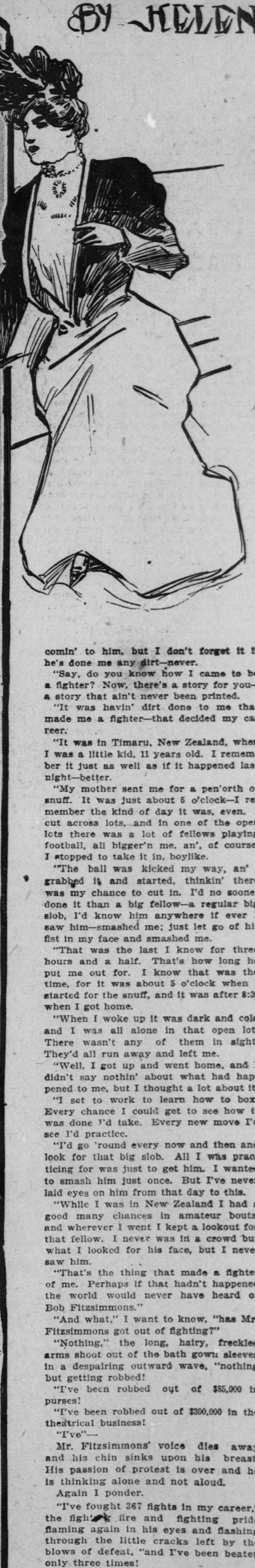
FITZ—IN THE HOUR OF HIS DEFEAT

BY HELEN DARE.





BOB FITZSIMMONS.

UNDOUBTEDLY "Fitz's heart is broken." The morning papers tell me that before—as I find out later—the blood of the fight has ceased to flow.

Mrs. Adams of the Adams House, who knows more about the sporting fraternity than any sporting writer even thinks he knows, tells me so over the phone when she tells me Fitz is still in bed, immured from the public that is now no longer his public.

Is she sure, I ask, that he will stay in bed, or in his room, or in the house until I can get there?

"Sure! His heart's broken and he doesn't feel like going out."

Fitz is in the hands of his masseur when I arrive, and he is not yet "fit for a lady to see," his manager tells me. So I wait behind the desk in the office with Mrs. Adams, preferring her entertaining company to lonely state in the parlor, and watch the newspaper men go right up without waiting for Fitz to be prettied.

Here my list of People I Have Met is increased by The Sullivans—Twins, who with professional courtesy solicitously inquire about Fitz but decline to go up, deciding it would be rather indelicate because they betted against him and are some hundreds richer by his downfall. They murmer in duet, when they know I am waiting to see him.

"'Sheart's broken. Yes, Fitz's heart's broken."

His manager conducting me at last to the presence prepares me on the way with "He's feeling terrible, of course; his heart's broken."

In his room the athletic young men supporting Fitz with silent sympathy rise in greeting when I enter and in response to the formalities of introduction look sorrowfully at Fitz and say "His heart's broken."

The lengthy gladiator of a day that is done, swathed in bath robe and blanket, the famous toupee carefully in place notwithstanding the state of his heart, gives me a big, hairy hand, shakes his head sadly, squeezes shut the little crack of battered eye that the fight has left open and tells me himself when I ask him:

"How do you feel?"

"Oh, Gawd! My 'eart's broke, my 'eart's broke for good this time."

And the elevator boy, fearful lest the information should have escaped me, tells me as he lets me out: "I guess it's all up with him as a fighter now—his heart's broken."

So, as I said at the beginning, undoubtedly Fitz's heart is broken.

It is only by his voice and his manner that the bitterness of his grief and the depth of his sorrow are conveyed to me.

His face, alas, is temporarily incapable of expressing the emotions of the soul, his eyes as mirrors of it are in eclipse.

His countenance—even after the ministrations of the masseur and the glutting of the leeches—is a bruised and purplish lumpy thing, dimly and grotesquely featured, defying identification by photograph or Bertillon system.

I see at once why the roped arena is forever secure against female invasion.

Not all the glory and the gain in the world could compensate a woman for a face like that.

But Mr. Fitzsimmons doesn't seem to care.

He does not, indeed, seem to care very much about anything in particular.

He is singularly apathetic and abstracted.

He is not living over again the incidents of the battle of the night before.

He is not inveighing against fate nor reviling fortune.

He is just explaining his defeat in a colorless voice.

"Oh, I guess I'm too old—I wasn't fast enough."

He is not really thinking of the fight, as he pats the sorer spots of his face with soothing finger tip.

He hasn't even read the morning papers that tell the story of his passing as a pugilist.

What, I wonder, is Mr. Fitzsimmons thinking of if not of that vivid scene of the night before?

