

was the first to speak. "Matches," he said, in a strange voice. George struck one. Then he leapt at the gas and a burner flamed from the match. Malcolm touched the thing on the floor with his foot and found it soft. He looked at his companions. They mouthed inquiries at him, but he shook his head. He lit the candle, and, kneeling down, examined the silent thing on the floor. Then he rose swiftly, and dipping his handkerchief in the water-jug, bent down again and grimly wiped the white face. Then he sprang back with a cry of incredulous horror, pointing at it. Leek's pistol fell to the floor and he shut out the sight with his hands, but the others, crowding forward, gazed spell-bound at the dead face of Hirst.

Before a word was spoken the door opened and Somers hastily entered the room. His eyes fell on the floor. "Good God!" he cried. "You didn't——"

Nobody spoke.

"I told him not to," he said, in a suffocating voice. "I told him not to. I told him——"

He leaned against the wall, deathly sick, put his arms out feebly, and fell fainting into the traveller's arms.

THE PEACEMAKER

THE harbour was crowded with fishing boats, and fresh arrivals were coming in every few minutes. Until the entrance was reached they came scudding along with every appearance of haste, but then their mainsails came tumbling down to the deck, and the boats with sufficient way left on them moved easily over the still water, and felt their way to a berth. Small boats conveyed the fish to the quay, where embryo fishermen were appraising the catch with a wisdom beyond their years.

There was a glut of whiting. So many whiting, and going so cheaply that it was enough to make them bite their tails from sheer vexation. Small flat fish which slid away from their pile were carefully looked after and coaxed back with the toe of a sea-boot, but whiting slid away unnoticed until they vanished from mortal ken in the pockets of predatory urchins.

In the small market, a short, red-faced man with a scrubby beard walked in a disparaging

fashion from heap to heap, using a favourite briar in lieu of a hammer to knock down such fish as found bidders. The latter were few and wary, and turning a deaf ear to eloquence expressed opinions distasteful to an auctioneer's ear in crude English.

The sense of the meeting being against him, the auctioneer truckled to it, and coming to another heap consisting of a selection of the most undesirable fish that swim Britannia's realm, gazed at it indignantly. There was a titter behind him, and he voiced his wrath impetuously.

"That's Joe Gubbs's catch," he bawled. "S'elp me, I'd know that man's luck anywhere."

He turned the fish over scornfully with his foot, and, with a severe glance at the hapless Gubbs, moved away to something more saleable.

"Where d' ye get 'em from, Gubbs?" inquired an aggravating voice. "We never get such things in our nets. I've never seen some o' them things afore."

"There's a lot you ain't seen, Bob Tarbut," said Gubbs, turning upon him, "and what you do see don't do you much good."

"I'd be ashamed to bring home such a queer-looking lot," jeered the other.

"They mayn't be up to much, but there's none

on 'em would care to change faces with you, I expect," related Gubbs.

"You leave my face alone," said Tarbut, whose physiognomy was much used in the village for purposes of comparison.

"A skate's handsome to you," said Gubbs, following up his advantage.

He jumped back suddenly as the fist of the sensitive Tarbut shot suddenly out, and treading on a small fish, whirled round wildly with his hands in the air in the effort to retain his balance, and sat down heavily. The bystanders instantly separated into two groups, and two or three anxious sympathisers helped the fallen man to his feet, and indicated those parts of Tarbut's frame which in their opinion were least adapted to offer resistance to his fist.

"Stand up," said Gubbs, sternly, as he shook himself free from these friends.

"I am a-standin' up!" said Tarbut, breathing hard.

The two combatants approached each other stealthily, and manœuvring round the heaps of fish, struck safely at each other over these convenient barriers.

"Get 'em in the road," cried an excited voice, "they can't 'urt each other here."

A dozen kindly hands helped them there, and

finding too much strategy for sport in a large ring, at the bidding of the resourceful individual who had last spoken, gradually made it smaller and smaller. Two or three small blows warmed the combatants, and they set to work in earnest. Then Gubbs, under a heavy blow from Tarbut, went to the ground and stayed there.

It was three minutes before he came thoroughly round, and then he sat up in a dazed fashion and looked round for his opponent.

"Did I kill 'im?" he inquired, in a whisper.

"No, not quite," said one of his friends, gently.

Gubbs rubbed his eyes. "What are they patting him on the back for?" he inquired, eyeing the group who were making a fuss over Tarbut.

