

EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE

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CONTENTS

A MAN FOR THE AGES The beginning of a splendid serial story about Lincoln ILLUSTRATED by JOHN WOLCOTT ADAMS	IRVING BACHELLER	11
A PERFECT CIRCUS The absolute truth about the greatest show DRAWINGS by RUTH CLEMENTS FARRELL	PETER MERRITT	19
THE GERMAN CHALLENGE Was Germany Really Beaten?	CAMERON MACKENZIE	20
DRINKING, NOT DRINKING AND POINTS BETWEEN Reflections of a frosted-chocolate devotee CARTOONS by REA IRVIN	FRANKLIN P. ADAMS	26
THE HOUSE THAT PATTY BUILT. A Story About an actress who set a word to work ILLUSTRATED by ALBERT STERNER and EDWARD HOPPER	LOUISE CLOSSER HALE	30
LINDA CONDON. A Serial Story In this instalment Linda's mother makes a discovery ILLUSTRATED by FREDERIC DORR STEELE	JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER	36
THE CASE OF MOUSER vs. BOWSER Are you a cat person? A dog person? If so, why? DRAWINGS by OLIVER HERFORD	ANNE HERENDEEN	41
THE WATERLOO OF A HARD-CASE SKIPPER. A Story In which there is a big fight ILLUSTRATED by HENRY RALEIGH and ALONZO KIMBALL	WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON	42
200,000 ACRES AND NOT A SINGLE HORSE Showing "How you're going to keep 'em down on the farm"	ROBERT H. MOULTON	47
HUMAN CURRENTS OF THE WAR Some of the great war changes in Europe ILLUSTRATION by RALPH T. WILLIS	HERBERT ADAMS GIBBONS	48
"THE HAND OF GOD." A Story About the Rodin sculptures and a love-affair ILLUSTRATED by ARTHUR I. KELLER	BONNIE R. GINGER	54
JOHN R. FIRES AN EXPERT. A Story In which business letters play the leading rôle ILLUSTRATED by WILSON C. DEXTER	WILLIAM H. HAMBY	59
THE QUEEREST THING IN THE WORLD A talk about books DECORATIONS by C. B. FALLS	ALFRED SINCLAIR CLARK	64
THE BRANDING-IRON. A Serial Story, Concluded ILLUSTRATED by C. N. SARKA	KATHARINE NEWLIN BURT	66
AFTER PEACE—? The New Pan-Americanism, by John Barrett; and The Business Man and Americanization, by Grace Humphrey		70
WONDERS OF THE WAR—Putting Them Over	JOHN H. VAN DEVENTER	72
SUCCESS. Verse	THEODOSIA GARRISON	74
POETRY OF THE WAR Highlanders, Fix Bayonets! DRAWING by RUTHERFORD BOYD	MARY CAROLYN DAVIES	76
WHICH IS WHICH? Seeing and being the world's masterpieces	RUTH DARLING SHULTIS	82
H. S. V. U. S.—The Turning-Point		89
UNDER THE SPREADING CHESTNUT TREE DRAWINGS by RALPH BARTON		101
BACK FROM ALSACE A Frenchwoman's impressions DRAWING by EDWARD PENFIELD	E. SAINTE-MARIE PERRIN	102
THE SONG UNMADE. Verse	GRACE HAZARD CONKLING	104
UNIMPORTANT PEOPLE Kate Barnes, who runs North Spray, N. C.	ELLEN KNIGHT	112
WITH "EVERYBODY'S" PUBLISHERS		4
COVER by FREDERIC DORR STEELE		



HERBERT ADAMS GIBBONS



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The Waterloo of a Hard-Case Skipper

By William Hope Hodgson

Illustrated by Henry Raleigh and Alonzo Kimball

CAPTAIN BULLY KELLER made the first serious mistake of a triumphal career, as hard-case skipper, when he hammered little Nibby Tompkins, the ship's boy.

He used the end of the mizzen topsail halyards for this purpose, and the topsail halyards of a three-thousand-ton, steel, four-masted bark is 'no suitable rope to lay across the back of a boy of fourteen or fifteen. It is certainly too heavy.

At an early stage of the thrashing, young Nibby had so far forgotten himself as to assure big Bully Keller that his father would kill him. As Nibby gasped this threat out, between the violent shocks of the heavy rope, it had run literally thus:

"Wait while me feyther sees you! He'll sure kill you, you great beast!"

He had no breath left for further threats. Captain Bully Keller had seen to that, most efficiently. He had finally thrown the half-senseless boy, in a quivering heap on to the mizzen hatch, whence he had been removed later by one of the men, in a soft-hearted moment, to his bunk.

As a result of his lamming, young Nibby Tompkins was a very sick lad when the big steel bark, *Alceste*, ran in through the Golden Gate, and came to anchor off Telegraph Hill, San Francisco.

Captain Bully Keller squared the doctor with a hundred-dollar bill; and little Nibby Tompkins's illness was recorded officially as rheumatism, with the result that there were no awkward inquiries from the authorities ashore. Nor had Captain Keller anything to fear from his crew; for the plain and simple reason that each man feared him like the wrath of God, or, indeed, considerably more. All his various crews learned to fear him entirely in the period of a single passage; for he weighed sixteen stone of brawn and malignant evil, and stood six feet one inch in his gum boots.

His favorite method of becoming "acquainted" with his crews was at once effectual and memorable. On the second or third day out, he would go forward into the fo'cas'le, after the watch below had turned in and was asleep. Here he would pace up and down, taunting the sleeping men in their bunks, that no two of them had the pluck to come out and fight him; which was inevitably true, and the rough, hairy sailors would lie sweating, insisting, in a rolling chorus of snores, that each man of them was the one and only remaining relative of the seven sleepers.

