

VIII.—NOTES UPON THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WHALE FISHERY.

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It is not my purpose to go back to the time when whaling was first carried on by the Biscayans, or speak particularly of a later period when England and Holland were engaged in the business, 1598–1611. At this time the Dutch sent one hundred and thirty-three whalers to Spitzbergen, and up to 1782 had captured thirty-three thousand Greenland whales, whose money value was computed at \$100,000,000. These notes have reference to a still later period, relating more especially to the business as carried on in our own country, commencing, perhaps, with the time of John Smith (of Pocahontas memory), when whales were captured along the coast of Maine, the undertaking being attended with great difficulty. Of these voyages there is comparatively little known. In 1670, William Hamilton succeeded in taking the first sperm-aceti whale off Nantucket, and from that time for nearly two hundred years Nantucket successfully pursued the business. It had increased to such dimensions in this and other towns in the State that, in a little over a hundred years, about 1775, Mr. Jefferson made an elaborate report to Congress upon the whale fishery of Massachusetts, and commended it as an enterprise worthy of the fostering care of the Government as a nucleus for American seamen alone. See "Pitkin's Reports."

That our people carried on regularly the business of whaling from the shore in boats as early as 1670, is shown by the following extract from the town records:

"At a town meeting of the trustees, 1693, it was agreed that the pines and undivided wood on Coatue be divided to every man his proportion as soon as it can be with convenience, and until or before that be done, no man shall cut or carry away off the land the said wood, on penalty of five shillings for every load cut or carried away. *Nevertheless*, any freeholder may cut timber for *whale-boats*, or the like, anything on this order to the contrary notwithstanding."

I find, also, by a letter signed by Nathaniel Coffin, son of James, dated June 16, 1699, at Saint Johns, N. F., on board one of our vessels, that they were on a whaling expedition, and had put in there for recruits, which shows that the making of comparatively long voyages was commenced at a much earlier period than is generally supposed.

In 1783 a number of our people, entertaining an idea that the island would not support its increasing population, purchased, with others from Providence and Newport, R. I., and Martha's Vineyard, of Peter Hogeboon, jr., and others, what was then known as Olaverack Landing,* above New York, on the Hudson River. The name was changed to "Hudson" the succeeding year. As early as 1784 many families removed thither from Nantucket, and among them was Alexander Coffin, a famous London packet commander, and a man of sterling worth. Captain Coffin was in Paris at the time of the negotiations between Dr. Franklin and the French Government, pending the treaty between that power and America, and was intrusted by Dr. Franklin with his dispatches to the Continental Congress, then sitting in Philadelphia, announcing his success the instant it was assured. As is well known, Captain Coffin faithfully executed the trust reposed in him. Nathan Coffin, of whom Bancroft (vol. 9, p. 313) speaks as a "hero," was also among those who emigrated to Hudson. He was grandfather of Charles H. Marshall, who established in New York the renowned "Black Ball Line" of Liverpool packets. And then there were the Paddocks, Barnards, Jenkinsons, Gardners, Folgers, Husseys, Worths, Macys, Starbucks, Cartwrights, in whose veins ran some of the best blood of the island. Soon after the settlement of Hudson the business of whaling and sealing upon Chili was commenced, but it was unsuccessful from the start and was soon abandoned. Notwithstanding the ill-success of their first venture, the people of Hudson, in 1830, again attempted to carry on the business, and procured from Nantucket a number of men for the undertaking. The ships Edward, Martha, Alex. Mansfield, Beaver, America, Henry Astor, Huron, George Clinton, and James Monroe were fitted and sent out. The America returned from the Pacific with upwards of three thousand barrels of sperm oil. Poughkeepsie also dispatched ships, N. P. Talmage, Russell, New England, Vermont, and others. After several voyages, both towns abandoned the business. Newbury had a similar experience, sending out the ships North America, Newark, and Russell. In 1817, the city of New York had a hand in the game. Previous to that time Thomas Hazard, esq., had operated from New Bedford, and associated himself with Jacob Barker, his son-in-law, sending out the ships Eliza Barker and Diana, followed soon after by the William Tell, Mobile, Trident, and others. Jacob Barker sent many of his own ships also, always with Nantucket commanders. The business was carried on but a very short time, and the ships were sold to New Bedford.

The whaling from Sag Harbor was commenced with small vessels soon after the American Revolution. Again in 1815, after peace with England, the business was renewed with ships of 300 tons, which were built, or bought new. Capt. Stephen Skinner, of the ship Indian Chief, and others

* Dutch *Klauffer-acht*, meaning eight hills or cliffs.

of the Nantucket commanders were engaged for these important enterprises. The voyages were usually crowned with success. From small beginnings Sag Harbor became a great center for whaling, and she maintained a successful fleet, both in the sperm and right whale fishery, until the "gold fever" developed itself in 1848.

