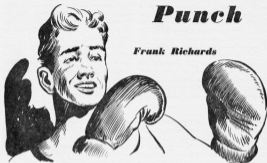


The Perkinson Punch



Frank Richards

"It wasn't Perkinson!" said Skip, in Study Four.

"Fathead!" said both his chums, Tom King and Dick Warren, together.

Skip's opinion was not highly valued in that study.

King and Warren felt as sorry for Perkinson of the Fifth as any fellow at Felgate. You could not help feeling sorry for a fellow who had to go up to the Head: and Perkinson was a popular man. They might have felt sorry even for Pook, in similar circumstances: though all the Felgate Fourth agreed that Pook was poisonous.

But while all Felgate compassionated Perkinson, how was any fellow to believe that he hadn't asked for it? Perk was always asking for it. On the football field or in the boxing ring, Percival Perkinson was the observed of all

observers, the admired of all admirers. He was in the final for the school boxing championship as a matter of course, and few, if any, doubted that he would pull it off: though his opponent, Pook of the Sixth, poisonous as he might be in the estimation of juniors, was a good boxer, and a good man of his hands. Perkinson had a tremendous punch, which was almost legendary at Felgate. Study Four confidently expected to see that punch land Pook into the middle of next week, or still further along the calendar: and they were going to enjoy seeing it. But while Perkinson had all Felgate admiring him as a boxer, his best friend, Purrings, could never have denied that he was, outside the ring, an almost unmitigated ass.

Perk had a sort of feud with his form-master, Kye. Mr. Kye had the rather

unenviable duty of driving some slight knowledge of the classics into the thickest head at Felgate. Kye, a dutiful man, did his best, without a lot of success. Sometimes he was very sharp with Perk, which even Purrings admitted was not to be wondered at. Perk's opinion seemed to be that Latin, being a dead language, ought to be buried also; and gladly he would have interred it. Really and truly, a Fifth-Form man shouldn't have been capable of mixing his perfect indicative plurals with his infinitives. Perk was capable of that, and more. Kye, as Perk often complained, was always girding at him in form. And many fellows knew, and more suspected, that it was Perk who had projected a mysterious tomato which had landed on Kye's mortar-board, and that he knew more than he cared to tell about a bag of soot that had once narrowly missed Kye. In which circumstances, how was anyone to doubt that it was Perkinson who had snooped Kye's notebook from Kye's study, and that he, alone in all Felgate, knew where it was to be found? That exploit, in fact, was talked of as "Perk's latest". It was, of course, Perkinson at it again: playing the giddy ox as usual and getting Kye's rag out. Probably Skip, in Study Four, was the only fellow who took an opposite view.

Kye, certainly, had no doubt. That notebook was missing. Perkinson had been in his study, delivering lines: often and often had Perk lines to deliver in that study. Kye, absent at the time, had returned to find Perk's lines on the table, and the notebook missing. He was well aware that Perk had been resentful about those lines. So Perk was sent for and questioned, his denials brushed aside: and he was given the

choice of returning that notebook or going up to the Head.

It could not have happened more unfortunately, on the day of the final round. Unless, during the day, Perkinson took that notebook back to Kye's study, he was going to Dr. Leicester at six o'clock. What sort of a show was he likely to put up in the gym that afternoon, with such a sword of Damocles hanging over his head? He would be thinking all the while of what was to follow the boxing: it was bound to put him right off his form. That toad, Pook, would pull it off, after all - for once, Perkinson's celebrated punch would fail to carry all before it.

Fellows gathered round Perkinson, and urged him, for his own sake, and everybody's sake, to take that miserable notebook back to Kye. Then he would get off with an impot. They pointed out that Kye was as mad as a hatter about it. For that notebook was a very special notebook: it contained years and years of notes made by Kye for an edition of Horace which he was going to publish some day, as he hoped at least: a bulky notebook, crammed with erudition, which every Felgate fellow knew by sight, so often was it in Kye's hand.

"For goodness' sake, Perk, stop playing the goat, and let your beak have his bosh back, and have done with it," urged Langdale, Felgate's captain.

"Do, old chap!" urged Purrings, almost with tears in his eyes.