He tells me that the Mr. O'Brien whose punch has punctuated his career with a full stop has just been sitting in the chair where I am; that he came up to inquire about him, to proffer his services and advice, and that he recommends collodion for black eyes.

I think it is very nice and polite of Mr. O'Brien, and Mr. Fitzsimmons says yes, it is, and that their relations are cordial.

"'E's a good fellow, all right, is O'Brien," says Mr. Fitzsimmons, "an', of course, we're friendly. W'y shouldn't we be? Fighting is just a business; that's all it is. There's no need for 'ard feelin's.

"Now, there's Jim Jeffries—there's no better fellow ever walked than 'im. There's not a crooked bone in 'is body. 'E couldn't do any one dirt, 'e couldn't. 'E's as square as they make 'em—I say it, an' 'E licked ME.

"An' then there's Corbett—'Gentleman Jim!' GENTLEMAN Jim, indeed. There never was a name a greater misfit than that. Him a gentleman—HIM! Huh!"

Mr. Fitzsimmons is not so apathetic now. "Oh," he throws out a hairy fist in despair and bangs it against the wall, "I can't think of nothin' mean enough to tell what I think of him. There AIN'T nothin' mean enough that you can say—before ladies.

"But I'll say this about him—as a fighter he's the cleverest of them all. I say that because I'm square. You can put that down for Bob Fitzsimmons.

"I give every one his due, just what's comin' to him, but I don't forget it if he's done me any dirt—never.

"Say, do you know how I came to be a fighter? Now, there's a story for you—a story that ain't never been printed.

"It was havin' dirt done to me that made me a fighter—that decided my career.

"It was in Timaru, New Zealand, when I was a little kid, 11 years old. I remember it just as well as if it happened last night—better.

"My mother sent me for a pen'orth of snuff. It was just about 5 o'clock—I remember the kind of day it was, even. I cut across lots, and in one of the open lots there was a lot of fellows playing football, all bigger'n me, an', of course, I stopped to take it in, boylike.

"The ball was kicked my way, an' I grabbed it and started, thinkin' there was my chance to cut in. I'd no sooner done it than a big fellow—a regular big slob, I'd know him anywhere if ever I saw him—smashed me; just let go of his fist in my face and smashed me.

"That was the last I knew for three hours and a half. That's how long he put me out for. I know that was the time, for it was about 5 o'clock when I started for the snuff, and it was after 8:30 when I got home.

"When I woke up it was dark and cold and I was all alone in that open lot. There wasn't any of them in sight. They'd all run away and left me.

"Well, I got up and went home, and I didn't say nothin' about what had happened to me, but I thought a lot about it.

"I set to work to learn how to box. Every chance I could get to see how it was done I'd take. Every new move I'd see I'd practice.

"I'd go 'round every now and then and look for that big slob. All I was practicing for was just to get him. I wanted to smash him just once. But I've never laid eyes on him from that day to this.

"While I was in New Zealand I had a good many chances in amateur bouts, and wherever I went I kept a lookout for that fellow. I never was in a crowd but what I looked for his face, but I never saw him.

"That's the thing that made a fighter of me. Perhaps if that hadn't happened the world would never have heard of Bob Fitzsimmons."

"And what," I want to know, "has Mr. Fitzsimmons got out of fighting?"

"Nothing," the long, hairy, freckled arms shoot out of the bath gown sleeves in a despairing outward wave, "nothing but getting robbed!

"I've been robbed out of $85,000 in purses!

"I've been robbed out of $300,000 in the theatrical business!

"I've"—

Mr. Fitzsimmons' voice dies away and his chin sinks upon his breast. His passion of protest is over and he is thinking alone and not aloud.

Again I ponder.

"I've fought 367 fights in my career," the fighting fire and fighting pride flaming again in his eyes and flashing through the little cracks left by the blows of defeat, "and I've been beaten only three times!

"There's more in fighting than the money!

"Why, I don't suppose there's a country in the world where Bob Fitzsimmons isn't known.

"I'd be willing to bet that more people have heard of me than of any other man living.

"I know I've never been anywhere where Bob Fitzsimmons wasn't known, nor run across anybody who hadn't heard of me.

"Why, when Fred Taral—you remember him as a jockey, don't you?—was training horses in Russia he said the Russians, all sorts of them, would come up to him and ask him if he knew Bob Fitzsimmons, and want to know what Bob Fitzsimmons was like—but they didn't know what the name of the President was.

"Let me tell you something that happened on a trip from Louisville, where I had been for a boxing match." His voice almost escapes from gloom to cheerfulness now.

"Going back to Chicago there were a lot of us all together on the train—sporting men, the newspaper men, and that sort, all having a good time. We were tied up at some place in the woods for a while, with the hills running up from the river. One of the fellows came in and told us there was a spring of fine water up at the top of a hill and we went up to get a drink and look around.