Among the enterprising merchants of this port at the end of Long Island were to be found the Howells, Slates, Mulfords, Huntingtons, Posts, Deerings, and Sherrys, and its noble race of shipmasters was second to none on the continent. In September, 1800, some merchants of Norwich and New London sent the twenty-gun ship *Oneida*, Captain Hubbell, to the coast of Chili on a sealing expedition, building and sending out immediately the ship *Miantonomoh* to the South Pacific Ocean, in charge of Valentine Swain, of Nantucket, on a whaling and sealing voyage. After securing cargoes the ships were to proceed to Canton, dispose of the oil and skins and take for the returned voyage to the United States teas, silks, and nankeens. In 1802 the *Miantonomoh* was captured and condemned by the Spaniards at Valparaiso. Nantucket lost one of her ships about the same time, which was engaged in whaling and sealing, as the former had been. She was named the *Trial*, and was commanded by Thomas Coffin, the father of the late lamented Lucretia Mott. Nothing was ever recovered from them. We had many others in the same employment, *Lady Adams*, *Brothers*, *Favorite*, *Mars*, *Minerva*, &c. The latter ship was commanded by Mayo Folger,* who was afterwards master of the *Topaz*, which belonged to himself and others in Boston. On one of his voyages in the *Topaz*, September, 1808, he discovered Pitcairn's Island, where he found the survivors of the Mutineers of the *Bounty*. This was the first knowledge the world had of the fate of these men since Bligh was set adrift in mid ocean eighteen years before. Upon Captain Folger's arrival in Valparaiso he communicated the news to the British admiral, who immediately dispatched a swift vessel to England with the facts. It created intense excitement at the time.

But to return to New London. In 1805 they bought and sent the ship *Dauphin*, Capt. Laban Williams, to Brazil Banks, and obtained a small voyage. This may be considered the commencement of whaling here, New London. Then they purchased the ship *Leonidas*, and both ships, she and the *Dauphin*, were fitted and sailed in August, 1806, the former commanded by Alexander Douglass, and the latter by Captain Williams. In 1807 both arrived with full cargoes of whale oil, one having about 700 barrels and the other 1,050. The ship *Lydia* was then purchased and the command given to Captain Douglass. The *Dauphin* was given to Joshua Sayer, of Nantucket, and the *Leonidas* to William

* It might not be out of place in this connection to mention the fact that Capt. Mayo Folger was brother of the above-mentioned Capt. Thomas Coffin's wife, who was, of course, the mother of Lucretia Mott. Captain Folger was postmaster at Massalon, Ohio, and died there in 1828.

Barnes. All of the ships came home full in 1808, the first with 900 barrels of whale oil, the second with 1,000, and the third with 1,200. They were then sold to other ports and not much more was done until 1821, when they commenced anew by fitting out the ship *Carrier*, Obed Swain, of Nantucket, for the Pacific Ocean. She returned in 1823 with 2,074 barrels of sperm oil, having been absent twenty-eight months. From this date the merchants of New London put forth all their energies and the town became the third whaling port in the United States, and it may be proud of its record in the pursuit and development of this branch of national industry, as well as of its opulent merchants and capitalists, among whom are the Barnes, Browns, Billings, Lawrences, Smiths, Hovens, Perkins, Debones, Funks, Fitches, Williams, Hanus, and many others.

The ship *Thames*, Capt. Reuben Clasby, of Nantucket, sailed in October, 1822, from New Haven for the Pacific Ocean, having on board the first missionaries for the Sandwich Islands. Revs. Mr. Bingham, Williams, Charles Stewart, and others, with their wives. They landed at Oahu and Lapina in May, 1823. The ship *Helena*, Capt. Naiah Coffin, of Nantucket, also sailed from New Haven for the Pacific. Both ships came home with full cargoes of sperm oil from the coast of Japan, but oil was worth only 38 cents per gallon and the ships were sold to Sag Harbor. Stonington, Mystic, and Bridgeport came along with a successful fleet of whalers, all of which have made quite as big claims as any of the older peoples in this service.

New York, Hudson, Cold Spring, and Greenport have had their day at New Zealand, Falkland Islands, and the Northwest coast. Poughkeepsie, and Wilmington on the Delaware, have had their trials in the game, but of comparatively recent date, and soon abandoned it.

In 1820 Warren, R. I., fitted out the new ship *Rosalie*, Capt. David Easton, of Nantucket. This ship was followed by some of the finest that could be built or bought out of the China or cotton trade, until it was but little behind her neighbors in Connecticut. *Bristol* followed in 1827, with the *Ganges*, purchased in Boston, and the *Bowditch*, a Boston East Indiaman, both ships being commanded by Nantucket men. The *Leonidas*, Captain Lawton, came immediately after, and large sperm whale voyages were obtained by all these ships. Then were added the famed *Corinthian*, and the *Balance*, and James DeWolf's teak ship, *General Jackson*. The *Balance* and *General Jackson* were captured in the war of 1812, and the latter renamed for the hero of New Orleans. She was one hundred and fifty years old when retired from service, the other ninety years old.

Providence, R. I., merchants added a few ships to the sperm whaling grounds, and also to the Arctic fleet, among them the *Liverpool* packet ship *South America*, the splendid ship *Brutus*, &c.

In 1820 Newport, R. I., fitted out her first whale ships, *Frederick Augustus*, Capt. Joseph Earl; *Robinson Potter*, Capt. Reuben Swain;

Carrier, Capt. William Fitzgerald—all the captains hailing from Nantucket. These ships went to the Pacific Ocean, and in due season returned filled with sperm oil. From this beginning sprang quite a numerous fleet of sperm whalers, which was maintained until the decline of whaling in 1850.

