



TALKING of prize-fighters, sir, said the night watchman, who had nearly danced himself over the edge of the wharf in illustrating one of Mr. Corbett's most trusted blows, and was now sitting down taking in sufficient air for three, they ain't wot they used to be when I was a boy. They advertise in the papers for months and months about their fights, and when it does come off, they do it with gloves, and they're all right agin a day or two arter.

I saw a picter the other day o' one punching a bag wot couldn't punch back, for practice. Why, I remember as a young man Sinker Pitt, as used to 'ave the King's Arms 'ere in 'is old age; when 'e wanted practice 'is plan was to dress up, in a soft 'at and black coat like a chapel minister or something, and go in a pub and contradict people; sailormen for choice. He'd 'a no more thought o' hitting a pore 'armless bag than I should ha' thought of hitting 'im.

The strangest prize-fighter I ever come across was one wot shipped with me on the *Cavendish*. He was the most eggstrordinry fighter I've ever seen or 'eard of, and 'e got to be such a nuisance afore 'e'd done with us that we could 'ardly call our souls our own. He shipped as an ordinary seaman—a unfair thing to do, as 'e was anything but ordinary, and 'ad no right to be there at all.

We'd got one terror on board afore he come, and that was Bill Bone, one o' the biggest and strongest men I've ever seen down a ship's fo'c's'le, and that's saying a good deal. Built more like a bull than a man, 'e was, and when he was in his tantrums the best thing to do was to get out of 'is way or else get into your bunk and keep quiet. Oppersition used to send 'im crazy a'most, an' if 'e said a red shirt was a blue one, you 'ad to keep quiet. It didn't do to agree with 'im and call it blue even, cos if you did he'd call you a liar and punch you for telling lies.



He was the only drawback to that ship. We 'ad a nice old man, good mates, and good grub. You may know it was Ar when I tell you that most of us 'ad been in 'er for several v'y'ges.

But Bill was a drawback, and no mistake. In the main he was a 'earty, good-tempered sort o' shipmate as you'd wish to see, only, as I said afore, oppersition was a thing he could not and would not stand. It used to fly to his 'ed direckly.

The v'y'ge I'm speaking of—we used to trade between Australia and London—Bill came aboard about an hour afore the ship sail'ed. The rest of us was already aboard and down below, some of us stowing our things away and the rest sitting down and telling each other lies about wot we'd been doing. Bill came lurching down the ladder, and Tom Baker put 'is 'and to 'im to steady 'im as he got to the bottom.

"Who are you putting your 'ands on?" ses Bill, glaring at 'im.

"Only 'olding you up, Bill," ses Tom, smiling.

"Oh," ses Bill.

He put 'is back up agin a bunk and pulled hisself together.

"'Olding of me—up—was you?" he ses ; "whaffor, if I might be so bold as to arsk?"

"I thought your foot 'ad slipped, Bill, old man," ses Tom ; "but I'm sorry if it 'adn't."

Bill looks at 'im agin 'ard.

"Sorry if my foot didn't slip?" he ses.

"You know wot I mean, Bill," ses Tom, smiling a uneasy smile.

"Don't laugh at me," roars Bill.

"I wasn't laughing, Bill, old pal," ses Tom.

"'E's called me a liar," ses Bill, looking round at us ; "called me a liar. 'Old my coat, Charlie, and I'll split 'im in halves."

Charlie took the coat like a lamb, though he was Tom's pal, and Tom looked round to see whether he couldn't nip up the ladder and get away, but Bill was just in front of it. Then Tom found out that one of 'is boot-laces was undone and he knelt down to do it up, and this young ordinary seaman, Joe Simms by name, put his 'ead out of his bunk and he ses, quiet-like :—

"You ain't afraid of that thing, mate, are you?"

"Wot?" screams Bill, starting.

"Don't make such a noise when I'm speaking," ses Joe ; "where's your manners, you great 'ulking rascal?"

"I thought Bill would ha' dropped with surprise at being spoke to like that. His

face was purple all over and 'e stood staring at Joe as though 'e didn't know wot to make of 'im. And we stared too, Joe being a smallish sort o' chap and not looking at all strong.

"Go easy, mate," whispers Tom ; "you don't know who you're talking to."

"Bosh," ses Joe, "he's no good. He's too fat and too silly to do any 'arm. He sha'n't 'urt you while I'm 'ere."

