

# The Chief Disgrace of the Roving Sailor

(Copyright, 1903, by Albert Sonnichsen.)  
**P**EOPLE ashore with only a limited knowledge of men who sail in ships are not apt to regard the sailor as a gentleman of dignity. Slovenly, unshaven and drunk, he rolls down the grimy streets of the waterfront districts, disregarding of what people think of him, apparently without pride. But, for all that, Jack is a most sensitive being, keenly conscious of what constitutes disgrace according to his own peculiar code of morals.

There is no more keenly felt disgrace to the genuine deep sea sailor than having his ability as a seaman impeached. You might cast all sorts of doubts on the integrity of his moral character, but, provided you qualified them by admitting his professional ability, he might still be your friend. Reverse the order, and declare him a good man but a poor seaman, and he is on the warpath at once.

This peculiarity is fully understood by ship's officers, they, of course, being more susceptible to it than the men under them. So when they wish to inflict some particularly severe form of punishment on a sailor they do not resort to physical violence. Assault with a belaying pin might imply merely a momentary displeasure. That is not the bucko mate's method when he wants to be especially cruel. He simply sets his victim to work at some job ordinarily given to the deck boys, and thus strikes deeper than mere blows ever could. That sort of punishment has set more than one sailor brooding during the night watches until he ended his misery by a leap overboard.

I remember a particular case wherein an old sailor, who had sailed every sea on the globe, was punished in this manner. He had given the mate some back talk. At first it looked as if there would be a fight, but the mate withdrew with a revengeful look in his eyes.

Here, for the benefit of the landsman, certain details must be explained. Each square sail on a sailing ship is furled by means of ropes called buntlines, which pull the sail up to the yard arm, where it is made fast with other ropes called gaskets. When the sails are set the buntlines hang loose, and, so that they shall not chafe the sail by the weight of the hauling part running down to the deck, they are pulled up slightly and fastened to the block on the yard with thin cotton twine, easily broken if it becomes necessary to clue up the sail. Overhauling and stopping buntlines with twine is essentially a deck boy's duty; the greenhorn learns it on first coming aboard.

In the second dog watch of the day when the mate and old Jack quarreled, all hands were gathered on the main hatch, spinning yarns, as is the custom. At such a time the men are never disturbed unless it is absolutely necessary for the safety of the ship.

As we lay there we noticed the mate come down from the poop and go to the main rigging. He grasped one of the main upper topsail buntlines and gave it a jerk. In the stillness the snapping of the twine aloft could be heard. A moment later the bos'n came fore'd and sang out:

"Jack, go up and overhaul the main upper topsail buntlines and stop them to the jackstay!"

Every man became silent at once and looked uneasily into his neighbor's eyes. Jack gasped, then paled to a sickly white. His hands trembled as he slowly rose. On the bos'n's face was an expression of almost abject apology, as though he meant to say:

"For God's sake, don't blame me—it's orders!"

Jack climbed slowly and painfully aloft, as though he had aged ten years in the last minute.

He did as he had been ordered, but for the rest of that passage he was no longer the same man he had been.

When the ship reached port Jack went ashore and by chance met the mate in a grog shop. The few drinks he had taken broke the last restraint, and had not bystanders interfered he would have spent his remaining days in the queen's service. As it was, he cut the mate with his sheath knife so severely that next trip there was a new mate.

It is well known how fond ship's officers are of swearing. Life at sea seems to breed in men a genius for creative profanity. In the sailor's vocabulary of swear words there are terms never heard ashore. But occasionally a mate feels that even extraordinary profanity will not adequately express the state of his feelings toward some one whom he particularly wishes to wound verbally. He turns red and blue in the face with suppressed rage, then, with relief, finds the one word that will rankle: "You blasted soldier!"

The sailor thus termed is pretty apt to fight, even though his opponent is his superior officer.

What mortal insult there is in being called a soldier is hard to explain. It prob-

ably originated in the olden times when soldiers were transported in sailing ships. They usually incurred the contempt of sailors by their frightened behavior during storms, as all landsmen are apt to do at first, and thus the word may have come to be synonymous with coward. Anyhow, sailors believe that soldiers—that is, soldiers in time of peace—are the most contemptible creatures on earth.

I knew of a mate once who punished by ordering men to pace the deck with capstan bars on their shoulders, as though they were troops on parade. He carried that on until he caused a desperate mutiny wherein several men were killed.

In spite of the fact that many Cape Cod sailors are also farmers, Jack considers tilling the soil in the light of a disgrace. I was once walking a country road in England with a shipmate, a typical sailor who had been to sea all his life. Outside a small village we were overtaken and joined by a farmer on his way to market with a wagon load of potatoes. He invited us to ride with him and we accepted his invitation.

The countryman did not observe that we were sailors, so began speaking of the crops and various other things incidental to farming life in a way that inferred a thorough knowledge of the subjects on our part. Jack sniffed contemptuously, as though considering it quite a condescension that an able seaman should choose to converse with a common farmer.