As early as the year 1755 New Bedford had a sloop or two engaged in whaling, and between that and 1765 two or three more were fitted out from Dartmouth, as New Bedford was then called. In 1791 the ship *Rebecca*, Captain Halsey, was sent into the Pacific. In 1795 the *Rotches* and *Rodmans*, having left their island home and selected New Bedford as their future abiding place, employed a number of ships independent of their French fishery; but it was not until 1820 that the business assumed any great proportions. In that year the whale fishery was taken up and prosecuted with great spirit, the influx of new elements, both in ownership and masters, not only from Nantucket, but every part of New England, added greatly to the movement. After 1830 the great and brilliant voyages of its *Braganzas*, *Magnolias*, *George Howlands*, *Parkers*, *William Hamiltons*, *Emeralds*, and *Reindeers*, gained in the Pacific Ocean, gave to New Bedford a period of success, made it a tower of strength, and secured for its merchants a reputation not easily attained at the present day. New Bedford still pursues the business with considerable vigor in every part of the globe where it has been found remunerative. *Fair Haven*, opposite New Bedford, *Westport*, and *Fall River*, have all come to number some of the finest ships in their fleets, but, alas, all that spirit may be said to have gone into new channels, more productive of success. *Ichabod* is written on the pillars of their ports.

Boston, in 1820, had her *William Gray* and *Israel Thorndike*, and they fitted out for the Pacific Ocean the ships *Cadmus*, *Nathaniel C. Cary*, *Beverly*, *Elias Suley*, *Hope*, *Jethro Coffin*, *Palladium*, *Alexander Macy*, all the captains being Nantucket men. These ships all filled with sperm oil and returned to Boston. Oil commanding but 33 cents* a gallon, the owners became discouraged and sold the ships. The *Beverly* was sold into the merchant service, and was burned at sea, off *Peru* on a voyage to *Peru* with a valuable cargo, in 1826. The rest of the fleet were whalers' for many years after. But few other whale ships have since been fitted at Boston, hardly enough to make mention of, with the exception perhaps of the *Herald* and *Charles Carroll*, fitted in 1833.

Salem, Plymouth, Newburyport, Mass., Portsmouth, N. H., and Wis-

* Sperm oil has since been sold as high as \$2.40 a gallon. The oil of the ships above mentioned was purchased here at Nantucket by Aaron Mitchell, and from its sale to another firm, Messrs. Gardner & Swift, of this place, grew up the great lawsuit in 1826, known as the "Gardner and Swift case." Hon. Daniel Webster was retained by the Quaker in this and all other business where said Gardner was a party, receiving for his services a fee of \$10,000. The old Quaker employed Mr. Webster in two ship cases then in litigation at Nantucket with insurance offices.

casset, Me., have in the years mentioned, say from 1820 to 1850, turned many of their old East Indiamen, China, cotton, and pepper ships, and European packets into whalers. Some have been successful, but as a general thing the business has declined, the ships have been sold and finally brought up in some far-away port, mostly San Francisco—there to be broken up, and their iron and copper used as a circulating medium, perhaps, in the inner waters of the Chinese Empire.

Nantucket has made its honorable mark in every sea where a vessel could go in pursuit of wealth. A nobler record cannot be shown, and here it must rest, I fear, forever.

In 1785 Mr. William Rotch went to London, and there waited four months upon George III and William Pitt and his council, subject to the call of Pitt at any time. Lord Hawkesbury at length gave him a hearing, but would not listen to Rotch's proposition to bring twenty ships from America with all their material for whaling and enter them free of duty. Mr. Rotch, tired of waiting, and, getting no satisfaction from Hawkesbury, left England on the ship *Maria* for Dunkirk, France. On his arrival in Paris he was granted an early interview by the French minister, who agreed to admit his ships; and, in fact, agreed to all Mr. Rotch demanded, and the business was soon in successful operation. His ships were dispatched to the Pacific, coast of Africa, and Falkland Islands. On the 1st of February, 1792, the ship *Falkland*, Capt. Obed Paddock, arrived at Dunkirk filled with sperm oil. A week later the *Harmony*, Capt. David Starbuck, arrived with a full cargo from Peru. These ships* were among the first that obtained sperm-oil in the Pacific Ocean, and that, too, just under the peaks of the Andes (1789-92). What would Burke have said to that achievement, doubling the stormy cape, and so down to Peru, in the most temperate climate man has yet known? The *Harmony* was afterwards (1796) sunk by a whale on Brazil Banks, which leaped on board in the night. The crew were all saved, being taken on board the ship *Leo*, of Nantucket. Abel Rawson was in command of the *Harmony* at the time. This Captain Rawson kept the Staten Island Light, New York, as late as 1826.

So soon as the British ministry heard that Mr. Rotch and his son Benjamin had left London for France, Lord Hawkesbury sent a courier with dispatches to recall him. On his return to London Mr. Rotch met Mr. Pitt and Lord Hawkesbury, who agreed to allow him to bring thirty ships from America, but Rotch informed him that it was too late, as he had agreed to go to France. The ministry, being dissatisfied with Hawkesbury, desired that Mr. Rotch should give them a detailed account in writing of the whole circumstances, in order that when Parliament met the matter might be laid before them. Mr. Rotch refused, as he did not wish to be instrumental in creating or aiding an opposition

* These two ships rendezvoused at Callao, Peru, together with the ship *Columbia*, of Boston, Captain Gray, who had, in this his second voyage, in 1792, just discovered the Columbia River on the northwest coast.

among the ministry; and thus the matter ended. When the French revolution broke out the Rotchs accepted certain terms from the English Government, and went to Milford Haven with part of their ships. After the revolution in France the Rotch's had two fleets of whalers, one sailing from England, the other from France, and this continued until the death of Mr. Benjamin Rotch in London in 1839. The French fleet continued in existence until the death of Mr. William R. Rodman, a grandson of Mr. Rotch, which event occurred in 1855, the business thus remaining in the family for seventy years, and passing from grandfather to grandson.