Captain Bully Keller would continue his disturbing promenade of the "sleeping" fo'cas'le, expressing his opinion of the sleepers' mixed parentage, in terms and voice that could be heard and appreciated by Mr. Jackson, the pleasant bucko



mate, who walked the short poop, away aft, grinning like a wolf.

Eventually, Captain Bully Keller, having lashed his sides sufficiently to require violent action as a sedative, would spring at the nearest bunks and haul a couple of men out by their hair. He would pile them on the deck of the fo'cas'le in a struggling heap, which he kicked and punched until, in desperation, they would "go" for him, fighting mad, only to be knocked out of time and place by the captain's great fists.

If they put up a good fight, he would send the steward forward, afterward, with a bucket of rum and water. But if he failed to bring them up to the fighting point, he would chase them round and round the decks, in their flannel drawers, kicking and punching them to his entire satisfaction.

Only once had he ever met his match. This was when a big Irish A. B. had jumped out of his bunk, at the first taunt the skipper had let loose, and had knocked Captain Bully Keller across the fo'cas'le with a mighty and scientific right-and-left punch. And Captain Bully Keller had immediately shown the brute's blood that was in him; for he had drawn his gun and shot the big Irishman through the shoulder; after which, although the man was disabled, he had hammered him into quiescence.

There you have the man. He loved fighting. He liked a good fight; but he would fight as foul and ugly as an apache, if he thought there was any danger of some one beating him.

Very few men could say truthfully that they had ever drawn a pay-day out of any ship commanded by Captain Bully Keller. Nor could the men of his latest crew boast otherwise; for they lowered one of the boats, with enormous secrecy and fear, the same night the ship dropped anchor in the bay; and pulled for the shore, sans pay-day and sea-chests.

But had they understood Captain Bully Keller's point of view, they might have experienced less fear, and troubled less about secrecy. He had been awake while they maneuvered with much grease (out of the cook's slush-tub) to grease the boat's falls and the sheaves of the blocks, so as to insure their running silently when they lowered the boat. And he had merely grinned to himself and let them go; for the boat could be recovered in the morning; and it was a cheap way of getting labor—to have the men all run off without a cent of pay!

The only defect of the system was the difficulty it entailed of getting men. But this was solved by the longshore crimps and shanghai-houses on the water-front.

II

THE *Alceste* discharged her cargo and went across to the mudflats, to lie up and wait for freights to rise.

By this time, Nibby Tompkins was sufficiently recovered to be about the decks again, and as there was no one aboard but Captain Bully Keller, his mate, Mr. Jackson, and the steward, Nibby had a vigorous time of it, between dawn and dusk.

Each night, Nibby was further employed in the boat. It was his work to go ashore with the captain and the mate, and stand by the boat till they returned, which was often not until well after midnight. Nibby, however, occupied the time usefully enough in sleeping on the bottom boards, rolled up in a piece of old sailcloth, which he kept stored away in the boat for that purpose.

One night, however, just as Nibby was standing up, rolling himself into a sort of human sausage, preliminary to lying down for his accustomed "snooze," a voice hailed him through the dusk from the little wooden jetty to which the boat was made fast. And at the sound of the voice, Nibby both thrilled and shivered; for his father was a stern disciplinarian, almost as stern (though not in any way brutal) as Captain Bully Keller; and it was his father's voice that had hailed the boat.

"You in the boat, there! Ha! You in the boat, there! Can you tell me where

yon ship, named *Alceste* is?" came the hail again.

"Father!" said Nibby, in a half-suffocated voice, and shed the wrapping of old sailcloth like a skin.

"It's Nibby boy!" he heard his mother's voice cry out, suddenly. "Nibby! Nibby! Nibby!"

"Hush, Mother!" said his father, quietly.

"Mother," shouted Nibby, and hauled the boat in alongside, by the painter, all his hesitation gone. "Mother!" he shouted, as he leaped up on to the jetty.

A little woman was standing there, in the dusk, beside a short, enormously thick-set, bow-legged man, with a goatee. The little woman gave out a small screech, and ran at the lad. Then her arms were round him, and she was crooning and crying, to-

gether, in sudden satisfied contentment.