"'Cos he's won," said his friend.

Gubbs staggered to his feet.

"It's no good," said the landlord of the "Three Fishers," who had run over to the scene of the fray; "you wasn't properly trained, you know. Now, look 'ere. If you put yourself in my hands, in three weeks you can beat him holler."

"You do as Mr. Larkins ses, Joe," said his friend, impressively.

"I lived among prizefighters afore I come down 'ere," said Mr. Larkins, expanding his small frame. "In three weeks' time, Gubbs, you'll be able to knock him silly."

"Well, what about Tarbut? He ought to be trained too," said one of the men. "Fair play's fair play any day."

"I'll train 'im," said an old ex-coastguardsman.

"I don't want no training," said Tarbut, surlily.

"I've beat 'im, beat 'im easy."

"Well, beat 'im again, Tarbut," said one of his friends. "I'll put my five bob on you. Who'll take me?"

For the next five minutes, heedless of the assertions of both men that they wouldn't fight any more, bets were freely taken, Tarbut, in view of his recent success, being a hot favourite.

A jarring element was introduced into the proceedings by a small, elderly man wearing a piece of blue ribbon, who, pushing his way in eagerly, inquired what it was all about. Nobody troubling to give him a correct answer, he tried to solve it for himself, and was then caught, just in the nick of time, trying to make the enemies shake hands.

"You go off to your Mother's Meeting, Peter Morgan," said an incensed voice.

"It's a fight," said the little man, raising his voice. "Oh, my friends—"

"It's nothing o' the kind," said Larkins, hotly. "I'm training 'em for a race, that's all. They're just going to see who's the best runner."

Morgan, disregarding the publican, looked to others for information.

"It's quite right," said a bystander. "You can believe me, can't you?"

"When's it going to be?" asked Morgan.

"I don't know," said the other, turning away.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves," said Morgan, warmly. "It's bad enough to make a couple of men fight what don't want to without telling a lot of lies about it."

"It's none o' your business," said Larkins, surlily. "Ask no questions and you'll hear no lies. You'll get some idea into that 'ead of yours and then go and split, and have it stopped."

"I never told of anything in my life," said Morgan, sharply. "My mates here know that. That ain't my way. My way's persuasion and example, not forcing people to do what I want."

"There's a purse o' fifteen and six made up for the winner," said Larkins, turning away and whispering the news to Gubbs. "The spot for the picnic'll be made known later on. Them what's in the know is respectfully asked to keep their mouths shut to save trouble all round."

He went back to his bar, and the other men, after standing about a bit, strolled off one by one to their teas. Mr. Morgan was one of the last to leave, and went as far as Tarbut's door

with him to tell him an anecdote of a man who was struck behind the ear in a fight and killed on the spot.

A comfortable meal and a good night's rest restored Mr. Gubbs to his wonted serenity of mind, and he awoke at six o'clock feeling determined to shake hands with Tarbut and let the matter drop. A persistent hammering at the door, which gradually got louder and louder, interfering with his meditations, he roused Mrs. Gubbs, who was sleeping peacefully, and with some asperity bade her get up and stop it.

"It's Mr. Larkins, Joe," said the lady, hastily withdrawing her head from the window.

Mr. Gubbs sat up in bed, and then with a mighty yawn rose, and, pushing open the case-ment again, gazed indignantly at the small publican, who was standing below keeping up an incessant rapping on the door with a small cane.

"Morning, Mr. Larkins, sir," said Gubbs, sniffing at the cool morning air.

"Halloa!" said Larkins, looking up. "This won't do, you know. You're wasting time. You ought to be up and out by now."

"I've changed my mind," said Gubbs, leaning out and speaking in a low voice to defeat the intentions of Mrs. Gubbs, who was listening. "I

dreamt I killed Tarbut, an' it's give me such a fright that I've resolved not to fight."

"That's all right," said Larkins, briskly; "dreams always go by contraries."

"Well there ain't much comfort in that," said Gubbs, who was anxious to get back to his warm bed, sharply.

"You dress and come down," said the imperious Larkins. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself after all the trouble I'm taking on your behalf."

Mr. Gubbs rubbed his eyes and pondered. "What's the towel for?" he demanded, suspiciously.

"Rub you down with after you've bathed," said the other.

"*Bathed?*" said Mr. Gubbs, with emphasis. "Bathed? What for?"

"Training," replied Mr. Larkins. "Hurry up."

