# ***Chapter VIII***

## *The Pulpit*

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Regardful: mindful

Verdure: greenery

Engrafted: grafted on, affixed

Imputable: attributable

Tarpaulin: strong, flexible, water-resistant material such as waterproofed canvas

Pilot cloth: a thick blue cloth used for sailors' coats and jackets

I had not been seated very long ere a man of a certain venerable robustness entered; immediately as the storm-pelted door flew back upon admitting him, a quick regardful eyeing of him by all the congregation, sufficiently attested that this fine old man was the chaplain. Yes, it was the famous Father Mapple, so called by the whalemen, among whom he was a very great favorite. He had been a sailor and a harpooneer in his youth, but for many years past had dedicated his life to the ministry. At the time I now write of, Father Mapple was in the hardy winter of a healthy old age; that sort of old age which seems merging into a second flowering youth, for among all the fissures of his wrinkles, there shone certain mild gleams of a newly developing bloom—the spring verdure peeping forth even beneath February's snow. No one having previously heard his history, could for the first time behold Father Mapple without the utmost interest, because there were certain engrafted clerical peculiarities about him, imputable to that adventurous maritime life he had led. When he entered I observed that he carried no umbrella, and certainly had not come in his carriage, for his tarpaulin hat ran down with melting sleet, and his great pilot cloth jacket seemed almost to drag him to the floor with the weight of the water it had absorbed. However, hat and coat and overshoes were one by one removed, and hung up in a little space in an adjacent corner; when, arrayed in a decent suit, he quietly approached the pulpit.

Side ladder: a ladder that hangs over the side of a boat

Like most old fashioned pulpits, it was a very lofty one, and since a regular stairs to such a height would, by its long angle with the floor, seriously contract the already small area of the chapel, the architect, it seemed, had acted upon the hint of Father Mapple, and finished the pulpit without a stairs, substituting a perpendicular side ladder, like those used in mounting

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Man-ropes: ropes alongside a ladder that serve as handrails

Headed: topped off

Main-top: the main-top mast, which is the second, upper section of a ship's main mast

a ship from a boat at sea. The wife of a whaling captain had provided the chapel with a handsome pair of red worsted man-ropes for this ladder, which, being itself nicely headed, and stained with a mahogany color, the whole contrivance, considering what manner of chapel it was, seemed by no means in bad taste. Halting for an instant at the foot of the ladder, and with both hands grasping the ornamental knobs of the man-ropes, Father Mapple cast a look upwards, and then with a truly sailorlike but still reverential dexterity, hand over hand, mounted the steps as if ascending the main-top of his vessel.

Rounds: rungs

Quebec: Old Quebec City in the province of Quebec, Canada, is a fortified, walled city

The perpendicular parts of this side ladder, as is usually the case with swinging ones, were of cloth-covered rope, only the rounds were of wood, so that at every step there was a joint. At my first glimpse of the pulpit, it had not escaped me that however convenient for a ship, these joints in the present instance seemed unnecessary. For I was not prepared to see Father Mapple after gaining the height, slowly turn round, and stooping over the pulpit, deliberately drag up the ladder step by step, till the whole was deposited within, leaving him impregnable in his little Quebec.

The word: that is, the Word of God

[Ehrenbreitstein:](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ehrenbreitstein) a fortress on the Rhine River near Koblenz, Germany

I pondered some time without fully comprehending the reason for this. Father Mapple enjoyed such a wide reputation for sincerity and sanctity, that I could not suspect him of courting notoriety by any mere tricks of the stage. No, thought I, there must be some sober reason for this thing; furthermore, it must symbolize something unseen. Can it be, then, that by that act of physical isolation, he signifies his spiritual withdrawal for the time, from all outward worldly ties and connexions? Yes, for replenished with the meat and wine of the word, to the faithful man of God, this pulpit, I see, is a self-containing stronghold—a lofty Ehrenbreitstein, with a perennial well of water within the walls.

Cenotaph: a monument to someone buried elsewhere

Lee coast: a shore downwind of the ship

But the side ladder was not the only strange feature of the place, borrowed from the chaplain's former sea-farings. Between the marble cenotaphs on either hand of the pulpit, the wall which formed its back was adorned with a large painting representing a gallant ship beating against a terrible storm off a lee coast of black rocks and snowy breakers. But high above the

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The Victory's plank where Nelson fell: British Vice-Admiral [Horatio Nelson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horatio_Nelson) (1758-1805), a hero of the Napoleonic Wars, was killed on the deck of his ship, Victory, during the Battle of Trafalgar

flying scud and dark-rolling clouds, there floated a little isle of sunlight, from which beamed forth an angel's face; and this bright face shed a distinct spot of radiance upon the ship's tossed deck, something like that silver plate now inserted into the Victory's plank where Nelson fell. "Ah, noble ship," the angel seemed to say, "beat on, beat on, thou noble ship, and bear a hardy helm; for lo! the sun is breaking through; the clouds are rolling off—serenest azure is at hand."