While in France Mr. Rotch appeared in the French assembly with a petition for a modification of the conscription and Maniago laws, which should favor the Friends or Quakers, many of whom had emigrated from Nantucket with their families to France. He was listened to with marked attention by all who were in the assembly. Mirabeau was chosen to reply to him, and it was a masterly effort. Edward Everett is quoted as saying that it was the best speech he ever made.

During the war of 1812 Nantucket was attacked at home and abroad. England kept her Scorpions, Nimrods, and Bulldogs hovering around the island, capturing everything inward or outward bound. At times the inhabitants were in extreme distress for want of the bare necessities of life. When peace was declared in February, 1815, there was an unusual demonstration and great rejoicing among the people. The ocean was once more open and free to their ships, and they were not long in sending to sea a new and extensive fleet. We soon had a large number upon Chili, Peru, and what was known as the "off-shore" whaling ground, which extended from near the equator as far west as the Society and Navigator's group of islands. But whales had become scarce, and the oily monsters must be sought after in new seas. In 1820, the ships *Maro* and *Rambler*, of Nantucket, commanded, respectively, by Capts. Joseph Allen and Benjamin Worth, in company with the *Syren*, of London, belonging to Samuel Enderly, Capt. Fred. K. Coffin; Cyrus, Capt. Elisha Folger, jr., and *Balena*, Capt. Edmund Gardner, of New Bedford, rendezvoused at the Sandwich Islands. Here they met Captain Winship, of the ship *O'Cane*, a veteran northwest coast merchantman, who informed them that while crossing on his many voyages from the Sandwich Islands to Canton, China, he observed a great number of sperm whales on what was called the Coast of Japan, in latitude 25° north, longitude 165° east, even up to the Japan Islands. Convinced that the enthusiastic statements of Captain Winship could be relied upon as facts, the several captains hurriedly recruited their ships and sailed into these unfrequented seas. Two of the fleet arriving off the coast of Japan, in the spring of 1820, on the 10th day of May Captain Coffin in the *Syren* saw and struck his first sperm whale; Captain Allen, in the ship *Maro*, of Nantucket, struck the next whale June 1, and both ships were filled with sperm oil in three months after leaving the Sandwich Islands, each ship taking upwards of 1,800 barrels.

The other ships sailed a little to the northward of the Sandwich Islands, meeting good success, coming east and filling up off Cape Saint Lucas, California. All the ships returned home with great cargoes.

We doubt if Nantucket ever, before or since, produced the superiors of these five men in intellect or daring. They were all natives of the island, and after their retirement from the sea lived to great ages, two of them reaching ninety-two years, and the others from seventy-eight to eighty-five years. Each of them had brilliant careers. It was from such men as these that Mr. Seward obtained his information when preparing his great speech asking for Government aid in surveying Behring Strait. His speech was delivered in the United States Senate in 1852. In it he made glowing allusion to the enterprise and daring of Nantucket whalers. Many of our sea captains after their retirement from active labor settled in and around Auburn, and became neighbors of the great Senator, Capt. Fred. Coffin being of the number.

Captain Winship remarked to the writer in the spring of 1835, that he had seen great numbers of sperm whales on the northwest coast, off Kodiak, while passing to the Sandwich Islands, and was certain that they were spermaceti species. Being convinced that there was something to be made out of this, we fitted out the ship Ganges and sent her, in the summer of 1835, to the locality mentioned, in charge of Barzallia T. Folger. In his first report which we received from there, Captain Folger stated that he had seen nothing but right whales. As whale oil and bone were of little value at that period, and as he did not care to lower his boats for them, he had, after taking 300 barrels, dropped down the coast to Pudder Bay, California. The next season, however, he filled his ship with sperm oil off the coast of Japan. The French ship *Ville de Lyon*, of Havre, was the next upon the northwest coast. She also was successful, and was followed in 1840 by the *Elbe*, Captain Waterman, of Poughkeepsie, N. Y., which ship returned home with a full cargo of whale and sperm oil. Since that date whale fishing on the northwest and sea coast of Japan has been prosecuted with wonderful vigor by every place that had a ship to send to sea.

