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Title: Moby Dick; Or, The Whale

Author: Herman Melville

Release date: July 1, 2001 [eBook #2701]

Most recently updated: August 18, 2021

Language: English

\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOBY DICK; OR, THE WHALE \*\*\*

MOBY-DICK;

or, THE WHALE.

By Herman Melville

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Original Transcriber’s Notes:

This text is a combination of etexts, one from the now-defunct ERIS

project at Virginia Tech and one from Project Gutenberg’s archives. The

proofreaders of this version are indebted to The University of Adelaide

Library for preserving the Virginia Tech version. The resulting etext

was compared with a public domain hard copy version of the text.

ETYMOLOGY.

(Supplied by a Late Consumptive Usher to a Grammar School.)

The pale Usher—threadbare in coat, heart, body, and brain; I see him

now. He was ever dusting his old lexicons and grammars, with a queer

handkerchief, mockingly embellished with all the gay flags of all the

known nations of the world. He loved to dust his old grammars; it

somehow mildly reminded him of his mortality.

“While you take in hand to school others, and to teach them by what

name a whale-fish is to be called in our tongue, leaving out, through

ignorance, the letter H, which almost alone maketh up the

signification of the word, you deliver that which is not true.”

—\_Hackluyt.\_

“WHALE. \* \* \* Sw. and Dan. \_hval\_. This animal is named from

roundness or rolling; for in Dan. \_hvalt\_ is arched or vaulted.”

—\_Webster’s Dictionary.\_

“WHALE. \* \* \* It is more immediately from the Dut. and Ger. \_Wallen\_;

A.S. \_Walw-ian\_, to roll, to wallow.” —\_Richardson’s Dictionary.\_

חו, \_Hebrew\_.

ϰητος, \_Greek\_.

CETUS, \_Latin\_.

WHŒL, \_Anglo-Saxon\_.

HVALT, \_Danish\_.

WAL, \_Dutch\_.

HWAL, \_Swedish\_.

WHALE, \_Icelandic\_.

WHALE, \_English\_.

BALLENA, \_Spanish\_.

PEKEE-NUEE-NUEE, \_Fegee\_.

PEHEE-NUEE-NUEE, \_Erromangoan\_.

EXTRACTS. (Supplied by a Sub-Sub-Librarian).

It will be seen that this mere painstaking burrower and grub-worm of

a poor devil of a Sub-Sub appears to have gone through the long

Vaticans and street-stalls of the earth, picking up whatever random

allusions to whales he could anyways find in any book whatsoever,

sacred or profane. Therefore you must not, in every case at least,

take the higgledy-piggledy whale statements, however authentic, in

these extracts, for veritable gospel cetology. Far from it. As

touching the ancient authors generally, as well as the poets here

appearing, these extracts are solely valuable or entertaining, as

affording a glancing bird’s eye view of what has been promiscuously

said, thought, fancied, and sung of Leviathan, by many nations and

generations, including our own.

So fare thee well, poor devil of a Sub-Sub, whose commentator I am.

Thou belongest to that hopeless, sallow tribe which no wine of this

world will ever warm; and for whom even Pale Sherry would be too

rosy-strong; but with whom one sometimes loves to sit, and feel

poor-devilish, too; and grow convivial upon tears; and say to them

bluntly, with full eyes and empty glasses, and in not altogether

unpleasant sadness—Give it up, Sub-Subs! For by how much the more

pains ye take to please the world, by so much the more shall ye for

ever go thankless! Would that I could clear out Hampton Court and the

Tuileries for ye! But gulp down your tears and hie aloft to the

royal-mast with your hearts; for your friends who have gone before

are clearing out the seven-storied heavens, and making refugees of

long-pampered Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael, against your coming.

Here ye strike but splintered hearts together—there, ye shall strike

unsplinterable glasses!

EXTRACTS.

“And God created great whales.” —\_Genesis\_.

“Leviathan maketh a path to shine after him; One would think the deep

to be hoary.” —\_Job\_.

“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.”

—\_Jonah\_.

“There go the ships; there is that Leviathan whom thou hast made to

play therein.” —\_Psalms\_.

“In that day, the Lord with his sore, and great, and strong sword,

shall punish Leviathan the piercing serpent, even Leviathan that

crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.”

—\_Isaiah\_.

“And what thing soever besides cometh within the chaos of this

monster’s mouth, be it beast, boat, or stone, down it goes all

incontinently that foul great swallow of his, and perisheth in the

bottomless gulf of his paunch.” —\_Holland’s Plutarch’s Morals\_.

“The Indian Sea breedeth the most and the biggest fishes that are:

among which the Whales and Whirlpooles called Balaene, take up as

much in length as four acres or arpens of land.” —\_Holland’s Pliny\_.

“Scarcely had we proceeded two days on the sea, when about sunrise a

great many Whales and other monsters of the sea, appeared. Among the

former, one was of a most monstrous size.... This came towards us,

open-mouthed, raising the waves on all sides, and beating the sea

before him into a foam.” —\_Tooke’s Lucian\_. “\_The True History\_.”

“He visited this country also with a view of catching horse-whales,

which had bones of very great value for their teeth, of which he

brought some to the king.... The best whales were catched in his own

country, of which some were forty-eight, some fifty yards long. He

said that he was one of six who had killed sixty in two days.”

—\_Other or Other’s verbal narrative taken down from his mouth by King

Alfred, A.D.\_ 890.

“And whereas all the other things, whether beast or vessel, that

enter into the dreadful gulf of this monster’s (whale’s) mouth, are

immediately lost and swallowed up, the sea-gudgeon retires into it in

great security, and there sleeps.” —MONTAIGNE. —\_Apology for Raimond

Sebond\_.

“Let us fly, let us fly! Old Nick take me if it is not Leviathan

described by the noble prophet Moses in the life of patient Job.”

—\_Rabelais\_.

“This whale’s liver was two cartloads.” —\_Stowe’s Annals\_.

“The great Leviathan that maketh the seas to seethe like boiling

pan.” —\_Lord Bacon’s Version of the Psalms\_.

“Touching that monstrous bulk of the whale or ork we have received

nothing certain. They grow exceeding fat, insomuch that an incredible

quantity of oil will be extracted out of one whale.” —\_Ibid\_.

“\_History of Life and Death\_.”

“The sovereignest thing on earth is parmacetti for an inward bruise.”

—\_King Henry\_.

“Very like a whale.” —\_Hamlet\_.

“Which to secure, no skill of leach’s art Mote him availle, but to

returne againe To his wound’s worker, that with lowly dart, Dinting

his breast, had bred his restless paine, Like as the wounded whale to

shore flies thro’ the maine.” —\_The Fairie Queen\_.

“Immense as whales, the motion of whose vast bodies can in a peaceful

calm trouble the ocean till it boil.” —\_Sir William Davenant. Preface

to Gondibert\_.

“What spermacetti is, men might justly doubt, since the learned

Hosmannus in his work of thirty years, saith plainly, \_Nescio quid

sit\_.” —\_Sir T. Browne. Of Sperma Ceti and the Sperma Ceti Whale.

Vide his V. E.\_

“Like Spencer’s Talus with his modern flail He threatens ruin with

his ponderous tail. ... Their fixed jav’lins in his side he wears,

And on his back a grove of pikes appears.” —\_Waller’s Battle of the

Summer Islands\_.

“By art is created that great Leviathan, called a Commonwealth or

State—(in Latin, Civitas) which is but an artificial man.” —\_Opening

sentence of Hobbes’s Leviathan\_.

“Silly Mansoul swallowed it without chewing, as if it had been a

sprat in the mouth of a whale.” —\_Pilgrim’s Progress\_.

“That sea beast Leviathan, which God of all his works Created hugest

that swim the ocean stream.” —\_Paradise Lost\_.

—“There Leviathan, Hugest of living creatures, in the deep Stretched

like a promontory sleeps or swims, And seems a moving land; and at

his gills Draws in, and at his breath spouts out a sea.” —\_Ibid\_.

“The mighty whales which swim in a sea of water, and have a sea of

oil swimming in them.” —\_Fuller’s Profane and Holy State\_.

“So close behind some promontory lie The huge Leviathan to attend

their prey, And give no chance, but swallow in the fry, Which through

their gaping jaws mistake the way.” —\_Dryden’s Annus Mirabilis\_.

“While the whale is floating at the stern of the ship, they cut off

his head, and tow it with a boat as near the shore as it will come;

but it will be aground in twelve or thirteen feet water.” —\_Thomas

Edge’s Ten Voyages to Spitzbergen, in Purchas\_.

“In their way they saw many whales sporting in the ocean, and in

wantonness fuzzing up the water through their pipes and vents, which

nature has placed on their shoulders.” —\_Sir T. Herbert’s Voyages

into Asia and Africa. Harris Coll\_.

“Here they saw such huge troops of whales, that they were forced to

proceed with a great deal of caution for fear they should run their

ship upon them.” —\_Schouten’s Sixth Circumnavigation\_.

“We set sail from the Elbe, wind N.E. in the ship called The

Jonas-in-the-Whale.... Some say the whale can’t open his mouth, but

that is a fable.... They frequently climb up the masts to see whether

they can see a whale, for the first discoverer has a ducat for his

pains.... I was told of a whale taken near Shetland, that had above a

barrel of herrings in his belly.... One of our harpooneers told me

that he caught once a whale in Spitzbergen that was white all over.”

—\_A Voyage to Greenland, A.D.\_ 1671. \_Harris Coll\_.

“Several whales have come in upon this coast (Fife) Anno 1652, one

eighty feet in length of the whale-bone kind came in, which (as I was

informed), besides a vast quantity of oil, did afford 500 weight of

baleen. The jaws of it stand for a gate in the garden of Pitferren.”

—\_Sibbald’s Fife and Kinross\_.

“Myself have agreed to try whether I can master and kill this

Sperma-ceti whale, for I could never hear of any of that sort that

was killed by any man, such is his fierceness and swiftness.”

—\_Richard Strafford’s Letter from the Bermudas. Phil. Trans. A.D.\_

1668.

“Whales in the sea God’s voice obey.” —\_N. E. Primer\_.

“We saw also abundance of large whales, there being more in those

southern seas, as I may say, by a hundred to one; than we have to the

northward of us.” —\_Captain Cowley’s Voyage round the Globe, A.D.\_

1729.

“... and the breath of the whale is frequently attended with such an

insupportable smell, as to bring on a disorder of the brain.”

—\_Ulloa’s South America\_.

“To fifty chosen sylphs of special note, We trust the important

charge, the petticoat. Oft have we known that seven-fold fence to

fail, Tho’ stuffed with hoops and armed with ribs of whale.” —\_Rape

of the Lock\_.

“If we compare land animals in respect to magnitude, with those that

take up their abode in the deep, we shall find they will appear

contemptible in the comparison. The whale is doubtless the largest

animal in creation.” —\_Goldsmith, Nat. Hist\_.

“If you should write a fable for little fishes, you would make them

speak like great whales.” —\_Goldsmith to Johnson\_.

“In the afternoon we saw what was supposed to be a rock, but it was

found to be a dead whale, which some Asiatics had killed, and were

then towing ashore. They seemed to endeavor to conceal themselves

behind the whale, in order to avoid being seen by us.” —\_Cook’s

Voyages\_.

“The larger whales, they seldom venture to attack. They stand in so

great dread of some of them, that when out at sea they are afraid to

mention even their names, and carry dung, lime-stone, juniper-wood,

and some other articles of the same nature in their boats, in order

to terrify and prevent their too near approach.” —\_Uno Von Troil’s

Letters on Banks’s and Solander’s Voyage to Iceland in\_ 1772.

“The Spermacetti Whale found by the Nantuckois, is an active, fierce

animal, and requires vast address and boldness in the fishermen.”

—\_Thomas Jefferson’s Whale Memorial to the French minister in\_ 1778.

“And pray, sir, what in the world is equal to it?” —\_Edmund Burke’s

reference in Parliament to the Nantucket Whale-Fishery\_.

“Spain—a great whale stranded on the shores of Europe.” —\_Edmund

Burke\_. (\_somewhere\_.)

“A tenth branch of the king’s ordinary revenue, said to be grounded

on the consideration of his guarding and protecting the seas from

pirates and robbers, is the right to \_royal\_ fish, which are whale

and sturgeon. And these, when either thrown ashore or caught near the

coast, are the property of the king.” —\_Blackstone\_.

“Soon to the sport of death the crews repair: Rodmond unerring o’er

his head suspends The barbed steel, and every turn attends.”

—\_Falconer’s Shipwreck\_.

“Bright shone the roofs, the domes, the spires, And rockets blew self

driven, To hang their momentary fire Around the vault of heaven.

“So fire with water to compare, The ocean serves on high, Up-spouted

by a whale in air, To express unwieldy joy.” —\_Cowper, on the Queen’s

Visit to London\_.

“Ten or fifteen gallons of blood are thrown out of the heart at a

stroke, with immense velocity.” —\_John Hunter’s account of the

dissection of a whale\_. (\_A small sized one\_.)

“The aorta of a whale is larger in the bore than the main pipe of the

water-works at London Bridge, and the water roaring in its passage

through that pipe is inferior in impetus and velocity to the blood

gushing from the whale’s heart.” —\_Paley’s Theology\_.

“The whale is a mammiferous animal without hind feet.” —\_Baron

Cuvier\_.

“In 40 degrees south, we saw Spermacetti Whales, but did not take any

till the first of May, the sea being then covered with them.”

—\_Colnett’s Voyage for the Purpose of Extending the Spermaceti Whale

Fishery\_.

“In the free element beneath me swam, Floundered and dived, in play,

in chace, in battle, Fishes of every colour, form, and kind; Which

language cannot paint, and mariner Had never seen; from dread

Leviathan To insect millions peopling every wave: Gather’d in shoals

immense, like floating islands, Led by mysterious instincts through

that waste And trackless region, though on every side Assaulted by

voracious enemies, Whales, sharks, and monsters, arm’d in front or

jaw, With swords, saws, spiral horns, or hooked fangs.”

—\_Montgomery’s World before the Flood\_.

“Io! Paean! Io! sing. To the finny people’s king. Not a mightier

whale than this In the vast Atlantic is; Not a fatter fish than he,

Flounders round the Polar Sea.” —\_Charles Lamb’s Triumph of the

Whale\_.

“In the year 1690 some persons were on a high hill observing the

whales spouting and sporting with each other, when one observed:

there—pointing to the sea—is a green pasture where our children’s

grand-children will go for bread.” —\_Obed Macy’s History of

Nantucket\_.

“I built a cottage for Susan and myself and made a gateway in the

form of a Gothic Arch, by setting up a whale’s jaw bones.”

—\_Hawthorne’s Twice Told Tales\_.

“She came to bespeak a monument for her first love, who had been

killed by a whale in the Pacific ocean, no less than forty years

ago.” —\_Ibid\_.

“No, Sir, ’tis a Right Whale,” answered Tom; “I saw his sprout; he

threw up a pair of as pretty rainbows as a Christian would wish to

look at. He’s a raal oil-butt, that fellow!” —\_Cooper’s Pilot\_.

“The papers were brought in, and we saw in the Berlin Gazette that

whales had been introduced on the stage there.” —\_Eckermann’s

Conversations with Goethe\_.

“My God! Mr. Chace, what is the matter?” I answered, “we have been

stove by a whale.” —“\_Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Whale Ship

Essex of Nantucket, which was attacked and finally destroyed by a

large Sperm Whale in the Pacific Ocean\_.” \_By Owen Chace of

Nantucket, first mate of said vessel. New York\_, 1821.

“A mariner sat in the shrouds one night, The wind was piping free;

Now bright, now dimmed, was the moonlight pale, And the phospher

gleamed in the wake of the whale, As it floundered in the sea.”

—\_Elizabeth Oakes Smith\_.

“The quantity of line withdrawn from the boats engaged in the capture

of this one whale, amounted altogether to 10,440 yards or nearly six

English miles....

“Sometimes the whale shakes its tremendous tail in the air, which,

cracking like a whip, resounds to the distance of three or four

miles.” —\_Scoresby\_.

“Mad with the agonies he endures from these fresh attacks, the

infuriated Sperm Whale rolls over and over; he rears his enormous

head, and with wide expanded jaws snaps at everything around him; he

rushes at the boats with his head; they are propelled before him with

vast swiftness, and sometimes utterly destroyed.... It is a matter of

great astonishment that the consideration of the habits of so

interesting, and, in a commercial point of view, so important an

animal (as the Sperm Whale) should have been so entirely neglected,

or should have excited so little curiosity among the numerous, and

many of them competent observers, that of late years, must have

possessed the most abundant and the most convenient opportunities of

witnessing their habitudes.” —\_Thomas Beale’s History of the Sperm

Whale\_, 1839.

“The Cachalot” (Sperm Whale) “is not only better armed than the True

Whale” (Greenland or Right Whale) “in possessing a formidable weapon

at either extremity of its body, but also more frequently displays a

disposition to employ these weapons offensively and in manner at once

so artful, bold, and mischievous, as to lead to its being regarded as

the most dangerous to attack of all the known species of the whale

tribe.” —\_Frederick Debell Bennett’s Whaling Voyage Round the Globe\_,

1840.

October 13. “There she blows,” was sung out from the mast-head.

“Where away?” demanded the captain. “Three points off the lee bow,

sir.” “Raise up your wheel. Steady!” “Steady, sir.” “Mast-head

ahoy! Do you see that whale now?” “Ay ay, sir! A shoal of Sperm

Whales! There she blows! There she breaches!” “Sing out! sing out

every time!” “Ay Ay, sir! There she blows! there—there—\_thar\_ she

blows—bowes—bo-o-os!” “How far off?” “Two miles and a half.” “Thunder

and lightning! so near! Call all hands.” —\_J. Ross Browne’s Etchings

of a Whaling Cruize\_. 1846.

“The Whale-ship Globe, on board of which vessel occurred the horrid

transactions we are about to relate, belonged to the island of

Nantucket.” —“\_Narrative of the Globe Mutiny\_,” \_by Lay and Hussey

survivors. A.D.\_ 1828.

Being once pursued by a whale which he had wounded, he parried the

assault for some time with a lance; but the furious monster at length

rushed on the boat; himself and comrades only being preserved by

leaping into the water when they saw the onset was inevitable.”

—\_Missionary Journal of Tyerman and Bennett\_.

“Nantucket itself,” said Mr. Webster, “is a very striking and

peculiar portion of the National interest. There is a population of

eight or nine thousand persons living here in the sea, adding largely

every year to the National wealth by the boldest and most persevering

industry.” —\_Report of Daniel Webster’s Speech in the U. S. Senate,

on the application for the Erection of a Breakwater at Nantucket\_.

1828.

“The whale fell directly over him, and probably killed him in a

moment.” —“\_The Whale and his Captors, or The Whaleman’s Adventures

and the Whale’s Biography, gathered on the Homeward Cruise of the

Commodore Preble\_.” \_By Rev. Henry T. Cheever\_.

“If you make the least damn bit of noise,” replied Samuel, “I will

send you to hell.” —\_Life of Samuel Comstock\_ (\_the mutineer\_), \_by

his brother, William Comstock. Another Version of the whale-ship

Globe narrative\_.

“The voyages of the Dutch and English to the Northern Ocean, in

order, if possible, to discover a passage through it to India, though

they failed of their main object, laid-open the haunts of the whale.”

—\_McCulloch’s Commercial Dictionary\_.

“These things are reciprocal; the ball rebounds, only to bound

forward again; for now in laying open the haunts of the whale, the

whalemen seem to have indirectly hit upon new clews to that same

mystic North-West Passage.” —\_From\_ “\_Something\_” \_unpublished\_.

“It is impossible to meet a whale-ship on the ocean without being

struck by her near appearance. The vessel under short sail, with

look-outs at the mast-heads, eagerly scanning the wide expanse around

them, has a totally different air from those engaged in regular

voyage.” —\_Currents and Whaling. U.S. Ex. Ex\_.

“Pedestrians in the vicinity of London and elsewhere may recollect

having seen large curved bones set upright in the earth, either to

form arches over gateways, or entrances to alcoves, and they may

perhaps have been told that these were the ribs of whales.” —\_Tales

of a Whale Voyager to the Arctic Ocean\_.

“It was not till the boats returned from the pursuit of these whales,

that the whites saw their ship in bloody possession of the savages

enrolled among the crew.” —\_Newspaper Account of the Taking and

Retaking of the Whale-Ship Hobomack\_.

“It is generally well known that out of the crews of Whaling vessels

(American) few ever return in the ships on board of which they

departed.” —\_Cruise in a Whale Boat\_.

“Suddenly a mighty mass emerged from the water, and shot up

perpendicularly into the air. It was the whale.” —\_Miriam Coffin or

the Whale Fisherman\_.

“The Whale is harpooned to be sure; but bethink you, how you would

manage a powerful unbroken colt, with the mere appliance of a rope

tied to the root of his tail.” —\_A Chapter on Whaling in Ribs and

Trucks\_.

“On one occasion I saw two of these monsters (whales) probably male

and female, slowly swimming, one after the other, within less than a

stone’s throw of the shore” (Terra Del Fuego), “over which the beech

tree extended its branches.” —\_Darwin’s Voyage of a Naturalist\_.

“‘Stern all!’ exclaimed the mate, as upon turning his head, he saw

the distended jaws of a large Sperm Whale close to the head of the

boat, threatening it with instant destruction;—‘Stern all, for your

lives!’” —\_Wharton the Whale Killer\_.

“So be cheery, my lads, let your hearts never fail, While the bold

harpooneer is striking the whale!” —\_Nantucket Song\_.

“Oh, the rare old Whale, mid storm and gale In his ocean home will be

A giant in might, where might is right, And King of the boundless

sea.” —\_Whale Song\_.

CHAPTER 1. Loomings.

Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having

little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me

on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part

of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen and

regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about

the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever

I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and

bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever

my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral

principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and

methodically knocking people’s hats off—then, I account it high time to

get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball.

With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I

quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this. If they

but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other,

cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me.

There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by

wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs—commerce surrounds it with her

surf. Right and left, the streets take you waterward. Its extreme

downtown is the battery, where that noble mole is washed by waves, and

cooled by breezes, which a few hours previous were out of sight of

land. Look at the crowds of water-gazers there.

Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Corlears

Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What

do you see?—Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand

thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some

leaning against the spiles; some seated upon the pier-heads; some

looking over the bulwarks of ships from China; some high aloft in the

rigging, as if striving to get a still better seaward peep. But these

are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to

counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this? Are

the green fields gone? What do they here?

But look! here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and

seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the

extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder

warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water

as they possibly can without falling in. And there they stand—miles of

them—leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets

and avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell

me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all

those ships attract them thither?

Once more. Say you are in the country; in some high land of lakes. Take

almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a

dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in

it. Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest

reveries—stand that man on his legs, set his feet a-going, and he will

infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region.

Should you ever be athirst in the great American desert, try this

experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical

professor. Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for

ever.

But here is an artist. He desires to paint you the dreamiest, shadiest,

quietest, most enchanting bit of romantic landscape in all the valley

of the Saco. What is the chief element he employs? There stand his

trees, each with a hollow trunk, as if a hermit and a crucifix were

within; and here sleeps his meadow, and there sleep his cattle; and up

from yonder cottage goes a sleepy smoke. Deep into distant woodlands

winds a mazy way, reaching to overlapping spurs of mountains bathed in

their hill-side blue. But though the picture lies thus tranced, and

though this pine-tree shakes down its sighs like leaves upon this

shepherd’s head, yet all were vain, unless the shepherd’s eye were

fixed upon the magic stream before him. Go visit the Prairies in June,

when for scores on scores of miles you wade knee-deep among

Tiger-lilies—what is the one charm wanting?—Water—there is not a drop

of water there! Were Niagara but a cataract of sand, would you travel

your thousand miles to see it? Why did the poor poet of Tennessee, upon

suddenly receiving two handfuls of silver, deliberate whether to buy

him a coat, which he sadly needed, or invest his money in a pedestrian

trip to Rockaway Beach? Why is almost every robust healthy boy with a

robust healthy soul in him, at some time or other crazy to go to sea?

Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a

mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out

of sight of land? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did

the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely

all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that

story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild

image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that

same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image

of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.

Now, when I say that I am in the habit of going to sea whenever I begin

to grow hazy about the eyes, and begin to be over conscious of my

lungs, I do not mean to have it inferred that I ever go to sea as a

passenger. For to go as a passenger you must needs have a purse, and a

purse is but a rag unless you have something in it. Besides, passengers

get sea-sick—grow quarrelsome—don’t sleep of nights—do not enjoy

themselves much, as a general thing;—no, I never go as a passenger;

nor, though I am something of a salt, do I ever go to sea as a

Commodore, or a Captain, or a Cook. I abandon the glory and distinction

of such offices to those who like them. For my part, I abominate all

honorable respectable toils, trials, and tribulations of every kind

whatsoever. It is quite as much as I can do to take care of myself,

without taking care of ships, barques, brigs, schooners, and what not.

And as for going as cook,—though I confess there is considerable glory

in that, a cook being a sort of officer on ship-board—yet, somehow, I

never fancied broiling fowls;—though once broiled, judiciously

buttered, and judgmatically salted and peppered, there is no one who

will speak more respectfully, not to say reverentially, of a broiled

fowl than I will. It is out of the idolatrous dotings of the old

Egyptians upon broiled ibis and roasted river horse, that you see the

mummies of those creatures in their huge bake-houses the pyramids.

No, when I go to sea, I go as a simple sailor, right before the mast,

plumb down into the forecastle, aloft there to the royal mast-head.

True, they rather order me about some, and make me jump from spar to

spar, like a grasshopper in a May meadow. And at first, this sort of

thing is unpleasant enough. It touches one’s sense of honor,

particularly if you come of an old established family in the land, the

Van Rensselaers, or Randolphs, or Hardicanutes. And more than all, if

just previous to putting your hand into the tar-pot, you have been

lording it as a country schoolmaster, making the tallest boys stand in

awe of you. The transition is a keen one, I assure you, from a

schoolmaster to a sailor, and requires a strong decoction of Seneca and

the Stoics to enable you to grin and bear it. But even this wears off

in time.

What of it, if some old hunks of a sea-captain orders me to get a broom

and sweep down the decks? What does that indignity amount to, weighed,

I mean, in the scales of the New Testament? Do you think the archangel

Gabriel thinks anything the less of me, because I promptly and

respectfully obey that old hunks in that particular instance? Who ain’t

a slave? Tell me that. Well, then, however the old sea-captains may

order me about—however they may thump and punch me about, I have the

satisfaction of knowing that it is all right; that everybody else is

one way or other served in much the same way—either in a physical or

metaphysical point of view, that is; and so the universal thump is

passed round, and all hands should rub each other’s shoulder-blades,

and be content.

Again, I always go to sea as a sailor, because they make a point of

paying me for my trouble, whereas they never pay passengers a single

penny that I ever heard of. On the contrary, passengers themselves must

pay. And there is all the difference in the world between paying and

being paid. The act of paying is perhaps the most uncomfortable

infliction that the two orchard thieves entailed upon us. But \_being

paid\_,—what will compare with it? The urbane activity with which a man

receives money is really marvellous, considering that we so earnestly

believe money to be the root of all earthly ills, and that on no

account can a monied man enter heaven. Ah! how cheerfully we consign

ourselves to perdition!

Finally, I always go to sea as a sailor, because of the wholesome

exercise and pure air of the fore-castle deck. For as in this world,

head winds are far more prevalent than winds from astern (that is, if

you never violate the Pythagorean maxim), so for the most part the

Commodore on the quarter-deck gets his atmosphere at second hand from

the sailors on the forecastle. He thinks he breathes it first; but not

so. In much the same way do the commonalty lead their leaders in many

other things, at the same time that the leaders little suspect it. But

wherefore it was that after having repeatedly smelt the sea as a

merchant sailor, I should now take it into my head to go on a whaling

voyage; this the invisible police officer of the Fates, who has the

constant surveillance of me, and secretly dogs me, and influences me in

some unaccountable way—he can better answer than any one else. And,

doubtless, my going on this whaling voyage, formed part of the grand

programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago. It came in

as a sort of brief interlude and solo between more extensive

performances. I take it that this part of the bill must have run

something like this:

“\_Grand Contested Election for the Presidency of the United States.\_

“WHALING VOYAGE BY ONE ISHMAEL. “BLOODY BATTLE IN AFFGHANISTAN.”

Though I cannot tell why it was exactly that those stage managers, the

Fates, put me down for this shabby part of a whaling voyage, when

others were set down for magnificent parts in high tragedies, and short

and easy parts in genteel comedies, and jolly parts in farces—though I

cannot tell why this was exactly; yet, now that I recall all the

circumstances, I think I can see a little into the springs and motives

which being cunningly presented to me under various disguises, induced

me to set about performing the part I did, besides cajoling me into the

delusion that it was a choice resulting from my own unbiased freewill

and discriminating judgment.

Chief among these motives was the overwhelming idea of the great whale

himself. Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my

curiosity. Then the wild and distant seas where he rolled his island

bulk; the undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale; these, with all

the attending marvels of a thousand Patagonian sights and sounds,

helped to sway me to my wish. With other men, perhaps, such things

would not have been inducements; but as for me, I am tormented with an

everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and

land on barbarous coasts. Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to

perceive a horror, and could still be social with it—would they let

me—since it is but well to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of

the place one lodges in.

By reason of these things, then, the whaling voyage was welcome; the

great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open, and in the wild

conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into

my inmost soul, endless processions of the whale, and, mid most of them

all, one grand hooded phantom, like a snow hill in the air.

CHAPTER 2. The Carpet-Bag.

I stuffed a shirt or two into my old carpet-bag, tucked it under my

arm, and started for Cape Horn and the Pacific. Quitting the good city

of old Manhatto, I duly arrived in New Bedford. It was a Saturday night

in December. Much was I disappointed upon learning that the little

packet for Nantucket had already sailed, and that no way of reaching

that place would offer, till the following Monday.

As most young candidates for the pains and penalties of whaling stop at

this same New Bedford, thence to embark on their voyage, it may as well

be related that I, for one, had no idea of so doing. For my mind was

made up to sail in no other than a Nantucket craft, because there was a

fine, boisterous something about everything connected with that famous

old island, which amazingly pleased me. Besides though New Bedford has

of late been gradually monopolising the business of whaling, and though

in this matter poor old Nantucket is now much behind her, yet Nantucket

was her great original—the Tyre of this Carthage;—the place where the

first dead American whale was stranded. Where else but from Nantucket

did those aboriginal whalemen, the Red-Men, first sally out in canoes

to give chase to the Leviathan? And where but from Nantucket, too, did

that first adventurous little sloop put forth, partly laden with

imported cobblestones—so goes the story—to throw at the whales, in

order to discover when they were nigh enough to risk a harpoon from the

bowsprit?

Now having a night, a day, and still another night following before me

in New Bedford, ere I could embark for my destined port, it became a

matter of concernment where I was to eat and sleep meanwhile. It was a

very dubious-looking, nay, a very dark and dismal night, bitingly cold

and cheerless. I knew no one in the place. With anxious grapnels I had

sounded my pocket, and only brought up a few pieces of silver,—So,

wherever you go, Ishmael, said I to myself, as I stood in the middle of

a dreary street shouldering my bag, and comparing the gloom towards the

north with the darkness towards the south—wherever in your wisdom you

may conclude to lodge for the night, my dear Ishmael, be sure to

inquire the price, and don’t be too particular.

With halting steps I paced the streets, and passed the sign of “The

Crossed Harpoons”—but it looked too expensive and jolly there. Further

on, from the bright red windows of the “Sword-Fish Inn,” there came

such fervent rays, that it seemed to have melted the packed snow and

ice from before the house, for everywhere else the congealed frost lay

ten inches thick in a hard, asphaltic pavement,—rather weary for me,

when I struck my foot against the flinty projections, because from

hard, remorseless service the soles of my boots were in a most

miserable plight. Too expensive and jolly, again thought I, pausing one

moment to watch the broad glare in the street, and hear the sounds of

the tinkling glasses within. But go on, Ishmael, said I at last; don’t

you hear? get away from before the door; your patched boots are

stopping the way. So on I went. I now by instinct followed the streets

that took me waterward, for there, doubtless, were the cheapest, if not

the cheeriest inns.

Such dreary streets! blocks of blackness, not houses, on either hand,

and here and there a candle, like a candle moving about in a tomb. At

this hour of the night, of the last day of the week, that quarter of

the town proved all but deserted. But presently I came to a smoky light

proceeding from a low, wide building, the door of which stood

invitingly open. It had a careless look, as if it were meant for the

uses of the public; so, entering, the first thing I did was to stumble

over an ash-box in the porch. Ha! thought I, ha, as the flying

particles almost choked me, are these ashes from that destroyed city,

Gomorrah? But “The Crossed Harpoons,” and “The Sword-Fish?”—this, then

must needs be the sign of “The Trap.” However, I picked myself up and

hearing a loud voice within, pushed on and opened a second, interior

door.

It seemed the great Black Parliament sitting in Tophet. A hundred black

faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of

Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church; and the

preacher’s text was about the blackness of darkness, and the weeping

and wailing and teeth-gnashing there. Ha, Ishmael, muttered I, backing

out, Wretched entertainment at the sign of ‘The Trap!’

Moving on, I at last came to a dim sort of light not far from the

docks, and heard a forlorn creaking in the air; and looking up, saw a

swinging sign over the door with a white painting upon it, faintly

representing a tall straight jet of misty spray, and these words

underneath—“The Spouter Inn:—Peter Coffin.”

Coffin?—Spouter?—Rather ominous in that particular connexion, thought

I. But it is a common name in Nantucket, they say, and I suppose this

Peter here is an emigrant from there. As the light looked so dim, and

the place, for the time, looked quiet enough, and the dilapidated

little wooden house itself looked as if it might have been carted here

from the ruins of some burnt district, and as the swinging sign had a

poverty-stricken sort of creak to it, I thought that here was the very

spot for cheap lodgings, and the best of pea coffee.

It was a queer sort of place—a gable-ended old house, one side palsied

as it were, and leaning over sadly. It stood on a sharp bleak corner,

where that tempestuous wind Euroclydon kept up a worse howling than

ever it did about poor Paul’s tossed craft. Euroclydon, nevertheless,

is a mighty pleasant zephyr to any one in-doors, with his feet on the

hob quietly toasting for bed. “In judging of that tempestuous wind

called Euroclydon,” says an old writer—of whose works I possess the

only copy extant—“it maketh a marvellous difference, whether thou

lookest out at it from a glass window where the frost is all on the

outside, or whether thou observest it from that sashless window, where

the frost is on both sides, and of which the wight Death is the only

glazier.” True enough, thought I, as this passage occurred to my

mind—old black-letter, thou reasonest well. Yes, these eyes are

windows, and this body of mine is the house. What a pity they didn’t

stop up the chinks and the crannies though, and thrust in a little lint

here and there. But it’s too late to make any improvements now. The

universe is finished; the copestone is on, and the chips were carted

off a million years ago. Poor Lazarus there, chattering his teeth

against the curbstone for his pillow, and shaking off his tatters with

his shiverings, he might plug up both ears with rags, and put a

corn-cob into his mouth, and yet that would not keep out the

tempestuous Euroclydon. Euroclydon! says old Dives, in his red silken

wrapper—(he had a redder one afterwards) pooh, pooh! What a fine frosty

night; how Orion glitters; what northern lights! Let them talk of their

oriental summer climes of everlasting conservatories; give me the

privilege of making my own summer with my own coals.

But what thinks Lazarus? Can he warm his blue hands by holding them up

to the grand northern lights? Would not Lazarus rather be in Sumatra

than here? Would he not far rather lay him down lengthwise along the

line of the equator; yea, ye gods! go down to the fiery pit itself, in

order to keep out this frost?

Now, that Lazarus should lie stranded there on the curbstone before the

door of Dives, this is more wonderful than that an iceberg should be

moored to one of the Moluccas. Yet Dives himself, he too lives like a

Czar in an ice palace made of frozen sighs, and being a president of a

temperance society, he only drinks the tepid tears of orphans.

But no more of this blubbering now, we are going a-whaling, and there

is plenty of that yet to come. Let us scrape the ice from our frosted

feet, and see what sort of a place this “Spouter” may be.

CHAPTER 3. The Spouter-Inn.

Entering that gable-ended Spouter-Inn, you found yourself in a wide,

low, straggling entry with old-fashioned wainscots, reminding one of

the bulwarks of some condemned old craft. On one side hung a very large

oilpainting so thoroughly besmoked, and every way defaced, that in the

unequal crosslights by which you viewed it, it was only by diligent

study and a series of systematic visits to it, and careful inquiry of

the neighbors, that you could any way arrive at an understanding of its

purpose. Such unaccountable masses of shades and shadows, that at first

you almost thought some ambitious young artist, in the time of the New

England hags, had endeavored to delineate chaos bewitched. But by dint

of much and earnest contemplation, and oft repeated ponderings, and

especially by throwing open the little window towards the back of the

entry, you at last come to the conclusion that such an idea, however

wild, might not be altogether unwarranted.

But what most puzzled and confounded you was a long, limber,

portentous, black mass of something hovering in the centre of the

picture over three blue, dim, perpendicular lines floating in a

nameless yeast. A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly, enough to drive

a nervous man distracted. Yet was there a sort of indefinite,

half-attained, unimaginable sublimity about it that fairly froze you to

it, till you involuntarily took an oath with yourself to find out what

that marvellous painting meant. Ever and anon a bright, but, alas,

deceptive idea would dart you through.—It’s the Black Sea in a midnight

gale.—It’s the unnatural combat of the four primal elements.—It’s a

blasted heath.—It’s a Hyperborean winter scene.—It’s the breaking-up of

the icebound stream of Time. But at last all these fancies yielded to

that one portentous something in the picture’s midst. \_That\_ once found

out, and all the rest were plain. But stop; does it not bear a faint

resemblance to a gigantic fish? even the great leviathan himself?

In fact, the artist’s design seemed this: a final theory of my own,

partly based upon the aggregated opinions of many aged persons with

whom I conversed upon the subject. The picture represents a Cape-Horner

in a great hurricane; the half-foundered ship weltering there with its

three dismantled masts alone visible; and an exasperated whale,

purposing to spring clean over the craft, is in the enormous act of

impaling himself upon the three mast-heads.

The opposite wall of this entry was hung all over with a heathenish

array of monstrous clubs and spears. Some were thickly set with

glittering teeth resembling ivory saws; others were tufted with knots

of human hair; and one was sickle-shaped, with a vast handle sweeping

round like the segment made in the new-mown grass by a long-armed

mower. You shuddered as you gazed, and wondered what monstrous cannibal

and savage could ever have gone a death-harvesting with such a hacking,

horrifying implement. Mixed with these were rusty old whaling lances

and harpoons all broken and deformed. Some were storied weapons. With

this once long lance, now wildly elbowed, fifty years ago did Nathan

Swain kill fifteen whales between a sunrise and a sunset. And that

harpoon—so like a corkscrew now—was flung in Javan seas, and run away

with by a whale, years afterwards slain off the Cape of Blanco. The

original iron entered nigh the tail, and, like a restless needle

sojourning in the body of a man, travelled full forty feet, and at last

was found imbedded in the hump.

Crossing this dusky entry, and on through yon low-arched way—cut

through what in old times must have been a great central chimney with

fireplaces all round—you enter the public room. A still duskier place

is this, with such low ponderous beams above, and such old wrinkled

planks beneath, that you would almost fancy you trod some old craft’s

cockpits, especially of such a howling night, when this corner-anchored

old ark rocked so furiously. On one side stood a long, low, shelf-like

table covered with cracked glass cases, filled with dusty rarities

gathered from this wide world’s remotest nooks. Projecting from the

further angle of the room stands a dark-looking den—the bar—a rude

attempt at a right whale’s head. Be that how it may, there stands the

vast arched bone of the whale’s jaw, so wide, a coach might almost

drive beneath it. Within are shabby shelves, ranged round with old

decanters, bottles, flasks; and in those jaws of swift destruction,

like another cursed Jonah (by which name indeed they called him),

bustles a little withered old man, who, for their money, dearly sells

the sailors deliriums and death.

Abominable are the tumblers into which he pours his poison. Though true

cylinders without—within, the villanous green goggling glasses

deceitfully tapered downwards to a cheating bottom. Parallel meridians

rudely pecked into the glass, surround these footpads’ goblets. Fill to

\_this\_ mark, and your charge is but a penny; to \_this\_ a penny more;

and so on to the full glass—the Cape Horn measure, which you may gulp

down for a shilling.

Upon entering the place I found a number of young seamen gathered about

a table, examining by a dim light divers specimens of \_skrimshander\_. I

sought the landlord, and telling him I desired to be accommodated with

a room, received for answer that his house was full—not a bed

unoccupied. “But avast,” he added, tapping his forehead, “you haint no

objections to sharing a harpooneer’s blanket, have ye? I s’pose you are

goin’ a-whalin’, so you’d better get used to that sort of thing.”

I told him that I never liked to sleep two in a bed; that if I should

ever do so, it would depend upon who the harpooneer might be, and that

if he (the landlord) really had no other place for me, and the

harpooneer was not decidedly objectionable, why rather than wander

further about a strange town on so bitter a night, I would put up with

the half of any decent man’s blanket.

“I thought so. All right; take a seat. Supper?—you want supper?

Supper’ll be ready directly.”

I sat down on an old wooden settle, carved all over like a bench on the

Battery. At one end a ruminating tar was still further adorning it with

his jack-knife, stooping over and diligently working away at the space

between his legs. He was trying his hand at a ship under full sail, but

he didn’t make much headway, I thought.

At last some four or five of us were summoned to our meal in an

adjoining room. It was cold as Iceland—no fire at all—the landlord said

he couldn’t afford it. Nothing but two dismal tallow candles, each in a

winding sheet. We were fain to button up our monkey jackets, and hold

to our lips cups of scalding tea with our half frozen fingers. But the

fare was of the most substantial kind—not only meat and potatoes, but

dumplings; good heavens! dumplings for supper! One young fellow in a

green box coat, addressed himself to these dumplings in a most direful

manner.

“My boy,” said the landlord, “you’ll have the nightmare to a dead

sartainty.”

“Landlord,” I whispered, “that aint the harpooneer is it?”

“Oh, no,” said he, looking a sort of diabolically funny, “the

harpooneer is a dark complexioned chap. He never eats dumplings, he

don’t—he eats nothing but steaks, and he likes ’em rare.”

“The devil he does,” says I. “Where is that harpooneer? Is he here?”

“He’ll be here afore long,” was the answer.

I could not help it, but I began to feel suspicious of this “dark

complexioned” harpooneer. At any rate, I made up my mind that if it so

turned out that we should sleep together, he must undress and get into

bed before I did.

Supper over, the company went back to the bar-room, when, knowing not

what else to do with myself, I resolved to spend the rest of the

evening as a looker on.

Presently a rioting noise was heard without. Starting up, the landlord

cried, “That’s the Grampus’s crew. I seed her reported in the offing

this morning; a three years’ voyage, and a full ship. Hurrah, boys; now

we’ll have the latest news from the Feegees.”

A tramping of sea boots was heard in the entry; the door was flung

open, and in rolled a wild set of mariners enough. Enveloped in their

shaggy watch coats, and with their heads muffled in woollen comforters,

all bedarned and ragged, and their beards stiff with icicles, they

seemed an eruption of bears from Labrador. They had just landed from

their boat, and this was the first house they entered. No wonder, then,

that they made a straight wake for the whale’s mouth—the bar—when the

wrinkled little old Jonah, there officiating, soon poured them out

brimmers all round. One complained of a bad cold in his head, upon

which Jonah mixed him a pitch-like potion of gin and molasses, which he

swore was a sovereign cure for all colds and catarrhs whatsoever, never

mind of how long standing, or whether caught off the coast of Labrador,

or on the weather side of an ice-island.

The liquor soon mounted into their heads, as it generally does even

with the arrantest topers newly landed from sea, and they began

capering about most obstreperously.

I observed, however, that one of them held somewhat aloof, and though

he seemed desirous not to spoil the hilarity of his shipmates by his

own sober face, yet upon the whole he refrained from making as much

noise as the rest. This man interested me at once; and since the

sea-gods had ordained that he should soon become my shipmate (though

but a sleeping-partner one, so far as this narrative is concerned), I

will here venture upon a little description of him. He stood full six

feet in height, with noble shoulders, and a chest like a coffer-dam. I

have seldom seen such brawn in a man. His face was deeply brown and

burnt, making his white teeth dazzling by the contrast; while in the

deep shadows of his eyes floated some reminiscences that did not seem

to give him much joy. His voice at once announced that he was a

Southerner, and from his fine stature, I thought he must be one of

those tall mountaineers from the Alleghanian Ridge in Virginia. When

the revelry of his companions had mounted to its height, this man

slipped away unobserved, and I saw no more of him till he became my

comrade on the sea. In a few minutes, however, he was missed by his

shipmates, and being, it seems, for some reason a huge favourite with

them, they raised a cry of “Bulkington! Bulkington! where’s

Bulkington?” and darted out of the house in pursuit of him.

It was now about nine o’clock, and the room seeming almost

supernaturally quiet after these orgies, I began to congratulate myself

upon a little plan that had occurred to me just previous to the

entrance of the seamen.

No man prefers to sleep two in a bed. In fact, you would a good deal

rather not sleep with your own brother. I don’t know how it is, but

people like to be private when they are sleeping. And when it comes to

sleeping with an unknown stranger, in a strange inn, in a strange town,

and that stranger a harpooneer, then your objections indefinitely

multiply. Nor was there any earthly reason why I as a sailor should

sleep two in a bed, more than anybody else; for sailors no more sleep

two in a bed at sea, than bachelor Kings do ashore. To be sure they all

sleep together in one apartment, but you have your own hammock, and

cover yourself with your own blanket, and sleep in your own skin.

The more I pondered over this harpooneer, the more I abominated the

thought of sleeping with him. It was fair to presume that being a

harpooneer, his linen or woollen, as the case might be, would not be of

the tidiest, certainly none of the finest. I began to twitch all over.

Besides, it was getting late, and my decent harpooneer ought to be home

and going bedwards. Suppose now, he should tumble in upon me at

midnight—how could I tell from what vile hole he had been coming?

“Landlord! I’ve changed my mind about that harpooneer.—I shan’t sleep

with him. I’ll try the bench here.”

“Just as you please; I’m sorry I can’t spare ye a tablecloth for a

mattress, and it’s a plaguy rough board here”—feeling of the knots and

notches. “But wait a bit, Skrimshander; I’ve got a carpenter’s plane

there in the bar—wait, I say, and I’ll make ye snug enough.” So saying

he procured the plane; and with his old silk handkerchief first dusting

the bench, vigorously set to planing away at my bed, the while grinning

like an ape. The shavings flew right and left; till at last the

plane-iron came bump against an indestructible knot. The landlord was

near spraining his wrist, and I told him for heaven’s sake to quit—the

bed was soft enough to suit me, and I did not know how all the planing

in the world could make eider down of a pine plank. So gathering up the

shavings with another grin, and throwing them into the great stove in

the middle of the room, he went about his business, and left me in a

brown study.

I now took the measure of the bench, and found that it was a foot too

short; but that could be mended with a chair. But it was a foot too

narrow, and the other bench in the room was about four inches higher

than the planed one—so there was no yoking them. I then placed the

first bench lengthwise along the only clear space against the wall,

leaving a little interval between, for my back to settle down in. But I

soon found that there came such a draught of cold air over me from

under the sill of the window, that this plan would never do at all,

especially as another current from the rickety door met the one from

the window, and both together formed a series of small whirlwinds in

the immediate vicinity of the spot where I had thought to spend the

night.

The devil fetch that harpooneer, thought I, but stop, couldn’t I steal

a march on him—bolt his door inside, and jump into his bed, not to be

wakened by the most violent knockings? It seemed no bad idea; but upon

second thoughts I dismissed it. For who could tell but what the next

morning, so soon as I popped out of the room, the harpooneer might be

standing in the entry, all ready to knock me down!

Still, looking round me again, and seeing no possible chance of

spending a sufferable night unless in some other person’s bed, I began

to think that after all I might be cherishing unwarrantable prejudices

against this unknown harpooneer. Thinks I, I’ll wait awhile; he must be

dropping in before long. I’ll have a good look at him then, and perhaps

we may become jolly good bedfellows after all—there’s no telling.

But though the other boarders kept coming in by ones, twos, and threes,

and going to bed, yet no sign of my harpooneer.

“Landlord!” said I, “what sort of a chap is he—does he always keep such

late hours?” It was now hard upon twelve o’clock.

The landlord chuckled again with his lean chuckle, and seemed to be

mightily tickled at something beyond my comprehension. “No,” he

answered, “generally he’s an early bird—airley to bed and airley to

rise—yes, he’s the bird what catches the worm. But to-night he went out

a peddling, you see, and I don’t see what on airth keeps him so late,

unless, may be, he can’t sell his head.”

“Can’t sell his head?—What sort of a bamboozingly story is this you are

telling me?” getting into a towering rage. “Do you pretend to say,

landlord, that this harpooneer is actually engaged this blessed

Saturday night, or rather Sunday morning, in peddling his head around

this town?”

“That’s precisely it,” said the landlord, “and I told him he couldn’t

sell it here, the market’s overstocked.”

“With what?” shouted I.

“With heads to be sure; ain’t there too many heads in the world?”

“I tell you what it is, landlord,” said I quite calmly, “you’d better

stop spinning that yarn to me—I’m not green.”

“May be not,” taking out a stick and whittling a toothpick, “but I

rayther guess you’ll be done \_brown\_ if that ere harpooneer hears you a

slanderin’ his head.”

“I’ll break it for him,” said I, now flying into a passion again at

this unaccountable farrago of the landlord’s.

“It’s broke a’ready,” said he.

“Broke,” said I—“\_broke\_, do you mean?”

“Sartain, and that’s the very reason he can’t sell it, I guess.”

“Landlord,” said I, going up to him as cool as Mt. Hecla in a

snow-storm—“landlord, stop whittling. You and I must understand one

another, and that too without delay. I come to your house and want a

bed; you tell me you can only give me half a one; that the other half

belongs to a certain harpooneer. And about this harpooneer, whom I have

not yet seen, you persist in telling me the most mystifying and

exasperating stories tending to beget in me an uncomfortable feeling

towards the man whom you design for my bedfellow—a sort of connexion,

landlord, which is an intimate and confidential one in the highest

degree. I now demand of you to speak out and tell me who and what this

harpooneer is, and whether I shall be in all respects safe to spend the

night with him. And in the first place, you will be so good as to unsay

that story about selling his head, which if true I take to be good

evidence that this harpooneer is stark mad, and I’ve no idea of

sleeping with a madman; and you, sir, \_you\_ I mean, landlord, \_you\_,

sir, by trying to induce me to do so knowingly, would thereby render

yourself liable to a criminal prosecution.”

“Wall,” said the landlord, fetching a long breath, “that’s a purty long

sarmon for a chap that rips a little now and then. But be easy, be

easy, this here harpooneer I have been tellin’ you of has just arrived

from the south seas, where he bought up a lot of ’balmed New Zealand

heads (great curios, you know), and he’s sold all on ’em but one, and

that one he’s trying to sell to-night, cause to-morrow’s Sunday, and it

would not do to be sellin’ human heads about the streets when folks is

goin’ to churches. He wanted to, last Sunday, but I stopped him just as

he was goin’ out of the door with four heads strung on a string, for

all the airth like a string of inions.”

This account cleared up the otherwise unaccountable mystery, and showed

that the landlord, after all, had had no idea of fooling me—but at the

same time what could I think of a harpooneer who stayed out of a

Saturday night clean into the holy Sabbath, engaged in such a cannibal

business as selling the heads of dead idolators?

“Depend upon it, landlord, that harpooneer is a dangerous man.”

“He pays reg’lar,” was the rejoinder. “But come, it’s getting dreadful

late, you had better be turning flukes—it’s a nice bed; Sal and me

slept in that ere bed the night we were spliced. There’s plenty of room

for two to kick about in that bed; it’s an almighty big bed that. Why,

afore we give it up, Sal used to put our Sam and little Johnny in the

foot of it. But I got a dreaming and sprawling about one night, and

somehow, Sam got pitched on the floor, and came near breaking his arm.

Arter that, Sal said it wouldn’t do. Come along here, I’ll give ye a

glim in a jiffy;” and so saying he lighted a candle and held it towards

me, offering to lead the way. But I stood irresolute; when looking at a

clock in the corner, he exclaimed “I vum it’s Sunday—you won’t see that

harpooneer to-night; he’s come to anchor somewhere—come along then;

\_do\_ come; \_won’t\_ ye come?”

I considered the matter a moment, and then up stairs we went, and I was

ushered into a small room, cold as a clam, and furnished, sure enough,

with a prodigious bed, almost big enough indeed for any four

harpooneers to sleep abreast.

“There,” said the landlord, placing the candle on a crazy old sea chest

that did double duty as a wash-stand and centre table; “there, make

yourself comfortable now, and good night to ye.” I turned round from

eyeing the bed, but he had disappeared.

Folding back the counterpane, I stooped over the bed. Though none of

the most elegant, it yet stood the scrutiny tolerably well. I then

glanced round the room; and besides the bedstead and centre table,

could see no other furniture belonging to the place, but a rude shelf,

the four walls, and a papered fireboard representing a man striking a

whale. Of things not properly belonging to the room, there was a

hammock lashed up, and thrown upon the floor in one corner; also a

large seaman’s bag, containing the harpooneer’s wardrobe, no doubt in

lieu of a land trunk. Likewise, there was a parcel of outlandish bone

fish hooks on the shelf over the fire-place, and a tall harpoon

standing at the head of the bed.

But what is this on the chest? I took it up, and held it close to the

light, and felt it, and smelt it, and tried every way possible to

arrive at some satisfactory conclusion concerning it. I can compare it

to nothing but a large door mat, ornamented at the edges with little

tinkling tags something like the stained porcupine quills round an

Indian moccasin. There was a hole or slit in the middle of this mat, as

you see the same in South American ponchos. But could it be possible

that any sober harpooneer would get into a door mat, and parade the

streets of any Christian town in that sort of guise? I put it on, to

try it, and it weighed me down like a hamper, being uncommonly shaggy

and thick, and I thought a little damp, as though this mysterious

harpooneer had been wearing it of a rainy day. I went up in it to a bit

of glass stuck against the wall, and I never saw such a sight in my

life. I tore myself out of it in such a hurry that I gave myself a kink

in the neck.

I sat down on the side of the bed, and commenced thinking about this

head-peddling harpooneer, and his door mat. After thinking some time on

the bed-side, I got up and took off my monkey jacket, and then stood in

the middle of the room thinking. I then took off my coat, and thought a

little more in my shirt sleeves. But beginning to feel very cold now,

half undressed as I was, and remembering what the landlord said about

the harpooneer’s not coming home at all that night, it being so very

late, I made no more ado, but jumped out of my pantaloons and boots,

and then blowing out the light tumbled into bed, and commended myself

to the care of heaven.

Whether that mattress was stuffed with corn-cobs or broken crockery,

there is no telling, but I rolled about a good deal, and could not

sleep for a long time. At last I slid off into a light doze, and had

pretty nearly made a good offing towards the land of Nod, when I heard

a heavy footfall in the passage, and saw a glimmer of light come into

the room from under the door.

Lord save me, thinks I, that must be the harpooneer, the infernal

head-peddler. But I lay perfectly still, and resolved not to say a word

till spoken to. Holding a light in one hand, and that identical New

Zealand head in the other, the stranger entered the room, and without

looking towards the bed, placed his candle a good way off from me on

the floor in one corner, and then began working away at the knotted

cords of the large bag I before spoke of as being in the room. I was

all eagerness to see his face, but he kept it averted for some time

while employed in unlacing the bag’s mouth. This accomplished, however,

he turned round—when, good heavens! what a sight! Such a face! It was

of a dark, purplish, yellow colour, here and there stuck over with

large blackish looking squares. Yes, it’s just as I thought, he’s a

terrible bedfellow; he’s been in a fight, got dreadfully cut, and here

he is, just from the surgeon. But at that moment he chanced to turn his

face so towards the light, that I plainly saw they could not be

sticking-plasters at all, those black squares on his cheeks. They were

stains of some sort or other. At first I knew not what to make of this;

but soon an inkling of the truth occurred to me. I remembered a story

of a white man—a whaleman too—who, falling among the cannibals, had

been tattooed by them. I concluded that this harpooneer, in the course

of his distant voyages, must have met with a similar adventure. And

what is it, thought I, after all! It’s only his outside; a man can be

honest in any sort of skin. But then, what to make of his unearthly

complexion, that part of it, I mean, lying round about, and completely

independent of the squares of tattooing. To be sure, it might be

nothing but a good coat of tropical tanning; but I never heard of a hot

sun’s tanning a white man into a purplish yellow one. However, I had

never been in the South Seas; and perhaps the sun there produced these

extraordinary effects upon the skin. Now, while all these ideas were

passing through me like lightning, this harpooneer never noticed me at

all. But, after some difficulty having opened his bag, he commenced

fumbling in it, and presently pulled out a sort of tomahawk, and a

seal-skin wallet with the hair on. Placing these on the old chest in

the middle of the room, he then took the New Zealand head—a ghastly

thing enough—and crammed it down into the bag. He now took off his

hat—a new beaver hat—when I came nigh singing out with fresh surprise.

There was no hair on his head—none to speak of at least—nothing but a

small scalp-knot twisted up on his forehead. His bald purplish head now

looked for all the world like a mildewed skull. Had not the stranger

stood between me and the door, I would have bolted out of it quicker

than ever I bolted a dinner.

Even as it was, I thought something of slipping out of the window, but

it was the second floor back. I am no coward, but what to make of this

head-peddling purple rascal altogether passed my comprehension.

Ignorance is the parent of fear, and being completely nonplussed and

confounded about the stranger, I confess I was now as much afraid of

him as if it was the devil himself who had thus broken into my room at

the dead of night. In fact, I was so afraid of him that I was not game

enough just then to address him, and demand a satisfactory answer

concerning what seemed inexplicable in him.

Meanwhile, he continued the business of undressing, and at last showed

his chest and arms. As I live, these covered parts of him were

checkered with the same squares as his face; his back, too, was all

over the same dark squares; he seemed to have been in a Thirty Years’

War, and just escaped from it with a sticking-plaster shirt. Still

more, his very legs were marked, as if a parcel of dark green frogs

were running up the trunks of young palms. It was now quite plain that

he must be some abominable savage or other shipped aboard of a whaleman

in the South Seas, and so landed in this Christian country. I quaked to

think of it. A peddler of heads too—perhaps the heads of his own

brothers. He might take a fancy to mine—heavens! look at that tomahawk!