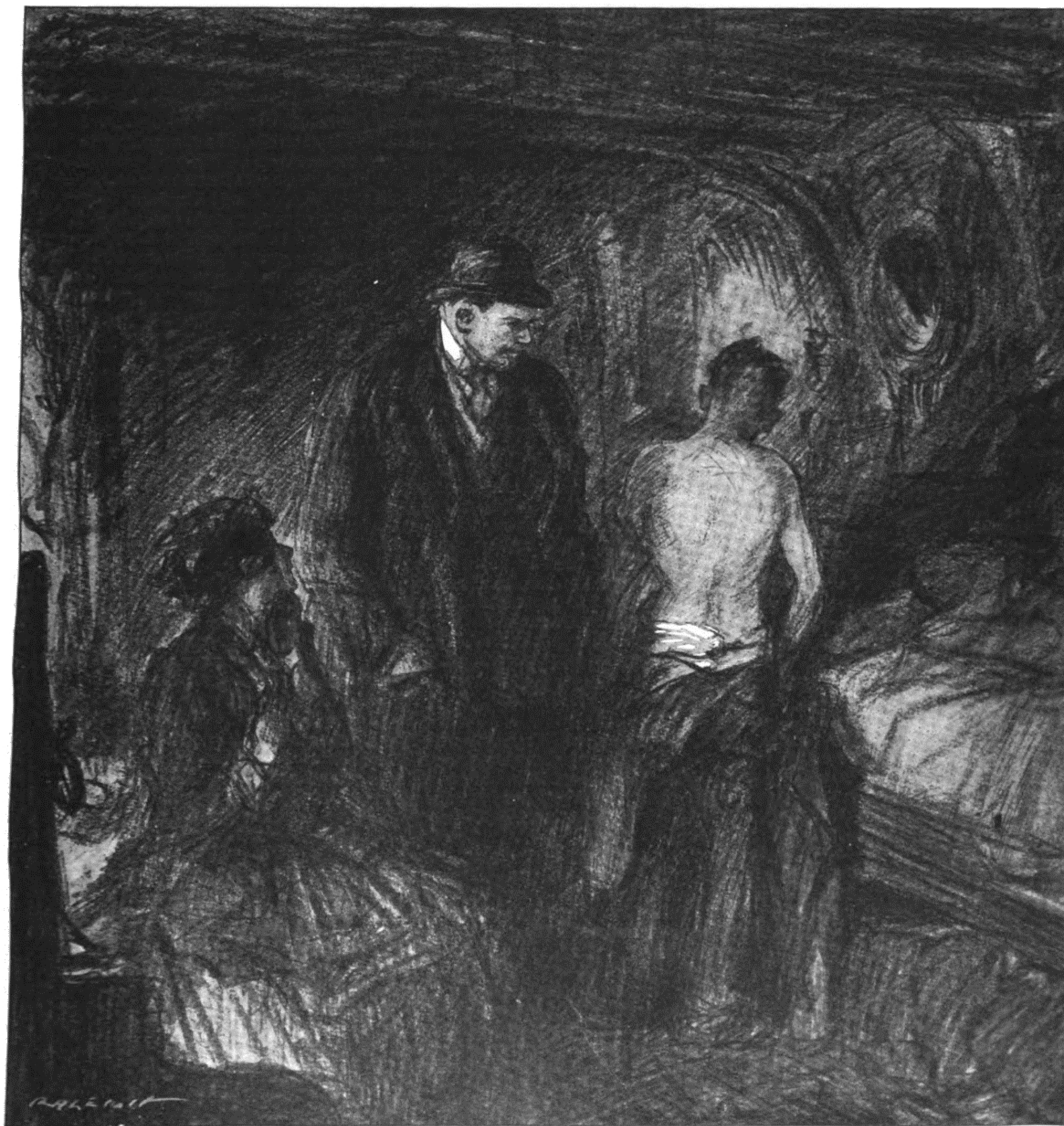
The short, thick-set man came forward slowly and patted the woman gently on the shoulder. "There, there, Mother! Don't 'ee take on!" he said, in a curiously deep, gentle voice.

"You'll not be hard with him, Jo-seph?" said the woman, in a stifled, anxious tone.

"Nay, Mother, the lad's made his bed, and he must lie on it; but there's things I've to say to him. Nibby, son, do ye think it was right to your mother, to go running off like this to sea with never a word? Son, I tell you, I would have thrashed you within an inch of your life, had I caught ye three months back. I can't think ye'd any true idee how you would put your mother so in trouble, or you'd never have done the like of such a

thing. And the first word we had from you was after ye reached here, tellin' how the cap'n had laced you good and proper; and well you needed it, son, I'm thinkin'. You've made your bed, and you'll have to lie on it. I come here to bring your mother; for she was breaking her heart with trouble over you. But don't think, son, as I'll stand for you backin' down from your contrac'! You've made your bed, and you'll lie in it! You'll finish this voyage, out and back to Boston, and sign off proper and get your discharge and money, and come home, and maybe you'll have learned a bit sense by then, and found the sea's not like the dime books tell about. What are you doing down in that boat?"

"I'm standin' by her, feyther, till cap'n an' mate come back from the drink



Even his father, the winner of over sixty fierce ring fights, let out his breath a little quickly. The boy's skin was furrowed in huge discolored wheals.

III

saloon," said Nibby, loosing himself gently out of his mother's arms and facing his father.

"What time'll they be back, son?" asked Mr. Tompkins, in his quiet, deep voice.

"Gen'rally about midnight," said Nibby. "I sleeps in the bottom of the boat till they comes."

"Where's the ship, son?" asked his father. "Your mother's set that she must see where you sleep and eat, and what-like your clothes is, an' the like. Can we go aboard?"

"Sure, feyther," said Nibby. "Come, Mother an' Dad. I'll pull ye both out in a crack. There's hours 'fore the boat'll be needed."

Ten minutes later Nibby and his father and mother were in the somewhat gloomy, bare, iron-sided fo'cas'le of the *Alceste*.

"An' where do ye sleep, Nibby?" asked his mother.

"Here, Mother, mum," he said, and drew back the rough curtains that he had made out of an old potato-sack.

"Why, Nibby, where's your bed?" asked his mother, in a shocked voice.

"Haven't got one, Mummie," he said. "Hadn't a cent when I come aboard."

"You been sleepin' on them bare boards, all this past three months?" said his mother, and began to cry.

Joseph Tompkins flashed a quick look, that betrayed a sudden grim pride, at his son. But, "I guess you sure got a hard bed to shake up, son," was all he said, in his quiet way. Then, suddenly, as if remembering something, he ordered abruptly: "Strip, son. I'll take a look to see if the cap'n lambasted you as hard as you said in your letter."

Nibby pulled off his dungaree jumper, and then his shirt, and turned his small but muscular back for his parents to inspect. Even his father, the winner of over sixty fierce ring-fights, let out his breath a little quickly; for though it was a month since the thrashing, the boy's back was still all covered with great dull livid patches, where the flesh had not yet recovered from the crushing and bruising of the heavy topsail halyards; while in many places the skin was furrowed in huge discolored wheals.

Nibby's mother neither cried nor said anything for maybe a full minute. Then she spoke, in a queer, fierce breathless voice: "Jo-seph!" she said, "are you going to stand for that, Jo-seph?"

