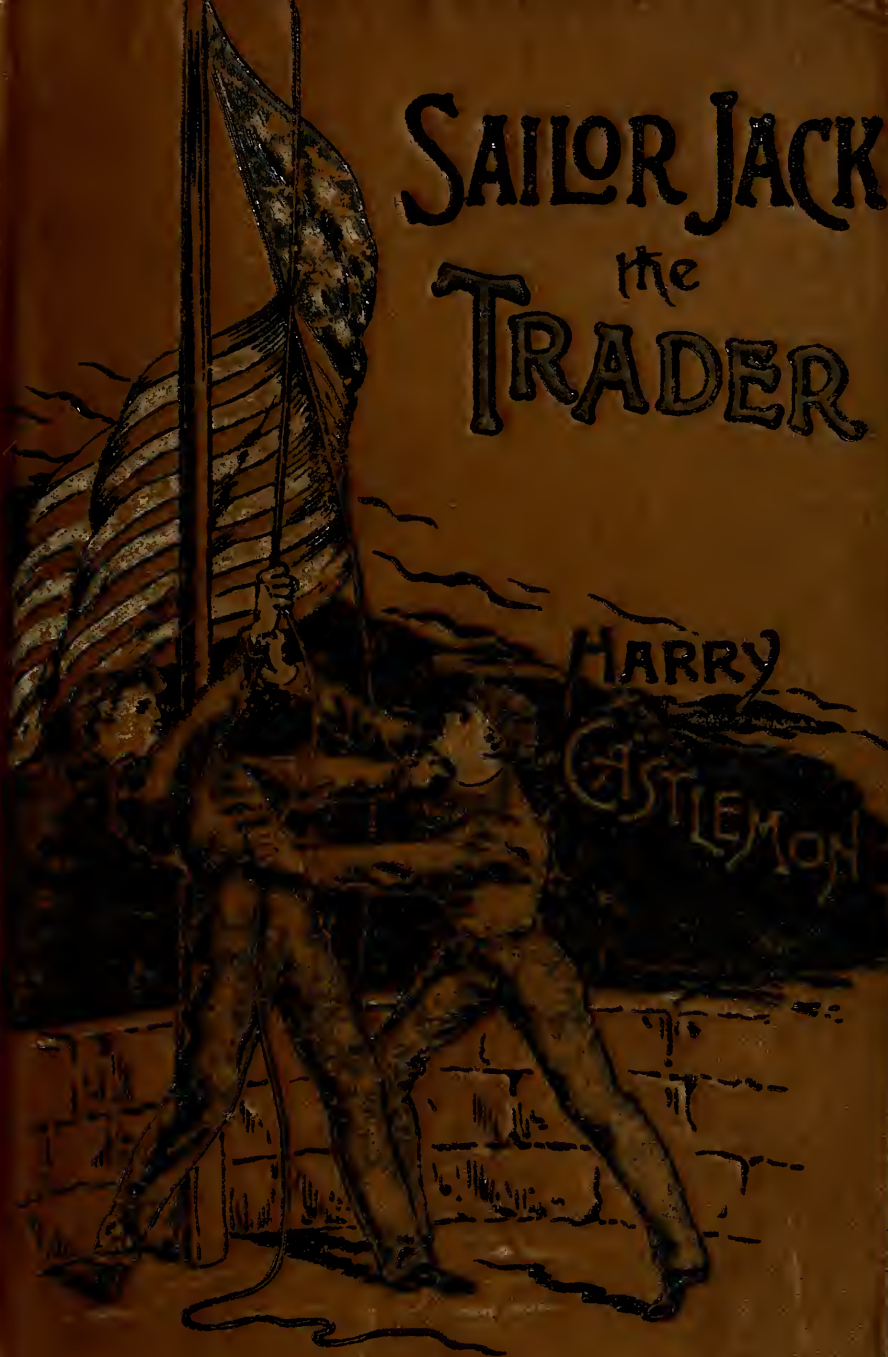


SAILOR JACK

the

TRADER

HARRY
ESTLEMAN





THE LAST OF THE "LOUISIANA."

CASTLEMON'S WAR SERIES.

SAILOR JACK, THE TRADER

BY

HARRY CASTLEMON,

AUTHOR OF "GUNBOAT SERIES," "ROCKY MOUNTAIN SERIES,"
"FOREST AND STREAM SERIES," ETC., ETC.

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SAILOR JACK, THE TRADER.

CHAPTER I.

TOM RANDOLPH, CONSCRIPT.

“WELL, by gum! Am I dreamin’? Is this Tom Randolph or his hant?”

“I don’t wonder that you are surprised. It’s Tom Randolph easy enough, though I can hardly believe it myself when I look in the glass. There isn’t a nigger in the settlement that isn’t better clad and better mounted than I am.”

