

BALLAD OF THE SWABS

BY GEORGE STERLING

The tale is of my grandsire
And his good whaling-ship,
Back to Sag Harbor faring
From his eleventh trip.—

A true man, a taut man,
With sea-blue eyes and bright,
Three foot across the shoulders
And five foot five in height.

The stout ship *Thomas Dickinson*
Up from Rio rolled,
Eighteen hundred casks of oil
Braced tight in her hold.

Two years out each man Jack was
And ninety days to spare,
Wives and sweethearts waiting
Starved love to share.

Block Island lay to starboard,
Montauk lay to port.
“Damme! my bullies!
Land’s the place for sport.

“Rum’s a mocker when ’tis served
Only once a day,
With the brown Marquesan girls
Half a world away.

“Now swab the deck, my hearties!
Two hours will see us home
From toil and fluke and tempest
And the night-reef’s foam.”

Out spake Billy Palmer,
An Amagansett boy:
“Flense my butt if I crook arm
At any such employ!

“To hell with oil and whalebone
And all sea-faring men,

Till I and my dear Betty
Ha' kissed and kissed again!"

They heaved the black swabs overboard
And whistled a gay tune.
Ahead they saw the Gardiner woods
And Napeague's first dune.

A kind man my grandsire was,
But tougher than a spar.
None in all the whaling-fleets
Cast the harpoon so far.

"Mr. Luce!" (the first mate jumped)
"East sou'-east's her course."
The second mate swore heartily,
Being weary of salt-horse.

Then rumbled Reuben Pentlatch,
The gloomiest of men:
"By hell's floor! is he plannin'
To turn Cape Stiff again?"

Back to the Atlantic blue
The ordered course was laid,
And both mates used familiar words
Until new swabs were made.

Out of sight of land or spire,—
Far from kith and kin,
Long they heard the creaking yards
Speak of discipline.

Three full days they swabbed the deck
With most painstaking care,
Till Dolly Madison herself
Could ha' eat her supper there.

"Now west nor'-west's her course again,"
My bull-necked grandsire said—
Twice as hot as any there
For home and wife and bed.

Again they lifted high Montauk
And low Block Island's sands;
But till they saw the roofs of home
Those swabs were in their hands;

And when the anchor rattled down
In harbor water green,
Their blessed hearts were clean and wise,
And the deck uncommon clean.

THE LION-TAMER

BY JIM TULLY

IT WAS my second hobo journey through Mississippi. After the first I had vowed never to return, but Arkansas moonshine had changed my plans. Three times the first week I narrowly escaped arrest. Then, hurrying toward Louisiana, I lost track of the days of the week and month. There was no need to know. I had, as the hoboes say, dragged a long haul from Hot Springs, Arkansas, to McComb City, Mississippi, some hundreds of miles. The latter town is a sun-scorched group of frame-houses stretched forlornly along the Illinois Central tracks, ninety miles from New Orleans.

Half dazed from loss of sleep, weak from hunger, and irritated by vermin-infested clothes, I resolved to leave the road for a spell. The terrible Mississippi vagrancy law hung over me. Under that law an officer is given two dollars and a half for every vagrant he captures alive. In other parts of the United States a tramp is not molested if he keeps off railroad property, but in Mississippi he is hunted up hill and down dale for the two dollars and fifty cents.

Once captured, he is given a fine of seventy-five dollars. Having no money, he is made to work the fine out—at twenty cents a day! This comes to about eleven months and twenty-nine days, allowing a few days for good behavior. But there is, furthermore, a joker. The prisoner always needs clothing. He is charged three dollars for a fifty-cent pair of overalls, and seven dollars for a pair of dollar-and-a-quarter brogans. These debts are added to his sentence and worked out at twenty cents a day. It is no uncommon thing for a friend-

less man to spend several years as a peon in Mississippi. So I had reason to worry.

Life had been completely against me for weeks. I had, with the sincerest motives, left Hot Springs for the remoter Arkansas wilds with a pair of loaded dice in my pocket. I hoped to trade my virtuosity with them for the money which the blasé lumberjacks had taken from the Lumber Interests. With this end in view I had actually worked two weeks at a camp near Pine Bluff. When pay-day came I started a crap game on the stump of an immense pine tree. To my befuddled consternation I lost every dime I had. And I had worked so hard for the money! Trekking wearily back to camp after the game, I felt sure that someone had cheated, but not wishing to accuse anyone unjustly, I kept still. The Jewish manager of the company store had played.

It was my intention to beg a few dollars and leave the camp next morning. But a cyclone, speeding hundreds of miles an hour, roared across the State. It broke large trees as though they were toothpicks in the hands of traveling salesmen. It was a swirling funnel of doom. It sounded like the agitated rumbling of thousands of locomotives climbing a steep hill. We hurried to the cyclone cellars dug deep in the ground. The landscape next morning was as clean as a desert bone. I was drafted into the army of labor again. On my next pay-day I started another crap game. The Jewish store-keeper played again. I lost again.

Downcast, I then left Pine Bluff and finally reached McComb City. Not wishing to bother the police with my presence,