Nibby's father said nothing for a little. He was too shaken with an extraordinary new sort of anger—the kind of anger that shakes the she bear when her cubs are molested; but what he said, at last, in his deep voice, was just this, and he meant every word of it:

"Nibby's shore been through it, Mother; but I mean as he shall finish what he begun. I mean as he shall learn his lesson once an' always. But I'm kind-a angry too; for I don't reckon as that's a proper way to lick no lad. We'll go back ashore, wife, to the hotel; an' we'll have a word of prayer about this."

For Nibby's father was that most pungent of combinations—a reformed and deeply religious prize-fighter.

"Nibby," he said, as they left their son at the little wooden jetty, a few minutes later, "here's five doll'rs. Get yourself a bed, son, an' a shirt or two. Me an' your mother'll come down and see you here to-morrow night."

NEXT evening, shortly after Nibby had been left in charge of the boat, his father and mother came along the little wooden jetty, and his father hailed him.

"I've brought you some buckwheats an' bacon-pastries, Nibby," his mother told him, as he hauled the boat alongside the jetty. "They'm not what I'd call proper pastry-cake, but you wait while I gets you to home. I'll shore cook you some as you'll like fine."

"Do they ever carry passengers in your ship, Nibby?" his father asked him.

"Dunno, Feyther," said Nibby, with his mouth full of bacon pie. "Are ye thinkin' of comin' passenger for the trip home, Dad? Is Mother comin'?"

"Me and your mother has an idee of it, son," replied his father.

"I heard th' cap'n say to-day as we was goin' to ship a few runners and go up the river to Crockett on Wednesday, to load grain," said Nibby. "Maybe if you an' Mum was to come alongside in Crockett, casual, an' say as you wanted to go round to Boston, you might fix it up with the old beast. I hope you lams the soul out of him afore we gets back, Dad."

Mr. Tompkins frowned a little. "Ye'll use better language, son, before your mother!" he said, quietly. "An, further, you'll understand, son, not one word as I'm yer feyther. Not one word, mind ye! You've made your bed, an' you must lie on it, an' maybe by the time ye hit Boston again, ye'll have a bit of horse-sense hammered into you. Though I'm not sayin' I'll stan' for the cap'n using you bad again, the way he done on the v'yage out here. At first, I'll own, I weakened, son, an' I wanted bad to give way to me nat'ral feelin', an' lay the cap'n out. But me an' your mother's had a deal of prayer about this. An' she reck'ns, same as me, that we can trust the Lord in all things, if we does our best to help ourselves, same time. Me an' your mother will come passengers, if I can fix it up with the cap'n; an', maybe, son, as I've said to your mother, he may prove a brand as we can pluck from the burnin'."

"I doubt he'd ship you, Dad, if he knew you was my feyther," said Nibby.

IV

"YOU'M wanted, Cap'n," said Nibby, the following Thursday, as the *Alceste* lay alongside the grain wharf, up in the little wheat-packing township of Crockett.

"Eh?" said Captain Bully Keller. "Who the 'ell wants me?"

"It's an old geezer an' his missus, up on the quay side, Cap'n," said Nibby; "Says he wants to take a passage to Boston."

The captain's eyes brightened a moment with interest and greed. If he could "nobble" a passenger or two for the run home, he would so work it that no mention of the fact ever reached his owner; and the passage-money would prove very useful to a man of his somewhat exceptional thirst.

He went up on deck, his face less unpleasant than usual. "Mornin', sir! Mornin', ma'am!" he said, as he came to the side of the vessel, close to where the old "geezer" and his wife were standing. "I hear you'd like to take the trip home with me. Come aboard. I should think we might fix it up, if you got the dollars."

"Safe right here, an' plenty of 'em, Cap'n," said Nibby's father, slapping the breast of his coat.

The big captain's hard eyes glinted again, with a quick flash of money-lust. Here was plainly an old "stick" who had the dollars and didn't mind the world hearing of the fact. He promptly named a sum far in excess of what he had meant to ask.

"I'll take you both round, sir, an' land you in Boston, safe an' sound, an' well fed, for the sum of four hundred dollars for the two of you, paid down on the nail," he said. "Will you come aboard an' look round the ship?"

They climbed down aboard and went the round of the ship, with Mrs. Tompkins striving all the time to get a sight of Nibby, without the captain noticing.

They concluded the tour of the vessel and came to a pause on the poop, where Mrs. Tompkins stood behind the huge figure of the captain, and ventured a slight signal of affection to her son, whom she could see swabbing down paintwork, near at hand.

Meanwhile, Mr. Tompkins was talking to the skipper. "You'll not be a religious man, Cap'n Keller?" he remarked.

"No, sir," said Captain Keller, firmly, "I'm not what you'd call religious."

Then he realized in a sudden flash of quick cunning that the countrified-looking couple, who proposed to take passage with him, must be given "that way." "But I've a sound respect for religion, sir—a sound respect," he added, hastily.

Here was a clear four hundred dollars going a-begging, and Captain Keller had considerably more use for gold than for his own soul. He regretted, savagely, that he hadn't seen at once the kind of people these prospective passengers were. They were just the sort of folk to be shy of taking passage with a man that hadn't a "denomination" of his own. He wished he had been less emphatic about his non-religious temperament. Perhaps he could remove the impression—

He was aware suddenly, that Mr. Tompkins was speaking again: "Me an' my missus is sure sorry, Cap'n, you ain't reeligious," he was saying. "I don't reckon as an unsaved man had oughter go to sea—no, sir, I sure don't."

