

KINGS OF SAILORTOWN

by JOHN BRAND

WITH the passing of the sailing vessel from the sea has gone the sea's romance. Romance cannot live without its villains. Boarding masters, bucko mates, bullying captains—these were the villains of sea romance, and they are gone, or going, with the sailing craft they lived in.

Chief among them in their generations was the boarding master of sailortown. Though he never went to sea, he was the heavy villain in every plot that delivered the unlucky sailor, or the unluckier landsman, into the hands of captains and mates. Mostly they were sneaking, brutal, cunning scamps, these boarding masters, owners of low dives along the waterfront, which they misnamed sailors' boarding houses. They hung in the wake of incoming ships, made friends with the easiest marks among the crews and baited or bullied them into their dens. There poor Jack Tar was kept and entertained with bad whiskey and worse women until his money was gone. Then he was shipped aboard some vessel, after signing away one or more months' unearned wages in payment for an imaginary board bill and a "donkey's breakfast," sea slang for a straw bedtick. "Blood money" and "dead horse," the sailors called this robbery. The captains always paid it, taking the sailor's "advance note," which was certain to



be paid out of the debtor's "hide" or his wages. Boarding masters of this class were petty rascals. They dealt in men at retail. The brothers John and Peter Sherman, of Irvington, on the Pacific coast, were of another type. They dealt in men wholesale, shipped entire crews. Their boarding houses were licensed by the government. Captains bargained with them openly. The shipping commissioner of the port winked at their devious ways. A crowd of thugs, runners and hangers-on served them and thrived by their favor. They were men of substance and owned or controlled as part of their business every saloon, dance hall and resort in the crooked streets and dark alleys about the wharves. Upper Irvington drew a deadline about the waterfront and seldom ventured out it outside of business hours. Jack and Pete Sherman were kings of Irvington's sailortown.

Every autumn saw a big fleet of "wind jammers"—ships of 2,000 to 3,000 tons register—lying off Irvington. The wheat of the new northwest was in their holds, consigned to ports in Europe or India, by way of the six-months' journey round the Horn. The wheat fleet, Irvington called it, and when the wheat fleet came, upper Irvington stirred itself, sailortown roused to various life and the sailortown kings reaped a harvest of blood money.

No captain shipped a crew from Irvington until he had done business with the kings and paid their price. Captain Brown, of the bark Carmarthen, learned that to his cost. He put into Irvington for a cargo at a time when ships were plenty and men hard to get. He was unconcerned, for his men had been shipped in England and would not be discharged until the home port was reached. Captains of deep-laden vessels lying in the stream eyed the Carmarthen's crew enviously. Jack Sherman quietly sent a man or two aboard the "limejuicer" to visit and smuggle in forbidden whiskey. By twos and threes Captain Brown's crew left him and were hidden about sailortown. The Irvington police were asked to bring them back, but however hard they looked for deserters they didn't find any.

Then one dark night the rest of the crew vanished over the side, to the last man, after knocking the breath out of Captain Brown and trying the mate up to the main firerail. And before the astonished captain could recover breath enough to roar for "law" Jack and Pete Sherman had his men shipped in one of the waiting vessels and away. Next day the captain was waited on by the kings, who blandly offered to find him a new crew—at \$50 the man. He roared again—to the British consul, to his shipping agents, to the police, who were sympathetic but helpless. Nobody could be found to even hint that the kings had any hand in the affair and the shipping commissioner's records were clear. He had shipped no deserters that he knew of.

But Captain Brown swore that if he couldn't get back his men, or get the dogs of justice to even bark at the kings, he at least would pay them no blood money for a new crew. So he went to another port and brought a new crew to Irvington by steamer. His bark was hauled out into the stream and her crew kept close in her forecastle. That night she was boarded by masked men, who swept her new crew over the bows into the stream. Gossip had it that some of them were drowned. Captain Brown gave up and paid the Sherman boys \$75 instead of \$50 each for a crew, and put to sea in a hurry. "They're bleedin' swine, but they're kings of

sea short-handed. However blind the shipping commissioner might be in other ways, he saw to it that the shipping laws were obeyed as to the number of men required for types and tonnage of ships. A man might never have seen the sea, but if he were not too drunk to say he was an able seaman and to sign his name to the ship's articles, that settled it. He would probably be an able seaman or a dead greenhorn before his ship reached port.