But there was no time for shuddering, for now the savage went about

something that completely fascinated my attention, and convinced me

that he must indeed be a heathen. Going to his heavy grego, or wrapall,

or dreadnaught, which he had previously hung on a chair, he fumbled in

the pockets, and produced at length a curious little deformed image

with a hunch on its back, and exactly the colour of a three days’ old

Congo baby. Remembering the embalmed head, at first I almost thought

that this black manikin was a real baby preserved in some similar

manner. But seeing that it was not at all limber, and that it glistened

a good deal like polished ebony, I concluded that it must be nothing

but a wooden idol, which indeed it proved to be. For now the savage

goes up to the empty fire-place, and removing the papered fire-board,

sets up this little hunch-backed image, like a tenpin, between the

andirons. The chimney jambs and all the bricks inside were very sooty,

so that I thought this fire-place made a very appropriate little shrine

or chapel for his Congo idol.

I now screwed my eyes hard towards the half hidden image, feeling but

ill at ease meantime—to see what was next to follow. First he takes

about a double handful of shavings out of his grego pocket, and places

them carefully before the idol; then laying a bit of ship biscuit on

top and applying the flame from the lamp, he kindled the shavings into

a sacrificial blaze. Presently, after many hasty snatches into the

fire, and still hastier withdrawals of his fingers (whereby he seemed

to be scorching them badly), he at last succeeded in drawing out the

biscuit; then blowing off the heat and ashes a little, he made a polite

offer of it to the little negro. But the little devil did not seem to

fancy such dry sort of fare at all; he never moved his lips. All these

strange antics were accompanied by still stranger guttural noises from

the devotee, who seemed to be praying in a sing-song or else singing

some pagan psalmody or other, during which his face twitched about in

the most unnatural manner. At last extinguishing the fire, he took the

idol up very unceremoniously, and bagged it again in his grego pocket

as carelessly as if he were a sportsman bagging a dead woodcock.

All these queer proceedings increased my uncomfortableness, and seeing

him now exhibiting strong symptoms of concluding his business

operations, and jumping into bed with me, I thought it was high time,

now or never, before the light was put out, to break the spell in which

I had so long been bound.

But the interval I spent in deliberating what to say, was a fatal one.

Taking up his tomahawk from the table, he examined the head of it for

an instant, and then holding it to the light, with his mouth at the

handle, he puffed out great clouds of tobacco smoke. The next moment

the light was extinguished, and this wild cannibal, tomahawk between

his teeth, sprang into bed with me. I sang out, I could not help it

now; and giving a sudden grunt of astonishment he began feeling me.

Stammering out something, I knew not what, I rolled away from him

against the wall, and then conjured him, whoever or whatever he might

be, to keep quiet, and let me get up and light the lamp again. But his

guttural responses satisfied me at once that he but ill comprehended my

meaning.

“Who-e debel you?”—he at last said—“you no speak-e, dam-me, I kill-e.”

And so saying the lighted tomahawk began flourishing about me in the

dark.

“Landlord, for God’s sake, Peter Coffin!” shouted I. “Landlord! Watch!

Coffin! Angels! save me!”

“Speak-e! tell-ee me who-ee be, or dam-me, I kill-e!” again growled the

cannibal, while his horrid flourishings of the tomahawk scattered the

hot tobacco ashes about me till I thought my linen would get on fire.

But thank heaven, at that moment the landlord came into the room light

in hand, and leaping from the bed I ran up to him.

“Don’t be afraid now,” said he, grinning again, “Queequeg here wouldn’t

harm a hair of your head.”

“Stop your grinning,” shouted I, “and why didn’t you tell me that that

infernal harpooneer was a cannibal?”

“I thought ye know’d it;—didn’t I tell ye, he was a peddlin’ heads

around town?—but turn flukes again and go to sleep. Queequeg, look

here—you sabbee me, I sabbee—you this man sleepe you—you sabbee?”

“Me sabbee plenty”—grunted Queequeg, puffing away at his pipe and

sitting up in bed.

“You gettee in,” he added, motioning to me with his tomahawk, and

throwing the clothes to one side. He really did this in not only a

civil but a really kind and charitable way. I stood looking at him a

moment. For all his tattooings he was on the whole a clean, comely

looking cannibal. What’s all this fuss I have been making about,

thought I to myself—the man’s a human being just as I am: he has just

as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him. Better sleep

with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian.

“Landlord,” said I, “tell him to stash his tomahawk there, or pipe, or

whatever you call it; tell him to stop smoking, in short, and I will

turn in with him. But I don’t fancy having a man smoking in bed with

me. It’s dangerous. Besides, I ain’t insured.”

This being told to Queequeg, he at once complied, and again politely

motioned me to get into bed—rolling over to one side as much as to

say—“I won’t touch a leg of ye.”

“Good night, landlord,” said I, “you may go.”

I turned in, and never slept better in my life.

CHAPTER 4. The Counterpane.

Upon waking next morning about daylight, I found Queequeg’s arm thrown

over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost

thought I had been his wife. The counterpane was of patchwork, full of

odd little parti-coloured squares and triangles; and this arm of his

tattooed all over with an interminable Cretan labyrinth of a figure, no

two parts of which were of one precise shade—owing I suppose to his

keeping his arm at sea unmethodically in sun and shade, his shirt

sleeves irregularly rolled up at various times—this same arm of his, I

say, looked for all the world like a strip of that same patchwork

quilt. Indeed, partly lying on it as the arm did when I first awoke, I

could hardly tell it from the quilt, they so blended their hues

together; and it was only by the sense of weight and pressure that I

could tell that Queequeg was hugging me.

My sensations were strange. Let me try to explain them. When I was a

child, I well remember a somewhat similar circumstance that befell me;

whether it was a reality or a dream, I never could entirely settle. The

circumstance was this. I had been cutting up some caper or other—I

think it was trying to crawl up the chimney, as I had seen a little

sweep do a few days previous; and my stepmother who, somehow or other,

was all the time whipping me, or sending me to bed supperless,—my

mother dragged me by the legs out of the chimney and packed me off to

bed, though it was only two o’clock in the afternoon of the 21st June,

the longest day in the year in our hemisphere. I felt dreadfully. But

there was no help for it, so up stairs I went to my little room in the

third floor, undressed myself as slowly as possible so as to kill time,

and with a bitter sigh got between the sheets.

I lay there dismally calculating that sixteen entire hours must elapse

before I could hope for a resurrection. Sixteen hours in bed! the small

of my back ached to think of it. And it was so light too; the sun

shining in at the window, and a great rattling of coaches in the

streets, and the sound of gay voices all over the house. I felt worse

and worse—at last I got up, dressed, and softly going down in my

stockinged feet, sought out my stepmother, and suddenly threw myself at

her feet, beseeching her as a particular favour to give me a good

slippering for my misbehaviour; anything indeed but condemning me to

lie abed such an unendurable length of time. But she was the best and

most conscientious of stepmothers, and back I had to go to my room. For

several hours I lay there broad awake, feeling a great deal worse than

I have ever done since, even from the greatest subsequent misfortunes.

At last I must have fallen into a troubled nightmare of a doze; and

slowly waking from it—half steeped in dreams—I opened my eyes, and the

before sun-lit room was now wrapped in outer darkness. Instantly I felt

a shock running through all my frame; nothing was to be seen, and

nothing was to be heard; but a supernatural hand seemed placed in mine.

My arm hung over the counterpane, and the nameless, unimaginable,

silent form or phantom, to which the hand belonged, seemed closely

seated by my bed-side. For what seemed ages piled on ages, I lay there,

frozen with the most awful fears, not daring to drag away my hand; yet

ever thinking that if I could but stir it one single inch, the horrid

spell would be broken. I knew not how this consciousness at last glided

away from me; but waking in the morning, I shudderingly remembered it

all, and for days and weeks and months afterwards I lost myself in

confounding attempts to explain the mystery. Nay, to this very hour, I

often puzzle myself with it.

Now, take away the awful fear, and my sensations at feeling the

supernatural hand in mine were very similar, in their strangeness, to

those which I experienced on waking up and seeing Queequeg’s pagan arm

thrown round me. But at length all the past night’s events soberly

recurred, one by one, in fixed reality, and then I lay only alive to

the comical predicament. For though I tried to move his arm—unlock his

bridegroom clasp—yet, sleeping as he was, he still hugged me tightly,

as though naught but death should part us twain. I now strove to rouse

him—“Queequeg!”—but his only answer was a snore. I then rolled over, my

neck feeling as if it were in a horse-collar; and suddenly felt a

slight scratch. Throwing aside the counterpane, there lay the tomahawk

sleeping by the savage’s side, as if it were a hatchet-faced baby. A

pretty pickle, truly, thought I; abed here in a strange house in the

broad day, with a cannibal and a tomahawk! “Queequeg!—in the name of

goodness, Queequeg, wake!” At length, by dint of much wriggling, and

loud and incessant expostulations upon the unbecomingness of his

hugging a fellow male in that matrimonial sort of style, I succeeded in

extracting a grunt; and presently, he drew back his arm, shook himself

all over like a Newfoundland dog just from the water, and sat up in

bed, stiff as a pike-staff, looking at me, and rubbing his eyes as if

he did not altogether remember how I came to be there, though a dim

consciousness of knowing something about me seemed slowly dawning over

him. Meanwhile, I lay quietly eyeing him, having no serious misgivings

now, and bent upon narrowly observing so curious a creature. When, at

last, his mind seemed made up touching the character of his bedfellow,

and he became, as it were, reconciled to the fact; he jumped out upon

the floor, and by certain signs and sounds gave me to understand that,

if it pleased me, he would dress first and then leave me to dress

afterwards, leaving the whole apartment to myself. Thinks I, Queequeg,

under the circumstances, this is a very civilized overture; but, the

truth is, these savages have an innate sense of delicacy, say what you

will; it is marvellous how essentially polite they are. I pay this

particular compliment to Queequeg, because he treated me with so much

civility and consideration, while I was guilty of great rudeness;

staring at him from the bed, and watching all his toilette motions; for

the time my curiosity getting the better of my breeding. Nevertheless,

a man like Queequeg you don’t see every day, he and his ways were well

worth unusual regarding.

He commenced dressing at top by donning his beaver hat, a very tall

one, by the by, and then—still minus his trowsers—he hunted up his

boots. What under the heavens he did it for, I cannot tell, but his

next movement was to crush himself—boots in hand, and hat on—under the

bed; when, from sundry violent gaspings and strainings, I inferred he

was hard at work booting himself; though by no law of propriety that I

ever heard of, is any man required to be private when putting on his

boots. But Queequeg, do you see, was a creature in the transition

stage—neither caterpillar nor butterfly. He was just enough civilized

to show off his outlandishness in the strangest possible manners. His

education was not yet completed. He was an undergraduate. If he had not

been a small degree civilized, he very probably would not have troubled

himself with boots at all; but then, if he had not been still a savage,

he never would have dreamt of getting under the bed to put them on. At

last, he emerged with his hat very much dented and crushed down over

his eyes, and began creaking and limping about the room, as if, not

being much accustomed to boots, his pair of damp, wrinkled cowhide

ones—probably not made to order either—rather pinched and tormented him

at the first go off of a bitter cold morning.

Seeing, now, that there were no curtains to the window, and that the

street being very narrow, the house opposite commanded a plain view

into the room, and observing more and more the indecorous figure that

Queequeg made, staving about with little else but his hat and boots on;

I begged him as well as I could, to accelerate his toilet somewhat, and

particularly to get into his pantaloons as soon as possible. He

complied, and then proceeded to wash himself. At that time in the

morning any Christian would have washed his face; but Queequeg, to my

amazement, contented himself with restricting his ablutions to his

chest, arms, and hands. He then donned his waistcoat, and taking up a

piece of hard soap on the wash-stand centre table, dipped it into water

and commenced lathering his face. I was watching to see where he kept

his razor, when lo and behold, he takes the harpoon from the bed

corner, slips out the long wooden stock, unsheathes the head, whets it

a little on his boot, and striding up to the bit of mirror against the

wall, begins a vigorous scraping, or rather harpooning of his cheeks.

Thinks I, Queequeg, this is using Rogers’s best cutlery with a

vengeance. Afterwards I wondered the less at this operation when I came

to know of what fine steel the head of a harpoon is made, and how

exceedingly sharp the long straight edges are always kept.

The rest of his toilet was soon achieved, and he proudly marched out of

the room, wrapped up in his great pilot monkey jacket, and sporting his

harpoon like a marshal’s baton.

CHAPTER 5. Breakfast.

I quickly followed suit, and descending into the bar-room accosted the

grinning landlord very pleasantly. I cherished no malice towards him,

though he had been skylarking with me not a little in the matter of my

bedfellow.

However, a good laugh is a mighty good thing, and rather too scarce a

good thing; the more’s the pity. So, if any one man, in his own proper

person, afford stuff for a good joke to anybody, let him not be

backward, but let him cheerfully allow himself to spend and be spent in

that way. And the man that has anything bountifully laughable about

him, be sure there is more in that man than you perhaps think for.

The bar-room was now full of the boarders who had been dropping in the

night previous, and whom I had not as yet had a good look at. They were

nearly all whalemen; chief mates, and second mates, and third mates,

and sea carpenters, and sea coopers, and sea blacksmiths, and

harpooneers, and ship keepers; a brown and brawny company, with bosky

beards; an unshorn, shaggy set, all wearing monkey jackets for morning

gowns.

You could pretty plainly tell how long each one had been ashore. This

young fellow’s healthy cheek is like a sun-toasted pear in hue, and

would seem to smell almost as musky; he cannot have been three days

landed from his Indian voyage. That man next him looks a few shades

lighter; you might say a touch of satin wood is in him. In the

complexion of a third still lingers a tropic tawn, but slightly

bleached withal; \_he\_ doubtless has tarried whole weeks ashore. But who

could show a cheek like Queequeg? which, barred with various tints,

seemed like the Andes’ western slope, to show forth in one array,

contrasting climates, zone by zone.

“Grub, ho!” now cried the landlord, flinging open a door, and in we

went to breakfast.

They say that men who have seen the world, thereby become quite at ease

in manner, quite self-possessed in company. Not always, though:

Ledyard, the great New England traveller, and Mungo Park, the Scotch

one; of all men, they possessed the least assurance in the parlor. But

perhaps the mere crossing of Siberia in a sledge drawn by dogs as

Ledyard did, or the taking a long solitary walk on an empty stomach, in

the negro heart of Africa, which was the sum of poor Mungo’s

performances—this kind of travel, I say, may not be the very best mode

of attaining a high social polish. Still, for the most part, that sort

of thing is to be had anywhere.

These reflections just here are occasioned by the circumstance that

after we were all seated at the table, and I was preparing to hear some

good stories about whaling; to my no small surprise, nearly every man

maintained a profound silence. And not only that, but they looked

embarrassed. Yes, here were a set of sea-dogs, many of whom without the

slightest bashfulness had boarded great whales on the high seas—entire

strangers to them—and duelled them dead without winking; and yet, here

they sat at a social breakfast table—all of the same calling, all of

kindred tastes—looking round as sheepishly at each other as though they

had never been out of sight of some sheepfold among the Green

Mountains. A curious sight; these bashful bears, these timid warrior

whalemen!

But as for Queequeg—why, Queequeg sat there among them—at the head of

the table, too, it so chanced; as cool as an icicle. To be sure I

cannot say much for his breeding. His greatest admirer could not have

cordially justified his bringing his harpoon into breakfast with him,

and using it there without ceremony; reaching over the table with it,

to the imminent jeopardy of many heads, and grappling the beefsteaks

towards him. But \_that\_ was certainly very coolly done by him, and

every one knows that in most people’s estimation, to do anything coolly

is to do it genteelly.

We will not speak of all Queequeg’s peculiarities here; how he eschewed

coffee and hot rolls, and applied his undivided attention to

beefsteaks, done rare. Enough, that when breakfast was over he withdrew

like the rest into the public room, lighted his tomahawk-pipe, and was

sitting there quietly digesting and smoking with his inseparable hat

on, when I sallied out for a stroll.

CHAPTER 6. 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.

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, Tongatobooarrs, 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. 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.

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.

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 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?

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.

CHAPTER 7. The Chapel.

In this same New Bedford there stands a Whaleman’s Chapel, and few are

the moody fishermen, shortly bound for the Indian Ocean or Pacific, who

fail to make a Sunday visit to the spot. I am sure that I did not.

Returning from my first morning stroll, I again sallied out upon this

special errand. The sky had changed from clear, sunny cold, to driving

sleet and mist. Wrapping myself in my shaggy jacket of the cloth called

bearskin, I fought my way against the stubborn storm. Entering, I found

a small scattered congregation of sailors, and sailors’ wives and

widows. A muffled silence reigned, only broken at times by the shrieks

of the storm. Each silent worshipper seemed purposely sitting apart

from the other, as if each silent grief were insular and

incommunicable. The chaplain had not yet arrived; and there these

silent islands of men and women sat steadfastly eyeing several marble

tablets, with black borders, masoned into the wall on either side the

pulpit. Three of them ran something like the following, but I do not

pretend to quote:—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF JOHN TALBOT, Who, at the age of eighteen, was

lost overboard, Near the Isle of Desolation, off Patagonia, \_November\_

1\_st\_, 1836. THIS TABLET Is erected to his Memory BY HIS SISTER.

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF ROBERT LONG, WILLIS ELLERY, NATHAN COLEMAN,

WALTER CANNY, SETH MACY, AND SAMUEL GLEIG, Forming one of the boats’

crews OF THE SHIP ELIZA Who were towed out of sight by a Whale, On the

Off-shore Ground in the PACIFIC, \_December\_ 31\_st\_, 1839. THIS MARBLE

Is here placed by their surviving SHIPMATES.

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF The late CAPTAIN EZEKIEL HARDY, Who in the bows

of his boat was killed by a Sperm Whale on the coast of Japan, \_August\_

3\_d\_, 1833. THIS TABLET Is erected to his Memory BY HIS WIDOW.

Shaking off the sleet from my ice-glazed hat and jacket, I seated

myself near the door, and turning sideways was surprised to see

Queequeg near me. Affected by the solemnity of the scene, there was a

wondering gaze of incredulous curiosity in his countenance. This savage

was the only person present who seemed to notice my entrance; because

he was the only one who could not read, and, therefore, was not reading

those frigid inscriptions on the wall. Whether any of the relatives of

the seamen whose names appeared there were now among the congregation,

I knew not; but so many are the unrecorded accidents in the fishery,

and so plainly did several women present wear the countenance if not

the trappings of some unceasing grief, that I feel sure that here

before me were assembled those, in whose unhealing hearts the sight of

those bleak tablets sympathetically caused the old wounds to bleed

afresh.

Oh! ye whose dead lie buried beneath the green grass; who standing

among flowers can say—here, \_here\_ lies my beloved; ye know not the

desolation that broods in bosoms like these. What bitter blanks in

those black-bordered marbles which cover no ashes! What despair in

those immovable inscriptions! What deadly voids and unbidden

infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith, and refuse

resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a

grave. As well might those tablets stand in the cave of Elephanta as

here.

In what census of living creatures, the dead of mankind are included;

why it is that a universal proverb says of them, that they tell no

tales, though containing more secrets than the Goodwin Sands; how it is

that to his name who yesterday departed for the other world, we prefix

so significant and infidel a word, and yet do not thus entitle him, if

he but embarks for the remotest Indies of this living earth; why the

Life Insurance Companies pay death-forfeitures upon immortals; in what

eternal, unstirring paralysis, and deadly, hopeless trance, yet lies

antique Adam who died sixty round centuries ago; how it is that we

still refuse to be comforted for those who we nevertheless maintain are

dwelling in unspeakable bliss; why all the living so strive to hush all

the dead; wherefore but the rumor of a knocking in a tomb will terrify

a whole city. All these things are not without their meanings.

But Faith, like a jackal, feeds among the tombs, and even from these

dead doubts she gathers her most vital hope.

It needs scarcely to be told, with what feelings, on the eve of a

Nantucket voyage, I regarded those marble tablets, and by the murky

light of that darkened, doleful day read the fate of the whalemen who

had gone before me. Yes, Ishmael, the same fate may be thine. But

somehow I grew merry again. Delightful inducements to embark, fine

chance for promotion, it seems—aye, a stove boat will make me an

immortal by brevet. Yes, there is death in this business of whaling—a

speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of a man into Eternity. But what

then? Methinks we have hugely mistaken this matter of Life and Death.

Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true

substance. Methinks that in looking at things spiritual, we are too

much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking

that thick water the thinnest of air. Methinks my body is but the lees

of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is

not me. And therefore three cheers for Nantucket; and come a stove boat

and stove body when they will, for stave my soul, Jove himself cannot.

CHAPTER 8. The Pulpit.

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 favourite. 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.

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 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 colour, 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 sailor-like but still

reverential dexterity, hand over hand, mounted the steps as if

ascending the main-top of his vessel.

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.

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.

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 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.”

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 a

projecting piece of scroll work, fashioned after a ship’s fiddle-headed

beak.

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 favourable winds.

Yes, the world’s a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete;

and the pulpit is its prow.

CHAPTER 9. The Sermon.

Father Mapple rose, and in a mild voice of unassuming authority ordered

the scattered people to condense. “Starboard gangway, there! side away

to larboard—larboard gangway to starboard! Midships! midships!”

There was a low rumbling of heavy sea-boots among the benches, and a

still slighter shuffling of women’s shoes, and all was quiet again, and

every eye on the preacher.

He paused a little; then kneeling in the pulpit’s bows, folded his

large brown hands across his chest, uplifted his closed eyes, and

offered a prayer so deeply devout that he seemed kneeling and praying

at the bottom of the sea.

This ended, in prolonged solemn tones, like the continual tolling of a

bell in a ship that is foundering at sea in a fog—in such tones he

commenced reading the following hymn; but changing his manner towards

the concluding stanzas, burst forth with a pealing exultation and joy—

“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.”

Nearly all joined in singing this hymn, which swelled high above the

howling of the storm. A brief pause ensued; the preacher slowly turned

over the leaves of the Bible, and at last, folding his hand down upon

the proper page, said: “Beloved shipmates, clinch the last verse of the

first chapter of Jonah—‘And God had prepared a great fish to swallow up

Jonah.’”

“Shipmates, this book, containing only four chapters—four yarns—is one

of the smallest strands in the mighty cable of the Scriptures. Yet what

depths of the soul does Jonah’s deep sealine sound! what a pregnant

lesson to us is this prophet! What a noble thing is that canticle in

the fish’s belly! How billow-like and boisterously grand! We feel the

floods surging over us; we sound with him to the kelpy bottom of the

waters; sea-weed and all the slime of the sea is about us! But \_what\_

is this lesson that the book of Jonah teaches? Shipmates, it is a

two-stranded lesson; a lesson to us all as sinful men, and a lesson to

me as a pilot of the living God. As sinful men, it is a lesson to us

all, because it is a story of the sin, hard-heartedness, suddenly

awakened fears, the swift punishment, repentance, prayers, and finally

the deliverance and joy of Jonah. As with all sinners among men, the

sin of this son of Amittai was in his wilful disobedience of the

command of God—never mind now what that command was, or how

conveyed—which he found a hard command. But all the things that God

would have us do are hard for us to do—remember that—and hence, he

oftener commands us than endeavors to persuade. And if we obey God, we

must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein

the hardness of obeying God consists.

“With this sin of disobedience in him, Jonah still further flouts at

God, by seeking to flee from Him. He thinks that a ship made by men

will carry him into countries where God does not reign, but only the

Captains of this earth. He skulks about the wharves of Joppa, and seeks

a ship that’s bound for Tarshish. There lurks, perhaps, a hitherto

unheeded meaning here. By all accounts Tarshish could have been no

other city than the modern Cadiz. That’s the opinion of learned men.

And where is Cadiz, shipmates? Cadiz is in Spain; as far by water, from

Joppa, as Jonah could possibly have sailed in those ancient days, when

the Atlantic was an almost unknown sea. Because Joppa, the modern

Jaffa, shipmates, is on the most easterly coast of the Mediterranean,

the Syrian; and Tarshish or Cadiz more than two thousand miles to the

westward from that, just outside the Straits of Gibraltar. See ye not

then, shipmates, that Jonah sought to flee world-wide from God?

Miserable man! Oh! most contemptible and worthy of all scorn; with

slouched hat and guilty eye, skulking from his God; prowling among the

shipping like a vile burglar hastening to cross the seas. So

disordered, self-condemning is his look, that had there been policemen

in those days, Jonah, on the mere suspicion of something wrong, had

been arrested ere he touched a deck. How plainly he’s a fugitive! no

baggage, not a hat-box, valise, or carpet-bag,—no friends accompany him

to the wharf with their adieux. At last, after much dodging search, he

finds the Tarshish ship receiving the last items of her cargo; and as

he steps on board to see its Captain in the cabin, all the sailors for

the moment desist from hoisting in the goods, to mark the stranger’s

evil eye. Jonah sees this; but in vain he tries to look all ease and

confidence; in vain essays his wretched smile. Strong intuitions of the

man assure the mariners he can be no innocent. In their gamesome but

still serious way, one whispers to the other—“Jack, he’s robbed a

widow;” or, “Joe, do you mark him; he’s a bigamist;” or, “Harry lad, I

guess he’s the adulterer that broke jail in old Gomorrah, or belike,

one of the missing murderers from Sodom.” Another runs to read the bill

that’s stuck against the spile upon the wharf to which the ship is

moored, offering five hundred gold coins for the apprehension of a

parricide, and containing a description of his person. He reads, and

looks from Jonah to the bill; while all his sympathetic shipmates now

crowd round Jonah, prepared to lay their hands upon him. Frighted Jonah

trembles, and summoning all his boldness to his face, only looks so

much the more a coward. He will not confess himself suspected; but that

itself is strong suspicion. So he makes the best of it; and when the

sailors find him not to be the man that is advertised, they let him

pass, and he descends into the cabin.

“‘Who’s there?’ cries the Captain at his busy desk, hurriedly making

out his papers for the Customs—‘Who’s there?’ Oh! how that harmless

question mangles Jonah! For the instant he almost turns to flee again.

But he rallies. ‘I seek a passage in this ship to Tarshish; how soon

sail ye, sir?’ Thus far the busy Captain had not looked up to Jonah,

though the man now stands before him; but no sooner does he hear that

hollow voice, than he darts a scrutinizing glance. ‘We sail with the

next coming tide,’ at last he slowly answered, still intently eyeing

him. ‘No sooner, sir?’—‘Soon enough for any honest man that goes a

passenger.’ Ha! Jonah, that’s another stab. But he swiftly calls away

the Captain from that scent. ‘I’ll sail with ye,’—he says,—‘the passage

money how much is that?—I’ll pay now.’ For it is particularly written,

shipmates, as if it were a thing not to be overlooked in this history,

‘that he paid the fare thereof’ ere the craft did sail. And taken with

the context, this is full of meaning.

“Now Jonah’s Captain, shipmates, was one whose discernment detects

crime in any, but whose cupidity exposes it only in the penniless. In

this world, shipmates, sin that pays its way can travel freely, and

without a passport; whereas Virtue, if a pauper, is stopped at all

frontiers. So Jonah’s Captain prepares to test the length of Jonah’s

purse, ere he judge him openly. He charges him thrice the usual sum;

and it’s assented to. Then the Captain knows that Jonah is a fugitive;

but at the same time resolves to help a flight that paves its rear with

gold. Yet when Jonah fairly takes out his purse, prudent suspicions

still molest the Captain. He rings every coin to find a counterfeit.

Not a forger, any way, he mutters; and Jonah is put down for his

passage. ‘Point out my state-room, Sir,’ says Jonah now, ‘I’m

travel-weary; I need sleep.’ ‘Thou lookest like it,’ says the Captain,

‘there’s thy room.’ Jonah enters, and would lock the door, but the lock

contains no key. Hearing him foolishly fumbling there, the Captain

laughs lowly to himself, and mutters something about the doors of

convicts’ cells being never allowed to be locked within. All dressed

and dusty as he is, Jonah throws himself into his berth, and finds the

little state-room ceiling almost resting on his forehead. The air is

close, and Jonah gasps. Then, in that contracted hole, sunk, too,

beneath the ship’s water-line, Jonah feels the heralding presentiment

of that stifling hour, when the whale shall hold him in the smallest of

his bowels’ wards.

“Screwed at its axis against the side, a swinging lamp slightly

oscillates in Jonah’s room; and the ship, heeling over towards the

wharf with the weight of the last bales received, the lamp, flame and

all, though in slight motion, still maintains a permanent obliquity

with reference to the room; though, in truth, infallibly straight

itself, it but made obvious the false, lying levels among which it

hung. The lamp alarms and frightens Jonah; as lying in his berth his

tormented eyes roll round the place, and this thus far successful

fugitive finds no refuge for his restless glance. But that

contradiction in the lamp more and more appals him. The floor, the

ceiling, and the side, are all awry. ‘Oh! so my conscience hangs in

me!’ he groans, ‘straight upwards, so it burns; but the chambers of my

soul are all in crookedness!’

“Like one who after a night of drunken revelry hies to his bed, still

reeling, but with conscience yet pricking him, as the plungings of the

Roman race-horse but so much the more strike his steel tags into him;

as one who in that miserable plight still turns and turns in giddy

anguish, praying God for annihilation until the fit be passed; and at

last amid the whirl of woe he feels, a deep stupor steals over him, as

over the man who bleeds to death, for conscience is the wound, and

there’s naught to staunch it; so, after sore wrestlings in his berth,

Jonah’s prodigy of ponderous misery drags him drowning down to sleep.

“And now the time of tide has come; the ship casts off her cables; and

from the deserted wharf the uncheered ship for Tarshish, all careening,

glides to sea. That ship, my friends, was the first of recorded

smugglers! the contraband was Jonah. But the sea rebels; he will not

bear the wicked burden. A dreadful storm comes on, the ship is like to

break. But now when the boatswain calls all hands to lighten her; when

boxes, bales, and jars are clattering overboard; when the wind is

shrieking, and the men are yelling, and every plank thunders with

trampling feet right over Jonah’s head; in all this raging tumult,

Jonah sleeps his hideous sleep. He sees no black sky and raging sea,

feels not the reeling timbers, and little hears he or heeds he the far

rush of the mighty whale, which even now with open mouth is cleaving

the seas after him. Aye, shipmates, Jonah was gone down into the sides

of the ship—a berth in the cabin as I have taken it, and was fast

asleep. But the frightened master comes to him, and shrieks in his dead

ear, ‘What meanest thou, O, sleeper! arise!’ Startled from his lethargy

by that direful cry, Jonah staggers to his feet, and stumbling to the

deck, grasps a shroud, to look out upon the sea. But at that moment he

is sprung upon by a panther billow leaping over the bulwarks. Wave

after wave thus leaps into the ship, and finding no speedy vent runs

roaring fore and aft, till the mariners come nigh to drowning while yet

afloat. And ever, as the white moon shows her affrighted face from the

steep gullies in the blackness overhead, aghast Jonah sees the rearing

bowsprit pointing high upward, but soon beat downward again towards the

tormented deep.

“Terrors upon terrors run shouting through his soul. In all his

cringing attitudes, the God-fugitive is now too plainly known. The

sailors mark him; more and more certain grow their suspicions of him,

and at last, fully to test the truth, by referring the whole matter to

high Heaven, they fall to casting lots, to see for whose cause this

great tempest was upon them. The lot is Jonah’s; that discovered, then

how furiously they mob him with their questions. ‘What is thine

occupation? Whence comest thou? Thy country? What people? But mark now,

my shipmates, the behavior of poor Jonah. The eager mariners but ask

him who he is, and where from; whereas, they not only receive an answer

to those questions, but likewise another answer to a question not put

by them, but the unsolicited answer is forced from Jonah by the hard

hand of God that is upon him.

“‘I am a Hebrew,’ he cries—and then—‘I fear the Lord the God of Heaven

who hath made the sea and the dry land!’ Fear him, O Jonah? Aye, well

mightest thou fear the Lord God \_then!\_ Straightway, he now goes on to

make a full confession; whereupon the mariners became more and more

appalled, but still are pitiful. For when Jonah, not yet supplicating

God for mercy, since he but too well knew the darkness of his

deserts,—when wretched Jonah cries out to them to take him and cast him

forth into the sea, for he knew that for \_his\_ sake this great tempest

was upon them; they mercifully turn from him, and seek by other means

to save the ship. But all in vain; the indignant gale howls louder;

then, with one hand raised invokingly to God, with the other they not

unreluctantly lay hold of Jonah.

“And now behold Jonah taken up as an anchor and dropped into the sea;

when instantly an oily calmness floats out from the east, and the sea

is still, as Jonah carries down the gale with him, leaving smooth water

behind. He goes down in the whirling heart of such a masterless

commotion that he scarce heeds the moment when he drops seething into

the yawning jaws awaiting him; and the whale shoots-to all his ivory

teeth, like so many white bolts, upon his prison. Then Jonah prayed

unto the Lord out of the fish’s belly. But observe his prayer, and

learn a weighty lesson. For sinful as he is, Jonah does not weep and

wail for direct deliverance. He feels that his dreadful punishment is

just. He leaves all his deliverance to God, contenting himself with

this, that spite of all his pains and pangs, he will still look towards

His holy temple. And here, shipmates, is true and faithful repentance;

not clamorous for pardon, but grateful for punishment. And how pleasing

to God was this conduct in Jonah, is shown in the eventual deliverance

of him from the sea and the whale. Shipmates, I do not place Jonah

before you to be copied for his sin but I do place him before you as a

model for repentance. Sin not; but if you do, take heed to repent of it

like Jonah.”

While he was speaking these words, the howling of the shrieking,

slanting storm without seemed to add new power to the preacher, who,

when describing Jonah’s sea-storm, seemed tossed by a storm himself.

His deep chest heaved as with a ground-swell; his tossed arms seemed

the warring elements at work; and the thunders that rolled away from

off his swarthy brow, and the light leaping from his eye, made all his

simple hearers look on him with a quick fear that was strange to them.

There now came a lull in his look, as he silently turned over the

leaves of the Book once more; and, at last, standing motionless, with

closed eyes, for the moment, seemed communing with God and himself.

But again he leaned over towards the people, and bowing his head lowly,

with an aspect of the deepest yet manliest humility, he spake these

words:

“Shipmates, God has laid but one hand upon you; both his hands press

upon me. I have read ye by what murky light may be mine the lesson that

Jonah teaches to all sinners; and therefore to ye, and still more to

me, for I am a greater sinner than ye. And now how gladly would I come

down from this mast-head and sit on the hatches there where you sit,

and listen as you listen, while some one of you reads \_me\_ that other

and more awful lesson which Jonah teaches to \_me\_, as a pilot of the

living God. How being an anointed pilot-prophet, or speaker of true

things, and bidden by the Lord to sound those unwelcome truths in the

ears of a wicked Nineveh, Jonah, appalled at the hostility he should

raise, fled from his mission, and sought to escape his duty and his God

by taking ship at Joppa. But God is everywhere; Tarshish he never

reached. As we have seen, God came upon him in the whale, and swallowed

him down to living gulfs of doom, and with swift slantings tore him

along ‘into the midst of the seas,’ where the eddying depths sucked him

ten thousand fathoms down, and ‘the weeds were wrapped about his head,’

and all the watery world of woe bowled over him. Yet even then beyond

the reach of any plummet—‘out of the belly of hell’—when the whale

grounded upon the ocean’s utmost bones, even then, God heard the

engulphed, repenting prophet when he cried. Then God spake unto the

fish; and from the shuddering cold and blackness of the sea, the whale

came breeching up towards the warm and pleasant sun, and all the

delights of air and earth; and ‘vomited out Jonah upon the dry land;’

when the word of the Lord came a second time; and Jonah, bruised and

beaten—his ears, like two sea-shells, still multitudinously murmuring

of the ocean—Jonah did the Almighty’s bidding. And what was that,

shipmates? To preach the Truth to the face of Falsehood! That was it!

“This, shipmates, this is that other lesson; and woe to that pilot of

the living God who slights it. Woe to him whom this world charms from

Gospel duty! Woe to him who seeks to pour oil upon the waters when God

has brewed them into a gale! Woe to him who seeks to please rather than

to appal! Woe to him whose good name is more to him than goodness! Woe

to him who, in this world, courts not dishonor! Woe to him who would

not be true, even though to be false were salvation! Yea, woe to him

who, as the great Pilot Paul has it, while preaching to others is

himself a castaway!”

He dropped and fell away from himself for a moment; then lifting his

face to them again, showed a deep joy in his eyes, as he cried out with

a heavenly enthusiasm,—“But oh! shipmates! on the starboard hand of

every woe, there is a sure delight; and higher the top of that delight,

than the bottom of the woe is deep. Is not the main-truck higher than

the kelson is low? Delight is to him—a far, far upward, and inward

delight—who against the proud gods and commodores of this earth, ever

stands forth his own inexorable self. Delight is to him whose strong

arms yet support him, when the ship of this base treacherous world has

gone down beneath him. Delight is to him, who gives no quarter in the

truth, and kills, burns, and destroys all sin though he pluck it out

from under the robes of Senators and Judges. Delight,—top-gallant

delight is to him, who acknowledges no law or lord, but the Lord his

God, and is only a patriot to heaven. Delight is to him, whom all the

waves of the billows of the seas of the boisterous mob can never shake

from this sure Keel of the Ages. And eternal delight and deliciousness

will be his, who coming to lay him down, can say with his final

breath—O Father!—chiefly known to me by Thy rod—mortal or immortal,

here I die. I have striven to be Thine, more than to be this world’s,

or mine own. Yet this is nothing: I leave eternity to Thee; for what is

man that he should live out the lifetime of his God?”

He said no more, but slowly waving a benediction, covered his face with

his hands, and so remained kneeling, till all the people had departed,

and he was left alone in the place.

CHAPTER 10. A Bosom Friend.

Returning to the Spouter-Inn from the Chapel, I found Queequeg there

quite alone; he having left the Chapel before the benediction some

time. He was sitting on a bench before the fire, with his feet on the

stove hearth, and in one hand was holding close up to his face that

little negro idol of his; peering hard into its face, and with a

jack-knife gently whittling away at its nose, meanwhile humming to

himself in his heathenish way.

But being now interrupted, he put up the image; and pretty soon, going

to the table, took up a large book there, and placing it on his lap

began counting the pages with deliberate regularity; at every fiftieth

page—as I fancied—stopping a moment, looking vacantly around him, and

giving utterance to a long-drawn gurgling whistle of astonishment. He

would then begin again at the next fifty; seeming to commence at number

one each time, as though he could not count more than fifty, and it was

only by such a large number of fifties being found together, that his

astonishment at the multitude of pages was excited.

With much interest I sat watching him. Savage though he was, and

hideously marred about the face—at least to my taste—his countenance

yet had a something in it which was by no means disagreeable. You

cannot hide the soul. Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I

saw the traces of a simple honest heart; and in his large, deep eyes,

fiery black and bold, there seemed tokens of a spirit that would dare a

thousand devils. And besides all this, there was a certain lofty

bearing about the Pagan, which even his uncouthness could not

altogether maim. He looked like a man who had never cringed and never

had had a creditor. Whether it was, too, that his head being shaved,

his forehead was drawn out in freer and brighter relief, and looked

more expansive than it otherwise would, this I will not venture to

decide; but certain it was his head was phrenologically an excellent

one. It may seem ridiculous, but it reminded me of General Washington’s

head, as seen in the popular busts of him. It had the same long

regularly graded retreating slope from above the brows, which were

likewise very projecting, like two long promontories thickly wooded on

top. Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed.

Whilst I was thus closely scanning him, half-pretending meanwhile to be

looking out at the storm from the casement, he never heeded my

presence, never troubled himself with so much as a single glance; but

appeared wholly occupied with counting the pages of the marvellous

book. Considering how sociably we had been sleeping together the night

previous, and especially considering the affectionate arm I had found

thrown over me upon waking in the morning, I thought this indifference

of his very strange. But savages are strange beings; at times you do

not know exactly how to take them. At first they are overawing; their

calm self-collectedness of simplicity seems a Socratic wisdom. I had

noticed also that Queequeg never consorted at all, or but very little,

with the other seamen in the inn. He made no advances whatever;

appeared to have no desire to enlarge the circle of his acquaintances.

All this struck me as mighty singular; yet, upon second thoughts, there

was something almost sublime in it. Here was a man some twenty thousand

miles from home, by the way of Cape Horn, that is—which was the only

way he could get there—thrown among people as strange to him as though

he were in the planet Jupiter; and yet he seemed entirely at his ease;

preserving the utmost serenity; content with his own companionship;

always equal to himself. Surely this was a touch of fine philosophy;

though no doubt he had never heard there was such a thing as that. But,

perhaps, to be true philosophers, we mortals should not be conscious of

so living or so striving. So soon as I hear that such or such a man

gives himself out for a philosopher, I conclude that, like the

dyspeptic old woman, he must have “broken his digester.”

As I sat there in that now lonely room; the fire burning low, in that

mild stage when, after its first intensity has warmed the air, it then

only glows to be looked at; the evening shades and phantoms gathering

round the casements, and peering in upon us silent, solitary twain; the

storm booming without in solemn swells; I began to be sensible of

strange feelings. I felt a melting in me. No more my splintered heart

and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing

savage had redeemed it. There he sat, his very indifference speaking a

nature in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland

deceits. Wild he was; a very sight of sights to see; yet I began to

feel myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things that

would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets that thus

drew me. I’ll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness

has proved but hollow courtesy. I drew my bench near him, and made some

friendly signs and hints, doing my best to talk with him meanwhile. At

first he little noticed these advances; but presently, upon my

referring to his last night’s hospitalities, he made out to ask me

whether we were again to be bedfellows. I told him yes; whereat I

thought he looked pleased, perhaps a little complimented.

We then turned over the book together, and I endeavored to explain to

him the purpose of the printing, and the meaning of the few pictures

that were in it. Thus I soon engaged his interest; and from that we

went to jabbering the best we could about the various outer sights to

be seen in this famous town. Soon I proposed a social smoke; and,

producing his pouch and tomahawk, he quietly offered me a puff. And

then we sat exchanging puffs from that wild pipe of his, and keeping it

regularly passing between us.

If there yet lurked any ice of indifference towards me in the Pagan’s

breast, this pleasant, genial smoke we had, soon thawed it out, and

left us cronies. He seemed to take to me quite as naturally and

unbiddenly as I to him; and when our smoke was over, he pressed his

forehead against mine, clasped me round the waist, and said that

henceforth we were married; meaning, in his country’s phrase, that we

were bosom friends; he would gladly die for me, if need should be. In a

countryman, this sudden flame of friendship would have seemed far too

premature, a thing to be much distrusted; but in this simple savage

those old rules would not apply.

After supper, and another social chat and smoke, we went to our room

together. He made me a present of his embalmed head; took out his

enormous tobacco wallet, and groping under the tobacco, drew out some

thirty dollars in silver; then spreading them on the table, and

mechanically dividing them into two equal portions, pushed one of them

towards me, and said it was mine. I was going to remonstrate; but he

silenced me by pouring them into my trowsers’ pockets. I let them stay.

He then went about his evening prayers, took out his idol, and removed

the paper fireboard. By certain signs and symptoms, I thought he seemed

anxious for me to join him; but well knowing what was to follow, I

deliberated a moment whether, in case he invited me, I would comply or

otherwise.

I was a good Christian; born and bred in the bosom of the infallible

Presbyterian Church. How then could I unite with this wild idolator in

worshipping his piece of wood? But what is worship? thought I. Do you

suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and

earth—pagans and all included—can possibly be jealous of an

insignificant bit of black wood? Impossible! But what is worship?—to do

the will of God—\_that\_ is worship. And what is the will of God?—to do

to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me—\_that\_ is

the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish

that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, unite with me in my particular

Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him

in his; ergo, I must turn idolator. So I kindled the shavings; helped

prop up the innocent little idol; offered him burnt biscuit with

Queequeg; salamed before him twice or thrice; kissed his nose; and that

done, we undressed and went to bed, at peace with our own consciences

and all the world. But we did not go to sleep without some little chat.

How it is I know not; but there is no place like a bed for confidential

disclosures between friends. Man and wife, they say, there open the

very bottom of their souls to each other; and some old couples often

lie and chat over old times till nearly morning. Thus, then, in our

hearts’ honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg—a cosy, loving pair.

CHAPTER 11. Nightgown.

We had lain thus in bed, chatting and napping at short intervals, and

Queequeg now and then affectionately throwing his brown tattooed legs

over mine, and then drawing them back; so entirely sociable and free

and easy were we; when, at last, by reason of our confabulations, what

little nappishness remained in us altogether departed, and we felt like

getting up again, though day-break was yet some way down the future.

Yes, we became very wakeful; so much so that our recumbent position

began to grow wearisome, and by little and little we found ourselves

sitting up; the clothes well tucked around us, leaning against the

head-board with our four knees drawn up close together, and our two

noses bending over them, as if our kneepans were warming-pans. We felt

very nice and snug, the more so since it was so chilly out of doors;

indeed out of bed-clothes too, seeing that there was no fire in the

room. The more so, I say, because truly to enjoy bodily warmth, some

small part of you must be cold, for there is no quality in this world

that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself. If

you flatter yourself that you are all over comfortable, and have been

so a long time, then you cannot be said to be comfortable any more. But

if, like Queequeg and me in the bed, the tip of your nose or the crown

of your head be slightly chilled, why then, indeed, in the general

consciousness you feel most delightfully and unmistakably warm. For

this reason a sleeping apartment should never be furnished with a fire,

which is one of the luxurious discomforts of the rich. For the height

of this sort of deliciousness is to have nothing but the blanket

between you and your snugness and the cold of the outer air. Then there

you lie like the one warm spark in the heart of an arctic crystal.

We had been sitting in this crouching manner for some time, when all at

once I thought I would open my eyes; for when between sheets, whether

by day or by night, and whether asleep or awake, I have a way of always

keeping my eyes shut, in order the more to concentrate the snugness of

being in bed. Because no man can ever feel his own identity aright

except his eyes be closed; as if darkness were indeed the proper

element of our essences, though light be more congenial to our clayey

part. Upon opening my eyes then, and coming out of my own pleasant and

self-created darkness into the imposed and coarse outer gloom of the

unilluminated twelve-o’clock-at-night, I experienced a disagreeable

revulsion. Nor did I at all object to the hint from Queequeg that

perhaps it were best to strike a light, seeing that we were so wide

awake; and besides he felt a strong desire to have a few quiet puffs

from his Tomahawk. Be it said, that though I had felt such a strong

repugnance to his smoking in the bed the night before, yet see how

elastic our stiff prejudices grow when love once comes to bend them.

For now I liked nothing better than to have Queequeg smoking by me,

even in bed, because he seemed to be full of such serene household joy

then. I no more felt unduly concerned for the landlord’s policy of

insurance. I was only alive to the condensed confidential

comfortableness of sharing a pipe and a blanket with a real friend.

With our shaggy jackets drawn about our shoulders, we now passed the

Tomahawk from one to the other, till slowly there grew over us a blue

hanging tester of smoke, illuminated by the flame of the new-lit lamp.

Whether it was that this undulating tester rolled the savage away to

far distant scenes, I know not, but he now spoke of his native island;

and, eager to hear his history, I begged him to go on and tell it. He

gladly complied. Though at the time I but ill comprehended not a few of

his words, yet subsequent disclosures, when I had become more familiar

with his broken phraseology, now enable me to present the whole story

such as it may prove in the mere skeleton I give.

CHAPTER 12. Biographical.

Queequeg was a native of Rokovoko, an island far away to the West and

South. It is not down in any map; true places never are.

When a new-hatched savage running wild about his native woodlands in a

grass clout, followed by the nibbling goats, as if he were a green

sapling; even then, in Queequeg’s ambitious soul, lurked a strong

desire to see something more of Christendom than a specimen whaler or

two. His father was a High Chief, a King; his uncle a High Priest; and

on the maternal side he boasted aunts who were the wives of

unconquerable warriors. There was excellent blood in his veins—royal

stuff; though sadly vitiated, I fear, by the cannibal propensity he

nourished in his untutored youth.

A Sag Harbor ship visited his father’s bay, and Queequeg sought a

passage to Christian lands. But the ship, having her full complement of

seamen, spurned his suit; and not all the King his father’s influence

could prevail. But Queequeg vowed a vow. Alone in his canoe, he paddled

off to a distant strait, which he knew the ship must pass through when

she quitted the island. On one side was a coral reef; on the other a

low tongue of land, covered with mangrove thickets that grew out into

the water. Hiding his canoe, still afloat, among these thickets, with

its prow seaward, he sat down in the stern, paddle low in hand; and

when the ship was gliding by, like a flash he darted out; gained her

side; with one backward dash of his foot capsized and sank his canoe;

climbed up the chains; and throwing himself at full length upon the

deck, grappled a ring-bolt there, and swore not to let it go, though

hacked in pieces.

In vain the captain threatened to throw him overboard; suspended a

cutlass over his naked wrists; Queequeg was the son of a King, and

Queequeg budged not. Struck by his desperate dauntlessness, and his

wild desire to visit Christendom, the captain at last relented, and

told him he might make himself at home. But this fine young savage—this

sea Prince of Wales, never saw the Captain’s cabin. They put him down

among the sailors, and made a whaleman of him. But like Czar Peter

content to toil in the shipyards of foreign cities, Queequeg disdained

no seeming ignominy, if thereby he might happily gain the power of

enlightening his untutored countrymen. For at bottom—so he told me—he

was actuated by a profound desire to learn among the Christians, the

arts whereby to make his people still happier than they were; and more

than that, still better than they were. But, alas! the practices of

whalemen soon convinced him that even Christians could be both

miserable and wicked; infinitely more so, than all his father’s

heathens. Arrived at last in old Sag Harbor; and seeing what the

sailors did there; and then going on to Nantucket, and seeing how they

spent their wages in \_that\_ place also, poor Queequeg gave it up for

lost. Thought he, it’s a wicked world in all meridians; I’ll die a

pagan.

And thus an old idolator at heart, he yet lived among these Christians,

wore their clothes, and tried to talk their gibberish. Hence the queer

ways about him, though now some time from home.

By hints, I asked him whether he did not propose going back, and having

a coronation; since he might now consider his father dead and gone, he

being very old and feeble at the last accounts. He answered no, not

yet; and added that he was fearful Christianity, or rather Christians,

had unfitted him for ascending the pure and undefiled throne of thirty

pagan Kings before him. But by and by, he said, he would return,—as

soon as he felt himself baptized again. For the nonce, however, he

proposed to sail about, and sow his wild oats in all four oceans. They

had made a harpooneer of him, and that barbed iron was in lieu of a

sceptre now.

I asked him what might be his immediate purpose, touching his future

movements. He answered, to go to sea again, in his old vocation. Upon

this, I told him that whaling was my own design, and informed him of my

intention to sail out of Nantucket, as being the most promising port

for an adventurous whaleman to embark from. He at once resolved to

accompany me to that island, ship aboard the same vessel, get into the

same watch, the same boat, the same mess with me, in short to share my

every hap; with both my hands in his, boldly dip into the Potluck of

both worlds. To all this I joyously assented; for besides the affection

I now felt for Queequeg, he was an experienced harpooneer, and as such,

could not fail to be of great usefulness to one, who, like me, was

wholly ignorant of the mysteries of whaling, though well acquainted

with the sea, as known to merchant seamen.

His story being ended with his pipe’s last dying puff, Queequeg

embraced me, pressed his forehead against mine, and blowing out the

light, we rolled over from each other, this way and that, and very soon

were sleeping.

CHAPTER 13. Wheelbarrow.

Next morning, Monday, after disposing of the embalmed head to a barber,

for a block, I settled my own and comrade’s bill; using, however, my

comrade’s money. The grinning landlord, as well as the boarders, seemed

amazingly tickled at the sudden friendship which had sprung up between

me and Queequeg—especially as Peter Coffin’s cock and bull stories

about him had previously so much alarmed me concerning the very person

whom I now companied with.

We borrowed a wheelbarrow, and embarking our things, including my own

poor carpet-bag, and Queequeg’s canvas sack and hammock, away we went

down to “the Moss,” the little Nantucket packet schooner moored at the

wharf. As we were going along the people stared; not at Queequeg so

much—for they were used to seeing cannibals like him in their

streets,—but at seeing him and me upon such confidential terms. But we

heeded them not, going along wheeling the barrow by turns, and Queequeg

now and then stopping to adjust the sheath on his harpoon barbs. I

asked him why he carried such a troublesome thing with him ashore, and

whether all whaling ships did not find their own harpoons. To this, in

substance, he replied, that though what I hinted was true enough, yet

he had a particular affection for his own harpoon, because it was of

assured stuff, well tried in many a mortal combat, and deeply intimate

with the hearts of whales. In short, like many inland reapers and

mowers, who go into the farmers’ meadows armed with their own

scythes—though in no wise obliged to furnish them—even so, Queequeg,

for his own private reasons, preferred his own harpoon.

Shifting the barrow from my hand to his, he told me a funny story about

the first wheelbarrow he had ever seen. It was in Sag Harbor. The

owners of his ship, it seems, had lent him one, in which to carry his

heavy chest to his boarding house. Not to seem ignorant about the

thing—though in truth he was entirely so, concerning the precise way in

which to manage the barrow—Queequeg puts his chest upon it; lashes it

fast; and then shoulders the barrow and marches up the wharf. “Why,”

said I, “Queequeg, you might have known better than that, one would

think. Didn’t the people laugh?”

Upon this, he told me another story. The people of his island of

Rokovoko, it seems, at their wedding feasts express the fragrant water

of young cocoanuts into a large stained calabash like a punchbowl; and

this punchbowl always forms the great central ornament on the braided

mat where the feast is held. Now a certain grand merchant ship once

touched at Rokovoko, and its commander—from all accounts, a very

stately punctilious gentleman, at least for a sea captain—this

commander was invited to the wedding feast of Queequeg’s sister, a

pretty young princess just turned of ten. Well; when all the wedding

guests were assembled at the bride’s bamboo cottage, this Captain

marches in, and being assigned the post of honor, placed himself over

against the punchbowl, and between the High Priest and his majesty the

King, Queequeg’s father. Grace being said,—for those people have their

grace as well as we—though Queequeg told me that unlike us, who at such

times look downwards to our platters, they, on the contrary, copying

the ducks, glance upwards to the great Giver of all feasts—Grace, I

say, being said, the High Priest opens the banquet by the immemorial

ceremony of the island; that is, dipping his consecrated and

consecrating fingers into the bowl before the blessed beverage

circulates. Seeing himself placed next the Priest, and noting the

ceremony, and thinking himself—being Captain of a ship—as having plain

precedence over a mere island King, especially in the King’s own

house—the Captain coolly proceeds to wash his hands in the

punchbowl;—taking it I suppose for a huge finger-glass. “Now,” said

Queequeg, “what you tink now?—Didn’t our people laugh?”

At last, passage paid, and luggage safe, we stood on board the

schooner. Hoisting sail, it glided down the Acushnet river. On one

side, New Bedford rose in terraces of streets, their ice-covered trees

all glittering in the clear, cold air. Huge hills and mountains of

casks on casks were piled upon her wharves, and side by side the

world-wandering whale ships lay silent and safely moored at last; while

from others came a sound of carpenters and coopers, with blended noises

of fires and forges to melt the pitch, all betokening that new cruises

were on the start; that one most perilous and long voyage ended, only

begins a second; and a second ended, only begins a third, and so on,

for ever and for aye. Such is the endlessness, yea, the intolerableness

of all earthly effort.

Gaining the more open water, the bracing breeze waxed fresh; the little

Moss tossed the quick foam from her bows, as a young colt his

snortings. How I snuffed that Tartar air!—how I spurned that turnpike

earth!—that common highway all over dented with the marks of slavish

heels and hoofs; and turned me to admire the magnanimity of the sea

which will permit no records.

At the same foam-fountain, Queequeg seemed to drink and reel with me.

His dusky nostrils swelled apart; he showed his filed and pointed

teeth. On, on we flew; and our offing gained, the Moss did homage to

the blast; ducked and dived her bows as a slave before the Sultan.

Sideways leaning, we sideways darted; every ropeyarn tingling like a

wire; the two tall masts buckling like Indian canes in land tornadoes.

So full of this reeling scene were we, as we stood by the plunging

bowsprit, that for some time we did not notice the jeering glances of

the passengers, a lubber-like assembly, who marvelled that two fellow

beings should be so companionable; as though a white man were anything

more dignified than a whitewashed negro. But there were some boobies

and bumpkins there, who, by their intense greenness, must have come

from the heart and centre of all verdure. Queequeg caught one of these

young saplings mimicking him behind his back. I thought the bumpkin’s

hour of doom was come. Dropping his harpoon, the brawny savage caught

him in his arms, and by an almost miraculous dexterity and strength,

sent him high up bodily into the air; then slightly tapping his stern

in mid-somerset, the fellow landed with bursting lungs upon his feet,

while Queequeg, turning his back upon him, lighted his tomahawk pipe

and passed it to me for a puff.

“Capting! Capting!” yelled the bumpkin, running towards that officer;

“Capting, Capting, here’s the devil.”

“Hallo, \_you\_ sir,” cried the Captain, a gaunt rib of the sea, stalking

up to Queequeg, “what in thunder do you mean by that? Don’t you know

you might have killed that chap?”

“What him say?” said Queequeg, as he mildly turned to me.

“He say,” said I, “that you came near kill-e that man there,” pointing

to the still shivering greenhorn.

“Kill-e,” cried Queequeg, twisting his tattooed face into an unearthly

expression of disdain, “ah! him bevy small-e fish-e; Queequeg no kill-e

so small-e fish-e; Queequeg kill-e big whale!”

“Look you,” roared the Captain, “I’ll kill-e \_you\_, you cannibal, if

you try any more of your tricks aboard here; so mind your eye.”

But it so happened just then, that it was high time for the Captain to

mind his own eye. The prodigious strain upon the main-sail had parted

the weather-sheet, and the tremendous boom was now flying from side to

side, completely sweeping the entire after part of the deck. The poor

fellow whom Queequeg had handled so roughly, was swept overboard; all

hands were in a panic; and to attempt snatching at the boom to stay it,

seemed madness. It flew from right to left, and back again, almost in

one ticking of a watch, and every instant seemed on the point of

snapping into splinters. Nothing was done, and nothing seemed capable

of being done; those on deck rushed towards the bows, and stood eyeing

the boom as if it were the lower jaw of an exasperated whale. In the

midst of this consternation, Queequeg dropped deftly to his knees, and

crawling under the path of the boom, whipped hold of a rope, secured

one end to the bulwarks, and then flinging the other like a lasso,

caught it round the boom as it swept over his head, and at the next

jerk, the spar was that way trapped, and all was safe. The schooner was

run into the wind, and while the hands were clearing away the stern

boat, Queequeg, stripped to the waist, darted from the side with a long

living arc of a leap. For three minutes or more he was seen swimming

like a dog, throwing his long arms straight out before him, and by

turns revealing his brawny shoulders through the freezing foam. I

looked at the grand and glorious fellow, but saw no one to be saved.

