

VANITY FAIR

William Thackeray

"Hold off, Cuff; don't bully that child anymore, or I'll—"

Cuff asked in amazement at this interruption.—" Hold out your hand, you little beast."

" I'll give you the worst thrashing you ever had in your life," Dobbin said, in reply to the first part of Cuff's sentence ; and little Osborne, gasping and in tears, looked up with wonder and incredulity at seeing this amazing champion put up suddenly to defend him : while Cuff's astonishment was scarcely less. Fancy our late monarch George III. when he heard of the revolt of the North American colonies : fancy brazen Goliath when little David stepped forward and claimed a meet→ing : and you have the feelings of Mr. Reginald Cuff when this rencontre was proposed to him.

" After school," says he, of course ; after a pause and a look, as much, as to say, " Make your will, and com→municate your last wishes to your friends, between this time and that."

" As you please," Dobbin said.—" You must be my bottle-holder, Osborne."

" Well, if you like," little Osborne replied ; for, you see, his papa kept a carriage, and he was rather ashamed of his champion.

Yes, when the hour of battle came, lie was almost ashamed to say, " Go it, Figs ; " and not a single other, boy in the place uttered that cry for the first two or three rounds of this famous combat ; at the commence→ment of which the scientific Cuff, with a contemptuous smile on his face, and. as light and as gay as if he was at a ball, planted his blows upon his adversary, and floored that unlucky champion three times running. At each fall there was a cheer ; and everybody was anxious to have the honour of offering the conqueror a knee.

" What a licking I shall get when it's over !" young Osborne thought, picking up his man. " You'd best give in," he said to Dobbin ; " it's only a thrashing, Figs, and you know I'm used to it." But Figs, all whose limbs were in a quiver, and whose nostrils were breathing rage, put his little bottle-holder aside, and went in for a fourth time.

As he did not in the least know how to parry the blows that were aimed at himself, and Cuff had begun the attack on the three preceding occasions, without ever allowing his enemy to strike, Figs now determined that he would commence the engagement by a charge on his own part ; and accordingly, being a left-handed man, brought that arm into action, and hit out a couple of times with all his might—once at Mr. Cuffs left eye, and once on his beautiful Roman nose.

Cuff went down this time, to the astonishment of the assembly. " Well hit, by Jove ! " says little Osborne, with the air of a connoisseur, clapping his man on the back. " Give it him with the left, Figs, my boy."

Figs's left made terrific play during all the rest of the combat. Cuff went down every time. At the sixth round, there were almost as many fellows shouting out, " Go it, Figs !" as there were youths exclaiming, " Go it, Cuff !" At the twelfth round, the latter champion was all abroad, as the saying is, and had lost all presence of mind and power of attack or defence. Figs, on the contrary, was as calm as a Quaker. His face being quite pale, his eyes shining open, and a great cut on his under lip bleeding profusely, gave this young fellow a fierce and ghastly air, which perhaps struck terror

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into many spectators. Nevertheless, his intrepid adversary prepared to close for the thirteenth time.

If I had the pen of a Napier, or a Bell's Life, I should like to describe this combat properly. It was the last charge of the Guard.—(that is, it would have been, only Waterloo had not yet taken place)—it was Ney's column breasting the hill of La Haye Sainte, bristling with ten thousand bayonets, and crowned with twenty eagles—it was the shout of the beef-eating British, as leaping down the hill they rushed to hug the enemy in the savage arms of battle—in other words, Cuff coining up full of pluck, but quite reeling and groggy, the Fig-merchant put in his left as usual on his adversary's nose, and sent him down for the last time.