"I don't believe old Bullock's going to make Tarbut bathe," said Gubbs, shivering; "it's weakening."

"You do as you're told," said the autocratic Larkins. "Bullock don't know nothing about it."

Mr. Gubbs sighed and withdrew his head, and explaining to his astonished wife that he was going for a little stroll, gloomily dressed himself and joined his trainer below.

"Shoulders back," said the small publican. "Head up."

He led the way down to the beach, and, ignoring the looks of aversion which Mr. Gubbs bestowed upon the silver sea, stood by while he disrobed and picked his way painfully over the shingle to the edge of the water. It was a bright morning, but somewhat chill, and Mr. Gubbs's breathless gaspings furnished an excellent clue to the temperature of the water.

"How do you feel?" inquired Mr. Larkins, anxiously, as he rubbed him down.

"I feel ill," said the other, shivering.

"You'll feel better when you've had your run," said Larkins, cheerily.

"'Ad my w—w—*wol*?" inquired Mr. Gubbs, staring at him offensively, and rubbing himself furiously with the towel.

"Your run," repeated Larkins, sternly. "You don't want your coat. I'll hold that. And mind, I don't want you to go running like a steam-engine, or a runaway horse."

"I wasn't goin' to," said Gubbs.

"Just trot easy," continued the other, "for about half a mile. Go as far as that gate over there, then rest two minutes and trot back again."

His manner was so dictatorial that Mr. Gubbs, remembering in time his score at the "Three

Fishers," swallowed something he was going to say—and it was nearly strong enough to choke him—and set off at a strange, weird gait towards the indicated goal. He reached it at last, and after a long two minutes started back again in response to the semaphore-like appeals of the enthusiastic Larkins.

"I've got my work cut out for me, I can see," said the latter, as his victim, puffing and blowing, sat down on the ground. "But I'll soon get you in trim, and mind you keep quiet about it. I don't want Bullock to know."

"Why not?" demanded Mr. Gubbs.

"Because he'd train Tarbut the same way," said Larkins, with a cunning grin.

"Well, why shouldn't Tarbut 'ave a doing same as me?" said Mr. Gubbs, vindictively. "Why should 'e be a-laying in comfort in 'is bed while I'm catching cold bathing and killing myself running?"

"Don't you be a fool," said Larkins, affectionately patting him on the shoulder. "Come into my place when you have time, and I'll put the gloves on with you a bit; and be careful what you eat, mind, else you'll undo all the good I've done you."

If it is possible for a man to expectorate sarcastically, Mr. Gubbs achieved that feat.

"Only two cups of tea with your breakfast," continued Larkins, solemnly, "and no greens for dinner, and I'll send you in one pint of old ale every day free gratis."

The tensivity of Mr. Gubbs's features relaxed, and he smiled faintly as he rose and accompanied his friend back. Larkins saw him to his door, and after explaining fluently to Mrs. Gubbs that her husband was training for a race, gave her explicit instructions as to his diet, and departed.

It was a source of much joy to Mr. Larkins, though he was unable to persuade Gubbs to share in his feelings, that Tarbut's trainer was satisfied with a less vigorous system for his man. He let Tarbut off with a cold sponging on rising, and as Tarbut had his own ideas as to what constituted a cold sponging, both parties were well pleased with each other.

The business-like nature of these proceedings was keenly appreciated by the inhabitants of the fishing quarter. Fights had happened before and doubtless would again, but they were mere rough-and-tumble affairs, and over before any proper excitement could be worked up. The purse had steadily mounted up to thirty-five shillings, and the betting varied from day to day.

Each man had his knot of supporters, and enthusiasm had reached such a pitch that Gubbs,

who was naturally of a retiring disposition, had to take his matutinal tub before quite a circle of admirers. Opposition on the part of the ladies was balked by continuing to allude to the affair as a race, though Mrs. Gubbs, who got up one morning to see her man run, went home in a state of mind bordering upon stupefaction.

An uneasy feeling was caused by the anxiety of the excellent Mr. Morgan to discover the time and place of meeting. No information was afforded him, and as he had indignantly denied any intention of giving the alarm, the gentlemen interested were much exercised as to the reasons for his curiosity.

The battle was fixed for a Saturday evening, the two trainers, after much wordy warfare, having selected a site which Mr. Larkins insisted had been made purposely by Nature with a view to affairs of the kind. Lofty cliffs hid it from view, and the ground itself consisted of turf so soft and spongy that Larkins predicted that Tarbut would bounce up from it like an indiarubber ball. The principals expressed themselves as satisfied, though their niggardliness in the matter of thanks for the trouble which had been taken over the arrangements formed food for conversation for the trainers all the way home.