The greenhorn had gone down. Shooting himself perpendicularly from the

water, Queequeg, now took an instant’s glance around him, and seeming

to see just how matters were, dived down and disappeared. A few minutes

more, and he rose again, one arm still striking out, and with the other

dragging a lifeless form. The boat soon picked them up. The poor

bumpkin was restored. All hands voted Queequeg a noble trump; the

captain begged his pardon. From that hour I clove to Queequeg like a

barnacle; yea, till poor Queequeg took his last long dive.

Was there ever such unconsciousness? He did not seem to think that he

at all deserved a medal from the Humane and Magnanimous Societies. He

only asked for water—fresh water—something to wipe the brine off; that

done, he put on dry clothes, lighted his pipe, and leaning against the

bulwarks, and mildly eyeing those around him, seemed to be saying to

himself—“It’s a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We

cannibals must help these Christians.”

CHAPTER 14. Nantucket.

Nothing more happened on the passage worthy the mentioning; so, after a

fine run, we safely arrived in Nantucket.

Nantucket! Take out your map and look at it. See what a real corner of

the world it occupies; how it stands there, away off shore, more lonely

than the Eddystone lighthouse. Look at it—a mere hillock, and elbow of

sand; all beach, without a background. There is more sand there than

you would use in twenty years as a substitute for blotting paper. Some

gamesome wights will tell you that they have to plant weeds there, they

don’t grow naturally; that they import Canada thistles; that they have

to send beyond seas for a spile to stop a leak in an oil cask; that

pieces of wood in Nantucket are carried about like bits of the true

cross in Rome; that people there plant toadstools before their houses,

to get under the shade in summer time; that one blade of grass makes an

oasis, three blades in a day’s walk a prairie; that they wear quicksand

shoes, something like Laplander snow-shoes; that they are so shut up,

belted about, every way inclosed, surrounded, and made an utter island

of by the ocean, that to their very chairs and tables small clams will

sometimes be found adhering, as to the backs of sea turtles. But these

extravaganzas only show that Nantucket is no Illinois.

Look now at the wondrous traditional story of how this island was

settled by the red-men. Thus goes the legend. In olden times an eagle

swooped down upon the New England coast, and carried off an infant

Indian in his talons. With loud lament the parents saw their child

borne out of sight over the wide waters. They resolved to follow in the

same direction. Setting out in their canoes, after a perilous passage

they discovered the island, and there they found an empty ivory

casket,—the poor little Indian’s skeleton.

What wonder, then, that these Nantucketers, born on a beach, should

take to the sea for a livelihood! They first caught crabs and quohogs

in the sand; grown bolder, they waded out with nets for mackerel; more

experienced, they pushed off in boats and captured cod; and at last,

launching a navy of great ships on the sea, explored this watery world;

put an incessant belt of circumnavigations round it; peeped in at

Behring’s Straits; and in all seasons and all oceans declared

everlasting war with the mightiest animated mass that has survived the

flood; most monstrous and most mountainous! That Himmalehan, salt-sea

Mastodon, clothed with such portentousness of unconscious power, that

his very panics are more to be dreaded than his most fearless and

malicious assaults!

And thus have these naked Nantucketers, these sea hermits, issuing from

their ant-hill in the sea, overrun and conquered the watery world like

so many Alexanders; parcelling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific,

and Indian oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland. Let America

add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let the English

overswarm all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun;

two thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketer’s. For the sea

is his; he owns it, as Emperors own empires; other seamen having but a

right of way through it. Merchant ships are but extension bridges;

armed ones but floating forts; even pirates and privateers, though

following the sea as highwaymen the road, they but plunder other ships,

other fragments of the land like themselves, without seeking to draw

their living from the bottomless deep itself. The Nantucketer, he alone

resides and riots on the sea; he alone, in Bible language, goes down to

it in ships; to and fro ploughing it as his own special plantation.

\_There\_ is his home; \_there\_ lies his business, which a Noah’s flood

would not interrupt, though it overwhelmed all the millions in China.

He lives on the sea, as prairie cocks in the prairie; he hides among

the waves, he climbs them as chamois hunters climb the Alps. For years

he knows not the land; so that when he comes to it at last, it smells

like another world, more strangely than the moon would to an Earthsman.

With the landless gull, that at sunset folds her wings and is rocked to

sleep between billows; so at nightfall, the Nantucketer, out of sight

of land, furls his sails, and lays him to his rest, while under his

very pillow rush herds of walruses and whales.

CHAPTER 15. Chowder.

It was quite late in the evening when the little Moss came snugly to

anchor, and Queequeg and I went ashore; so we could attend to no

business that day, at least none but a supper and a bed. The landlord

of the Spouter-Inn had recommended us to his cousin Hosea Hussey of the

Try Pots, whom he asserted to be the proprietor of one of the best kept

hotels in all Nantucket, and moreover he had assured us that Cousin

Hosea, as he called him, was famous for his chowders. In short, he

plainly hinted that we could not possibly do better than try pot-luck

at the Try Pots. But the directions he had given us about keeping a

yellow warehouse on our starboard hand till we opened a white church to

the larboard, and then keeping that on the larboard hand till we made a

corner three points to the starboard, and that done, then ask the first

man we met where the place was: these crooked directions of his very

much puzzled us at first, especially as, at the outset, Queequeg

insisted that the yellow warehouse—our first point of departure—must be

left on the larboard hand, whereas I had understood Peter Coffin to say

it was on the starboard. However, by dint of beating about a little in

the dark, and now and then knocking up a peaceable inhabitant to

inquire the way, we at last came to something which there was no

mistaking.

Two enormous wooden pots painted black, and suspended by asses’ ears,

swung from the cross-trees of an old top-mast, planted in front of an

old doorway. The horns of the cross-trees were sawed off on the other

side, so that this old top-mast looked not a little like a gallows.

Perhaps I was over sensitive to such impressions at the time, but I

could not help staring at this gallows with a vague misgiving. A sort

of crick was in my neck as I gazed up to the two remaining horns; yes,

\_two\_ of them, one for Queequeg, and one for me. It’s ominous, thinks

I. A Coffin my Innkeeper upon landing in my first whaling port;

tombstones staring at me in the whalemen’s chapel; and here a gallows!

and a pair of prodigious black pots too! Are these last throwing out

oblique hints touching Tophet?

I was called from these reflections by the sight of a freckled woman

with yellow hair and a yellow gown, standing in the porch of the inn,

under a dull red lamp swinging there, that looked much like an injured

eye, and carrying on a brisk scolding with a man in a purple woollen

shirt.

“Get along with ye,” said she to the man, “or I’ll be combing ye!”

“Come on, Queequeg,” said I, “all right. There’s Mrs. Hussey.”

And so it turned out; Mr. Hosea Hussey being from home, but leaving

Mrs. Hussey entirely competent to attend to all his affairs. Upon

making known our desires for a supper and a bed, Mrs. Hussey,

postponing further scolding for the present, ushered us into a little

room, and seating us at a table spread with the relics of a recently

concluded repast, turned round to us and said—“Clam or Cod?”

“What’s that about Cods, ma’am?” said I, with much politeness.

“Clam or Cod?” she repeated.

“A clam for supper? a cold clam; is \_that\_ what you mean, Mrs. Hussey?”

says I, “but that’s a rather cold and clammy reception in the winter

time, ain’t it, Mrs. Hussey?”

But being in a great hurry to resume scolding the man in the purple

Shirt, who was waiting for it in the entry, and seeming to hear nothing

but the word “clam,” Mrs. Hussey hurried towards an open door leading

to the kitchen, and bawling out “clam for two,” disappeared.

“Queequeg,” said I, “do you think that we can make out a supper for us

both on one clam?”

However, a warm savory steam from the kitchen served to belie the

apparently cheerless prospect before us. But when that smoking chowder

came in, the mystery was delightfully explained. Oh, sweet friends!

hearken to me. It was made of small juicy clams, scarcely bigger than

hazel nuts, mixed with pounded ship biscuit, and salted pork cut up

into little flakes; the whole enriched with butter, and plentifully

seasoned with pepper and salt. Our appetites being sharpened by the

frosty voyage, and in particular, Queequeg seeing his favourite fishing

food before him, and the chowder being surpassingly excellent, we

despatched it with great expedition: when leaning back a moment and

bethinking me of Mrs. Hussey’s clam and cod announcement, I thought I

would try a little experiment. Stepping to the kitchen door, I uttered

the word “cod” with great emphasis, and resumed my seat. In a few

moments the savoury steam came forth again, but with a different

flavor, and in good time a fine cod-chowder was placed before us.

We resumed business; and while plying our spoons in the bowl, thinks I

to myself, I wonder now if this here has any effect on the head? What’s

that stultifying saying about chowder-headed people? “But look,

Queequeg, ain’t that a live eel in your bowl? Where’s your harpoon?”

Fishiest of all fishy places was the Try Pots, which well deserved its

name; for the pots there were always boiling chowders. Chowder for

breakfast, and chowder for dinner, and chowder for supper, till you

began to look for fish-bones coming through your clothes. The area

before the house was paved with clam-shells. Mrs. Hussey wore a

polished necklace of codfish vertebra; and Hosea Hussey had his account

books bound in superior old shark-skin. There was a fishy flavor to the

milk, too, which I could not at all account for, till one morning

happening to take a stroll along the beach among some fishermen’s

boats, I saw Hosea’s brindled cow feeding on fish remnants, and

marching along the sand with each foot in a cod’s decapitated head,

looking very slip-shod, I assure ye.

Supper concluded, we received a lamp, and directions from Mrs. Hussey

concerning the nearest way to bed; but, as Queequeg was about to

precede me up the stairs, the lady reached forth her arm, and demanded

his harpoon; she allowed no harpoon in her chambers. “Why not?” said I;

“every true whaleman sleeps with his harpoon—but why not?” “Because

it’s dangerous,” says she. “Ever since young Stiggs coming from that

unfort’nt v’y’ge of his, when he was gone four years and a half, with

only three barrels of \_ile\_, was found dead in my first floor back,

with his harpoon in his side; ever since then I allow no boarders to

take sich dangerous weepons in their rooms at night. So, Mr. Queequeg”

(for she had learned his name), “I will just take this here iron, and

keep it for you till morning. But the chowder; clam or cod to-morrow

for breakfast, men?”

“Both,” says I; “and let’s have a couple of smoked herring by way of

variety.”

CHAPTER 16. The Ship.

In bed we concocted our plans for the morrow. But to my surprise and no

small concern, Queequeg now gave me to understand, that he had been

diligently consulting Yojo—the name of his black little god—and Yojo

had told him two or three times over, and strongly insisted upon it

everyway, that instead of our going together among the whaling-fleet in

harbor, and in concert selecting our craft; instead of this, I say,

Yojo earnestly enjoined that the selection of the ship should rest

wholly with me, inasmuch as Yojo purposed befriending us; and, in order

to do so, had already pitched upon a vessel, which, if left to myself,

I, Ishmael, should infallibly light upon, for all the world as though

it had turned out by chance; and in that vessel I must immediately ship

myself, for the present irrespective of Queequeg.

I have forgotten to mention that, in many things, Queequeg placed great

confidence in the excellence of Yojo’s judgment and surprising forecast

of things; and cherished Yojo with considerable esteem, as a rather

good sort of god, who perhaps meant well enough upon the whole, but in

all cases did not succeed in his benevolent designs.

Now, this plan of Queequeg’s, or rather Yojo’s, touching the selection

of our craft; I did not like that plan at all. I had not a little

relied upon Queequeg’s sagacity to point out the whaler best fitted to

carry us and our fortunes securely. But as all my remonstrances

produced no effect upon Queequeg, I was obliged to acquiesce; and

accordingly prepared to set about this business with a determined

rushing sort of energy and vigor, that should quickly settle that

trifling little affair. Next morning early, leaving Queequeg shut up

with Yojo in our little bedroom—for it seemed that it was some sort of

Lent or Ramadan, or day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer with

Queequeg and Yojo that day; \_how\_ it was I never could find out, for,

though I applied myself to it several times, I never could master his

liturgies and XXXIX Articles—leaving Queequeg, then, fasting on his

tomahawk pipe, and Yojo warming himself at his sacrificial fire of

shavings, I sallied out among the shipping. After much prolonged

sauntering and many random inquiries, I learnt that there were three

ships up for three-years’ voyages—The Devil-dam, the Tit-bit, and the

Pequod. \_Devil-Dam\_, I do not know the origin of; \_Tit-bit\_ is obvious;

\_Pequod\_, you will no doubt remember, was the name of a celebrated

tribe of Massachusetts Indians; now extinct as the ancient Medes. I

peered and pryed about the Devil-dam; from her, hopped over to the

Tit-bit; and finally, going on board the Pequod, looked around her for

a moment, and then decided that this was the very ship for us.

You may have seen many a quaint craft in your day, for aught I

know;—square-toed luggers; mountainous Japanese junks; butter-box

galliots, and what not; but take my word for it, you never saw such a

rare old craft as this same rare old Pequod. She was a ship of the old

school, rather small if anything; with an old-fashioned claw-footed

look about her. Long seasoned and weather-stained in the typhoons and

calms of all four oceans, her old hull’s complexion was darkened like a

French grenadier’s, who has alike fought in Egypt and Siberia. Her

venerable bows looked bearded. Her masts—cut somewhere on the coast of

Japan, where her original ones were lost overboard in a gale—her masts

stood stiffly up like the spines of the three old kings of Cologne. Her

ancient decks were worn and wrinkled, like the pilgrim-worshipped

flag-stone in Canterbury Cathedral where Becket bled. But to all these

her old antiquities, were added new and marvellous features, pertaining

to the wild business that for more than half a century she had

followed. Old Captain Peleg, many years her chief-mate, before he

commanded another vessel of his own, and now a retired seaman, and one

of the principal owners of the Pequod,—this old Peleg, during the term

of his chief-mateship, had built upon her original grotesqueness, and

inlaid it, all over, with a quaintness both of material and device,

unmatched by anything except it be Thorkill-Hake’s carved buckler or

bedstead. She was apparelled like any barbaric Ethiopian emperor, his

neck heavy with pendants of polished ivory. She was a thing of

trophies. A cannibal of a craft, tricking herself forth in the chased

bones of her enemies. All round, her unpanelled, open bulwarks were

garnished like one continuous jaw, with the long sharp teeth of the

sperm whale, inserted there for pins, to fasten her old hempen thews

and tendons to. Those thews ran not through base blocks of land wood,

but deftly travelled over sheaves of sea-ivory. Scorning a turnstile

wheel at her reverend helm, she sported there a tiller; and that tiller

was in one mass, curiously carved from the long narrow lower jaw of her

hereditary foe. The helmsman who steered by that tiller in a tempest,

felt like the Tartar, when he holds back his fiery steed by clutching

its jaw. A noble craft, but somehow a most melancholy! All noble things

are touched with that.

Now when I looked about the quarter-deck, for some one having

authority, in order to propose myself as a candidate for the voyage, at

first I saw nobody; but I could not well overlook a strange sort of

tent, or rather wigwam, pitched a little behind the main-mast. It

seemed only a temporary erection used in port. It was of a conical

shape, some ten feet high; consisting of the long, huge slabs of limber

black bone taken from the middle and highest part of the jaws of the

right-whale. Planted with their broad ends on the deck, a circle of

these slabs laced together, mutually sloped towards each other, and at

the apex united in a tufted point, where the loose hairy fibres waved

to and fro like the top-knot on some old Pottowottamie Sachem’s head. A

triangular opening faced towards the bows of the ship, so that the

insider commanded a complete view forward.

And half concealed in this queer tenement, I at length found one who by

his aspect seemed to have authority; and who, it being noon, and the

ship’s work suspended, was now enjoying respite from the burden of

command. He was seated on an old-fashioned oaken chair, wriggling all

over with curious carving; and the bottom of which was formed of a

stout interlacing of the same elastic stuff of which the wigwam was

constructed.

There was nothing so very particular, perhaps, about the appearance of

the elderly man I saw; he was brown and brawny, like most old seamen,

and heavily rolled up in blue pilot-cloth, cut in the Quaker style;

only there was a fine and almost microscopic net-work of the minutest

wrinkles interlacing round his eyes, which must have arisen from his

continual sailings in many hard gales, and always looking to

windward;—for this causes the muscles about the eyes to become pursed

together. Such eye-wrinkles are very effectual in a scowl.

“Is this the Captain of the Pequod?” said I, advancing to the door of

the tent.

“Supposing it be the captain of the Pequod, what dost thou want of

him?” he demanded.

“I was thinking of shipping.”

“Thou wast, wast thou? I see thou art no Nantucketer—ever been in a

stove boat?”

“No, Sir, I never have.”

“Dost know nothing at all about whaling, I dare say—eh?

“Nothing, Sir; but I have no doubt I shall soon learn. I’ve been

several voyages in the merchant service, and I think that—”

“Merchant service be damned. Talk not that lingo to me. Dost see that

leg?—I’ll take that leg away from thy stern, if ever thou talkest of

the marchant service to me again. Marchant service indeed! I suppose

now ye feel considerable proud of having served in those marchant

ships. But flukes! man, what makes thee want to go a whaling, eh?—it

looks a little suspicious, don’t it, eh?—Hast not been a pirate, hast

thou?—Didst not rob thy last Captain, didst thou?—Dost not think of

murdering the officers when thou gettest to sea?”

I protested my innocence of these things. I saw that under the mask of

these half humorous innuendoes, this old seaman, as an insulated

Quakerish Nantucketer, was full of his insular prejudices, and rather

distrustful of all aliens, unless they hailed from Cape Cod or the

Vineyard.

“But what takes thee a-whaling? I want to know that before I think of

shipping ye.”

“Well, sir, I want to see what whaling is. I want to see the world.”

“Want to see what whaling is, eh? Have ye clapped eye on Captain Ahab?”

“Who is Captain Ahab, sir?”

“Aye, aye, I thought so. Captain Ahab is the Captain of this ship.”

“I am mistaken then. I thought I was speaking to the Captain himself.”

“Thou art speaking to Captain Peleg—that’s who ye are speaking to,

young man. It belongs to me and Captain Bildad to see the Pequod fitted

out for the voyage, and supplied with all her needs, including crew. We

are part owners and agents. But as I was going to say, if thou wantest

to know what whaling is, as thou tellest ye do, I can put ye in a way

of finding it out before ye bind yourself to it, past backing out. Clap

eye on Captain Ahab, young man, and thou wilt find that he has only one

leg.”

“What do you mean, sir? Was the other one lost by a whale?”

“Lost by a whale! Young man, come nearer to me: it was devoured, chewed

up, crunched by the monstrousest parmacetty that ever chipped a

boat!—ah, ah!”

I was a little alarmed by his energy, perhaps also a little touched at

the hearty grief in his concluding exclamation, but said as calmly as I

could, “What you say is no doubt true enough, sir; but how could I know

there was any peculiar ferocity in that particular whale, though indeed

I might have inferred as much from the simple fact of the accident.”

“Look ye now, young man, thy lungs are a sort of soft, d’ye see; thou

dost not talk shark a bit. \_Sure\_, ye’ve been to sea before now; sure

of that?”

“Sir,” said I, “I thought I told you that I had been four voyages in

the merchant—”

“Hard down out of that! Mind what I said about the marchant

service—don’t aggravate me—I won’t have it. But let us understand each

other. I have given thee a hint about what whaling is; do ye yet feel

inclined for it?”

“I do, sir.”

“Very good. Now, art thou the man to pitch a harpoon down a live

whale’s throat, and then jump after it? Answer, quick!”

“I am, sir, if it should be positively indispensable to do so; not to

be got rid of, that is; which I don’t take to be the fact.”

“Good again. Now then, thou not only wantest to go a-whaling, to find

out by experience what whaling is, but ye also want to go in order to

see the world? Was not that what ye said? I thought so. Well then, just

step forward there, and take a peep over the weather-bow, and then back

to me and tell me what ye see there.”

For a moment I stood a little puzzled by this curious request, not

knowing exactly how to take it, whether humorously or in earnest. But

concentrating all his crow’s feet into one scowl, Captain Peleg started

me on the errand.

Going forward and glancing over the weather bow, I perceived that the

ship swinging to her anchor with the flood-tide, was now obliquely

pointing towards the open ocean. The prospect was unlimited, but

exceedingly monotonous and forbidding; not the slightest variety that I

could see.

“Well, what’s the report?” said Peleg when I came back; “what did ye

see?”

“Not much,” I replied—“nothing but water; considerable horizon though,

and there’s a squall coming up, I think.”

“Well, what does thou think then of seeing the world? Do ye wish to go

round Cape Horn to see any more of it, eh? Can’t ye see the world where

you stand?”

I was a little staggered, but go a-whaling I must, and I would; and the

Pequod was as good a ship as any—I thought the best—and all this I now

repeated to Peleg. Seeing me so determined, he expressed his

willingness to ship me.

“And thou mayest as well sign the papers right off,” he added—“come

along with ye.” And so saying, he led the way below deck into the

cabin.

Seated on the transom was what seemed to me a most uncommon and

surprising figure. It turned out to be Captain Bildad, who along with

Captain Peleg was one of the largest owners of the vessel; the other

shares, as is sometimes the case in these ports, being held by a crowd

of old annuitants; widows, fatherless children, and chancery wards;

each owning about the value of a timber head, or a foot of plank, or a

nail or two in the ship. People in Nantucket invest their money in

whaling vessels, the same way that you do yours in approved state

stocks bringing in good interest.

Now, Bildad, like Peleg, and indeed many other Nantucketers, was a

Quaker, the island having been originally settled by that sect; and to

this day its inhabitants in general retain in an uncommon measure the

peculiarities of the Quaker, only variously and anomalously modified by

things altogether alien and heterogeneous. For some of these same

Quakers are the most sanguinary of all sailors and whale-hunters. They

are fighting Quakers; they are Quakers with a vengeance.

So that there are instances among them of men, who, named with

Scripture names—a singularly common fashion on the island—and in

childhood naturally imbibing the stately dramatic thee and thou of the

Quaker idiom; still, from the audacious, daring, and boundless

adventure of their subsequent lives, strangely blend with these

unoutgrown peculiarities, a thousand bold dashes of character, not

unworthy a Scandinavian sea-king, or a poetical Pagan Roman. And when

these things unite in a man of greatly superior natural force, with a

globular brain and a ponderous heart; who has also by the stillness and

seclusion of many long night-watches in the remotest waters, and

beneath constellations never seen here at the north, been led to think

untraditionally and independently; receiving all nature’s sweet or

savage impressions fresh from her own virgin voluntary and confiding

breast, and thereby chiefly, but with some help from accidental

advantages, to learn a bold and nervous lofty language—that man makes

one in a whole nation’s census—a mighty pageant creature, formed for

noble tragedies. Nor will it at all detract from him, dramatically

regarded, if either by birth or other circumstances, he have what seems

a half wilful overruling morbidness at the bottom of his nature. For

all men tragically great are made so through a certain morbidness. Be

sure of this, O young ambition, all mortal greatness is but disease.

But, as yet we have not to do with such an one, but with quite another;

and still a man, who, if indeed peculiar, it only results again from

another phase of the Quaker, modified by individual circumstances.

Like Captain Peleg, Captain Bildad was a well-to-do, retired whaleman.

But unlike Captain Peleg—who cared not a rush for what are called

serious things, and indeed deemed those self-same serious things the

veriest of all trifles—Captain Bildad had not only been originally

educated according to the strictest sect of Nantucket Quakerism, but

all his subsequent ocean life, and the sight of many unclad, lovely

island creatures, round the Horn—all that had not moved this native

born Quaker one single jot, had not so much as altered one angle of his

vest. Still, for all this immutableness, was there some lack of common

consistency about worthy Captain Bildad. Though refusing, from

conscientious scruples, to bear arms against land invaders, yet himself

had illimitably invaded the Atlantic and Pacific; and though a sworn

foe to human bloodshed, yet had he in his straight-bodied coat, spilled

tuns upon tuns of leviathan gore. How now in the contemplative evening

of his days, the pious Bildad reconciled these things in the

reminiscence, I do not know; but it did not seem to concern him much,

and very probably he had long since come to the sage and sensible

conclusion that a man’s religion is one thing, and this practical world

quite another. This world pays dividends. Rising from a little

cabin-boy in short clothes of the drabbest drab, to a harpooneer in a

broad shad-bellied waistcoat; from that becoming boat-header,

chief-mate, and captain, and finally a ship owner; Bildad, as I hinted

before, had concluded his adventurous career by wholly retiring from

active life at the goodly age of sixty, and dedicating his remaining

days to the quiet receiving of his well-earned income.

Now, Bildad, I am sorry to say, had the reputation of being an

incorrigible old hunks, and in his sea-going days, a bitter, hard

task-master. They told me in Nantucket, though it certainly seems a

curious story, that when he sailed the old Categut whaleman, his crew,

upon arriving home, were mostly all carried ashore to the hospital,

sore exhausted and worn out. For a pious man, especially for a Quaker,

he was certainly rather hard-hearted, to say the least. He never used

to swear, though, at his men, they said; but somehow he got an

inordinate quantity of cruel, unmitigated hard work out of them. When

Bildad was a chief-mate, to have his drab-coloured eye intently looking

at you, made you feel completely nervous, till you could clutch

something—a hammer or a marling-spike, and go to work like mad, at

something or other, never mind what. Indolence and idleness perished

before him. His own person was the exact embodiment of his utilitarian

character. On his long, gaunt body, he carried no spare flesh, no

superfluous beard, his chin having a soft, economical nap to it, like

the worn nap of his broad-brimmed hat.

Such, then, was the person that I saw seated on the transom when I

followed Captain Peleg down into the cabin. The space between the decks

was small; and there, bolt-upright, sat old Bildad, who always sat so,

and never leaned, and this to save his coat tails. His broad-brim was

placed beside him; his legs were stiffly crossed; his drab vesture was

buttoned up to his chin; and spectacles on nose, he seemed absorbed in

reading from a ponderous volume.

“Bildad,” cried Captain Peleg, “at it again, Bildad, eh? Ye have been

studying those Scriptures, now, for the last thirty years, to my

certain knowledge. How far ye got, Bildad?”

As if long habituated to such profane talk from his old shipmate,

Bildad, without noticing his present irreverence, quietly looked up,

and seeing me, glanced again inquiringly towards Peleg.

“He says he’s our man, Bildad,” said Peleg, “he wants to ship.”

“Dost thee?” said Bildad, in a hollow tone, and turning round to me.

“I \_dost\_,” said I unconsciously, he was so intense a Quaker.

“What do ye think of him, Bildad?” said Peleg.

“He’ll do,” said Bildad, eyeing me, and then went on spelling away at

his book in a mumbling tone quite audible.

I thought him the queerest old Quaker I ever saw, especially as Peleg,

his friend and old shipmate, seemed such a blusterer. But I said

nothing, only looking round me sharply. Peleg now threw open a chest,

and drawing forth the ship’s articles, placed pen and ink before him,

and seated himself at a little table. I began to think it was high time

to settle with myself at what terms I would be willing to engage for

the voyage. I was already aware that in the whaling business they paid

no wages; but all hands, including the captain, received certain shares

of the profits called \_lays\_, and that these lays were proportioned to

the degree of importance pertaining to the respective duties of the

ship’s company. I was also aware that being a green hand at whaling, my

own lay would not be very large; but considering that I was used to the

sea, could steer a ship, splice a rope, and all that, I made no doubt

that from all I had heard I should be offered at least the 275th

lay—that is, the 275th part of the clear net proceeds of the voyage,

whatever that might eventually amount to. And though the 275th lay was

what they call a rather \_long lay\_, yet it was better than nothing; and

if we had a lucky voyage, might pretty nearly pay for the clothing I

would wear out on it, not to speak of my three years’ beef and board,

for which I would not have to pay one stiver.

It might be thought that this was a poor way to accumulate a princely

fortune—and so it was, a very poor way indeed. But I am one of those

that never take on about princely fortunes, and am quite content if the

world is ready to board and lodge me, while I am putting up at this

grim sign of the Thunder Cloud. Upon the whole, I thought that the

275th lay would be about the fair thing, but would not have been

surprised had I been offered the 200th, considering I was of a

broad-shouldered make.

But one thing, nevertheless, that made me a little distrustful about

receiving a generous share of the profits was this: Ashore, I had heard

something of both Captain Peleg and his unaccountable old crony Bildad;

how that they being the principal proprietors of the Pequod, therefore

the other and more inconsiderable and scattered owners, left nearly the

whole management of the ship’s affairs to these two. And I did not know

but what the stingy old Bildad might have a mighty deal to say about

shipping hands, especially as I now found him on board the Pequod,

quite at home there in the cabin, and reading his Bible as if at his

own fireside. Now while Peleg was vainly trying to mend a pen with his

jack-knife, old Bildad, to my no small surprise, considering that he

was such an interested party in these proceedings; Bildad never heeded

us, but went on mumbling to himself out of his book, “\_Lay\_ not up for

yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth—”

“Well, Captain Bildad,” interrupted Peleg, “what d’ye say, what lay

shall we give this young man?”

“Thou knowest best,” was the sepulchral reply, “the seven hundred and

seventy-seventh wouldn’t be too much, would it?—‘where moth and rust do

corrupt, but \_lay\_—’”

\_Lay\_, indeed, thought I, and such a lay! the seven hundred and

seventy-seventh! Well, old Bildad, you are determined that I, for one,

shall not \_lay\_ up many \_lays\_ here below, where moth and rust do

corrupt. It was an exceedingly \_long lay\_ that, indeed; and though from

the magnitude of the figure it might at first deceive a landsman, yet

the slightest consideration will show that though seven hundred and

seventy-seven is a pretty large number, yet, when you come to make a

\_teenth\_ of it, you will then see, I say, that the seven hundred and

seventy-seventh part of a farthing is a good deal less than seven

hundred and seventy-seven gold doubloons; and so I thought at the time.

“Why, blast your eyes, Bildad,” cried Peleg, “thou dost not want to

swindle this young man! he must have more than that.”

“Seven hundred and seventy-seventh,” again said Bildad, without lifting

his eyes; and then went on mumbling—“for where your treasure is, there

will your heart be also.”

“I am going to put him down for the three hundredth,” said Peleg, “do

ye hear that, Bildad! The three hundredth lay, I say.”

Bildad laid down his book, and turning solemnly towards him said,

“Captain Peleg, thou hast a generous heart; but thou must consider the

duty thou owest to the other owners of this ship—widows and orphans,

many of them—and that if we too abundantly reward the labors of this

young man, we may be taking the bread from those widows and those

orphans. The seven hundred and seventy-seventh lay, Captain Peleg.”

“Thou Bildad!” roared Peleg, starting up and clattering about the

cabin. “Blast ye, Captain Bildad, if I had followed thy advice in these

matters, I would afore now had a conscience to lug about that would be

heavy enough to founder the largest ship that ever sailed round Cape

Horn.”

“Captain Peleg,” said Bildad steadily, “thy conscience may be drawing

ten inches of water, or ten fathoms, I can’t tell; but as thou art

still an impenitent man, Captain Peleg, I greatly fear lest thy

conscience be but a leaky one; and will in the end sink thee foundering

down to the fiery pit, Captain Peleg.”

“Fiery pit! fiery pit! ye insult me, man; past all natural bearing, ye

insult me. It’s an all-fired outrage to tell any human creature that

he’s bound to hell. Flukes and flames! Bildad, say that again to me,

and start my soul-bolts, but I’ll—I’ll—yes, I’ll swallow a live goat

with all his hair and horns on. Out of the cabin, ye canting,

drab-coloured son of a wooden gun—a straight wake with ye!”

As he thundered out this he made a rush at Bildad, but with a

marvellous oblique, sliding celerity, Bildad for that time eluded him.

Alarmed at this terrible outburst between the two principal and

responsible owners of the ship, and feeling half a mind to give up all

idea of sailing in a vessel so questionably owned and temporarily

commanded, I stepped aside from the door to give egress to Bildad, who,

I made no doubt, was all eagerness to vanish from before the awakened

wrath of Peleg. But to my astonishment, he sat down again on the

transom very quietly, and seemed to have not the slightest intention of

withdrawing. He seemed quite used to impenitent Peleg and his ways. As

for Peleg, after letting off his rage as he had, there seemed no more

left in him, and he, too, sat down like a lamb, though he twitched a

little as if still nervously agitated. “Whew!” he whistled at last—“the

squall’s gone off to leeward, I think. Bildad, thou used to be good at

sharpening a lance, mend that pen, will ye. My jack-knife here needs

the grindstone. That’s he; thank ye, Bildad. Now then, my young man,

Ishmael’s thy name, didn’t ye say? Well then, down ye go here, Ishmael,

for the three hundredth lay.”

“Captain Peleg,” said I, “I have a friend with me who wants to ship

too—shall I bring him down to-morrow?”

“To be sure,” said Peleg. “Fetch him along, and we’ll look at him.”

“What lay does he want?” groaned Bildad, glancing up from the book in

which he had again been burying himself.

“Oh! never thee mind about that, Bildad,” said Peleg. “Has he ever

whaled it any?” turning to me.

“Killed more whales than I can count, Captain Peleg.”

“Well, bring him along then.”

And, after signing the papers, off I went; nothing doubting but that I

had done a good morning’s work, and that the Pequod was the identical

ship that Yojo had provided to carry Queequeg and me round the Cape.

But I had not proceeded far, when I began to bethink me that the

Captain with whom I was to sail yet remained unseen by me; though,

indeed, in many cases, a whale-ship will be completely fitted out, and

receive all her crew on board, ere the captain makes himself visible by

arriving to take command; for sometimes these voyages are so prolonged,

and the shore intervals at home so exceedingly brief, that if the

captain have a family, or any absorbing concernment of that sort, he

does not trouble himself much about his ship in port, but leaves her to

the owners till all is ready for sea. However, it is always as well to

have a look at him before irrevocably committing yourself into his

hands. Turning back I accosted Captain Peleg, inquiring where Captain

Ahab was to be found.

“And what dost thou want of Captain Ahab? It’s all right enough; thou

art shipped.”

“Yes, but I should like to see him.”

“But I don’t think thou wilt be able to at present. I don’t know

exactly what’s the matter with him; but he keeps close inside the

house; a sort of sick, and yet he don’t look so. In fact, he ain’t

sick; but no, he isn’t well either. Any how, young man, he won’t always

see me, so I don’t suppose he will thee. He’s a queer man, Captain

Ahab—so some think—but a good one. Oh, thou’lt like him well enough; no

fear, no fear. He’s a grand, ungodly, god-like man, Captain Ahab;

doesn’t speak much; but, when he does speak, then you may well listen.

Mark ye, be forewarned; Ahab’s above the common; Ahab’s been in

colleges, as well as ’mong the cannibals; been used to deeper wonders

than the waves; fixed his fiery lance in mightier, stranger foes than

whales. His lance! aye, the keenest and the surest that out of all our

isle! Oh! he ain’t Captain Bildad; no, and he ain’t Captain Peleg;

\_he’s Ahab\_, boy; and Ahab of old, thou knowest, was a crowned king!”

“And a very vile one. When that wicked king was slain, the dogs, did

they not lick his blood?”

“Come hither to me—hither, hither,” said Peleg, with a significance in

his eye that almost startled me. “Look ye, lad; never say that on board

the Pequod. Never say it anywhere. Captain Ahab did not name himself.

’Twas a foolish, ignorant whim of his crazy, widowed mother, who died

when he was only a twelvemonth old. And yet the old squaw Tistig, at

Gayhead, said that the name would somehow prove prophetic. And,

perhaps, other fools like her may tell thee the same. I wish to warn

thee. It’s a lie. I know Captain Ahab well; I’ve sailed with him as

mate years ago; I know what he is—a good man—not a pious, good man,

like Bildad, but a swearing good man—something like me—only there’s a

good deal more of him. Aye, aye, I know that he was never very jolly;

and I know that on the passage home, he was a little out of his mind

for a spell; but it was the sharp shooting pains in his bleeding stump

that brought that about, as any one might see. I know, too, that ever

since he lost his leg last voyage by that accursed whale, he’s been a

kind of moody—desperate moody, and savage sometimes; but that will all

pass off. And once for all, let me tell thee and assure thee, young

man, it’s better to sail with a moody good captain than a laughing bad

one. So good-bye to thee—and wrong not Captain Ahab, because he happens

to have a wicked name. Besides, my boy, he has a wife—not three voyages

wedded—a sweet, resigned girl. Think of that; by that sweet girl that

old man has a child: hold ye then there can be any utter, hopeless harm

in Ahab? No, no, my lad; stricken, blasted, if he be, Ahab has his

humanities!”

As I walked away, I was full of thoughtfulness; what had been

incidentally revealed to me of Captain Ahab, filled me with a certain

wild vagueness of painfulness concerning him. And somehow, at the time,

I felt a sympathy and a sorrow for him, but for I don’t know what,

unless it was the cruel loss of his leg. And yet I also felt a strange

awe of him; but that sort of awe, which I cannot at all describe, was

not exactly awe; I do not know what it was. But I felt it; and it did

not disincline me towards him; though I felt impatience at what seemed

like mystery in him, so imperfectly as he was known to me then.

However, my thoughts were at length carried in other directions, so

that for the present dark Ahab slipped my mind.

CHAPTER 17. The Ramadan.

As Queequeg’s Ramadan, or Fasting and Humiliation, was to continue all

day, I did not choose to disturb him till towards night-fall; for I

cherish the greatest respect towards everybody’s religious obligations,

never mind how comical, and could not find it in my heart to undervalue

even a congregation of ants worshipping a toad-stool; or those other

creatures in certain parts of our earth, who with a degree of

footmanism quite unprecedented in other planets, bow down before the

torso of a deceased landed proprietor merely on account of the

inordinate possessions yet owned and rented in his name.

I say, we good Presbyterian Christians should be charitable in these

things, and not fancy ourselves so vastly superior to other mortals,

pagans and what not, because of their half-crazy conceits on these

subjects. There was Queequeg, now, certainly entertaining the most

absurd notions about Yojo and his Ramadan;—but what of that? Queequeg

thought he knew what he was about, I suppose; he seemed to be content;

and there let him rest. All our arguing with him would not avail; let

him be, I say: and Heaven have mercy on us all—Presbyterians and Pagans

alike—for we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the head, and

sadly need mending.

Towards evening, when I felt assured that all his performances and

rituals must be over, I went up to his room and knocked at the door;

but no answer. I tried to open it, but it was fastened inside.

“Queequeg,” said I softly through the key-hole:—all silent. “I say,

Queequeg! why don’t you speak? It’s I—Ishmael.” But all remained still

as before. I began to grow alarmed. I had allowed him such abundant

time; I thought he might have had an apoplectic fit. I looked through

the key-hole; but the door opening into an odd corner of the room, the

key-hole prospect was but a crooked and sinister one. I could only see

part of the foot-board of the bed and a line of the wall, but nothing

more. I was surprised to behold resting against the wall the wooden

shaft of Queequeg’s harpoon, which the landlady the evening previous

had taken from him, before our mounting to the chamber. That’s strange,

thought I; but at any rate, since the harpoon stands yonder, and he

seldom or never goes abroad without it, therefore he must be inside

here, and no possible mistake.

“Queequeg!—Queequeg!”—all still. Something must have happened.

Apoplexy! I tried to burst open the door; but it stubbornly resisted.

Running down stairs, I quickly stated my suspicions to the first person

I met—the chamber-maid. “La! la!” she cried, “I thought something must

be the matter. I went to make the bed after breakfast, and the door was

locked; and not a mouse to be heard; and it’s been just so silent ever

since. But I thought, may be, you had both gone off and locked your

baggage in for safe keeping. La! la, ma’am!—Mistress! murder! Mrs.

Hussey! apoplexy!”—and with these cries, she ran towards the kitchen, I

following.

Mrs. Hussey soon appeared, with a mustard-pot in one hand and a

vinegar-cruet in the other, having just broken away from the occupation

of attending to the castors, and scolding her little black boy

meantime.

“Wood-house!” cried I, “which way to it? Run for God’s sake, and fetch

something to pry open the door—the axe!—the axe! he’s had a stroke;

depend upon it!”—and so saying I was unmethodically rushing up stairs

again empty-handed, when Mrs. Hussey interposed the mustard-pot and

vinegar-cruet, and the entire castor of her countenance.

“What’s the matter with you, young man?”

“Get the axe! For God’s sake, run for the doctor, some one, while I pry

it open!”

“Look here,” said the landlady, quickly putting down the vinegar-cruet,

so as to have one hand free; “look here; are you talking about prying

open any of my doors?”—and with that she seized my arm. “What’s the

matter with you? What’s the matter with you, shipmate?”

In as calm, but rapid a manner as possible, I gave her to understand

the whole case. Unconsciously clapping the vinegar-cruet to one side of

her nose, she ruminated for an instant; then exclaimed—“No! I haven’t

seen it since I put it there.” Running to a little closet under the

landing of the stairs, she glanced in, and returning, told me that

Queequeg’s harpoon was missing. “He’s killed himself,” she cried. “It’s

unfort’nate Stiggs done over again—there goes another counterpane—God

pity his poor mother!—it will be the ruin of my house. Has the poor lad

a sister? Where’s that girl?—there, Betty, go to Snarles the Painter,

and tell him to paint me a sign, with—“no suicides permitted here, and

no smoking in the parlor;”—might as well kill both birds at once. Kill?

The Lord be merciful to his ghost! What’s that noise there? You, young

man, avast there!”

And running up after me, she caught me as I was again trying to force

open the door.

“I don’t allow it; I won’t have my premises spoiled. Go for the

locksmith, there’s one about a mile from here. But avast!” putting her

hand in her side-pocket, “here’s a key that’ll fit, I guess; let’s

see.” And with that, she turned it in the lock; but, alas! Queequeg’s

supplemental bolt remained unwithdrawn within.

“Have to burst it open,” said I, and was running down the entry a

little, for a good start, when the landlady caught at me, again vowing

I should not break down her premises; but I tore from her, and with a

sudden bodily rush dashed myself full against the mark.

With a prodigious noise the door flew open, and the knob slamming

against the wall, sent the plaster to the ceiling; and there, good

heavens! there sat Queequeg, altogether cool and self-collected; right

in the middle of the room; squatting on his hams, and holding Yojo on

top of his head. He looked neither one way nor the other way, but sat

like a carved image with scarce a sign of active life.

“Queequeg,” said I, going up to him, “Queequeg, what’s the matter with

you?”

“He hain’t been a sittin’ so all day, has he?” said the landlady.

But all we said, not a word could we drag out of him; I almost felt

like pushing him over, so as to change his position, for it was almost

intolerable, it seemed so painfully and unnaturally constrained;

especially, as in all probability he had been sitting so for upwards of

eight or ten hours, going too without his regular meals.

“Mrs. Hussey,” said I, “he’s \_alive\_ at all events; so leave us, if you

please, and I will see to this strange affair myself.”

Closing the door upon the landlady, I endeavored to prevail upon

Queequeg to take a chair; but in vain. There he sat; and all he could

do—for all my polite arts and blandishments—he would not move a peg,

nor say a single word, nor even look at me, nor notice my presence in

the slightest way.

I wonder, thought I, if this can possibly be a part of his Ramadan; do

they fast on their hams that way in his native island. It must be so;

yes, it’s part of his creed, I suppose; well, then, let him rest; he’ll

get up sooner or later, no doubt. It can’t last for ever, thank God,

and his Ramadan only comes once a year; and I don’t believe it’s very

punctual then.

I went down to supper. After sitting a long time listening to the long

stories of some sailors who had just come from a plum-pudding voyage,

as they called it (that is, a short whaling-voyage in a schooner or

brig, confined to the north of the line, in the Atlantic Ocean only);

after listening to these plum-puddingers till nearly eleven o’clock, I

went up stairs to go to bed, feeling quite sure by this time Queequeg

must certainly have brought his Ramadan to a termination. But no; there

he was just where I had left him; he had not stirred an inch. I began

to grow vexed with him; it seemed so downright senseless and insane to

be sitting there all day and half the night on his hams in a cold room,

holding a piece of wood on his head.

“For heaven’s sake, Queequeg, get up and shake yourself; get up and

have some supper. You’ll starve; you’ll kill yourself, Queequeg.” But

not a word did he reply.

Despairing of him, therefore, I determined to go to bed and to sleep;

and no doubt, before a great while, he would follow me. But previous to

turning in, I took my heavy bearskin jacket, and threw it over him, as

it promised to be a very cold night; and he had nothing but his

ordinary round jacket on. For some time, do all I would, I could not

get into the faintest doze. I had blown out the candle; and the mere

thought of Queequeg—not four feet off—sitting there in that uneasy

position, stark alone in the cold and dark; this made me really

wretched. Think of it; sleeping all night in the same room with a wide

awake pagan on his hams in this dreary, unaccountable Ramadan!

But somehow I dropped off at last, and knew nothing more till break of

day; when, looking over the bedside, there squatted Queequeg, as if he

had been screwed down to the floor. But as soon as the first glimpse of

sun entered the window, up he got, with stiff and grating joints, but

with a cheerful look; limped towards me where I lay; pressed his

forehead again against mine; and said his Ramadan was over.

Now, as I before hinted, I have no objection to any person’s religion,

be it what it may, so long as that person does not kill or insult any

other person, because that other person don’t believe it also. But when

a man’s religion becomes really frantic; when it is a positive torment

to him; and, in fine, makes this earth of ours an uncomfortable inn to

lodge in; then I think it high time to take that individual aside and

argue the point with him.

And just so I now did with Queequeg. “Queequeg,” said I, “get into bed

now, and lie and listen to me.” I then went on, beginning with the rise

and progress of the primitive religions, and coming down to the various

religions of the present time, during which time I labored to show

Queequeg that all these Lents, Ramadans, and prolonged ham-squattings

in cold, cheerless rooms were stark nonsense; bad for the health;

useless for the soul; opposed, in short, to the obvious laws of Hygiene

and common sense. I told him, too, that he being in other things such

an extremely sensible and sagacious savage, it pained me, very badly

pained me, to see him now so deplorably foolish about this ridiculous

Ramadan of his. Besides, argued I, fasting makes the body cave in;

hence the spirit caves in; and all thoughts born of a fast must

necessarily be half-starved. This is the reason why most dyspeptic

religionists cherish such melancholy notions about their hereafters. In

one word, Queequeg, said I, rather digressively; hell is an idea first

born on an undigested apple-dumpling; and since then perpetuated

through the hereditary dyspepsias nurtured by Ramadans.

I then asked Queequeg whether he himself was ever troubled with

dyspepsia; expressing the idea very plainly, so that he could take it

in. He said no; only upon one memorable occasion. It was after a great

feast given by his father the king, on the gaining of a great battle

wherein fifty of the enemy had been killed by about two o’clock in the

afternoon, and all cooked and eaten that very evening.

“No more, Queequeg,” said I, shuddering; “that will do;” for I knew the

inferences without his further hinting them. I had seen a sailor who

had visited that very island, and he told me that it was the custom,

when a great battle had been gained there, to barbecue all the slain in

the yard or garden of the victor; and then, one by one, they were

placed in great wooden trenchers, and garnished round like a pilau,

with breadfruit and cocoanuts; and with some parsley in their mouths,

were sent round with the victor’s compliments to all his friends, just

as though these presents were so many Christmas turkeys.

After all, I do not think that my remarks about religion made much

impression upon Queequeg. Because, in the first place, he somehow

seemed dull of hearing on that important subject, unless considered

from his own point of view; and, in the second place, he did not more

than one third understand me, couch my ideas simply as I would; and,

finally, he no doubt thought he knew a good deal more about the true

religion than I did. He looked at me with a sort of condescending

concern and compassion, as though he thought it a great pity that such

a sensible young man should be so hopelessly lost to evangelical pagan

piety.

At last we rose and dressed; and Queequeg, taking a prodigiously hearty

breakfast of chowders of all sorts, so that the landlady should not

make much profit by reason of his Ramadan, we sallied out to board the

Pequod, sauntering along, and picking our teeth with halibut bones.

CHAPTER 18. His Mark.

As we were walking down the end of the wharf towards the ship, Queequeg

carrying his harpoon, Captain Peleg in his gruff voice loudly hailed us

from his wigwam, saying he had not suspected my friend was a cannibal,

and furthermore announcing that he let no cannibals on board that

craft, unless they previously produced their papers.

“What do you mean by that, Captain Peleg?” said I, now jumping on the

bulwarks, and leaving my comrade standing on the wharf.

“I mean,” he replied, “he must show his papers.”

“Yes,” said Captain Bildad in his hollow voice, sticking his head from

behind Peleg’s, out of the wigwam. “He must show that he’s converted.

Son of darkness,” he added, turning to Queequeg, “art thou at present

in communion with any Christian church?”

“Why,” said I, “he’s a member of the first Congregational Church.” Here

be it said, that many tattooed savages sailing in Nantucket ships at

last come to be converted into the churches.

“First Congregational Church,” cried Bildad, “what! that worships in

Deacon Deuteronomy Coleman’s meeting-house?” and so saying, taking out

his spectacles, he rubbed them with his great yellow bandana

handkerchief, and putting them on very carefully, came out of the

wigwam, and leaning stiffly over the bulwarks, took a good long look at

Queequeg.

“How long hath he been a member?” he then said, turning to me; “not

very long, I rather guess, young man.”

“No,” said Peleg, “and he hasn’t been baptized right either, or it

would have washed some of that devil’s blue off his face.”

“Do tell, now,” cried Bildad, “is this Philistine a regular member of

Deacon Deuteronomy’s meeting? I never saw him going there, and I pass

it every Lord’s day.”

“I don’t know anything about Deacon Deuteronomy or his meeting,” said

I; “all I know is, that Queequeg here is a born member of the First

Congregational Church. He is a deacon himself, Queequeg is.”

“Young man,” said Bildad sternly, “thou art skylarking with me—explain

thyself, thou young Hittite. What church dost thee mean? answer me.”

Finding myself thus hard pushed, I replied. “I mean, sir, the same

ancient Catholic Church to which you and I, and Captain Peleg there,

and Queequeg here, and all of us, and every mother’s son and soul of us

belong; the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole

worshipping world; we all belong to that; only some of us cherish some

queer crotchets no ways touching the grand belief; in \_that\_ we all

join hands.”

“Splice, thou mean’st \_splice\_ hands,” cried Peleg, drawing nearer.

“Young man, you’d better ship for a missionary, instead of a fore-mast

hand; I never heard a better sermon. Deacon Deuteronomy—why Father

Mapple himself couldn’t beat it, and he’s reckoned something. Come

aboard, come aboard; never mind about the papers. I say, tell Quohog

there—what’s that you call him? tell Quohog to step along. By the great

anchor, what a harpoon he’s got there! looks like good stuff that; and

he handles it about right. I say, Quohog, or whatever your name is, did

you ever stand in the head of a whale-boat? did you ever strike a

fish?”

Without saying a word, Queequeg, in his wild sort of way, jumped upon

the bulwarks, from thence into the bows of one of the whale-boats

hanging to the side; and then bracing his left knee, and poising his

harpoon, cried out in some such way as this:—

“Cap’ain, you see him small drop tar on water dere? You see him? well,

spose him one whale eye, well, den!” and taking sharp aim at it, he

darted the iron right over old Bildad’s broad brim, clean across the

ship’s decks, and struck the glistening tar spot out of sight.

“Now,” said Queequeg, quietly hauling in the line, “spos-ee him whale-e

eye; why, dad whale dead.”

“Quick, Bildad,” said Peleg, his partner, who, aghast at the close

vicinity of the flying harpoon, had retreated towards the cabin

gangway. “Quick, I say, you Bildad, and get the ship’s papers. We must

have Hedgehog there, I mean Quohog, in one of our boats. Look ye,

Quohog, we’ll give ye the ninetieth lay, and that’s more than ever was

given a harpooneer yet out of Nantucket.”

So down we went into the cabin, and to my great joy Queequeg was soon

enrolled among the same ship’s company to which I myself belonged.

When all preliminaries were over and Peleg had got everything ready for

signing, he turned to me and said, “I guess, Quohog there don’t know

how to write, does he? I say, Quohog, blast ye! dost thou sign thy name

or make thy mark?”

But at this question, Queequeg, who had twice or thrice before taken

part in similar ceremonies, looked no ways abashed; but taking the

offered pen, copied upon the paper, in the proper place, an exact

counterpart of a queer round figure which was tattooed upon his arm; so

that through Captain Peleg’s obstinate mistake touching his

appellative, it stood something like this:—

Quohog. his X mark.

Meanwhile Captain Bildad sat earnestly and steadfastly eyeing Queequeg,

and at last rising solemnly and fumbling in the huge pockets of his

broad-skirted drab coat, took out a bundle of tracts, and selecting one

entitled “The Latter Day Coming; or No Time to Lose,” placed it in

Queequeg’s hands, and then grasping them and the book with both his,

looked earnestly into his eyes, and said, “Son of darkness, I must do

my duty by thee; I am part owner of this ship, and feel concerned for

the souls of all its crew; if thou still clingest to thy Pagan ways,

which I sadly fear, I beseech thee, remain not for aye a Belial

bondsman. Spurn the idol Bell, and the hideous dragon; turn from the

wrath to come; mind thine eye, I say; oh! goodness gracious! steer

clear of the fiery pit!”

Something of the salt sea yet lingered in old Bildad’s language,

heterogeneously mixed with Scriptural and domestic phrases.

“Avast there, avast there, Bildad, avast now spoiling our harpooneer,”

cried Peleg. “Pious harpooneers never make good voyagers—it takes the

shark out of ’em; no harpooneer is worth a straw who aint pretty

sharkish. There was young Nat Swaine, once the bravest boat-header out

of all Nantucket and the Vineyard; he joined the meeting, and never

came to good. He got so frightened about his plaguy soul, that he

shrinked and sheered away from whales, for fear of after-claps, in case

he got stove and went to Davy Jones.”

“Peleg! Peleg!” said Bildad, lifting his eyes and hands, “thou thyself,

as I myself, hast seen many a perilous time; thou knowest, Peleg, what

it is to have the fear of death; how, then, can’st thou prate in this

ungodly guise. Thou beliest thine own heart, Peleg. Tell me, when this

same Pequod here had her three masts overboard in that typhoon on

Japan, that same voyage when thou went mate with Captain Ahab, did’st

thou not think of Death and the Judgment then?”

“Hear him, hear him now,” cried Peleg, marching across the cabin, and

thrusting his hands far down into his pockets,—“hear him, all of ye.

Think of that! When every moment we thought the ship would sink! Death

and the Judgment then? What? With all three masts making such an

everlasting thundering against the side; and every sea breaking over

us, fore and aft. Think of Death and the Judgment then? No! no time to

think about Death then. Life was what Captain Ahab and I was thinking

of; and how to save all hands—how to rig jury-masts—how to get into the

nearest port; that was what I was thinking of.”

Bildad said no more, but buttoning up his coat, stalked on deck, where

we followed him. There he stood, very quietly overlooking some

sailmakers who were mending a top-sail in the waist. Now and then he

stooped to pick up a patch, or save an end of tarred twine, which

otherwise might have been wasted.

CHAPTER 19. The Prophet.

“Shipmates, have ye shipped in that ship?”

Queequeg and I had just left the Pequod, and were sauntering away from

the water, for the moment each occupied with his own thoughts, when the

above words were put to us by a stranger, who, pausing before us,

levelled his massive forefinger at the vessel in question. He was but

shabbily apparelled in faded jacket and patched trowsers; a rag of a

black handkerchief investing his neck. A confluent small-pox had in all

directions flowed over his face, and left it like the complicated

ribbed bed of a torrent, when the rushing waters have been dried up.

“Have ye shipped in her?” he repeated.

“You mean the ship Pequod, I suppose,” said I, trying to gain a little

more time for an uninterrupted look at him.

“Aye, the Pequod—that ship there,” he said, drawing back his whole arm,

and then rapidly shoving it straight out from him, with the fixed

bayonet of his pointed finger darted full at the object.

“Yes,” said I, “we have just signed the articles.”

“Anything down there about your souls?”

“About what?”

“Oh, perhaps you hav’n’t got any,” he said quickly. “No matter though,

I know many chaps that hav’n’t got any,—good luck to ’em; and they are

all the better off for it. A soul’s a sort of a fifth wheel to a

wagon.”

“What are you jabbering about, shipmate?” said I.

“\_He’s\_ got enough, though, to make up for all deficiencies of that

sort in other chaps,” abruptly said the stranger, placing a nervous

emphasis upon the word \_he\_.

“Queequeg,” said I, “let’s go; this fellow has broken loose from

somewhere; he’s talking about something and somebody we don’t know.”

“Stop!” cried the stranger. “Ye said true—ye hav’n’t seen Old Thunder

yet, have ye?”

“Who’s Old Thunder?” said I, again riveted with the insane earnestness

of his manner.

“Captain Ahab.”

“What! the captain of our ship, the Pequod?”

“Aye, among some of us old sailor chaps, he goes by that name. Ye

hav’n’t seen him yet, have ye?”

“No, we hav’n’t. He’s sick they say, but is getting better, and will be

all right again before long.”

“All right again before long!” laughed the stranger, with a solemnly

derisive sort of laugh. “Look ye; when Captain Ahab is all right, then

this left arm of mine will be all right; not before.”

“What do you know about him?”

“What did they \_tell\_ you about him? Say that!”

“They didn’t tell much of anything about him; only I’ve heard that he’s

a good whale-hunter, and a good captain to his crew.”

“That’s true, that’s true—yes, both true enough. But you must jump when

he gives an order. Step and growl; growl and go—that’s the word with

Captain Ahab. But nothing about that thing that happened to him off

Cape Horn, long ago, when he lay like dead for three days and nights;

nothing about that deadly skrimmage with the Spaniard afore the altar

in Santa?—heard nothing about that, eh? Nothing about the silver

calabash he spat into? And nothing about his losing his leg last

voyage, according to the prophecy. Didn’t ye hear a word about them

matters and something more, eh? No, I don’t think ye did; how could ye?

Who knows it? Not all Nantucket, I guess. But hows’ever, mayhap, ye’ve

heard tell about the leg, and how he lost it; aye, ye have heard of

that, I dare say. Oh yes, \_that\_ every one knows a’most—I mean they

know he’s only one leg; and that a parmacetti took the other off.”

“My friend,” said I, “what all this gibberish of yours is about, I

don’t know, and I don’t much care; for it seems to me that you must be

a little damaged in the head. But if you are speaking of Captain Ahab,

of that ship there, the Pequod, then let me tell you, that I know all

about the loss of his leg.”

“\_All\_ about it, eh—sure you do?—all?”

“Pretty sure.”

With finger pointed and eye levelled at the Pequod, the beggar-like

stranger stood a moment, as if in a troubled reverie; then starting a

little, turned and said:—“Ye’ve shipped, have ye? Names down on the

papers? Well, well, what’s signed, is signed; and what’s to be, will

be; and then again, perhaps it won’t be, after all. Anyhow, it’s all

fixed and arranged a’ready; and some sailors or other must go with him,

I suppose; as well these as any other men, God pity ’em! Morning to ye,

shipmates, morning; the ineffable heavens bless ye; I’m sorry I stopped

ye.”

“Look here, friend,” said I, “if you have anything important to tell

us, out with it; but if you are only trying to bamboozle us, you are

mistaken in your game; that’s all I have to say.”

