

THE DEAD PRIZE-FIGHTER.

Wasted Life of Old Joe Coburn, Whose Funeral Occurs in This City To-Day.

The Last Hard Fight to a Finish with the Grim Opponent Who Holds the Championship of Eternity.

Joe Coburn, the willow prize fighter, was yesterday lying in his coffin at No. 242 West Thirty-fifth street. His funeral occurs to-day.

He had been ailing for a year. It was the longest fight that the old-time pugilist ever waged. It was to be his last one, too. Death was his opponent in the ring, and it was to be a fight to a finish. Joe Coburn knew it, and every time that he was downed he was up again and on his feet.

He planted them firmly in the dust each time, but every round found him weakening. Once they picked him up, and the grim angel was ready to call "Finn." But he rallied for another turn, and still another, Saturday evening, as the shadows were gathering, he fell down once more. He tried once more, too, to shake himself together.

But it was too late. There was blood on his lips and the rattle in his throat. The doctors picked him up and tried to keep life in his veins a little longer. All the time death stood at the other end of the ring waiting the issue. And the grim angel stood there, too, with one hand uplifted, ready to record it.

"Time."

The old pugilist had turned his face to the wall and died.

The Joe Coburns more often go out like a candle. Something snaps inside them, as the bow does, and they drop by the wayside, or they die very old. But sometimes, too, the fell disease which kills with such slow strokes catches your Samsons, dallies with them, plays with them, and finally throws them on their backs. That was the way it was with Coburn.

He had been ailing a year. He had tossed on his bed and then got up again. He had lots of sporting blood left in him yet. But it was not many months before those around him knew it was only a question of time. But he never gave up.

Day by day sickness reduced him, as if he were in training for a prize-fight. Then slowly he began to fall below his fighting weight. One morning and one of his watchers saw a thin, cruel line burrowing its way underneath his mouth. Another, and there was a transparent whiteness in his nostrils. He was in training, sure enough—in training for his fight with death.

His wife stood by him to the end. And the curly-headed little chap that he has left behind used to crow and laugh beside him, filling his last sad days with sunlight.

His life had been a misguided one. There had not been much good in it, perhaps, but whenever there was nobility in it came to the surface in these last few months. And so he died in peace.

Some of the first days of his illness had been very dark, 'tis true. He had wasted all

his money, as he had wasted all his life. What he had earned by his fists he had spent in pot-houses. The earnings and the spendings were both equally unfortunate. So there came a time when he had nothing, and he lay there helpless and dying.

Once in a while some old friends would drop in upon him and comfort him. Then they would go away and tell the other boys about him and the straits he was in. A short time ago some of them banded together—for you will find the milk of human kindness in men of "sporting blood"—and got up a benefit for him at Lenox Hall. They raised some hundreds of dollars. And his last hours were made comfortable.



JOE COBURN.

What a life of fever and unrest it had been; and, as he lay in his bed impotent and helpless as a babe, how it must all have come up before him again! How little there was good and ennobling in it there must have been to comfort him as his life was flickering. And there was no lack of memory's power to come between him and his recollections. He was conscious to the very last.

As he reviewed his life he must have seen all the old "boys" pass in review before his

eyes—Ned Price and "Awful" Gardner, Mike McCool and Harry Grubbs, Con Fitzgerald and Jim Mace, Pat Flynn and lastly Sullivan, with whom he travelled through the country six years ago.

He must have recalled again his first flash of victory when he whipped Gardner in old Hibernia Hall in Prince street. Gardner then was not a man to be sneezed at by any pugilist, and yet Coburn downed him in six rounds with gloves. Then the sporting men hailed him as the coming champion, and his head was on fire with his success.

And he must have seen again the waters of Still Pond, in Massachusetts, where soon after this with the laurels of his recent victory still fresh on his forehead, he met Ned Price. That was a good many years ago, when Price was a noted boxer, who had just come over from England, lusty and full of young blood, and long before he became the noted criminal lawyer that he now is in the vicinity of the Fombs. Price, full of fight and blood, had sent out a challenge to every man in the ring to fight him. And Coburn bristled up and boasted that he was not afraid to meet him.

So the meeting was arranged and Still Pond was the place selected. The fight was a tough one. For nearly three hours and a half they pounded one another, and evening came on before the contest was anywhere near its ending. They called the fight a draw. Both men were fearfully pummeled, and it was several days before they were able to get out on the street again. To this day the battle, which was one of the fiercest waged in an American ring, has never been actually decided. Coburn challenged Price again some time after this to put an end to all indecision about the affair, but nothing ever came of it.