“Well, I have seen you when you looked a trifle pearter, that’s a fact.”

“And what brought me to this? The Yankees and their cowardly sympathizers. I don’t blame the boys in blue so much, for brave soldiers always respect one another, even though their sense of duty compels them to fight under different flags; but the traitors we have

right here among us are too mean to be of any use. And the meanest one among them is Rodney Gray.”

The first speaker was Lieutenant Lambert, who, by his zealous efforts to serve the cause of the South, brought about the bombardment of Baton Rouge, and the person whom he addressed was the redoubtable Captain Tom himself, who had just returned to Mooreville after undergoing two months' military discipline at Camp Pinckney.

The last time we saw these two worthies was shortly after the Confederate General Breckenridge made his unsuccessful attempt to capture Baton Rouge, and the conscripting officer, Captain Roach, disappeared so completely that no one had ever heard a word of him since, and the veteran Major Morgan, backed by fifty soldiers who hated all Home Guards and other skulkers as cordially as they hated the Yankees, came to take his place. Knowing that Captain Roach had been very remiss in his duty, that he had spent more time in visiting and eating good dinners than he had in sending conscripts to the army, Major

Morgan hardly gave himself time to take possession of the office in Kimberley's store before he declared that that sort of work was going to cease entirely, and that everyone in his district who was liable to military duty, Home Guards as well as civilians, must start for the camp of instruction at once or be taken there by force. The news spread rapidly, and in a very few hours everyone in the settlement had heard it. The wounded and disabled veterans of the Army of the Centre, of whom there were a goodly number in the neighborhood, were overjoyed to learn that at last there was a man in the conscripting office who could not be trifled with, and some of the civilians, who came under the exemption clause of the Conscription Act, secretly cherished the hope that Captain Tom and his first lieutenant might be sent to serve under Bragg, who did not scruple to shoot his soldiers for the most trivial offences.

As to Tom and his Home Guards, they did not at first pay much attention to the major's threats. It was right that civilians should be forced to shoulder muskets, since they would not do it of their own free will, but as for

them, they were State troops, and the government at Richmond could not order them around as it pleased. Besides, they had great confidence in Mrs. Randolph's powers of persuasion. She would never permit her son to go into the army, and having managed Captain Roach pretty near as she pleased, the Home Guards did not see why she could not manage Major Morgan as well; but when it became noised abroad that the latter had curtly refused Mrs. Randolph's invitation to dinner, intimating that he was not ordered to Mooreville to waste his time in visiting and nonsense, they were terribly frightened, and demanded that Captain Tom should "see them through." When they enlisted in his company, he promised to stand between them and the Confederate authorities, and now was the time for him to make that promise good; but Tom was as badly frightened as they were, and did not know what to do. When his mother suggested that it might be well for him to put his commission in his pocket, and ride to Mooreville and talk the matter over with the major, Tom almost went frantic.

“Go down there and face that despot alone,” he exclaimed, “while he has fifty veterans at his back to obey his slightest wish? I’d about as soon be shot and have done with it. Besides, what have I got to ride? The Yankees have stolen me afoot.”

Captain Tom knew well enough that he was not telling the truth. It wasn’t Yankees who “stole him afoot,” but men who wore the same kind of uniform he did. You will remember that we compared the short visit of Breckenridge’s army to a plague of locusts. Everything in the shape of eatables in and around Mooreville, as well as some articles of value, disappeared and were never heard of afterward; and among those articles of value were several fine horses, Tom Randolph’s being one of the first to turn up missing. His expensive saddle and bridle disappeared at the same time, and now, if Tom wanted to go anywhere, he was obliged to walk or ride a plough mule bare-back, which was harrowing to his feelings. He wouldn’t appear before a Confederate officer of rank in any such style as that, he said, and that was all there was

about it. But, as it happened, the conscripting officer had a word to say on that point. On the morning following his arrival in the village a couple of strange troopers galloped into Mr. Randolph's front yard and drew up at the steps with a jerk. Captain Tom's heart sank when he saw them coming, for something told him that they were after him and nobody else; and paying no heed to the earnest entreaties of his mother, who assured him that he might as well face them one time as another, for he could not save himself by flight, he disappeared like a shot through the nearest door, leaving her to explain his absence in any way she thought proper. But after taking a second look at the unwelcome visitors, Mrs. Randolph knew it would be of no use to try to shield the timid Home Guard. The trooper who ascended the steps, leaving his comrade to hold his horse, was a rough-looking fellow, as well he might be, for he had seen hard service. The little pieces of metal on his huge Texas spurs tinkled musically, his heavy cavalry sabre clanked against his heels as he walked, and Mrs. Randolph thought there was something

threatening in the sound. He lifted his cap respectfully, but said in a brisk business tone :

“I’d like to see Tom Randolph, if you please.”

