# ***Chapter VI***

## *The Street*

If I had been astonished at first catching a glimpse of so outlandish an individual as Queequeg circulating among the polite society of a civilized town, that astonishment soon departed upon taking my first daylight stroll through the streets of New Bedford.

Nondescripts: people lacking distinct characteristics

Broadway: a main street in Manhattan

Chestnut Street: a main street in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Regent Street: a main shopping street in London, England

Lascar: a sailor from India on a European ship

Malays: Malaysians

Bombay: now Mumbai

Apollo Green: a parade ground in Mumbai

Water street: many port towns have a "Water Street," but this may refer to the one in [Liverpool, England,](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liverpool) an elegant shopping street in Melville's day

[Wapping:](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wapping) part of the Docklands area of London

Tongatabooarrs: natives of Tongataboo Island of [Tonga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tonga)

Erromanggoans: natives of Erromango Island in [Vanuatu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vanuatu) in the South Pacific

Pannangians: maybe natives of [Penang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penang) on the northwest coast of Malaysia

Brighggians: scholars don't know what this refers to

In thoroughfares nigh the docks, any considerable seaport will frequently offer to view the queerest looking nondescripts from foreign parts. Even in Broadway and Chestnut streets, Mediterranean mariners will sometimes jostle the affrighted ladies. Regent street is not unknown to Lascars and Malays; and at Bombay, in the Apollo Green, live Yankees have often scared the natives. But New Bedford beats all Water street and Wapping. In these last-mentioned haunts you see only sailors; but in New Bedford, actual cannibals stand chatting at street corners; savages outright; many of whom yet carry on their bones unholy flesh. It makes a stranger stare.

But, besides the Feegeeans, Tongatabooarrs, Erromanggoans, Pannangians, and Brighggians, and, besides the wild specimens of the whaling-craft which unheeded reel about the streets, you will see other sights still more curious, certainly more comical.

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Fishery: the whaling industry

Swallow-tailed coat: a tailcoat

[Sou'wester:](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sou%27wester) a hat made of flexible, waterproof material, with a wide brim in the back

Bombazine: twill fabric made of silk, wool, or both

There weekly arrive in this town scores of green Vermonters and New Hampshire men, all athirst for gain and glory in the fishery. They are mostly young, of stalwart frames; fellows who have felled forests, and now seek to drop the axe and snatch the whale-lance. Many are as green as the Green Mountains whence they came. In some things you would think them but a few hours old. Look there! that chap strutting round the corner. He wears a beaver hat and swallow-tailed coat, girdled with a sailor-belt and sheath-knife. Here comes another with a sou'-wester and a bombazine cloak.

Dog-days: the hottest days of summer

Bespeaking: having tailored

Straps: suspenders

Hay-Seed: a rube or hick

No town-bred dandy will compare with a country-bred one—I mean a downright bumpkin dandy—a fellow that, in the dog-days, will mow his two acres in buckskin gloves for fear of tanning his hands. Now when a country dandy like this takes it into his head to make a distinguished reputation, and joins the great whale-fishery, you should see the comical things he does upon reaching the seaport. In bespeaking his sea-outfit, he orders bell-buttons to his waistcoats; straps to his canvas trowsers. Ah, poor Hay-Seed! how bitterly will burst those straps in the first howling gale, when thou art driven, straps, buttons, and all, down the throat of the tempest.

Howling: desolate

[Canaan:](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canaan) the land that now includes Israel. In [Deuteronomy 8:8,](http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=Deu&c=8&v=8&t=KJV#8) this promised land is described as "a land of oil olive," among other things

Patrician-like: aristocratic

Scraggy: ragged, bare

Scoria: a cindery lava-based rock

But think not that this famous town has only harpooneers, cannibals, and bumpkins to show her visitors. Not at all. Still New Bedford is a queer place. Had it not been for us whalemen, that tract of land would this day perhaps have been in as howling condition as the coast of Labrador. As it is, parts of her back country are enough to frighten one, they look so bony. The town itself is perhaps the dearest place to live in, in all New England. It is a land of oil, true enough; but not like Canaan; a land, also, of corn and wine. The streets do not run with milk; nor in the spring-time do they pave them with fresh eggs. Yet, in spite of this, nowhere in all America will you find more patrician-like houses; parks and gardens more opulent, than in New Bedford. Whence came they? how planted upon this once scraggy scoria of a country?

