

house, the 'Two Brewers,' in Wardour Street. I have news for his backer which might be important. At five o'clock this afternoon, Jem was playing racquets in a court in Little St. Martin's Lane. The marker, sending a ball back carelessly, caught poor Jem one in the right eye and cut it almost out of the socket. Belcher's stone blind in that eye for ever, the surgeon says."

A gasp of astonishment shuddered in the air from all assembled. Jem Belcher, the pride of the ring, struck down—it was unthinkable. Almost by instinct, gentlemen and fighter turned to Sir John Dering.

"Tell me—Pearce," he said coolly, "who was Belcher with at the time of the accident?"

"Captain Stuart, sir," he answered.

The faces in the crowded room turned on Darleigh. Stuart, a notorious man about town, had been known to go about with Darleigh, and rumour, which whispered some of Colonel Darleigh's doings were not creditable, had pointed to Stuart as a partner in them.

Sir John Dering looked at Colonel Darleigh. A grim smile played about his firm mouth. His white teeth showed as he smiled.

"I begin to understand," he said slowly.

"What do you mean?" Darleigh shouted hoarsely.

Sir John Dering laughed.

"Not the unspoken thought—not yet. I mean I begin to understand Belcher will not fight. Poor Belcher." For a moment his fine eyes softened, and then he drew himself together and stood there inflexible. "The fight arranged will go on, Colonel

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