Previous to the voyage to Japan in 1820, before mentioned, Captain Coffin, while making a voyage to the eastward of Cape of Good Hope in the same ship, *Syren*, met with an adventure which came near proving fatal to the whole crew. On a fine day, while near one of the Pilew Islands, all the boats being from the ship in pursuit of whales, and but a small number of men remaining on board, she was taken forcible possession of by the natives of those islands, who drove the men into the rigging for safety. The ship and all on board were now in a perilous position. These naked and howling savages had full command of the ship. When the mate came alongside he comprehended the situation at a glance, and immediately gave orders for the men in the top to open the arm-chests and scatter all the tack-nails they could find down upon the deck. This was promptly done, and the nails poured

down like rain upon the heads of the demons. This was a kind of warfare which they were not prepared for. They could not understand it. The deck was literally covered with tacks, and, being barefooted, the sharp little nails penetrated their feet, while with shrieks and yells of rage and pain they tumbled headlong into the sea, leaving the ship once more in the hands of her rightful owners. The natives, however, did not leave the ship without severely injuring at least one of the crew. While giving his order for the men in the top to scatter down the tacks the mate, Mr. Absalom Bunker, received a severe wound from an arrow just above one of his eyes, which necessitated his return to Nantucket and final retirement from the sea. He died in 1836. He was as capable and energetic a man as ever sailed from Nantucket, but this injury affected him mentally, and never after was he the same man he had formerly been. Mr. Bunker was grandson of Uriah Bunker, who, as previously stated, landed at Nantucket, April 19, 1775, the first load of oil from the Southern hemisphere. At the commencement of hostilities in 1812, England had many whale ships in the Pacific Ocean, most of them commanded by Nantucket men. A few, however, were in charge of Englishmen who had been taught the art of taking whales by Nantucket captains sailing from English ports. Later on in the war these ships, on sailing from England, were armed as privateers, and captured many of our own ships when full of oil and homeward bound. The gallant Porter, however, in the frigate *Essex*, made havoc among them, taking nearly the whole of the British fleet in the Pacific Ocean and running them off to Neuheva, Marquesas, where some were retaken and sent to England; among them the *Seringapatam*, *Sir Andrew Hammond*, *Montezuma*, and *Greenwich*. Among those remaining in our hands was the *Atlantic*, afterwards called the *Essex, jr.* She was a very fast ship, and was taken home by the late Commodore Downs (then first lieutenant of the *Essex*). When Commodore Porter ascertained that some of his captures were commanded by Americans he invited the captains into his cabin and treated them with courtesy and generosity.

The people of Martha's Vineyard were never a sea-going people in early times like their Nantucket neighbors. A few of her citizens came to Nantucket and sailed from here, becoming at once superior commanders, as well as fishermen. In 1816 old Capt. Jethro Daggett bought the New York ship *Apollo*, a small ship, 200 tons, carrying 1,700 barrels, and fitted her out for the Brazilian coast. This was the first enterprise of the kind on the Vineyard of which we have any knowledge. She proceeded on her voyage, but not meeting with success she was taken into Rio Janeiro and fitted for a more extended voyage to the Pacific Ocean and its extensive cruising grounds. In due time the ship returned to Edgartown full, with 1,500 or 1,600 barrels of sperm oil, and to this beginning were added many fine ships, not only to Edgartown but to Holmes Hole, and the island is now noted for its able captains and fine seaman, second to none in America.

Falmouth commenced with a new ship built in 1821, called the Pocahontas, 300 tons. She sailed for the Pacific in charge of F. B. Chase, of Nantucket, and filled with sperm-oil. A fine fleet of live-oak ships was built after this success, consisting of the Uncas, Hobomok, B. Gosnold, Commodore Norris, &c. Some of these ships were upwards of 400 tons and capable of carrying from 3,600 to 4,000 barrels of oil, commanded by other Nantucket men. Some of them are still engaged in whaling from other ports, for now not a ship sails from this port. The same story can be told of Wareham, Mattapoisett, Sippican, and other small places, not a ship belonging now to either of these ports.

Cape Cod is pretty well sustained by her bold Provincetown whale-fishermen. They have a small fleet of schooners, whose cruising ground is chiefly in the Atlantic Ocean, and they have done well in sustaining so large a fleet, considering the many trials they have met and overcome so nobly, both on the sea and on the land. The oil wells of Pennsylvania, war, bad voyages, Alabamas, disasters at sea—all have had their effect on the whale fishery in this and in all other places that have been engaged in this business since the disastrous days of the "California fever."

In 1830 Gloucester took the whaling fever, and the old Mount Wal-laston was purchased of Mr. Crufts, a Russian merchant of Boston. The ship *Louis* was also purchased, and the commands of the two ships were given to Nantucket men. The venture proving unsuccessful, the ships were sold to New Bedford and Salem. Mr. Crufts at the same time sold his ship, with the apostolic name of *St. Peter*, to New Bedford. This gentleman was the contemporary of William Gray, the princely ship owner, better known as Billy Gray, and Benjamin Willis.

Although Mr. Gray's name has been mentioned in this article as being connected with the whale fishery in Boston, in the year 1820, it seems that about this time he offered all his ships then at sea, and to purchase more, if a certain enterprising citizen of Nantucket, personally known to him, would come to Boston, take charge of the fleet, and fit the ships for whalers. Believing that it would be the death-blow to the whaling interests of his native town, the citizen of Nantucket declined the proffered temptation.

Reading the annals of the Nantucket whale fishery, and looking back at the events that have occurred in connection with this gigantic business during the one hundred and seventy-five years of its history, calls up many well remembered scenes and traditions. Many and thrilling are the stories that can be told of incidents which have occurred under the frozen mountains of Disco and Greenland, on the burning coast of Africa and on Brazil, and on the more savage coasts of the Falkland Islands and Patagonia. And what a terrible loss of life and property has there been in the fearful encounters of our hardy seamen with that monster of the deep, the sperm-whale. Of all the different species of whales, the spermaceti is the most savage when aroused.

