

VETERAN OF THE PRIZE-RING

Story of a Holme Nonagenarian

The death occurred on Dec. 6 at Beach House, Holme-next-Sea, of Mr. James Abram Ellender, at the advanced age of 90. Mr. Ellender was a native of Holkham. Coming to Holme nearly half-a-century ago, he purchased Beach House and a block of cottages in the village.

He was a familiar figure on the marshes, where he acted as supervisor for many years. He was the last of a family of nine, all of whom lived to a great age. In village affairs he had no interest, all his spare time being taken up on his holding and in his large garden, of which he was very proud. He leaves two daughters.

A BARE-KNUCKLE FIGHTER

In his youth Mr. Ellender was a professional pugilist of the bare-knuckle days. His secret was confided to few. Those who did come to hear of this "folly of youth," as he called it, and succeeded in drawing him out, were rewarded with some rare reminiscences of Corinthian days in London. He would refer familiarly to Jem Mace, the English champion, who had family associations with the Swaffham district. In old age, with snow-white hair, he was still a wonderful figure of a man—a gnarled oak of the human species. Sturdily and powerfully built, he seemed to enjoy the exercise of his muscular powers as he toiled away for long hours on his small-holding. He used to wear little more than shirt, trousers and boots, with a light hat in summer to keep the sun off his neck. The capacity of his fork when he was hay-making must have been double that of most men.

Ellender once related that he had fought over 200 fights. In comparison with the huge sums now paid to boxers for their ring appearances, he recalled the long, gruelling and bloody prize-fights in which he had taken part for a few pounds. The big money in those days was made in the bets of the backers. According to his story, he left his Norfolk home when in the late teens to seek his fortune as a prize-fighter in London, having gained a local reputation at the "noble art." In the 70's he was at the top of his form.

OUTWITTING THE LAW

There were no padded gloves or decisions on points in those days; the pugilists fought stripped to the waist with their fists until one had won. The gruesome business resulted in the law stepping in to forbid the bloody sport, but it was carried on surreptitiously. Ellender did most of his fighting under the ban. It was necessary to outwit the police and this added a new zest to the game. Of the devices and plans adopted to defeat the vigilance of the law, he could tell some amusing tales. One day he was taking part in a contest secretly arranged in a field near the Welsh Harp, Hendon, in the presence of a small crowd, when suddenly the alarm was given that the police were coming. They began to arrive in cabs and on foot, dozens of them, and the gathering broke up in disorder, dispersing in all directions. Ellender ran for it, too—as one of the boxers he was a marked man—and, making a wide detour, he arrived back safely in the City, having come by Hampstead Heath.

One another occasion he was less lucky. A fight was to take place in the open near Epsom and the contestants, promoters and referee all travelled down from London in a horse-drawn pantehnicon hired for the purpose and driven by two accomplices. The outgoing journey was uneventful and the fight was staged without interruption. The homeward journey was then begun, the same company filling the van. After a time a stop was made at a wayside inn, and the drivers dismounted and went inside for refreshment for the party. Soon they came out carrying tankards of ale, which were handed in at the back of the van. Somehow the police got on the track. Suddenly they appeared on the scene, bundled the two drivers inside the pantehnicon with the others, clapped a padlock on the doors and drove off with the human cargo to a police station.

Ellender also spoke of boxing saloons where the sport was secretly indulged behind locked doors. These were usually run in conjunction with public-houses and drew a very mixed company, brawling being frequent. He had known these places to be raided. One day he turned his back on London, retired from the prize-ring and returned to his native county. It was a resolute step for which he appeared to have no regrets. He did not confide the reason for it. He sometimes used to be asked at Holme if he had ever been to London. He could reply with truth that he had seen more "life" in London in one day than most people managed to see in a lifetime.

HIS HOUSE WAS HIS CASTLE

Ellender worked hard and lived very quietly on his small-holding. He was a man of great independence and no respecter of persons. One day a distinguished party of motorists explored the road leading down to the sea from Holme village. His house stood at the end of the road, adjoining the extremities of Hunstanton golf links, and in order to turn round the chauffeur of the car opened the double gates of the yard and began to back in the car. Mr. Ellender came on the scene and in forcible language demanded to know by what authority they had dared to open his gates and trespass on his property without permission. The chauffeur, taken aback, tried to explain that he had some distinguished passengers in the car. That made no difference to Ellender's point of view, and the upshot was that he received a personal apology from the gracious lady in the car.

Golfers who sliced balls over the ditch into his garden and did not know the consequences of calling "Hi!" to him soon learned the error of their ways. No obligation lay upon him to return golf balls gratuitously deposited on his property. He knew it and would not allow himself to be summoned with disrespect, if he was to extend the favour of returning them. And woe betide anyone who tried to cross the ditch.

Yet he was delighted about one ball driven by the present writer full toss into his yard from the 8th tee. It bounded into the house through the open door and bounced

upstairs, having to be retrieved from a bedroom. After so many balls among his cabbages, the novelty of this one amused him genuinely and there was a paragraph in the *Lynn Advertiser* about it. Those who knew Ellender admired him as a sturdy character, full of sound wisdom from the fruit of his long life's experience. Possibly he was the last of the old prize-fighters.

The interment took place at the parish church on Tuesday last week, the Rev. S. Harper (rector) officiating. The chief mourners were: Miss S. Ellender and Miss M. Ellender, daughters. Among others present were: Mrs. Clynick, Mr. W. Renault, Mr. J. Callaby, Mrs. Rutledge (Ringstead), Mrs. H. Proudfoot, Mrs. Goode, Mrs. S. Mowton, Mrs. K. Burton, Mrs. Nicholls, and Mrs. W. Potter. There were a number of floral tributes, including a wreath from his tenants.

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