He just rolled out of 'is bunk and, standing in front of Bill, put 'is fists up at 'im and stared 'im straight in the eye.

"You touch that man," he ses, quietly, pointing to Tom, "and I'll give you such a dressing-down as you've never 'ad afore. Mark my words, now."

"I wasn't going to 'it him," ses Bill, in a strange, mild voice.

"You'd better not," ses the young 'un, shaking his fist at 'im ; "you'd better not, my lad. If there's any fighting to be done in this fo'c's'le I'll do it. Mind that."

It's no good me saying we was staggered ; becos staggered ain't no word for it. To see Bill put 'is hands in 'is pockets and try and whistle, and then sit down on a locker and scratch 'is head, was the most amazing thing I've ever seen. Presently 'e begins to sing under his breath.

"Stop that 'umming," ses Joe ; "when I want you to 'um I'll tell you."

Bill left off 'umming, and then he gives a little cough behind the back of 'is 'and, and arter fidgeting about a bit with 'is feet went up on deck again.

"'Strewth," ses Tom, looking round at us.

"'Ave we shipped a bloomin' prize-fighter?"

"Wot did you call me?" ses Joe, looking at 'im.

"Nothing, mate," ses Tom, drawing back.

"You keep a quiet tongue in your 'ed," ses Joe, "and speak when you're spoken to, my lad."

He was a ordinary seaman, mind, talking to A.B.'s like that. Men who'd been up aloft and doin' their little bit when 'e was going about catching cold in 'is little petti-cuts. Still, if Bill could stand it, we supposed as we'd better.

Bill stayed up on deck till we was under way, and 'is spirit seemed to be broke. He went about 'is work like a man wot was walking in 'is sleep, and when breakfast come 'e 'ardly tasted it.

Joe made a splendid breakfast, and when he'd finished 'e went to Bill's bunk and chucked the things out all over the place and said 'e was going to 'ave it for himself. And



Bill sat there and took it all quiet, and by-and-by he took 'is things up and put them in Joe's bunk without a word.

It was the most peaceful fust day we 'ad ever 'ad down that fo'c's'le, Bill usually being in 'is tantrums the fust day or two at sea, and wanting to know why 'e'd been born. If you talked you was noisy and worriting, and if you didn't talk you was sulky; but this time 'e sat quite still and didn't interfere a bit. It was such a pleasant change that we all felt a bit grateful, and at tea-time Tom Baker patted Joe on the back and said he was one o' the right old sort.

"You've been in a scrap or two in your time, I know," he ses, admiring like. "I knew you was a bit of a one with your fists direckly I see you."

"Oh, 'ow's that?" asks Joe.

"I could see by your nose," ses Tom.

You never know how to take people like that. The words 'ad 'ardly left Tom's lips afore the other ups with a basin of 'ot tea and heaves it all over 'im.

"Take that, you insulting rascal," he ses, as Tom jumped up spluttering and wiping 'is face with his coat. "How dare you insult me?"

"Get up," ses Tom, dancing with rage. "Get up; prize-fighter or no prize-fighter, I'll mark you."

"Sit down," ses Bill, turning round.

"I'm going to 'ave a go at 'im, Bill," ses Tom; "if you're afraid of 'im, I ain't."

"Sit down," ses Bill, starting up. "'Ow dare you insult me like that?"

"Like wot?" ses Tom, staring.

"If I can't lick 'im you can't," ses Bill; "that's 'ow it is, mate."

"But I can try," ses Tom.

"All right," ses Bill. "Me fust, then if you lick me, you can 'ave a go at 'im. If you can't lick me, 'ow can you lick 'im?"

"Sit down both of you," ses young Joe, drinking Bill's tea to make up for 'is own. "And mind you, I'm cock o' this fo'c's'le, and don't you forget it. Sit down, both of you, afore I start on you."

They both sat down, but Tom wasn't quick enough to please Bill, and he got a wipe o' the side o' the 'ead that made it ring for an hour afterwards.

That was the beginning of it, and instead of 'aving one master we found we'd got two, owing to the eggstrordnry way Bill had o' looking at things. He gave Joe best without even 'aving a try at him, and if anybody else wanted to 'ave a try, it was a insult to Bill. We couldn't make 'ed or tail of it, and all we

could get out of Bill was that 'e had one time 'ad a turn-up with Joe Simms ashore, which he'd remember all 'is life. It must ha' been something of a turn, too, the way Bill used to try and curry favour with 'im.