Instances are on record where, as soon as struck by the harpoon, they have shown fight, and have attacked and crushed into kindling wood one, two, and even three boats in turn, crushing and mangling in their hugh jaws some poor fellow, or with one sweep of their monstrous tails sending whole boats crews to a watery grave.*

There are many living to-day who bear the marks upon their persons of wounds received in these terrible encounters. Some have lost limbs, teeth, had broken bones, and received contusions upon various parts of the body.

Even ships have been attacked by whales, as was the case with the Essex, Captain Pollard, in November, 1820. This ship was nearly full, and about to sail for home. One day, all the boats being off in pursuit of whales, a huge fellow was observed making for the ship, which he struck full on the bow, making her reel and tumble about like a shell. Making off to windward several miles, he turned, and made again for the ship with great speed, staving in her bow. She reeled over and sank to the water's edge. Of course the whole crew were obliged to take to the boats. Their sufferings were incredible, being obliged, in order to sustain life, to eat their own shipmates. Out of a crew of twenty men five only arrived home, three having been left at Dull's Island on the way to the coast of America. No other catastrophe upon the deep ever so touched the hearts of our people. There remains now but one survivor of this ill-fated crew, Capt. Thomas G. Nickerson, of Nantucket.†

Look, too, at the great number of our ships that have foundered at sea, or been wrecked on the coral beds near the equator, or upon the islands all over the Pacific, in some instances every soul on board perishing. And the men who carried on the whale fishery, commanded the ships, composed the crews; what of them? They were inured to every hardship known to sea life, and were heroes whom the world should acknowledge as such. Among them was Capt. Jared Gardner, half-brother to Jacob Barker, who was in command of John Jacob Astor's old tea-ship, then of Hudson, N. Y., in 1834, and who, on the day he was seventy years old, killed and took to his ship a 75-barrel sperm whale. James Josiah Coffin, in command of a ship from London, England, in 1826, killed and took to his ship, on the day he was seventy years old, an 80-barrel sperm whale.

John Paul Jones had five of our men with him on the *Bon Homme Richard* in the English Channel and North Sea. None were found more worthy to take a prize to France than Lieut. Reuben Chase, whom

* When a whale has been found to be bent on mischief a cask is sometimes taken in one of the boats and, at the proper moment, thrown overboard. While the whale is venting his fury upon this bubble the boat is rowed quietly up to the monster, an officer takes the fatal lance and quickly and dexterously brings him to blood and death.

† The ships *Union*, Capt. Edward Gardner, 1807; *Commerce*, Capt. Jesse Bunker, 1813, and *Ann Alexander*, Captain Deblois, 1850, met similar fates.

Cooper has immortalized as "Long Tom Coffin," in his fascinating novel of the Pilot, a sea story that has charmed millions of readers.

It was not until 1849 that the matter was finally adjusted for carrying these prizes into French ports, the men or their families then receiving, through our Government, their share of the prize-money.

There is probably no town on the sea-coast of America that can point to so large a number of her citizens who have died in foreign ports, English, French, and Algeriene prisons. After the Revolution, returning to the town from the Jersey and Newport prison ships, some died in the harbor while in sight of their homes.

One hundred and ten years ago we had our London packets, some fifteen of which were commanded by the most experienced seamen of the place, and we sent to sea one hundred and thirty-five vessels on whaling voyages, which, together with the coasters and smaller craft, required upwards of twenty-two hundred seamen to man them.

The second light-house* in America was built on Brant Point in 1746 at the entrance to our harbor. It was lighted by the merchants of the town for upwards of forty-five years, when it passed under the control of the General Government.

The men of Nantucket were the pioneers and directors of the whale fishery for upwards of one hundred and seventy-five years. At this and every other port that followed it the record is a good one, and will stand forever. Other people having had at times a small degree of success, have claimed more than belonged to them, and would fain leave us in the wake of their recent beginnings. We ask nothing but what belongs to our place and people, and shall maintain at any cost our prerogative as pioneers.

There has been considerable discussion of late years as to who was the first person that struck and succeeded in killing and securing the first sperm whale ever captured in the Pacific Ocean. I have in my possession an authentic letter which gives credit to whom credit is due, and in order to set at rest forever this controversy the true facts of the case are here given. It seems that Samuel Enderly, a famous merchant of London, England, had been for some time in constant communication with the Rotches and others of Nantucket, purchasing of them many and large invoices of oil. Very naturally, he became much interested in the island, and fitted out from time to time many of our commanders for these undertakings in distant seas.

In 1788 Mr. Enderly sent to Brazil Banks the ship Aurelian, commanded by James Shields, who had for his first officer Archelus Hammond. Arriving on the whaling ground too late in the season, Mr. Hammond induced his captain to proceed around Cape Horn into the Pacific Ocean, which they reached in due time and commenced whaling. Mr. Hammond soon after *struck and killed the first spermaceti*

*Brewster light was erected in Boston Harbor, 1715. See Drake's Antiquities of Boston, page 553.

whale. The ship was soon filled with oil and proceeded to Callao, Peru, to recruit, from whence she sailed for London, speaking on the voyage home, off Trinidad, lat. 20°, the ship Hope, Thaddeus Swain, forty-six days from Dunkirk, for Delago Bay, and arriving there in September, 1790.