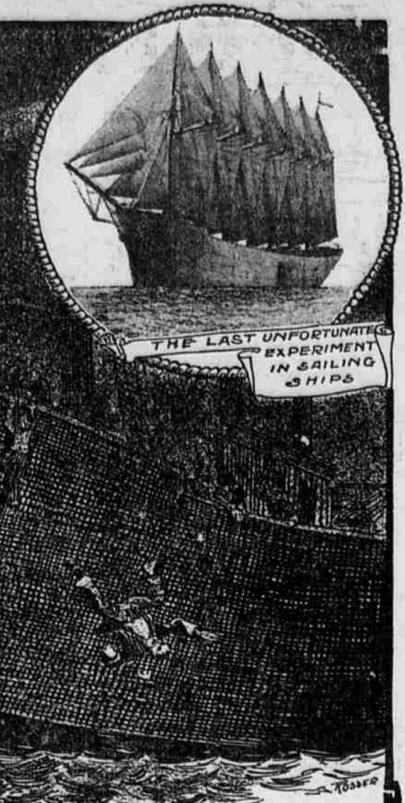
This official insistence on the letter of the law sometimes caused the kings to do strange things. Toward the end of the season they were at times hard pushed for one or two men to fill out a crew. Then did all men in sailortown not in the kings' special favor hunt cover and stay hid until the last ship was out of sight beyond the bar. For Jack and Pete were not of respecters of persons. All men looked alike to them, and they sent to sea more than one who held himself too acute to be trapped into an unwilling voyage. Well-educated, well-dressed and companionable, the kings mixed with the best and worst that drifted into their realms, and once in their clutches no man escaped from them except by the open sea.

Jimmy Hunter, Yale man and cowpuncher, went down to the waterfront alone one day, against the advice of the upper town, to see the sights. He was wise to the world and had a year's thrash and pay with him. He met the kings, who were glad to see him. Just one more man was needed for the square-rigger Good Hope, then lying in the stream waiting for a crew, with her captain, Black, swearing at Jack and Pete for delaying him. The kings attended to Hunter's thirst and were friendly, even confidential. No secret was made of their trade. They told him stories of shanghai'd sailormen and of crews they had stolen from one ship for another. He was much interested. Jack took him up to the shipping commissioner's to see the crew of the Good Hope shipped. He was even asked to and did sign his name once or twice "as a witness." A friend from the upper town risked a broken head to warn him. But the Sherman boys were also friends—at least three hours old—and, anyhow, he could take care of himself.

At last he caught Pete in an attempt to drug his whiskey and left the kings, with a laughing comment on sailortown ways. Well outside the deadline he stopped in a quiet saloon. It was late and he and the lonesome bartender had a nightcap together. When he came alive next morning he was at sea in the Good Hope and a beefy English mate was kicking him in the ribs.

Of the months that followed Hunter never told much. He learned sailors' work; he had to. He picked up a scar or two from the English mate's brass knuckles. Also he acquired a deep desire to kill the kings of sailortown, Captain Black and the mate.

At last he found himself in the consul's office at Dunkirk, France, dressed in the clothes he had on when he met the Sherman boys. For a wonder, they had sent them aboard with him. He was in United States territory again, and, first off, he would square yards with Captain Black. But—the consular agent was a Frenchman who would neither speak English nor understand Hunter's French unless he wanted to. Captain Black lolled in an office chair and grinned while Hunter told his troubles. When he had finished, without a word of comment the consular agent spread out two papers, the ship's articles and an "advance note." "Ees thees votre nom?" he asked. It was. He remembered his signing "as



a witness" and was dumb. After the "advance note" and a preposterous sloop chest charge had been deducted from his wages, they handed him the balance, a pitiful little pile of small silver, and told him to get out. It was against the law, of course, but he didn't know that.

He was set adrift, almost without money, in a land of strangers. A hostile land, too, for the gendarmes in front of the office eyed him with disfavor. He was desperately lonely, and felt the grip of circumstance keen upon him. As he wandered about the strange streets he discovered, sewed in the lining of his coat, an envelope, until then unnoticed. Its contents were four one-hundred-dollar bills and this note:

Irvington, Oct. 17.
Mr. James Hunter,
Dear Sir: Here's your dust. We kept your gun. It would only make trouble for you. We are not thieves, only boarding masters. You would get drunk and we needed men. Hide your money till you get ashore. You will need it all, for Black is certain to turn you adrift dead broke. Quit boozing and be a man.
Yours truly,
PETER SHERMAN.