“And it’s said very well, and I like to hear a chap talk up that way;

you are just the man for him—the likes of ye. Morning to ye, shipmates,

morning! Oh! when ye get there, tell ’em I’ve concluded not to make one

of ’em.”

“Ah, my dear fellow, you can’t fool us that way—you can’t fool us. It

is the easiest thing in the world for a man to look as if he had a

great secret in him.”

“Morning to ye, shipmates, morning.”

“Morning it is,” said I. “Come along, Queequeg, let’s leave this crazy

man. But stop, tell me your name, will you?”

“Elijah.”

Elijah! thought I, and we walked away, both commenting, after each

other’s fashion, upon this ragged old sailor; and agreed that he was

nothing but a humbug, trying to be a bugbear. But we had not gone

perhaps above a hundred yards, when chancing to turn a corner, and

looking back as I did so, who should be seen but Elijah following us,

though at a distance. Somehow, the sight of him struck me so, that I

said nothing to Queequeg of his being behind, but passed on with my

comrade, anxious to see whether the stranger would turn the same corner

that we did. He did; and then it seemed to me that he was dogging us,

but with what intent I could not for the life of me imagine. This

circumstance, coupled with his ambiguous, half-hinting, half-revealing,

shrouded sort of talk, now begat in me all kinds of vague wonderments

and half-apprehensions, and all connected with the Pequod; and Captain

Ahab; and the leg he had lost; and the Cape Horn fit; and the silver

calabash; and what Captain Peleg had said of him, when I left the ship

the day previous; and the prediction of the squaw Tistig; and the

voyage we had bound ourselves to sail; and a hundred other shadowy

things.

I was resolved to satisfy myself whether this ragged Elijah was really

dogging us or not, and with that intent crossed the way with Queequeg,

and on that side of it retraced our steps. But Elijah passed on,

without seeming to notice us. This relieved me; and once more, and

finally as it seemed to me, I pronounced him in my heart, a humbug.

CHAPTER 20. All Astir.

A day or two passed, and there was great activity aboard the Pequod.

Not only were the old sails being mended, but new sails were coming on

board, and bolts of canvas, and coils of rigging; in short, everything

betokened that the ship’s preparations were hurrying to a close.

Captain Peleg seldom or never went ashore, but sat in his wigwam

keeping a sharp look-out upon the hands: Bildad did all the purchasing

and providing at the stores; and the men employed in the hold and on

the rigging were working till long after night-fall.

On the day following Queequeg’s signing the articles, word was given at

all the inns where the ship’s company were stopping, that their chests

must be on board before night, for there was no telling how soon the

vessel might be sailing. So Queequeg and I got down our traps,

resolving, however, to sleep ashore till the last. But it seems they

always give very long notice in these cases, and the ship did not sail

for several days. But no wonder; there was a good deal to be done, and

there is no telling how many things to be thought of, before the Pequod

was fully equipped.

Every one knows what a multitude of things—beds, sauce-pans, knives and

forks, shovels and tongs, napkins, nut-crackers, and what not, are

indispensable to the business of housekeeping. Just so with whaling,

which necessitates a three-years’ housekeeping upon the wide ocean, far

from all grocers, costermongers, doctors, bakers, and bankers. And

though this also holds true of merchant vessels, yet not by any means

to the same extent as with whalemen. For besides the great length of

the whaling voyage, the numerous articles peculiar to the prosecution

of the fishery, and the impossibility of replacing them at the remote

harbors usually frequented, it must be remembered, that of all ships,

whaling vessels are the most exposed to accidents of all kinds, and

especially to the destruction and loss of the very things upon which

the success of the voyage most depends. Hence, the spare boats, spare

spars, and spare lines and harpoons, and spare everythings, almost, but

a spare Captain and duplicate ship.

At the period of our arrival at the Island, the heaviest storage of the

Pequod had been almost completed; comprising her beef, bread, water,

fuel, and iron hoops and staves. But, as before hinted, for some time

there was a continual fetching and carrying on board of divers odds and

ends of things, both large and small.

Chief among those who did this fetching and carrying was Captain

Bildad’s sister, a lean old lady of a most determined and indefatigable

spirit, but withal very kindhearted, who seemed resolved that, if \_she\_

could help it, nothing should be found wanting in the Pequod, after

once fairly getting to sea. At one time she would come on board with a

jar of pickles for the steward’s pantry; another time with a bunch of

quills for the chief mate’s desk, where he kept his log; a third time

with a roll of flannel for the small of some one’s rheumatic back.

Never did any woman better deserve her name, which was Charity—Aunt

Charity, as everybody called her. And like a sister of charity did this

charitable Aunt Charity bustle about hither and thither, ready to turn

her hand and heart to anything that promised to yield safety, comfort,

and consolation to all on board a ship in which her beloved brother

Bildad was concerned, and in which she herself owned a score or two of

well-saved dollars.

But it was startling to see this excellent hearted Quakeress coming on

board, as she did the last day, with a long oil-ladle in one hand, and

a still longer whaling lance in the other. Nor was Bildad himself nor

Captain Peleg at all backward. As for Bildad, he carried about with him

a long list of the articles needed, and at every fresh arrival, down

went his mark opposite that article upon the paper. Every once in a

while Peleg came hobbling out of his whalebone den, roaring at the men

down the hatchways, roaring up to the riggers at the mast-head, and

then concluded by roaring back into his wigwam.

During these days of preparation, Queequeg and I often visited the

craft, and as often I asked about Captain Ahab, and how he was, and

when he was going to come on board his ship. To these questions they

would answer, that he was getting better and better, and was expected

aboard every day; meantime, the two captains, Peleg and Bildad, could

attend to everything necessary to fit the vessel for the voyage. If I

had been downright honest with myself, I would have seen very plainly

in my heart that I did but half fancy being committed this way to so

long a voyage, without once laying my eyes on the man who was to be the

absolute dictator of it, so soon as the ship sailed out upon the open

sea. But when a man suspects any wrong, it sometimes happens that if he

be already involved in the matter, he insensibly strives to cover up

his suspicions even from himself. And much this way it was with me. I

said nothing, and tried to think nothing.

At last it was given out that some time next day the ship would

certainly sail. So next morning, Queequeg and I took a very early

start.

CHAPTER 21. Going Aboard.

It was nearly six o’clock, but only grey imperfect misty dawn, when we

drew nigh the wharf.

“There are some sailors running ahead there, if I see right,” said I to

Queequeg, “it can’t be shadows; she’s off by sunrise, I guess; come

on!”

“Avast!” cried a voice, whose owner at the same time coming close

behind us, laid a hand upon both our shoulders, and then insinuating

himself between us, stood stooping forward a little, in the uncertain

twilight, strangely peering from Queequeg to me. It was Elijah.

“Going aboard?”

“Hands off, will you,” said I.

“Lookee here,” said Queequeg, shaking himself, “go ’way!”

“Ain’t going aboard, then?”

“Yes, we are,” said I, “but what business is that of yours? Do you

know, Mr. Elijah, that I consider you a little impertinent?”

“No, no, no; I wasn’t aware of that,” said Elijah, slowly and

wonderingly looking from me to Queequeg, with the most unaccountable

glances.

“Elijah,” said I, “you will oblige my friend and me by withdrawing. We

are going to the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and would prefer not to be

detained.”

“Ye be, be ye? Coming back afore breakfast?”

“He’s cracked, Queequeg,” said I, “come on.”

“Holloa!” cried stationary Elijah, hailing us when we had removed a few

paces.

“Never mind him,” said I, “Queequeg, come on.”

But he stole up to us again, and suddenly clapping his hand on my

shoulder, said—“Did ye see anything looking like men going towards that

ship a while ago?”

Struck by this plain matter-of-fact question, I answered, saying, “Yes,

I thought I did see four or five men; but it was too dim to be sure.”

“Very dim, very dim,” said Elijah. “Morning to ye.”

Once more we quitted him; but once more he came softly after us; and

touching my shoulder again, said, “See if you can find ’em now, will

ye?

“Find who?”

“Morning to ye! morning to ye!” he rejoined, again moving off. “Oh! I

was going to warn ye against—but never mind, never mind—it’s all one,

all in the family too;—sharp frost this morning, ain’t it? Good-bye to

ye. Shan’t see ye again very soon, I guess; unless it’s before the

Grand Jury.” And with these cracked words he finally departed, leaving

me, for the moment, in no small wonderment at his frantic impudence.

At last, stepping on board the Pequod, we found everything in profound

quiet, not a soul moving. The cabin entrance was locked within; the

hatches were all on, and lumbered with coils of rigging. Going forward

to the forecastle, we found the slide of the scuttle open. Seeing a

light, we went down, and found only an old rigger there, wrapped in a

tattered pea-jacket. He was thrown at whole length upon two chests, his

face downwards and inclosed in his folded arms. The profoundest slumber

slept upon him.

“Those sailors we saw, Queequeg, where can they have gone to?” said I,

looking dubiously at the sleeper. But it seemed that, when on the

wharf, Queequeg had not at all noticed what I now alluded to; hence I

would have thought myself to have been optically deceived in that

matter, were it not for Elijah’s otherwise inexplicable question. But I

beat the thing down; and again marking the sleeper, jocularly hinted to

Queequeg that perhaps we had best sit up with the body; telling him to

establish himself accordingly. He put his hand upon the sleeper’s rear,

as though feeling if it was soft enough; and then, without more ado,

sat quietly down there.

“Gracious! Queequeg, don’t sit there,” said I.

“Oh! perry dood seat,” said Queequeg, “my country way; won’t hurt him

face.”

“Face!” said I, “call that his face? very benevolent countenance then;

but how hard he breathes, he’s heaving himself; get off, Queequeg, you

are heavy, it’s grinding the face of the poor. Get off, Queequeg! Look,

he’ll twitch you off soon. I wonder he don’t wake.”

Queequeg removed himself to just beyond the head of the sleeper, and

lighted his tomahawk pipe. I sat at the feet. We kept the pipe passing

over the sleeper, from one to the other. Meanwhile, upon questioning

him in his broken fashion, Queequeg gave me to understand that, in his

land, owing to the absence of settees and sofas of all sorts, the king,

chiefs, and great people generally, were in the custom of fattening

some of the lower orders for ottomans; and to furnish a house

comfortably in that respect, you had only to buy up eight or ten lazy

fellows, and lay them round in the piers and alcoves. Besides, it was

very convenient on an excursion; much better than those garden-chairs

which are convertible into walking-sticks; upon occasion, a chief

calling his attendant, and desiring him to make a settee of himself

under a spreading tree, perhaps in some damp marshy place.

While narrating these things, every time Queequeg received the tomahawk

from me, he flourished the hatchet-side of it over the sleeper’s head.

“What’s that for, Queequeg?”

“Perry easy, kill-e; oh! perry easy!”

He was going on with some wild reminiscences about his tomahawk-pipe,

which, it seemed, had in its two uses both brained his foes and soothed

his soul, when we were directly attracted to the sleeping rigger. The

strong vapor now completely filling the contracted hole, it began to

tell upon him. He breathed with a sort of muffledness; then seemed

troubled in the nose; then revolved over once or twice; then sat up and

rubbed his eyes.

“Holloa!” he breathed at last, “who be ye smokers?”

“Shipped men,” answered I, “when does she sail?”

“Aye, aye, ye are going in her, be ye? She sails to-day. The Captain

came aboard last night.”

“What Captain?—Ahab?”

“Who but him indeed?”

I was going to ask him some further questions concerning Ahab, when we

heard a noise on deck.

“Holloa! Starbuck’s astir,” said the rigger. “He’s a lively chief mate,

that; good man, and a pious; but all alive now, I must turn to.” And so

saying he went on deck, and we followed.

It was now clear sunrise. Soon the crew came on board in twos and

threes; the riggers bestirred themselves; the mates were actively

engaged; and several of the shore people were busy in bringing various

last things on board. Meanwhile Captain Ahab remained invisibly

enshrined within his cabin.

CHAPTER 22. Merry Christmas.

At length, towards noon, upon the final dismissal of the ship’s

riggers, and after the Pequod had been hauled out from the wharf, and

after the ever-thoughtful Charity had come off in a whale-boat, with

her last gift—a night-cap for Stubb, the second mate, her

brother-in-law, and a spare Bible for the steward—after all this, the

two Captains, Peleg and Bildad, issued from the cabin, and turning to

the chief mate, Peleg said:

“Now, Mr. Starbuck, are you sure everything is right? Captain Ahab is

all ready—just spoke to him—nothing more to be got from shore, eh?

Well, call all hands, then. Muster ’em aft here—blast ’em!”

“No need of profane words, however great the hurry, Peleg,” said

Bildad, “but away with thee, friend Starbuck, and do our bidding.”

How now! Here upon the very point of starting for the voyage, Captain

Peleg and Captain Bildad were going it with a high hand on the

quarter-deck, just as if they were to be joint-commanders at sea, as

well as to all appearances in port. And, as for Captain Ahab, no sign

of him was yet to be seen; only, they said he was in the cabin. But

then, the idea was, that his presence was by no means necessary in

getting the ship under weigh, and steering her well out to sea. Indeed,

as that was not at all his proper business, but the pilot’s; and as he

was not yet completely recovered—so they said—therefore, Captain Ahab

stayed below. And all this seemed natural enough; especially as in the

merchant service many captains never show themselves on deck for a

considerable time after heaving up the anchor, but remain over the

cabin table, having a farewell merry-making with their shore friends,

before they quit the ship for good with the pilot.

But there was not much chance to think over the matter, for Captain

Peleg was now all alive. He seemed to do most of the talking and

commanding, and not Bildad.

“Aft here, ye sons of bachelors,” he cried, as the sailors lingered at

the main-mast. “Mr. Starbuck, drive ’em aft.”

“Strike the tent there!”—was the next order. As I hinted before, this

whalebone marquee was never pitched except in port; and on board the

Pequod, for thirty years, the order to strike the tent was well known

to be the next thing to heaving up the anchor.

“Man the capstan! Blood and thunder!—jump!”—was the next command, and

the crew sprang for the handspikes.

Now in getting under weigh, the station generally occupied by the pilot

is the forward part of the ship. And here Bildad, who, with Peleg, be

it known, in addition to his other officers, was one of the licensed

pilots of the port—he being suspected to have got himself made a pilot

in order to save the Nantucket pilot-fee to all the ships he was

concerned in, for he never piloted any other craft—Bildad, I say, might

now be seen actively engaged in looking over the bows for the

approaching anchor, and at intervals singing what seemed a dismal stave

of psalmody, to cheer the hands at the windlass, who roared forth some

sort of a chorus about the girls in Booble Alley, with hearty good

will. Nevertheless, not three days previous, Bildad had told them that

no profane songs would be allowed on board the Pequod, particularly in

getting under weigh; and Charity, his sister, had placed a small choice

copy of Watts in each seaman’s berth.

Meantime, overseeing the other part of the ship, Captain Peleg ripped

and swore astern in the most frightful manner. I almost thought he

would sink the ship before the anchor could be got up; involuntarily I

paused on my handspike, and told Queequeg to do the same, thinking of

the perils we both ran, in starting on the voyage with such a devil for

a pilot. I was comforting myself, however, with the thought that in

pious Bildad might be found some salvation, spite of his seven hundred

and seventy-seventh lay; when I felt a sudden sharp poke in my rear,

and turning round, was horrified at the apparition of Captain Peleg in

the act of withdrawing his leg from my immediate vicinity. That was my

first kick.

“Is that the way they heave in the marchant service?” he roared.

“Spring, thou sheep-head; spring, and break thy backbone! Why don’t ye

spring, I say, all of ye—spring! Quohog! spring, thou chap with the red

whiskers; spring there, Scotch-cap; spring, thou green pants. Spring, I

say, all of ye, and spring your eyes out!” And so saying, he moved

along the windlass, here and there using his leg very freely, while

imperturbable Bildad kept leading off with his psalmody. Thinks I,

Captain Peleg must have been drinking something to-day.

At last the anchor was up, the sails were set, and off we glided. It

was a short, cold Christmas; and as the short northern day merged into

night, we found ourselves almost broad upon the wintry ocean, whose

freezing spray cased us in ice, as in polished armor. The long rows of

teeth on the bulwarks glistened in the moonlight; and like the white

ivory tusks of some huge elephant, vast curving icicles depended from

the bows.

Lank Bildad, as pilot, headed the first watch, and ever and anon, as

the old craft deep dived into the green seas, and sent the shivering

frost all over her, and the winds howled, and the cordage rang, his

steady notes were heard,—

\_“Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood, Stand dressed in living

green. So to the Jews old Canaan stood, While Jordan rolled between.”\_

Never did those sweet words sound more sweetly to me than then. They

were full of hope and fruition. Spite of this frigid winter night in

the boisterous Atlantic, spite of my wet feet and wetter jacket, there

was yet, it then seemed to me, many a pleasant haven in store; and

meads and glades so eternally vernal, that the grass shot up by the

spring, untrodden, unwilted, remains at midsummer.

At last we gained such an offing, that the two pilots were needed no

longer. The stout sail-boat that had accompanied us began ranging

alongside.

It was curious and not unpleasing, how Peleg and Bildad were affected

at this juncture, especially Captain Bildad. For loath to depart, yet;

very loath to leave, for good, a ship bound on so long and perilous a

voyage—beyond both stormy Capes; a ship in which some thousands of his

hard earned dollars were invested; a ship, in which an old shipmate

sailed as captain; a man almost as old as he, once more starting to

encounter all the terrors of the pitiless jaw; loath to say good-bye to

a thing so every way brimful of every interest to him,—poor old Bildad

lingered long; paced the deck with anxious strides; ran down into the

cabin to speak another farewell word there; again came on deck, and

looked to windward; looked towards the wide and endless waters, only

bounded by the far-off unseen Eastern Continents; looked towards the

land; looked aloft; looked right and left; looked everywhere and

nowhere; and at last, mechanically coiling a rope upon its pin,

convulsively grasped stout Peleg by the hand, and holding up a lantern,

for a moment stood gazing heroically in his face, as much as to say,

“Nevertheless, friend Peleg, I can stand it; yes, I can.”

As for Peleg himself, he took it more like a philosopher; but for all

his philosophy, there was a tear twinkling in his eye, when the lantern

came too near. And he, too, did not a little run from cabin to deck—now

a word below, and now a word with Starbuck, the chief mate.

But, at last, he turned to his comrade, with a final sort of look about

him,—“Captain Bildad—come, old shipmate, we must go. Back the main-yard

there! Boat ahoy! Stand by to come close alongside, now! Careful,

careful!—come, Bildad, boy—say your last. Luck to ye, Starbuck—luck to

ye, Mr. Stubb—luck to ye, Mr. Flask—good-bye and good luck to ye

all—and this day three years I’ll have a hot supper smoking for ye in

old Nantucket. Hurrah and away!”

“God bless ye, and have ye in His holy keeping, men,” murmured old

Bildad, almost incoherently. “I hope ye’ll have fine weather now, so

that Captain Ahab may soon be moving among ye—a pleasant sun is all he

needs, and ye’ll have plenty of them in the tropic voyage ye go. Be

careful in the hunt, ye mates. Don’t stave the boats needlessly, ye

harpooneers; good white cedar plank is raised full three per cent.

within the year. Don’t forget your prayers, either. Mr. Starbuck, mind

that cooper don’t waste the spare staves. Oh! the sail-needles are in

the green locker! Don’t whale it too much a’ Lord’s days, men; but

don’t miss a fair chance either, that’s rejecting Heaven’s good gifts.

Have an eye to the molasses tierce, Mr. Stubb; it was a little leaky, I

thought. If ye touch at the islands, Mr. Flask, beware of fornication.

Good-bye, good-bye! Don’t keep that cheese too long down in the hold,

Mr. Starbuck; it’ll spoil. Be careful with the butter—twenty cents the

pound it was, and mind ye, if—”

“Come, come, Captain Bildad; stop palavering,—away!” and with that,

Peleg hurried him over the side, and both dropt into the boat.

Ship and boat diverged; the cold, damp night breeze blew between; a

screaming gull flew overhead; the two hulls wildly rolled; we gave

three heavy-hearted cheers, and blindly plunged like fate into the lone

Atlantic.

CHAPTER 23. The Lee Shore.

Some chapters back, one Bulkington was spoken of, a tall, newlanded

mariner, encountered in New Bedford at the inn.

When on that shivering winter’s night, the Pequod thrust her vindictive

bows into the cold malicious waves, who should I see standing at her

helm but Bulkington! I looked with sympathetic awe and fearfulness upon

the man, who in mid-winter just landed from a four years’ dangerous

voyage, could so unrestingly push off again for still another

tempestuous term. The land seemed scorching to his feet. Wonderfullest

things are ever the unmentionable; deep memories yield no epitaphs;

this six-inch chapter is the stoneless grave of Bulkington. Let me only

say that it fared with him as with the storm-tossed ship, that

miserably drives along the leeward land. The port would fain give

succor; the port is pitiful; in the port is safety, comfort,

hearthstone, supper, warm blankets, friends, all that’s kind to our

mortalities. But in that gale, the port, the land, is that ship’s

direst jeopardy; she must fly all hospitality; one touch of land,

though it but graze the keel, would make her shudder through and

through. With all her might she crowds all sail off shore; in so doing,

fights ’gainst the very winds that fain would blow her homeward; seeks

all the lashed sea’s landlessness again; for refuge’s sake forlornly

rushing into peril; her only friend her bitterest foe!

Know ye now, Bulkington? Glimpses do ye seem to see of that mortally

intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid

effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the

wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the

treacherous, slavish shore?

But as in landlessness alone resides highest truth, shoreless,

indefinite as God—so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite,

than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety! For

worm-like, then, oh! who would craven crawl to land! Terrors of the

terrible! is all this agony so vain? Take heart, take heart, O

Bulkington! Bear thee grimly, demigod! Up from the spray of thy

ocean-perishing—straight up, leaps thy apotheosis!

CHAPTER 24. The Advocate.

As Queequeg and I are now fairly embarked in this business of whaling;

and as this business of whaling has somehow come to be regarded among

landsmen as a rather unpoetical and disreputable pursuit; therefore, I

am all anxiety to convince ye, ye landsmen, of the injustice hereby

done to us hunters of whales.

In the first place, it may be deemed almost superfluous to establish

the fact, that among people at large, the business of whaling is not

accounted on a level with what are called the liberal professions. If a

stranger were introduced into any miscellaneous metropolitan society,

it would but slightly advance the general opinion of his merits, were

he presented to the company as a harpooneer, say; and if in emulation

of the naval officers he should append the initials S.W.F. (Sperm Whale

Fishery) to his visiting card, such a procedure would be deemed

pre-eminently presuming and ridiculous.

Doubtless one leading reason why the world declines honoring us

whalemen, is this: they think that, at best, our vocation amounts to a

butchering sort of business; and that when actively engaged therein, we

are surrounded by all manner of defilements. Butchers we are, that is

true. But butchers, also, and butchers of the bloodiest badge have been

all Martial Commanders whom the world invariably delights to honor. And

as for the matter of the alleged uncleanliness of our business, ye

shall soon be initiated into certain facts hitherto pretty generally

unknown, and which, upon the whole, will triumphantly plant the sperm

whale-ship at least among the cleanliest things of this tidy earth. But

even granting the charge in question to be true; what disordered

slippery decks of a whale-ship are comparable to the unspeakable

carrion of those battle-fields from which so many soldiers return to

drink in all ladies’ plaudits? And if the idea of peril so much

enhances the popular conceit of the soldier’s profession; let me assure

ye that many a veteran who has freely marched up to a battery, would

quickly recoil at the apparition of the sperm whale’s vast tail,

fanning into eddies the air over his head. For what are the

comprehensible terrors of man compared with the interlinked terrors and

wonders of God!

But, though the world scouts at us whale hunters, yet does it

unwittingly pay us the profoundest homage; yea, an all-abounding

adoration! for almost all the tapers, lamps, and candles that burn

round the globe, burn, as before so many shrines, to our glory!

But look at this matter in other lights; weigh it in all sorts of

scales; see what we whalemen are, and have been.

Why did the Dutch in De Witt’s time have admirals of their whaling

fleets? Why did Louis XVI. of France, at his own personal expense, fit

out whaling ships from Dunkirk, and politely invite to that town some

score or two of families from our own island of Nantucket? Why did

Britain between the years 1750 and 1788 pay to her whalemen in bounties

upwards of £1,000,000? And lastly, how comes it that we whalemen of

America now outnumber all the rest of the banded whalemen in the world;

sail a navy of upwards of seven hundred vessels; manned by eighteen

thousand men; yearly consuming 4,000,000 of dollars; the ships worth,

at the time of sailing, $20,000,000! and every year importing into our

harbors a well reaped harvest of $7,000,000. How comes all this, if

there be not something puissant in whaling?

But this is not the half; look again.

I freely assert, that the cosmopolite philosopher cannot, for his life,

point out one single peaceful influence, which within the last sixty

years has operated more potentially upon the whole broad world, taken

in one aggregate, than the high and mighty business of whaling. One way

and another, it has begotten events so remarkable in themselves, and so

continuously momentous in their sequential issues, that whaling may

well be regarded as that Egyptian mother, who bore offspring themselves

pregnant from her womb. It would be a hopeless, endless task to

catalogue all these things. Let a handful suffice. For many years past

the whale-ship has been the pioneer in ferreting out the remotest and

least known parts of the earth. She has explored seas and archipelagoes

which had no chart, where no Cook or Vancouver had ever sailed. If

American and European men-of-war now peacefully ride in once savage

harbors, let them fire salutes to the honor and glory of the

whale-ship, which originally showed them the way, and first interpreted

between them and the savages. They may celebrate as they will the

heroes of Exploring Expeditions, your Cooks, your Krusensterns; but I

say that scores of anonymous Captains have sailed out of Nantucket,

that were as great, and greater than your Cook and your Krusenstern.

For in their succourless empty-handedness, they, in the heathenish

sharked waters, and by the beaches of unrecorded, javelin islands,

battled with virgin wonders and terrors that Cook with all his marines

and muskets would not willingly have dared. All that is made such a

flourish of in the old South Sea Voyages, those things were but the

life-time commonplaces of our heroic Nantucketers. Often, adventures

which Vancouver dedicates three chapters to, these men accounted

unworthy of being set down in the ship’s common log. Ah, the world! Oh,

the world!

Until the whale fishery rounded Cape Horn, no commerce but colonial,

scarcely any intercourse but colonial, was carried on between Europe

and the long line of the opulent Spanish provinces on the Pacific

coast. It was the whaleman who first broke through the jealous policy

of the Spanish crown, touching those colonies; and, if space permitted,

it might be distinctly shown how from those whalemen at last eventuated

the liberation of Peru, Chili, and Bolivia from the yoke of Old Spain,

and the establishment of the eternal democracy in those parts.

That great America on the other side of the sphere, Australia, was

given to the enlightened world by the whaleman. After its first

blunder-born discovery by a Dutchman, all other ships long shunned

those shores as pestiferously barbarous; but the whale-ship touched

there. The whale-ship is the true mother of that now mighty colony.

Moreover, in the infancy of the first Australian settlement, the

emigrants were several times saved from starvation by the benevolent

biscuit of the whale-ship luckily dropping an anchor in their waters.

The uncounted isles of all Polynesia confess the same truth, and do

commercial homage to the whale-ship, that cleared the way for the

missionary and the merchant, and in many cases carried the primitive

missionaries to their first destinations. If that double-bolted land,

Japan, is ever to become hospitable, it is the whale-ship alone to whom

the credit will be due; for already she is on the threshold.

But if, in the face of all this, you still declare that whaling has no

æsthetically noble associations connected with it, then am I ready to

shiver fifty lances with you there, and unhorse you with a split helmet

every time.

The whale has no famous author, and whaling no famous chronicler, you

will say.

\_The whale no famous author, and whaling no famous chronicler?\_ Who

wrote the first account of our Leviathan? Who but mighty Job! And who

composed the first narrative of a whaling-voyage? Who, but no less a

prince than Alfred the Great, who, with his own royal pen, took down

the words from Other, the Norwegian whale-hunter of those times! And

who pronounced our glowing eulogy in Parliament? Who, but Edmund Burke!

True enough, but then whalemen themselves are poor devils; they have no

good blood in their veins.

\_No good blood in their veins?\_ They have something better than royal

blood there. The grandmother of Benjamin Franklin was Mary Morrel;

afterwards, by marriage, Mary Folger, one of the old settlers of

Nantucket, and the ancestress to a long line of Folgers and

harpooneers—all kith and kin to noble Benjamin—this day darting the

barbed iron from one side of the world to the other.

Good again; but then all confess that somehow whaling is not

respectable.

\_Whaling not respectable?\_ Whaling is imperial! By old English

statutory law, the whale is declared “a royal fish.” \*

Oh, that’s only nominal! The whale himself has never figured in any

grand imposing way.

\_The whale never figured in any grand imposing way?\_ In one of the

mighty triumphs given to a Roman general upon his entering the world’s

capital, the bones of a whale, brought all the way from the Syrian

coast, were the most conspicuous object in the cymballed procession.\*

\*See subsequent chapters for something more on this head.

Grant it, since you cite it; but, say what you will, there is no real

dignity in whaling.

\_No dignity in whaling?\_ The dignity of our calling the very heavens

attest. Cetus is a constellation in the South! No more! Drive down your

hat in presence of the Czar, and take it off to Queequeg! No more! I

know a man that, in his lifetime, has taken three hundred and fifty

whales. I account that man more honorable than that great captain of

antiquity who boasted of taking as many walled towns.

And, as for me, if, by any possibility, there be any as yet

undiscovered prime thing in me; if I shall ever deserve any real repute

in that small but high hushed world which I might not be unreasonably

ambitious of; if hereafter I shall do anything that, upon the whole, a

man might rather have done than to have left undone; if, at my death,

my executors, or more properly my creditors, find any precious MSS. in

my desk, then here I prospectively ascribe all the honor and the glory

to whaling; for a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.

CHAPTER 25. Postscript.

In behalf of the dignity of whaling, I would fain advance naught but

substantiated facts. But after embattling his facts, an advocate who

should wholly suppress a not unreasonable surmise, which might tell

eloquently upon his cause—such an advocate, would he not be

blameworthy?

It is well known that at the coronation of kings and queens, even

modern ones, a certain curious process of seasoning them for their

functions is gone through. There is a saltcellar of state, so called,

and there may be a castor of state. How they use the salt,

precisely—who knows? Certain I am, however, that a king’s head is

solemnly oiled at his coronation, even as a head of salad. Can it be,

though, that they anoint it with a view of making its interior run

well, as they anoint machinery? Much might be ruminated here,

concerning the essential dignity of this regal process, because in

common life we esteem but meanly and contemptibly a fellow who anoints

his hair, and palpably smells of that anointing. In truth, a mature man

who uses hair-oil, unless medicinally, that man has probably got a

quoggy spot in him somewhere. As a general rule, he can’t amount to

much in his totality.

But the only thing to be considered here, is this—what kind of oil is

used at coronations? Certainly it cannot be olive oil, nor macassar

oil, nor castor oil, nor bear’s oil, nor train oil, nor cod-liver oil.

What then can it possibly be, but sperm oil in its unmanufactured,

unpolluted state, the sweetest of all oils?

Think of that, ye loyal Britons! we whalemen supply your kings and

queens with coronation stuff!

CHAPTER 26. Knights and Squires.

The chief mate of the Pequod was Starbuck, a native of Nantucket, and a

Quaker by descent. He was a long, earnest man, and though born on an

icy coast, seemed well adapted to endure hot latitudes, his flesh being

hard as twice-baked biscuit. Transported to the Indies, his live blood

would not spoil like bottled ale. He must have been born in some time

of general drought and famine, or upon one of those fast days for which

his state is famous. Only some thirty arid summers had he seen; those

summers had dried up all his physical superfluousness. But this, his

thinness, so to speak, seemed no more the token of wasting anxieties

and cares, than it seemed the indication of any bodily blight. It was

merely the condensation of the man. He was by no means ill-looking;

quite the contrary. His pure tight skin was an excellent fit; and

closely wrapped up in it, and embalmed with inner health and strength,

like a revivified Egyptian, this Starbuck seemed prepared to endure for

long ages to come, and to endure always, as now; for be it Polar snow

or torrid sun, like a patent chronometer, his interior vitality was

warranted to do well in all climates. Looking into his eyes, you seemed

to see there the yet lingering images of those thousand-fold perils he

had calmly confronted through life. A staid, steadfast man, whose life

for the most part was a telling pantomime of action, and not a tame

chapter of sounds. Yet, for all his hardy sobriety and fortitude, there

were certain qualities in him which at times affected, and in some

cases seemed well nigh to overbalance all the rest. Uncommonly

conscientious for a seaman, and endued with a deep natural reverence,

the wild watery loneliness of his life did therefore strongly incline

him to superstition; but to that sort of superstition, which in some

organizations seems rather to spring, somehow, from intelligence than

from ignorance. Outward portents and inward presentiments were his. And

if at times these things bent the welded iron of his soul, much more

did his far-away domestic memories of his young Cape wife and child,

tend to bend him still more from the original ruggedness of his nature,

and open him still further to those latent influences which, in some

honest-hearted men, restrain the gush of dare-devil daring, so often

evinced by others in the more perilous vicissitudes of the fishery. “I

will have no man in my boat,” said Starbuck, “who is not afraid of a

whale.” By this, he seemed to mean, not only that the most reliable and

useful courage was that which arises from the fair estimation of the

encountered peril, but that an utterly fearless man is a far more

dangerous comrade than a coward.

“Aye, aye,” said Stubb, the second mate, “Starbuck, there, is as

careful a man as you’ll find anywhere in this fishery.” But we shall

ere long see what that word “careful” precisely means when used by a

man like Stubb, or almost any other whale hunter.

Starbuck was no crusader after perils; in him courage was not a

sentiment; but a thing simply useful to him, and always at hand upon

all mortally practical occasions. Besides, he thought, perhaps, that in

this business of whaling, courage was one of the great staple outfits

of the ship, like her beef and her bread, and not to be foolishly

wasted. Wherefore he had no fancy for lowering for whales after

sun-down; nor for persisting in fighting a fish that too much persisted

in fighting him. For, thought Starbuck, I am here in this critical

ocean to kill whales for my living, and not to be killed by them for

theirs; and that hundreds of men had been so killed Starbuck well knew.

What doom was his own father’s? Where, in the bottomless deeps, could

he find the torn limbs of his brother?

With memories like these in him, and, moreover, given to a certain

superstitiousness, as has been said; the courage of this Starbuck which

could, nevertheless, still flourish, must indeed have been extreme. But

it was not in reasonable nature that a man so organized, and with such

terrible experiences and remembrances as he had; it was not in nature

that these things should fail in latently engendering an element in

him, which, under suitable circumstances, would break out from its

confinement, and burn all his courage up. And brave as he might be, it

was that sort of bravery chiefly, visible in some intrepid men, which,

while generally abiding firm in the conflict with seas, or winds, or

whales, or any of the ordinary irrational horrors of the world, yet

cannot withstand those more terrific, because more spiritual terrors,

which sometimes menace you from the concentrating brow of an enraged

and mighty man.

But were the coming narrative to reveal in any instance, the complete

abasement of poor Starbuck’s fortitude, scarce might I have the heart

to write it; for it is a thing most sorrowful, nay shocking, to expose

the fall of valour in the soul. Men may seem detestable as joint

stock-companies and nations; knaves, fools, and murderers there may be;

men may have mean and meagre faces; but man, in the ideal, is so noble

and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any

ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their

costliest robes. That immaculate manliness we feel within ourselves, so

far within us, that it remains intact though all the outer character

seem gone; bleeds with keenest anguish at the undraped spectacle of a

valor-ruined man. Nor can piety itself, at such a shameful sight,

completely stifle her upbraidings against the permitting stars. But

this august dignity I treat of, is not the dignity of kings and robes,

but that abounding dignity which has no robed investiture. Thou shalt

see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that

democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God;

Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all

democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!

If, then, to meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways, I shall

hereafter ascribe high qualities, though dark; weave round them tragic

graces; if even the most mournful, perchance the most abased, among

them all, shall at times lift himself to the exalted mounts; if I shall

touch that workman’s arm with some ethereal light; if I shall spread a

rainbow over his disastrous set of sun; then against all mortal critics

bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which hast spread one

royal mantle of humanity over all my kind! Bear me out in it, thou

great democratic God! who didst not refuse to the swart convict,

Bunyan, the pale, poetic pearl; Thou who didst clothe with doubly

hammered leaves of finest gold, the stumped and paupered arm of old

Cervantes; Thou who didst pick up Andrew Jackson from the pebbles; who

didst hurl him upon a war-horse; who didst thunder him higher than a

throne! Thou who, in all Thy mighty, earthly marchings, ever cullest

Thy selectest champions from the kingly commons; bear me out in it, O

God!

CHAPTER 27. Knights and Squires.

Stubb was the second mate. He was a native of Cape Cod; and hence,

according to local usage, was called a Cape-Cod-man. A happy-go-lucky;

neither craven nor valiant; taking perils as they came with an

indifferent air; and while engaged in the most imminent crisis of the

chase, toiling away, calm and collected as a journeyman joiner engaged

for the year. Good-humored, easy, and careless, he presided over his

whale-boat as if the most deadly encounter were but a dinner, and his

crew all invited guests. He was as particular about the comfortable

arrangement of his part of the boat, as an old stage-driver is about

the snugness of his box. When close to the whale, in the very

death-lock of the fight, he handled his unpitying lance coolly and

off-handedly, as a whistling tinker his hammer. He would hum over his

old rigadig tunes while flank and flank with the most exasperated

monster. Long usage had, for this Stubb, converted the jaws of death

into an easy chair. What he thought of death itself, there is no

telling. Whether he ever thought of it at all, might be a question;

but, if he ever did chance to cast his mind that way after a

comfortable dinner, no doubt, like a good sailor, he took it to be a

sort of call of the watch to tumble aloft, and bestir themselves there,

about something which he would find out when he obeyed the order, and

not sooner.

What, perhaps, with other things, made Stubb such an easy-going,

unfearing man, so cheerily trudging off with the burden of life in a

world full of grave pedlars, all bowed to the ground with their packs;

what helped to bring about that almost impious good-humor of his; that

thing must have been his pipe. For, like his nose, his short, black

little pipe was one of the regular features of his face. You would

almost as soon have expected him to turn out of his bunk without his

nose as without his pipe. He kept a whole row of pipes there ready

loaded, stuck in a rack, within easy reach of his hand; and, whenever

he turned in, he smoked them all out in succession, lighting one from

the other to the end of the chapter; then loading them again to be in

readiness anew. For, when Stubb dressed, instead of first putting his

legs into his trowsers, he put his pipe into his mouth.

I say this continual smoking must have been one cause, at least, of his

peculiar disposition; for every one knows that this earthly air,

whether ashore or afloat, is terribly infected with the nameless

miseries of the numberless mortals who have died exhaling it; and as in

time of the cholera, some people go about with a camphorated

handkerchief to their mouths; so, likewise, against all mortal

tribulations, Stubb’s tobacco smoke might have operated as a sort of

disinfecting agent.

The third mate was Flask, a native of Tisbury, in Martha’s Vineyard. A

short, stout, ruddy young fellow, very pugnacious concerning whales,

who somehow seemed to think that the great leviathans had personally

and hereditarily affronted him; and therefore it was a sort of point of

honor with him, to destroy them whenever encountered. So utterly lost

was he to all sense of reverence for the many marvels of their majestic

bulk and mystic ways; and so dead to anything like an apprehension of

any possible danger from encountering them; that in his poor opinion,

the wondrous whale was but a species of magnified mouse, or at least

water-rat, requiring only a little circumvention and some small

application of time and trouble in order to kill and boil. This

ignorant, unconscious fearlessness of his made him a little waggish in

the matter of whales; he followed these fish for the fun of it; and a

three years’ voyage round Cape Horn was only a jolly joke that lasted

that length of time. As a carpenter’s nails are divided into wrought

nails and cut nails; so mankind may be similarly divided. Little Flask

was one of the wrought ones; made to clinch tight and last long. They

called him King-Post on board of the Pequod; because, in form, he could

be well likened to the short, square timber known by that name in

Arctic whalers; and which by the means of many radiating side timbers

inserted into it, serves to brace the ship against the icy concussions

of those battering seas.

Now these three mates—Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask, were momentous men.

They it was who by universal prescription commanded three of the

Pequod’s boats as headsmen. In that grand order of battle in which

Captain Ahab would probably marshal his forces to descend on the

whales, these three headsmen were as captains of companies. Or, being

armed with their long keen whaling spears, they were as a picked trio

of lancers; even as the harpooneers were flingers of javelins.

And since in this famous fishery, each mate or headsman, like a Gothic

Knight of old, is always accompanied by his boat-steerer or harpooneer,

who in certain conjunctures provides him with a fresh lance, when the

former one has been badly twisted, or elbowed in the assault; and

moreover, as there generally subsists between the two, a close intimacy

and friendliness; it is therefore but meet, that in this place we set

down who the Pequod’s harpooneers were, and to what headsman each of

them belonged.

First of all was Queequeg, whom Starbuck, the chief mate, had selected

for his squire. But Queequeg is already known.

Next was Tashtego, an unmixed Indian from Gay Head, the most westerly

promontory of Martha’s Vineyard, where there still exists the last

remnant of a village of red men, which has long supplied the

neighboring island of Nantucket with many of her most daring

harpooneers. In the fishery, they usually go by the generic name of

Gay-Headers. Tashtego’s long, lean, sable hair, his high cheek bones,

and black rounding eyes—for an Indian, Oriental in their largeness, but

Antarctic in their glittering expression—all this sufficiently

proclaimed him an inheritor of the unvitiated blood of those proud

warrior hunters, who, in quest of the great New England moose, had

scoured, bow in hand, the aboriginal forests of the main. But no longer

snuffing in the trail of the wild beasts of the woodland, Tashtego now

hunted in the wake of the great whales of the sea; the unerring harpoon

of the son fitly replacing the infallible arrow of the sires. To look

at the tawny brawn of his lithe snaky limbs, you would almost have

credited the superstitions of some of the earlier Puritans, and

half-believed this wild Indian to be a son of the Prince of the Powers

of the Air. Tashtego was Stubb the second mate’s squire.

Third among the harpooneers was Daggoo, a gigantic, coal-black

negro-savage, with a lion-like tread—an Ahasuerus to behold. Suspended

from his ears were two golden hoops, so large that the sailors called

them ring-bolts, and would talk of securing the top-sail halyards to

them. In his youth Daggoo had voluntarily shipped on board of a whaler,

lying in a lonely bay on his native coast. And never having been

anywhere in the world but in Africa, Nantucket, and the pagan harbors

most frequented by whalemen; and having now led for many years the bold

life of the fishery in the ships of owners uncommonly heedful of what

manner of men they shipped; Daggoo retained all his barbaric virtues,

and erect as a giraffe, moved about the decks in all the pomp of six

feet five in his socks. There was a corporeal humility in looking up at

him; and a white man standing before him seemed a white flag come to

beg truce of a fortress. Curious to tell, this imperial negro,

Ahasuerus Daggoo, was the Squire of little Flask, who looked like a

chess-man beside him. As for the residue of the Pequod’s company, be it

said, that at the present day not one in two of the many thousand men

before the mast employed in the American whale fishery, are Americans

born, though pretty nearly all the officers are. Herein it is the same

with the American whale fishery as with the American army and military

and merchant navies, and the engineering forces employed in the

construction of the American Canals and Railroads. The same, I say,

because in all these cases the native American liberally provides the

brains, the rest of the world as generously supplying the muscles. No

small number of these whaling seamen belong to the Azores, where the

outward bound Nantucket whalers frequently touch to augment their crews

from the hardy peasants of those rocky shores. In like manner, the

Greenland whalers sailing out of Hull or London, put in at the Shetland

Islands, to receive the full complement of their crew. Upon the passage

homewards, they drop them there again. How it is, there is no telling,

but Islanders seem to make the best whalemen. They were nearly all

Islanders in the Pequod, \_Isolatoes\_ too, I call such, not

acknowledging the common continent of men, but each \_Isolato\_ living on

a separate continent of his own. Yet now, federated along one keel,

what a set these Isolatoes were! An Anacharsis Clootz deputation from

all the isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth, accompanying

Old Ahab in the Pequod to lay the world’s grievances before that bar

from which not very many of them ever come back. Black Little Pip—he

never did—oh, no! he went before. Poor Alabama boy! On the grim

Pequod’s forecastle, ye shall ere long see him, beating his tambourine;

prelusive of the eternal time, when sent for, to the great quarter-deck

on high, he was bid strike in with angels, and beat his tambourine in

glory; called a coward here, hailed a hero there!

CHAPTER 28. Ahab.

For several days after leaving Nantucket, nothing above hatches was

seen of Captain Ahab. The mates regularly relieved each other at the

watches, and for aught that could be seen to the contrary, they seemed

to be the only commanders of the ship; only they sometimes issued from

the cabin with orders so sudden and peremptory, that after all it was

plain they but commanded vicariously. Yes, their supreme lord and

dictator was there, though hitherto unseen by any eyes not permitted to

penetrate into the now sacred retreat of the cabin.

Every time I ascended to the deck from my watches below, I instantly

gazed aft to mark if any strange face were visible; for my first vague

disquietude touching the unknown captain, now in the seclusion of the

sea, became almost a perturbation. This was strangely heightened at

times by the ragged Elijah’s diabolical incoherences uninvitedly

recurring to me, with a subtle energy I could not have before conceived

of. But poorly could I withstand them, much as in other moods I was

almost ready to smile at the solemn whimsicalities of that outlandish

prophet of the wharves. But whatever it was of apprehensiveness or

uneasiness—to call it so—which I felt, yet whenever I came to look

about me in the ship, it seemed against all warrantry to cherish such

emotions. For though the harpooneers, with the great body of the crew,

were a far more barbaric, heathenish, and motley set than any of the

tame merchant-ship companies which my previous experiences had made me

acquainted with, still I ascribed this—and rightly ascribed it—to the

fierce uniqueness of the very nature of that wild Scandinavian vocation

in which I had so abandonedly embarked. But it was especially the

aspect of the three chief officers of the ship, the mates, which was

most forcibly calculated to allay these colourless misgivings, and

induce confidence and cheerfulness in every presentment of the voyage.

Three better, more likely sea-officers and men, each in his own

different way, could not readily be found, and they were every one of

them Americans; a Nantucketer, a Vineyarder, a Cape man. Now, it being

Christmas when the ship shot from out her harbor, for a space we had

biting Polar weather, though all the time running away from it to the

southward; and by every degree and minute of latitude which we sailed,

gradually leaving that merciless winter, and all its intolerable

weather behind us. It was one of those less lowering, but still grey

and gloomy enough mornings of the transition, when with a fair wind the

ship was rushing through the water with a vindictive sort of leaping

and melancholy rapidity, that as I mounted to the deck at the call of

the forenoon watch, so soon as I levelled my glance towards the

taffrail, foreboding shivers ran over me. Reality outran apprehension;

Captain Ahab stood upon his quarter-deck.

There seemed no sign of common bodily illness about him, nor of the

recovery from any. He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when

the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them,

or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness. His

whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an

unalterable mould, like Cellini’s cast Perseus. Threading its way out

from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his

tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you

saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish. It resembled that

perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a

great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and

without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from

top to bottom, ere running off into the soil, leaving the tree still

greenly alive, but branded. Whether that mark was born with him, or

whether it was the scar left by some desperate wound, no one could

certainly say. By some tacit consent, throughout the voyage little or

no allusion was made to it, especially by the mates. But once

Tashtego’s senior, an old Gay-Head Indian among the crew,

superstitiously asserted that not till he was full forty years old did

Ahab become that way branded, and then it came upon him, not in the

fury of any mortal fray, but in an elemental strife at sea. Yet, this

wild hint seemed inferentially negatived, by what a grey Manxman

insinuated, an old sepulchral man, who, having never before sailed out

of Nantucket, had never ere this laid eye upon wild Ahab. Nevertheless,

the old sea-traditions, the immemorial credulities, popularly invested

this old Manxman with preternatural powers of discernment. So that no

white sailor seriously contradicted him when he said that if ever

Captain Ahab should be tranquilly laid out—which might hardly come to

pass, so he muttered—then, whoever should do that last office for the

dead, would find a birth-mark on him from crown to sole.

So powerfully did the whole grim aspect of Ahab affect me, and the

livid brand which streaked it, that for the first few moments I hardly

noted that not a little of this overbearing grimness was owing to the

barbaric white leg upon which he partly stood. It had previously come

to me that this ivory leg had at sea been fashioned from the polished

bone of the sperm whale’s jaw. “Aye, he was dismasted off Japan,” said

the old Gay-Head Indian once; “but like his dismasted craft, he shipped

another mast without coming home for it. He has a quiver of ’em.”

I was struck with the singular posture he maintained. Upon each side of

the Pequod’s quarter deck, and pretty close to the mizzen shrouds,

there was an auger hole, bored about half an inch or so, into the

plank. His bone leg steadied in that hole; one arm elevated, and

holding by a shroud; Captain Ahab stood erect, looking straight out

beyond the ship’s ever-pitching prow. There was an infinity of firmest

fortitude, a determinate, unsurrenderable wilfulness, in the fixed and

fearless, forward dedication of that glance. Not a word he spoke; nor

did his officers say aught to him; though by all their minutest

gestures and expressions, they plainly showed the uneasy, if not

painful, consciousness of being under a troubled master-eye. And not

only that, but moody stricken Ahab stood before them with a crucifixion

in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some

mighty woe.

Ere long, from his first visit in the air, he withdrew into his cabin.

But after that morning, he was every day visible to the crew; either

standing in his pivot-hole, or seated upon an ivory stool he had; or

heavily walking the deck. As the sky grew less gloomy; indeed, began to

grow a little genial, he became still less and less a recluse; as if,

when the ship had sailed from home, nothing but the dead wintry

bleakness of the sea had then kept him so secluded. And, by and by, it

came to pass, that he was almost continually in the air; but, as yet,

for all that he said, or perceptibly did, on the at last sunny deck, he

seemed as unnecessary there as another mast. But the Pequod was only

making a passage now; not regularly cruising; nearly all whaling

preparatives needing supervision the mates were fully competent to, so

that there was little or nothing, out of himself, to employ or excite

Ahab, now; and thus chase away, for that one interval, the clouds that

layer upon layer were piled upon his brow, as ever all clouds choose

the loftiest peaks to pile themselves upon.

Nevertheless, ere long, the warm, warbling persuasiveness of the

pleasant, holiday weather we came to, seemed gradually to charm him

from his mood. For, as when the red-cheeked, dancing girls, April and

May, trip home to the wintry, misanthropic woods; even the barest,

ruggedest, most thunder-cloven old oak will at least send forth some

few green sprouts, to welcome such glad-hearted visitants; so Ahab did,

in the end, a little respond to the playful allurings of that girlish

air. More than once did he put forth the faint blossom of a look,

which, in any other man, would have soon flowered out in a smile.

CHAPTER 29. Enter Ahab; to Him, Stubb.

Some days elapsed, and ice and icebergs all astern, the Pequod now went

rolling through the bright Quito spring, which, at sea, almost

perpetually reigns on the threshold of the eternal August of the

Tropic. The warmly cool, clear, ringing, perfumed, overflowing,

redundant days, were as crystal goblets of Persian sherbet, heaped

up—flaked up, with rose-water snow. The starred and stately nights

seemed haughty dames in jewelled velvets, nursing at home in lonely

pride, the memory of their absent conquering Earls, the golden helmeted

suns! For sleeping man, ’twas hard to choose between such winsome days

and such seducing nights. But all the witcheries of that unwaning

weather did not merely lend new spells and potencies to the outward

world. Inward they turned upon the soul, especially when the still mild

hours of eve came on; then, memory shot her crystals as the clear ice

most forms of noiseless twilights. And all these subtle agencies, more

and more they wrought on Ahab’s texture.

Old age is always wakeful; as if, the longer linked with life, the less

man has to do with aught that looks like death. Among sea-commanders,

the old greybeards will oftenest leave their berths to visit the

night-cloaked deck. It was so with Ahab; only that now, of late, he

seemed so much to live in the open air, that truly speaking, his visits

were more to the cabin, than from the cabin to the planks. “It feels

like going down into one’s tomb,”—he would mutter to himself—“for an

old captain like me to be descending this narrow scuttle, to go to my

grave-dug berth.”

So, almost every twenty-four hours, when the watches of the night were

set, and the band on deck sentinelled the slumbers of the band below;

and when if a rope was to be hauled upon the forecastle, the sailors

flung it not rudely down, as by day, but with some cautiousness dropt

it to its place for fear of disturbing their slumbering shipmates; when

this sort of steady quietude would begin to prevail, habitually, the

silent steersman would watch the cabin-scuttle; and ere long the old

man would emerge, gripping at the iron banister, to help his crippled

way. Some considering touch of humanity was in him; for at times like

these, he usually abstained from patrolling the quarter-deck; because

to his wearied mates, seeking repose within six inches of his ivory

heel, such would have been the reverberating crack and din of that bony

step, that their dreams would have been on the crunching teeth of

sharks. But once, the mood was on him too deep for common regardings;

and as with heavy, lumber-like pace he was measuring the ship from

taffrail to mainmast, Stubb, the old second mate, came up from below,

with a certain unassured, deprecating humorousness, hinted that if

Captain Ahab was pleased to walk the planks, then, no one could say

nay; but there might be some way of muffling the noise; hinting

something indistinctly and hesitatingly about a globe of tow, and the

insertion into it, of the ivory heel. Ah! Stubb, thou didst not know

Ahab then.

“Am I a cannon-ball, Stubb,” said Ahab, “that thou wouldst wad me that

fashion? But go thy ways; I had forgot. Below to thy nightly grave;

where such as ye sleep between shrouds, to use ye to the filling one at

last.—Down, dog, and kennel!”

Starting at the unforseen concluding exclamation of the so suddenly

scornful old man, Stubb was speechless a moment; then said excitedly,

“I am not used to be spoken to that way, sir; I do but less than half

like it, sir.”

“Avast! gritted Ahab between his set teeth, and violently moving away,

as if to avoid some passionate temptation.

“No, sir; not yet,” said Stubb, emboldened, “I will not tamely be

called a dog, sir.”

“Then be called ten times a donkey, and a mule, and an ass, and begone,

or I’ll clear the world of thee!”

As he said this, Ahab advanced upon him with such overbearing terrors

in his aspect, that Stubb involuntarily retreated.

“I was never served so before without giving a hard blow for it,”

muttered Stubb, as he found himself descending the cabin-scuttle. “It’s

very queer. Stop, Stubb; somehow, now, I don’t well know whether to go

back and strike him, or—what’s that?—down here on my knees and pray for

him? Yes, that was the thought coming up in me; but it would be the

first time I ever \_did\_ pray. It’s queer; very queer; and he’s queer

too; aye, take him fore and aft, he’s about the queerest old man Stubb

ever sailed with. How he flashed at me!—his eyes like powder-pans! is

he mad? Anyway there’s something on his mind, as sure as there must be

something on a deck when it cracks. He aint in his bed now, either,

more than three hours out of the twenty-four; and he don’t sleep then.

Didn’t that Dough-Boy, the steward, tell me that of a morning he always

finds the old man’s hammock clothes all rumpled and tumbled, and the

sheets down at the foot, and the coverlid almost tied into knots, and

the pillow a sort of frightful hot, as though a baked brick had been on

it? A hot old man! I guess he’s got what some folks ashore call a

conscience; it’s a kind of Tic-Dolly-row they say—worse nor a

toothache. Well, well; I don’t know what it is, but the Lord keep me

from catching it. He’s full of riddles; I wonder what he goes into the

after hold for, every night, as Dough-Boy tells me he suspects; what’s

that for, I should like to know? Who’s made appointments with him in

the hold? Ain’t that queer, now? But there’s no telling, it’s the old

game—Here goes for a snooze. Damn me, it’s worth a fellow’s while to be

born into the world, if only to fall right asleep. And now that I think

of it, that’s about the first thing babies do, and that’s a sort of

queer, too. Damn me, but all things are queer, come to think of ’em.

But that’s against my principles. Think not, is my eleventh

commandment; and sleep when you can, is my twelfth—So here goes again.

But how’s that? didn’t he call me a dog? blazes! he called me ten times

a donkey, and piled a lot of jackasses on top of \_that!\_ He might as

well have kicked me, and done with it. Maybe he \_did\_ kick me, and I

didn’t observe it, I was so taken all aback with his brow, somehow. It

flashed like a bleached bone. What the devil’s the matter with me? I

don’t stand right on my legs. Coming afoul of that old man has a sort

of turned me wrong side out. By the Lord, I must have been dreaming,

though—How? how? how?—but the only way’s to stash it; so here goes to

hammock again; and in the morning, I’ll see how this plaguey juggling

thinks over by daylight.”

CHAPTER 30. The Pipe.

When Stubb had departed, Ahab stood for a while leaning over the

bulwarks; and then, as had been usual with him of late, calling a

sailor of the watch, he sent him below for his ivory stool, and also

his pipe. Lighting the pipe at the binnacle lamp and planting the stool

on the weather side of the deck, he sat and smoked.

In old Norse times, the thrones of the sea-loving Danish kings were

fabricated, saith tradition, of the tusks of the narwhale. How could

one look at Ahab then, seated on that tripod of bones, without

bethinking him of the royalty it symbolized? For a Khan of the plank,

and a king of the sea, and a great lord of Leviathans was Ahab.

Some moments passed, during which the thick vapor came from his mouth

in quick and constant puffs, which blew back again into his face. “How

now,” he soliloquized at last, withdrawing the tube, “this smoking no

longer soothes. Oh, my pipe! hard must it go with me if thy charm be

gone! Here have I been unconsciously toiling, not pleasuring—aye, and

ignorantly smoking to windward all the while; to windward, and with

such nervous whiffs, as if, like the dying whale, my final jets were

the strongest and fullest of trouble. What business have I with this

pipe? This thing that is meant for sereneness, to send up mild white

vapors among mild white hairs, not among torn iron-grey locks like

mine. I’ll smoke no more—”

He tossed the still lighted pipe into the sea. The fire hissed in the

waves; the same instant the ship shot by the bubble the sinking pipe

made. With slouched hat, Ahab lurchingly paced the planks.

CHAPTER 31. Queen Mab.

Next morning Stubb accosted Flask.

“Such a queer dream, King-Post, I never had. You know the old man’s

ivory leg, well I dreamed he kicked me with it; and when I tried to

kick back, upon my soul, my little man, I kicked my leg right off! And

then, presto! Ahab seemed a pyramid, and I, like a blazing fool, kept

kicking at it. But what was still more curious, Flask—you know how

curious all dreams are—through all this rage that I was in, I somehow

seemed to be thinking to myself, that after all, it was not much of an

insult, that kick from Ahab. ‘Why,’ thinks I, ‘what’s the row? It’s not

a real leg, only a false leg.’ And there’s a mighty difference between

a living thump and a dead thump. That’s what makes a blow from the

hand, Flask, fifty times more savage to bear than a blow from a cane.