Even Pook joined in urging him, which was considered rather decent, for once, of Pook, who stood to gain so much by that worrying weight on Perkinson's mind.

"Take it back, Perkinson," said Pook, quite earnestly. "Kye'll let you off with a Georgie if you do. Why don't you?"



"Looks as if he could box a bunny rabbit!" said Dick Warren. "Odds on the rabbit!" he added thoughtfully

"I tell all of you!" Perkinson almost yelled, "I tell all of you that I don't know anything about Kye's dashed notebook - not a thing! I never touched it, and don't know a thing about it. I expect the old ass has put it somewhere and forgotten where. I tell you I don't know a thing about it."

Pook shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here——!" said Langdale.

"Oh, rats!" hooted Perkinson.

"Rats" was not an appropriate reply to make to the captain of the School. But Perkinson was in a rather seething state. As a rule, nobody would have dreamed of doubting his word: now, everybody did. Even Purrings couldn't believe him. Of course it was Perk,

carrying on that idiotic feud with his beak - who else? Certainly, if Perk was in fact innocent of that latest and maddest prank on Kye, his seething state was easy to understand. But of course it was Perk, who was fathead enough for anything: and fellows only wondered how even Perk could be fathead enough to refuse to cough up that wretched notebook, in the awful circumstances.

"Look at him!" said Tom King. The chums of the Fourth were at the window of Study Four, where they had witnessed, and heard, a crowd of fellows remonstrating with Perk in the quad. "Looks like a winner - I don't think."

Perkinson did not look much like a

winner. He glared at the fellows who had tried to make him see sense, and stalked away on his own. But his stalk soon changed into something like a crawl. He almost limped. His face was a picture of concentrated worry. On his looks, he was about fit to stand up to Sykes of the Second with the gloves on.

"Looks as if he could box a bunny rabbit!" said Dick Warren. "Odds on the rabbit!" he added, thoughtfully.

"It's pretty thick!" said Skip, shaking a fat head. "Perkinson never did it - he says so, and I take his word. He's fool enough, I know: still, he never did it if he says he didn't. I jolly well know!"

"And how do you know, fathead?" inquired Tom King.

"Look at the way he got me out of the way of a car, when my bike went over that day," said Skip. "Think I wouldn't take his word, after that?"

There was a chuckle in Study Four. Skip's method of reasoning struck his comrades as funny. Perkinson had got Skip out of the way of a car: ergo, he hadn't snooped Kye's notebook! Skip's fat brain moved in mysterious ways.

"Fathead!" said Tom.

"Ass!" said Warren.

"Well, I jolly well know!" said Skip. "It's jolly tough, I can tell you. He looks as limp as a rag, and very likely that cad Pook will knock him out in the gym, and win the championship - it looks like it. It couldn't have happened better, for Pook. Pook's an oily beast, and old Perk's one of the best, with all his silly tricks. Look here, what price shipping Pook's study, while everybody's in the gym? It would serve him jolly well right!"

"Blitherer!" said Tom.

"Bletherer!" said Warren.

Having thus expressed their opinion

of Skip's suggestion, they left Study Four to join the crowd of fellows heading for the gymnasium. Skip did not follow them. What good it would do Perkinson, or anybody else, to "ship" Pook's study while everybody was in the gym, Stanley St. Leger Ruggles might have found it hard to explain: still, it was true that Pook was an "oily" beast, not good enough to wipe Perk's shoes, and it would serve him jolly well right to find his study "shipped" when he came back after a victory to which he really and truly was not entitled. So Skip did not join the swarm in the gym to see the final.

II

"One, two, three, four, five, six——"

Kent, the games-master, referee on this great occasion, was counting. It was, as Tom King whispered to Dick Warren, sickening. Only in the second round, Perk was down on his back, and Pook smiling that oily smile of his, that had often made fellows want to smack it off his face.