“Do you mean Captain Randolph?” corrected the lady.

“No, ma’am. He was given to me as plain Tom Randolph, and that is the only name I know him by. I’d like to see him, if you please.”

“Will you step in while I go and find him?”

“Thank you, no. I have no time to sit down. I am in a great hurry.”

“You can spare a moment to tell me, his mother, what you are going to do with him, can you not?”

“All I can say is that the major wants to see him at once,” was the short answer.

“Do you know what the major wants of him, so that I can explain——”

“Pardon me if I say that no explanations are necessary. It is enough for him to know that Major Morgan wants to see him without a moment’s delay.”

The tone in which the words were spoken satisfied Mrs. Randolph that the impatient trooper could not be put off any longer, so she turned about and went into the house. She knew that Tom had gone straight to her room, and when she tried the door she found that he had locked himself in.

“Who’s there?” demanded a husky voice from the inside.

“It is I, my dear, and I am alone,” was the reply. “Let me in at once. Now, call all your courage to your aid, and show yourself the brave soldier you were on the night you knocked that Yankee sentinel down with the butt of a musket and escaped being sent to a Northern prison-pen,” she continued, as she slipped through the half open door, which was quickly closed and locked behind her. “Major Morgan wants to see you at his office, and, my dear, you had better go at once. The man at the door will not wait much longer.”

“I don’t care if he won’t,” shouted Captain Tom, who was terribly alarmed. “If he gets tired of standing there, let him go back where he came from and tell that major that

I—what business has that fellow got out there?”

Tom chanced to look through the window while he was talking, and when he saw one of the troopers ride down the carriage-way as if he were going to the rear of the house, it flashed upon him that the man was going there to watch the back door. At the same moment the jingling of spurs and the rattling of a sabre were heard in the next room, the door knob was tried by a strong hand, and something that might have been the toe of a heavy boot was propelled with considerable force against the door itself.

“Open up here,” commanded a stern voice on the other side. “Do it at once, or I shall be obliged to force an entrance.”

This threat brought Captain Tom to his senses. In a second the door was unlocked and opened, and the soldier stepped into the room.

“By what right does Major Morgan——” began Tom.

“I don’t know a thing about it,” was the quick reply. “It is no part of my duty to

inquire into my superior's private affairs. All I can say is that I am commanded to bring Tom Randolph before him without loss of time. You are Tom Randolph, I take it. Then saddle up and come with me."

"But the Yankees stole my horse and I have nothing to ride except a mule," whined Tom.

"Then ride the mule or come afoot. Make up your mind to something, for I am going to start in half a minute by the watch."

"You will give my son time to exchange his citizen's clothes for his captain's uniform, of course," ventured Mrs. Randolph.

"Sorry I haven't an instant to wait, but the color of his clothes will make no sort of difference to Major Morgan," was the reply. "Now then, will you order up that mule, or walk, or ride double with my man?"

"Are you an officer?" faltered Tom.

"Not much of one—only a captain."

"Well, that puts a different look on the matter entirely," said Tom, who up to this time thought he was being ordered around by a private soldier. "Since you are an officer

I expect to receive an officer's treatment from you, and I don't wish to be addressed——”

“That's all right. But hurry up, for the time is precious.”

Being satisfied at last that his meeting with the dreaded conscript officer could not be delayed any longer, Captain Tom hastened to his room after his commission, while his mother sent a darky to the stable-yard to bring up the solitary mule that had been left there when the few remaining field-hands went to work in the morning. And a very sorry-looking beast it proved to be when it was led to the door—too decrepit to work, and so weak with age that it fairly staggered as Tom threw his weight upon the sheepskin which the thoughtful darky had placed on the animal's back to serve in lieu of a saddle. A sorry picture Captain Tom made, too, when he was mounted ; but he had no choice between going that way and riding double with a private, and that was a thing he could not bring himself to do.

While they were on their way to town Captain Tom made several fruitless attempts to

induce his captors—for that was just what they were—to give him some idea of what he might expect when he presented himself before the major; but although he could not prevail upon them to say a word on that subject, he was able to make a pretty shrewd guess as to the nature of the business in hand, and if he had known that he was going to prison for a long term of years he could not have felt so utterly wretched and disheartened.

“If I were going to jail I might have a chance to get pardoned out,” thought Tom, “but the only way to get out of the army is to be killed or have an arm or leg shot off. I’d be perfectly willing to go if Jeff Davis and all his Cabinet could be compelled to go too. I’m afraid I am in for trouble this time, sure.”

If Captain Tom had any lingering doubts on this point they were dispelled in less than half a minute after he entered the enrolling office. He had never before met the grizzly veteran who sat at Captain Roach’s desk with a multitude of papers before him, and when their short interview was ended Captain Tom hoped from the bottom of his heart that he might