The living member—that makes the living insult, my little man. And

thinks I to myself all the while, mind, while I was stubbing my silly

toes against that cursed pyramid—so confoundedly contradictory was it

all, all the while, I say, I was thinking to myself, ‘what’s his leg

now, but a cane—a whalebone cane. Yes,’ thinks I, ‘it was only a

playful cudgelling—in fact, only a whaleboning that he gave me—not a

base kick. Besides,’ thinks I, ‘look at it once; why, the end of it—the

foot part—what a small sort of end it is; whereas, if a broad footed

farmer kicked me, \_there’s\_ a devilish broad insult. But this insult is

whittled down to a point only.’ But now comes the greatest joke of the

dream, Flask. While I was battering away at the pyramid, a sort of

badger-haired old merman, with a hump on his back, takes me by the

shoulders, and slews me round. ‘What are you ’bout?’ says he. Slid!

man, but I was frightened. Such a phiz! But, somehow, next moment I was

over the fright. ‘What am I about?’ says I at last. ‘And what business

is that of yours, I should like to know, Mr. Humpback? Do \_you\_ want a

kick?’ By the lord, Flask, I had no sooner said that, than he turned

round his stern to me, bent over, and dragging up a lot of seaweed he

had for a clout—what do you think, I saw?—why thunder alive, man, his

stern was stuck full of marlinspikes, with the points out. Says I, on

second thoughts, ‘I guess I won’t kick you, old fellow.’ ‘Wise Stubb,’

said he, ‘wise Stubb;’ and kept muttering it all the time, a sort of

eating of his own gums like a chimney hag. Seeing he wasn’t going to

stop saying over his ‘wise Stubb, wise Stubb,’ I thought I might as

well fall to kicking the pyramid again. But I had only just lifted my

foot for it, when he roared out, ‘Stop that kicking!’ ‘Halloa,’ says I,

‘what’s the matter now, old fellow?’ ‘Look ye here,’ says he; ‘let’s

argue the insult. Captain Ahab kicked ye, didn’t he?’ ‘Yes, he did,’

says I—‘right \_here\_ it was.’ ‘Very good,’ says he—‘he used his ivory

leg, didn’t he?’ ‘Yes, he did,’ says I. ‘Well then,’ says he, ‘wise

Stubb, what have you to complain of? Didn’t he kick with right good

will? it wasn’t a common pitch pine leg he kicked with, was it? No, you

were kicked by a great man, and with a beautiful ivory leg, Stubb. It’s

an honor; I consider it an honor. Listen, wise Stubb. In old England

the greatest lords think it great glory to be slapped by a queen, and

made garter-knights of; but, be \_your\_ boast, Stubb, that ye were

kicked by old Ahab, and made a wise man of. Remember what I say; \_be\_

kicked by him; account his kicks honors; and on no account kick back;

for you can’t help yourself, wise Stubb. Don’t you see that pyramid?’

With that, he all of a sudden seemed somehow, in some queer fashion, to

swim off into the air. I snored; rolled over; and there I was in my

hammock! Now, what do you think of that dream, Flask?”

“I don’t know; it seems a sort of foolish to me, tho.’”

“May be; may be. But it’s made a wise man of me, Flask. D’ye see Ahab

standing there, sideways looking over the stern? Well, the best thing

you can do, Flask, is to let the old man alone; never speak to him,

whatever he says. Halloa! What’s that he shouts? Hark!”

“Mast-head, there! Look sharp, all of ye! There are whales hereabouts!

“If ye see a white one, split your lungs for him!

“What do you think of that now, Flask? ain’t there a small drop of

something queer about that, eh? A white whale—did ye mark that, man?

Look ye—there’s something special in the wind. Stand by for it, Flask.

Ahab has that that’s bloody on his mind. But, mum; he comes this way.”

CHAPTER 32. Cetology.

Already we are boldly launched upon the deep; but soon we shall be lost

in its unshored, harbourless immensities. Ere that come to pass; ere

the Pequod’s weedy hull rolls side by side with the barnacled hulls of

the leviathan; at the outset it is but well to attend to a matter

almost indispensable to a thorough appreciative understanding of the

more special leviathanic revelations and allusions of all sorts which

are to follow.

It is some systematized exhibition of the whale in his broad genera,

that I would now fain put before you. Yet is it no easy task. The

classification of the constituents of a chaos, nothing less is here

essayed. Listen to what the best and latest authorities have laid down.

“No branch of Zoology is so much involved as that which is entitled

Cetology,” says Captain Scoresby, A.D. 1820.

“It is not my intention, were it in my power, to enter into the inquiry

as to the true method of dividing the cetacea into groups and families.

\* \* \* Utter confusion exists among the historians of this animal”

(sperm whale), says Surgeon Beale, A.D. 1839.

“Unfitness to pursue our research in the unfathomable waters.”

“Impenetrable veil covering our knowledge of the cetacea.” “A field

strewn with thorns.” “All these incomplete indications but serve to

torture us naturalists.”

Thus speak of the whale, the great Cuvier, and John Hunter, and Lesson,

those lights of zoology and anatomy. Nevertheless, though of real

knowledge there be little, yet of books there are a plenty; and so in

some small degree, with cetology, or the science of whales. Many are

the men, small and great, old and new, landsmen and seamen, who have at

large or in little, written of the whale. Run over a few:—The Authors

of the Bible; Aristotle; Pliny; Aldrovandi; Sir Thomas Browne; Gesner;

Ray; Linnæus; Rondeletius; Willoughby; Green; Artedi; Sibbald; Brisson;

Marten; Lacépède; Bonneterre; Desmarest; Baron Cuvier; Frederick

Cuvier; John Hunter; Owen; Scoresby; Beale; Bennett; J. Ross Browne;

the Author of Miriam Coffin; Olmstead; and the Rev. T. Cheever. But to

what ultimate generalizing purpose all these have written, the above

cited extracts will show.

Of the names in this list of whale authors, only those following Owen

ever saw living whales; and but one of them was a real professional

harpooneer and whaleman. I mean Captain Scoresby. On the separate

subject of the Greenland or right-whale, he is the best existing

authority. But Scoresby knew nothing and says nothing of the great

sperm whale, compared with which the Greenland whale is almost unworthy

mentioning. And here be it said, that the Greenland whale is an usurper

upon the throne of the seas. He is not even by any means the largest of

the whales. Yet, owing to the long priority of his claims, and the

profound ignorance which, till some seventy years back, invested the

then fabulous or utterly unknown sperm-whale, and which ignorance to

this present day still reigns in all but some few scientific retreats

and whale-ports; this usurpation has been every way complete. Reference

to nearly all the leviathanic allusions in the great poets of past

days, will satisfy you that the Greenland whale, without one rival, was

to them the monarch of the seas. But the time has at last come for a

new proclamation. This is Charing Cross; hear ye! good people all,—the

Greenland whale is deposed,—the great sperm whale now reigneth!

There are only two books in being which at all pretend to put the

living sperm whale before you, and at the same time, in the remotest

degree succeed in the attempt. Those books are Beale’s and Bennett’s;

both in their time surgeons to English South-Sea whale-ships, and both

exact and reliable men. The original matter touching the sperm whale to

be found in their volumes is necessarily small; but so far as it goes,

it is of excellent quality, though mostly confined to scientific

description. As yet, however, the sperm whale, scientific or poetic,

lives not complete in any literature. Far above all other hunted

whales, his is an unwritten life.

Now the various species of whales need some sort of popular

comprehensive classification, if only an easy outline one for the

present, hereafter to be filled in all its departments by subsequent

laborers. As no better man advances to take this matter in hand, I

hereupon offer my own poor endeavors. I promise nothing complete;

because any human thing supposed to be complete, must for that very

reason infallibly be faulty. I shall not pretend to a minute anatomical

description of the various species, or—in this place at least—to much

of any description. My object here is simply to project the draught of

a systematization of cetology. I am the architect, not the builder.

But it is a ponderous task; no ordinary letter-sorter in the

Post-Office is equal to it. To grope down into the bottom of the sea

after them; to have one’s hands among the unspeakable foundations,

ribs, and very pelvis of the world; this is a fearful thing. What am I

that I should essay to hook the nose of this leviathan! The awful

tauntings in Job might well appal me. Will he (the leviathan) make a

covenant with thee? Behold the hope of him is vain! But I have swam

through libraries and sailed through oceans; I have had to do with

whales with these visible hands; I am in earnest; and I will try. There

are some preliminaries to settle.

First: The uncertain, unsettled condition of this science of Cetology

is in the very vestibule attested by the fact, that in some quarters it

still remains a moot point whether a whale be a fish. In his System of

Nature, A.D. 1776, Linnæus declares, “I hereby separate the whales from

the fish.” But of my own knowledge, I know that down to the year 1850,

sharks and shad, alewives and herring, against Linnæus’s express edict,

were still found dividing the possession of the same seas with the

Leviathan.

The grounds upon which Linnæus would fain have banished the whales from

the waters, he states as follows: “On account of their warm bilocular

heart, their lungs, their movable eyelids, their hollow ears, penem

intrantem feminam mammis lactantem,” and finally, “ex lege naturæ jure

meritoque.” I submitted all this to my friends Simeon Macey and Charley

Coffin, of Nantucket, both messmates of mine in a certain voyage, and

they united in the opinion that the reasons set forth were altogether

insufficient. Charley profanely hinted they were humbug.

Be it known that, waiving all argument, I take the good old fashioned

ground that the whale is a fish, and call upon holy Jonah to back me.

This fundamental thing settled, the next point is, in what internal

respect does the whale differ from other fish. Above, Linnæus has given

you those items. But in brief, they are these: lungs and warm blood;

whereas, all other fish are lungless and cold blooded.

Next: how shall we define the whale, by his obvious externals, so as

conspicuously to label him for all time to come? To be short, then, a

whale is \_a spouting fish with a horizontal tail\_. There you have him.

However contracted, that definition is the result of expanded

meditation. A walrus spouts much like a whale, but the walrus is not a

fish, because he is amphibious. But the last term of the definition is

still more cogent, as coupled with the first. Almost any one must have

noticed that all the fish familiar to landsmen have not a flat, but a

vertical, or up-and-down tail. Whereas, among spouting fish the tail,

though it may be similarly shaped, invariably assumes a horizontal

position.

By the above definition of what a whale is, I do by no means exclude

from the leviathanic brotherhood any sea creature hitherto identified

with the whale by the best informed Nantucketers; nor, on the other

hand, link with it any fish hitherto authoritatively regarded as

alien.\* Hence, all the smaller, spouting, and horizontal tailed fish

must be included in this ground-plan of Cetology. Now, then, come the

grand divisions of the entire whale host.

\*I am aware that down to the present time, the fish styled Lamatins and

Dugongs (Pig-fish and Sow-fish of the Coffins of Nantucket) are

included by many naturalists among the whales. But as these pig-fish

are a noisy, contemptible set, mostly lurking in the mouths of rivers,

and feeding on wet hay, and especially as they do not spout, I deny

their credentials as whales; and have presented them with their

passports to quit the Kingdom of Cetology.

First: According to magnitude I divide the whales into three primary

BOOKS (subdivisible into CHAPTERS), and these shall comprehend them

all, both small and large.

I. THE FOLIO WHALE; II. the OCTAVO WHALE; III. the DUODECIMO WHALE.

As the type of the FOLIO I present the \_Sperm Whale\_; of the OCTAVO,

the \_Grampus\_; of the DUODECIMO, the \_Porpoise\_.

FOLIOS. Among these I here include the following chapters:—I. The

\_Sperm Whale\_; II. the \_Right Whale\_; III. the \_Fin-Back Whale\_; IV.

the \_Hump-backed Whale\_; V. the \_Razor Back Whale\_; VI. the \_Sulphur

Bottom Whale\_.

BOOK I. (\_Folio\_), CHAPTER I. (\_Sperm Whale\_).—This whale, among the

English of old vaguely known as the Trumpa whale, and the Physeter

whale, and the Anvil Headed whale, is the present Cachalot of the

French, and the Pottsfich of the Germans, and the Macrocephalus of the

Long Words. He is, without doubt, the largest inhabitant of the globe;

the most formidable of all whales to encounter; the most majestic in

aspect; and lastly, by far the most valuable in commerce; he being the

only creature from which that valuable substance, spermaceti, is

obtained. All his peculiarities will, in many other places, be enlarged

upon. It is chiefly with his name that I now have to do. Philologically

considered, it is absurd. Some centuries ago, when the Sperm whale was

almost wholly unknown in his own proper individuality, and when his oil

was only accidentally obtained from the stranded fish; in those days

spermaceti, it would seem, was popularly supposed to be derived from a

creature identical with the one then known in England as the Greenland

or Right Whale. It was the idea also, that this same spermaceti was

that quickening humor of the Greenland Whale which the first syllable

of the word literally expresses. In those times, also, spermaceti was

exceedingly scarce, not being used for light, but only as an ointment

and medicament. It was only to be had from the druggists as you

nowadays buy an ounce of rhubarb. When, as I opine, in the course of

time, the true nature of spermaceti became known, its original name was

still retained by the dealers; no doubt to enhance its value by a

notion so strangely significant of its scarcity. And so the appellation

must at last have come to be bestowed upon the whale from which this

spermaceti was really derived.

BOOK I. (\_Folio\_), CHAPTER II. (\_Right Whale\_).—In one respect this is

the most venerable of the leviathans, being the one first regularly

hunted by man. It yields the article commonly known as whalebone or

baleen; and the oil specially known as “whale oil,” an inferior article

in commerce. Among the fishermen, he is indiscriminately designated by

all the following titles: The Whale; the Greenland Whale; the Black

Whale; the Great Whale; the True Whale; the Right Whale. There is a

deal of obscurity concerning the identity of the species thus

multitudinously baptised. What then is the whale, which I include in

the second species of my Folios? It is the Great Mysticetus of the

English naturalists; the Greenland Whale of the English whalemen; the

Baleine Ordinaire of the French whalemen; the Growlands Walfish of the

Swedes. It is the whale which for more than two centuries past has been

hunted by the Dutch and English in the Arctic seas; it is the whale

which the American fishermen have long pursued in the Indian ocean, on

the Brazil Banks, on the Nor’ West Coast, and various other parts of

the world, designated by them Right Whale Cruising Grounds.

Some pretend to see a difference between the Greenland whale of the

English and the right whale of the Americans. But they precisely agree

in all their grand features; nor has there yet been presented a single

determinate fact upon which to ground a radical distinction. It is by

endless subdivisions based upon the most inconclusive differences, that

some departments of natural history become so repellingly intricate.

The right whale will be elsewhere treated of at some length, with

reference to elucidating the sperm whale.

BOOK I. (\_Folio\_), CHAPTER III. (\_Fin-Back\_).—Under this head I reckon

a monster which, by the various names of Fin-Back, Tall-Spout, and

Long-John, has been seen almost in every sea and is commonly the whale

whose distant jet is so often descried by passengers crossing the

Atlantic, in the New York packet-tracks. In the length he attains, and

in his baleen, the Fin-back resembles the right whale, but is of a less

portly girth, and a lighter colour, approaching to olive. His great

lips present a cable-like aspect, formed by the intertwisting, slanting

folds of large wrinkles. His grand distinguishing feature, the fin,

from which he derives his name, is often a conspicuous object. This fin

is some three or four feet long, growing vertically from the hinder

part of the back, of an angular shape, and with a very sharp pointed

end. Even if not the slightest other part of the creature be visible,

this isolated fin will, at times, be seen plainly projecting from the

surface. When the sea is moderately calm, and slightly marked with

spherical ripples, and this gnomon-like fin stands up and casts shadows

upon the wrinkled surface, it may well be supposed that the watery

circle surrounding it somewhat resembles a dial, with its style and

wavy hour-lines graved on it. On that Ahaz-dial the shadow often goes

back. The Fin-Back is not gregarious. He seems a whale-hater, as some

men are man-haters. Very shy; always going solitary; unexpectedly

rising to the surface in the remotest and most sullen waters; his

straight and single lofty jet rising like a tall misanthropic spear

upon a barren plain; gifted with such wondrous power and velocity in

swimming, as to defy all present pursuit from man; this leviathan seems

the banished and unconquerable Cain of his race, bearing for his mark

that style upon his back. From having the baleen in his mouth, the

Fin-Back is sometimes included with the right whale, among a theoretic

species denominated \_Whalebone whales\_, that is, whales with baleen. Of

these so called Whalebone whales, there would seem to be several

varieties, most of which, however, are little known. Broad-nosed whales

and beaked whales; pike-headed whales; bunched whales; under-jawed

whales and rostrated whales, are the fishermen’s names for a few sorts.

In connection with this appellative of “Whalebone whales,” it is of

great importance to mention, that however such a nomenclature may be

convenient in facilitating allusions to some kind of whales, yet it is

in vain to attempt a clear classification of the Leviathan, founded

upon either his baleen, or hump, or fin, or teeth; notwithstanding that

those marked parts or features very obviously seem better adapted to

afford the basis for a regular system of Cetology than any other

detached bodily distinctions, which the whale, in his kinds, presents.

How then? The baleen, hump, back-fin, and teeth; these are things whose

peculiarities are indiscriminately dispersed among all sorts of whales,

without any regard to what may be the nature of their structure in

other and more essential particulars. Thus, the sperm whale and the

humpbacked whale, each has a hump; but there the similitude ceases.

Then, this same humpbacked whale and the Greenland whale, each of these

has baleen; but there again the similitude ceases. And it is just the

same with the other parts above mentioned. In various sorts of whales,

they form such irregular combinations; or, in the case of any one of

them detached, such an irregular isolation; as utterly to defy all

general methodization formed upon such a basis. On this rock every one

of the whale-naturalists has split.

But it may possibly be conceived that, in the internal parts of the

whale, in his anatomy—there, at least, we shall be able to hit the

right classification. Nay; what thing, for example, is there in the

Greenland whale’s anatomy more striking than his baleen? Yet we have

seen that by his baleen it is impossible correctly to classify the

Greenland whale. And if you descend into the bowels of the various

leviathans, why there you will not find distinctions a fiftieth part as

available to the systematizer as those external ones already

enumerated. What then remains? nothing but to take hold of the whales

bodily, in their entire liberal volume, and boldly sort them that way.

And this is the Bibliographical system here adopted; and it is the only

one that can possibly succeed, for it alone is practicable. To proceed.

BOOK I. (\_Folio\_) CHAPTER IV. (\_Hump Back\_).—This whale is often seen

on the northern American coast. He has been frequently captured there,

and towed into harbor. He has a great pack on him like a peddler; or

you might call him the Elephant and Castle whale. At any rate, the

popular name for him does not sufficiently distinguish him, since the

sperm whale also has a hump though a smaller one. His oil is not very

valuable. He has baleen. He is the most gamesome and light-hearted of

all the whales, making more gay foam and white water generally than any

other of them.

BOOK I. (\_Folio\_), CHAPTER V. (\_Razor Back\_).—Of this whale little is

known but his name. I have seen him at a distance off Cape Horn. Of a

retiring nature, he eludes both hunters and philosophers. Though no

coward, he has never yet shown any part of him but his back, which

rises in a long sharp ridge. Let him go. I know little more of him, nor

does anybody else.

BOOK I. (\_Folio\_), CHAPTER VI. (\_Sulphur Bottom\_).—Another retiring

gentleman, with a brimstone belly, doubtless got by scraping along the

Tartarian tiles in some of his profounder divings. He is seldom seen;

at least I have never seen him except in the remoter southern seas, and

then always at too great a distance to study his countenance. He is

never chased; he would run away with rope-walks of line. Prodigies are

told of him. Adieu, Sulphur Bottom! I can say nothing more that is true

of ye, nor can the oldest Nantucketer.

Thus ends BOOK I. (\_Folio\_), and now begins BOOK II. (\_Octavo\_).

OCTAVOES.\*—These embrace the whales of middling magnitude, among which

present may be numbered:—I., the \_Grampus\_; II., the \_Black Fish\_;

III., the \_Narwhale\_; IV., the \_Thrasher\_; V., the \_Killer\_.

\*Why this book of whales is not denominated the Quarto is very plain.

Because, while the whales of this order, though smaller than those of

the former order, nevertheless retain a proportionate likeness to them

in figure, yet the bookbinder’s Quarto volume in its dimensioned form

does not preserve the shape of the Folio volume, but the Octavo volume

does.

BOOK II. (\_Octavo\_), CHAPTER I. (\_Grampus\_).—Though this fish, whose

loud sonorous breathing, or rather blowing, has furnished a proverb to

landsmen, is so well known a denizen of the deep, yet is he not

popularly classed among whales. But possessing all the grand

distinctive features of the leviathan, most naturalists have recognised

him for one. He is of moderate octavo size, varying from fifteen to

twenty-five feet in length, and of corresponding dimensions round the

waist. He swims in herds; he is never regularly hunted, though his oil

is considerable in quantity, and pretty good for light. By some

fishermen his approach is regarded as premonitory of the advance of the

great sperm whale.

BOOK II. (\_Octavo\_), CHAPTER II. (\_Black Fish\_).—I give the popular

fishermen’s names for all these fish, for generally they are the best.

Where any name happens to be vague or inexpressive, I shall say so, and

suggest another. I do so now, touching the Black Fish, so-called,

because blackness is the rule among almost all whales. So, call him the

Hyena Whale, if you please. His voracity is well known, and from the

circumstance that the inner angles of his lips are curved upwards, he

carries an everlasting Mephistophelean grin on his face. This whale

averages some sixteen or eighteen feet in length. He is found in almost

all latitudes. He has a peculiar way of showing his dorsal hooked fin

in swimming, which looks something like a Roman nose. When not more

profitably employed, the sperm whale hunters sometimes capture the

Hyena whale, to keep up the supply of cheap oil for domestic

employment—as some frugal housekeepers, in the absence of company, and

quite alone by themselves, burn unsavory tallow instead of odorous wax.

Though their blubber is very thin, some of these whales will yield you

upwards of thirty gallons of oil.

BOOK II. (\_Octavo\_), CHAPTER III. (\_Narwhale\_), that is, \_Nostril

whale\_.—Another instance of a curiously named whale, so named I suppose

from his peculiar horn being originally mistaken for a peaked nose. The

creature is some sixteen feet in length, while its horn averages five

feet, though some exceed ten, and even attain to fifteen feet. Strictly

speaking, this horn is but a lengthened tusk, growing out from the jaw

in a line a little depressed from the horizontal. But it is only found

on the sinister side, which has an ill effect, giving its owner

something analogous to the aspect of a clumsy left-handed man. What

precise purpose this ivory horn or lance answers, it would be hard to

say. It does not seem to be used like the blade of the sword-fish and

bill-fish; though some sailors tell me that the Narwhale employs it for

a rake in turning over the bottom of the sea for food. Charley Coffin

said it was used for an ice-piercer; for the Narwhale, rising to the

surface of the Polar Sea, and finding it sheeted with ice, thrusts his

horn up, and so breaks through. But you cannot prove either of these

surmises to be correct. My own opinion is, that however this one-sided

horn may really be used by the Narwhale—however that may be—it would

certainly be very convenient to him for a folder in reading pamphlets.

The Narwhale I have heard called the Tusked whale, the Horned whale,

and the Unicorn whale. He is certainly a curious example of the

Unicornism to be found in almost every kingdom of animated nature. From

certain cloistered old authors I have gathered that this same

sea-unicorn’s horn was in ancient days regarded as the great antidote

against poison, and as such, preparations of it brought immense prices.

It was also distilled to a volatile salts for fainting ladies, the same

way that the horns of the male deer are manufactured into hartshorn.

Originally it was in itself accounted an object of great curiosity.

Black Letter tells me that Sir Martin Frobisher on his return from that

voyage, when Queen Bess did gallantly wave her jewelled hand to him

from a window of Greenwich Palace, as his bold ship sailed down the

Thames; “when Sir Martin returned from that voyage,” saith Black

Letter, “on bended knees he presented to her highness a prodigious long

horn of the Narwhale, which for a long period after hung in the castle

at Windsor.” An Irish author avers that the Earl of Leicester, on

bended knees, did likewise present to her highness another horn,

pertaining to a land beast of the unicorn nature.

The Narwhale has a very picturesque, leopard-like look, being of a

milk-white ground colour, dotted with round and oblong spots of black.

His oil is very superior, clear and fine; but there is little of it,

and he is seldom hunted. He is mostly found in the circumpolar seas.

BOOK II. (\_Octavo\_), CHAPTER IV. (\_Killer\_).—Of this whale little is

precisely known to the Nantucketer, and nothing at all to the professed

naturalist. From what I have seen of him at a distance, I should say

that he was about the bigness of a grampus. He is very savage—a sort of

Feegee fish. He sometimes takes the great Folio whales by the lip, and

hangs there like a leech, till the mighty brute is worried to death.

The Killer is never hunted. I never heard what sort of oil he has.

Exception might be taken to the name bestowed upon this whale, on the

ground of its indistinctness. For we are all killers, on land and on

sea; Bonapartes and Sharks included.

BOOK II. (\_Octavo\_), CHAPTER V. (\_Thrasher\_).—This gentleman is famous

for his tail, which he uses for a ferule in thrashing his foes. He

mounts the Folio whale’s back, and as he swims, he works his passage by

flogging him; as some schoolmasters get along in the world by a similar

process. Still less is known of the Thrasher than of the Killer. Both

are outlaws, even in the lawless seas.

Thus ends BOOK II. (\_Octavo\_), and begins BOOK III. (\_Duodecimo\_).

DUODECIMOES.—These include the smaller whales. I. The Huzza Porpoise.

II. The Algerine Porpoise. III. The Mealy-mouthed Porpoise.

To those who have not chanced specially to study the subject, it may

possibly seem strange, that fishes not commonly exceeding four or five

feet should be marshalled among WHALES—a word, which, in the popular

sense, always conveys an idea of hugeness. But the creatures set down

above as Duodecimoes are infallibly whales, by the terms of my

definition of what a whale is—\_i.e.\_ a spouting fish, with a horizontal

tail.

BOOK III. (\_Duodecimo\_), CHAPTER 1. (\_Huzza Porpoise\_).—This is the

common porpoise found almost all over the globe. The name is of my own

bestowal; for there are more than one sort of porpoises, and something

must be done to distinguish them. I call him thus, because he always

swims in hilarious shoals, which upon the broad sea keep tossing

themselves to heaven like caps in a Fourth-of-July crowd. Their

appearance is generally hailed with delight by the mariner. Full of

fine spirits, they invariably come from the breezy billows to windward.

They are the lads that always live before the wind. They are accounted

a lucky omen. If you yourself can withstand three cheers at beholding

these vivacious fish, then heaven help ye; the spirit of godly

gamesomeness is not in ye. A well-fed, plump Huzza Porpoise will yield

you one good gallon of good oil. But the fine and delicate fluid

extracted from his jaws is exceedingly valuable. It is in request among

jewellers and watchmakers. Sailors put it on their hones. Porpoise meat

is good eating, you know. It may never have occurred to you that a

porpoise spouts. Indeed, his spout is so small that it is not very

readily discernible. But the next time you have a chance, watch him;

and you will then see the great Sperm whale himself in miniature.

BOOK III. (\_Duodecimo\_), CHAPTER II. (\_Algerine Porpoise\_).—A pirate.

Very savage. He is only found, I think, in the Pacific. He is somewhat

larger than the Huzza Porpoise, but much of the same general make.

Provoke him, and he will buckle to a shark. I have lowered for him many

times, but never yet saw him captured.

BOOK III. (\_Duodecimo\_), CHAPTER III. (\_Mealy-mouthed Porpoise\_).—The

largest kind of Porpoise; and only found in the Pacific, so far as it

is known. The only English name, by which he has hitherto been

designated, is that of the fishers—Right-Whale Porpoise, from the

circumstance that he is chiefly found in the vicinity of that Folio. In

shape, he differs in some degree from the Huzza Porpoise, being of a

less rotund and jolly girth; indeed, he is of quite a neat and

gentleman-like figure. He has no fins on his back (most other porpoises

have), he has a lovely tail, and sentimental Indian eyes of a hazel

hue. But his mealy-mouth spoils all. Though his entire back down to his

side fins is of a deep sable, yet a boundary line, distinct as the mark

in a ship’s hull, called the “bright waist,” that line streaks him from

stem to stern, with two separate colours, black above and white below.

The white comprises part of his head, and the whole of his mouth, which

makes him look as if he had just escaped from a felonious visit to a

meal-bag. A most mean and mealy aspect! His oil is much like that of

the common porpoise.

\* \* \* \* \* \*

Beyond the DUODECIMO, this system does not proceed, inasmuch as the

Porpoise is the smallest of the whales. Above, you have all the

Leviathans of note. But there are a rabble of uncertain, fugitive,

half-fabulous whales, which, as an American whaleman, I know by

reputation, but not personally. I shall enumerate them by their

fore-castle appellations; for possibly such a list may be valuable to

future investigators, who may complete what I have here but begun. If

any of the following whales, shall hereafter be caught and marked, then

he can readily be incorporated into this System, according to his

Folio, Octavo, or Duodecimo magnitude:—The Bottle-Nose Whale; the Junk

Whale; the Pudding-Headed Whale; the Cape Whale; the Leading Whale; the

Cannon Whale; the Scragg Whale; the Coppered Whale; the Elephant Whale;

the Iceberg Whale; the Quog Whale; the Blue Whale; etc. From Icelandic,

Dutch, and old English authorities, there might be quoted other lists

of uncertain whales, blessed with all manner of uncouth names. But I

omit them as altogether obsolete; and can hardly help suspecting them

for mere sounds, full of Leviathanism, but signifying nothing.

Finally: It was stated at the outset, that this system would not be

here, and at once, perfected. You cannot but plainly see that I have

kept my word. But I now leave my cetological System standing thus

unfinished, even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left, with the

crane still standing upon the top of the uncompleted tower. For small

erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true

ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity. God keep me from ever

completing anything. This whole book is but a draught—nay, but the

draught of a draught. Oh, Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience!

CHAPTER 33. The Specksnyder.

Concerning the officers of the whale-craft, this seems as good a place

as any to set down a little domestic peculiarity on ship-board, arising

from the existence of the harpooneer class of officers, a class unknown

of course in any other marine than the whale-fleet.

The large importance attached to the harpooneer’s vocation is evinced

by the fact, that originally in the old Dutch Fishery, two centuries

and more ago, the command of a whale ship was not wholly lodged in the

person now called the captain, but was divided between him and an

officer called the Specksnyder. Literally this word means Fat-Cutter;

usage, however, in time made it equivalent to Chief Harpooneer. In

those days, the captain’s authority was restricted to the navigation

and general management of the vessel; while over the whale-hunting

department and all its concerns, the Specksnyder or Chief Harpooneer

reigned supreme. In the British Greenland Fishery, under the corrupted

title of Specksioneer, this old Dutch official is still retained, but

his former dignity is sadly abridged. At present he ranks simply as

senior Harpooneer; and as such, is but one of the captain’s more

inferior subalterns. Nevertheless, as upon the good conduct of the

harpooneers the success of a whaling voyage largely depends, and since

in the American Fishery he is not only an important officer in the

boat, but under certain circumstances (night watches on a whaling

ground) the command of the ship’s deck is also his; therefore the grand

political maxim of the sea demands, that he should nominally live apart

from the men before the mast, and be in some way distinguished as their

professional superior; though always, by them, familiarly regarded as

their social equal.

Now, the grand distinction drawn between officer and man at sea, is

this—the first lives aft, the last forward. Hence, in whale-ships and

merchantmen alike, the mates have their quarters with the captain; and

so, too, in most of the American whalers the harpooneers are lodged in

the after part of the ship. That is to say, they take their meals in

the captain’s cabin, and sleep in a place indirectly communicating with

it.

Though the long period of a Southern whaling voyage (by far the longest

of all voyages now or ever made by man), the peculiar perils of it, and

the community of interest prevailing among a company, all of whom, high

or low, depend for their profits, not upon fixed wages, but upon their

common luck, together with their common vigilance, intrepidity, and

hard work; though all these things do in some cases tend to beget a

less rigorous discipline than in merchantmen generally; yet, never mind

how much like an old Mesopotamian family these whalemen may, in some

primitive instances, live together; for all that, the punctilious

externals, at least, of the quarter-deck are seldom materially relaxed,

and in no instance done away. Indeed, many are the Nantucket ships in

which you will see the skipper parading his quarter-deck with an elated

grandeur not surpassed in any military navy; nay, extorting almost as

much outward homage as if he wore the imperial purple, and not the

shabbiest of pilot-cloth.

And though of all men the moody captain of the Pequod was the least

given to that sort of shallowest assumption; and though the only homage

he ever exacted, was implicit, instantaneous obedience; though he

required no man to remove the shoes from his feet ere stepping upon the

quarter-deck; and though there were times when, owing to peculiar

circumstances connected with events hereafter to be detailed, he

addressed them in unusual terms, whether of condescension or \_in

terrorem\_, or otherwise; yet even Captain Ahab was by no means

unobservant of the paramount forms and usages of the sea.

Nor, perhaps, will it fail to be eventually perceived, that behind

those forms and usages, as it were, he sometimes masked himself;

incidentally making use of them for other and more private ends than

they were legitimately intended to subserve. That certain sultanism of

his brain, which had otherwise in a good degree remained unmanifested;

through those forms that same sultanism became incarnate in an

irresistible dictatorship. For be a man’s intellectual superiority what

it will, it can never assume the practical, available supremacy over

other men, without the aid of some sort of external arts and

entrenchments, always, in themselves, more or less paltry and base.

This it is, that for ever keeps God’s true princes of the Empire from

the world’s hustings; and leaves the highest honors that this air can

give, to those men who become famous more through their infinite

inferiority to the choice hidden handful of the Divine Inert, than

through their undoubted superiority over the dead level of the mass.

Such large virtue lurks in these small things when extreme political

superstitions invest them, that in some royal instances even to idiot

imbecility they have imparted potency. But when, as in the case of

Nicholas the Czar, the ringed crown of geographical empire encircles an

imperial brain; then, the plebeian herds crouch abased before the

tremendous centralization. Nor, will the tragic dramatist who would

depict mortal indomitableness in its fullest sweep and direct swing,

ever forget a hint, incidentally so important in his art, as the one

now alluded to.

But Ahab, my Captain, still moves before me in all his Nantucket

grimness and shagginess; and in this episode touching Emperors and

Kings, I must not conceal that I have only to do with a poor old

whale-hunter like him; and, therefore, all outward majestical trappings

and housings are denied me. Oh, Ahab! what shall be grand in thee, it

must needs be plucked at from the skies, and dived for in the deep, and

featured in the unbodied air!

CHAPTER 34. The Cabin-Table.

It is noon; and Dough-Boy, the steward, thrusting his pale

loaf-of-bread face from the cabin-scuttle, announces dinner to his lord

and master; who, sitting in the lee quarter-boat, has just been taking

an observation of the sun; and is now mutely reckoning the latitude on

the smooth, medallion-shaped tablet, reserved for that daily purpose on

the upper part of his ivory leg. From his complete inattention to the

tidings, you would think that moody Ahab had not heard his menial. But

presently, catching hold of the mizen shrouds, he swings himself to the

deck, and in an even, unexhilarated voice, saying, “Dinner, Mr.

Starbuck,” disappears into the cabin.

When the last echo of his sultan’s step has died away, and Starbuck,

the first Emir, has every reason to suppose that he is seated, then

Starbuck rouses from his quietude, takes a few turns along the planks,

and, after a grave peep into the binnacle, says, with some touch of

pleasantness, “Dinner, Mr. Stubb,” and descends the scuttle. The second

Emir lounges about the rigging awhile, and then slightly shaking the

main brace, to see whether it will be all right with that important

rope, he likewise takes up the old burden, and with a rapid “Dinner,

Mr. Flask,” follows after his predecessors.

But the third Emir, now seeing himself all alone on the quarter-deck,

seems to feel relieved from some curious restraint; for, tipping all

sorts of knowing winks in all sorts of directions, and kicking off his

shoes, he strikes into a sharp but noiseless squall of a hornpipe right

over the Grand Turk’s head; and then, by a dexterous sleight, pitching

his cap up into the mizentop for a shelf, he goes down rollicking so

far at least as he remains visible from the deck, reversing all other

processions, by bringing up the rear with music. But ere stepping into

the cabin doorway below, he pauses, ships a new face altogether, and,

then, independent, hilarious little Flask enters King Ahab’s presence,

in the character of Abjectus, or the Slave.

It is not the least among the strange things bred by the intense

artificialness of sea-usages, that while in the open air of the deck

some officers will, upon provocation, bear themselves boldly and

defyingly enough towards their commander; yet, ten to one, let those

very officers the next moment go down to their customary dinner in that

same commander’s cabin, and straightway their inoffensive, not to say

deprecatory and humble air towards him, as he sits at the head of the

table; this is marvellous, sometimes most comical. Wherefore this

difference? A problem? Perhaps not. To have been Belshazzar, King of

Babylon; and to have been Belshazzar, not haughtily but courteously,

therein certainly must have been some touch of mundane grandeur. But he

who in the rightly regal and intelligent spirit presides over his own

private dinner-table of invited guests, that man’s unchallenged power

and dominion of individual influence for the time; that man’s royalty

of state transcends Belshazzar’s, for Belshazzar was not the greatest.

Who has but once dined his friends, has tasted what it is to be Cæsar.

It is a witchery of social czarship which there is no withstanding.

Now, if to this consideration you superadd the official supremacy of a

ship-master, then, by inference, you will derive the cause of that

peculiarity of sea-life just mentioned.

Over his ivory-inlaid table, Ahab presided like a mute, maned sea-lion

on the white coral beach, surrounded by his warlike but still

deferential cubs. In his own proper turn, each officer waited to be

served. They were as little children before Ahab; and yet, in Ahab,

there seemed not to lurk the smallest social arrogance. With one mind,

their intent eyes all fastened upon the old man’s knife, as he carved

the chief dish before him. I do not suppose that for the world they

would have profaned that moment with the slightest observation, even

upon so neutral a topic as the weather. No! And when reaching out his

knife and fork, between which the slice of beef was locked, Ahab

thereby motioned Starbuck’s plate towards him, the mate received his

meat as though receiving alms; and cut it tenderly; and a little

started if, perchance, the knife grazed against the plate; and chewed

it noiselessly; and swallowed it, not without circumspection. For, like

the Coronation banquet at Frankfort, where the German Emperor

profoundly dines with the seven Imperial Electors, so these cabin meals

were somehow solemn meals, eaten in awful silence; and yet at table old

Ahab forbade not conversation; only he himself was dumb. What a relief

it was to choking Stubb, when a rat made a sudden racket in the hold

below. And poor little Flask, he was the youngest son, and little boy

of this weary family party. His were the shinbones of the saline beef;

his would have been the drumsticks. For Flask to have presumed to help

himself, this must have seemed to him tantamount to larceny in the

first degree. Had he helped himself at that table, doubtless, never

more would he have been able to hold his head up in this honest world;

nevertheless, strange to say, Ahab never forbade him. And had Flask

helped himself, the chances were Ahab had never so much as noticed it.

Least of all, did Flask presume to help himself to butter. Whether he

thought the owners of the ship denied it to him, on account of its

clotting his clear, sunny complexion; or whether he deemed that, on so

long a voyage in such marketless waters, butter was at a premium, and

therefore was not for him, a subaltern; however it was, Flask, alas!

was a butterless man!

Another thing. Flask was the last person down at the dinner, and Flask

is the first man up. Consider! For hereby Flask’s dinner was badly

jammed in point of time. Starbuck and Stubb both had the start of him;

and yet they also have the privilege of lounging in the rear. If Stubb

even, who is but a peg higher than Flask, happens to have but a small

appetite, and soon shows symptoms of concluding his repast, then Flask

must bestir himself, he will not get more than three mouthfuls that

day; for it is against holy usage for Stubb to precede Flask to the

deck. Therefore it was that Flask once admitted in private, that ever

since he had arisen to the dignity of an officer, from that moment he

had never known what it was to be otherwise than hungry, more or less.

For what he ate did not so much relieve his hunger, as keep it immortal

in him. Peace and satisfaction, thought Flask, have for ever departed

from my stomach. I am an officer; but, how I wish I could fish a bit of

old-fashioned beef in the forecastle, as I used to when I was before

the mast. There’s the fruits of promotion now; there’s the vanity of

glory: there’s the insanity of life! Besides, if it were so that any

mere sailor of the Pequod had a grudge against Flask in Flask’s

official capacity, all that sailor had to do, in order to obtain ample

vengeance, was to go aft at dinner-time, and get a peep at Flask

through the cabin sky-light, sitting silly and dumfoundered before

awful Ahab.

Now, Ahab and his three mates formed what may be called the first table

in the Pequod’s cabin. After their departure, taking place in inverted

order to their arrival, the canvas cloth was cleared, or rather was

restored to some hurried order by the pallid steward. And then the

three harpooneers were bidden to the feast, they being its residuary

legatees. They made a sort of temporary servants’ hall of the high and

mighty cabin.

In strange contrast to the hardly tolerable constraint and nameless

invisible domineerings of the captain’s table, was the entire care-free

license and ease, the almost frantic democracy of those inferior

fellows the harpooneers. While their masters, the mates, seemed afraid

of the sound of the hinges of their own jaws, the harpooneers chewed

their food with such a relish that there was a report to it. They dined

like lords; they filled their bellies like Indian ships all day loading

with spices. Such portentous appetites had Queequeg and Tashtego, that

to fill out the vacancies made by the previous repast, often the pale

Dough-Boy was fain to bring on a great baron of salt-junk, seemingly

quarried out of the solid ox. And if he were not lively about it, if he

did not go with a nimble hop-skip-and-jump, then Tashtego had an

ungentlemanly way of accelerating him by darting a fork at his back,

harpoon-wise. And once Daggoo, seized with a sudden humor, assisted

Dough-Boy’s memory by snatching him up bodily, and thrusting his head

into a great empty wooden trencher, while Tashtego, knife in hand,

began laying out the circle preliminary to scalping him. He was

naturally a very nervous, shuddering sort of little fellow, this

bread-faced steward; the progeny of a bankrupt baker and a hospital

nurse. And what with the standing spectacle of the black terrific Ahab,

and the periodical tumultuous visitations of these three savages,

Dough-Boy’s whole life was one continual lip-quiver. Commonly, after

seeing the harpooneers furnished with all things they demanded, he

would escape from their clutches into his little pantry adjoining, and

fearfully peep out at them through the blinds of its door, till all was

over.

It was a sight to see Queequeg seated over against Tashtego, opposing

his filed teeth to the Indian’s: crosswise to them, Daggoo seated on

the floor, for a bench would have brought his hearse-plumed head to the

low carlines; at every motion of his colossal limbs, making the low

cabin framework to shake, as when an African elephant goes passenger in

a ship. But for all this, the great negro was wonderfully abstemious,

not to say dainty. It seemed hardly possible that by such comparatively

small mouthfuls he could keep up the vitality diffused through so

broad, baronial, and superb a person. But, doubtless, this noble savage

fed strong and drank deep of the abounding element of air; and through

his dilated nostrils snuffed in the sublime life of the worlds. Not by

beef or by bread, are giants made or nourished. But Queequeg, he had a

mortal, barbaric smack of the lip in eating—an ugly sound enough—so

much so, that the trembling Dough-Boy almost looked to see whether any

marks of teeth lurked in his own lean arms. And when he would hear

Tashtego singing out for him to produce himself, that his bones might

be picked, the simple-witted steward all but shattered the crockery

hanging round him in the pantry, by his sudden fits of the palsy. Nor

did the whetstone which the harpooneers carried in their pockets, for

their lances and other weapons; and with which whetstones, at dinner,

they would ostentatiously sharpen their knives; that grating sound did

not at all tend to tranquillize poor Dough-Boy. How could he forget

that in his Island days, Queequeg, for one, must certainly have been

guilty of some murderous, convivial indiscretions. Alas! Dough-Boy!

hard fares the white waiter who waits upon cannibals. Not a napkin

should he carry on his arm, but a buckler. In good time, though, to his

great delight, the three salt-sea warriors would rise and depart; to

his credulous, fable-mongering ears, all their martial bones jingling

in them at every step, like Moorish scimetars in scabbards.

But, though these barbarians dined in the cabin, and nominally lived

there; still, being anything but sedentary in their habits, they were

scarcely ever in it except at mealtimes, and just before sleeping-time,

when they passed through it to their own peculiar quarters.

In this one matter, Ahab seemed no exception to most American whale

captains, who, as a set, rather incline to the opinion that by rights

the ship’s cabin belongs to them; and that it is by courtesy alone that

anybody else is, at any time, permitted there. So that, in real truth,

the mates and harpooneers of the Pequod might more properly be said to

have lived out of the cabin than in it. For when they did enter it, it

was something as a street-door enters a house; turning inwards for a

moment, only to be turned out the next; and, as a permanent thing,

residing in the open air. Nor did they lose much hereby; in the cabin

was no companionship; socially, Ahab was inaccessible. Though nominally

included in the census of Christendom, he was still an alien to it. He

lived in the world, as the last of the Grisly Bears lived in settled

Missouri. And as when Spring and Summer had departed, that wild Logan

of the woods, burying himself in the hollow of a tree, lived out the

winter there, sucking his own paws; so, in his inclement, howling old

age, Ahab’s soul, shut up in the caved trunk of his body, there fed

upon the sullen paws of its gloom!

CHAPTER 35. The Mast-Head.

It was during the more pleasant weather, that in due rotation with the

other seamen my first mast-head came round.

In most American whalemen the mast-heads are manned almost

simultaneously with the vessel’s leaving her port; even though she may

have fifteen thousand miles, and more, to sail ere reaching her proper

cruising ground. And if, after a three, four, or five years’ voyage she

is drawing nigh home with anything empty in her—say, an empty vial

even—then, her mast-heads are kept manned to the last; and not till her

skysail-poles sail in among the spires of the port, does she altogether

relinquish the hope of capturing one whale more.

Now, as the business of standing mast-heads, ashore or afloat, is a

very ancient and interesting one, let us in some measure expatiate

here. I take it, that the earliest standers of mast-heads were the old

Egyptians; because, in all my researches, I find none prior to them.

For though their progenitors, the builders of Babel, must doubtless, by

their tower, have intended to rear the loftiest mast-head in all Asia,

or Africa either; yet (ere the final truck was put to it) as that great

stone mast of theirs may be said to have gone by the board, in the

dread gale of God’s wrath; therefore, we cannot give these Babel

builders priority over the Egyptians. And that the Egyptians were a

nation of mast-head standers, is an assertion based upon the general

belief among archæologists, that the first pyramids were founded for

astronomical purposes: a theory singularly supported by the peculiar

stair-like formation of all four sides of those edifices; whereby, with

prodigious long upliftings of their legs, those old astronomers were

wont to mount to the apex, and sing out for new stars; even as the

look-outs of a modern ship sing out for a sail, or a whale just bearing

in sight. In Saint Stylites, the famous Christian hermit of old times,

who built him a lofty stone pillar in the desert and spent the whole

latter portion of his life on its summit, hoisting his food from the

ground with a tackle; in him we have a remarkable instance of a

dauntless stander-of-mast-heads; who was not to be driven from his

place by fogs or frosts, rain, hail, or sleet; but valiantly facing

everything out to the last, literally died at his post. Of modern

standers-of-mast-heads we have but a lifeless set; mere stone, iron,

and bronze men; who, though well capable of facing out a stiff gale,

are still entirely incompetent to the business of singing out upon

discovering any strange sight. There is Napoleon; who, upon the top of

the column of Vendome, stands with arms folded, some one hundred and

fifty feet in the air; careless, now, who rules the decks below;

whether Louis Philippe, Louis Blanc, or Louis the Devil. Great

Washington, too, stands high aloft on his towering main-mast in

Baltimore, and like one of Hercules’ pillars, his column marks that

point of human grandeur beyond which few mortals will go. Admiral

Nelson, also, on a capstan of gun-metal, stands his mast-head in

Trafalgar Square; and ever when most obscured by that London smoke,

token is yet given that a hidden hero is there; for where there is

smoke, must be fire. But neither great Washington, nor Napoleon, nor

Nelson, will answer a single hail from below, however madly invoked to

befriend by their counsels the distracted decks upon which they gaze;

however it may be surmised, that their spirits penetrate through the

thick haze of the future, and descry what shoals and what rocks must be

shunned.

It may seem unwarrantable to couple in any respect the mast-head

standers of the land with those of the sea; but that in truth it is not

so, is plainly evinced by an item for which Obed Macy, the sole

historian of Nantucket, stands accountable. The worthy Obed tells us,

that in the early times of the whale fishery, ere ships were regularly

launched in pursuit of the game, the people of that island erected

lofty spars along the sea-coast, to which the look-outs ascended by

means of nailed cleats, something as fowls go upstairs in a hen-house.

A few years ago this same plan was adopted by the Bay whalemen of New

Zealand, who, upon descrying the game, gave notice to the ready-manned

boats nigh the beach. But this custom has now become obsolete; turn we

then to the one proper mast-head, that of a whale-ship at sea. The

three mast-heads are kept manned from sun-rise to sun-set; the seamen

taking their regular turns (as at the helm), and relieving each other

every two hours. In the serene weather of the tropics it is exceedingly

pleasant the mast-head; nay, to a dreamy meditative man it is

delightful. There you stand, a hundred feet above the silent decks,

striding along the deep, as if the masts were gigantic stilts, while

beneath you and between your legs, as it were, swim the hugest monsters

of the sea, even as ships once sailed between the boots of the famous

Colossus at old Rhodes. There you stand, lost in the infinite series of

the sea, with nothing ruffled but the waves. The tranced ship

indolently rolls; the drowsy trade winds blow; everything resolves you

into languor. For the most part, in this tropic whaling life, a sublime

uneventfulness invests you; you hear no news; read no gazettes; extras

with startling accounts of commonplaces never delude you into

unnecessary excitements; you hear of no domestic afflictions; bankrupt

securities; fall of stocks; are never troubled with the thought of what

you shall have for dinner—for all your meals for three years and more

are snugly stowed in casks, and your bill of fare is immutable.

In one of those southern whalesmen, on a long three or four years’

voyage, as often happens, the sum of the various hours you spend at the

mast-head would amount to several entire months. And it is much to be

deplored that the place to which you devote so considerable a portion

of the whole term of your natural life, should be so sadly destitute of

anything approaching to a cosy inhabitiveness, or adapted to breed a

comfortable localness of feeling, such as pertains to a bed, a hammock,

a hearse, a sentry box, a pulpit, a coach, or any other of those small

and snug contrivances in which men temporarily isolate themselves. Your

most usual point of perch is the head of the t’ gallant-mast, where you

stand upon two thin parallel sticks (almost peculiar to whalemen)

called the t’ gallant cross-trees. Here, tossed about by the sea, the

beginner feels about as cosy as he would standing on a bull’s horns. To

be sure, in cold weather you may carry your house aloft with you, in

the shape of a watch-coat; but properly speaking the thickest

watch-coat is no more of a house than the unclad body; for as the soul

is glued inside of its fleshy tabernacle, and cannot freely move about

in it, nor even move out of it, without running great risk of perishing

(like an ignorant pilgrim crossing the snowy Alps in winter); so a

watch-coat is not so much of a house as it is a mere envelope, or

additional skin encasing you. You cannot put a shelf or chest of

drawers in your body, and no more can you make a convenient closet of

your watch-coat.

Concerning all this, it is much to be deplored that the mast-heads of a

southern whale ship are unprovided with those enviable little tents or

pulpits, called \_crow’s-nests\_, in which the look-outs of a Greenland

whaler are protected from the inclement weather of the frozen seas. In

the fireside narrative of Captain Sleet, entitled “A Voyage among the

Icebergs, in quest of the Greenland Whale, and incidentally for the

re-discovery of the Lost Icelandic Colonies of Old Greenland;” in this

admirable volume, all standers of mast-heads are furnished with a

charmingly circumstantial account of the then recently invented

\_crow’s-nest\_ of the Glacier, which was the name of Captain Sleet’s

good craft. He called it the \_Sleet’s crow’s-nest\_, in honor of

himself; he being the original inventor and patentee, and free from all

ridiculous false delicacy, and holding that if we call our own children

after our own names (we fathers being the original inventors and

patentees), so likewise should we denominate after ourselves any other

apparatus we may beget. In shape, the Sleet’s crow’s-nest is something

like a large tierce or pipe; it is open above, however, where it is

furnished with a movable side-screen to keep to windward of your head

in a hard gale. Being fixed on the summit of the mast, you ascend into

it through a little trap-hatch in the bottom. On the after side, or

side next the stern of the ship, is a comfortable seat, with a locker

underneath for umbrellas, comforters, and coats. In front is a leather

rack, in which to keep your speaking trumpet, pipe, telescope, and

other nautical conveniences. When Captain Sleet in person stood his

mast-head in this crow’s-nest of his, he tells us that he always had a

rifle with him (also fixed in the rack), together with a powder flask

and shot, for the purpose of popping off the stray narwhales, or

vagrant sea unicorns infesting those waters; for you cannot

successfully shoot at them from the deck owing to the resistance of the

water, but to shoot down upon them is a very different thing. Now, it

was plainly a labor of love for Captain Sleet to describe, as he does,

all the little detailed conveniences of his crow’s-nest; but though he

so enlarges upon many of these, and though he treats us to a very

scientific account of his experiments in this crow’s-nest, with a small

compass he kept there for the purpose of counteracting the errors

resulting from what is called the “local attraction” of all binnacle

magnets; an error ascribable to the horizontal vicinity of the iron in

the ship’s planks, and in the Glacier’s case, perhaps, to there having

been so many broken-down blacksmiths among her crew; I say, that though

the Captain is very discreet and scientific here, yet, for all his

learned “binnacle deviations,” “azimuth compass observations,” and

“approximate errors,” he knows very well, Captain Sleet, that he was

not so much immersed in those profound magnetic meditations, as to fail

being attracted occasionally towards that well replenished little

case-bottle, so nicely tucked in on one side of his crow’s nest, within

easy reach of his hand. Though, upon the whole, I greatly admire and

even love the brave, the honest, and learned Captain; yet I take it

very ill of him that he should so utterly ignore that case-bottle,

seeing what a faithful friend and comforter it must have been, while

with mittened fingers and hooded head he was studying the mathematics

aloft there in that bird’s nest within three or four perches of the

pole.

But if we Southern whale-fishers are not so snugly housed aloft as

Captain Sleet and his Greenlandmen were; yet that disadvantage is

greatly counter-balanced by the widely contrasting serenity of those

seductive seas in which we South fishers mostly float. For one, I used

to lounge up the rigging very leisurely, resting in the top to have a

chat with Queequeg, or any one else off duty whom I might find there;

then ascending a little way further, and throwing a lazy leg over the

top-sail yard, take a preliminary view of the watery pastures, and so

at last mount to my ultimate destination.

Let me make a clean breast of it here, and frankly admit that I kept

but sorry guard. With the problem of the universe revolving in me, how

could I—being left completely to myself at such a thought-engendering

altitude—how could I but lightly hold my obligations to observe all

whale-ships’ standing orders, “Keep your weather eye open, and sing out

every time.”

And let me in this place movingly admonish you, ye ship-owners of

Nantucket! Beware of enlisting in your vigilant fisheries any lad with

lean brow and hollow eye; given to unseasonable meditativeness; and who

offers to ship with the Phædon instead of Bowditch in his head. Beware

of such an one, I say; your whales must be seen before they can be

killed; and this sunken-eyed young Platonist will tow you ten wakes

round the world, and never make you one pint of sperm the richer. Nor

are these monitions at all unneeded. For nowadays, the whale-fishery

furnishes an asylum for many romantic, melancholy, and absent-minded

young men, disgusted with the carking cares of earth, and seeking

sentiment in tar and blubber. Childe Harold not unfrequently perches

himself upon the mast-head of some luckless disappointed whale-ship,

and in moody phrase ejaculates:—

“Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll! Ten thousand

blubber-hunters sweep over thee in vain.”

Very often do the captains of such ships take those absent-minded young

philosophers to task, upbraiding them with not feeling sufficient

“interest” in the voyage; half-hinting that they are so hopelessly lost

to all honorable ambition, as that in their secret souls they would

rather not see whales than otherwise. But all in vain; those young

Platonists have a notion that their vision is imperfect; they are

short-sighted; what use, then, to strain the visual nerve? They have

left their opera-glasses at home.

“Why, thou monkey,” said a harpooneer to one of these lads, “we’ve been

cruising now hard upon three years, and thou hast not raised a whale

yet. Whales are scarce as hen’s teeth whenever thou art up here.”

Perhaps they were; or perhaps there might have been shoals of them in

the far horizon; but lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of

vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending

cadence of waves with thoughts, that at last he loses his identity;

takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep,

blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange,

half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every

dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernible form, seems to him

the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by

continually flitting through it. In this enchanted mood, thy spirit

ebbs away to whence it came; becomes diffused through time and space;

like Cranmer’s sprinkled Pantheistic ashes, forming at last a part of

every shore the round globe over.

There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a

gently rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from

the inscrutable tides of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on

ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your

identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And

perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled

shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no

more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists!

CHAPTER 36. The Quarter-Deck.

(\_Enter Ahab: Then, all.\_)

It was not a great while after the affair of the pipe, that one morning

shortly after breakfast, Ahab, as was his wont, ascended the

cabin-gangway to the deck. There most sea-captains usually walk at that

hour, as country gentlemen, after the same meal, take a few turns in

the garden.

Soon his steady, ivory stride was heard, as to and fro he paced his old

rounds, upon planks so familiar to his tread, that they were all over

dented, like geological stones, with the peculiar mark of his walk. Did

you fixedly gaze, too, upon that ribbed and dented brow; there also,

you would see still stranger foot-prints—the foot-prints of his one

unsleeping, ever-pacing thought.

But on the occasion in question, those dents looked deeper, even as his

nervous step that morning left a deeper mark. And, so full of his

thought was Ahab, that at every uniform turn that he made, now at the

main-mast and now at the binnacle, you could almost see that thought

turn in him as he turned, and pace in him as he paced; so completely

possessing him, indeed, that it all but seemed the inward mould of

every outer movement.

“D’ye mark him, Flask?” whispered Stubb; “the chick that’s in him pecks

the shell. ’Twill soon be out.”

The hours wore on;—Ahab now shut up within his cabin; anon, pacing the

deck, with the same intense bigotry of purpose in his aspect.

It drew near the close of day. Suddenly he came to a halt by the

bulwarks, and inserting his bone leg into the auger-hole there, and

with one hand grasping a shroud, he ordered Starbuck to send everybody

aft.

“Sir!” said the mate, astonished at an order seldom or never given on

ship-board except in some extraordinary case.

“Send everybody aft,” repeated Ahab. “Mast-heads, there! come down!”