Mr. Hammond proceeded to Dunkirk, France, and communicated to William Rotch the particulars of his voyage. The ships Falkland and Harmony were then equipped and ready for a voyage to Delago Bay, right whaling, but Mr. Hammond's story influenced Mr. Rotch so much that he decided to send the ships to the Pacific Ocean in pursuit of sperm whales. They were then taken into dock and coppered,* sailing respectively on the 12th and 20th of November, 1790, for their new destination, returning with full cargoes of sperm oil on the 7th and 14th of February, 1792; one having 1,200 and the other 1,600 barrels. Some of these facts were doubtless communicated to our people at Nantucket by Mr. Rotch, for in 1791 there were fitted out from here the Beaver, Paul Worth, Washington, George Bunker, Hector, Thomas Brock, new ships, and the Rebecca, Seth Folger, Warren, Robert Meaday, Favorite, and Obed Barnard, old ships, and all sailed for the Pacific Ocean.

In order that some idea may be formed of the proportions to which this great enterprise attained, attention is called to the following facts: In 1850 there were engaged in the whale fishery upwards of seven hundred ships, brigs, and schooners belonging to the United States, and in 1882, *not one hundred are left*. In 1843 167,000 barrels of sperm oil were imported, and in 1847 313,000 barrels of whale oil. These were the largest importations ever made. The greatest amount of sperm oil ever taken by a ship on any voyage was 4,181 barrels, and of whale oil 7,000 barrels, the first amount being secured by ship William Hamilton, of New Bedford, commanded by Capt. William Swain, of Nantucket, and belonging to Isaac Howland & Co.

The writer cannot conclude this article without giving some of the incidents connected with the fishery that was carried on from London, through the influence of William Rotch, in his many shipments of spermaceti oil from Nantucket to the merchants of that city, Messrs. Samuel Enderly, Thomas Dickerson, Barnard & Harrison, Chapman & Dickerson, and others, as appears from evidences in his possession. Shipments were made to London as early as 1720, and numerous well-laden ships were sent from here between 1765 and 1800; at that date they obtained all the oils they required by their own importations direct from the South Seas. About this time a ship sailed from London, in charge of one of the Nantucket captains, for the east coast of the Cape of Good Hope and Madagascar, on a sealing and whaling voyage. When the

* Ships were coppered as a preventive against the encroachment of worms, and this was only done when the ships were sent into the Pacific on voyages of a year or more. In the shorter voyages the bottoms of the ships were tallowed, tarred, or painted.

ship had been absent from London eighteen months, receiving no news of her, and supposing her to be lost, the owners became discouraged and offered her for sale at "Doctor's Commons," the great mart in London for sales of prizes and for matters relating to commerce.

Mellish, the great London victualler, who supplied the Government with beef for the army and navy, hearing that the ship was to be sold, determined to purchase her, if some one would share the venture with him. He accordingly called on Mr. Bennett, a blacksmith, who had a shop near Wapping, and said to him, "Let's buy this venture." Bennett had by hard work and diligent industry saved a few thousand pounds, and immediately acceded to Mellish's proposition. "All right," said Mr. Bennett; the sum was fixed which they were willing to pay, and Mr. Mellish departed for Doctor's Commons. He soon returned and informed Mr. Bennett that they had become the successful purchasers of the supposed lost ship, the price paid being £1,000 (\$5,000). In three weeks Mr. Mellish was back again in Bennett's shop, and commenced to banter upon his or their folly. "Are you sick of your bargain?" said the matter-of-fact mechanic, "and if so, what will you sell out for?" "I will sell for £400," Mellish replied. "I will take her," said Bennett. The papers were made, Bennett paid down his hard earned guineas, and the "venture" was his, Mr. Mellish going away this time from Mr. Bennett's shop a poorer man by some \$500 than on his first visit. Three days after this transaction the missing ship anchored at Gravesend with a full cargo of oil, besides seventy thousand seal-skins, and Mr. Bennett, now famous and no longer obliged to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, found himself enormously rich. All of this valuable cargo had been secured at the Crozette Islands, in the Indian Ocean.*

There were at this time in London two Nantucket men, Ransom Jones and Benjamin Swift, both men of superior endowments, who had just arrived from Delago Bay on a whaling voyage. The now renowned Mr. Bennett offered to each the command of a ship, and the offer being accepted he empowered them to purchase two Danish sloops of war then about to be sold at Doctor's Commons by the British Government. The ships were bought, and in due time sailed for Madagascar, the Crozettes, and Desolation Islands. Jones called his ship the Africa, and Swift named his the Brook Watson,† after a son-in-law of Mr. Bennett.

* A picture of this ship now hangs in the library of the Nantucket Athenaeum.