In about three days our life wasn't worth living, and the fo'c's'le was more like a Sunday-school class than anything else. In the fust place Joe put down swearing. He wouldn't 'ave no bad langwidge, he said, and he didn't neither. If a man used a bad word Joe would pull 'im up the fust time, and the second he'd order Bill to 'it 'im, being afraid of 'urting 'im too much 'imself. 'Arf the men 'ad to leave off talking altogether when Joe was by, but the way they used to swear when he wasn't was something shocking. Harry Moore got clergyman's sore throat one arternoon through it.

Then Joe objected to us playing cards for money, and we 'ad to arrange on the quiet that brace buttons was ha'-pennies and coat buttons pennies, and that lasted until one evening Tom Baker got up and danced and nearly went off 'is 'ead with joy through havin' won a few dozen. That was enough for Joe, and Bill by his orders took the cards and pitched 'em over the side.

Sweet-'earting and that sort o' thing Joe couldn't abear, and Ned Davis put his foot into it finely one arternoon through not knowing. He was lying in 'is bunk smoking and thinking, and by-and-by he looked across at Bill, who was 'arf asleep, and 'e ses:—

"I wonder whether you'll see that little gal at Melbourne agin this trip, Bill."

Bill's eyes opened wide and he shook 'is fist at Ned, as Ned thought, playful-like.

"All right, I'm a looking at you, Bill," 'e ses. "I can see you."

"What gal is that, Ned?" ses Joe, who was in the next bunk to him, and I saw Bill's eyes screw up tight, and 'e suddenly fell fast asleep.

"I don't know 'er name," ses Ned, "but she was very much struck on Bill; they used to go to the theayter together."

"Pretty gal?" ses Joe, leading 'im on.

"Rather," ses Ned. "Trust Bill for that, 'e always gets the prettiest gal in the place—I've known as many as six and seven to——"

"WOT!" screams Bill, waking up out of 'is sleep, and jumping out of 'is bunk.

"Keep still, Bill, and don't interfere when I'm talking," ses Joe, very sharp.

"'E's insulted me," ses Bill; "talking about gals when everybody knows I 'ate 'em worse than pison."

"Hold your tongue," ses Joe. "Now,



Ned, what's this about this little gal? What's 'er name?"

"It was only a little joke o' mine," ses Ned, who saw 'e'd put 'is foot in it. "Bill 'ates 'em worse than—worse than—pison."

"You're telling me a lie," ses Joe, sternly. "Who was it?"

"It was only my fun, Joe," ses Ned.

"Oh, very well then. I'm going to 'ave a bit of fun now," ses Joe. "Bill!"

"Yes," ses Bill.

"I won't 'it Ned myself for fear I shall do 'im a lasting injury," ses Joe, "so you just

was dazed like, struck out wild at Ned and missed 'im, and the next moment was knocked down agin. We could 'ardly believe our eyes, and as for Ned, 'e looked as though 'e'd been doing miracles by mistake.

When Bill got up the second time 'e was that shaky 'e could 'ardly stand, and Ned 'ad it all 'is own way, until at last 'e got Bill's 'ead under 'is arm and punched at it till they was both tired.

"All right," ses Bill; "I've 'ad enough. I've met my master."

"Wot?" ses Joe, staring.



"THEN JOE OBJECTED TO US PLAYING CARDS FOR MONEY."

start on 'im and keep on till 'e tells all about your goings on with that gal."

"Hit 'im to make 'im tell about *me*?" ses Bill, staring 'is 'ardest.

"You 'eard wot I said," ses Joe; "don't repeat my words. You a married man, too; I've got sisters of my own, and I'm going to put this sort o' thing down. If you don't down 'im, I will."

Ned wasn't much of a fighter, and I 'alf expected to see 'im do a bolt up on deck and complain to the skipper. He did look like it for a moment, then he stood up, looking a bit white as Bill walked over to 'im, and the next moment 'is fist flew out, and afore we could turn round I'm blest if Bill wasn't on the floor. 'E got up as if 'e

"I've met my master," ses Bill, going and sitting down. "Ned 'as knocked me about crool."

Joe looked at 'im speechless, and then without saying another word, or 'aving a go at Ned himself, as we expected, 'e went up on deck, and Ned crossed over and sat down by Bill.