When the entire ship’s company were assembled, and with curious and not

wholly unapprehensive faces, were eyeing him, for he looked not unlike

the weather horizon when a storm is coming up, Ahab, after rapidly

glancing over the bulwarks, and then darting his eyes among the crew,

started from his standpoint; and as though not a soul were nigh him

resumed his heavy turns upon the deck. With bent head and half-slouched

hat he continued to pace, unmindful of the wondering whispering among

the men; till Stubb cautiously whispered to Flask, that Ahab must have

summoned them there for the purpose of witnessing a pedestrian feat.

But this did not last long. Vehemently pausing, he cried:—

“What do ye do when ye see a whale, men?”

“Sing out for him!” was the impulsive rejoinder from a score of clubbed

voices.

“Good!” cried Ahab, with a wild approval in his tones; observing the

hearty animation into which his unexpected question had so magnetically

thrown them.

“And what do ye next, men?”

“Lower away, and after him!”

“And what tune is it ye pull to, men?”

“A dead whale or a stove boat!”

More and more strangely and fiercely glad and approving, grew the

countenance of the old man at every shout; while the mariners began to

gaze curiously at each other, as if marvelling how it was that they

themselves became so excited at such seemingly purposeless questions.

But, they were all eagerness again, as Ahab, now half-revolving in his

pivot-hole, with one hand reaching high up a shroud, and tightly,

almost convulsively grasping it, addressed them thus:—

“All ye mast-headers have before now heard me give orders about a white

whale. Look ye! d’ye see this Spanish ounce of gold?”—holding up a

broad bright coin to the sun—“it is a sixteen dollar piece, men. D’ye

see it? Mr. Starbuck, hand me yon top-maul.”

While the mate was getting the hammer, Ahab, without speaking, was

slowly rubbing the gold piece against the skirts of his jacket, as if

to heighten its lustre, and without using any words was meanwhile lowly

humming to himself, producing a sound so strangely muffled and

inarticulate that it seemed the mechanical humming of the wheels of his

vitality in him.

Receiving the top-maul from Starbuck, he advanced towards the main-mast

with the hammer uplifted in one hand, exhibiting the gold with the

other, and with a high raised voice exclaiming: “Whosoever of ye raises

me a white-headed whale with a wrinkled brow and a crooked jaw;

whosoever of ye raises me that white-headed whale, with three holes

punctured in his starboard fluke—look ye, whosoever of ye raises me

that same white whale, he shall have this gold ounce, my boys!”

“Huzza! huzza!” cried the seamen, as with swinging tarpaulins they

hailed the act of nailing the gold to the mast.

“It’s a white whale, I say,” resumed Ahab, as he threw down the

topmaul: “a white whale. Skin your eyes for him, men; look sharp for

white water; if ye see but a bubble, sing out.”

All this while Tashtego, Daggoo, and Queequeg had looked on with even

more intense interest and surprise than the rest, and at the mention of

the wrinkled brow and crooked jaw they had started as if each was

separately touched by some specific recollection.

“Captain Ahab,” said Tashtego, “that white whale must be the same that

some call Moby Dick.”

“Moby Dick?” shouted Ahab. “Do ye know the white whale then, Tash?”

“Does he fan-tail a little curious, sir, before he goes down?” said the

Gay-Header deliberately.

“And has he a curious spout, too,” said Daggoo, “very bushy, even for a

parmacetty, and mighty quick, Captain Ahab?”

“And he have one, two, three—oh! good many iron in him hide, too,

Captain,” cried Queequeg disjointedly, “all twiske-tee be-twisk, like

him—him—” faltering hard for a word, and screwing his hand round and

round as though uncorking a bottle—“like him—him—”

“Corkscrew!” cried Ahab, “aye, Queequeg, the harpoons lie all twisted

and wrenched in him; aye, Daggoo, his spout is a big one, like a whole

shock of wheat, and white as a pile of our Nantucket wool after the

great annual sheep-shearing; aye, Tashtego, and he fan-tails like a

split jib in a squall. Death and devils! men, it is Moby Dick ye have

seen—Moby Dick—Moby Dick!”

“Captain Ahab,” said Starbuck, who, with Stubb and Flask, had thus far

been eyeing his superior with increasing surprise, but at last seemed

struck with a thought which somewhat explained all the wonder. “Captain

Ahab, I have heard of Moby Dick—but it was not Moby Dick that took off

thy leg?”

“Who told thee that?” cried Ahab; then pausing, “Aye, Starbuck; aye, my

hearties all round; it was Moby Dick that dismasted me; Moby Dick that

brought me to this dead stump I stand on now. Aye, aye,” he shouted

with a terrific, loud, animal sob, like that of a heart-stricken moose;

“Aye, aye! it was that accursed white whale that razed me; made a poor

pegging lubber of me for ever and a day!” Then tossing both arms, with

measureless imprecations he shouted out: “Aye, aye! and I’ll chase him

round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom,

and round perdition’s flames before I give him up. And this is what ye

have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale on both sides of land,

and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin

out. What say ye, men, will ye splice hands on it, now? I think ye do

look brave.”

“Aye, aye!” shouted the harpooneers and seamen, running closer to the

excited old man: “A sharp eye for the white whale; a sharp lance for

Moby Dick!”

“God bless ye,” he seemed to half sob and half shout. “God bless ye,

men. Steward! go draw the great measure of grog. But what’s this long

face about, Mr. Starbuck; wilt thou not chase the white whale? art not

game for Moby Dick?”

“I am game for his crooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too, Captain

Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I

came here to hunt whales, not my commander’s vengeance. How many

barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain

Ahab? it will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market.”

“Nantucket market! Hoot! But come closer, Starbuck; thou requirest a

little lower layer. If money’s to be the measurer, man, and the

accountants have computed their great counting-house the globe, by

girdling it with guineas, one to every three parts of an inch; then,

let me tell thee, that my vengeance will fetch a great premium \_here!\_”

“He smites his chest,” whispered Stubb, “what’s that for? methinks it

rings most vast, but hollow.”

“Vengeance on a dumb brute!” cried Starbuck, “that simply smote thee

from blindest instinct! Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing,

Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous.”

“Hark ye yet again—the little lower layer. All visible objects, man,

are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the

undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth

the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man

will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach

outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is

that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there’s naught beyond.

But ’tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous

strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable

thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the

white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me

of blasphemy, man; I’d strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the

sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of

fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my

master, man, is even that fair play. Who’s over me? Truth hath no

confines. Take off thine eye! more intolerable than fiends’ glarings is

a doltish stare! So, so; thou reddenest and palest; my heat has melted

thee to anger-glow. But look ye, Starbuck, what is said in heat, that

thing unsays itself. There are men from whom warm words are small

indignity. I meant not to incense thee. Let it go. Look! see yonder

Turkish cheeks of spotted tawn—living, breathing pictures painted by

the sun. The Pagan leopards—the unrecking and unworshipping things,

that live; and seek, and give no reasons for the torrid life they feel!

The crew, man, the crew! Are they not one and all with Ahab, in this

matter of the whale? See Stubb! he laughs! See yonder Chilian! he

snorts to think of it. Stand up amid the general hurricane, thy one

tost sapling cannot, Starbuck! And what is it? Reckon it. ’Tis but to

help strike a fin; no wondrous feat for Starbuck. What is it more? From

this one poor hunt, then, the best lance out of all Nantucket, surely

he will not hang back, when every foremast-hand has clutched a

whetstone? Ah! constrainings seize thee; I see! the billow lifts thee!

Speak, but speak!—Aye, aye! thy silence, then, \_that\_ voices thee.

(\_Aside\_) Something shot from my dilated nostrils, he has inhaled it in

his lungs. Starbuck now is mine; cannot oppose me now, without

rebellion.”

“God keep me!—keep us all!” murmured Starbuck, lowly.

But in his joy at the enchanted, tacit acquiescence of the mate, Ahab

did not hear his foreboding invocation; nor yet the low laugh from the

hold; nor yet the presaging vibrations of the winds in the cordage; nor

yet the hollow flap of the sails against the masts, as for a moment

their hearts sank in. For again Starbuck’s downcast eyes lighted up

with the stubbornness of life; the subterranean laugh died away; the

winds blew on; the sails filled out; the ship heaved and rolled as

before. Ah, ye admonitions and warnings! why stay ye not when ye come?

But rather are ye predictions than warnings, ye shadows! Yet not so

much predictions from without, as verifications of the foregoing things

within. For with little external to constrain us, the innermost

necessities in our being, these still drive us on.

“The measure! the measure!” cried Ahab.

Receiving the brimming pewter, and turning to the harpooneers, he

ordered them to produce their weapons. Then ranging them before him

near the capstan, with their harpoons in their hands, while his three

mates stood at his side with their lances, and the rest of the ship’s

company formed a circle round the group; he stood for an instant

searchingly eyeing every man of his crew. But those wild eyes met his,

as the bloodshot eyes of the prairie wolves meet the eye of their

leader, ere he rushes on at their head in the trail of the bison; but,

alas! only to fall into the hidden snare of the Indian.

“Drink and pass!” he cried, handing the heavy charged flagon to the

nearest seaman. “The crew alone now drink. Round with it, round! Short

draughts—long swallows, men; ’tis hot as Satan’s hoof. So, so; it goes

round excellently. It spiralizes in ye; forks out at the

serpent-snapping eye. Well done; almost drained. That way it went, this

way it comes. Hand it me—here’s a hollow! Men, ye seem the years; so

brimming life is gulped and gone. Steward, refill!

“Attend now, my braves. I have mustered ye all round this capstan; and

ye mates, flank me with your lances; and ye harpooneers, stand there

with your irons; and ye, stout mariners, ring me in, that I may in some

sort revive a noble custom of my fisherman fathers before me. O men,

you will yet see that—Ha! boy, come back? bad pennies come not sooner.

Hand it me. Why, now, this pewter had run brimming again, wer’t not

thou St. Vitus’ imp—away, thou ague!

“Advance, ye mates! Cross your lances full before me. Well done! Let me

touch the axis.” So saying, with extended arm, he grasped the three

level, radiating lances at their crossed centre; while so doing,

suddenly and nervously twitched them; meanwhile, glancing intently from

Starbuck to Stubb; from Stubb to Flask. It seemed as though, by some

nameless, interior volition, he would fain have shocked into them the

same fiery emotion accumulated within the Leyden jar of his own

magnetic life. The three mates quailed before his strong, sustained,

and mystic aspect. Stubb and Flask looked sideways from him; the honest

eye of Starbuck fell downright.

“In vain!” cried Ahab; “but, maybe, ’tis well. For did ye three but

once take the full-forced shock, then mine own electric thing, \_that\_

had perhaps expired from out me. Perchance, too, it would have dropped

ye dead. Perchance ye need it not. Down lances! And now, ye mates, I do

appoint ye three cupbearers to my three pagan kinsmen there—yon three

most honorable gentlemen and noblemen, my valiant harpooneers. Disdain

the task? What, when the great Pope washes the feet of beggars, using

his tiara for ewer? Oh, my sweet cardinals! your own condescension,

\_that\_ shall bend ye to it. I do not order ye; ye will it. Cut your

seizings and draw the poles, ye harpooneers!”

Silently obeying the order, the three harpooneers now stood with the

detached iron part of their harpoons, some three feet long, held, barbs

up, before him.

“Stab me not with that keen steel! Cant them; cant them over! know ye

not the goblet end? Turn up the socket! So, so; now, ye cup-bearers,

advance. The irons! take them; hold them while I fill!” Forthwith,

slowly going from one officer to the other, he brimmed the harpoon

sockets with the fiery waters from the pewter.

“Now, three to three, ye stand. Commend the murderous chalices! Bestow

them, ye who are now made parties to this indissoluble league. Ha!

Starbuck! but the deed is done! Yon ratifying sun now waits to sit upon

it. Drink, ye harpooneers! drink and swear, ye men that man the

deathful whaleboat’s bow—Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do

not hunt Moby Dick to his death!” The long, barbed steel goblets were

lifted; and to cries and maledictions against the white whale, the

spirits were simultaneously quaffed down with a hiss. Starbuck paled,

and turned, and shivered. Once more, and finally, the replenished

pewter went the rounds among the frantic crew; when, waving his free

hand to them, they all dispersed; and Ahab retired within his cabin.

CHAPTER 37. Sunset.

\_The cabin; by the stern windows; Ahab sitting alone, and gazing out\_.

I leave a white and turbid wake; pale waters, paler cheeks, where’er I

sail. The envious billows sidelong swell to whelm my track; let them;

but first I pass.

Yonder, by ever-brimming goblet’s rim, the warm waves blush like wine.

The gold brow plumbs the blue. The diver sun—slow dived from noon—goes

down; my soul mounts up! she wearies with her endless hill. Is, then,

the crown too heavy that I wear? this Iron Crown of Lombardy. Yet is it

bright with many a gem; I the wearer, see not its far flashings; but

darkly feel that I wear that, that dazzlingly confounds. ’Tis iron—that

I know—not gold. ’Tis split, too—that I feel; the jagged edge galls me

so, my brain seems to beat against the solid metal; aye, steel skull,

mine; the sort that needs no helmet in the most brain-battering fight!

Dry heat upon my brow? Oh! time was, when as the sunrise nobly spurred

me, so the sunset soothed. No more. This lovely light, it lights not

me; all loveliness is anguish to me, since I can ne’er enjoy. Gifted

with the high perception, I lack the low, enjoying power; damned, most

subtly and most malignantly! damned in the midst of Paradise! Good

night—good night! (\_waving his hand, he moves from the window\_.)

’Twas not so hard a task. I thought to find one stubborn, at the least;

but my one cogged circle fits into all their various wheels, and they

revolve. Or, if you will, like so many ant-hills of powder, they all

stand before me; and I their match. Oh, hard! that to fire others, the

match itself must needs be wasting! What I’ve dared, I’ve willed; and

what I’ve willed, I’ll do! They think me mad—Starbuck does; but I’m

demoniac, I am madness maddened! That wild madness that’s only calm to

comprehend itself! The prophecy was that I should be dismembered;

and—Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my

dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one. That’s

more than ye, ye great gods, ever were. I laugh and hoot at ye, ye

cricket-players, ye pugilists, ye deaf Burkes and blinded Bendigoes! I

will not say as schoolboys do to bullies—Take some one of your own

size; don’t pommel \_me!\_ No, ye’ve knocked me down, and I am up again;

but \_ye\_ have run and hidden. Come forth from behind your cotton bags!

I have no long gun to reach ye. Come, Ahab’s compliments to ye; come

and see if ye can swerve me. Swerve me? ye cannot swerve me, else ye

swerve yourselves! man has ye there. Swerve me? The path to my fixed

purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run.

Over unsounded gorges, through the rifled hearts of mountains, under

torrents’ beds, unerringly I rush! Naught’s an obstacle, naught’s an

angle to the iron way!

CHAPTER 38. Dusk.

\_By the Mainmast; Starbuck leaning against it\_.

My soul is more than matched; she’s overmanned; and by a madman!

Insufferable sting, that sanity should ground arms on such a field! But

he drilled deep down, and blasted all my reason out of me! I think I

see his impious end; but feel that I must help him to it. Will I, nill

I, the ineffable thing has tied me to him; tows me with a cable I have

no knife to cut. Horrible old man! Who’s over him, he cries;—aye, he

would be a democrat to all above; look, how he lords it over all below!

Oh! I plainly see my miserable office,—to obey, rebelling; and worse

yet, to hate with touch of pity! For in his eyes I read some lurid woe

would shrivel me up, had I it. Yet is there hope. Time and tide flow

wide. The hated whale has the round watery world to swim in, as the

small gold-fish has its glassy globe. His heaven-insulting purpose, God

may wedge aside. I would up heart, were it not like lead. But my whole

clock’s run down; my heart the all-controlling weight, I have no key to

lift again.

[\_A burst of revelry from the forecastle\_.]

Oh, God! to sail with such a heathen crew that have small touch of

human mothers in them! Whelped somewhere by the sharkish sea. The white

whale is their demigorgon. Hark! the infernal orgies! that revelry is

forward! mark the unfaltering silence aft! Methinks it pictures life.

Foremost through the sparkling sea shoots on the gay, embattled,

bantering bow, but only to drag dark Ahab after it, where he broods

within his sternward cabin, builded over the dead water of the wake,

and further on, hunted by its wolfish gurglings. The long howl thrills

me through! Peace! ye revellers, and set the watch! Oh, life! ’tis in

an hour like this, with soul beat down and held to knowledge,—as wild,

untutored things are forced to feed—Oh, life! ’tis now that I do feel

the latent horror in thee! but ’tis not me! that horror’s out of me!

and with the soft feeling of the human in me, yet will I try to fight

ye, ye grim, phantom futures! Stand by me, hold me, bind me, O ye

blessed influences!

CHAPTER 39. First Night-Watch.

Fore-Top.

(\_Stubb solus, and mending a brace\_.)

Ha! ha! ha! ha! hem! clear my throat!—I’ve been thinking over it ever

since, and that ha, ha’s the final consequence. Why so? Because a

laugh’s the wisest, easiest answer to all that’s queer; and come what

will, one comfort’s always left—that unfailing comfort is, it’s all

predestinated. I heard not all his talk with Starbuck; but to my poor

eye Starbuck then looked something as I the other evening felt. Be sure

the old Mogul has fixed him, too. I twigged it, knew it; had had the

gift, might readily have prophesied it—for when I clapped my eye upon

his skull I saw it. Well, Stubb, \_wise\_ Stubb—that’s my title—well,

Stubb, what of it, Stubb? Here’s a carcase. I know not all that may be

coming, but be it what it will, I’ll go to it laughing. Such a waggish

leering as lurks in all your horribles! I feel funny. Fa, la! lirra,

skirra! What’s my juicy little pear at home doing now? Crying its eyes

out?—Giving a party to the last arrived harpooneers, I dare say, gay as

a frigate’s pennant, and so am I—fa, la! lirra, skirra! Oh—

We’ll drink to-night with hearts as light, To love, as gay and fleeting

As bubbles that swim, on the beaker’s brim, And break on the lips while

meeting.

A brave stave that—who calls? Mr. Starbuck? Aye, aye, sir—(\_Aside\_)

he’s my superior, he has his too, if I’m not mistaken.—Aye, aye, sir,

just through with this job—coming.

CHAPTER 40. Midnight, Forecastle.

HARPOONEERS AND SAILORS.

(\_Foresail rises and discovers the watch standing, lounging, leaning,

and lying in various attitudes, all singing in chorus\_.)

Farewell and adieu to you, Spanish ladies! Farewell and adieu to you,

ladies of Spain! Our captain’s commanded.—

1ST NANTUCKET SAILOR. Oh, boys, don’t be sentimental; it’s bad for the

digestion! Take a tonic, follow me!

(\_Sings, and all follow.\_)

Our captain stood upon the deck, A spy-glass in his hand, A viewing of

those gallant whales That blew at every strand. Oh, your tubs in your

boats, my boys, And by your braces stand, And we’ll have one of those

fine whales, Hand, boys, over hand! So, be cheery, my lads! may your

hearts never fail! While the bold harpooner is striking the whale!

MATE’S VOICE FROM THE QUARTER-DECK. Eight bells there, forward!

2ND NANTUCKET SAILOR. Avast the chorus! Eight bells there! d’ye hear,

bell-boy? Strike the bell eight, thou Pip! thou blackling! and let me

call the watch. I’ve the sort of mouth for that—the hogshead mouth. So,

so, (\_thrusts his head down the scuttle\_,) Star-bo-l-e-e-n-s, a-h-o-y!

Eight bells there below! Tumble up!

DUTCH SAILOR. Grand snoozing to-night, maty; fat night for that. I mark

this in our old Mogul’s wine; it’s quite as deadening to some as

filliping to others. We sing; they sleep—aye, lie down there, like

ground-tier butts. At ’em again! There, take this copper-pump, and hail

’em through it. Tell ’em to avast dreaming of their lasses. Tell ’em

it’s the resurrection; they must kiss their last, and come to judgment.

That’s the way—\_that’s\_ it; thy throat ain’t spoiled with eating

Amsterdam butter.

FRENCH SAILOR. Hist, boys! let’s have a jig or two before we ride to

anchor in Blanket Bay. What say ye? There comes the other watch. Stand

by all legs! Pip! little Pip! hurrah with your tambourine!

PIP. (\_Sulky and sleepy.\_) Don’t know where it is.

FRENCH SAILOR. Beat thy belly, then, and wag thy ears. Jig it, men, I

say; merry’s the word; hurrah! Damn me, won’t you dance? Form, now,

Indian-file, and gallop into the double-shuffle? Throw yourselves!

Legs! legs!

ICELAND SAILOR. I don’t like your floor, maty; it’s too springy to my

taste. I’m used to ice-floors. I’m sorry to throw cold water on the

subject; but excuse me.

MALTESE SAILOR. Me too; where’s your girls? Who but a fool would take

his left hand by his right, and say to himself, how d’ye do? Partners!

I must have partners!

SICILIAN SAILOR. Aye; girls and a green!—then I’ll hop with ye; yea,

turn grasshopper!

LONG-ISLAND SAILOR. Well, well, ye sulkies, there’s plenty more of us.

Hoe corn when you may, say I. All legs go to harvest soon. Ah! here

comes the music; now for it!

AZORE SAILOR. (\_Ascending, and pitching the tambourine up the

scuttle\_.) Here you are, Pip; and there’s the windlass-bitts; up you

mount! Now, boys! (\_The half of them dance to the tambourine; some go

below; some sleep or lie among the coils of rigging. Oaths a-plenty\_.)

AZORE SAILOR. (\_Dancing\_) Go it, Pip! Bang it, bell-boy! Rig it, dig

it, stig it, quig it, bell-boy! Make fire-flies; break the jinglers!

PIP. Jinglers, you say?—there goes another, dropped off; I pound it so.

CHINA SAILOR. Rattle thy teeth, then, and pound away; make a pagoda of

thyself.

FRENCH SAILOR. Merry-mad! Hold up thy hoop, Pip, till I jump through

it! Split jibs! tear yourselves!

TASHTEGO. (\_Quietly smoking.\_) That’s a white man; he calls that fun:

humph! I save my sweat.

OLD MANX SAILOR. I wonder whether those jolly lads bethink them of what

they are dancing over. I’ll dance over your grave, I will—that’s the

bitterest threat of your night-women, that beat head-winds round

corners. O Christ! to think of the green navies and the green-skulled

crews! Well, well; belike the whole world’s a ball, as you scholars

have it; and so ’tis right to make one ballroom of it. Dance on, lads,

you’re young; I was once.

3D NANTUCKET SAILOR. Spell oh!—whew! this is worse than pulling after

whales in a calm—give us a whiff, Tash.

(\_They cease dancing, and gather in clusters. Meantime the sky

darkens—the wind rises\_.)

LASCAR SAILOR. By Brahma! boys, it’ll be douse sail soon. The sky-born,

high-tide Ganges turned to wind! Thou showest thy black brow, Seeva!

MALTESE SAILOR. (\_Reclining and shaking his cap\_.) It’s the waves—the

snow’s caps turn to jig it now. They’ll shake their tassels soon. Now

would all the waves were women, then I’d go drown, and chassee with

them evermore! There’s naught so sweet on earth—heaven may not match

it!—as those swift glances of warm, wild bosoms in the dance, when the

over-arboring arms hide such ripe, bursting grapes.

SICILIAN SAILOR. (\_Reclining\_.) Tell me not of it! Hark ye, lad—fleet

interlacings of the limbs—lithe swayings—coyings—flutterings! lip!

heart! hip! all graze: unceasing touch and go! not taste, observe ye,

else come satiety. Eh, Pagan? (\_Nudging\_.)

TAHITAN SAILOR. (\_Reclining on a mat\_.) Hail, holy nakedness of our

dancing girls!—the Heeva-Heeva! Ah! low veiled, high palmed Tahiti! I

still rest me on thy mat, but the soft soil has slid! I saw thee woven

in the wood, my mat! green the first day I brought ye thence; now worn

and wilted quite. Ah me!—not thou nor I can bear the change! How then,

if so be transplanted to yon sky? Hear I the roaring streams from

Pirohitee’s peak of spears, when they leap down the crags and drown the

villages?—The blast! the blast! Up, spine, and meet it! (\_Leaps to his

feet\_.)

PORTUGUESE SAILOR. How the sea rolls swashing ’gainst the side! Stand

by for reefing, hearties! the winds are just crossing swords, pell-mell

they’ll go lunging presently.

DANISH SAILOR. Crack, crack, old ship! so long as thou crackest, thou

holdest! Well done! The mate there holds ye to it stiffly. He’s no more

afraid than the isle fort at Cattegat, put there to fight the Baltic

with storm-lashed guns, on which the sea-salt cakes!

4TH NANTUCKET SAILOR. He has his orders, mind ye that. I heard old Ahab

tell him he must always kill a squall, something as they burst a

waterspout with a pistol—fire your ship right into it!

ENGLISH SAILOR. Blood! but that old man’s a grand old cove! We are the

lads to hunt him up his whale!

ALL. Aye! aye!

OLD MANX SAILOR. How the three pines shake! Pines are the hardest sort

of tree to live when shifted to any other soil, and here there’s none

but the crew’s cursed clay. Steady, helmsman! steady. This is the sort

of weather when brave hearts snap ashore, and keeled hulls split at

sea. Our captain has his birthmark; look yonder, boys, there’s another

in the sky—lurid-like, ye see, all else pitch black.

DAGGOO. What of that? Who’s afraid of black’s afraid of me! I’m

quarried out of it!

SPANISH SAILOR. (\_Aside\_.) He wants to bully, ah!—the old grudge makes

me touchy (\_Advancing\_.) Aye, harpooneer, thy race is the undeniable

dark side of mankind—devilish dark at that. No offence.

DAGGOO (\_grimly\_). None.

ST. JAGO’S SAILOR. That Spaniard’s mad or drunk. But that can’t be, or

else in his one case our old Mogul’s fire-waters are somewhat long in

working.

5TH NANTUCKET SAILOR. What’s that I saw—lightning? Yes.

SPANISH SAILOR. No; Daggoo showing his teeth.

DAGGOO (\_springing\_). Swallow thine, mannikin! White skin, white liver!

SPANISH SAILOR (\_meeting him\_). Knife thee heartily! big frame, small

spirit!

ALL. A row! a row! a row!

TASHTEGO (\_with a whiff\_). A row a’low, and a row aloft—Gods and

men—both brawlers! Humph!

BELFAST SAILOR. A row! arrah a row! The Virgin be blessed, a row!

Plunge in with ye!

ENGLISH SAILOR. Fair play! Snatch the Spaniard’s knife! A ring, a ring!

OLD MANX SAILOR. Ready formed. There! the ringed horizon. In that ring

Cain struck Abel. Sweet work, right work! No? Why then, God, mad’st

thou the ring?

MATE’S VOICE FROM THE QUARTER-DECK. Hands by the halyards! in

top-gallant sails! Stand by to reef topsails!

ALL. The squall! the squall! jump, my jollies! (\_They scatter\_.)

PIP (\_shrinking under the windlass\_). Jollies? Lord help such jollies!

Crish, crash! there goes the jib-stay! Blang-whang! God! Duck lower,

Pip, here comes the royal yard! It’s worse than being in the whirled

woods, the last day of the year! Who’d go climbing after chestnuts now?

But there they go, all cursing, and here I don’t. Fine prospects to

’em; they’re on the road to heaven. Hold on hard! Jimmini, what a

squall! But those chaps there are worse yet—they are your white

squalls, they. White squalls? white whale, shirr! shirr! Here have I

heard all their chat just now, and the white whale—shirr! shirr!—but

spoken of once! and only this evening—it makes me jingle all over like

my tambourine—that anaconda of an old man swore ’em in to hunt him! Oh,

thou big white God aloft there somewhere in yon darkness, have mercy on

this small black boy down here; preserve him from all men that have no

bowels to feel fear!

CHAPTER 41. Moby Dick.

I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest;

my oath had been welded with theirs; and stronger I shouted, and more

did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A

wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab’s quenchless feud

seemed mine. With greedy ears I learned the history of that murderous

monster against whom I and all the others had taken our oaths of

violence and revenge.

For some time past, though at intervals only, the unaccompanied,

secluded White Whale had haunted those uncivilized seas mostly

frequented by the Sperm Whale fishermen. But not all of them knew of

his existence; only a few of them, comparatively, had knowingly seen

him; while the number who as yet had actually and knowingly given

battle to him, was small indeed. For, owing to the large number of

whale-cruisers; the disorderly way they were sprinkled over the entire

watery circumference, many of them adventurously pushing their quest

along solitary latitudes, so as seldom or never for a whole twelvemonth

or more on a stretch, to encounter a single news-telling sail of any

sort; the inordinate length of each separate voyage; the irregularity

of the times of sailing from home; all these, with other circumstances,

direct and indirect, long obstructed the spread through the whole

world-wide whaling-fleet of the special individualizing tidings

concerning Moby Dick. It was hardly to be doubted, that several vessels

reported to have encountered, at such or such a time, or on such or

such a meridian, a Sperm Whale of uncommon magnitude and malignity,

which whale, after doing great mischief to his assailants, had

completely escaped them; to some minds it was not an unfair

presumption, I say, that the whale in question must have been no other

than Moby Dick. Yet as of late the Sperm Whale fishery had been marked

by various and not unfrequent instances of great ferocity, cunning, and

malice in the monster attacked; therefore it was, that those who by

accident ignorantly gave battle to Moby Dick; such hunters, perhaps,

for the most part, were content to ascribe the peculiar terror he bred,

more, as it were, to the perils of the Sperm Whale fishery at large,

than to the individual cause. In that way, mostly, the disastrous

encounter between Ahab and the whale had hitherto been popularly

regarded.

And as for those who, previously hearing of the White Whale, by chance

caught sight of him; in the beginning of the thing they had every one

of them, almost, as boldly and fearlessly lowered for him, as for any

other whale of that species. But at length, such calamities did ensue

in these assaults—not restricted to sprained wrists and ankles, broken

limbs, or devouring amputations—but fatal to the last degree of

fatality; those repeated disastrous repulses, all accumulating and

piling their terrors upon Moby Dick; those things had gone far to shake

the fortitude of many brave hunters, to whom the story of the White

Whale had eventually come.

Nor did wild rumors of all sorts fail to exaggerate, and still the more

horrify the true histories of these deadly encounters. For not only do

fabulous rumors naturally grow out of the very body of all surprising

terrible events,—as the smitten tree gives birth to its fungi; but, in

maritime life, far more than in that of terra firma, wild rumors

abound, wherever there is any adequate reality for them to cling to.

And as the sea surpasses the land in this matter, so the whale fishery

surpasses every other sort of maritime life, in the wonderfulness and

fearfulness of the rumors which sometimes circulate there. For not only

are whalemen as a body unexempt from that ignorance and

superstitiousness hereditary to all sailors; but of all sailors, they

are by all odds the most directly brought into contact with whatever is

appallingly astonishing in the sea; face to face they not only eye its

greatest marvels, but, hand to jaw, give battle to them. Alone, in such

remotest waters, that though you sailed a thousand miles, and passed a

thousand shores, you would not come to any chiseled hearth-stone, or

aught hospitable beneath that part of the sun; in such latitudes and

longitudes, pursuing too such a calling as he does, the whaleman is

wrapped by influences all tending to make his fancy pregnant with many

a mighty birth.

No wonder, then, that ever gathering volume from the mere transit over

the widest watery spaces, the outblown rumors of the White Whale did in

the end incorporate with themselves all manner of morbid hints, and

half-formed fœtal suggestions of supernatural agencies, which

eventually invested Moby Dick with new terrors unborrowed from anything

that visibly appears. So that in many cases such a panic did he finally

strike, that few who by those rumors, at least, had heard of the White

Whale, few of those hunters were willing to encounter the perils of his

jaw.

But there were still other and more vital practical influences at work.

Not even at the present day has the original prestige of the Sperm

Whale, as fearfully distinguished from all other species of the

leviathan, died out of the minds of the whalemen as a body. There are

those this day among them, who, though intelligent and courageous

enough in offering battle to the Greenland or Right whale, would

perhaps—either from professional inexperience, or incompetency, or

timidity, decline a contest with the Sperm Whale; at any rate, there

are plenty of whalemen, especially among those whaling nations not

sailing under the American flag, who have never hostilely encountered

the Sperm Whale, but whose sole knowledge of the leviathan is

restricted to the ignoble monster primitively pursued in the North;

seated on their hatches, these men will hearken with a childish

fireside interest and awe, to the wild, strange tales of Southern

whaling. Nor is the pre-eminent tremendousness of the great Sperm Whale

anywhere more feelingly comprehended, than on board of those prows

which stem him.

And as if the now tested reality of his might had in former legendary

times thrown its shadow before it; we find some book

naturalists—Olassen and Povelson—declaring the Sperm Whale not only to

be a consternation to every other creature in the sea, but also to be

so incredibly ferocious as continually to be athirst for human blood.

Nor even down to so late a time as Cuvier’s, were these or almost

similar impressions effaced. For in his Natural History, the Baron

himself affirms that at sight of the Sperm Whale, all fish (sharks

included) are “struck with the most lively terrors,” and “often in the

precipitancy of their flight dash themselves against the rocks with

such violence as to cause instantaneous death.” And however the general

experiences in the fishery may amend such reports as these; yet in

their full terribleness, even to the bloodthirsty item of Povelson, the

superstitious belief in them is, in some vicissitudes of their

vocation, revived in the minds of the hunters.

So that overawed by the rumors and portents concerning him, not a few

of the fishermen recalled, in reference to Moby Dick, the earlier days

of the Sperm Whale fishery, when it was oftentimes hard to induce long

practised Right whalemen to embark in the perils of this new and daring

warfare; such men protesting that although other leviathans might be

hopefully pursued, yet to chase and point lance at such an apparition

as the Sperm Whale was not for mortal man. That to attempt it, would be

inevitably to be torn into a quick eternity. On this head, there are

some remarkable documents that may be consulted.

Nevertheless, some there were, who even in the face of these things

were ready to give chase to Moby Dick; and a still greater number who,

chancing only to hear of him distantly and vaguely, without the

specific details of any certain calamity, and without superstitious

accompaniments, were sufficiently hardy not to flee from the battle if

offered.

One of the wild suggestions referred to, as at last coming to be linked

with the White Whale in the minds of the superstitiously inclined, was

the unearthly conceit that Moby Dick was ubiquitous; that he had

actually been encountered in opposite latitudes at one and the same

instant of time.

Nor, credulous as such minds must have been, was this conceit

altogether without some faint show of superstitious probability. For as

the secrets of the currents in the seas have never yet been divulged,

even to the most erudite research; so the hidden ways of the Sperm

Whale when beneath the surface remain, in great part, unaccountable to

his pursuers; and from time to time have originated the most curious

and contradictory speculations regarding them, especially concerning

the mystic modes whereby, after sounding to a great depth, he

transports himself with such vast swiftness to the most widely distant

points.

It is a thing well known to both American and English whale-ships, and

as well a thing placed upon authoritative record years ago by Scoresby,

that some whales have been captured far north in the Pacific, in whose

bodies have been found the barbs of harpoons darted in the Greenland

seas. Nor is it to be gainsaid, that in some of these instances it has

been declared that the interval of time between the two assaults could

not have exceeded very many days. Hence, by inference, it has been

believed by some whalemen, that the Nor’ West Passage, so long a

problem to man, was never a problem to the whale. So that here, in the

real living experience of living men, the prodigies related in old

times of the inland Strello mountain in Portugal (near whose top there

was said to be a lake in which the wrecks of ships floated up to the

surface); and that still more wonderful story of the Arethusa fountain

near Syracuse (whose waters were believed to have come from the Holy

Land by an underground passage); these fabulous narrations are almost

fully equalled by the realities of the whalemen.

Forced into familiarity, then, with such prodigies as these; and

knowing that after repeated, intrepid assaults, the White Whale had

escaped alive; it cannot be much matter of surprise that some whalemen

should go still further in their superstitions; declaring Moby Dick not

only ubiquitous, but immortal (for immortality is but ubiquity in

time); that though groves of spears should be planted in his flanks, he

would still swim away unharmed; or if indeed he should ever be made to

spout thick blood, such a sight would be but a ghastly deception; for

again in unensanguined billows hundreds of leagues away, his unsullied

jet would once more be seen.

But even stripped of these supernatural surmisings, there was enough in

the earthly make and incontestable character of the monster to strike

the imagination with unwonted power. For, it was not so much his

uncommon bulk that so much distinguished him from other sperm whales,

but, as was elsewhere thrown out—a peculiar snow-white wrinkled

forehead, and a high, pyramidical white hump. These were his prominent

features; the tokens whereby, even in the limitless, uncharted seas, he

revealed his identity, at a long distance, to those who knew him.

The rest of his body was so streaked, and spotted, and marbled with the

same shrouded hue, that, in the end, he had gained his distinctive

appellation of the White Whale; a name, indeed, literally justified by

his vivid aspect, when seen gliding at high noon through a dark blue

sea, leaving a milky-way wake of creamy foam, all spangled with golden

gleamings.

Nor was it his unwonted magnitude, nor his remarkable hue, nor yet his

deformed lower jaw, that so much invested the whale with natural

terror, as that unexampled, intelligent malignity which, according to

specific accounts, he had over and over again evinced in his assaults.

More than all, his treacherous retreats struck more of dismay than

perhaps aught else. For, when swimming before his exulting pursuers,

with every apparent symptom of alarm, he had several times been known

to turn round suddenly, and, bearing down upon them, either stave their

boats to splinters, or drive them back in consternation to their ship.

Already several fatalities had attended his chase. But though similar

disasters, however little bruited ashore, were by no means unusual in

the fishery; yet, in most instances, such seemed the White Whale’s

infernal aforethought of ferocity, that every dismembering or death

that he caused, was not wholly regarded as having been inflicted by an

unintelligent agent.

Judge, then, to what pitches of inflamed, distracted fury the minds of

his more desperate hunters were impelled, when amid the chips of chewed

boats, and the sinking limbs of torn comrades, they swam out of the

white curds of the whale’s direful wrath into the serene, exasperating

sunlight, that smiled on, as if at a birth or a bridal.

His three boats stove around him, and oars and men both whirling in the

eddies; one captain, seizing the line-knife from his broken prow, had

dashed at the whale, as an Arkansas duellist at his foe, blindly

seeking with a six inch blade to reach the fathom-deep life of the

whale. That captain was Ahab. And then it was, that suddenly sweeping

his sickle-shaped lower jaw beneath him, Moby Dick had reaped away

Ahab’s leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field. No turbaned Turk,

no hired Venetian or Malay, could have smote him with more seeming

malice. Small reason was there to doubt, then, that ever since that

almost fatal encounter, Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness

against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness

he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but

all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White Whale swam

before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious

agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left

living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity

which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern

Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of

the east reverenced in their statue devil;—Ahab did not fall down and

worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the

abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All

that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things;

all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the

brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy

Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby

Dick. He piled upon the whale’s white hump the sum of all the general

rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if

his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart’s shell upon it.

It is not probable that this monomania in him took its instant rise at

the precise time of his bodily dismemberment. Then, in darting at the

monster, knife in hand, he had but given loose to a sudden, passionate,

corporal animosity; and when he received the stroke that tore him, he

probably but felt the agonizing bodily laceration, but nothing more.

Yet, when by this collision forced to turn towards home, and for long

months of days and weeks, Ahab and anguish lay stretched together in

one hammock, rounding in mid winter that dreary, howling Patagonian

Cape; then it was, that his torn body and gashed soul bled into one

another; and so interfusing, made him mad. That it was only then, on

the homeward voyage, after the encounter, that the final monomania

seized him, seems all but certain from the fact that, at intervals

during the passage, he was a raving lunatic; and, though unlimbed of a

leg, yet such vital strength yet lurked in his Egyptian chest, and was

moreover intensified by his delirium, that his mates were forced to

lace him fast, even there, as he sailed, raving in his hammock. In a

strait-jacket, he swung to the mad rockings of the gales. And, when

running into more sufferable latitudes, the ship, with mild stun’sails

spread, floated across the tranquil tropics, and, to all appearances,

the old man’s delirium seemed left behind him with the Cape Horn

swells, and he came forth from his dark den into the blessed light and

air; even then, when he bore that firm, collected front, however pale,

and issued his calm orders once again; and his mates thanked God the

direful madness was now gone; even then, Ahab, in his hidden self,

raved on. Human madness is oftentimes a cunning and most feline thing.

When you think it fled, it may have but become transfigured into some

still subtler form. Ahab’s full lunacy subsided not, but deepeningly

contracted; like the unabated Hudson, when that noble Northman flows

narrowly, but unfathomably through the Highland gorge. But, as in his

narrow-flowing monomania, not one jot of Ahab’s broad madness had been

left behind; so in that broad madness, not one jot of his great natural

intellect had perished. That before living agent, now became the living

instrument. If such a furious trope may stand, his special lunacy

stormed his general sanity, and carried it, and turned all its

concentred cannon upon its own mad mark; so that far from having lost

his strength, Ahab, to that one end, did now possess a thousand fold

more potency than ever he had sanely brought to bear upon any one

reasonable object.

This is much; yet Ahab’s larger, darker, deeper part remains unhinted.

But vain to popularize profundities, and all truth is profound. Winding

far down from within the very heart of this spiked Hotel de Cluny where

we here stand—however grand and wonderful, now quit it;—and take your

way, ye nobler, sadder souls, to those vast Roman halls of Thermes;

where far beneath the fantastic towers of man’s upper earth, his root

of grandeur, his whole awful essence sits in bearded state; an antique

buried beneath antiquities, and throned on torsoes! So with a broken

throne, the great gods mock that captive king; so like a Caryatid, he

patient sits, upholding on his frozen brow the piled entablatures of

ages. Wind ye down there, ye prouder, sadder souls! question that

proud, sad king! A family likeness! aye, he did beget ye, ye young

exiled royalties; and from your grim sire only will the old

State-secret come.

Now, in his heart, Ahab had some glimpse of this, namely: all my means

are sane, my motive and my object mad. Yet without power to kill, or

change, or shun the fact; he likewise knew that to mankind he did long

dissemble; in some sort, did still. But that thing of his dissembling

was only subject to his perceptibility, not to his will determinate.

Nevertheless, so well did he succeed in that dissembling, that when

with ivory leg he stepped ashore at last, no Nantucketer thought him

otherwise than but naturally grieved, and that to the quick, with the

terrible casualty which had overtaken him.

The report of his undeniable delirium at sea was likewise popularly

ascribed to a kindred cause. And so too, all the added moodiness which

always afterwards, to the very day of sailing in the Pequod on the

present voyage, sat brooding on his brow. Nor is it so very unlikely,

that far from distrusting his fitness for another whaling voyage, on

account of such dark symptoms, the calculating people of that prudent

isle were inclined to harbor the conceit, that for those very reasons

he was all the better qualified and set on edge, for a pursuit so full

of rage and wildness as the bloody hunt of whales. Gnawed within and

scorched without, with the infixed, unrelenting fangs of some incurable

idea; such an one, could he be found, would seem the very man to dart

his iron and lift his lance against the most appalling of all brutes.

Or, if for any reason thought to be corporeally incapacitated for that,

yet such an one would seem superlatively competent to cheer and howl on

his underlings to the attack. But be all this as it may, certain it is,

that with the mad secret of his unabated rage bolted up and keyed in

him, Ahab had purposely sailed upon the present voyage with the one

only and all-engrossing object of hunting the White Whale. Had any one

of his old acquaintances on shore but half dreamed of what was lurking

in him then, how soon would their aghast and righteous souls have

wrenched the ship from such a fiendish man! They were bent on

profitable cruises, the profit to be counted down in dollars from the

mint. He was intent on an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural

revenge.

Here, then, was this grey-headed, ungodly old man, chasing with curses

a Job’s whale round the world, at the head of a crew, too, chiefly made

up of mongrel renegades, and castaways, and cannibals—morally enfeebled

also, by the incompetence of mere unaided virtue or right-mindedness in

Starbuck, the invulnerable jollity of indifference and recklessness in

Stubb, and the pervading mediocrity in Flask. Such a crew, so

officered, seemed specially picked and packed by some infernal fatality

to help him to his monomaniac revenge. How it was that they so

aboundingly responded to the old man’s ire—by what evil magic their

souls were possessed, that at times his hate seemed almost theirs; the

White Whale as much their insufferable foe as his; how all this came to

be—what the White Whale was to them, or how to their unconscious

understandings, also, in some dim, unsuspected way, he might have

seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life,—all this to

explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go. The subterranean

miner that works in us all, how can one tell whither leads his shaft by

the ever shifting, muffled sound of his pick? Who does not feel the

irresistible arm drag? What skiff in tow of a seventy-four can stand

still? For one, I gave myself up to the abandonment of the time and the

place; but while yet all a-rush to encounter the whale, could see

naught in that brute but the deadliest ill.

CHAPTER 42. The Whiteness of the Whale.

What the white whale was to Ahab, has been hinted; what, at times, he

was to me, as yet remains unsaid.

Aside from those more obvious considerations touching Moby Dick, which

could not but occasionally awaken in any man’s soul some alarm, there

was another thought, or rather vague, nameless horror concerning him,

which at times by its intensity completely overpowered all the rest;

and yet so mystical and well nigh ineffable was it, that I almost

despair of putting it in a comprehensible form. It was the whiteness of

the whale that above all things appalled me. But how can I hope to

explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I

must, else all these chapters might be naught.

Though in many natural objects, whiteness refiningly enhances beauty,

as if imparting some special virtue of its own, as in marbles,

japonicas, and pearls; and though various nations have in some way

recognised a certain royal preeminence in this hue; even the barbaric,

grand old kings of Pegu placing the title “Lord of the White Elephants”

above all their other magniloquent ascriptions of dominion; and the

modern kings of Siam unfurling the same snow-white quadruped in the

royal standard; and the Hanoverian flag bearing the one figure of a

snow-white charger; and the great Austrian Empire, Cæsarian, heir to

overlording Rome, having for the imperial colour the same imperial hue;

and though this pre-eminence in it applies to the human race itself,

giving the white man ideal mastership over every dusky tribe; and

though, besides, all this, whiteness has been even made significant of

gladness, for among the Romans a white stone marked a joyful day; and

though in other mortal sympathies and symbolizings, this same hue is

made the emblem of many touching, noble things—the innocence of brides,

the benignity of age; though among the Red Men of America the giving of

the white belt of wampum was the deepest pledge of honor; though in

many climes, whiteness typifies the majesty of Justice in the ermine of

the Judge, and contributes to the daily state of kings and queens drawn

by milk-white steeds; though even in the higher mysteries of the most

august religions it has been made the symbol of the divine spotlessness

and power; by the Persian fire worshippers, the white forked flame

being held the holiest on the altar; and in the Greek mythologies,

Great Jove himself being made incarnate in a snow-white bull; and

though to the noble Iroquois, the midwinter sacrifice of the sacred

White Dog was by far the holiest festival of their theology, that

spotless, faithful creature being held the purest envoy they could send

to the Great Spirit with the annual tidings of their own fidelity; and

though directly from the Latin word for white, all Christian priests

derive the name of one part of their sacred vesture, the alb or tunic,

worn beneath the cassock; and though among the holy pomps of the Romish

faith, white is specially employed in the celebration of the Passion of

our Lord; though in the Vision of St. John, white robes are given to

the redeemed, and the four-and-twenty elders stand clothed in white

before the great white throne, and the Holy One that sitteth there

white like wool; yet for all these accumulated associations, with

whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an

elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more

of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood.

This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when

divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object

terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds.

Witness the white bear of the poles, and the white shark of the

tropics; what but their smooth, flaky whiteness makes them the

transcendent horrors they are? That ghastly whiteness it is which

imparts such an abhorrent mildness, even more loathsome than terrific,

to the dumb gloating of their aspect. So that not the fierce-fanged

tiger in his heraldic coat can so stagger courage as the white-shrouded

bear or shark.\*

\*With reference to the Polar bear, it may possibly be urged by him who

would fain go still deeper into this matter, that it is not the

whiteness, separately regarded, which heightens the intolerable

hideousness of that brute; for, analysed, that heightened hideousness,

it might be said, only rises from the circumstance, that the

irresponsible ferociousness of the creature stands invested in the

fleece of celestial innocence and love; and hence, by bringing together

two such opposite emotions in our minds, the Polar bear frightens us

with so unnatural a contrast. But even assuming all this to be true;

yet, were it not for the whiteness, you would not have that intensified

terror.

As for the white shark, the white gliding ghostliness of repose in that

creature, when beheld in his ordinary moods, strangely tallies with the

same quality in the Polar quadruped. This peculiarity is most vividly

hit by the French in the name they bestow upon that fish. The Romish

mass for the dead begins with “Requiem eternam” (eternal rest), whence

\_Requiem\_ denominating the mass itself, and any other funeral music.

Now, in allusion to the white, silent stillness of death in this shark,

and the mild deadliness of his habits, the French call him \_Requin\_.

Bethink thee of the albatross, whence come those clouds of spiritual

wonderment and pale dread, in which that white phantom sails in all

imaginations? Not Coleridge first threw that spell; but God’s great,

unflattering laureate, Nature.\*

\*I remember the first albatross I ever saw. It was during a prolonged

gale, in waters hard upon the Antarctic seas. From my forenoon watch

below, I ascended to the overclouded deck; and there, dashed upon the

main hatches, I saw a regal, feathery thing of unspotted whiteness, and

with a hooked, Roman bill sublime. At intervals, it arched forth its

vast archangel wings, as if to embrace some holy ark. Wondrous

flutterings and throbbings shook it. Though bodily unharmed, it uttered

cries, as some king’s ghost in supernatural distress. Through its

inexpressible, strange eyes, methought I peeped to secrets which took

hold of God. As Abraham before the angels, I bowed myself; the white

thing was so white, its wings so wide, and in those for ever exiled

waters, I had lost the miserable warping memories of traditions and of

towns. Long I gazed at that prodigy of plumage. I cannot tell, can only

hint, the things that darted through me then. But at last I awoke; and

turning, asked a sailor what bird was this. A goney, he replied. Goney!

never had heard that name before; is it conceivable that this glorious

thing is utterly unknown to men ashore! never! But some time after, I

learned that goney was some seaman’s name for albatross. So that by no

possibility could Coleridge’s wild Rhyme have had aught to do with

those mystical impressions which were mine, when I saw that bird upon

our deck. For neither had I then read the Rhyme, nor knew the bird to

be an albatross. Yet, in saying this, I do but indirectly burnish a

little brighter the noble merit of the poem and the poet.

I assert, then, that in the wondrous bodily whiteness of the bird

chiefly lurks the secret of the spell; a truth the more evinced in

this, that by a solecism of terms there are birds called grey

albatrosses; and these I have frequently seen, but never with such

emotions as when I beheld the Antarctic fowl.

But how had the mystic thing been caught? Whisper it not, and I will

tell; with a treacherous hook and line, as the fowl floated on the sea.

At last the Captain made a postman of it; tying a lettered, leathern

tally round its neck, with the ship’s time and place; and then letting

it escape. But I doubt not, that leathern tally, meant for man, was

taken off in Heaven, when the white fowl flew to join the wing-folding,

the invoking, and adoring cherubim!

Most famous in our Western annals and Indian traditions is that of the

White Steed of the Prairies; a magnificent milk-white charger,

large-eyed, small-headed, bluff-chested, and with the dignity of a

thousand monarchs in his lofty, overscorning carriage. He was the

elected Xerxes of vast herds of wild horses, whose pastures in those

days were only fenced by the Rocky Mountains and the Alleghanies. At

their flaming head he westward trooped it like that chosen star which

every evening leads on the hosts of light. The flashing cascade of his

mane, the curving comet of his tail, invested him with housings more

resplendent than gold and silver-beaters could have furnished him. A

most imperial and archangelical apparition of that unfallen, western

world, which to the eyes of the old trappers and hunters revived the

glories of those primeval times when Adam walked majestic as a god,

bluff-browed and fearless as this mighty steed. Whether marching amid

his aides and marshals in the van of countless cohorts that endlessly

streamed it over the plains, like an Ohio; or whether with his

circumambient subjects browsing all around at the horizon, the White

Steed gallopingly reviewed them with warm nostrils reddening through

his cool milkiness; in whatever aspect he presented himself, always to

the bravest Indians he was the object of trembling reverence and awe.

Nor can it be questioned from what stands on legendary record of this

noble horse, that it was his spiritual whiteness chiefly, which so

clothed him with divineness; and that this divineness had that in it

which, though commanding worship, at the same time enforced a certain

nameless terror.

But there are other instances where this whiteness loses all that

accessory and strange glory which invests it in the White Steed and

Albatross.

What is it that in the Albino man so peculiarly repels and often shocks

the eye, as that sometimes he is loathed by his own kith and kin! It is

that whiteness which invests him, a thing expressed by the name he

bears. The Albino is as well made as other men—has no substantive

deformity—and yet this mere aspect of all-pervading whiteness makes him

more strangely hideous than the ugliest abortion. Why should this be

so?

Nor, in quite other aspects, does Nature in her least palpable but not

the less malicious agencies, fail to enlist among her forces this

crowning attribute of the terrible. From its snowy aspect, the

gauntleted ghost of the Southern Seas has been denominated the White

Squall. Nor, in some historic instances, has the art of human malice

omitted so potent an auxiliary. How wildly it heightens the effect of

that passage in Froissart, when, masked in the snowy symbol of their

faction, the desperate White Hoods of Ghent murder their bailiff in the

market-place!

Nor, in some things, does the common, hereditary experience of all

mankind fail to bear witness to the supernaturalism of this hue. It

cannot well be doubted, that the one visible quality in the aspect of

the dead which most appals the gazer, is the marble pallor lingering

there; as if indeed that pallor were as much like the badge of

consternation in the other world, as of mortal trepidation here. And

from that pallor of the dead, we borrow the expressive hue of the

shroud in which we wrap them. Nor even in our superstitions do we fail

to throw the same snowy mantle round our phantoms; all ghosts rising in

a milk-white fog—Yea, while these terrors seize us, let us add, that

even the king of terrors, when personified by the evangelist, rides on

his pallid horse.

Therefore, in his other moods, symbolize whatever grand or gracious

thing he will by whiteness, no man can deny that in its profoundest

idealized significance it calls up a peculiar apparition to the soul.

But though without dissent this point be fixed, how is mortal man to

account for it? To analyse it, would seem impossible. Can we, then, by

the citation of some of those instances wherein this thing of

whiteness—though for the time either wholly or in great part stripped

of all direct associations calculated to impart to it aught fearful,

but nevertheless, is found to exert over us the same sorcery, however

modified;—can we thus hope to light upon some chance clue to conduct us

to the hidden cause we seek?

Let us try. But in a matter like this, subtlety appeals to subtlety,

and without imagination no man can follow another into these halls. And

though, doubtless, some at least of the imaginative impressions about

to be presented may have been shared by most men, yet few perhaps were

entirely conscious of them at the time, and therefore may not be able

to recall them now.

Why to the man of untutored ideality, who happens to be but loosely

acquainted with the peculiar character of the day, does the bare

mention of Whitsuntide marshal in the fancy such long, dreary,

speechless processions of slow-pacing pilgrims, down-cast and hooded

with new-fallen snow? Or, to the unread, unsophisticated Protestant of

the Middle American States, why does the passing mention of a White

Friar or a White Nun, evoke such an eyeless statue in the soul?

Or what is there apart from the traditions of dungeoned warriors and

kings (which will not wholly account for it) that makes the White Tower

of London tell so much more strongly on the imagination of an

untravelled American, than those other storied structures, its

neighbors—the Byward Tower, or even the Bloody? And those sublimer

towers, the White Mountains of New Hampshire, whence, in peculiar

moods, comes that gigantic ghostliness over the soul at the bare

mention of that name, while the thought of Virginia’s Blue Ridge is

full of a soft, dewy, distant dreaminess? Or why, irrespective of all

latitudes and longitudes, does the name of the White Sea exert such a

spectralness over the fancy, while that of the Yellow Sea lulls us with

mortal thoughts of long lacquered mild afternoons on the waves,

followed by the gaudiest and yet sleepiest of sunsets? Or, to choose a

wholly unsubstantial instance, purely addressed to the fancy, why, in

reading the old fairy tales of Central Europe, does “the tall pale man”

of the Hartz forests, whose changeless pallor unrustlingly glides

through the green of the groves—why is this phantom more terrible than

all the whooping imps of the Blocksburg?

Nor is it, altogether, the remembrance of her cathedral-toppling

earthquakes; nor the stampedoes of her frantic seas; nor the

tearlessness of arid skies that never rain; nor the sight of her wide

field of leaning spires, wrenched cope-stones, and crosses all adroop

(like canted yards of anchored fleets); and her suburban avenues of

house-walls lying over upon each other, as a tossed pack of cards;—it

is not these things alone which make tearless Lima, the strangest,

saddest city thou can’st see. For Lima has taken the white veil; and

there is a higher horror in this whiteness of her woe. Old as Pizarro,

this whiteness keeps her ruins for ever new; admits not the cheerful

greenness of complete decay; spreads over her broken ramparts the rigid

pallor of an apoplexy that fixes its own distortions.

I know that, to the common apprehension, this phenomenon of whiteness

is not confessed to be the prime agent in exaggerating the terror of

objects otherwise terrible; nor to the unimaginative mind is there

aught of terror in those appearances whose awfulness to another mind

almost solely consists in this one phenomenon, especially when

exhibited under any form at all approaching to muteness or

universality. What I mean by these two statements may perhaps be

respectively elucidated by the following examples.

First: The mariner, when drawing nigh the coasts of foreign lands, if

by night he hear the roar of breakers, starts to vigilance, and feels

just enough of trepidation to sharpen all his faculties; but under

precisely similar circumstances, let him be called from his hammock to

view his ship sailing through a midnight sea of milky whiteness—as if

from encircling headlands shoals of combed white bears were swimming

round him, then he feels a silent, superstitious dread; the shrouded

phantom of the whitened waters is horrible to him as a real ghost; in

vain the lead assures him he is still off soundings; heart and helm

they both go down; he never rests till blue water is under him again.

Yet where is the mariner who will tell thee, “Sir, it was not so much

the fear of striking hidden rocks, as the fear of that hideous

whiteness that so stirred me?”

Second: To the native Indian of Peru, the continual sight of the

snow-howdahed Andes conveys naught of dread, except, perhaps, in the

mere fancying of the eternal frosted desolateness reigning at such vast

altitudes, and the natural conceit of what a fearfulness it would be to

lose oneself in such inhuman solitudes. Much the same is it with the

backwoodsman of the West, who with comparative indifference views an

unbounded prairie sheeted with driven snow, no shadow of tree or twig

to break the fixed trance of whiteness. Not so the sailor, beholding

the scenery of the Antarctic seas; where at times, by some infernal

trick of legerdemain in the powers of frost and air, he, shivering and

half shipwrecked, instead of rainbows speaking hope and solace to his

misery, views what seems a boundless churchyard grinning upon him with

its lean ice monuments and splintered crosses.

But thou sayest, methinks that white-lead chapter about whiteness is

but a white flag hung out from a craven soul; thou surrenderest to a

hypo, Ishmael.