Then, too, as the old-time fighter's eyes were growing dim, he must have thought again of his fight with Jim Mace. He was still pining for new worlds to conquer, and he sent Mace a challenge to the effect that he would fight Mace for \$5,000 a side and the championship of the globe. Coburn, after placing a forfeit of \$1,000, sailed away to a fresh battlefield. When he landed in England, however, he found that there was a screw loose somewhere in the arrangements. Mace took advantage of this hitch, so the chronicles of the ring say, and Coburn put the latter's forfeit in his pocket and set sail for home.

Some years after this Mace came to this country and started a saloon in West Twenty-third street. Coburn never let up on him, but was challenging him constantly to come out again and square himself. Mace, however, could never be prevailed

upon to do it. This was more than the other could bear, and the much-sought-for challenge was finally sent to Coburn. He snatched it up greedily and the two men were matched for \$5,000 a side to fight on Canadian soil. For one hour and fifteen minutes they



THE WATCHERS AT THE BIER OF JOE COBURN, THE OLD PRIZE-FIGHTER, IN HIS HOME AT NO. 242 WEST THIRTY-FIFTH STREET.

When to do it. Coburn used to frequent the vicinity with a chip on his shoulder, and Mace used to meet him always with a smile that had a suggestion of the beatitude of peace in its wroth.

Only fighting and drinking and the squandering of money in reckless barroom generosity and a life of turbulence—these are the memories that must have risen to the mind of the pugilist as he lay dying there. Given a superb frame and a mighty constitution that should have lasted long after the three score years and ten, he was dying there wasted away by dissipation and a riotous existence.

Given a strong arm and muscles of iron, he might have earned easily a competence to last him all that time, and he was going out of life penniless and a charge on his friends, and leaving behind him a widow and a babe with nothing.

Even after he had given up prize-fighting he might have gained an honest living from the saloon which he set up, and what did he do with his money? Squandered it and continued to get drunk on it.

And did he have redeeming qualities? Well, they say all men have. For one thing—let it be said to his everlasting honor—he was kind always to his family. When he had money they were the first to receive its benefits.

He was generous, too, to friends in distress. They were barroom friends, his companions in midnight brawls, but when they were hard pressed they found a helper in need in quick-tempered Joe Coburn.

What was left of him lay yesterday in the little front room of his flat. The room was very small, and the coffin took up nearly the whole of the place. A heavy black pall covered the bier, and two gray-haired women watched beside it.

One side of the room, against the street, was draped in sable. Every picture in the room was shrouded in the same sombre black.

There were no lithographs of prize-fighters nor any mementoes of pugilism among them.

Over the head of the coffin there was a tall gilded crucifix. Candles were burning at the feet. Above the crucifix, on a black curtain, were the letters I. H. S. in silver.

While a young man from THE WOMAN was looking on the old fighter's dead face a woman dressed in deep mourning entered the room—the must have been very handsome once, and she was handsome still. She was Joe Coburn's widow.

Outside, in another room, in a tiny crib lay a pretty, golden-haired little fellow of

two years asleep. He was Joe Coburn's baby.

It was very peaceful there and quiet. And the contrast between this quiet room, this calm, handsome woman and the sleeping babe to the riotous, ill-spent life of the dead pugilist was singularly striking. And he had thrown away all that, which might have been his for many years to come, and in far happier conditions, for what? That he might be a hero among sports; that he might drink and riot in drunken brawls; that he might draw out the existence of a brute.

He had changed a good deal in his long illness, but his well-known face was still plainly recognizable. His sparse gray hair had been brushed neatly back and his beard of iron gray flowed down upon his breast. In his hands some one had placed a bunch of flowers. Those great, strong hands that could have strangled a man not so very many months ago held them listlessly, powerless even so much as to crush one of their tiny, silk-like petals.

Once in a while some of Coburn's old comrades came in to look upon his face, and then one of the three women watching there would get up and draw aside the pall. And all the while quietly sat in the corner the pugilist's widow, with her hands folded. She had been his wife for nearly nineteen years. They had one child, and that died a long time ago. Then, after several years, came the little boy, whom people turn around in the streets to look at and inquire who he is.

They are going to bury the body of the old pugilist this morning at 10 o'clock from the Church of the Holy Innocents in West Thirty-seventh street, near Broadway. Probably Father Kenney, who was with Coburn when he died and gave him the last sacrament, will conduct the service.

The arrangements are simple as may be, and yet it is expected that the church will be filled. For every one in the sporting world knew Joe Coburn. There will be few who will fail to come to his funeral. When it is all over, they will lay the dead pugilist in Calvary Cemetery for the grave of his fair-haired boy who died so long ago.

She Died from the Burn.

Mrs. Mary Burke, who, with her baby, was burned by the explosion of a lamp at their home, No. 643 First avenue, last Sunday, died yesterday at Bellevue Hospital.