

The Bull of the Cavendish

BY W. W. JACOBS

"TALKING of prize fighters," said the night watchman, who had nearly danced himself over the edge of the wharf in illustrating one of Mr. Corbett's 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 again a day or two arter."

"I saw a picter the other day of 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 chap minister or something, and go in a pub and contradict people; sailormen for choice. He'd ha' no more thought of hitting a pore 'armless bag than I should ha' thought of hitting 'im."

"The strangest prize fighter I ever come across was one who shipped with me on the Cavendish. He was the most eggstrordinary 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 'e come, and that was Bill Bone, one of the biggest and strongest men I've ever seen down a ship's fo'c'sle, and that's saying a good deal. Built more like a bull than a man, 'e was, and when 'e was in 'is tantrums the best thing to do was to get out of 'is way or else get into your bunk and keep quiet. Operation used to send 'im crazy 'most, an' if 'e said a red shirt was a blue one, you 'ad to keep quiet. It didn't do to argue with 'im and call it blue even, cos if you did 'e'd call you a liar and punch you for telling lies."

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

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

"The y'es 'is 'im speaking of—we used to trade between Australia and London—Bill came aboard about an hour afore the ship sailed. 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 were 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."

"'E put 'im back up agin a bunk and pulled 'isself together."

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

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

"Bill looks at 'im agin, 'ard."

"Sorry if my foot didn't slip?" he ses, 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 'eartiest mates, and 'e knelt down to do it up, and this young ordinary seaman, Joe Simms by name, put 'is 'ead out of his bunk and he, puzzled, said:

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

"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 of chap and not looking at all strong."

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

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

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

"You touch that man," he ses, quietly, pointing to Tom, as though you touch a dressing-down as you've never 'ad before. Mark my words, now."

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

"You'd better not," ses the young 'un, shaking 'is fist at 'im; 'you'd better not, my lad, if there's any fighting to be done in 'is fo'c'sle 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 'ands in 'is pockets and try and whistle, and then sit down on a locker and scratch 'is 'ead, was the most amazing thing I've ever seen. Presently 'e begins to sing under 'is 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?"

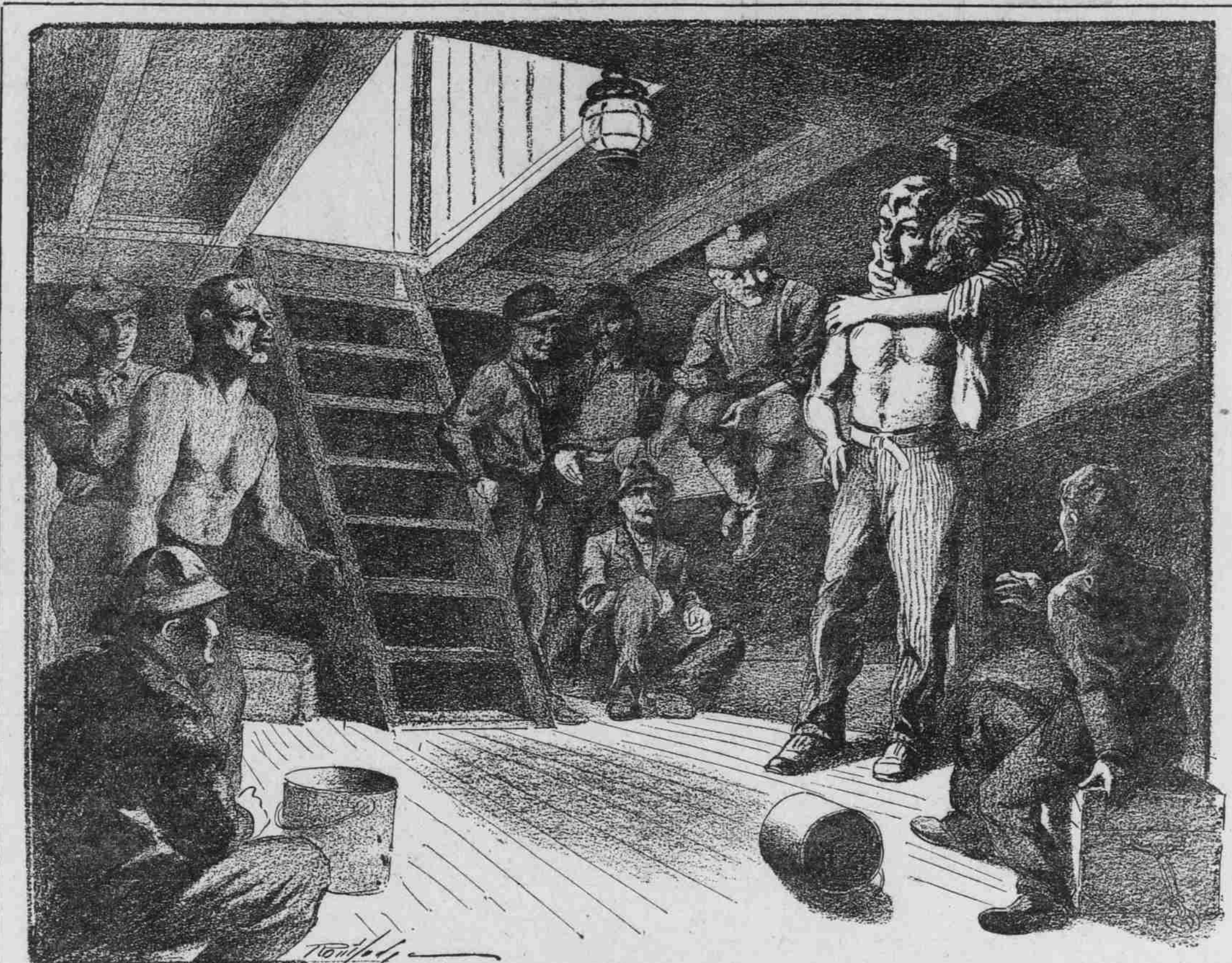
"Wot did you call me?" ses Joe, looking at 'im."

"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."

"'E was an ordinary seaman, mind, talking to A. B.'s like that. Men who'd been up aloft and doing their little bit when 'e was going about catching cold in 'is little petticoats. Still, if Bill could stand it, we supposed as we'd better."

"Bill stayed up on deck till we was under way, and 'is snit 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



"PUTS HIS ARMS AROUND BILL'S NECK AND BEGINS TO CRY."

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 first day we 'ad ever 'ad down that fo'c'sle, Bill usually being in 'is tantrums the first day or two of 'is voyage, and wanting to know why 'e'd been born. If you talked you was noisy and wotting, and if you didn't talk you was sulky; but this time 'e sat quite still and didn't interfere a bit. 'E was such a pleasant change that we all felt a bit grateful, and at teatime Tom Baker patted Joe on the back and said he was one of the right old sort."

"You've been in a scrape or two in your time, I know," he ses, admiring like."

"I knew you was a bit of a one with your 'ands directly," I ses to 'im. 'E was '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?"

"'Es 'ad 'is Tom, dancing with rage. 'Get up; prizefighter or no prizefighter, I'll mark you."

"'Sit down," ses Bill, turning round."

"'Gosh," ses Joe; 'if you're afraid of 'im, I ain't."

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

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

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

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