"I 'ope I didn't hurt you, mate," he ses, kindly.

"Hurt me?" roars Bill. "You! You 'urt me? You, you little bag o' bones. Wait till I get you ashore by yourself for five minits, Ned Davis, and then you'll know wot 'urting means."

"I don't understand you, Bill," ses Ned; "you're a mystery, that's what you are; but



I tell you plain when you go ashore you don't have me for a companion."

It was a mystery to all of us, and it got worse and worse as time went on. Bill didn't dare to call 'is soul 'is own, although Joe only hit 'im once the whole time, and then not very hard, and he excused 'is cowardice by telling us of a man Joe 'ad killed in a fight down in one o' them West-end clubs.

Wot with Joe's Sunday-school ways and Bill backing 'em up, we was all pretty glad by the time we got to Melbourne. It was like getting out o' pris'n to get away from Joe for a little while. All but Bill, that is, and Joe took 'im to hear a dissolving views on John Bunyan. Bill said 'e'd be delighted to go, but the language he used about 'im on the quiet when he came back showed wot 'e thought of it. I don't know who John Bunyan is, or wot he's done, but the things Bill said about 'im I wouldn't soil my tongue by repeating.

Arter we'd been there two or three days we began to feel a'most sorry for Bill. Night arter night, when we was ashore, Joe would take 'im off and look arter 'im, and at last, partly for 'is sake, but more to see the fun, Tom Baker managed to think o' something to put things straight.

"You stay aboard to-night, Bill," he ses one morning, "and you'll see something that'll startle you."

"Worse than you?" ses Bill, whose temper was getting worse and worse.

"There'll be an end o' that bullying Joe," ses Tom, taking 'im by the arm. "We've arranged to give 'im a lesson as'll lay 'im up for a time."

"Oh," ses Bill, looking 'ard at a boat wot was passing.

"We've got Dodgy Pete coming to see us to-night," ses Tom, in a whisper; "there'll only be the second officer aboard, and he'll likely be asleep. Dodgy's one o' the best light-weights in Australia, and if 'e don't fix up Mister Joe, it'll be a pity."

"You're a fair treat, Tom," ses Bill, turning round; "that's what you are. A fair treat."

"I thought you'd be pleased, Bill," ses Tom.

"Pleased ain't no name for it, Tom," answers Bill. "You've took a load off my mind."

The fo'c's'le was pretty full that evening, everybody giving each other a little grin on the quiet, and looking over to where Joe was sitting in 'is bunk putting a button or two on

his coat. At about ha'-past six Dodgy comes aboard, and the fun begins to commence.

He was a nasty, low-looking little chap, was Dodgy, very fly-looking and very conceited. I didn't like the look of 'im at all, and unbearable as Joe was, it didn't seem to be quite the sort o' thing to get a chap aboard to 'ammer a shipmate you couldn't 'ammer yourself.

"Nasty stuffy place you've got down 'ere," ses Dodgy, who was smoking a big cigar; "I can't think 'ow you can stick it."

"It ain't bad for a fo'c's'le," ses Charlie.

"An' what's that in that bunk over there?" ses Dodgy, pointing with 'is cigar at Joe.

"Hush, be careful," ses Tom, with a wink; "that's a prize-fighter."

"Oh," ses Dodgy, grinning, "I thought it was a monkey."

You might 'ave heard a pin drop, and there was a pleasant feeling went all over us at the thought of the little fight we was going to see - all to ourselves, as Joe lays down the jacket he was stitching at and just puts 'is little 'ead over the side o' the bunk.

"Bill," he ses, yawning.

"Well," ses Bill, all on the grin like the rest of us.

"Who is that 'andsome, gentlemanly-looking young feller over there smoking a half-crown cigar?" ses Joe.

"That's a young gent wot's come down to 'ave a look round," ses Tom, as Dodgy takes 'is cigar out of 'is mouth and looks round, puzzled.

"Wot a terror 'e must be to the gals, with them lovely little peepers of 'is," ses Joe, shaking 'is 'ead. "*Bill!*"

"Well," ses Bill, agin, as Dodgy got up.

"Take that lovely little gentleman and kick 'im up the fo'c's'le ladder," ses Joe, taking up 'is jacket agin; "and don't make too much noise over it, cos I've got a bit of a 'ead-ache, else I'd do it myself."