Tell me, why this strong young colt, foaled in some peaceful valley of

Vermont, far removed from all beasts of prey—why is it that upon the

sunniest day, if you but shake a fresh buffalo robe behind him, so that

he cannot even see it, but only smells its wild animal muskiness—why

will he start, snort, and with bursting eyes paw the ground in

phrensies of affright? There is no remembrance in him of any gorings of

wild creatures in his green northern home, so that the strange

muskiness he smells cannot recall to him anything associated with the

experience of former perils; for what knows he, this New England colt,

of the black bisons of distant Oregon?

No: but here thou beholdest even in a dumb brute, the instinct of the

knowledge of the demonism in the world. Though thousands of miles from

Oregon, still when he smells that savage musk, the rending, goring

bison herds are as present as to the deserted wild foal of the

prairies, which this instant they may be trampling into dust.

Thus, then, the muffled rollings of a milky sea; the bleak rustlings of

the festooned frosts of mountains; the desolate shiftings of the

windrowed snows of prairies; all these, to Ishmael, are as the shaking

of that buffalo robe to the frightened colt!

Though neither knows where lie the nameless things of which the mystic

sign gives forth such hints; yet with me, as with the colt, somewhere

those things must exist. Though in many of its aspects this visible

world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in

fright.

But not yet have we solved the incantation of this whiteness, and

learned why it appeals with such power to the soul; and more strange

and far more portentous—why, as we have seen, it is at once the most

meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the

Christian’s Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent

in things the most appalling to mankind.

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids

and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the

thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky

way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a colour as

the visible absence of colour; and at the same time the concrete of all

colours; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness,

full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colourless, all-colour

of atheism from which we shrink? And when we consider that other theory

of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues—every stately

or lovely emblazoning—the sweet tinges of sunset skies and woods; yea,

and the gilded velvets of butterflies, and the butterfly cheeks of

young girls; all these are but subtile deceits, not actually inherent

in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified

Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover

nothing but the charnel-house within; and when we proceed further, and

consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her

hues, the great principle of light, for ever remains white or colorless

in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all

objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge—pondering all

this, the palsied universe lies before us a leper; and like wilful

travellers in Lapland, who refuse to wear coloured and colouring

glasses upon their eyes, so the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at

the monumental white shroud that wraps all the prospect around him. And

of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at

the fiery hunt?

CHAPTER 43. Hark!

“HIST! Did you hear that noise, Cabaco?”

It was the middle-watch: a fair moonlight; the seamen were standing in

a cordon, extending from one of the fresh-water butts in the waist, to

the scuttle-butt near the taffrail. In this manner, they passed the

buckets to fill the scuttle-butt. Standing, for the most part, on the

hallowed precincts of the quarter-deck, they were careful not to speak

or rustle their feet. From hand to hand, the buckets went in the

deepest silence, only broken by the occasional flap of a sail, and the

steady hum of the unceasingly advancing keel.

It was in the midst of this repose, that Archy, one of the cordon,

whose post was near the after-hatches, whispered to his neighbor, a

Cholo, the words above.

“Hist! did you hear that noise, Cabaco?”

“Take the bucket, will ye, Archy? what noise d’ye mean?”

“There it is again—under the hatches—don’t you hear it—a cough—it

sounded like a cough.”

“Cough be damned! Pass along that return bucket.”

“There again—there it is!—it sounds like two or three sleepers turning

over, now!”

“Caramba! have done, shipmate, will ye? It’s the three soaked biscuits

ye eat for supper turning over inside of ye—nothing else. Look to the

bucket!”

“Say what ye will, shipmate; I’ve sharp ears.”

“Aye, you are the chap, ain’t ye, that heard the hum of the old

Quakeress’s knitting-needles fifty miles at sea from Nantucket; you’re

the chap.”

“Grin away; we’ll see what turns up. Hark ye, Cabaco, there is somebody

down in the after-hold that has not yet been seen on deck; and I

suspect our old Mogul knows something of it too. I heard Stubb tell

Flask, one morning watch, that there was something of that sort in the

wind.”

“Tish! the bucket!”

CHAPTER 44. The Chart.

Had you followed Captain Ahab down into his cabin after the squall that

took place on the night succeeding that wild ratification of his

purpose with his crew, you would have seen him go to a locker in the

transom, and bringing out a large wrinkled roll of yellowish sea

charts, spread them before him on his screwed-down table. Then seating

himself before it, you would have seen him intently study the various

lines and shadings which there met his eye; and with slow but steady

pencil trace additional courses over spaces that before were blank. At

intervals, he would refer to piles of old log-books beside him, wherein

were set down the seasons and places in which, on various former

voyages of various ships, sperm whales had been captured or seen.

While thus employed, the heavy pewter lamp suspended in chains over his

head, continually rocked with the motion of the ship, and for ever

threw shifting gleams and shadows of lines upon his wrinkled brow, till

it almost seemed that while he himself was marking out lines and

courses on the wrinkled charts, some invisible pencil was also tracing

lines and courses upon the deeply marked chart of his forehead.

But it was not this night in particular that, in the solitude of his

cabin, Ahab thus pondered over his charts. Almost every night they were

brought out; almost every night some pencil marks were effaced, and

others were substituted. For with the charts of all four oceans before

him, Ahab was threading a maze of currents and eddies, with a view to

the more certain accomplishment of that monomaniac thought of his soul.

Now, to any one not fully acquainted with the ways of the leviathans,

it might seem an absurdly hopeless task thus to seek out one solitary

creature in the unhooped oceans of this planet. But not so did it seem

to Ahab, who knew the sets of all tides and currents; and thereby

calculating the driftings of the sperm whale’s food; and, also, calling

to mind the regular, ascertained seasons for hunting him in particular

latitudes; could arrive at reasonable surmises, almost approaching to

certainties, concerning the timeliest day to be upon this or that

ground in search of his prey.

So assured, indeed, is the fact concerning the periodicalness of the

sperm whale’s resorting to given waters, that many hunters believe

that, could he be closely observed and studied throughout the world;

were the logs for one voyage of the entire whale fleet carefully

collated, then the migrations of the sperm whale would be found to

correspond in invariability to those of the herring-shoals or the

flights of swallows. On this hint, attempts have been made to construct

elaborate migratory charts of the sperm whale.\*

\*Since the above was written, the statement is happily borne out by

an official circular, issued by Lieutenant Maury, of the National

Observatory, Washington, April 16th, 1851. By that circular, it

appears that precisely such a chart is in course of completion; and

portions of it are presented in the circular. “This chart divides the

ocean into districts of five degrees of latitude by five degrees of

longitude; perpendicularly through each of which districts are twelve

columns for the twelve months; and horizontally through each of which

districts are three lines; one to show the number of days that have

been spent in each month in every district, and the two others to

show the number of days in which whales, sperm or right, have been

seen.”

Besides, when making a passage from one feeding-ground to another, the

sperm whales, guided by some infallible instinct—say, rather, secret

intelligence from the Deity—mostly swim in \_veins\_, as they are called;

continuing their way along a given ocean-line with such undeviating

exactitude, that no ship ever sailed her course, by any chart, with one

tithe of such marvellous precision. Though, in these cases, the

direction taken by any one whale be straight as a surveyor’s parallel,

and though the line of advance be strictly confined to its own

unavoidable, straight wake, yet the arbitrary \_vein\_ in which at these

times he is said to swim, generally embraces some few miles in width

(more or less, as the vein is presumed to expand or contract); but

never exceeds the visual sweep from the whale-ship’s mast-heads, when

circumspectly gliding along this magic zone. The sum is, that at

particular seasons within that breadth and along that path, migrating

whales may with great confidence be looked for.

And hence not only at substantiated times, upon well known separate

feeding-grounds, could Ahab hope to encounter his prey; but in crossing

the widest expanses of water between those grounds he could, by his

art, so place and time himself on his way, as even then not to be

wholly without prospect of a meeting.

There was a circumstance which at first sight seemed to entangle his

delirious but still methodical scheme. But not so in the reality,

perhaps. Though the gregarious sperm whales have their regular seasons

for particular grounds, yet in general you cannot conclude that the

herds which haunted such and such a latitude or longitude this year,

say, will turn out to be identically the same with those that were

found there the preceding season; though there are peculiar and

unquestionable instances where the contrary of this has proved true. In

general, the same remark, only within a less wide limit, applies to the

solitaries and hermits among the matured, aged sperm whales. So that

though Moby Dick had in a former year been seen, for example, on what

is called the Seychelle ground in the Indian ocean, or Volcano Bay on

the Japanese Coast; yet it did not follow, that were the Pequod to

visit either of those spots at any subsequent corresponding season, she

would infallibly encounter him there. So, too, with some other feeding

grounds, where he had at times revealed himself. But all these seemed

only his casual stopping-places and ocean-inns, so to speak, not his

places of prolonged abode. And where Ahab’s chances of accomplishing

his object have hitherto been spoken of, allusion has only been made to

whatever way-side, antecedent, extra prospects were his, ere a

particular set time or place were attained, when all possibilities

would become probabilities, and, as Ahab fondly thought, every

possibility the next thing to a certainty. That particular set time and

place were conjoined in the one technical phrase—the

Season-on-the-Line. For there and then, for several consecutive years,

Moby Dick had been periodically descried, lingering in those waters for

awhile, as the sun, in its annual round, loiters for a predicted

interval in any one sign of the Zodiac. There it was, too, that most of

the deadly encounters with the white whale had taken place; there the

waves were storied with his deeds; there also was that tragic spot

where the monomaniac old man had found the awful motive to his

vengeance. But in the cautious comprehensiveness and unloitering

vigilance with which Ahab threw his brooding soul into this unfaltering

hunt, he would not permit himself to rest all his hopes upon the one

crowning fact above mentioned, however flattering it might be to those

hopes; nor in the sleeplessness of his vow could he so tranquillize his

unquiet heart as to postpone all intervening quest.

Now, the Pequod had sailed from Nantucket at the very beginning of the

Season-on-the-Line. No possible endeavor then could enable her

commander to make the great passage southwards, double Cape Horn, and

then running down sixty degrees of latitude arrive in the equatorial

Pacific in time to cruise there. Therefore, he must wait for the next

ensuing season. Yet the premature hour of the Pequod’s sailing had,

perhaps, been correctly selected by Ahab, with a view to this very

complexion of things. Because, an interval of three hundred and

sixty-five days and nights was before him; an interval which, instead

of impatiently enduring ashore, he would spend in a miscellaneous hunt;

if by chance the White Whale, spending his vacation in seas far remote

from his periodical feeding-grounds, should turn up his wrinkled brow

off the Persian Gulf, or in the Bengal Bay, or China Seas, or in any

other waters haunted by his race. So that Monsoons, Pampas,

Nor’-Westers, Harmattans, Trades; any wind but the Levanter and Simoon,

might blow Moby Dick into the devious zig-zag world-circle of the

Pequod’s circumnavigating wake.

But granting all this; yet, regarded discreetly and coolly, seems it

not but a mad idea, this; that in the broad boundless ocean, one

solitary whale, even if encountered, should be thought capable of

individual recognition from his hunter, even as a white-bearded Mufti

in the thronged thoroughfares of Constantinople? Yes. For the peculiar

snow-white brow of Moby Dick, and his snow-white hump, could not but be

unmistakable. And have I not tallied the whale, Ahab would mutter to

himself, as after poring over his charts till long after midnight he

would throw himself back in reveries—tallied him, and shall he escape?

His broad fins are bored, and scalloped out like a lost sheep’s ear!

And here, his mad mind would run on in a breathless race; till a

weariness and faintness of pondering came over him; and in the open air

of the deck he would seek to recover his strength. Ah, God! what

trances of torments does that man endure who is consumed with one

unachieved revengeful desire. He sleeps with clenched hands; and wakes

with his own bloody nails in his palms.

Often, when forced from his hammock by exhausting and intolerably vivid

dreams of the night, which, resuming his own intense thoughts through

the day, carried them on amid a clashing of phrensies, and whirled them

round and round and round in his blazing brain, till the very throbbing

of his life-spot became insufferable anguish; and when, as was

sometimes the case, these spiritual throes in him heaved his being up

from its base, and a chasm seemed opening in him, from which forked

flames and lightnings shot up, and accursed fiends beckoned him to leap

down among them; when this hell in himself yawned beneath him, a wild

cry would be heard through the ship; and with glaring eyes Ahab would

burst from his state room, as though escaping from a bed that was on

fire. Yet these, perhaps, instead of being the unsuppressable symptoms

of some latent weakness, or fright at his own resolve, were but the

plainest tokens of its intensity. For, at such times, crazy Ahab, the

scheming, unappeasedly steadfast hunter of the white whale; this Ahab

that had gone to his hammock, was not the agent that so caused him to

burst from it in horror again. The latter was the eternal, living

principle or soul in him; and in sleep, being for the time dissociated

from the characterizing mind, which at other times employed it for its

outer vehicle or agent, it spontaneously sought escape from the

scorching contiguity of the frantic thing, of which, for the time, it

was no longer an integral. But as the mind does not exist unless

leagued with the soul, therefore it must have been that, in Ahab’s

case, yielding up all his thoughts and fancies to his one supreme

purpose; that purpose, by its own sheer inveteracy of will, forced

itself against gods and devils into a kind of self-assumed, independent

being of its own. Nay, could grimly live and burn, while the common

vitality to which it was conjoined, fled horror-stricken from the

unbidden and unfathered birth. Therefore, the tormented spirit that

glared out of bodily eyes, when what seemed Ahab rushed from his room,

was for the time but a vacated thing, a formless somnambulistic being,

a ray of living light, to be sure, but without an object to colour, and

therefore a blankness in itself. God help thee, old man, thy thoughts

have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking thus

makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart for ever; that

vulture the very creature he creates.

CHAPTER 45. The Affidavit.

So far as what there may be of a narrative in this book; and, indeed,

as indirectly touching one or two very interesting and curious

particulars in the habits of sperm whales, the foregoing chapter, in

its earlier part, is as important a one as will be found in this

volume; but the leading matter of it requires to be still further and

more familiarly enlarged upon, in order to be adequately understood,

and moreover to take away any incredulity which a profound ignorance of

the entire subject may induce in some minds, as to the natural verity

of the main points of this affair.

I care not to perform this part of my task methodically; but shall be

content to produce the desired impression by separate citations of

items, practically or reliably known to me as a whaleman; and from

these citations, I take it—the conclusion aimed at will naturally

follow of itself.

First: I have personally known three instances where a whale, after

receiving a harpoon, has effected a complete escape; and, after an

interval (in one instance of three years), has been again struck by the

same hand, and slain; when the two irons, both marked by the same

private cypher, have been taken from the body. In the instance where

three years intervened between the flinging of the two harpoons; and I

think it may have been something more than that; the man who darted

them happening, in the interval, to go in a trading ship on a voyage to

Africa, went ashore there, joined a discovery party, and penetrated far

into the interior, where he travelled for a period of nearly two years,

often endangered by serpents, savages, tigers, poisonous miasmas, with

all the other common perils incident to wandering in the heart of

unknown regions. Meanwhile, the whale he had struck must also have been

on its travels; no doubt it had thrice circumnavigated the globe,

brushing with its flanks all the coasts of Africa; but to no purpose.

This man and this whale again came together, and the one vanquished the

other. I say I, myself, have known three instances similar to this;

that is in two of them I saw the whales struck; and, upon the second

attack, saw the two irons with the respective marks cut in them,

afterwards taken from the dead fish. In the three-year instance, it so

fell out that I was in the boat both times, first and last, and the

last time distinctly recognised a peculiar sort of huge mole under the

whale’s eye, which I had observed there three years previous. I say

three years, but I am pretty sure it was more than that. Here are three

instances, then, which I personally know the truth of; but I have heard

of many other instances from persons whose veracity in the matter there

is no good ground to impeach.

Secondly: It is well known in the Sperm Whale Fishery, however ignorant

the world ashore may be of it, that there have been several memorable

historical instances where a particular whale in the ocean has been at

distant times and places popularly cognisable. Why such a whale became

thus marked was not altogether and originally owing to his bodily

peculiarities as distinguished from other whales; for however peculiar

in that respect any chance whale may be, they soon put an end to his

peculiarities by killing him, and boiling him down into a peculiarly

valuable oil. No: the reason was this: that from the fatal experiences

of the fishery there hung a terrible prestige of perilousness about

such a whale as there did about Rinaldo Rinaldini, insomuch that most

fishermen were content to recognise him by merely touching their

tarpaulins when he would be discovered lounging by them on the sea,

without seeking to cultivate a more intimate acquaintance. Like some

poor devils ashore that happen to know an irascible great man, they

make distant unobtrusive salutations to him in the street, lest if they

pursued the acquaintance further, they might receive a summary thump

for their presumption.

But not only did each of these famous whales enjoy great individual

celebrity—Nay, you may call it an ocean-wide renown; not only was he

famous in life and now is immortal in forecastle stories after death,

but he was admitted into all the rights, privileges, and distinctions

of a name; had as much a name indeed as Cambyses or Cæsar. Was it not

so, O Timor Tom! thou famed leviathan, scarred like an iceberg, who so

long did’st lurk in the Oriental straits of that name, whose spout was

oft seen from the palmy beach of Ombay? Was it not so, O New Zealand

Jack! thou terror of all cruisers that crossed their wakes in the

vicinity of the Tattoo Land? Was it not so, O Morquan! King of Japan,

whose lofty jet they say at times assumed the semblance of a snow-white

cross against the sky? Was it not so, O Don Miguel! thou Chilian whale,

marked like an old tortoise with mystic hieroglyphics upon the back! In

plain prose, here are four whales as well known to the students of

Cetacean History as Marius or Sylla to the classic scholar.

But this is not all. New Zealand Tom and Don Miguel, after at various

times creating great havoc among the boats of different vessels, were

finally gone in quest of, systematically hunted out, chased and killed

by valiant whaling captains, who heaved up their anchors with that

express object as much in view, as in setting out through the

Narragansett Woods, Captain Butler of old had it in his mind to capture

that notorious murderous savage Annawon, the headmost warrior of the

Indian King Philip.

I do not know where I can find a better place than just here, to make

mention of one or two other things, which to me seem important, as in

printed form establishing in all respects the reasonableness of the

whole story of the White Whale, more especially the catastrophe. For

this is one of those disheartening instances where truth requires full

as much bolstering as error. So ignorant are most landsmen of some of

the plainest and most palpable wonders of the world, that without some

hints touching the plain facts, historical and otherwise, of the

fishery, they might scout at Moby Dick as a monstrous fable, or still

worse and more detestable, a hideous and intolerable allegory.

First: Though most men have some vague flitting ideas of the general

perils of the grand fishery, yet they have nothing like a fixed, vivid

conception of those perils, and the frequency with which they recur.

One reason perhaps is, that not one in fifty of the actual disasters

and deaths by casualties in the fishery, ever finds a public record at

home, however transient and immediately forgotten that record. Do you

suppose that that poor fellow there, who this moment perhaps caught by

the whale-line off the coast of New Guinea, is being carried down to

the bottom of the sea by the sounding leviathan—do you suppose that

that poor fellow’s name will appear in the newspaper obituary you will

read to-morrow at your breakfast? No: because the mails are very

irregular between here and New Guinea. In fact, did you ever hear what

might be called regular news direct or indirect from New Guinea? Yet I

tell you that upon one particular voyage which I made to the Pacific,

among many others we spoke thirty different ships, every one of which

had had a death by a whale, some of them more than one, and three that

had each lost a boat’s crew. For God’s sake, be economical with your

lamps and candles! not a gallon you burn, but at least one drop of

man’s blood was spilled for it.

Secondly: People ashore have indeed some indefinite idea that a whale

is an enormous creature of enormous power; but I have ever found that

when narrating to them some specific example of this two-fold

enormousness, they have significantly complimented me upon my

facetiousness; when, I declare upon my soul, I had no more idea of

being facetious than Moses, when he wrote the history of the plagues of

Egypt.

But fortunately the special point I here seek can be established upon

testimony entirely independent of my own. That point is this: The Sperm

Whale is in some cases sufficiently powerful, knowing, and judiciously

malicious, as with direct aforethought to stave in, utterly destroy,

and sink a large ship; and what is more, the Sperm Whale \_has\_ done it.

First: In the year 1820 the ship Essex, Captain Pollard, of Nantucket,

was cruising in the Pacific Ocean. One day she saw spouts, lowered her

boats, and gave chase to a shoal of sperm whales. Ere long, several of

the whales were wounded; when, suddenly, a very large whale escaping

from the boats, issued from the shoal, and bore directly down upon the

ship. Dashing his forehead against her hull, he so stove her in, that

in less than “ten minutes” she settled down and fell over. Not a

surviving plank of her has been seen since. After the severest

exposure, part of the crew reached the land in their boats. Being

returned home at last, Captain Pollard once more sailed for the Pacific

in command of another ship, but the gods shipwrecked him again upon

unknown rocks and breakers; for the second time his ship was utterly

lost, and forthwith forswearing the sea, he has never tempted it since.

At this day Captain Pollard is a resident of Nantucket. I have seen

Owen Chace, who was chief mate of the Essex at the time of the tragedy;

I have read his plain and faithful narrative; I have conversed with his

son; and all this within a few miles of the scene of the catastrophe.\*

\*The following are extracts from Chace’s narrative: “Every fact seemed

to warrant me in concluding that it was anything but chance which

directed his operations; he made two several attacks upon the ship, at

a short interval between them, both of which, according to their

direction, were calculated to do us the most injury, by being made

ahead, and thereby combining the speed of the two objects for the

shock; to effect which, the exact manœuvres which he made were

necessary. His aspect was most horrible, and such as indicated

resentment and fury. He came directly from the shoal which we had just

before entered, and in which we had struck three of his companions, as

if fired with revenge for their sufferings.” Again: “At all events, the

whole circumstances taken together, all happening before my own eyes,

and producing, at the time, impressions in my mind of decided,

calculating mischief, on the part of the whale (many of which

impressions I cannot now recall), induce me to be satisfied that I am

correct in my opinion.”

Here are his reflections some time after quitting the ship, during a

black night in an open boat, when almost despairing of reaching any

hospitable shore. “The dark ocean and swelling waters were nothing; the

fears of being swallowed up by some dreadful tempest, or dashed upon

hidden rocks, with all the other ordinary subjects of fearful

contemplation, seemed scarcely entitled to a moment’s thought; the

dismal looking wreck, and \_the horrid aspect and revenge of the whale\_,

wholly engrossed my reflections, until day again made its appearance.”

In another place—p. 45,—he speaks of “\_the mysterious and mortal attack

of the animal\_.”

Secondly: The ship Union, also of Nantucket, was in the year 1807

totally lost off the Azores by a similar onset, but the authentic

particulars of this catastrophe I have never chanced to encounter,

though from the whale hunters I have now and then heard casual

allusions to it.

Thirdly: Some eighteen or twenty years ago Commodore J——, then

commanding an American sloop-of-war of the first class, happened to be

dining with a party of whaling captains, on board a Nantucket ship in

the harbor of Oahu, Sandwich Islands. Conversation turning upon whales,

the Commodore was pleased to be sceptical touching the amazing strength

ascribed to them by the professional gentlemen present. He peremptorily

denied for example, that any whale could so smite his stout

sloop-of-war as to cause her to leak so much as a thimbleful. Very

good; but there is more coming. Some weeks after, the Commodore set

sail in this impregnable craft for Valparaiso. But he was stopped on

the way by a portly sperm whale, that begged a few moments’

confidential business with him. That business consisted in fetching the

Commodore’s craft such a thwack, that with all his pumps going he made

straight for the nearest port to heave down and repair. I am not

superstitious, but I consider the Commodore’s interview with that whale

as providential. Was not Saul of Tarsus converted from unbelief by a

similar fright? I tell you, the sperm whale will stand no nonsense.

I will now refer you to Langsdorff’s Voyages for a little circumstance

in point, peculiarly interesting to the writer hereof. Langsdorff, you

must know by the way, was attached to the Russian Admiral Krusenstern’s

famous Discovery Expedition in the beginning of the present century.

Captain Langsdorff thus begins his seventeenth chapter:

“By the thirteenth of May our ship was ready to sail, and the next day

we were out in the open sea, on our way to Ochotsh. The weather was

very clear and fine, but so intolerably cold that we were obliged to

keep on our fur clothing. For some days we had very little wind; it was

not till the nineteenth that a brisk gale from the northwest sprang up.

An uncommon large whale, the body of which was larger than the ship

itself, lay almost at the surface of the water, but was not perceived

by any one on board till the moment when the ship, which was in full

sail, was almost upon him, so that it was impossible to prevent its

striking against him. We were thus placed in the most imminent danger,

as this gigantic creature, setting up its back, raised the ship three

feet at least out of the water. The masts reeled, and the sails fell

altogether, while we who were below all sprang instantly upon the deck,

concluding that we had struck upon some rock; instead of this we saw

the monster sailing off with the utmost gravity and solemnity. Captain

D’Wolf applied immediately to the pumps to examine whether or not the

vessel had received any damage from the shock, but we found that very

happily it had escaped entirely uninjured.”

Now, the Captain D’Wolf here alluded to as commanding the ship in

question, is a New Englander, who, after a long life of unusual

adventures as a sea-captain, this day resides in the village of

Dorchester near Boston. I have the honor of being a nephew of his. I

have particularly questioned him concerning this passage in Langsdorff.

He substantiates every word. The ship, however, was by no means a large

one: a Russian craft built on the Siberian coast, and purchased by my

uncle after bartering away the vessel in which he sailed from home.

In that up and down manly book of old-fashioned adventure, so full,

too, of honest wonders—the voyage of Lionel Wafer, one of ancient

Dampier’s old chums—I found a little matter set down so like that just

quoted from Langsdorff, that I cannot forbear inserting it here for a

corroborative example, if such be needed.

Lionel, it seems, was on his way to “John Ferdinando,” as he calls the

modern Juan Fernandes. “In our way thither,” he says, “about four

o’clock in the morning, when we were about one hundred and fifty

leagues from the Main of America, our ship felt a terrible shock, which

put our men in such consternation that they could hardly tell where

they were or what to think; but every one began to prepare for death.

And, indeed, the shock was so sudden and violent, that we took it for

granted the ship had struck against a rock; but when the amazement was

a little over, we cast the lead, and sounded, but found no ground. \* \*

\* \* \* The suddenness of the shock made the guns leap in their

carriages, and several of the men were shaken out of their hammocks.

Captain Davis, who lay with his head on a gun, was thrown out of his

cabin!” Lionel then goes on to impute the shock to an earthquake, and

seems to substantiate the imputation by stating that a great

earthquake, somewhere about that time, did actually do great mischief

along the Spanish land. But I should not much wonder if, in the

darkness of that early hour of the morning, the shock was after all

caused by an unseen whale vertically bumping the hull from beneath.

I might proceed with several more examples, one way or another known to

me, of the great power and malice at times of the sperm whale. In more

than one instance, he has been known, not only to chase the assailing

boats back to their ships, but to pursue the ship itself, and long

withstand all the lances hurled at him from its decks. The English ship

Pusie Hall can tell a story on that head; and, as for his strength, let

me say, that there have been examples where the lines attached to a

running sperm whale have, in a calm, been transferred to the ship, and

secured there; the whale towing her great hull through the water, as a

horse walks off with a cart. Again, it is very often observed that, if

the sperm whale, once struck, is allowed time to rally, he then acts,

not so often with blind rage, as with wilful, deliberate designs of

destruction to his pursuers; nor is it without conveying some eloquent

indication of his character, that upon being attacked he will

frequently open his mouth, and retain it in that dread expansion for

several consecutive minutes. But I must be content with only one more

and a concluding illustration; a remarkable and most significant one,

by which you will not fail to see, that not only is the most marvellous

event in this book corroborated by plain facts of the present day, but

that these marvels (like all marvels) are mere repetitions of the ages;

so that for the millionth time we say amen with Solomon—Verily there is

nothing new under the sun.

In the sixth Christian century lived Procopius, a Christian magistrate

of Constantinople, in the days when Justinian was Emperor and

Belisarius general. As many know, he wrote the history of his own

times, a work every way of uncommon value. By the best authorities, he

has always been considered a most trustworthy and unexaggerating

historian, except in some one or two particulars, not at all affecting

the matter presently to be mentioned.

Now, in this history of his, Procopius mentions that, during the term

of his prefecture at Constantinople, a great sea-monster was captured

in the neighboring Propontis, or Sea of Marmora, after having destroyed

vessels at intervals in those waters for a period of more than fifty

years. A fact thus set down in substantial history cannot easily be

gainsaid. Nor is there any reason it should be. Of what precise species

this sea-monster was, is not mentioned. But as he destroyed ships, as

well as for other reasons, he must have been a whale; and I am strongly

inclined to think a sperm whale. And I will tell you why. For a long

time I fancied that the sperm whale had been always unknown in the

Mediterranean and the deep waters connecting with it. Even now I am

certain that those seas are not, and perhaps never can be, in the

present constitution of things, a place for his habitual gregarious

resort. But further investigations have recently proved to me, that in

modern times there have been isolated instances of the presence of the

sperm whale in the Mediterranean. I am told, on good authority, that on

the Barbary coast, a Commodore Davis of the British navy found the

skeleton of a sperm whale. Now, as a vessel of war readily passes

through the Dardanelles, hence a sperm whale could, by the same route,

pass out of the Mediterranean into the Propontis.

In the Propontis, as far as I can learn, none of that peculiar

substance called \_brit\_ is to be found, the aliment of the right whale.

But I have every reason to believe that the food of the sperm

whale—squid or cuttle-fish—lurks at the bottom of that sea, because

large creatures, but by no means the largest of that sort, have been

found at its surface. If, then, you properly put these statements

together, and reason upon them a bit, you will clearly perceive that,

according to all human reasoning, Procopius’s sea-monster, that for

half a century stove the ships of a Roman Emperor, must in all

probability have been a sperm whale.

CHAPTER 46. Surmises.

Though, consumed with the hot fire of his purpose, Ahab in all his

thoughts and actions ever had in view the ultimate capture of Moby

Dick; though he seemed ready to sacrifice all mortal interests to that

one passion; nevertheless it may have been that he was by nature and

long habituation far too wedded to a fiery whaleman’s ways, altogether

to abandon the collateral prosecution of the voyage. Or at least if

this were otherwise, there were not wanting other motives much more

influential with him. It would be refining too much, perhaps, even

considering his monomania, to hint that his vindictiveness towards the

White Whale might have possibly extended itself in some degree to all

sperm whales, and that the more monsters he slew by so much the more he

multiplied the chances that each subsequently encountered whale would

prove to be the hated one he hunted. But if such an hypothesis be

indeed exceptionable, there were still additional considerations which,

though not so strictly according with the wildness of his ruling

passion, yet were by no means incapable of swaying him.

To accomplish his object Ahab must use tools; and of all tools used in

the shadow of the moon, men are most apt to get out of order. He knew,

for example, that however magnetic his ascendency in some respects was

over Starbuck, yet that ascendency did not cover the complete spiritual

man any more than mere corporeal superiority involves intellectual

mastership; for to the purely spiritual, the intellectual but stand in

a sort of corporeal relation. Starbuck’s body and Starbuck’s coerced

will were Ahab’s, so long as Ahab kept his magnet at Starbuck’s brain;

still he knew that for all this the chief mate, in his soul, abhorred

his captain’s quest, and could he, would joyfully disintegrate himself

from it, or even frustrate it. It might be that a long interval would

elapse ere the White Whale was seen. During that long interval Starbuck

would ever be apt to fall into open relapses of rebellion against his

captain’s leadership, unless some ordinary, prudential, circumstantial

influences were brought to bear upon him. Not only that, but the subtle

insanity of Ahab respecting Moby Dick was noways more significantly

manifested than in his superlative sense and shrewdness in foreseeing

that, for the present, the hunt should in some way be stripped of that

strange imaginative impiousness which naturally invested it; that the

full terror of the voyage must be kept withdrawn into the obscure

background (for few men’s courage is proof against protracted

meditation unrelieved by action); that when they stood their long night

watches, his officers and men must have some nearer things to think of

than Moby Dick. For however eagerly and impetuously the savage crew had

hailed the announcement of his quest; yet all sailors of all sorts are

more or less capricious and unreliable—they live in the varying outer

weather, and they inhale its fickleness—and when retained for any

object remote and blank in the pursuit, however promissory of life and

passion in the end, it is above all things requisite that temporary

interests and employments should intervene and hold them healthily

suspended for the final dash.

Nor was Ahab unmindful of another thing. In times of strong emotion

mankind disdain all base considerations; but such times are evanescent.

The permanent constitutional condition of the manufactured man, thought

Ahab, is sordidness. Granting that the White Whale fully incites the

hearts of this my savage crew, and playing round their savageness even

breeds a certain generous knight-errantism in them, still, while for

the love of it they give chase to Moby Dick, they must also have food

for their more common, daily appetites. For even the high lifted and

chivalric Crusaders of old times were not content to traverse two

thousand miles of land to fight for their holy sepulchre, without

committing burglaries, picking pockets, and gaining other pious

perquisites by the way. Had they been strictly held to their one final

and romantic object—that final and romantic object, too many would have

turned from in disgust. I will not strip these men, thought Ahab, of

all hopes of cash—aye, cash. They may scorn cash now; but let some

months go by, and no perspective promise of it to them, and then this

same quiescent cash all at once mutinying in them, this same cash would

soon cashier Ahab.

Nor was there wanting still another precautionary motive more related

to Ahab personally. Having impulsively, it is probable, and perhaps

somewhat prematurely revealed the prime but private purpose of the

Pequod’s voyage, Ahab was now entirely conscious that, in so doing, he

had indirectly laid himself open to the unanswerable charge of

usurpation; and with perfect impunity, both moral and legal, his crew

if so disposed, and to that end competent, could refuse all further

obedience to him, and even violently wrest from him the command. From

even the barely hinted imputation of usurpation, and the possible

consequences of such a suppressed impression gaining ground, Ahab must

of course have been most anxious to protect himself. That protection

could only consist in his own predominating brain and heart and hand,

backed by a heedful, closely calculating attention to every minute

atmospheric influence which it was possible for his crew to be

subjected to.

For all these reasons then, and others perhaps too analytic to be

verbally developed here, Ahab plainly saw that he must still in a good

degree continue true to the natural, nominal purpose of the Pequod’s

voyage; observe all customary usages; and not only that, but force

himself to evince all his well known passionate interest in the general

pursuit of his profession.

Be all this as it may, his voice was now often heard hailing the three

mast-heads and admonishing them to keep a bright look-out, and not omit

reporting even a porpoise. This vigilance was not long without reward.

CHAPTER 47. The Mat-Maker.

It was a cloudy, sultry afternoon; the seamen were lazily lounging

about the decks, or vacantly gazing over into the lead-coloured waters.

Queequeg and I were mildly employed weaving what is called a sword-mat,

for an additional lashing to our boat. So still and subdued and yet

somehow preluding was all the scene, and such an incantation of reverie

lurked in the air, that each silent sailor seemed resolved into his own

invisible self.

I was the attendant or page of Queequeg, while busy at the mat. As I

kept passing and repassing the filling or woof of marline between the

long yarns of the warp, using my own hand for the shuttle, and as

Queequeg, standing sideways, ever and anon slid his heavy oaken sword

between the threads, and idly looking off upon the water, carelessly

and unthinkingly drove home every yarn: I say so strange a dreaminess

did there then reign all over the ship and all over the sea, only

broken by the intermitting dull sound of the sword, that it seemed as

if this were the Loom of Time, and I myself were a shuttle mechanically

weaving and weaving away at the Fates. There lay the fixed threads of

the warp subject to but one single, ever returning, unchanging

vibration, and that vibration merely enough to admit of the crosswise

interblending of other threads with its own. This warp seemed

necessity; and here, thought I, with my own hand I ply my own shuttle

and weave my own destiny into these unalterable threads. Meantime,

Queequeg’s impulsive, indifferent sword, sometimes hitting the woof

slantingly, or crookedly, or strongly, or weakly, as the case might be;

and by this difference in the concluding blow producing a corresponding

contrast in the final aspect of the completed fabric; this savage’s

sword, thought I, which thus finally shapes and fashions both warp and

woof; this easy, indifferent sword must be chance—aye, chance, free

will, and necessity—nowise incompatible—all interweavingly working

together. The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its

ultimate course—its every alternating vibration, indeed, only tending

to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads;

and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of

necessity, and sideways in its motions directed by free will, though

thus prescribed to by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the

last featuring blow at events.

Thus we were weaving and weaving away when I started at a sound so

strange, long drawn, and musically wild and unearthly, that the ball of

free will dropped from my hand, and I stood gazing up at the clouds

whence that voice dropped like a wing. High aloft in the cross-trees

was that mad Gay-Header, Tashtego. His body was reaching eagerly

forward, his hand stretched out like a wand, and at brief sudden

intervals he continued his cries. To be sure the same sound was that

very moment perhaps being heard all over the seas, from hundreds of

whalemen’s look-outs perched as high in the air; but from few of those

lungs could that accustomed old cry have derived such a marvellous

cadence as from Tashtego the Indian’s.

As he stood hovering over you half suspended in air, so wildly and

eagerly peering towards the horizon, you would have thought him some

prophet or seer beholding the shadows of Fate, and by those wild cries

announcing their coming.

“There she blows! there! there! there! she blows! she blows!”

“Where-away?”

“On the lee-beam, about two miles off! a school of them!”

Instantly all was commotion.

The Sperm Whale blows as a clock ticks, with the same undeviating and

reliable uniformity. And thereby whalemen distinguish this fish from

other tribes of his genus.

“There go flukes!” was now the cry from Tashtego; and the whales

disappeared.

“Quick, steward!” cried Ahab. “Time! time!”

Dough-Boy hurried below, glanced at the watch, and reported the exact

minute to Ahab.

The ship was now kept away from the wind, and she went gently rolling

before it. Tashtego reporting that the whales had gone down heading to

leeward, we confidently looked to see them again directly in advance of

our bows. For that singular craft at times evinced by the Sperm Whale

when, sounding with his head in one direction, he nevertheless, while

concealed beneath the surface, mills round, and swiftly swims off in

the opposite quarter—this deceitfulness of his could not now be in

action; for there was no reason to suppose that the fish seen by

Tashtego had been in any way alarmed, or indeed knew at all of our

vicinity. One of the men selected for shipkeepers—that is, those not

appointed to the boats, by this time relieved the Indian at the

main-mast head. The sailors at the fore and mizzen had come down; the

line tubs were fixed in their places; the cranes were thrust out; the

mainyard was backed, and the three boats swung over the sea like three

samphire baskets over high cliffs. Outside of the bulwarks their eager

crews with one hand clung to the rail, while one foot was expectantly

poised on the gunwale. So look the long line of man-of-war’s men about

to throw themselves on board an enemy’s ship.

But at this critical instant a sudden exclamation was heard that took

every eye from the whale. With a start all glared at dark Ahab, who was

surrounded by five dusky phantoms that seemed fresh formed out of air.

CHAPTER 48. The First Lowering.

The phantoms, for so they then seemed, were flitting on the other side

of the deck, and, with a noiseless celerity, were casting loose the

tackles and bands of the boat which swung there. This boat had always

been deemed one of the spare boats, though technically called the

captain’s, on account of its hanging from the starboard quarter. The

figure that now stood by its bows was tall and swart, with one white

tooth evilly protruding from its steel-like lips. A rumpled Chinese

jacket of black cotton funereally invested him, with wide black

trowsers of the same dark stuff. But strangely crowning this ebonness

was a glistening white plaited turban, the living hair braided and

coiled round and round upon his head. Less swart in aspect, the

companions of this figure were of that vivid, tiger-yellow complexion

peculiar to some of the aboriginal natives of the Manillas;—a race

notorious for a certain diabolism of subtilty, and by some honest white

mariners supposed to be the paid spies and secret confidential agents

on the water of the devil, their lord, whose counting-room they suppose

to be elsewhere.

While yet the wondering ship’s company were gazing upon these

strangers, Ahab cried out to the white-turbaned old man at their head,

“All ready there, Fedallah?”

“Ready,” was the half-hissed reply.

“Lower away then; d’ye hear?” shouting across the deck. “Lower away

there, I say.”

Such was the thunder of his voice, that spite of their amazement the

men sprang over the rail; the sheaves whirled round in the blocks; with

a wallow, the three boats dropped into the sea; while, with a

dexterous, off-handed daring, unknown in any other vocation, the

sailors, goat-like, leaped down the rolling ship’s side into the tossed

boats below.

Hardly had they pulled out from under the ship’s lee, when a fourth

keel, coming from the windward side, pulled round under the stern, and

showed the five strangers rowing Ahab, who, standing erect in the

stern, loudly hailed Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask, to spread themselves

widely, so as to cover a large expanse of water. But with all their

eyes again riveted upon the swart Fedallah and his crew, the inmates of

the other boats obeyed not the command.

“Captain Ahab?—” said Starbuck.

“Spread yourselves,” cried Ahab; “give way, all four boats. Thou,

Flask, pull out more to leeward!”

“Aye, aye, sir,” cheerily cried little King-Post, sweeping round his

great steering oar. “Lay back!” addressing his crew.

“There!—there!—there again! There she blows right ahead, boys!—lay

back!”

“Never heed yonder yellow boys, Archy.”

“Oh, I don’t mind ’em, sir,” said Archy; “I knew it all before now.

Didn’t I hear ’em in the hold? And didn’t I tell Cabaco here of it?

What say ye, Cabaco? They are stowaways, Mr. Flask.”

“Pull, pull, my fine hearts-alive; pull, my children; pull, my little

ones,” drawlingly and soothingly sighed Stubb to his crew, some of whom

still showed signs of uneasiness. “Why don’t you break your backbones,

my boys? What is it you stare at? Those chaps in yonder boat? Tut! They

are only five more hands come to help us—never mind from where—the more

the merrier. Pull, then, do pull; never mind the brimstone—devils are

good fellows enough. So, so; there you are now; that’s the stroke for a

thousand pounds; that’s the stroke to sweep the stakes! Hurrah for the

gold cup of sperm oil, my heroes! Three cheers, men—all hearts alive!

Easy, easy; don’t be in a hurry—don’t be in a hurry. Why don’t you snap

your oars, you rascals? Bite something, you dogs! So, so, so,

then:—softly, softly! That’s it—that’s it! long and strong. Give way

there, give way! The devil fetch ye, ye ragamuffin rapscallions; ye are

all asleep. Stop snoring, ye sleepers, and pull. Pull, will ye? pull,

can’t ye? pull, won’t ye? Why in the name of gudgeons and ginger-cakes

don’t ye pull?—pull and break something! pull, and start your eyes out!

Here!” whipping out the sharp knife from his girdle; “every mother’s

son of ye draw his knife, and pull with the blade between his teeth.

That’s it—that’s it. Now ye do something; that looks like it, my

steel-bits. Start her—start her, my silver-spoons! Start her,

marling-spikes!”

Stubb’s exordium to his crew is given here at large, because he had

rather a peculiar way of talking to them in general, and especially in

inculcating the religion of rowing. But you must not suppose from this

specimen of his sermonizings that he ever flew into downright passions

with his congregation. Not at all; and therein consisted his chief

peculiarity. He would say the most terrific things to his crew, in a

tone so strangely compounded of fun and fury, and the fury seemed so

calculated merely as a spice to the fun, that no oarsman could hear

such queer invocations without pulling for dear life, and yet pulling

for the mere joke of the thing. Besides he all the time looked so easy

and indolent himself, so loungingly managed his steering-oar, and so

broadly gaped—open-mouthed at times—that the mere sight of such a

yawning commander, by sheer force of contrast, acted like a charm upon

the crew. Then again, Stubb was one of those odd sort of humorists,

whose jollity is sometimes so curiously ambiguous, as to put all

inferiors on their guard in the matter of obeying them.

In obedience to a sign from Ahab, Starbuck was now pulling obliquely

across Stubb’s bow; and when for a minute or so the two boats were

pretty near to each other, Stubb hailed the mate.

“Mr. Starbuck! larboard boat there, ahoy! a word with ye, sir, if ye

please!”

“Halloa!” returned Starbuck, turning round not a single inch as he

spoke; still earnestly but whisperingly urging his crew; his face set

like a flint from Stubb’s.

“What think ye of those yellow boys, sir!”

“Smuggled on board, somehow, before the ship sailed. (Strong, strong,

boys!)” in a whisper to his crew, then speaking out loud again: “A sad

business, Mr. Stubb! (seethe her, seethe her, my lads!) but never mind,

Mr. Stubb, all for the best. Let all your crew pull strong, come what

will. (Spring, my men, spring!) There’s hogsheads of sperm ahead, Mr.

Stubb, and that’s what ye came for. (Pull, my boys!) Sperm, sperm’s the

play! This at least is duty; duty and profit hand in hand.”

“Aye, aye, I thought as much,” soliloquized Stubb, when the boats

diverged, “as soon as I clapt eye on ’em, I thought so. Aye, and that’s

what he went into the after hold for, so often, as Dough-Boy long

suspected. They were hidden down there. The White Whale’s at the bottom

of it. Well, well, so be it! Can’t be helped! All right! Give way, men!

It ain’t the White Whale to-day! Give way!”

Now the advent of these outlandish strangers at such a critical instant

as the lowering of the boats from the deck, this had not unreasonably

awakened a sort of superstitious amazement in some of the ship’s

company; but Archy’s fancied discovery having some time previous got

abroad among them, though indeed not credited then, this had in some

small measure prepared them for the event. It took off the extreme edge

of their wonder; and so what with all this and Stubb’s confident way of

accounting for their appearance, they were for the time freed from

superstitious surmisings; though the affair still left abundant room

for all manner of wild conjectures as to dark Ahab’s precise agency in

the matter from the beginning. For me, I silently recalled the

mysterious shadows I had seen creeping on board the Pequod during the

dim Nantucket dawn, as well as the enigmatical hintings of the

unaccountable Elijah.

Meantime, Ahab, out of hearing of his officers, having sided the

furthest to windward, was still ranging ahead of the other boats; a

circumstance bespeaking how potent a crew was pulling him. Those tiger

yellow creatures of his seemed all steel and whalebone; like five

trip-hammers they rose and fell with regular strokes of strength, which

periodically started the boat along the water like a horizontal burst

boiler out of a Mississippi steamer. As for Fedallah, who was seen

pulling the harpooneer oar, he had thrown aside his black jacket, and

displayed his naked chest with the whole part of his body above the

gunwale, clearly cut against the alternating depressions of the watery

horizon; while at the other end of the boat Ahab, with one arm, like a

fencer’s, thrown half backward into the air, as if to counterbalance

any tendency to trip; Ahab was seen steadily managing his steering oar

as in a thousand boat lowerings ere the White Whale had torn him. All

at once the outstretched arm gave a peculiar motion and then remained

fixed, while the boat’s five oars were seen simultaneously peaked. Boat

and crew sat motionless on the sea. Instantly the three spread boats in

the rear paused on their way. The whales had irregularly settled bodily

down into the blue, thus giving no distantly discernible token of the

movement, though from his closer vicinity Ahab had observed it.

“Every man look out along his oars!” cried Starbuck. “Thou, Queequeg,

stand up!”

Nimbly springing up on the triangular raised box in the bow, the savage

stood erect there, and with intensely eager eyes gazed off towards the

spot where the chase had last been descried. Likewise upon the extreme

stern of the boat where it was also triangularly platformed level with

the gunwale, Starbuck himself was seen coolly and adroitly balancing

himself to the jerking tossings of his chip of a craft, and silently

eyeing the vast blue eye of the sea.

Not very far distant Flask’s boat was also lying breathlessly still;

its commander recklessly standing upon the top of the loggerhead, a

stout sort of post rooted in the keel, and rising some two feet above

the level of the stern platform. It is used for catching turns with the

whale line. Its top is not more spacious than the palm of a man’s hand,

and standing upon such a base as that, Flask seemed perched at the

mast-head of some ship which had sunk to all but her trucks. But little

King-Post was small and short, and at the same time little King-Post

was full of a large and tall ambition, so that this loggerhead

stand-point of his did by no means satisfy King-Post.

“I can’t see three seas off; tip us up an oar there, and let me on to

that.”

Upon this, Daggoo, with either hand upon the gunwale to steady his way,

swiftly slid aft, and then erecting himself volunteered his lofty

shoulders for a pedestal.

“Good a mast-head as any, sir. Will you mount?”

“That I will, and thank ye very much, my fine fellow; only I wish you

fifty feet taller.”

Whereupon planting his feet firmly against two opposite planks of the

boat, the gigantic negro, stooping a little, presented his flat palm to

Flask’s foot, and then putting Flask’s hand on his hearse-plumed head

and bidding him spring as he himself should toss, with one dexterous

fling landed the little man high and dry on his shoulders. And here was

Flask now standing, Daggoo with one lifted arm furnishing him with a

breastband to lean against and steady himself by.

At any time it is a strange sight to the tyro to see with what wondrous

habitude of unconscious skill the whaleman will maintain an erect

posture in his boat, even when pitched about by the most riotously

perverse and cross-running seas. Still more strange to see him giddily

perched upon the loggerhead itself, under such circumstances. But the

sight of little Flask mounted upon gigantic Daggoo was yet more

curious; for sustaining himself with a cool, indifferent, easy,

unthought of, barbaric majesty, the noble negro to every roll of the

sea harmoniously rolled his fine form. On his broad back, flaxen-haired

Flask seemed a snow-flake. The bearer looked nobler than the rider.

Though truly vivacious, tumultuous, ostentatious little Flask would now

and then stamp with impatience; but not one added heave did he thereby

give to the negro’s lordly chest. So have I seen Passion and Vanity

stamping the living magnanimous earth, but the earth did not alter her

tides and her seasons for that.

Meanwhile Stubb, the third mate, betrayed no such far-gazing

solicitudes. The whales might have made one of their regular soundings,

not a temporary dive from mere fright; and if that were the case,

Stubb, as his wont in such cases, it seems, was resolved to solace the

languishing interval with his pipe. He withdrew it from his hatband,

where he always wore it aslant like a feather. He loaded it, and rammed

home the loading with his thumb-end; but hardly had he ignited his

match across the rough sandpaper of his hand, when Tashtego, his

harpooneer, whose eyes had been setting to windward like two fixed

stars, suddenly dropped like light from his erect attitude to his seat,

crying out in a quick phrensy of hurry, “Down, down all, and give

way!—there they are!”

To a landsman, no whale, nor any sign of a herring, would have been

visible at that moment; nothing but a troubled bit of greenish white

water, and thin scattered puffs of vapor hovering over it, and

suffusingly blowing off to leeward, like the confused scud from white

rolling billows. The air around suddenly vibrated and tingled, as it

were, like the air over intensely heated plates of iron. Beneath this

atmospheric waving and curling, and partially beneath a thin layer of

water, also, the whales were swimming. Seen in advance of all the other

indications, the puffs of vapor they spouted, seemed their forerunning

couriers and detached flying outriders.

All four boats were now in keen pursuit of that one spot of troubled

water and air. But it bade fair to outstrip them; it flew on and on, as

a mass of interblending bubbles borne down a rapid stream from the

hills.

“Pull, pull, my good boys,” said Starbuck, in the lowest possible but

intensest concentrated whisper to his men; while the sharp fixed glance

from his eyes darted straight ahead of the bow, almost seemed as two

visible needles in two unerring binnacle compasses. He did not say much

to his crew, though, nor did his crew say anything to him. Only the

silence of the boat was at intervals startlingly pierced by one of his

peculiar whispers, now harsh with command, now soft with entreaty.

How different the loud little King-Post. “Sing out and say something,

my hearties. Roar and pull, my thunderbolts! Beach me, beach me on

their black backs, boys; only do that for me, and I’ll sign over to you

my Martha’s Vineyard plantation, boys; including wife and children,

boys. Lay me on—lay me on! O Lord, Lord! but I shall go stark, staring

mad! See! see that white water!” And so shouting, he pulled his hat

from his head, and stamped up and down on it; then picking it up,

flirted it far off upon the sea; and finally fell to rearing and

plunging in the boat’s stern like a crazed colt from the prairie.

“Look at that chap now,” philosophically drawled Stubb, who, with his

unlighted short pipe, mechanically retained between his teeth, at a

short distance, followed after—“He’s got fits, that Flask has. Fits?

yes, give him fits—that’s the very word—pitch fits into ’em. Merrily,

merrily, hearts-alive. Pudding for supper, you know;—merry’s the word.

Pull, babes—pull, sucklings—pull, all. But what the devil are you

hurrying about? Softly, softly, and steadily, my men. Only pull, and

keep pulling; nothing more. Crack all your backbones, and bite your

knives in two—that’s all. Take it easy—why don’t ye take it easy, I

say, and burst all your livers and lungs!”

But what it was that inscrutable Ahab said to that tiger-yellow crew of

his—these were words best omitted here; for you live under the blessed

light of the evangelical land. Only the infidel sharks in the audacious

seas may give ear to such words, when, with tornado brow, and eyes of

red murder, and foam-glued lips, Ahab leaped after his prey.

Meanwhile, all the boats tore on. The repeated specific allusions of

Flask to “that whale,” as he called the fictitious monster which he

declared to be incessantly tantalizing his boat’s bow with its

tail—these allusions of his were at times so vivid and life-like, that

they would cause some one or two of his men to snatch a fearful look

over the shoulder. But this was against all rule; for the oarsmen must

put out their eyes, and ram a skewer through their necks; usage

pronouncing that they must have no organs but ears, and no limbs but

arms, in these critical moments.

It was a sight full of quick wonder and awe! The vast swells of the

omnipotent sea; the surging, hollow roar they made, as they rolled

along the eight gunwales, like gigantic bowls in a boundless

bowling-green; the brief suspended agony of the boat, as it would tip

for an instant on the knife-like edge of the sharper waves, that almost

seemed threatening to cut it in two; the sudden profound dip into the

watery glens and hollows; the keen spurrings and goadings to gain the

top of the opposite hill; the headlong, sled-like slide down its other

side;—all these, with the cries of the headsmen and harpooneers, and

the shuddering gasps of the oarsmen, with the wondrous sight of the

ivory Pequod bearing down upon her boats with outstretched sails, like

a wild hen after her screaming brood;—all this was thrilling.

Not the raw recruit, marching from the bosom of his wife into the fever

heat of his first battle; not the dead man’s ghost encountering the

first unknown phantom in the other world;—neither of these can feel

stranger and stronger emotions than that man does, who for the first

time finds himself pulling into the charmed, churned circle of the

hunted sperm whale.

The dancing white water made by the chase was now becoming more and

more visible, owing to the increasing darkness of the dun cloud-shadows

flung upon the sea. The jets of vapor no longer blended, but tilted

everywhere to right and left; the whales seemed separating their wakes.

The boats were pulled more apart; Starbuck giving chase to three whales

running dead to leeward. Our sail was now set, and, with the still

rising wind, we rushed along; the boat going with such madness through

the water, that the lee oars could scarcely be worked rapidly enough to

escape being torn from the row-locks.

Soon we were running through a suffusing wide veil of mist; neither

ship nor boat to be seen.

“Give way, men,” whispered Starbuck, drawing still further aft the

sheet of his sail; “there is time to kill a fish yet before the squall

comes. There’s white water again!—close to! Spring!”

Soon after, two cries in quick succession on each side of us denoted

that the other boats had got fast; but hardly were they overheard, when

with a lightning-like hurtling whisper Starbuck said: “Stand up!” and

Queequeg, harpoon in hand, sprang to his feet.

Though not one of the oarsmen was then facing the life and death peril

so close to them ahead, yet with their eyes on the intense countenance

of the mate in the stern of the boat, they knew that the imminent

instant had come; they heard, too, an enormous wallowing sound as of

fifty elephants stirring in their litter. Meanwhile the boat was still

booming through the mist, the waves curling and hissing around us like

the erected crests of enraged serpents.

“That’s his hump. \_There\_, \_there\_, give it to him!” whispered

Starbuck.

A short rushing sound leaped out of the boat; it was the darted iron of

Queequeg. Then all in one welded commotion came an invisible push from

astern, while forward the boat seemed striking on a ledge; the sail

collapsed and exploded; a gush of scalding vapor shot up near by;

something rolled and tumbled like an earthquake beneath us. The whole

crew were half suffocated as they were tossed helter-skelter into the

white curdling cream of the squall. Squall, whale, and harpoon had all

blended together; and the whale, merely grazed by the iron, escaped.

Though completely swamped, the boat was nearly unharmed. Swimming round

it we picked up the floating oars, and lashing them across the gunwale,

tumbled back to our places. There we sat up to our knees in the sea,

the water covering every rib and plank, so that to our downward gazing

eyes the suspended craft seemed a coral boat grown up to us from the

bottom of the ocean.

The wind increased to a howl; the waves dashed their bucklers together;

the whole squall roared, forked, and crackled around us like a white

fire upon the prairie, in which, unconsumed, we were burning; immortal

in these jaws of death! In vain we hailed the other boats; as well roar

to the live coals down the chimney of a flaming furnace as hail those

boats in that storm. Meanwhile the driving scud, rack, and mist, grew

darker with the shadows of night; no sign of the ship could be seen.

The rising sea forbade all attempts to bale out the boat. The oars were

useless as propellers, performing now the office of life-preservers.

So, cutting the lashing of the waterproof match keg, after many

failures Starbuck contrived to ignite the lamp in the lantern; then

stretching it on a waif pole, handed it to Queequeg as the

standard-bearer of this forlorn hope. There, then, he sat, holding up

that imbecile candle in the heart of that almighty forlornness. There,

then, he sat, the sign and symbol of a man without faith, hopelessly

holding up hope in the midst of despair.

Wet, drenched through, and shivering cold, despairing of ship or boat,

we lifted up our eyes as the dawn came on. The mist still spread over

the sea, the empty lantern lay crushed in the bottom of the boat.

Suddenly Queequeg started to his feet, hollowing his hand to his ear.

We all heard a faint creaking, as of ropes and yards hitherto muffled

by the storm. The sound came nearer and nearer; the thick mists were

dimly parted by a huge, vague form. Affrighted, we all sprang into the

sea as the ship at last loomed into view, bearing right down upon us

within a distance of not much more than its length.

Floating on the waves we saw the abandoned boat, as for one instant it

tossed and gaped beneath the ship’s bows like a chip at the base of a

cataract; and then the vast hull rolled over it, and it was seen no

more till it came up weltering astern. Again we swam for it, were

dashed against it by the seas, and were at last taken up and safely

landed on board. Ere the squall came close to, the other boats had cut

loose from their fish and returned to the ship in good time. The ship

had given us up, but was still cruising, if haply it might light upon

some token of our perishing,—an oar or a lance pole.

CHAPTER 49. The Hyena.

There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed

affair we call life when a man takes this whole universe for a vast

practical joke, though the wit thereof he but dimly discerns, and more

than suspects that the joke is at nobody’s expense but his own.