Go and gaze upon the iron emblematical harpoons round yonder lofty mansion, and your question will be answered. Yes; all these brave houses and flowery gardens came from the

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Herr Alexander: [Alexander Heimbürger](http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=de&u=http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Heimb%25C3%25BCrger&ei=IfXUSsb2BY63lAej7OGcCQ&sa=X&oi=translate&resnum=5&ct=result&ved=0CBgQ7gEwBA&prev=/search%3Fq%3D%2522Alexander%2BHeimb%25C3%25BCrger%2522%2B%2522herr%2Balexander%2522%26hl%3Den) (1819-1909), a world-famous German magician

Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans. One and all, they were harpooned and dragged up hither from the bottom of the sea. Can Herr Alexander perform a feat like that?

Dowers: dowries

Spermaceti: the white, waxy substance found in the head of the sperm whale. This whale got its name from the fact that this substance resembles semen

Superinduced: introduced in addition

[Seventh heavens:](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Heavens) the uppermost layer of heaven, where God dwells

Puritanic sands: the beaches where the [Puritans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puritans) had settled

In New Bedford, fathers, they say, give whales for dowers to their daughters, and portion off their nieces with a few porpoises a-piece. You must go to New Bedford to see a brilliant wedding; for, they say, they have reservoirs of oil in every house, and every night recklessly burn their lengths in spermaceti candles.

In summer time, the town is sweet to see; full of fine maples—long avenues of green and gold. And in August, high in air, the beautiful and bountiful horse-chestnuts, candelabra-wise, proffer the passer-by their tapering upright cones of congregated blossoms. So omnipotent is art; which in many a district of New Bedford has superinduced bright terraces of flowers upon the barren refuse rocks thrown aside at creation's final day.

And the women of New Bedford, they bloom like their own red roses. But roses only bloom in summer; whereas the fine carnation of their cheeks is perennial as sunlight in the seventh heavens. Elsewhere match that bloom of theirs, ye cannot, save in Salem, where they tell me the young girls breathe such musk, their sailor sweethearts smell them miles off shore, as though they were drawing nigh the odorous Moluccas instead of the Puritanic sands.

Ishmael's description of cannibals--"savages outright; many of whom yet carry on their bones unholy flesh" reminds me of the lines from Antony & Cleopatra:

... on the Alps It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh, Which some did die to look on:      [ Act I, Scene IV]

This is usually taken to refer to cannibalism. But there is also Jude 1:7: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." (Recall that the preacher's text earlier was also from the first chapter of Jude.)

Ishmael refers to "the Feegeeans, Tongatobooarrs, Erromanggoans, Pannangians, and Brighggians." The best I can figure out, these are what we would call today (respectively) Fijians; Tongans; natives of Erromango Island, Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides); natives of either Penang (Panang), Malaysia, or of Pango Pango (there is some dispute as to which Melville meant); and (possibly) a native of the New Hebrides. Some feel that Melville is just making these up, but given the bizarre spellings distant lands had in the 19th century, these could well be as indicated.

The green Vermonter "wears a beaver hat and swallow-tailed coat, girdled with a sailor-belt and sheath-knife. Here comes another with a sou'-wester and a bombazine cloak." The former is clearly improperly dressed for the rigors of a whaling ship (one can just imagine those long tails flapping in everyone's face in a brisk wind!), and bombazine is a dressy fabric, as opposed to the bearskin of Ishmael's "shaggy jacket".

Imagine walking out of a door in a seaport town and seeing not only sailors everywhere but cannibals, savages, and other “wild specimens”—Welcome to New Bedford, a “land of oil,” and “patrician like houses,” where the women “bloom like their own red roses”—marveling at the sites, Ishmael makes fun of the men “as green as the Green Mountains” (referencing the newness of the men, their change in profession from lands of higher elevation, and their ignorance of the oceans) and the “bumpkin dandies” (country folk all dressed up to plunge headlong into the tempest)—the pride of New Bedford revolves around the opulence of the town and the variety that the town has to offer, all of which it owes to the whale-fishery—”Go and gaze upon the iron emblematical harpoons round yonder lofty mansion, and your question will be answered. Yes; all these brave houses and flowery gardens came from the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans. One and all, they were harpooneed and dragged up hither from the bottom of the sea.”—without whaling, New Bedford “would this day have been in as howling condition as the coast of Labrador”—Bottom line: New Bedford is bomb dot com, but Ishmael still doesn’t want to sail from here