† In 1833 Mr. Mellish was the owner of the ship Partridge when she arrived from the Pacific Ocean in command of Capt. Noah Pease Folger, a Nantucket man. The voyage had been a protracted and unsuccessful one, and was, of course, unsatisfactory to Mr. Mellish. He denounced Folger upon 'Change, which so irritated Folger that he procured a pistol and upon meeting Mellish fired at him, the ball cutting some of the hair from his head and making a slight scratch. Folger was arrested, tried, and sentenced to Newgate for life. An influence was brought to bear upon the King, William IV (who, as Duke of Clarence, when an admiral, had met on the ocean and in port many Nantucket captains), for a commutation of his (Folger's) sentence. The

In thirteen months the *Africa* returned to London with 7,000 *barrels sperm whale and seal oil, and 70,000 seal skins*. The *Brook Watson* went into Delago Bay, where Captain Swift was taken sick with the African fever, died, and was buried; but he did not die alone. In the bay at the time were the ships *Cyrus*, *Archelus Hammond* (before mentioned), *Dolphin*, *Stephen West*, and *Paul West*, and a host of kindly and brave men performed the last sad rites for their fellow townsman, under the burning tropical sun, in a strange and far-away country. The mate of the *Brook Watson* took charge of her, sailing from Delago Bay to the east of Cape of Good Hope, where he obtained 1,300 barrels of oil, arriving safely in London, making, with this addition, Mr. Bennett *the richest commoner in England*. He subsequently fitted out a great many whalers, and there have been seen at one time (1824) at the Sandwich Islands twenty of these ships, among which may be mentioned the *Royal George*, *Recovery*, *Daniel 4th*, *Lady Amherst*, &c.

The *first ship* that ever entered the harbor of Nantucket was the *Nep-tune*, October 30, 1765, a London packet commanded by Nathan Coffin, previously mentioned. On her first voyage out she took from Nantucket a load of sperm oil, consigned to *Barnard & Harrison, of London*. Previous to this date we had only brigs, schooners, and sloops, and after 1765 nearly all of these brigs were rigged into ships.

The ship *Barclay*, which Mr. William Rotch had ordered to be built while he was in France in 1793, sailed from London in 1795, in command of David Swain, of Nantucket, bringing Mr. Rotch as passenger to Boston, where she arrived after a stormy passage of sixty days. October 23, 1799, the *Barclay*, under command of Griffin Barney, of Nantucket, sailed from New Bedford for the coast of Ohili on a sealing voyage. She filled with skins off St. Felix, and proceeded to Canton, China, where she disposed of the skins, and returned to New Bedford with a rich cargo. She was engaged in sperm whaling in the Pacific Ocean for many years, after this always obtaining valuable cargoes. In 1814 she was captured by the Spaniards, who nearly succeeded in taking her into Callao, when the late gallant Commodore David Porter, of the frigate *Essex*, recaptured her, cutting her out from under the guns of the fortifications of that fort, and restoring her to Captain Randall, who was in command when she was captured. She arrived safely in New Bedford full of sperm oil. She was finally broken up at New Bedford in 1864.

When our ships first appeared off the coast of Peru, in the latter part of the last century, the Spanish Government, learning the object of their

King was prevailed upon to pardon Folger on condition that he leave England forever, which he agreed to, and returned to Nantucket, where he died December 7, 1837.

The *Partridge* was a sister ship to *La Eagle*, captured from the Danes at Copenhagen in 1807. In 1824 *La Eagle*, in command of Capt. Valentine Starbuck, another Nantucket man, took as passengers to London the king and queen of the Sandwich Islands, both of whom died in London of the measles. Captain Folger was a nephew of Noah Pease, who for many years was a resident of London, and a successful ship-master out of that port, in the South Seawhaling.

visit, immediately dispatched two frigates from Spain to prevent their whaling around the shores or near the coast of Chili or Peru. Several captures were made and carried into port as lawful prizes, among which was the Beaver,* Paul Worth, of Nantucket.

After some detention and a great deal of negotiation she was released and arrived home in 1793, with a full cargo of sperm oil.

I must not forget to relate that in one of the interviews William Rotch had with George III, Pitt, and Lord Hawkesbury, upon the fishing privileges, and in which Mr. Rotch strongly urged the admission of twenty ships from Nantucket, with all their outfits, free of duty, the King demanded of Rotch what equivalent he expected to give if he was granted all the boons he asked for: "*I am going to give thy Majesty the young men from my native isle,*" was the answer received by his Imperial Highness from the sturdy old Quaker republican, and sure enough, in time, London saw a host of them.

One more fact and I am done. The first ship to cross the equator to the southern hemisphere was the Amazon, commanded by Capt. Uriah Bunker, who obtained a full ship, and anchored at Nantucket bar April 19, 1775, *the day on which the battle of Lexington was fought.*

These notes are not given with the idea that they make a complete history of the whale fishery. A hundred volumes could be written and a hundred writers might spend their lives in weaving the halo of romance about these ships and their commanders, and make stories to which those of the Pilot, the Phantom ship, and Sinbad the Sailor are as children's prattle. Then the half would not have been told of this gigantic undertaking, which required so much capital, so much skill and daring, which sent ships into every sea, even into the ends of the earth, ships manned by a set of heroes who braved every danger and suffered every hardship. These notes are given here as simple facts, in order to rescue them from that oblivion and forgetfulness to which they might else be consigned, and for the benefit of those who take an interest in the noble men who go down to the sea in ships.

JANUARY 16, 1883.

* This ship was the namesake of the one which assisted in making the brew of fragrant bohea, whose fumes wafted across the Atlantic, set the nerves of all Europe a tingle, as well as our own, only, however, by putting it overboard.