

JOHN FINERTY

—COWARD

By W. B. M.
FERGUSON

Six Feet Four Inches High; Weight 220



"There was Finerty, shoving one of them wheel chairs before 'im."

WHEN John Finerty had passed his civil service examination and the other necessary yards of red tape, he was assigned to the West Sixty-eighth Street station. His detail took in Sixty-first and Sixty-second Streets between Amsterdam and West End Avenues. There are worse beats in the city, but not many.

Finerty's beat was in the heart of San Juan Hill, that sharp declivity running from Columbus Avenue to the Hudson River and extending from Fifty-ninth Street to Sixty-fifth. When the Irish inhabited the district it was called Skiddersville, but when the negroes drove the former out in their march northward the name changed to Nigger Hill. Then came race riots and its present historic title.

It is a recognized fact in San Juan Hill that the negative colors, black and white, do not blend well and never will. At all events the district is known in police circles as "dangerous," a good place for a peaceful citizen to forget.

The police commissioner knew his business and Captain Hogan his duty when Finerty was assigned his beat. Finerty was only a raw hand, but he was far from being a boy. God has seldom made such a man. Six feet four he stood in the buff and moved the scales at two hundred and twenty pounds. You could not have pinched a thumbful of fat on an ounce of those pounds. Forty-eight inches would not span his chest, but the official measure lapped his middle with a thirty-inch line. Finerty was built for trouble.

The first day he stripped to the waist, upstairs in the dormitories, to wash, he caused a great deal of discussion and no little bad feeling. Plimmer was sitting on a cot, a bull's wool sock with the usual hole in the toe, in his hand. Plimmer was the minimum height and weight exhibit of the force—a tight-faced, acid-tongued cockney, "the top spit of White-chapel," as he himself said with great vulgarity and pride. He was a former welterweight champion of the Metropolitan police, London. Despite his birth he was a good man, and his fellow patrolmen did not hold his accent against him, though it was as villainous as his face, for Plimmer could hit like the kick of a siege gun and run like a Filipino general. As a rule he was not enthusiastic, but when he saw Finerty's naked shoulders and chest, eloquence caught him by the throat.

"My eye!" he exclaimed, excitedly wiping his face with the bull's wool sock. "Blime me, if 'e ain't tremenjous. 'E looks like Cleopatra's Needle. Wot

a bloomin' 'eavy 'e'd make. 'Ere, let me feel o' your arm." He sprang off the cot and laid experienced fingers on Finerty's—huge biceps. At the command, Finerty grudgingly flexed his muscles. He did not look gracious.

"'E ain't muscle-bound," cried Plimmer, as if his mother-in-law had died unexpectedly. "'Selp me, wot a show 'e'll make of the records at Sulzer's Park next month. 'E's the very man we wants."

"Yeh," nodded Craig, approvingly. "At th' hammer an' th' fiftysix pound weight. He'll fill a long empty hole. We never had a man good enough f'r them."

"I threw the weight twenty-nine feet three and one-half inches, yes," reminded "Handsome" Schmidt from his corner. "It vas last year."

"Ho, yuss, and come in a bloomin' third," scoffed Plimmer. "We remember. But 'ere," and he tapped Finerty's wide chest, "we 'ave the genooine article. If this precinct don't win the championship may I die a bloomin' Dutchman!" and he looked at Schmidt.

Finerty spoke for the first time. His eyes were on the floor.

"I'm goin' in no games," he said, doggedly. Plimmer's eyes opened and his mouth shut. The men stared. "No trainin' an' no records f'r mine," finished Finerty, heavily.

Craig was the first to recover. "Yer th' fittest man," he said, sourly. "I think yer oughter, f'r the honor of th' house. It ain't square to have such a build an' give us the go-by. On m' sacred Sam it ain't."

"On me bloomin' sacred Sam it ain't," improved Plimmer. "Wot 'ave you got against it? That's no way to do. Ain't you got no sportin' blood? Are you goin' to see your precinct licked by a lot of tykes?"

"No, f'r I won't be at no games," said Finerty, sullenly. His voice was determined.

"My eye," was all Plimmer could find to say. The rest of the men disgustedly read the decision in Finerty's sullen face. Plimmer was piously thunderstruck. "My eye, with all your bloomin' stren'th—"

"Blow m' bloomin' stren'th," growled Finerty, reaching for his coat.

"My eye," said Plimmer, again.