The gym was packed. Everybody wanted to see the final: and everybody, or almost everybody, was disappointed. It was not to be wondered at that Perkinson, up to the neck in a sea of troubles, was off his form. Probably he was seeing the Head's stern face, in his mind's eye, more than he saw the oily face of Pook with the eye of the flesh. The way he fumbled was almost worthy of Ruggles of the Fourth. He hardly seemed to know, or care, what he was doing. His punch - the Perkinson punch - where was it? If he hit Pook at all, it was only a fly tap. But Pook hit hard and hit often. Pook had his man where he wanted him, and he did not spare him. Perkinson, the mighty Perk, who



"One - two - three - four - five - six——"

had been universally expected to walk off with the final, was being licked like a fag.

Now he was down - and his friends, whose name was legion, wondered dismally whether he was out, too.

"Seven - eight - nine——"

Perkinson was on his feet again: Pook instantly pressing him hard. With a bright, but brief, flash of his old spirit, he waded into Pook and drove him round the ring, finally flopping him on the ropes with a hook to the jaw that made the oily one's head sing. But it was only a flash in the pan. Pook came up for the third round looking quite evil, and jabbing viciously: and it was Perk's turn to be punched round the ring. There was no doubt about it - that awful weight on his mind, that unnerving interview with the Head that was to follow the boxing, had knocked Perk out in advance, and his second, Furrings, might as well have chucked in the sponge at once.

"For the love of Mike," Furrings whispered, as he sponged a heated face after that round, "brace up, old man. You're throwing it away."

Perkinson only gave him a moody look. He knew that he was throwing it away, but he couldn't help it. If only Kye and his rotten notebook had happened some other day - but it had to happen now, at the very worst possible time for Perkinson. He had to go up to the Head: and it might even be the sack if he didn't produce that putrid notebook. And how could he, when - in spite of the general belief - he had never touched it, and hadn't the remotest idea where it was to be found? It was more than enough to make a fellow limp.

However, he braced up a little in the fourth round, and Pook did not have it all his own way. But everybody knew how it was going to end, in the K.O. for Perk, and he knew it himself. And if that unhappy result was going to be averted, not one in the eager swarm in the gym dreamed that it was going to be averted by a fat member of the Felgate Fourth, whose plump existence was totally forgotten just then even by his own chums.

III

Crash!

Skip grinned.

He was making rather a row in Pook's study in the Sixth. But that did not matter, with everybody in the gym watching the final. Nobody was likely to hear or heed. There was hardly a fellow in the Lower School at Felgate who wouldn't have liked to "ship" Pook's study: and now Skip, taking advantage of the general desertion of the House, was actively doing it: feeling

that, in the circumstances, it was safe as houses.

Pook's study looked very dismantled already. Papers lay all over the place. Ink streamed in all directions. The carpet was draped over the table, and the coal scuttle had been up-ended over the carpet. Skip might have thought that he had done enough, at that. But he was still busy.

Pook's desk remained to be dealt with. That desk was kept locked. But the terrific crash as Skip hurled it over burst the lock and it flew open, and its contents streamed round Skip. Papers, postage-stamps, letters, all sorts of odds and ends, and - what was that?

"Oh!" gasped Skip.

Could he believe his gooseberry eyes? For a moment he couldn't! Just for a moment he fancied he was fancying things! Then, with quite an extraordinary expression on his fat face, he pounced on the bulky notebook that lay on the floor at his feet.

He picked it up.

He goggled at it.

He knew that bulky notebook: every fellow at Felgate had seen it more than once. What was Kye's missing notebook doing in a locked desk in Pook's study? Perkinson, obviously, couldn't have put it there. Skip Ruggles was not quick on the uptake. But it dawned on him what it meant.

"The awful rotter!" breathed Skip.

Alone in Felgate, Skip had persisted that it wasn't Perkinson. And he knew now that it wasn't! Only Pook could have locked that notebook up in his desk, and Skip knew why: the oily beast jolly well knew that he couldn't beat Perk in the final by fair means, and he was going to beat him by foul. He jolly well knew that Perk, in a fearful row

with Kye, booked to go up to the Head, would not and could not be half his usual form: that was why.

Skip stood goggling at that notebook in his hand for several minutes. Then he left Pook's study. And he headed for Kye's.

IV

"Time!"

Only the call of time saved Percival Perkinson. Pook had him at his mercy, raining jabs and jolts, and the Fifth-form man seemed nowhere. However, Kent called time, and he tottered to his corner, where Purrings eyed him gloomily. It was as good - or as bad - as the finish.