"I've a sound respect for it, sir—a sound respect," repeated the captain, his great frame shaken with the anxiety of his possible loss. He could see that they felt disinclined now to sail with him. Could he think of nothing to help the scales of decision down on the side he wanted? A desperate thought flashed across him. Could he not turn "religious?" He opened his mouth to get out something or other that would revivify the fast-fading intention of these people to sail with him; but in that moment, Mr. Tompkins continued again:

"But there's hope, Cap'n; there's hope," said the ex-prize-fighter, with a glow of religious fervor in his somewhat somber eyes. "There's hope, Cap'n. I'm right glad to hear ye say you've a sound respect for religion. Yes, sir! Maybe the day of salvation approacheth. Would you come to a bit of dinner with me an' my missus, up at the Pike Restrong? Maybe we can fix this up over a snack, Cap'n. I'd sure like a talk. I've been a great sinner, Cap'n, meself. A great sinner—and the



She grasped the pin itself with her two hands, just as the captain struck.

fare you say, is four hundred dollars. Very good. Maybe we can show you the path, Cap'n. It would be a pleasure to sail with you, if you was regenerate, Cap'n—a great pleasure an' a great privilege. You'll come up to the Pike at seven thirty sharp, Cap'n?"

"Sure, sir an' ma'am," said Captain Bully Keller, feeling immensely hopeful.

"Jo-seph," said his wife, as they walked away up to the township, "I shore can"

feel Christianlike to that man, nohow. I shore don't feel I want to speak to him. The great brute!"

"Aye, Mother," said her husband, quietly. "I guess I understan'; but it would be a great deed to pluck such a brand from the burning. A great deed. We must put our heart bitterness behind us." His eyes still shone with the dull, steady glow of intense fervor that bespeaks the enthusiast.

V

EXACTLY what happened at that "snack," up at the Pike Restaurant, that night, I do not know; but a remarkably drunk sailor, one of the runners belonging to the *Alceste*, had an extraordinary tale to tell the next morning, which no one in the fo'cas'le believed.

He asserted that, the previous night, having spent no more than a dime on beer,

and feeling, as he put it, just nicely hearty, he had drifted in at the doorway of the little Salvation Army hall up in Pine Street.

"Strike me!" he continued; "but them's smart chaps at their job; they are that! I'd not sung mor'n two verses of 'Whisky is the Life of a Man,' when I found myself up on the pen-tent form, with one of 'em on each side of me, prayin' like the devil. Well, mates, I got thinkin', as I was there, I might as well let 'em save me, an' be done wiv it, when the next thing I knows, there was the capting, right on me star-board beam, with that old codger as come aboard to-day, and his missus, one on each side of him; an' they was prayin' like billy-oh! I never stopped to see the end of it. I was that scared, I thought sure it was the rats as was comin' on me; an' I just come clear out of the place, before them as was convertin' me had done the job proper. I told 'em I wasn't well, an' I'd call again. I tell you, mates, it's gospel I'm givin' you—"

And so forth, and much more in the same style; which only excited further violent disbelief, and earnest inquiries regarding the drink saloon where he had been able to achieve so much for the strictly modest sum of one dime.

Whatever we are to think about the matter, the fact remains that Mr. and Mrs. Tompkins *did* take passage with Captain Bully Keller. But, knowing the character of the man, I can scarcely think that even the lure of the four hundred dollars passage-money makes the runner's yarn seem plausible. Yet there is the fact—Nibby's father and mother took passage with Captain Bully Keller, cash paid down!

VI

THE way of the transgressor is hard, we are informed; though the hardness is sometimes less evident than poetic justice might desire. But in the case of Captain Bully Keller, the statement fitted. His conversation became so pruned on the passage home to Boston that his own mate hardly recognized it. Further, he had to take part in lengthy religious discussions with Mr. Tompkins, until, in self-defense, he took to staying in his cabin and swearing to himself, until some sensation of self-respect returned.

This lasted a little over a week, during which, more and more, old Mrs. Tompkins found herself less and less able to bear herself in Christianlike spirit toward this latest "brand plucked from the burning." She kept remembering the view she had been given of Nibby's terribly bruised and lacerated back; and the power of forgiveness was not in her.

Meanwhile, things were happening. Mr. Tompkins, the ex-prize-fighter, grew more and more fervid in his "religious talks" with the captain, his gray goatee wagging earnestly by the hour, in admonition and advice concerning the ways and wiles of Satan, of whom few men had more expert knowledge than big Captain Bully Keller. Also, what I might describe as the captain's boiler-pressure was rising daily.

The lid blew off finally, and with great violence, on the tenth day out. One of the men, a stranger to Captain Bully Keller's record, and not recognizing in this much-restrained captain anything resembling human dynamite, was so ill-advised as to "answer back" the captain on some trivial

point concerning the position of the ship's head, during his trick at the wheel. The result was painful to the man and necessitated his retiring to his bunk for a week to convalesce.

This proved the end of Captain Keller's enforced regeneration. Having, as it might be said, "tasted blood," he cut loose liberally, and went forward to the fo'cas'le to indulge in one of his orgies.

He was concluding a most enjoyable hammering of two of the men's heads together, when he heard the quiet voice of Mr. Tompkins, in the starboard fo'cas'le doorway.

"Cap'n! Sir! Cap'n!" he was saying in a grieved voice. "You'm backsliding, Cap'n. Take a holt on yourself, Cap'n, an' come away aft with me, an' me an' missus'll help ye wrestle in prayer, to drive the evil sperrit outen you—come, now, Cap'n. It's never too late—"

"You get to hell out of here, 'fore I smash you, you psalm-singing, chin-wagging goat, you!" bellowed Captain Bully Keller, in his old-time voice.

Mr. Jackson, his bucko mate, away aft on the poop, heard it, and smiled the only way he could smile, which I've explained earlier. This was something he could understand. The skipper was himself again.