THAT was the beginning of John Finerty's unpopularity, and a month later, when Schmidt's "twenty-nine feet three and one-half inches" in the weight throw at the Athletic Carnival was repeated and his precinct made a very poor showing, Finerty's unpopularity increased.

"'E's a bloomin' tyke," said Plimmer, in reference to Finerty. "We won the 'igh jump and the twenty, and if we'd 'ad 'im at the weights we'd 'ave made a show of the field. But 'e 'asn't any sand. Not a grain. 'E's a fine one to 'ave the beat 'e 'as."

"He ain't made an arrest yet," said Brown, meditatively. "I've had my eye on him."

"Ho, yuss," said Plimmer, "so 'ave I. Yesterday was my day orf, and I 'appened to be on Finerty's beat. There came a fine chance for a fight, but before I could mix in Finerty 'ad settled it. And 'ow? Why, argyfyin'. Argyfyin' like a bloomin' woman. Two niggers lickin' a white man and 'im argyfyin' instead of beltin' their 'eads orf like a gentleman. Ho, yuss," and Plimmer spat on the floor.

"What?" growled Brown, and Craig and Schmidt drew nearer.

"'Selp me," said Plimmer virtuously. "And when he saw the fight comin' his way, he got as white

as a clay pipe. And when I asked why 'e didn't mix in, 'e said 'e never would if 'e could 'elp it. 'E said the niggers were in the right that time. My eye, wot a cop! I tell you 'e's nothin' but a coward. Yuss." And again Plimmer spat on the floor, which was criminally wrong, for there were spittoons and explicit directions concerning trajectory.

"'A N' him such a great figure of a man," said Brown, regretfully and from between his teeth.

"It's a shame," agreed Plimmer. "Such a 'eavy thrown away. But it ain't a man's weight wot tells, it's 'is sand. I've seen a bantam belt the wind out of a welterweight, all 'because 'e 'ad the sand the other chap 'adn't."

"If Finerty's a coward," said Craig, voicing the sentiment of the men, "the sooner he gets transferred the better for him. This precinct's a bad place for a coward. I suppose if there had been two white men and one nigger he'd have taken the part of his own color."

"There's only one way to find out," said Brown, "and that's to try him. He'll have to prove himself."

"'E's a coward," said Plimmer, with conviction, "and I'll tell 'im so to 'is face." He glanced up quickly. Finerty, looking very large, was standing in the doorway. He paused for a moment, then came slowly into the room. The men were silent. Finerty was not ignorant of his own standing with his fellow patrolmen, but now, if he had heard Plimmer's words, his hard face gave no sign. The men thought he had, that he could not help but hear them and they waited for his resentment, some hopefully, some sneeringly. But Finerty only made a mild remark regarding the weather. No one answered but Plimmer—and in a most unexpected way.

"We were discussin' politics," he said, slowly, looking directly at Finerty, "and I said: 'T' 'ell with the Irish.'"

"Yes?" said Finerty, quietly.

"Yes," said Plimmer, loudly. "And I said they were nothing but a lot of white-livered cowards."

Finerty's face slowly paled and his eye-brows met. The men were eyeing him narrowly. But Finerty remained silent, his huge hands slowly opening and closing. His wide chest heaved and his lips twitched, but the hand that pointed to his audience was steady.

"An' ye said all thot wid thim prisint?" he said, his brogue asserting itself. "All thim?" and he counted off the tally on his big fingers. "Mulligan, McGonigal, Brady, Collins, Murphy. 'Tis thrue ye said all thot?"

But Plimmer was not to be caught.

"Ho, yus," he said, unblushingly, leaning forward on the cot, his hands on his knees. "And they ses: 'Wait till Finerty comes in from patrol. 'E'll dress you down, my man. 'E's the one to show you the kind of kiddies they breed in Ireland. We'll give 'im fust chance at your bloomin' 'ead before we take a crack at it.' That's wot they ses."

"Sure," chorused the men with a grunt. It was fun to see this mammoth baited by a bull terrier.

Finerty considered a minute, a strange light in his eyes.

"Well," he said, finally, "I don't foight f'r no man that don't foight f'r his country. He ain't worth it."

The five impeached patriots growled. They were not afraid of Finerty now. He had shown good digestive powers for unlovely words.

"An' mebbe there's another reason," sneered McGonigal.

"Oh, no, he ain't afraid," added Brady, reprovingly.

"And if you won't fight for them, will you fight for yourself?" said Plimmer, truculently, jumping off the cot and doubling his fists.