"It was miles from everywhere, and when we got to the spring there was a lout of a boy as green as they come.

"The fellows started joshing him and Lew Housman began by asking him:

"'Say, did you ever hear of Admiral Dewey?'

"'Naw.'

"'Admiral Sampson?'

"'Naw, never heard of Admiral Sampson.'

"'Did you ever hear of George Washington?'

"'George Washington? Naw; don't know who he is.'

"'Do you know who the President of the United States is?'

"'Naw, don't know who the President of the United States is.'

"'Did you ever hear of Roosevelt?'

"'Naw, I ain't never heard of Roosevelt.'

"'Do you know,' Housman was thinking hard for another one, and his eye hit me. 'Do you know who Fitzsimmons is?'

"'Fitzsimmons! Bob Fitzsimmons? Betcherlife I do. He's a fighter, he is. Hee! Hee! Hee!'

"Now," said Mr. Fitzsimmons, expanding his chest, "THAT shows!"

We drift, how no one may say, for such things find their own current, to talk of the Mrs. Fitzsimmons who was. She who was Rose Julian, and who had as much zest in his ring battles as he did himself.

"Yes," he says, with a sigh out of the very bottom of his heart, "yes, there never was a better woman—nor a better wife—on this earth than she was."

The sigh was not, I'm sure, for the Mrs. Fitzsimmons who was, but—

I ponder no more.

And what, I want to know, is Mr. Fitzsimmons going to do now?

"Perhaps," he says, like one repeating a lesson, "I'll stay on the stage. Perhaps I'll manage my wife. I'm having an opera written for her. She has the finest soprano voice in this country."

"And," I supplement, "she's very pretty."

"Yes," he says in that curious troubled way that is his on this afternoon, "she is."

He does not, it seems to my unsatisfied expectation, act the part of a man on whom a blow has fallen, but rather of one expecting a blow.

The next morning it has fallen.

I am at the Alhambra to see Mr. Fitzsimmons rehearsed—as I suppose.

He meets me with that big welcoming right that will swing no more swings and cut no more uppercuts to glory.

He tells me no more press agent stories and tries on me no more monologue samples.

"Oh, Gawd," he says huskily, with his back to the players on the bare stage, "my 'eart's broke all right this morning. There's not a sadder man in San Francisco than I am. I've lost—I've lost more than a fight."

"If I could do it I'd go East on the first train and see for myself.

"'Ere I am, tied up to THIS when I'd give my 'ead to be able to get away."

He is talking to himself as much as to me, and pulling the champion $5000 French poodle's tufts of whiskers until the poodle protests with a soft little whine. Then he makes amends by patting his head and smoothing his ears.

"No, it's not the losing of the fight that 'urts, and it's not business. It's—"

He doesn't say what it is and he doesn't need to, of course.

What it is is a week-old story now.

But the rehearsal of "A Fight for Love" must go on, even over broken hearts, and it is Fitz who rehearses the actors, and not, as I thought, the other way round.

"'Ere," he says, "that's not the way to do that. Don't laugh. Do it this way. Go up like this," he hunches a shoulder, projects his chin and swaggers, "and say it like this:

"'But if you TROW me after it's done it's yours next! Do you understand DAT? YOURS next!"

It is a lesson in acting to young Mr. Berger who takes his acting frivolously.

"'Ere," calls Mr. Fitzsimmons as the real actors troop off helter skelter—"'Ere, don't you KNOW—ladies first."

"'Remember you are safe so long as there is ladies present'—that's the cue, and there you go, but let the LADY go first. 'Ow the —— well, 'ow would it look if you didn't?"

However lightly, however frivolously the others, the real actors, may take "A Fight for Love," Mr. Fitzsimmons sees no frivolity in it.

It is Fitz as he sees himself and nothing could exceed the courtliness with which he rehearses the lines:

"Allow me, Miss Ellington, to present you this New horse shoe as a souvenir of our meeting."

Nothing, unless it is the fervor with which he clasps the leading lady to his ample chest—after transferring her from the wrong arm to the right for the sake of the picture—and exclaims: "HOW could I lose, Vivian, when it was a fight for love!"

I don't know how it is at other rehearsals, but on this morning the love scenes hold an added interest for Fitz, poor Fitz, who, one of his friends whispers to me, "is as affectionate as a dog," and they hold an added pathos for the lookers-on who already more than suspect why there is such fervor and such passion in the delivery of his lines. Fitz is finding an outlet.

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As I run down the steps of the Alhambra I bump into a friend of Fitz's, running up, who has heard of the unhappiness of a beaten man before the papers have it.

"Say," he says in the enthusiasm of his youth, "say," he says scattering logic and relation to the winds, "she'd never have done this if she'd been a man, would she? She'd never have thrown him when he was down!"

And I am inclined to agree with hi