The friendly faces of Uncle Sam's greenbacks gave him courage. He made plans and acted on them then and there. Meeting that English mate in the street, he gave him a most artistic beating, paid a fine, and took the next boat for London town. Incidentally, he forgot all about his desire to travel six or seven thousand miles and kill the sailortown kings. What spasm of virtue caused them to give him back his money he never knew. They were not noted for doing such things.

That the kings so continually escaped punishment was small wonder. The men injured never had a chance to tell their stories until they were ashore in some foreign land. Consuls in foreign ports could not libel ships or detain captains on their unsupported word. The ships' papers were always straight, at any rate on the face of them. The most that could be done was to report the case and there it ended. The Sherman boys on the other side of the earth never heard even an echo of it. The witnesses against them were scattered over the seven seas and prosecution could not touch them.

The United States district attorney and his staff did their best to keep the Shermans within the letter, at least, of the shipping laws, but they had hard sledding. In one case the kings were indicted Charlie Marsden, the star witness for the prosecution, was locked up in jail for safekeeping. Charlie Marsden disappeared. The jailer told a story of masked men, guns and general confusion, but could identify no one as having taken part in the jail delivery. With the witness gone, prosecution halted. Long afterward Charlie Marsden came back and told a moving tale. He had been bound, gagged and carried aboard a ship just as she sailed. When released at sea, he was told that he had been regularly shipped and was led a sorry life aboard. In foreign ports he appealed in vain to consuls, who showed him his name—forged, of course—on the ship's articles and laughed at him. When he finally worked his way back to Irvington his story awakened interest and new prosecutions were begun. The Sherman boys had well-paid lawyers who dragged out the cases with adjournments and legal tangles. Irvington was too busy to be long excited over the wrongs of a few sailors. Prosecution faltered and paltered along its usual dismal way, and what at last brought the sailortown kings up with a round turn was the united public opinion of Irvington directed against them.

Irvington suddenly waked up to find itself a blot on the map. Unexplained dead men are no good advertisement for any town; neither are mysterious disappearances of strangers within its gates to be desired, if their friends make a fuss about them. Captains who refused to be held up for extravagant blood money, and to play villain at small profit, avoided the port. Business was falling off. Upper Irvington was hit where it lived and the Sherman boys were notified to quit.

The kings of sailortown have abdicated. Steam vessels make voyages so short that "advance notes" are no longer prizes. Seamen's unions have given a measure of protection even to deep-water sailors, who seem to have fewer rights and more hardships than most men. The bullying captain, the bucko mate and the boarding master have all been sungen by the feeble and tardy fire of United States maritime law. The railroads had their share in the revolution. But what really caused the Sherman boys to become private citizens was the wrath of upper Irvington. When it was hit in its pocket and its self-esteem—that upset the kingdom of the sailortown tyrants.

ON HER DIGNITY.

"I should like a drink of water," said the young man, politely.
"You'll have to wait until mother comes downstairs," said the young lady, haughtily. "I want you to understand that I never go into the kitchen."

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Paris Pattern No. 2051, All Seams Allowed.—This simple shirt waist model, with its two broad tucks turning toward the shoulder, is suitable for taffetas, as well as for cashmere, albatross or french flannel. Any of the heavy linens or madras would look equally well made in this style, and chambray, indian-head cotton, victoria of persian lawns are also good materials for its development. In gray and black striped handkerchief linen, worn with a linen collar and a broad tie of black satin, it would be suitable for every day wear. This pattern is in 8 sizes—32 to 46 inches, bust measure. For 36 bust the waist requires 4 1/2 yards of material 20 inches wide, 3 1/2 yards 27 inches wide, 2 3/4 yards 36 inches wide and 2 1/2 yards 42 inches wide.

To procure this pattern send 10 cents to "Pattern Department," of this paper. Write name and address plainly, and be sure to give size and number of pattern.

NO. 2051. SIZE.....
NAME.....
TOWN.....
STREET AND NO.....
STATE.....

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To procure this pattern send 10 cents to "Pattern Department," of this paper. Write name and address plainly, and be sure to give size and number of pattern.

NO. 2725. SIZE.....
NAME.....
TOWN.....
STREET AND NO.....
STATE.....

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Some day there will be neither optimists nor pessimists, and that is doubtless what the prophet means when he says the mists will yet cease to obscure the truth.—Puck.



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