In the starboard fo'cas'le doorway, Mr. Tompkins, ex-prize-fighter, winner of over sixty first-class heavy-weight fights, hesitated, in conflict with the "natural evil" which had "iz" up in him at the "brand's" remark. Then Mr. Tompkins won—quite as great a battle, in its way, as any he had ever won in the ring.

"Are you going, you—you, hymn-swiping gazoot, or am I going to lay you out stiff, to teach you to keep to your own part of the ship!" bellowed Captain Bully Keller, again.

And Mr. Tompkins, ex-prize-fighter, winner of over sixty fights, turned and walked aft slowly, without a word.

VII

I RECK'N I'm standin' right in the shoes of law an' Providence," said Captain Bully Keller, later, in answer to Mr. Tompkins's gentle remonstrances. "I'm cap'n of this ship, sir, an' I reckon cap'in of a ship is the nearest thing to the A'mighty you'll get in this world; an' if I choose to do anything, why, I guess I'm the man as does it; an' I'm right weary o' psalm-singing! An' likewise, Mister, this end of the ship is where you belong, an' don't you need to be told twice again, or maybe I'll forget ye're a passenger and an old wheat-sheaf, an' I'll be giving you a tonic ye'll not forget in a hurry."

"Jo-seph!" said Mrs. Tompkins's voice, at that moment, from the companionway, "can I speak with ye a moment, Jo-seph?"

"Your pardon, Cap'n," said Mr. Tompkins; "the missus wants me a moment."

He crossed the poop to where his wife stood in the companionway. "Well, M'ria?" he said.

"Jo-seph," said his wife, very small, and very white-faced with inward anger. "Ye know, Jo-seph, I've always stood for you bein' converted; an' I just thanked God on me two knees, when ye turned *reeligious*, an' quit fightin', did I not, Jo-seph?"

"That's so, wife," said Mr. Tompkins.

"Well," said his wife, "me that's for

peacefulness an' godliness, an' that's helped ye to pluck many a brand from the burnin', me that thanked God when I won ye to peaceful decent ways, I say, Jo-seph, go an' fight that man, an' bring him low. I've stood here an' harked to things he's said to ye, an' I'm fair woun' up!" Her voice rose and cracked, shrilly, in a final brief command; "Fight the brute, Jo-seph! Beat him up good!"

There was a sudden roar of laughter from where the mate stood on the poop, and the helmsman grinned broadly; for they had caught the last few words of Mrs. Tompkins's injunctions.

The mate walked forward to where Captain Bully Keller stood near the break of the poop. "She's tellin' the old codger to beat you up, Cap'n!" Mr. and Mrs. Tompkins heard the mate say, in no modulated voice. "I guess, Cap'n, you've sure riled the old lady!"

Mrs. Tompkins clenched her small, rather thin hands. "Jo-seph!" she said. "Go right now an' beat him up, or you're no husband o' mine!"

"Nay, M'riar," said Mr. Tompkins, in his quiet composed way, "I've had more'n one fight wi' meself, an' I've won. An' you'll be the first to say I was right, when you'm less upset, wife. Maybe I can yet soften him."

Mrs. Tompkins turned and went down the stairs into her cabin, where she sat for an hour, staring at the bulkhead and fighting to drive out the storm that possessed her small body. And meanwhile, up on deck, Mr. Tompkins, ex-prize-fighter, continued with invincible self-command to ply the "soft word," but with about as much effect as if he had tried "genteel conversation" with a polar bear suffering from a sense of suppressed spiritual injuries.

VIII

"FEYTHER!" came a shrill cry, early in the morning hours, just after daybreak the following morning. And then the sounds of heavy blows, and of some one sobbing, breathlessly, as each blow was struck. Then again the shrill cry of "Feyther! Feyther!"

At the first cry, Mr. Tompkins, dressed in flannel drawers and shirt, had leaped from his bunk with an agility astonishing in so heavily built a man. And now he was on the companion steps, taking them four at a time, in great muscular bounds.

"Feyther!" came the cry again, shriller. "Comin', son," said Mr. Tompkins, in his deep voice.

Then he arrived, a quick-moving, human fighting machine, as dangerous as any angry tiger and as precise as a modern quick-firing gun.

Mr. Jackson, the big bucko mate, was thrown bodily a dozen feet along the poop deck, and Nibby was picked up, from where the mate had let him drop—for the man had been ropes-ending the lad with the end of the main brace, and Nibby was being violently sick, owing to the weight of the blows he had received.

As Mr. Tompkins held his son in a position to ease his vomiting, Mr. Jackson got up off the poop-deck and for the first time realized who it was that had attacked him.

"My beloved oath!" he shouted, and charged down on the ex-prize-fighter. "I'll gi'e you what I was givin' the kid, you

(Continued on page 99)

The WATERLOO of a HARD-CASE SKIPPER

(Continued from page 46)

bloomin' billy-goat, you!" he roared, and swung a powerful, clumsy right-hand punch at Mr. Tompkins's head.

Mr. Tompkins evaded the punch, and then, with Nibby in his arms, started to run for the companionway, with the mate thudding along the poop-deck in his wake.

Abruptly, something new happened—a small thin figure, wrapped in a sheet, darted up through the companionway on to the poop. It had thin, gray hair, done in three or four spiky plaits, that stuck out from its head at various angles; and it called out a shrill, terse direction: "Put Nibby down, Jo-seph. I'll tend him. Beat that beast up good, an' look out for the other, he's comin'."

Nibby's father lowered his son quickly on to the seat that ran all along the skylight, and jumped to one side. Nibby's mother, small though she was, gathered the boy up against her thin bosom and glanced over her shoulder, to see how her man dealt with the bucko mate.

The ex-prize-fighter made a quick job of it, and the bucko mate (accounted formidable enough against the usual port-sweepings and degenerates supplied by the shanghai-houses) made but a pitiable show against the grim fighter he had pursued with such fatuous confidence.

