

to wait on his drolleries. He pitched the rings when his fighting days were over, and advised the nobility on all their sports, racing, fighting and cocking. He was talking to one other, a good-humoured fighting-man named Firby. Known as the Young Ruffian, the winner of many matches, Colonel Darleigh, his patron, made no secret of the fact that he believed his man improved enough to beat Belcher himself.

The cloth had long been removed. The air in the room was thick with tobacco smoke and the fumes of drink. Song followed song, and the company roared the choruses. Bill Gibbons told tales of the lights of other days. Outside, the company in the "One Tun" talked on and on, and always in their speech was the sinister word "fight." The atmosphere grew more electric as the night progressed: Richmond became more quarrelsome in his cups, and had to be repeatedly thrust back in his seat by Bill Warr and Paddington Jones; there were other signs of disorder in the room. Fletcher Reid, looking at his watch almost impatiently, stood up in the hubbub as the clock in the hall pointed to twelve o'clock.

At once there was silence.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we've had a merry evening, and some of us will be better for taking the air. One or two of our Corinthian guests have other engagements and desire to get on, but before they go Colonel Darleigh wishes to make an announcement."

Anyone hearing the noise and uproar of the minutes before would have been surprised at the tense silence which fell upon the company. Even

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