There was a laugh went all round then, and Tom Baker was near killing himself, and then I'm blessed if Bill didn't get up and begin taking off 'is coat.

"Wot's the game?" ses Dodgy, staring.

"I'm obeying orders," ses Bill. "Last time I was in London, Joe 'ere half killed me one time, and 'e made me promise to do as 'e told me for six months. I'm very sorry, mate, but I've got to kick you up that ladder."

"You kick me up?" ses Dodgy, with a nasty little laugh.

"I can try, mate, can't I?" ses Bill, folding





"WHO IS THAT 'ANDSOME, GENTLEMANLY-LOOKING YOUNG FELLER?"

'is things up very neat and putting 'em on a locker.

"'Old my cigar," ses Dodgy, taking it out of 'is mouth and sticking it in Charlie's. "I don't need to take my coat off to 'im."

'E altered 'is mind, though, when he saw Bill's chest and arms, and not only took off his coat, but his waistcoat too. Then, with a nasty look at Bill, 'e put up 'is fists and just pranced up to 'im.

The fust blow Bill missed, and the next moment 'e got a tap on the jaw that nearly broke it, and that was followed up by one in the eye that sent 'im staggering up agin the side, and when 'e was there Dodgy's fists were rattling all round 'im.

I believe it was that that brought Bill round, and the next moment Dodgy was on 'is back with a blow that nearly knocked 'is 'ead off. Charlie grabbed at Tom's watch and began to count, and after a little bit called out "Time." It was a silly thing to do, as it would 'ave stopped the fight then and there if it 'adn't been for Tom's presence of mind saying it was two minutes slow. That gave Dodgy a chance, and he got up again and walked round Bill very careful, swearing 'ard at the small size of the fo'c's'le.

He got in three or four at Bill afore you

could wink a'most, and when Bill 'it back 'e wasn't there. That seemed to annoy Bill more than anything, and he suddenly flung out 'is arms, and grabbing 'old of 'im flung 'im right across the fo'c's'le to where, fortunately for 'im—Dodgy, I mean—Tom Baker was sitting.

Charlie called "Time" again, and we let 'em 'ave five minutes while we 'elped Tom to bed, and then wot 'e called the "disgusting exhibishun" was resumed. Bill 'ad dipped 'is face in a bucket and 'ad rubbed 'is great arms all over and was as fresh as a daisy. Dodgy looked a bit tottery, but 'e was game all through and very careful, and, try as Bill might, he didn't seem to be able to get 'old of 'im agin.

In five minutes more, though, it was all over, Dodgy not being able to see plain—except to get out o' Bill's way—and hitting wild. He seemed to think the whole fo'c's'le was full o' Bills sitting on a locker and waiting to be punched, and the end of it was a knock-out blow from the real Bill which left 'im on the floor without a soul offering to pick 'im up.

Bill 'elped 'im up at last and shook hands with 'im, and they rinsed their faces in the same bucket, and began to praise each other



up. They sat there purring like a couple o' cats, until at last we 'eard a smothered voice coming from Joe Simms's bunk.

"Is it all over?" he asks.

"Yes," ses somebody.

"How is Bill?" ses Joe's voice again.

"Look for yourself," ses Tom.

"Mighty Moses!" ses Dodgy Pete, jumping up, "it's a woman!"

"It's my wife!" ses Bill.

We understood it all then, leastways the married ones among us did. She'd shipped aboard partly to be with Bill and partly to keep an eye on 'im, and Tom Baker's



"HE SEEMED TO THINK THE WHOLE FO'C'S'LE WAS FULL O' BILLS."

Joe sat up in 'is bunk then and looked out, and he no sooner saw Bill's face than he gave a loud cry and fell back agin, and, as true as I'm sitting here, fainted clean away. We was struck all of a 'eap, and then Bill picked up the bucket and threw some water over 'im, and by-and-by he comes round agin and in a dazed sort o' way puts his arm round Bill's neck and begins to cry.

mistake about a prize-fighter had just suited 'er book better than anything. How Bill was to get 'er home 'e couldn't think, but it 'appened the second officer had been peeping down the fo'c's'le, waiting for ever so long for a suitable oppertunity to stop the fight, and the old man was so tickled about the way we'd all been done he gave 'er a passage back as stewardess to look arter the ship's cat.