

head towered erect on powerful shoulders; his neck full and round, was almost brick-red; his clothes, from the way they sat on his body, indicated a torso, like the trunk of a young tree, hard and muscular, firmly planted on clean, straight loins.

In the dead silence his appearance caused, four men looked him up and down—the chairman, Sir John Dering, Colonel Darleigh, and John Jackson. These men knew the fighting spirit at a glance.

"Who are you?" the chairman asked curtly, "and what do you want?"

"I know him," yelled Bill Richmond, with the insolence of the half-drunk man. "I know the lad—I do. He's the turnip-headed chawbacon hanging about Belcher's, and Jem thinks he is a coming champion. Perhaps the lad wants to fight the real champion, Bill Richmond. If he does, by God, I'll give him all he wants!"

"Silence!" thundered Jackson. "Silence, you big drunken bully."

The young man's face flushed angrily, and he half turned to the black.

Sir John Dering caught his glance.

"Control—self-control, for the fighter—you ought to know that. Keep your temper, and take no notice of the black fool. Answer the chairman."

"Which gentleman is Sir John Dering?" he asked, and turned to the gentleman who had addressed him, instinctively.

"Right, boy—go on," Sir John said.

"My name is Henry Pearce," the new-comer said; "they call me Hen Pearce. I'm from Bristol, same as Jem Belcher, and I've just come from Jem's