

CHAPTER VIII

The Wind-Ships Have Had It

Dinner was over. A huge driftwood log glowed and sputtered in the fireplace of the San Diego Yacht Club, then located on the Coronado side of San Diego Bay. The muted rumble of the surf came from a few hundred yards away, and somewhere in the growing murk outside a belated killdeer uttered its shrill "Kildeeeee!" as it wheeled, on busy wings, above the lonely beach.

Gathered around the fire that evening in the late summer of 1925 were a doctor with a flair for showmanship, an oceanographer, an officer of the United States Navy and two newspapermen who had a fondness for old ships. They were there for a purpose, although they were not all clear as to what that purpose was to be.

"Well, gentlemen," said one of them, "We might as well get down to business, and I'm going to start by reading you this clipping from one of last week's papers; it's an A.P. story out of New York . . ."

The story had to do with the Benj. F. Packard, a Yankee-built skysail-yarder which had been in the Cape Horn grain trade, in the Alaska fisheries -- and now was on the East Coast, about to be burned for her metal when a little group of sail enthusiasts had come to her rescue. The story told of the dream of a maritime museum consisting chiefly of the ship herself; it told of half-a-dozen old shellbacks who came aboard, hoisted her fading colors two-blocks to the tune of "Whiskey For My Johnnie!" and swore that the grand old packet could be saved.