Had Mr. Tompkins been minus his long goatee and eminently respectable side-whiskers, the mate might have recognized "old Bowleg Jo, the one-ton-punch merchant;" but he was oblivious just then to the fact and, a moment later, to all the facts of life; for the bulk of Mr. Tompkins slid, with an almost incongruous grace, under the bucko's great round-arm-punch, and immediately afterward the mate's chin made a brief but unforgettable acquaintance with the historic "one-ton-punch" right fist of Mr. Tompkins, and the thud his body made, as it struck the deck, seemed to shake the vessel.

"Look out, Jo-o-seph!" shrilled Mrs. Tompkins; and her husband hove himself round in his track, like a great agile cat, and met the silent ugly rush of Captain Bully Keller, who had just raced up out of his cabin, in time to see the mate go down senseless on the deck.

NOW, this sixteen stone of fight and violent evil was a very different proposition from that of the bucko mate; and the ex-prize-fighter was well aware of the fact. He side-stepped the charging captain, and tried a rib punch as he passed under his swing; but the captain chopped it down in a way that showed he knew more about scientific fighting than Mr. Tompkins had supposed.

The captain came round on his toes, and jumped in at Mr. Tompkins, hitting right and left at his face. The ex-prize-fighter slipped the right-hand-punch, and pushed up the left, like lightning. As he did this, his left foot went forward, and his left fist traveled upward about eight inches, and struck the underside of captain Bully Keller's jaw. The captain's head went back, and Mr. Tompkins brought in his right, with a short radius swing against the side of the Captain's neck.

The blow sounded exactly like a butcher's mallet hitting a piece of lean beef, and

the captain rocked just for one brief instant on his feet. Then he had recovered, for he was as strong as a bullock.

He jumped back a couple of paces and kicked off his slippers. "Now you goat-wagger, I'm going to maul you, by God, yes!" And he dashed in at the easily-poised figure of the ex-prize-fighter.

Mr. Tompkins side-stepped him, sliding his head in under the ponderous right-hand swing that the captain let fly, with a deep malignant grunt. As the captain over-shot him, Mr. Tompkins was, just for one brief moment, a little on his rear, and in that instant of time he smote the great stern of Captain Bully Keller with his open left palm, even as an emphatic matron "corrects" a child, in a hasty moment.

The sound of the mighty slap rang fore and aft along the decks, and suddenly there was a roar of laughter from forward; for both watches had streamed out of the fo'cas'le to watch the stupendous spectacle of the invincible Keller getting a hammering—at last!

NOW the slap had done no harm, for all that it was so hearty. It was nothing more than a natural ebullition of spirit on the part of Mr. Tompkins at finding himself, with a clear conscience, enjoying all the charm and intense zest of a first-class scrap. But the effect of that same slap on Captain Bully Keller, coupled with the laughter it had evoked, was to turn him temporarily into a madman. Just try to get it—sixteen stone, odd, of muscle and evil berserk rage! That was the particular kind of human tornado that came round, roaring, at Mr. Tompkins.

The captain made one spring, and caught him by the hair of his head with his left hand, and his goatee beard with the other, and swung him clean off his feet.

The method of attack was somewhat unorthodox, according to Mr. Tompkins's lights, and it lacked nothing of vigor. The captain swung him around bodily, in a half circle, with his feet off the deck. Then the hair and beard simultaneously refused duty. They came out in two handfuls, and Mr. Tompkins shot sprawling with a crash on to his hands and knees on the poop deck.

Captain Bully Keller roared like a great bull and charged down at the smaller man, his hands full of beard and hair. He kicked Mr. Tompkins in the face with his bare foot, cutting a great gouge under his left eye with his nails.

But Mr. Tompkins caught the foot, and Captain Bully Keller promptly fell on him; and as he opened his hands to save himself, the light breeze blew a couple of tufts of hair and beard hither and thither along the poop.

And then Captain Bully Keller got a nasty surprise and a very bad jar to his system, all in one and the same moment. As he sprawled an instant, grabbing for hold a-top of Mr. Tompkins's extremely broad and muscular back, the ex-prize-fighter descended for the first time to rough-and-tumble methods, and slewed half over on his side, and drove his right elbow backward and outward in a terrible jolting elbow-punch under the Captain's jaw.

The blow was a tremendous one, as any fighting man will understand, and would have put ninety-nine men in a hundred to sleep instantaneously; but, with Captain Bully Keller it merely drove his head back for a couple of seconds, and produced a vaguely stunned sensation, followed immediately by a gorgeous riot of toothache; for every tooth in his jaws had been jarred as if by a blow from a hammer.

Then Bully Keller was himself again; but things had changed considerably; for in that brief time of temporary "numbness" on the part of his enemy, Mr. Tompkins had hove himself out from under Bully Keller and was on his feet, waiting for his man.

Nor had he more than a bare half-second; for the skipper hurled himself up from the deck, with an inarticulate bellowing, and rushed the squat figure of the ex-prize-fighter. Right and left, right and left, he punched, grunting like an animal, with every blow, and had any one of them got home on a vital mark, they would have been enough, literally, to kill an average man! But here Mr. Tompkins was very truly at his own game, and he slipped and side-stepped round a small portion of the poop-deck, with the captain pursuing him, hitting and grunting, grunting and hitting; but never once reaching him in any fashion calculated to do serious damage.

Then, suddenly, Mr. Tompkins stopped dead in his wonderful circle of retreat, and one leg stiffened behind him rigidly, like a steel bar, at the identical moment that his right fist shot out in one of the famous "one-ton-punches" which had won him so many of his fights.