The boats got in early on Friday afternoon with

their fish. The catch was small and soon disposed of, and then the attentive trainers, rescuing their men from admirers, who were feeling their arms and putting leading questions as to their wind and state of mind, sent them indoors with concise instructions as to how they were to spend the last evening. Larkins officiously sent his man off for a short, sharp walk after his tea, and later on, going to the quay, found that Bullock had given his man the same instructions.

"Don't you go worrying of 'em, mind," said Larkins sternly to the group, "an' let 'em have an easy time of it to-morrow in the boats. Both of 'em," he added, generously.

"Spoke like a Briton, Mr. Larkins," said an old fisherman.

"What I want is fair play and no favour," said Mr. Larkins; "it's to be a genuine sporting affair. No bad blood or anything of that kind. After the little affair, all what go to see it are welcome to one drink at my expense."

"It's time my man was back," said Bullock, looking up the road which led over the cliffs. "I told him to go just as far as the ground and back."

"Old Peter Morgan's gone down to the place too, I think," piped a small lad in huge boots. "I saw 'im following of Tarbut."

The landlord of the "Three Fishers" started

uneasily. "It's on my mind," he said, in a melancholy voice, "that that blessed old teetotaller'll have the thing stopped. He'll tell the police or something."

"No he won't," said the old fisherman who had spoken before. "Me an' Peter was boys together, an' he's never done anything o' that sort in his life. Before old Peter got religious there was nothing he liked better than to see a fight, or to take part in one either, an' it's my opinion he'd like to see this one, only he don't like to say so."

"Well, he won't," said Larkins, grimly; "it may be as you say, but we're not going to take any risks."

Conversation became general, and in view of the nearness of the event, animated, but still the two gladiators failed to put in an appearance.

"He's overdoing it, that's what he is," said Mr. Larkins, referring to the ardent Gubbs. "You can 'ave a man too willing. He'll go and knock hisself up."

The small boy came up, his big boots clattering over the stones, and, shading his eyes with his hands, looked up the road. The other men, following his gaze, saw three men advancing lovingly arm-in-arm towards them.

"It—it can't be old Morgan with 'em?" said Mr. Larkins.

"It is, though," said the old fisherman, peering through screwed-up eyes. "They've made it up through old Peter, that's wot they've done. He's been talking at 'em and getting at 'em, and now there won't be no fight."

His disappointed auditors groaned in chorus. "Won't there," said Larkins, savagely. "Ho—won't there— You don't think me and my friend Bullock here are going to slave three weeks for nothing, do you?"

"There won't be no fight," repeated the old man. "Look how loving they are! All three of 'em as close together as sweethearts."

The advancing trio certainly bore out the old man's words to the letter. Mr. Peter Morgan was in the centre, and appeared to be half-embracing his companions.

"Why, they can hardly walk," said Bullock; "they've been too far."

"Yes, that's what it is," said Larkins, in a hollow voice.

"Seems to me," said the boy, slowly, "that they've 'ad a bit of a scrap already."

The crowd, with bated breath, stepped out to meet them, Larkins and Bullock leading. It was evident that the two heroes were clinging to Mr. Morgan more for support than from any motives of affection, and it was no less evident

that the lad's remark as to a bit of a scrap was capable of wide interpretation. In a few minutes both parties were face to face, and the two trainers gazing at their charges speechless with indignation.

"Which is Gubbs?" demanded Larkins at last, in an unnatural voice.

The figure on Morgan's right arm managed to open an eye and to twist its swollen lips into something intended for a smile.

"What 'ave you been doing?" vociferated the incensed landlord.

"Fightin'," said Gubbs, speaking with some difficulty; "it's all over now. It was a draw, and we're going to halve the money between us."

"Oh, are you," said Larkins, bitterly. "Well, you won't have a damned ha'penny of it. What do you mean by it? Eh?"

"I'll tell you all about it," said Morgan, who was looking radiantly happy. "I saw Tarbut going up the road and I followed him and talked to him, and by and by up comes Gubbs, and I talked to him. Then I found out what, of course, I knew before, that all you men were trying to induce these poor souls to knock each other about for money."

Mr. Larkins, choking helplessly, looked sternly

at Mr. Morgan, and pointed an incriminating finger at Tarbut's visage.