"What d'ye think of the early drum-head cabbage—about time to plant it now, isn't it?" suggested the countryman.

Jack answered very shortly that he didn't know.

"De'n't ye in the farmin' line yerself?" asked our companion.

I almost thought I saw tears in Jack's eyes. He looked himself over, and then me, saying, in a highly aggrieved tone:

"Say, mate, do we look like farmers? For heaven's sake don't tell this when we get aboard!"

In spite of the rough life they lead, sailors are undoubtedly cleaner and neater of dress aboard ship than any other workmen of their class. A slovenly man in a fore-castle never has a pleasant time with his mates. To be called dirty is a keen disgrace. This is especially impressed on young boys on their first trips.

On an American bark that traded between San Francisco and Honolulu there was once a green fellow from the Seattle coal trade, where the men can't keep clean. He had learned all he knew of sea life there, and consequently was under the impression that he could slouch about deck on a deep water vessel in the manner he had been accustomed to aboard the coasting collier.

At first his shipmates intimated by hints that his ways did not suit them, and when he disregarded them they told him plainly that he was a filthy cub. But he was not sailor enough to take that as an insult.

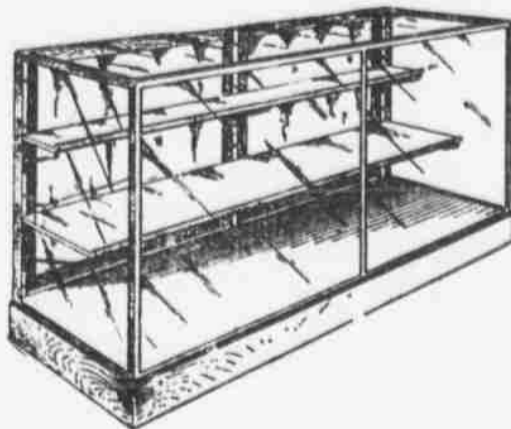
One early morning watch they dragged him out of his bunk and scrubbed him down with the deck brooms, and thereafter he was barred from social intercourse during the evening dog watches. A man whom it had been necessary to treat in that manner was considered disgraced for life. Never again was he treated on terms of equality in any fore-castle he afterward went in, the story having spread all over the coast. On this account he was dubbed "Dirty Dick."

## Gospel of Good Clothes

Tailors seem content to remain supine and permit the dressmakers to hold all the dress conventions, but it will in time be made clear that in order to induce people to make dress well and to make a broad breach in the multitudinous army of shabbiness there will need to be exhibitions of dressing. Contempt of good clothes is a weakness which it is to the tailors' interest to overthrow. No falseness ever was disseminated than "Don't judge a man by his clothes." Carelessness of clothes is carelessness of character. Shabbiness goes with dirt, and dirt goes with shiftlessness, and shiftlessness goes with a weak intellect, and then you begin to get close to crime. A clean collar is an aid to integrity, and a new suit of clothes insures happiness for twenty-four hours; twenty-four hours of happiness is not to be looked on with contempt in this melancholy world. Tailors do not seem to realize that they are preachers and teachers as well as garment makers. They make the world better, but some of them do charge a frightful price for doing it. A well-dressed world is going to be a more contented world. There should be missionary work, there should be conventions and exhibitions and training schools—and a reasonable reduction in prices. We are not giving all of this advice to tailors without seeking a direct and early benefit to the people.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

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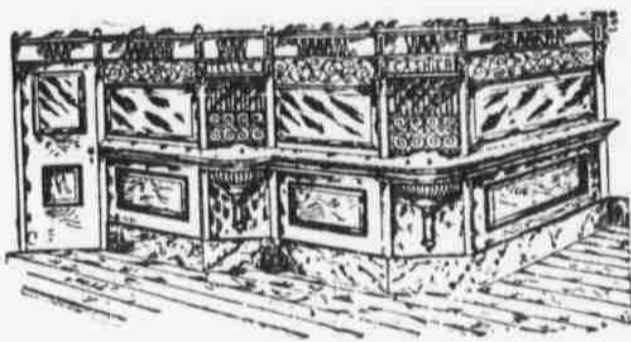


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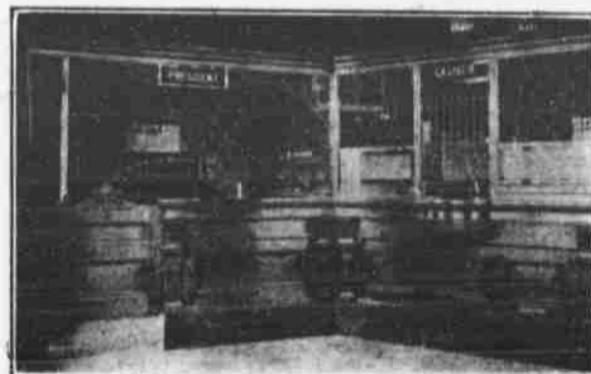
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