Bluff: steep

Fiddle-headed beak: a [decorative wooden scroll](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA01/Index/ships/billet/billet1.html) placed at the very front of a ship, in place of a figurehead

Nor was the pulpit itself without a trace of the same sea-taste that had achieved the ladder and the picture. Its panelled front was in the likeness of a ship's bluff bows, and the Holy Bible rested on the projecting piece of scroll work, fashioned after a ship's fiddle-headed beak.

Descried: caught sight of, noticed

Prow: the part of the ship's bow that is above water

What could be more full of meaning?—for the pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world. From thence it is the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt. From thence it is the God of breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favorable winds. Yes, the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow.

What denomination is the Whaleman's Chapel? I suppose it could be a non-denominational chapel as one finds on military bases, but what of Father Mapple's honorific? Most Protestant denominations do not refer to preachers as "Father"; the only ones I know of that do so are the Anglicans and Episcopalians, and the chapel hardly seems to belong to either of them.

"For I was not prepared to see Father Mapple after gaining the height, slowly turn round, and stooping over the pulpit, deliberately drag up the ladder step by step, till the whole was deposited within, leaving him impregnable in his little Quebec." Quebec (or rather, Quebec City) has had forts on its location since the 16th century, and is best known for the Battle of the Plains of Abraham (1759) in the Seven Years War when the English General Wolfe defeated the French General Montcalm. During the American Revolution, American troops attacked the fort, but failed to take it.

Another fortress is described: "Yes, for replenished with the meat and wine of the word, to the faithful man of God, this pulpit, I see, is a self-containing stronghold--a lofty Ehrenbreitstein, with a perennial well of water within the walls." Ehrenbreitstein Fortress is on the Rhine, opposite the city of Koblenz, originally built around 1000 C.E. However, its water supply is a series of cisterns capable of holding a three years' supply of water. The water itself comes from springs outside the walls.

There is an interesting story to go with, "[And] this bright face shed a distinct spot of radiance upon the ship's tossed deck, something like that silver plate now inserted into the Victory's plank where Nelson fell." Shortly after the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, the ship's carpenter made a round brass plaque that said "Here Nelson fell" with the date and nailed it to the quarterdeck. Some time in the middle of the 19th century it was removed and remained in private hands until it was recently auctioned. Melville probably did not know of its removal, and also mistakenly thought it was silver.

"The ribs and terrors in the whale,

Arched over me a dismal gloom,

While all God's sun-lit waves rolled by,

And lift me deepening down to doom.

"I saw the opening maw of hell,

With endless pains and sorrows there;

Which none but they that feel can tell--

Oh, I was plunging to despair.

"In black distress, I called my God,

When I could scarce believe him mine,

He bowed his ear to my complaints--

No more the whale did me confine.

"With speed he flew to my relief,

As on a radiant dolphin borne;

Awful, yet bright, as lightning shone

The face of my Deliverer God.

"My song for ever shall record

That terrible, that joyful hour;

I give the glory to my God,

His all the mercy and the power."

[T]he famous Father Mapple” enters the chapel, soaking wet (Ishmael attributes his maritime history as the cause of his not carrying an umbrella) —“a sailor and a harpooneer in his youth,” who had “for many years past […] dedicated himself to the ministry”—he ascends to the pulpit, which is designed much like a cross-section of a ship, side ladder and all, sticking out of the wall—Father Mapple scurries up the rope ladder to the pulpit and pulls it up behind him, isolating himself in this “lofty Ehrenbreitstein, with a perennial well of water within the walls”—Ishmael perceives the “act of physical separation” as signifying a “spiritual withdrawl […] from all outward worldly ties and connexions”—the rest of the chapel shows the influence of “the same sea-taste”—there’s a large painting depicting a tossed ship in stormy waters—”the Holy Bible rested on a projecting piece of scroll work, fashioned after [a ship’s fiddle-headed beak](http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/62600/62605/62605_fiddle-head.htm)“—how fitting and all full of meaning, Ishmael reflects; the pulpit is the foremost part of God’s creation—“The world’s a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow.”—the ocean shapes every aspect of life in New Bedford, and this is shown even in worship.