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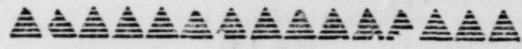
"This is True Liberty, when Free Born Men, having to advise the Public, may speak free."—EURIPIDES.

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VOL 37 CHARLOTTETOWN, P. E. ISLAND; SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 25, 1897. NO 224

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#### PACKET RATS OF OLD.

##### THE SAILORS THAT MANNED THE BLACKBALL CLIPPERS.

**Tough Crews Kept In Hand by Tougher Officers—How the Landmen Were Robbed and Beaten—Punishment That Was Sometimes Inflicted.**

"They were beautiful ships, the old Blackball packets; long, trim clippers, that tore through the western ocean under a cloud of canvas that was kept spread as long as it would stay to the yards. Many a one had never a dry deck or its crew a dry stitch of clothing in a dozen passages running. They were finely fitted up in the cabins and did a great part of the over-seas passenger carrying up to the end of the war, but they were tough crews and hard officers that sailed them—the toughest and hardest, I reckon, in the world."

Old Barney Rockliffe, the shipkeeper at an East river wharf, was talking. He was a deep sea sailor for many years.

"There was the regular packet sailor, who would ship on no other craft," he went on to say, "packet rats, we called them. When one of them was fixed out in his regulation togs—a red Havre shirt, black trousers, a glazed cap and neat calf-skin boots—he was known as a 'Bucko' sailor, and put on great airs. They went in gangs that shipped together for the trip across the Atlantic. They fought the officers where they dared and robbed and maltreated their fellow sailors. A green Dutchman on his first Blackball packet trip was their special mark, and he was lucky if, besides having his chest looted and the very boots stolen from his feet, he were not brutally beaten. The regular packet sailor carried no chest or bag, only the clothes on his back. He came aboard drunk, was driven, cursed and smashed through the passage by the officers and made a pier head leap from the ship before she was fairly moored at the wharf on the other side of the water. Pickpockets, burglars, criminals of every sort, whose industries compelled them to make sundry changes of residence, shipped in the packets so as to get from one side of the ocean to the other. Such a man, if a good seaman, might get through the trip all right, but if not he fared hard at the hands of the officers."

"It needed masterful, determined officers to keep such men under, and the packet officers were of that kind. They were fighters always ready, and their orders were sharp and stern, with a curse, and perhaps a snatch block or belying pin coming close behind them if the men were slow to move or to understand. A Blackball ship often came into port with fewer men than she started with, and many an officer found it necessary regularly to leave the ship before she came to anchor and stay in hiding until she sailed again to avoid the warrants of arrest against him on account of his treatment of the crew. After a Blackball ship had cleared away it usually happened that a Whitehall boat put out from some pier and set on board two or three men who, clapping on round, straight visored officers' hats, went to getting the crew into working order at short notice."

"I was not the kind of packet sailor I have been telling you about, but I sailed a number of trips in the Blackball ships during the civil war. Sailors were scarce, and the pay of \$80 to \$100 in gold for a trip was too tempting to miss. Being a good sailor and temperate, I got on well with the officers, and I managed to pull through without trouble with the men, but I saw some rough sights and doings. The thing that impressed me most was what I saw one Christmas day, with the ship lying out at anchor ready to sail at turn of tide. It was bitterly cold. The crew had come aboard in all stages of drunkenness, from fighting to dead drunk, and the uproar about the fore-castle was like what I have heard told of sheel.

"Among the crew was a very decent looking old man, warmly clad, and wearing, I remember, a red comforter round his neck. I don't know whether he had been drinking or not or whether he accidentally fell or was pushed down the hatchway, but he fell some 10 or 12 feet down into the forehold. A gang of the packet rats followed him down to where he lay, beat

and kicked him until he was insensible and robbed him of everything they fancied about him.

"When the ship was got under way and the crew were mustered amidships to be chosen off into watches, the old man stood among the rest, looking in mighty bad shape after the treatment he had undergone. As a rule little notice would have been taken of the matter and no inquiries made, but it chanced that the captain and he were both Freemasons, and the old man gave the captain a Masonic sign, and that got him notice. The captain's eyes blazed as he heard the old man's story, and he told him to point out the men who had beaten and robbed him. He identified six or seven—one of them was wearing his red comforter—and they were ordered to stand apart from the rest of the crew.

"They were compelled to deliver up to the old man everything that he said was his, then the mate and second mate, the boatswain and carpenter put on steel knuckles and walked into them. The fellows were knocked down and hammered and then pulled up to be knocked down again, the steel knuckles, wherever they landed, cutting like knives, until the deck looked like a slaughter pen. It was a cruel punishment, but none can say that it wasn't deserved.

"Now and then a packet officer would be killed by the crew. What these officers hated worst was to find a landlubber shipped as an able seaman, and they used to make the trip a miserable one to him. Some of their punishments were queer ones, such as setting a man to dip water from one bucket to another with a teaspoon or fitting canvas wings to him and making him pass the watch aloft on a yardarm, crowing like a cock at every two bells."—New York Sun.

#### Not the Belshazzar Legend.

The story is told of a Sunday school which once had a teacher named Aminadab Wilk, a milkman. One day the subject of the lesson was the feast of Belshazzar, but the class was most inattentive.

Wishing to arrest immediate attention, he called out to one of the boys in a sharp voice:

"Jim, who placed the writing on the wall?"

The boy falteringly answered, "Please, sir, it was Harry Barker."

The teacher was amazed, but he at once said:

"Read out what he wrote."

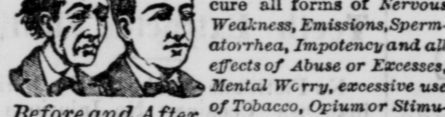
Jim immediately turned round and read from the wall:

Our teacher's name is Aminadab Wilk. He sits on a bucket his cows to milk; He waters his milk three times a day. Then comes to school to sing and pray.

—Scottish Nights.

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