

Bill Richmond, who had been screaming aloud his desire to fight anyone in the room, and "Jem Belcher himself, if he was here," sullenly pulled himself together and sat, a figure of motionless ebony, his dull, intoxicated eyes fixed upon the chair. The moment of the meeting had come for which all the men seated round that table were waiting—for which the rougher, noisier company in the rooms outside were waiting too.

"Gentlemen," said the chairman, breaking the tense silence, "I give you the last toast. It is the good old toast—to the next fight—and may the best man win."

"And may the best man win." In a sudden gust of noisy merriment the toast was honoured and the ruling spirit of the ring, embodied in the phrase, passed from mouth to mouth.

"Who's the next bit of stuff?" roared Richmond, his voice sounding above the cheers that greeted the toast. "Am I'm it—eh? And, if I'm not, I'll fight either one of 'em, or both, here and now."

The chairman looked at him angrily.

Jackson caught the big black by the collar.

"Sit down, you dog, and hold your trap," he shouted, an ugly glint in his fearless blue eyes.

"Remember where you are."

For the moment, Richmond was cowed into silence.

"Colonel Darleigh will make a statement which should interest us all," said the chairman, knocking on the table with a candle-trimmer.

Colonel Darleigh slowly rose from his seat. As he did so, his dour glance swept round the room—