"All over!" muttered Tom King.

"Bar shouting!" agreed Warren.

"I say - make room for a chap - I say - let me pass, will you - I say!" A sudden frantic yell woke the echoes of



Skip pounced on the bulky notebook

the Felgate gym. A crowd stared round at an excited fat junior bursting in. Many voices addressed him.

"Quiet, you fufthead!"

"Shut up!"

"Boot that fag out!"

"Skip, you potty ass——"

"Skip, you raging lunatic——"

"Order, there!" shouted Langdale, angrily. "Order!"

Skip did not heed. Ablaze with excitement, he shoved, pushed, elbowed and wriggled his way forward. Five or six fellows collared him. Still he heeded not.

"Let me pass! I've got to speak to Perkinson! I tell you I've got to speak to Perkinson! It's a message from Kye." Skip yelled. He shrieked. "I tell you I've got to tell Perkinson! Kye's found his notebook."

Then they let him pass.

Perkinson, limp in his corner, looked

round. He had heard Skip's frantic yell. Now not a hand stopped Skip as he rolled up to the ropes.

"Perkinson!" Skip panted, and every ear now hung on his words. "Kye's found his notebook. He knows now that you never touched it, and he's told me to tell you you're not to go to the Head—it's all right—and Kye said I was to tell you he's sorry he thought you did it——"

Skip's panting breath failed him. But he had said enough. There was a deep murmur in the crowded gym. Percival Perkinson stared at Skip Ruggles, and his face brightened, like the sun coming out from the clouds. Another face looked almost green: it was Pook's. How a notebook locked in a desk had come to light, Pook didn't know and couldn't guess. But he knew, and did not need to guess, that he was booked for bad trouble with Kye.



The Perkinson punch came into play at last

Wild excitement reigned. In the midst of it came Kent's voice:

"Time!"

"Oh, look at Perk now!" Tom King whispered to Warren.

Perk was worth looking at. It was a changed Perk - a renovated Perk - a Perk with all the old fire. That heavy weight that had bowed him down was gone - that sword of Damocles suspended over his worried head had disappeared - it was all clear now, and Perk was his old self again. It was the sixth round; and it was also the last. The way Perkinson walked into Pook rejoiced the hearts of his friends. The Perkinson punch came into play at last. It was a tremendous punch, and Pook had the full benefit of it. Pook went down under it, but struggled up; whereupon Perkinson administered the mixture as before, so to speak; and Pook

went down again - and this time he stayed down.

The referee counted up to ten; and might have counted up to twenty or thirty. Perkinson smiled - he could smile now. The gym rang with acclaim. Tom King and Dick Warren almost danced with glee. They thumped Skip on his back till he yelled with anguish. Perkinson, who had started the final looking like a limp rag, walked off with Furrings looking on top of the world, as any fellow had a right to look when he had won the school championship. Fellows crowded round Perkinson to tell him how sorry they were, and how glad they were; while Pook, in a dismantled study, was wondering dismally what on earth he was going to say to Kye, and to Folgate generally; an ordeal before him that was harder to face than even the Perkinson punch!

MY MELBOURNE STORY *(continued from page 18)*

It would be too complicated here to describe the races in detail, but I must say I spent some of the most exhilarating moments of my Melbourne trip bumping up and down in a small launch on those wide open waters in brilliant sunshine following one class after another.

Congratulations to Commander G. H. Mann and his crew in H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh's *Bluebirdie*, and to J. R. Blackhall and T. Smith in sharpie *Chucker* for their Bronze medals, and also to Colonel Stanley Perry and his crew for their "Silver" in

the big boat class. It was a real thrill to follow them all, watching them outmanoeuvring their opponents to make the most of the wind, but most of all I must record as my final memory of Melbourne the unique sight of the 5.5 metre class as these yachts set their gaily coloured spinnakers. In their red, blue, yellow and green stripes they billowed out over the Bay giving one the impression as one watched them sailing head-on towards us, of an invasion by an ancient Viking Fleet. Truly an unforgettable note on which to end this article.