"I urged 'em not to make such a brutal show of themselves for money," continued Mr. Morgan, "but they said as 'ow they would. Gubbs said it would be the easiest thirty-five shillings he'd ever earned, and Tarbut said it was him as was going to earn it. After a little talk o' this kind, Gubbs here 'it Tarbut smack in the eye."

Tarbut gave a faint groan in confirmation.

"Then they both started to peel," continued Mr. Morgan.

"Why didn't you stop 'em?" inquired the ex-coastguard; "it was your duty as a Christian to stop 'em."

"I thought it was better for 'em to fight like that than to make a brutal exhibition of themselves," said Mr. Morgan, with dignity. "It was a revolting spectacle, shocking, and I'm glad and thankful there was nobody there but me to see 'em make such brute beasts of themselves."

A threatening murmur broke from the crowd.

"There in that sweet secluded spot," said Mr. Morgan, shaking his head, "these two men, stripped to the waist, knocked one another about for fifteen rounds. First blood fell to Tarbut, he got in with his left on Gubbs's nose, then Gubbs up with a fearful blow and knocked him flat. It was as

clean a blow as ever I see. I took Tarbut on my knee—poor fellow, he was doing wrong, but still he was suffering, and Peter Morgan's always got a knee for the sufferer. Second round he was more cautious, and watching 'is opportunity, he clenched and fell with Gubbs underneath. It was a disgusting spectacle."

Mr. Larkins bent savagely over to Mr. Bullock and whispered in his ear.

"When time was called"—said Mr. Morgan.

"Who called it?" inquired a voice, with the air of one making a point.

"I did," said Mr. Morgan; "there was nobody else;—both of 'em walked round each other a bit, sparring and looking for opportunities. I think the third round was the longest of all. Both of 'em kept getting in a lot of little knocks and then dodging away again. Then Tarbut caught Gubbs one in the bread-ba—in the wind—and then followed up on his jaw and knocked him down again. It was a disgusting spectacle."

"Must ha' been," said a dejected voice.

"After that there was twelve more rounds," continued the narrator; "sometimes Tarbut had the best of it, and sometimes Gubbs. Both men was very determined and fought very fair. It was good, solid hard hitting, and they were marked all over before they'd finished. Once

Gubbs gave Tarbut a blow over the heart, and I thought he wouldn't get up to time."

"I wouldn't if you hadn't blowed water into my face out of that puddle," said Tarbut.

"It was a most disgusting spectacle," said Mr. Peter Morgan, hurriedly.

"Seems to me——" began Larkins, ferociously.

"Two fine strong men, stripped to the waist, hard as nails, knocking each other about for money," said Mr. Morgan. "They're never going to fight any more. I made 'em promise they wouldn't. They're good friends now; ain't you, lads?"

With an utter disregard of the feelings of the bystanders the two men shook hands.

"And though I regard fighting with horror," concluded Mr. Morgan, beaming on them, "I think that, as it was a bargain, you should divide the purse between 'em."

"They won't get a farthing of it," said Mr. Larkins, explosively, "unless you like to give it to 'em out of your own pocket."

"Me!" said Mr. Morgan, opening his eyes.

"Why?"

"Ask yourself," said Mr. Larkins, pointedly. "I should say if any man ever 'ad thirty-five shillingworth of sport all to hisself, you have; and, what's more, you know it, Mr. Peter Morgan."

The peacemaker sighed, and, turning, led his charges gently away. The crowd watched them as far as the "Three Fishers," and observing that they detached themselves by force from their guide and friend, crossed the road and followed them in.

FALSE COLOURS

"O F course, there is a deal of bullying done at sea at times," said the night-watchman, thoughtfully. "The men call it bullying an' the officers call it discipline, but it's the same thing under another name. Still, it's fair in a way. It gets passed on from one to another. Everybody aboard a'most has got somebody to bully, except, perhaps, the boy; he 'as the worst of it, unless he can manage to get the ship's cat by itself occasionally.

"I don't think sailor-men mind being bullied. I never 'eard of its putting one off 'is feed yet, and that's the main thing, arter all's said and done.

"Fust officers are often worse than skippers. In the fust place, they know they ain't skippers, an' that alone is enough to put 'em in a bad temper, especially if they've 'ad their certifikit a good many years and can't get a vacancy.

"I remember, a good many years ago now, I was lying at Calcutta one time in the *Peewit*, as