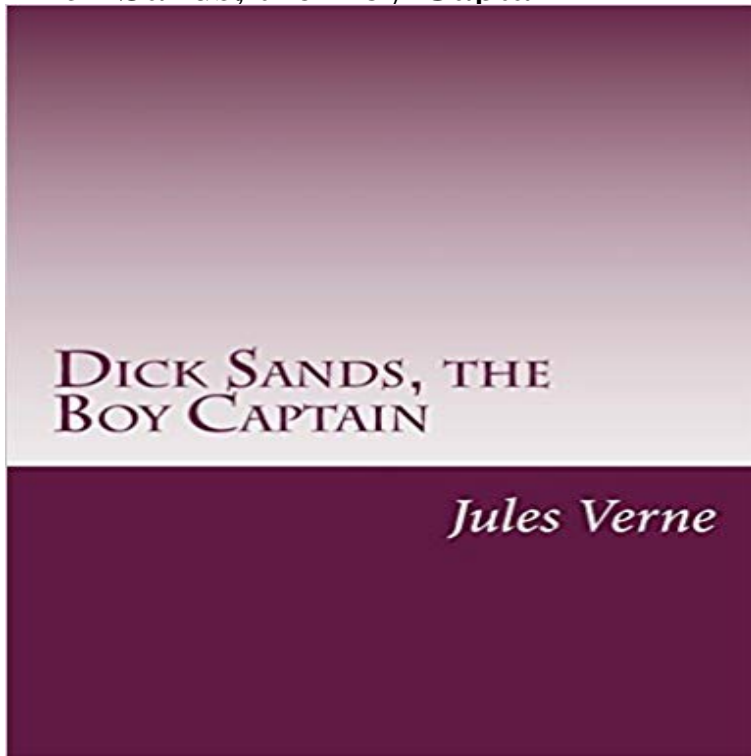


Dick Sands, the Boy Captain



On the 2nd of February, 1873, the Pilgrim, a tight little craft of 400 tons burden, lay in lat. 43 57, S. and long. 165 19, W. She was a schooner, the property of James W. Weldon, a wealthy Californian ship-owner who had fitted her out at San Francisco, expressly for the whale-fisheries in the southern seas. James Weldon was accustomed every season to send his whalers both to the Arctic regions beyond Behring Straits, and to the Antarctic Ocean below Tasmania and Cape Horn; and the Pilgrim, although one of the smallest, was one of the best-going vessels of its class; her sailing-powers were splendid, and her rigging was so adroitly adapted that with a very small crew she might venture without risk within sight of the impenetrable ice-fields of the southern hemisphere: under skilful guidance she could dauntlessly thread her way amongst the drifting ice-bergs that, lessened though they were by perpetual shocks and undermined by warm currents, made their way northwards as far as the parallel of New Zealand or the Cape of Good Hope, to a latitude corresponding to which in the northern hemisphere they are never seen, having already melted away in the depths of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. For several years the command of the Pilgrim had been entrusted to Captain Hull, an experienced seaman, and one of the most dexterous harpooners in Weldon's service. The crew consisted of five sailors and an apprentice. This number, of course, was quite insufficient for the process of whale-fishing, which requires a large contingent both for manning the whale-boats and for cutting up the whales after they are captured; but Weldon, following the example of other owners, found it more economical to embark at San Francisco only just enough men to work the ship to New Zealand, where, from the promiscuous gathering of seamen of well-nigh every nationality, and of needy

emigrants, the captain had no difficulty in engaging as many whalers as he wanted for the season. This method of hiring men who could be at once discharged when their services were no longer required had proved altogether to be the most profitable and convenient.

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