THE tremendous blow took the captain a little (not more than a full inch) below the point of the jaw, and all of Mr. Tompkins's strength and skill had gone to that blow; moreover, the punch had taken the captain in the midst of his storming rush, and the suddenly rigid leg of the prize-fighter stiffened to take the enormous shock of the sixteen stone man's charge, at the moment of impact.

Captain Bully Keller's jaw cocked up abruptly, in the absurdly helpless fashion that a man's head does go up, when he gets a punch of that kind from a certain angle; his great arms were suddenly adrift, and his ponderous shoulders were all at once untensed from fierce effort to an inexpressible inanition. He went backward one step, two steps, and then a third, still with his head cocked up in that absurd way.

Mr. Tompkins dropped his own hands to his sides with a satisfied expression. He knew, from his extensive experience, that he had just administered a knock-out blow, of a foot-energy (if I may so express it, without appearing Irish) of several hundred pounds.

The captain's body paused a moment, inertly, in its backward stagger. Then, lurched rearward, with one final, dragging step, and seemed on the point of collapsing. And then, in that moment, the Captain's chin came down slowly from its cocked-up angle, and he stared at Mr. Tompkins with half-glazed eyes, his face totally expressionless. It was most extraordinary. The man was knocked out of time and place. It

would take him anything from ten minutes to two hours to come round from such a blow as he had received, and here he was still standing on his feet and staring at his opponent.

The ex-prize-fighter stared, silent and fascinated. From away forward there was a low hum of talk that came clear through the chill morning air—just that sound and no other—except the odd creak of the masts, and the whine, whine, of the gear in the leads and blocks, and the odd slat, slat, of the reef-points away up aloft.

And then, in all that silence, Captain Bully Keller spoke, in a queer toneless, creaking voice: "Say," he said, "where am I?" The glazed look left his eyes as he spoke, and his shoulders lost their flaccid appearance; and abruptly, intelligence came into his eyes and face—and then memory.

Mr. Tompkins continued to stare. In all his years of fighting he had never seen a man make such a recovery—the man's vitality must be as stupendous as his physique. Suddenly, Mr. Tompkins got on the defensive. He received the knowledge of the captain's complete recovery just in time; for in that same moment Captain Bully Keller leaped at him and smashed in a flurry of right and left hand punches.

With a feeling of amazement in his brain, Mr. Tompkins slipped and guarded and side-stepped busily, until the sudden charge had eased a little. The captain was not hitting quite so hard, which proved that the "knock-out" punch he had received had taken steam from the boiler.

Then Mr. Tompkins saw an opportunity and stepped in smartly. He drove three uppercuts hard to the old place, and as the captain gave back he put in a tremendous right-and-left punch, aimed at the mark; but, as he expressed it to himself afterward, the man seemed to have ribs down to his knees. It was like punching into the side of a horse.

Yet the blows had effect; and a minute later he drove in a very heavy punch again, to the jaw, this time a little more on the side, and fairly knocked Captain Bully Keller off his feet.

During the whole of the fight Mr. Tompkins had not yet received one dangerous punch; but now he paid for a moment of carelessness; for the captain came up off the deck, as quick as a cat, and made one jump at him, and struck, before the prize-fighter's hands were up. The blow took Mr. Tompkins on the forehead, and knocked him literally head over heels, over the low sail-locker hatch.

Captain Bully Keller let out a roar, sprang to the rail, hauled out an iron belaying pin and jumped over the hatch to make an end of Mr. Tompkins.

"Look out, Jo-o-seph!" shrieked Mrs. Tompkins, and loosed Nibby. She ran round to the starboard side, just as the

captain caught her husband by the throat. She dropped the sheet and flew at him—a skinny wraith of wifely devotion. She grasped the pin itself with her two hands, just as the captain struck, and was hurled bodily a dozen feet, still clinging to the pin; but she had saved her husband; for Mr. Tompkins seized the chance, and hove himself sideways; then jumped, and got safely to his feet, his head singing like a kettle, and his whole system badly jarred.

He whirled round just in time to receive the captain's rush. He hurled himself at Mr. Tompkins and grabbed him round the body. He made a snap at Mr. Tompkins's nose with his teeth, and, missing this most useful organ, bit his ear.

Then Mr. Tompkins shed all his remaining Christianity and got busy. He uppercut the captain twice under the jaw, with both fists together, and then, as the captain's head went back and his great throat lay exposed, he hit him a chopping blow with his right fist, straight upon his Adam's apple.

Captain Bully Keller loosed away, making noises in his throat, and ran around in a circle, still making those noises. And in the midst of his running round and round, the ex-prize-fighter stepped in and hit him handsomely, with every ounce of his strength, one liberal right-hand swing on the side of the point of the jaw.

It may seem a little brutal on Mr. Tompkins's part to have done this at so distressing a moment; but, actually, it had an element of rough mercy in it; for the unconsciousness that followed promptly brought a swift and effectual ease to the bully.

The captain slid down into a heap on the deck, beaten physically, mentally and morally.

"Now," said Mr. Tompkins, converted prize-fighter, "maybe I'll win ye yet to the Lord's side." His eyes shone anew with the fervor of grim religious enthusiasm. He stooped and lifted the big man in his arms, with amazing ease, and carried him down to his cabin.

IX

TO-DAY there is no such person as Captain Bully Keller. After the hammering he received from Mr. Tompkins he lost prestige, and other heavily built sailormen discovered that it was possible to stand up successfully to him. His enormous confidence in himself seemed destroyed, and he became plain Captain Keller, a man who now pays his crews in cash, instead of in the blows that were once so economical and all-sufficient.

He still remembers Mr. and Mrs. Tompkins, passengers from San Francisco to Boston; but without, I may say, marked enthusiasm. Indeed, if you are a smallish man, it is well not to venture the subject.