

The Efficiency Expert

By

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CHAPTER I - JIMMY TORRANCE, JR.

The gymnasium was packed as Jimmy Torrance stepped into the ring for the final event of the evening that was to decide the boxing championship of the university. Drawing to a close were the nearly four years of his college career--profitable years, Jimmy considered them, and certainly successful up to this point. In the beginning of his senior year he had captained the varsity eleven, and in the coming spring he would again sally forth upon the diamond as the star initial sacker of collegedom.

His football triumphs were in the past, his continued baseball successes a foregone conclusion--if he won to-night his cup of happiness, and an unassailably dominant position among his fellows, would be assured, leaving nothing more, in so far as Jimmy reasoned, to be desired from four years attendance at one of America's oldest and most famous universities.

The youth who would dispute the right to championship honors with Jimmy was a dark horse to the extent that he was a freshman, and, therefore, practically unknown. He had worked hard, however, and given a good account of himself in his preparations for the battle, and there were rumors, as there always are about every campus, of marvelous exploits prior to his college days. It was even darkly hinted that he was a professional pugilist. As a matter of fact, he was the best exponent of the manly art of self-defense that Jimmy Torrance had ever faced, and in addition thereto he outweighed the senior and outreached him.

The boxing contest, as the faculty members of the athletic committee preferred to call it, was, from the tap of the gong, as pretty a two-fisted scrap as ever any aggregation of low-browed fight fans witnessed. The details of this gory contest, while interesting, have no particular bearing upon the development of this tale. What interests us is the outcome, which occurred in the middle of a very bloody fourth round, in which Jimmy Torrance scored a clean knock-out.

It was a battered but happy Jimmy who sat in his room the following Monday afternoon, striving to concentrate his mind upon a college text-book which should, by all the laws of fiction, have been 'well thumbed,' but in reality, possessed unruffled freshness which belied its real age.

"I wish," mused Jimmy, "that I could have got to the bird who invented mathematics before he inflicted all this unnecessary anguish upon an already unhappy world. In about three rounds I could have saved thousands from the sorrow which I feel every time I open this blooming book."

He was still deeply engrossed in the futile attempt of accomplishing in an hour that for which the college curriculum set aside several months when there came sounds of approaching footsteps rapidly ascending the stairway. His door was unceremoniously thrown open, and there appeared one of those strange apparitions which is the envy and despair of the small-town youth--a naturally good-looking young fellow, the sartorial arts of whose tailor had elevated his waist-line to his arm-pits, dragged down his shoulders, and caved in his front until he had the appearance of being badly dished from chin to knees. His trousers appeared to have been made for a man with legs six inches longer than his, while his hat was evidently several sizes too large, since it would have entirely extinguished his face had it not been supported by his ears.

"Hello, Kid!" cried Jimmy. "What's new?"

"Whiskers wants you," replied the other. "Faculty meeting. They just got through with me."

"Hell!" muttered Jimmy feelingly. "I don't know what Whiskers wants with me, but he never wants to see anybody about anything pleasant."

"I am here," agreed the other, "to announce to the universe that you are right, Jimmy. He didn't have anything pleasant to say to me. In fact, he insinuated that dear old alma mater might be able to wiggle along without me if I didn't abjure my criminal life. Made some nasty comparison between my academic achievements and foxtrotting. I wonder, Jimmy, how they get that way?"

"That's why they are profs," explained Jimmy. "There are two kinds of people in this world--human beings and profs. When does he want me?"

"Now."

Jimmy arose and put on his hat and coat. "Good-bye, Kid," he said. "Pray for me, and leave me one cigarette to smoke when I get back," and, grinning, he left the room.

James Torrance, Jr., was not greatly abashed as he faced the dour tribunal of the faculty. The younger members, among whom were several he knew to be mighty good fellows at heart, sat at the lower end of the long table, and with owl-like gravity attempted to emulate the appearance and manners of their seniors. At the head of the table sat Whiskers, as the dignified and venerable president of the university was popularly named. It was generally believed and solemnly sworn to throughout the large corps of undergraduates that within the knowledge of any living man Whiskers had never been known to smile, and to-day he was running true to form.

"Mr. Torrance," he said, sighing, "it has been my painful duty on more than one occasion to call your attention to the uniformly low average of your academic standing. At the earnest solicitation of the faculty members of the athletic committee, I have been influenced, against my better judgment, to temporize with an utterly insufferable condition.

"You are rapidly approaching the close of your senior year, and in the light of the records which I have before me I am constrained to believe that it will be utterly impossible for you to graduate, unless from now to the end of the semester you devote yourself exclusively to your academic work. If you cannot assure me that you will do this, I believe it would be to the best interests of the university for you to resign now, rather than to fail of graduation. And in this decision I am fully seconded by the faculty members of the athletic committee, who realize the harmful effect upon university athletics in the future were so prominent an athlete as you to fail at graduation."

If they had sentenced Jimmy to be shot at sunrise the blow could scarcely have been more stunning than that which followed the realization that he was not to be permitted to round out his fourth successful season at first base. But if Jimmy was momentarily stunned he gave no outward indication of the fact, and in the brief interval of silence following the president's ultimatum his alert mind functioned with the rapidity which it had often shown upon the gridiron, the diamond, and the squared circle.

Just for a moment the thought of being deprived of the pleasure and excitement of the coming baseball season filled his mind to the exclusion of every other consideration, but presently a less selfish impulse projected upon the screen of recollection the figure of the father he idolized. The boy realized the disappointment that this man would feel should his four years of college end thus disastrously and without the coveted diploma.

And then it was that he raised his eyes to those of the president.

"I hope, sir," he said, "that you will give me one more chance--that you will let me go on as I have in the past as far as baseball is concerned, with the understanding that if at the end of each month between now and commencement I do not show satisfactory improvement I shall not be permitted to play on the team. But please don't make that restriction binding yet. If I lay off the track work

I believe I can make up enough so that baseball will not interfere with my graduation."

And so Whiskers, who was much more human than the student body gave him credit for being, and was, in the bargain, a good judge of boys, gave Jimmy another chance on his own terms, and the university's heavyweight champion returned to his room filled with determination to make good at the eleventh hour.

Possibly one of the greatest obstacles which lay in Jimmy's path toward academic honors was the fact that he possessed those qualities of character which attracted others to him, with the result that there was seldom an hour during the day that he had his room to himself. On his return from the faculty meeting he found a half-dozen of his classmates there, awaiting his return.

"Well?" they inquired as he entered.

"It's worse than that," said Jimmy, as he unfolded the harrowing details of what had transpired at his meeting with the faculty. "And now," he said, "if you birds love me, keep out of here from now until commencement. There isn't a guy on earth can concentrate on anything with a roomful of you mental ciphers sitting around and yapping about girls and other non-essential creations."

"Non-essential!" gasped one of his visitors, letting his eyes wander over the walls of Jimmy's study, whereon were nailed, pinned or hung countless framed and unframed pictures of non-essential creations.

"All right, Jimmy," said another. "We are with you, horse, foot and artillery. When you want us, give us the high-sign and we will come. Otherwise we will leave you to your beloved books. It is too bad, though, as the bar-boy was just

explaining how the great drought might be circumvented by means of carrots, potato peelings, dish-water, and a raisin."

"Go on," said Jimmy; "I am not interested," and the boys left him to his "beloved" books.

Jimmy Torrance worked hard, and by dint of long hours and hard-working tutors he finished his college course and won his diploma. Nor did he have to forego the crowning honors of his last baseball season, although, like Ulysses S. Grant, he would have graduated at the head of his class had the list been turned upside down.