However, nothing dispirits, and nothing seems worth while disputing. He

bolts down all events, all creeds, and beliefs, and persuasions, all

hard things visible and invisible, never mind how knobby; as an ostrich

of potent digestion gobbles down bullets and gun flints. And as for

small difficulties and worryings, prospects of sudden disaster, peril

of life and limb; all these, and death itself, seem to him only sly,

good-natured hits, and jolly punches in the side bestowed by the unseen

and unaccountable old joker. That odd sort of wayward mood I am

speaking of, comes over a man only in some time of extreme tribulation;

it comes in the very midst of his earnestness, so that what just before

might have seemed to him a thing most momentous, now seems but a part

of the general joke. There is nothing like the perils of whaling to

breed this free and easy sort of genial, desperado philosophy; and with

it I now regarded this whole voyage of the Pequod, and the great White

Whale its object.

“Queequeg,” said I, when they had dragged me, the last man, to the

deck, and I was still shaking myself in my jacket to fling off the

water; “Queequeg, my fine friend, does this sort of thing often

happen?” Without much emotion, though soaked through just like me, he

gave me to understand that such things did often happen.

“Mr. Stubb,” said I, turning to that worthy, who, buttoned up in his

oil-jacket, was now calmly smoking his pipe in the rain; “Mr. Stubb, I

think I have heard you say that of all whalemen you ever met, our chief

mate, Mr. Starbuck, is by far the most careful and prudent. I suppose

then, that going plump on a flying whale with your sail set in a foggy

squall is the height of a whaleman’s discretion?”

“Certain. I’ve lowered for whales from a leaking ship in a gale off

Cape Horn.”

“Mr. Flask,” said I, turning to little King-Post, who was standing

close by; “you are experienced in these things, and I am not. Will you

tell me whether it is an unalterable law in this fishery, Mr. Flask,

for an oarsman to break his own back pulling himself back-foremost into

death’s jaws?”

“Can’t you twist that smaller?” said Flask. “Yes, that’s the law. I

should like to see a boat’s crew backing water up to a whale face

foremost. Ha, ha! the whale would give them squint for squint, mind

that!”

Here then, from three impartial witnesses, I had a deliberate statement

of the entire case. Considering, therefore, that squalls and capsizings

in the water and consequent bivouacks on the deep, were matters of

common occurrence in this kind of life; considering that at the

superlatively critical instant of going on to the whale I must resign

my life into the hands of him who steered the boat—oftentimes a fellow

who at that very moment is in his impetuousness upon the point of

scuttling the craft with his own frantic stampings; considering that

the particular disaster to our own particular boat was chiefly to be

imputed to Starbuck’s driving on to his whale almost in the teeth of a

squall, and considering that Starbuck, notwithstanding, was famous for

his great heedfulness in the fishery; considering that I belonged to

this uncommonly prudent Starbuck’s boat; and finally considering in

what a devil’s chase I was implicated, touching the White Whale: taking

all things together, I say, I thought I might as well go below and make

a rough draft of my will. “Queequeg,” said I, “come along, you shall be

my lawyer, executor, and legatee.”

It may seem strange that of all men sailors should be tinkering at

their last wills and testaments, but there are no people in the world

more fond of that diversion. This was the fourth time in my nautical

life that I had done the same thing. After the ceremony was concluded

upon the present occasion, I felt all the easier; a stone was rolled

away from my heart. Besides, all the days I should now live would be as

good as the days that Lazarus lived after his resurrection; a

supplementary clean gain of so many months or weeks as the case might

be. I survived myself; my death and burial were locked up in my chest.

I looked round me tranquilly and contentedly, like a quiet ghost with a

clean conscience sitting inside the bars of a snug family vault.

Now then, thought I, unconsciously rolling up the sleeves of my frock,

here goes for a cool, collected dive at death and destruction, and the

devil fetch the hindmost.

CHAPTER 50. Ahab’s Boat and Crew. Fedallah.

“Who would have thought it, Flask!” cried Stubb; “if I had but one leg

you would not catch me in a boat, unless maybe to stop the plug-hole

with my timber toe. Oh! he’s a wonderful old man!”

“I don’t think it so strange, after all, on that account,” said Flask.

“If his leg were off at the hip, now, it would be a different thing.

That would disable him; but he has one knee, and good part of the other

left, you know.”

“I don’t know that, my little man; I never yet saw him kneel.”

Among whale-wise people it has often been argued whether, considering

the paramount importance of his life to the success of the voyage, it

is right for a whaling captain to jeopardize that life in the active

perils of the chase. So Tamerlane’s soldiers often argued with tears in

their eyes, whether that invaluable life of his ought to be carried

into the thickest of the fight.

But with Ahab the question assumed a modified aspect. Considering that

with two legs man is but a hobbling wight in all times of danger;

considering that the pursuit of whales is always under great and

extraordinary difficulties; that every individual moment, indeed, then

comprises a peril; under these circumstances is it wise for any maimed

man to enter a whale-boat in the hunt? As a general thing, the

joint-owners of the Pequod must have plainly thought not.

Ahab well knew that although his friends at home would think little of

his entering a boat in certain comparatively harmless vicissitudes of

the chase, for the sake of being near the scene of action and giving

his orders in person, yet for Captain Ahab to have a boat actually

apportioned to him as a regular headsman in the hunt—above all for

Captain Ahab to be supplied with five extra men, as that same boat’s

crew, he well knew that such generous conceits never entered the heads

of the owners of the Pequod. Therefore he had not solicited a boat’s

crew from them, nor had he in any way hinted his desires on that head.

Nevertheless he had taken private measures of his own touching all that

matter. Until Cabaco’s published discovery, the sailors had little

foreseen it, though to be sure when, after being a little while out of

port, all hands had concluded the customary business of fitting the

whaleboats for service; when some time after this Ahab was now and then

found bestirring himself in the matter of making thole-pins with his

own hands for what was thought to be one of the spare boats, and even

solicitously cutting the small wooden skewers, which when the line is

running out are pinned over the groove in the bow: when all this was

observed in him, and particularly his solicitude in having an extra

coat of sheathing in the bottom of the boat, as if to make it better

withstand the pointed pressure of his ivory limb; and also the anxiety

he evinced in exactly shaping the thigh board, or clumsy cleat, as it

is sometimes called, the horizontal piece in the boat’s bow for bracing

the knee against in darting or stabbing at the whale; when it was

observed how often he stood up in that boat with his solitary knee

fixed in the semi-circular depression in the cleat, and with the

carpenter’s chisel gouged out a little here and straightened it a

little there; all these things, I say, had awakened much interest and

curiosity at the time. But almost everybody supposed that this

particular preparative heedfulness in Ahab must only be with a view to

the ultimate chase of Moby Dick; for he had already revealed his

intention to hunt that mortal monster in person. But such a supposition

did by no means involve the remotest suspicion as to any boat’s crew

being assigned to that boat.

Now, with the subordinate phantoms, what wonder remained soon waned

away; for in a whaler wonders soon wane. Besides, now and then such

unaccountable odds and ends of strange nations come up from the unknown

nooks and ash-holes of the earth to man these floating outlaws of

whalers; and the ships themselves often pick up such queer castaway

creatures found tossing about the open sea on planks, bits of wreck,

oars, whaleboats, canoes, blown-off Japanese junks, and what not; that

Beelzebub himself might climb up the side and step down into the cabin

to chat with the captain, and it would not create any unsubduable

excitement in the forecastle.

But be all this as it may, certain it is that while the subordinate

phantoms soon found their place among the crew, though still as it were

somehow distinct from them, yet that hair-turbaned Fedallah remained a

muffled mystery to the last. Whence he came in a mannerly world like

this, by what sort of unaccountable tie he soon evinced himself to be

linked with Ahab’s peculiar fortunes; nay, so far as to have some sort

of a half-hinted influence; Heaven knows, but it might have been even

authority over him; all this none knew. But one cannot sustain an

indifferent air concerning Fedallah. He was such a creature as

civilized, domestic people in the temperate zone only see in their

dreams, and that but dimly; but the like of whom now and then glide

among the unchanging Asiatic communities, especially the Oriental isles

to the east of the continent—those insulated, immemorial, unalterable

countries, which even in these modern days still preserve much of the

ghostly aboriginalness of earth’s primal generations, when the memory

of the first man was a distinct recollection, and all men his

descendants, unknowing whence he came, eyed each other as real

phantoms, and asked of the sun and the moon why they were created and

to what end; when though, according to Genesis, the angels indeed

consorted with the daughters of men, the devils also, add the

uncanonical Rabbins, indulged in mundane amours.

CHAPTER 51. The Spirit-Spout.

Days, weeks passed, and under easy sail, the ivory Pequod had slowly

swept across four several cruising-grounds; that off the Azores; off

the Cape de Verdes; on the Plate (so called), being off the mouth of

the Rio de la Plata; and the Carrol Ground, an unstaked, watery

locality, southerly from St. Helena.

It was while gliding through these latter waters that one serene and

moonlight night, when all the waves rolled by like scrolls of silver;

and, by their soft, suffusing seethings, made what seemed a silvery

silence, not a solitude; on such a silent night a silvery jet was seen

far in advance of the white bubbles at the bow. Lit up by the moon, it

looked celestial; seemed some plumed and glittering god uprising from

the sea. Fedallah first descried this jet. For of these moonlight

nights, it was his wont to mount to the main-mast head, and stand a

look-out there, with the same precision as if it had been day. And yet,

though herds of whales were seen by night, not one whaleman in a

hundred would venture a lowering for them. You may think with what

emotions, then, the seamen beheld this old Oriental perched aloft at

such unusual hours; his turban and the moon, companions in one sky. But

when, after spending his uniform interval there for several successive

nights without uttering a single sound; when, after all this silence,

his unearthly voice was heard announcing that silvery, moon-lit jet,

every reclining mariner started to his feet as if some winged spirit

had lighted in the rigging, and hailed the mortal crew. “There she

blows!” Had the trump of judgment blown, they could not have quivered

more; yet still they felt no terror; rather pleasure. For though it was

a most unwonted hour, yet so impressive was the cry, and so deliriously

exciting, that almost every soul on board instinctively desired a

lowering.

Walking the deck with quick, side-lunging strides, Ahab commanded the

t’gallant sails and royals to be set, and every stunsail spread. The

best man in the ship must take the helm. Then, with every mast-head

manned, the piled-up craft rolled down before the wind. The strange,

upheaving, lifting tendency of the taffrail breeze filling the hollows

of so many sails, made the buoyant, hovering deck to feel like air

beneath the feet; while still she rushed along, as if two antagonistic

influences were struggling in her—one to mount direct to heaven, the

other to drive yawingly to some horizontal goal. And had you watched

Ahab’s face that night, you would have thought that in him also two

different things were warring. While his one live leg made lively

echoes along the deck, every stroke of his dead limb sounded like a

coffin-tap. On life and death this old man walked. But though the ship

so swiftly sped, and though from every eye, like arrows, the eager

glances shot, yet the silvery jet was no more seen that night. Every

sailor swore he saw it once, but not a second time.

This midnight-spout had almost grown a forgotten thing, when, some days

after, lo! at the same silent hour, it was again announced: again it

was descried by all; but upon making sail to overtake it, once more it

disappeared as if it had never been. And so it served us night after

night, till no one heeded it but to wonder at it. Mysteriously jetted

into the clear moonlight, or starlight, as the case might be;

disappearing again for one whole day, or two days, or three; and

somehow seeming at every distinct repetition to be advancing still

further and further in our van, this solitary jet seemed for ever

alluring us on.

Nor with the immemorial superstition of their race, and in accordance

with the preternaturalness, as it seemed, which in many things invested

the Pequod, were there wanting some of the seamen who swore that

whenever and wherever descried; at however remote times, or in however

far apart latitudes and longitudes, that unnearable spout was cast by

one self-same whale; and that whale, Moby Dick. For a time, there

reigned, too, a sense of peculiar dread at this flitting apparition, as

if it were treacherously beckoning us on and on, in order that the

monster might turn round upon us, and rend us at last in the remotest

and most savage seas.

These temporary apprehensions, so vague but so awful, derived a

wondrous potency from the contrasting serenity of the weather, in

which, beneath all its blue blandness, some thought there lurked a

devilish charm, as for days and days we voyaged along, through seas so

wearily, lonesomely mild, that all space, in repugnance to our vengeful

errand, seemed vacating itself of life before our urn-like prow.

But, at last, when turning to the eastward, the Cape winds began

howling around us, and we rose and fell upon the long, troubled seas

that are there; when the ivory-tusked Pequod sharply bowed to the

blast, and gored the dark waves in her madness, till, like showers of

silver chips, the foam-flakes flew over her bulwarks; then all this

desolate vacuity of life went away, but gave place to sights more

dismal than before.

Close to our bows, strange forms in the water darted hither and thither

before us; while thick in our rear flew the inscrutable sea-ravens. And

every morning, perched on our stays, rows of these birds were seen; and

spite of our hootings, for a long time obstinately clung to the hemp,

as though they deemed our ship some drifting, uninhabited craft; a

thing appointed to desolation, and therefore fit roosting-place for

their homeless selves. And heaved and heaved, still unrestingly heaved

the black sea, as if its vast tides were a conscience; and the great

mundane soul were in anguish and remorse for the long sin and suffering

it had bred.

Cape of Good Hope, do they call ye? Rather Cape Tormentoso, as called

of yore; for long allured by the perfidious silences that before had

attended us, we found ourselves launched into this tormented sea, where

guilty beings transformed into those fowls and these fish, seemed

condemned to swim on everlastingly without any haven in store, or beat

that black air without any horizon. But calm, snow-white, and

unvarying; still directing its fountain of feathers to the sky; still

beckoning us on from before, the solitary jet would at times be

descried.

During all this blackness of the elements, Ahab, though assuming for

the time the almost continual command of the drenched and dangerous

deck, manifested the gloomiest reserve; and more seldom than ever

addressed his mates. In tempestuous times like these, after everything

above and aloft has been secured, nothing more can be done but

passively to await the issue of the gale. Then Captain and crew become

practical fatalists. So, with his ivory leg inserted into its

accustomed hole, and with one hand firmly grasping a shroud, Ahab for

hours and hours would stand gazing dead to windward, while an

occasional squall of sleet or snow would all but congeal his very

eyelashes together. Meantime, the crew driven from the forward part of

the ship by the perilous seas that burstingly broke over its bows,

stood in a line along the bulwarks in the waist; and the better to

guard against the leaping waves, each man had slipped himself into a

sort of bowline secured to the rail, in which he swung as in a loosened

belt. Few or no words were spoken; and the silent ship, as if manned by

painted sailors in wax, day after day tore on through all the swift

madness and gladness of the demoniac waves. By night the same muteness

of humanity before the shrieks of the ocean prevailed; still in silence

the men swung in the bowlines; still wordless Ahab stood up to the

blast. Even when wearied nature seemed demanding repose he would not

seek that repose in his hammock. Never could Starbuck forget the old

man’s aspect, when one night going down into the cabin to mark how the

barometer stood, he saw him with closed eyes sitting straight in his

floor-screwed chair; the rain and half-melted sleet of the storm from

which he had some time before emerged, still slowly dripping from the

unremoved hat and coat. On the table beside him lay unrolled one of

those charts of tides and currents which have previously been spoken

of. His lantern swung from his tightly clenched hand. Though the body

was erect, the head was thrown back so that the closed eyes were

pointed towards the needle of the tell-tale that swung from a beam in

the ceiling.\*

\*The cabin-compass is called the tell-tale, because without going to

the compass at the helm, the Captain, while below, can inform himself

of the course of the ship.

Terrible old man! thought Starbuck with a shudder, sleeping in this

gale, still thou steadfastly eyest thy purpose.

CHAPTER 52. The Albatross.

South-eastward from the Cape, off the distant Crozetts, a good cruising

ground for Right Whalemen, a sail loomed ahead, the Goney (Albatross)

by name. As she slowly drew nigh, from my lofty perch at the

fore-mast-head, I had a good view of that sight so remarkable to a tyro

in the far ocean fisheries—a whaler at sea, and long absent from home.

As if the waves had been fullers, this craft was bleached like the

skeleton of a stranded walrus. All down her sides, this spectral

appearance was traced with long channels of reddened rust, while all

her spars and her rigging were like the thick branches of trees furred

over with hoar-frost. Only her lower sails were set. A wild sight it

was to see her long-bearded look-outs at those three mast-heads. They

seemed clad in the skins of beasts, so torn and bepatched the raiment

that had survived nearly four years of cruising. Standing in iron hoops

nailed to the mast, they swayed and swung over a fathomless sea; and

though, when the ship slowly glided close under our stern, we six men

in the air came so nigh to each other that we might almost have leaped

from the mast-heads of one ship to those of the other; yet, those

forlorn-looking fishermen, mildly eyeing us as they passed, said not

one word to our own look-outs, while the quarter-deck hail was being

heard from below.

“Ship ahoy! Have ye seen the White Whale?”

But as the strange captain, leaning over the pallid bulwarks, was in

the act of putting his trumpet to his mouth, it somehow fell from his

hand into the sea; and the wind now rising amain, he in vain strove to

make himself heard without it. Meantime his ship was still increasing

the distance between. While in various silent ways the seamen of the

Pequod were evincing their observance of this ominous incident at the

first mere mention of the White Whale’s name to another ship, Ahab for

a moment paused; it almost seemed as though he would have lowered a

boat to board the stranger, had not the threatening wind forbade. But

taking advantage of his windward position, he again seized his trumpet,

and knowing by her aspect that the stranger vessel was a Nantucketer

and shortly bound home, he loudly hailed—“Ahoy there! This is the

Pequod, bound round the world! Tell them to address all future letters

to the Pacific ocean! and this time three years, if I am not at home,

tell them to address them to ——”

At that moment the two wakes were fairly crossed, and instantly, then,

in accordance with their singular ways, shoals of small harmless fish,

that for some days before had been placidly swimming by our side,

darted away with what seemed shuddering fins, and ranged themselves

fore and aft with the stranger’s flanks. Though in the course of his

continual voyagings Ahab must often before have noticed a similar

sight, yet, to any monomaniac man, the veriest trifles capriciously

carry meanings.

“Swim away from me, do ye?” murmured Ahab, gazing over into the water.

There seemed but little in the words, but the tone conveyed more of

deep helpless sadness than the insane old man had ever before evinced.

But turning to the steersman, who thus far had been holding the ship in

the wind to diminish her headway, he cried out in his old lion

voice,—“Up helm! Keep her off round the world!”

Round the world! There is much in that sound to inspire proud feelings;

but whereto does all that circumnavigation conduct? Only through

numberless perils to the very point whence we started, where those that

we left behind secure, were all the time before us.

Were this world an endless plain, and by sailing eastward we could for

ever reach new distances, and discover sights more sweet and strange

than any Cyclades or Islands of King Solomon, then there were promise

in the voyage. But in pursuit of those far mysteries we dream of, or in

tormented chase of that demon phantom that, some time or other, swims

before all human hearts; while chasing such over this round globe, they

either lead us on in barren mazes or midway leave us whelmed.

CHAPTER 53. The Gam.

The ostensible reason why Ahab did not go on board of the whaler we had

spoken was this: the wind and sea betokened storms. But even had this

not been the case, he would not after all, perhaps, have boarded

her—judging by his subsequent conduct on similar occasions—if so it had

been that, by the process of hailing, he had obtained a negative answer

to the question he put. For, as it eventually turned out, he cared not

to consort, even for five minutes, with any stranger captain, except he

could contribute some of that information he so absorbingly sought. But

all this might remain inadequately estimated, were not something said

here of the peculiar usages of whaling-vessels when meeting each other

in foreign seas, and especially on a common cruising-ground.

If two strangers crossing the Pine Barrens in New York State, or the

equally desolate Salisbury Plain in England; if casually encountering

each other in such inhospitable wilds, these twain, for the life of

them, cannot well avoid a mutual salutation; and stopping for a moment

to interchange the news; and, perhaps, sitting down for a while and

resting in concert: then, how much more natural that upon the

illimitable Pine Barrens and Salisbury Plains of the sea, two whaling

vessels descrying each other at the ends of the earth—off lone

Fanning’s Island, or the far away King’s Mills; how much more natural,

I say, that under such circumstances these ships should not only

interchange hails, but come into still closer, more friendly and

sociable contact. And especially would this seem to be a matter of

course, in the case of vessels owned in one seaport, and whose

captains, officers, and not a few of the men are personally known to

each other; and consequently, have all sorts of dear domestic things to

talk about.

For the long absent ship, the outward-bounder, perhaps, has letters on

board; at any rate, she will be sure to let her have some papers of a

date a year or two later than the last one on her blurred and

thumb-worn files. And in return for that courtesy, the outward-bound

ship would receive the latest whaling intelligence from the

cruising-ground to which she may be destined, a thing of the utmost

importance to her. And in degree, all this will hold true concerning

whaling vessels crossing each other’s track on the cruising-ground

itself, even though they are equally long absent from home. For one of

them may have received a transfer of letters from some third, and now

far remote vessel; and some of those letters may be for the people of

the ship she now meets. Besides, they would exchange the whaling news,

and have an agreeable chat. For not only would they meet with all the

sympathies of sailors, but likewise with all the peculiar

congenialities arising from a common pursuit and mutually shared

privations and perils.

Nor would difference of country make any very essential difference;

that is, so long as both parties speak one language, as is the case

with Americans and English. Though, to be sure, from the small number

of English whalers, such meetings do not very often occur, and when

they do occur there is too apt to be a sort of shyness between them;

for your Englishman is rather reserved, and your Yankee, he does not

fancy that sort of thing in anybody but himself. Besides, the English

whalers sometimes affect a kind of metropolitan superiority over the

American whalers; regarding the long, lean Nantucketer, with his

nondescript provincialisms, as a sort of sea-peasant. But where this

superiority in the English whalemen does really consist, it would be

hard to say, seeing that the Yankees in one day, collectively, kill

more whales than all the English, collectively, in ten years. But this

is a harmless little foible in the English whale-hunters, which the

Nantucketer does not take much to heart; probably, because he knows

that he has a few foibles himself.

So, then, we see that of all ships separately sailing the sea, the

whalers have most reason to be sociable—and they are so. Whereas, some

merchant ships crossing each other’s wake in the mid-Atlantic, will

oftentimes pass on without so much as a single word of recognition,

mutually cutting each other on the high seas, like a brace of dandies

in Broadway; and all the time indulging, perhaps, in finical criticism

upon each other’s rig. As for Men-of-War, when they chance to meet at

sea, they first go through such a string of silly bowings and

scrapings, such a ducking of ensigns, that there does not seem to be

much right-down hearty good-will and brotherly love about it at all. As

touching Slave-ships meeting, why, they are in such a prodigious hurry,

they run away from each other as soon as possible. And as for Pirates,

when they chance to cross each other’s cross-bones, the first hail

is—“How many skulls?”—the same way that whalers hail—“How many

barrels?” And that question once answered, pirates straightway steer

apart, for they are infernal villains on both sides, and don’t like to

see overmuch of each other’s villanous likenesses.

But look at the godly, honest, unostentatious, hospitable, sociable,

free-and-easy whaler! What does the whaler do when she meets another

whaler in any sort of decent weather? She has a “\_Gam\_,” a thing so

utterly unknown to all other ships that they never heard of the name

even; and if by chance they should hear of it, they only grin at it,

and repeat gamesome stuff about “spouters” and “blubber-boilers,” and

such like pretty exclamations. Why it is that all Merchant-seamen, and

also all Pirates and Man-of-War’s men, and Slave-ship sailors, cherish

such a scornful feeling towards Whale-ships; this is a question it

would be hard to answer. Because, in the case of pirates, say, I should

like to know whether that profession of theirs has any peculiar glory

about it. It sometimes ends in uncommon elevation, indeed; but only at

the gallows. And besides, when a man is elevated in that odd fashion,

he has no proper foundation for his superior altitude. Hence, I

conclude, that in boasting himself to be high lifted above a whaleman,

in that assertion the pirate has no solid basis to stand on.

But what is a \_Gam?\_ You might wear out your index-finger running up

and down the columns of dictionaries, and never find the word. Dr.

Johnson never attained to that erudition; Noah Webster’s ark does not

hold it. Nevertheless, this same expressive word has now for many years

been in constant use among some fifteen thousand true born Yankees.

Certainly, it needs a definition, and should be incorporated into the

Lexicon. With that view, let me learnedly define it.

GAM. NOUN—\_A social meeting of two\_ (\_or more\_) \_Whaleships, generally

on a cruising-ground; when, after exchanging hails, they exchange

visits by boats’ crews: the two captains remaining, for the time, on

board of one ship, and the two chief mates on the other.\_

There is another little item about Gamming which must not be forgotten

here. All professions have their own little peculiarities of detail; so

has the whale fishery. In a pirate, man-of-war, or slave ship, when the

captain is rowed anywhere in his boat, he always sits in the stern

sheets on a comfortable, sometimes cushioned seat there, and often

steers himself with a pretty little milliner’s tiller decorated with

gay cords and ribbons. But the whale-boat has no seat astern, no sofa

of that sort whatever, and no tiller at all. High times indeed, if

whaling captains were wheeled about the water on castors like gouty old

aldermen in patent chairs. And as for a tiller, the whale-boat never

admits of any such effeminacy; and therefore as in gamming a complete

boat’s crew must leave the ship, and hence as the boat steerer or

harpooneer is of the number, that subordinate is the steersman upon the

occasion, and the captain, having no place to sit in, is pulled off to

his visit all standing like a pine tree. And often you will notice that

being conscious of the eyes of the whole visible world resting on him

from the sides of the two ships, this standing captain is all alive to

the importance of sustaining his dignity by maintaining his legs. Nor

is this any very easy matter; for in his rear is the immense projecting

steering oar hitting him now and then in the small of his back, the

after-oar reciprocating by rapping his knees in front. He is thus

completely wedged before and behind, and can only expand himself

sideways by settling down on his stretched legs; but a sudden, violent

pitch of the boat will often go far to topple him, because length of

foundation is nothing without corresponding breadth. Merely make a

spread angle of two poles, and you cannot stand them up. Then, again,

it would never do in plain sight of the world’s riveted eyes, it would

never do, I say, for this straddling captain to be seen steadying

himself the slightest particle by catching hold of anything with his

hands; indeed, as token of his entire, buoyant self-command, he

generally carries his hands in his trowsers’ pockets; but perhaps being

generally very large, heavy hands, he carries them there for ballast.

Nevertheless there have occurred instances, well authenticated ones

too, where the captain has been known for an uncommonly critical moment

or two, in a sudden squall say—to seize hold of the nearest oarsman’s

hair, and hold on there like grim death.

CHAPTER 54. The Town-Ho’s Story.

(\_As told at the Golden Inn.\_)

The Cape of Good Hope, and all the watery region round about there, is

much like some noted four corners of a great highway, where you meet

more travellers than in any other part.

It was not very long after speaking the Goney that another

homeward-bound whaleman, the Town-Ho,\* was encountered. She was manned

almost wholly by Polynesians. In the short gam that ensued she gave us

strong news of Moby Dick. To some the general interest in the White

Whale was now wildly heightened by a circumstance of the Town-Ho’s

story, which seemed obscurely to involve with the whale a certain

wondrous, inverted visitation of one of those so called judgments of

God which at times are said to overtake some men. This latter

circumstance, with its own particular accompaniments, forming what may

be called the secret part of the tragedy about to be narrated, never

reached the ears of Captain Ahab or his mates. For that secret part of

the story was unknown to the captain of the Town-Ho himself. It was the

private property of three confederate white seamen of that ship, one of

whom, it seems, communicated it to Tashtego with Romish injunctions of

secrecy, but the following night Tashtego rambled in his sleep, and

revealed so much of it in that way, that when he was wakened he could

not well withhold the rest. Nevertheless, so potent an influence did

this thing have on those seamen in the Pequod who came to the full

knowledge of it, and by such a strange delicacy, to call it so, were

they governed in this matter, that they kept the secret among

themselves so that it never transpired abaft the Pequod’s main-mast.

Interweaving in its proper place this darker thread with the story as

publicly narrated on the ship, the whole of this strange affair I now

proceed to put on lasting record.

\*The ancient whale-cry upon first sighting a whale from the mast-head,

still used by whalemen in hunting the famous Gallipagos terrapin.

For my humor’s sake, I shall preserve the style in which I once

narrated it at Lima, to a lounging circle of my Spanish friends, one

saint’s eve, smoking upon the thick-gilt tiled piazza of the Golden

Inn. Of those fine cavaliers, the young Dons, Pedro and Sebastian, were

on the closer terms with me; and hence the interluding questions they

occasionally put, and which are duly answered at the time.

“Some two years prior to my first learning the events which I am about

rehearsing to you, gentlemen, the Town-Ho, Sperm Whaler of Nantucket,

was cruising in your Pacific here, not very many days’ sail eastward

from the eaves of this good Golden Inn. She was somewhere to the

northward of the Line. One morning upon handling the pumps, according

to daily usage, it was observed that she made more water in her hold

than common. They supposed a sword-fish had stabbed her, gentlemen. But

the captain, having some unusual reason for believing that rare good

luck awaited him in those latitudes; and therefore being very averse to

quit them, and the leak not being then considered at all dangerous,

though, indeed, they could not find it after searching the hold as low

down as was possible in rather heavy weather, the ship still continued

her cruisings, the mariners working at the pumps at wide and easy

intervals; but no good luck came; more days went by, and not only was

the leak yet undiscovered, but it sensibly increased. So much so, that

now taking some alarm, the captain, making all sail, stood away for the

nearest harbor among the islands, there to have his hull hove out and

repaired.

“Though no small passage was before her, yet, if the commonest chance

favoured, he did not at all fear that his ship would founder by the

way, because his pumps were of the best, and being periodically

relieved at them, those six-and-thirty men of his could easily keep the

ship free; never mind if the leak should double on her. In truth, well

nigh the whole of this passage being attended by very prosperous

breezes, the Town-Ho had all but certainly arrived in perfect safety at

her port without the occurrence of the least fatality, had it not been

for the brutal overbearing of Radney, the mate, a Vineyarder, and the

bitterly provoked vengeance of Steelkilt, a Lakeman and desperado from

Buffalo.

“‘Lakeman!—Buffalo! Pray, what is a Lakeman, and where is Buffalo?’

said Don Sebastian, rising in his swinging mat of grass.

“On the eastern shore of our Lake Erie, Don; but—I crave your

courtesy—may be, you shall soon hear further of all that. Now,

gentlemen, in square-sail brigs and three-masted ships, well-nigh as

large and stout as any that ever sailed out of your old Callao to far

Manilla; this Lakeman, in the land-locked heart of our America, had yet

been nurtured by all those agrarian freebooting impressions popularly

connected with the open ocean. For in their interflowing aggregate,

those grand fresh-water seas of ours,—Erie, and Ontario, and Huron, and

Superior, and Michigan,—possess an ocean-like expansiveness, with many

of the ocean’s noblest traits; with many of its rimmed varieties of

races and of climes. They contain round archipelagoes of romantic

isles, even as the Polynesian waters do; in large part, are shored by

two great contrasting nations, as the Atlantic is; they furnish long

maritime approaches to our numerous territorial colonies from the East,

dotted all round their banks; here and there are frowned upon by

batteries, and by the goat-like craggy guns of lofty Mackinaw; they

have heard the fleet thunderings of naval victories; at intervals, they

yield their beaches to wild barbarians, whose red painted faces flash

from out their peltry wigwams; for leagues and leagues are flanked by

ancient and unentered forests, where the gaunt pines stand like serried

lines of kings in Gothic genealogies; those same woods harboring wild

Afric beasts of prey, and silken creatures whose exported furs give

robes to Tartar Emperors; they mirror the paved capitals of Buffalo and

Cleveland, as well as Winnebago villages; they float alike the

full-rigged merchant ship, the armed cruiser of the State, the steamer,

and the beech canoe; they are swept by Borean and dismasting blasts as

direful as any that lash the salted wave; they know what shipwrecks

are, for out of sight of land, however inland, they have drowned full

many a midnight ship with all its shrieking crew. Thus, gentlemen,

though an inlander, Steelkilt was wild-ocean born, and wild-ocean

nurtured; as much of an audacious mariner as any. And for Radney,

though in his infancy he may have laid him down on the lone Nantucket

beach, to nurse at his maternal sea; though in after life he had long

followed our austere Atlantic and your contemplative Pacific; yet was

he quite as vengeful and full of social quarrel as the backwoods

seaman, fresh from the latitudes of buck-horn handled Bowie-knives. Yet

was this Nantucketer a man with some good-hearted traits; and this

Lakeman, a mariner, who though a sort of devil indeed, might yet by

inflexible firmness, only tempered by that common decency of human

recognition which is the meanest slave’s right; thus treated, this

Steelkilt had long been retained harmless and docile. At all events, he

had proved so thus far; but Radney was doomed and made mad, and

Steelkilt—but, gentlemen, you shall hear.

“It was not more than a day or two at the furthest after pointing her

prow for her island haven, that the Town-Ho’s leak seemed again

increasing, but only so as to require an hour or more at the pumps

every day. You must know that in a settled and civilized ocean like our

Atlantic, for example, some skippers think little of pumping their

whole way across it; though of a still, sleepy night, should the

officer of the deck happen to forget his duty in that respect, the

probability would be that he and his shipmates would never again

remember it, on account of all hands gently subsiding to the bottom.

Nor in the solitary and savage seas far from you to the westward,

gentlemen, is it altogether unusual for ships to keep clanging at their

pump-handles in full chorus even for a voyage of considerable length;

that is, if it lie along a tolerably accessible coast, or if any other

reasonable retreat is afforded them. It is only when a leaky vessel is

in some very out of the way part of those waters, some really landless

latitude, that her captain begins to feel a little anxious.

“Much this way had it been with the Town-Ho; so when her leak was found

gaining once more, there was in truth some small concern manifested by

several of her company; especially by Radney the mate. He commanded the

upper sails to be well hoisted, sheeted home anew, and every way

expanded to the breeze. Now this Radney, I suppose, was as little of a

coward, and as little inclined to any sort of nervous apprehensiveness

touching his own person as any fearless, unthinking creature on land or

on sea that you can conveniently imagine, gentlemen. Therefore when he

betrayed this solicitude about the safety of the ship, some of the

seamen declared that it was only on account of his being a part owner

in her. So when they were working that evening at the pumps, there was

on this head no small gamesomeness slily going on among them, as they

stood with their feet continually overflowed by the rippling clear

water; clear as any mountain spring, gentlemen—that bubbling from the

pumps ran across the deck, and poured itself out in steady spouts at

the lee scupper-holes.

“Now, as you well know, it is not seldom the case in this conventional

world of ours—watery or otherwise; that when a person placed in command

over his fellow-men finds one of them to be very significantly his

superior in general pride of manhood, straightway against that man he

conceives an unconquerable dislike and bitterness; and if he have a

chance he will pull down and pulverize that subaltern’s tower, and make

a little heap of dust of it. Be this conceit of mine as it may,

gentlemen, at all events Steelkilt was a tall and noble animal with a

head like a Roman, and a flowing golden beard like the tasseled

housings of your last viceroy’s snorting charger; and a brain, and a

heart, and a soul in him, gentlemen, which had made Steelkilt

Charlemagne, had he been born son to Charlemagne’s father. But Radney,

the mate, was ugly as a mule; yet as hardy, as stubborn, as malicious.

He did not love Steelkilt, and Steelkilt knew it.

“Espying the mate drawing near as he was toiling at the pump with the

rest, the Lakeman affected not to notice him, but unawed, went on with

his gay banterings.

“‘Aye, aye, my merry lads, it’s a lively leak this; hold a cannikin,

one of ye, and let’s have a taste. By the Lord, it’s worth bottling! I

tell ye what, men, old Rad’s investment must go for it! he had best cut

away his part of the hull and tow it home. The fact is, boys, that

sword-fish only began the job; he’s come back again with a gang of

ship-carpenters, saw-fish, and file-fish, and what not; and the whole

posse of ’em are now hard at work cutting and slashing at the bottom;

making improvements, I suppose. If old Rad were here now, I’d tell him

to jump overboard and scatter ’em. They’re playing the devil with his

estate, I can tell him. But he’s a simple old soul,—Rad, and a beauty

too. Boys, they say the rest of his property is invested in

looking-glasses. I wonder if he’d give a poor devil like me the model

of his nose.’

“‘Damn your eyes! what’s that pump stopping for?’ roared Radney,

pretending not to have heard the sailors’ talk. ‘Thunder away at it!’

“‘Aye, aye, sir,’ said Steelkilt, merry as a cricket. ‘Lively, boys,

lively, now!’ And with that the pump clanged like fifty fire-engines;

the men tossed their hats off to it, and ere long that peculiar gasping

of the lungs was heard which denotes the fullest tension of life’s

utmost energies.

“Quitting the pump at last, with the rest of his band, the Lakeman went

forward all panting, and sat himself down on the windlass; his face

fiery red, his eyes bloodshot, and wiping the profuse sweat from his

brow. Now what cozening fiend it was, gentlemen, that possessed Radney

to meddle with such a man in that corporeally exasperated state, I know

not; but so it happened. Intolerably striding along the deck, the mate

commanded him to get a broom and sweep down the planks, and also a

shovel, and remove some offensive matters consequent upon allowing a

pig to run at large.

“Now, gentlemen, sweeping a ship’s deck at sea is a piece of household

work which in all times but raging gales is regularly attended to every

evening; it has been known to be done in the case of ships actually

foundering at the time. Such, gentlemen, is the inflexibility of

sea-usages and the instinctive love of neatness in seamen; some of whom

would not willingly drown without first washing their faces. But in all

vessels this broom business is the prescriptive province of the boys,

if boys there be aboard. Besides, it was the stronger men in the

Town-Ho that had been divided into gangs, taking turns at the pumps;

and being the most athletic seaman of them all, Steelkilt had been

regularly assigned captain of one of the gangs; consequently he should

have been freed from any trivial business not connected with truly

nautical duties, such being the case with his comrades. I mention all

these particulars so that you may understand exactly how this affair

stood between the two men.

“But there was more than this: the order about the shovel was almost as

plainly meant to sting and insult Steelkilt, as though Radney had spat

in his face. Any man who has gone sailor in a whale-ship will

understand this; and all this and doubtless much more, the Lakeman

fully comprehended when the mate uttered his command. But as he sat

still for a moment, and as he steadfastly looked into the mate’s

malignant eye and perceived the stacks of powder-casks heaped up in him

and the slow-match silently burning along towards them; as he

instinctively saw all this, that strange forbearance and unwillingness

to stir up the deeper passionateness in any already ireful being—a

repugnance most felt, when felt at all, by really valiant men even when

aggrieved—this nameless phantom feeling, gentlemen, stole over

Steelkilt.

“Therefore, in his ordinary tone, only a little broken by the bodily

exhaustion he was temporarily in, he answered him saying that sweeping

the deck was not his business, and he would not do it. And then,

without at all alluding to the shovel, he pointed to three lads as the

customary sweepers; who, not being billeted at the pumps, had done

little or nothing all day. To this, Radney replied with an oath, in a

most domineering and outrageous manner unconditionally reiterating his

command; meanwhile advancing upon the still seated Lakeman, with an

uplifted cooper’s club hammer which he had snatched from a cask near

by.

“Heated and irritated as he was by his spasmodic toil at the pumps, for

all his first nameless feeling of forbearance the sweating Steelkilt

could but ill brook this bearing in the mate; but somehow still

smothering the conflagration within him, without speaking he remained

doggedly rooted to his seat, till at last the incensed Radney shook the

hammer within a few inches of his face, furiously commanding him to do

his bidding.

“Steelkilt rose, and slowly retreating round the windlass, steadily

followed by the mate with his menacing hammer, deliberately repeated

his intention not to obey. Seeing, however, that his forbearance had

not the slightest effect, by an awful and unspeakable intimation with

his twisted hand he warned off the foolish and infatuated man; but it

was to no purpose. And in this way the two went once slowly round the

windlass; when, resolved at last no longer to retreat, bethinking him

that he had now forborne as much as comported with his humor, the

Lakeman paused on the hatches and thus spoke to the officer:

“‘Mr. Radney, I will not obey you. Take that hammer away, or look to

yourself.’ But the predestinated mate coming still closer to him, where

the Lakeman stood fixed, now shook the heavy hammer within an inch of

his teeth; meanwhile repeating a string of insufferable maledictions.

Retreating not the thousandth part of an inch; stabbing him in the eye

with the unflinching poniard of his glance, Steelkilt, clenching his

right hand behind him and creepingly drawing it back, told his

persecutor that if the hammer but grazed his cheek he (Steelkilt) would

murder him. But, gentlemen, the fool had been branded for the slaughter

by the gods. Immediately the hammer touched the cheek; the next instant

the lower jaw of the mate was stove in his head; he fell on the hatch

spouting blood like a whale.

“Ere the cry could go aft Steelkilt was shaking one of the backstays

leading far aloft to where two of his comrades were standing their

mastheads. They were both Canallers.

“‘Canallers!’ cried Don Pedro. ‘We have seen many whale-ships in our

harbours, but never heard of your Canallers. Pardon: who and what are

they?’

“‘Canallers, Don, are the boatmen belonging to our grand Erie Canal.

You must have heard of it.’

“‘Nay, Senor; hereabouts in this dull, warm, most lazy, and hereditary

land, we know but little of your vigorous North.’

“‘Aye? Well then, Don, refill my cup. Your chicha’s very fine; and ere

proceeding further I will tell ye what our Canallers are; for such

information may throw side-light upon my story.’

“For three hundred and sixty miles, gentlemen, through the entire

breadth of the state of New York; through numerous populous cities and

most thriving villages; through long, dismal, uninhabited swamps, and

affluent, cultivated fields, unrivalled for fertility; by billiard-room

and bar-room; through the holy-of-holies of great forests; on Roman

arches over Indian rivers; through sun and shade; by happy hearts or

broken; through all the wide contrasting scenery of those noble Mohawk

counties; and especially, by rows of snow-white chapels, whose spires

stand almost like milestones, flows one continual stream of Venetianly

corrupt and often lawless life. There’s your true Ashantee, gentlemen;

there howl your pagans; where you ever find them, next door to you;

under the long-flung shadow, and the snug patronising lee of churches.

For by some curious fatality, as it is often noted of your metropolitan

freebooters that they ever encamp around the halls of justice, so

sinners, gentlemen, most abound in holiest vicinities.

“‘Is that a friar passing?’ said Don Pedro, looking downwards into the

crowded plazza, with humorous concern.

“‘Well for our northern friend, Dame Isabella’s Inquisition wanes in

Lima,’ laughed Don Sebastian. ‘Proceed, Senor.’

“‘A moment! Pardon!’ cried another of the company. ‘In the name of all

us Limeese, I but desire to express to you, sir sailor, that we have by

no means overlooked your delicacy in not substituting present Lima for

distant Venice in your corrupt comparison. Oh! do not bow and look

surprised; you know the proverb all along this coast—“Corrupt as Lima.”

It but bears out your saying, too; churches more plentiful than

billiard-tables, and for ever open—and “Corrupt as Lima.” So, too,

Venice; I have been there; the holy city of the blessed evangelist, St.

Mark!—St. Dominic, purge it! Your cup! Thanks: here I refill; now, you

pour out again.’

“Freely depicted in his own vocation, gentlemen, the Canaller would

make a fine dramatic hero, so abundantly and picturesquely wicked is

he. Like Mark Antony, for days and days along his green-turfed, flowery

Nile, he indolently floats, openly toying with his red-cheeked

Cleopatra, ripening his apricot thigh upon the sunny deck. But ashore,

all this effeminacy is dashed. The brigandish guise which the Canaller

so proudly sports; his slouched and gaily-ribboned hat betoken his

grand features. A terror to the smiling innocence of the villages

through which he floats; his swart visage and bold swagger are not

unshunned in cities. Once a vagabond on his own canal, I have received

good turns from one of these Canallers; I thank him heartily; would

fain be not ungrateful; but it is often one of the prime redeeming

qualities of your man of violence, that at times he has as stiff an arm

to back a poor stranger in a strait, as to plunder a wealthy one. In

sum, gentlemen, what the wildness of this canal life is, is

emphatically evinced by this; that our wild whale-fishery contains so

many of its most finished graduates, and that scarce any race of

mankind, except Sydney men, are so much distrusted by our whaling

captains. Nor does it at all diminish the curiousness of this matter,

that to many thousands of our rural boys and young men born along its

line, the probationary life of the Grand Canal furnishes the sole

transition between quietly reaping in a Christian corn-field, and

recklessly ploughing the waters of the most barbaric seas.

“‘I see! I see!’ impetuously exclaimed Don Pedro, spilling his chicha

upon his silvery ruffles. ‘No need to travel! The world’s one Lima. I

had thought, now, that at your temperate North the generations were

cold and holy as the hills.—But the story.’

“I left off, gentlemen, where the Lakeman shook the backstay. Hardly

had he done so, when he was surrounded by the three junior mates and

the four harpooneers, who all crowded him to the deck. But sliding down

the ropes like baleful comets, the two Canallers rushed into the

uproar, and sought to drag their man out of it towards the forecastle.

Others of the sailors joined with them in this attempt, and a twisted

turmoil ensued; while standing out of harm’s way, the valiant captain

danced up and down with a whale-pike, calling upon his officers to

manhandle that atrocious scoundrel, and smoke him along to the

quarter-deck. At intervals, he ran close up to the revolving border of

the confusion, and prying into the heart of it with his pike, sought to

prick out the object of his resentment. But Steelkilt and his

desperadoes were too much for them all; they succeeded in gaining the

forecastle deck, where, hastily slewing about three or four large casks

in a line with the windlass, these sea-Parisians entrenched themselves

behind the barricade.

“‘Come out of that, ye pirates!’ roared the captain, now menacing them

with a pistol in each hand, just brought to him by the steward. ‘Come

out of that, ye cut-throats!’

“Steelkilt leaped on the barricade, and striding up and down there,

defied the worst the pistols could do; but gave the captain to

understand distinctly, that his (Steelkilt’s) death would be the signal

for a murderous mutiny on the part of all hands. Fearing in his heart

lest this might prove but too true, the captain a little desisted, but

still commanded the insurgents instantly to return to their duty.

“‘Will you promise not to touch us, if we do?’ demanded their

ringleader.

“‘Turn to! turn to!—I make no promise;—to your duty! Do you want to

sink the ship, by knocking off at a time like this? Turn to!’ and he

once more raised a pistol.

“‘Sink the ship?’ cried Steelkilt. ‘Aye, let her sink. Not a man of us

turns to, unless you swear not to raise a rope-yarn against us. What

say ye, men?’ turning to his comrades. A fierce cheer was their

response.

“The Lakeman now patrolled the barricade, all the while keeping his eye

on the Captain, and jerking out such sentences as these:—‘It’s not our

fault; we didn’t want it; I told him to take his hammer away; it was

boy’s business; he might have known me before this; I told him not to

prick the buffalo; I believe I have broken a finger here against his

cursed jaw; ain’t those mincing knives down in the forecastle there,

men? look to those handspikes, my hearties. Captain, by God, look to

yourself; say the word; don’t be a fool; forget it all; we are ready to

turn to; treat us decently, and we’re your men; but we won’t be

flogged.’

“‘Turn to! I make no promises, turn to, I say!’

“‘Look ye, now,’ cried the Lakeman, flinging out his arm towards him,

‘there are a few of us here (and I am one of them) who have shipped for

the cruise, d’ye see; now as you well know, sir, we can claim our

discharge as soon as the anchor is down; so we don’t want a row; it’s

not our interest; we want to be peaceable; we are ready to work, but we

won’t be flogged.’

“‘Turn to!’ roared the Captain.

“Steelkilt glanced round him a moment, and then said:—‘I tell you what

it is now, Captain, rather than kill ye, and be hung for such a shabby

rascal, we won’t lift a hand against ye unless ye attack us; but till

you say the word about not flogging us, we don’t do a hand’s turn.’

“‘Down into the forecastle then, down with ye, I’ll keep ye there till

ye’re sick of it. Down ye go.’

“‘Shall we?’ cried the ringleader to his men. Most of them were against

it; but at length, in obedience to Steelkilt, they preceded him down

into their dark den, growlingly disappearing, like bears into a cave.

“As the Lakeman’s bare head was just level with the planks, the Captain

and his posse leaped the barricade, and rapidly drawing over the slide

of the scuttle, planted their group of hands upon it, and loudly called

for the steward to bring the heavy brass padlock belonging to the

companionway. Then opening the slide a little, the Captain whispered

something down the crack, closed it, and turned the key upon them—ten

in number—leaving on deck some twenty or more, who thus far had

remained neutral.

“All night a wide-awake watch was kept by all the officers, forward and

aft, especially about the forecastle scuttle and fore hatchway; at

which last place it was feared the insurgents might emerge, after

breaking through the bulkhead below. But the hours of darkness passed

in peace; the men who still remained at their duty toiling hard at the

pumps, whose clinking and clanking at intervals through the dreary

night dismally resounded through the ship.

“At sunrise the Captain went forward, and knocking on the deck,

summoned the prisoners to work; but with a yell they refused. Water was

then lowered down to them, and a couple of handfuls of biscuit were

tossed after it; when again turning the key upon them and pocketing it,

the Captain returned to the quarter-deck. Twice every day for three

days this was repeated; but on the fourth morning a confused wrangling,

and then a scuffling was heard, as the customary summons was delivered;

and suddenly four men burst up from the forecastle, saying they were

ready to turn to. The fetid closeness of the air, and a famishing diet,

united perhaps to some fears of ultimate retribution, had constrained

them to surrender at discretion. Emboldened by this, the Captain

reiterated his demand to the rest, but Steelkilt shouted up to him a

terrific hint to stop his babbling and betake himself where he

belonged. On the fifth morning three others of the mutineers bolted up

into the air from the desperate arms below that sought to restrain

them. Only three were left.

“‘Better turn to, now?’ said the Captain with a heartless jeer.

“‘Shut us up again, will ye!’ cried Steelkilt.

“‘Oh certainly,’ said the Captain, and the key clicked.

“It was at this point, gentlemen, that enraged by the defection of

seven of his former associates, and stung by the mocking voice that had

last hailed him, and maddened by his long entombment in a place as

black as the bowels of despair; it was then that Steelkilt proposed to

the two Canallers, thus far apparently of one mind with him, to burst

out of their hole at the next summoning of the garrison; and armed with

their keen mincing knives (long, crescentic, heavy implements with a

handle at each end) run amuck from the bowsprit to the taffrail; and if

by any devilishness of desperation possible, seize the ship. For

himself, he would do this, he said, whether they joined him or not.

That was the last night he should spend in that den. But the scheme met

with no opposition on the part of the other two; they swore they were

ready for that, or for any other mad thing, for anything in short but a

surrender. And what was more, they each insisted upon being the first

man on deck, when the time to make the rush should come. But to this

their leader as fiercely objected, reserving that priority for himself;

particularly as his two comrades would not yield, the one to the other,

in the matter; and both of them could not be first, for the ladder

would but admit one man at a time. And here, gentlemen, the foul play

of these miscreants must come out.

“Upon hearing the frantic project of their leader, each in his own

separate soul had suddenly lighted, it would seem, upon the same piece

of treachery, namely: to be foremost in breaking out, in order to be

the first of the three, though the last of the ten, to surrender; and

thereby secure whatever small chance of pardon such conduct might

merit. But when Steelkilt made known his determination still to lead

them to the last, they in some way, by some subtle chemistry of

villany, mixed their before secret treacheries together; and when their

leader fell into a doze, verbally opened their souls to each other in

three sentences; and bound the sleeper with cords, and gagged him with

cords; and shrieked out for the Captain at midnight.

“Thinking murder at hand, and smelling in the dark for the blood, he

and all his armed mates and harpooneers rushed for the forecastle. In a

few minutes the scuttle was opened, and, bound hand and foot, the still

struggling ringleader was shoved up into the air by his perfidious

allies, who at once claimed the honor of securing a man who had been

fully ripe for murder. But all these were collared, and dragged along

the deck like dead cattle; and, side by side, were seized up into the

mizzen rigging, like three quarters of meat, and there they hung till

morning. ‘Damn ye,’ cried the Captain, pacing to and fro before them,

‘the vultures would not touch ye, ye villains!’

“At sunrise he summoned all hands; and separating those who had

rebelled from those who had taken no part in the mutiny, he told the

former that he had a good mind to flog them all round—thought, upon the

whole, he would do so—he ought to—justice demanded it; but for the

present, considering their timely surrender, he would let them go with

a reprimand, which he accordingly administered in the vernacular.

“‘But as for you, ye carrion rogues,’ turning to the three men in the

rigging—‘for you, I mean to mince ye up for the try-pots;’ and, seizing

a rope, he applied it with all his might to the backs of the two

traitors, till they yelled no more, but lifelessly hung their heads

sideways, as the two crucified thieves are drawn.

“‘My wrist is sprained with ye!’ he cried, at last; ‘but there is still

rope enough left for you, my fine bantam, that wouldn’t give up. Take

that gag from his mouth, and let us hear what he can say for himself.’

“For a moment the exhausted mutineer made a tremulous motion of his

cramped jaws, and then painfully twisting round his head, said in a

sort of hiss, ‘What I say is this—and mind it well—if you flog me, I

murder you!’

“‘Say ye so? then see how ye frighten me’—and the Captain drew off with

the rope to strike.

“‘Best not,’ hissed the Lakeman.

“‘But I must,’—and the rope was once more drawn back for the stroke.

“Steelkilt here hissed out something, inaudible to all but the Captain;

who, to the amazement of all hands, started back, paced the deck

rapidly two or three times, and then suddenly throwing down his rope,

said, ‘I won’t do it—let him go—cut him down: d’ye hear?’

“But as the junior mates were hurrying to execute the order, a pale

man, with a bandaged head, arrested them—Radney the chief mate. Ever

since the blow, he had lain in his berth; but that morning, hearing the

tumult on the deck, he had crept out, and thus far had watched the

whole scene. Such was the state of his mouth, that he could hardly

speak; but mumbling something about \_his\_ being willing and able to do

what the captain dared not attempt, he snatched the rope and advanced

to his pinioned foe.

“‘You are a coward!’ hissed the Lakeman.

“‘So I am, but take that.’ The mate was in the very act of striking,

when another hiss stayed his uplifted arm. He paused: and then pausing

no more, made good his word, spite of Steelkilt’s threat, whatever that

might have been. The three men were then cut down, all hands were

turned to, and, sullenly worked by the moody seamen, the iron pumps

clanged as before.

“Just after dark that day, when one watch had retired below, a clamor

was heard in the forecastle; and the two trembling traitors running up,

besieged the cabin door, saying they durst not consort with the crew.

Entreaties, cuffs, and kicks could not drive them back, so at their own

instance they were put down in the ship’s run for salvation. Still, no

sign of mutiny reappeared among the rest. On the contrary, it seemed,

that mainly at Steelkilt’s instigation, they had resolved to maintain

the strictest peacefulness, obey all orders to the last, and, when the

ship reached port, desert her in a body. But in order to insure the

speediest end to the voyage, they all agreed to another thing—namely,

not to sing out for whales, in case any should be discovered. For,

spite of her leak, and spite of all her other perils, the Town-Ho still

maintained her mast-heads, and her captain was just as willing to lower

for a fish that moment, as on the day his craft first struck the

cruising ground; and Radney the mate was quite as ready to change his

berth for a boat, and with his bandaged mouth seek to gag in death the

vital jaw of the whale.

“But though the Lakeman had induced the seamen to adopt this sort of

passiveness in their conduct, he kept his own counsel (at least till

all was over) concerning his own proper and private revenge upon the

man who had stung him in the ventricles of his heart. He was in Radney

the chief mate’s watch; and as if the infatuated man sought to run more

than half way to meet his doom, after the scene at the rigging, he

insisted, against the express counsel of the captain, upon resuming the

head of his watch at night. Upon this, and one or two other

circumstances, Steelkilt systematically built the plan of his revenge.

“During the night, Radney had an unseamanlike way of sitting on the

bulwarks of the quarter-deck, and leaning his arm upon the gunwale of

the boat which was hoisted up there, a little above the ship’s side. In

this attitude, it was well known, he sometimes dozed. There was a

considerable vacancy between the boat and the ship, and down between

this was the sea. Steelkilt calculated his time, and found that his

next trick at the helm would come round at two o’clock, in the morning

of the third day from that in which he had been betrayed. At his

leisure, he employed the interval in braiding something very carefully

in his watches below.

“‘What are you making there?’ said a shipmate.

“‘What do you think? what does it look like?’

“‘Like a lanyard for your bag; but it’s an odd one, seems to me.’

“‘Yes, rather oddish,’ said the Lakeman, holding it at arm’s length

before him; ‘but I think it will answer. Shipmate, I haven’t enough

twine,—have you any?’

“But there was none in the forecastle.

“‘Then I must get some from old Rad;’ and he rose to go aft.

“‘You don’t mean to go a begging to \_him!\_’ said a sailor.

“‘Why not? Do you think he won’t do me a turn, when it’s to help

himself in the end, shipmate?’ and going to the mate, he looked at him

quietly, and asked him for some twine to mend his hammock. It was given

him—neither twine nor lanyard were seen again; but the next night an

iron ball, closely netted, partly rolled from the pocket of the

Lakeman’s monkey jacket, as he was tucking the coat into his hammock

for a pillow. Twenty-four hours after, his trick at the silent

helm—nigh to the man who was apt to doze over the grave always ready

dug to the seaman’s hand—that fatal hour was then to come; and in the

fore-ordaining soul of Steelkilt, the mate was already stark and

stretched as a corpse, with his forehead crushed in.

“But, gentlemen, a fool saved the would-be murderer from the bloody

deed he had planned. Yet complete revenge he had, and without being the

avenger. For by a mysterious fatality, Heaven itself seemed to step in

to take out of his hands into its own the damning thing he would have

done.

“It was just between daybreak and sunrise of the morning of the second

day, when they were washing down the decks, that a stupid Teneriffe

man, drawing water in the main-chains, all at once shouted out, ‘There

she rolls! there she rolls!’ Jesu, what a whale! It was Moby Dick.

“‘Moby Dick!’ cried Don Sebastian; ‘St. Dominic! Sir sailor, but do

whales have christenings? Whom call you Moby Dick?’

“‘A very white, and famous, and most deadly immortal monster, Don;—but

that would be too long a story.’

“‘How? how?’ cried all the young Spaniards, crowding.

“‘Nay, Dons, Dons—nay, nay! I cannot rehearse that now. Let me get more

into the air, Sirs.’

“‘The chicha! the chicha!’ cried Don Pedro; ‘our vigorous friend looks

faint;—fill up his empty glass!’

“No need, gentlemen; one moment, and I proceed.—Now, gentlemen, so

suddenly perceiving the snowy whale within fifty yards of the

ship—forgetful of the compact among the crew—in the excitement of the

moment, the Teneriffe man had instinctively and involuntarily lifted

his voice for the monster, though for some little time past it had been

plainly beheld from the three sullen mast-heads. All was now a phrensy.

‘The White Whale—the White Whale!’ was the cry from captain, mates, and

harpooneers, who, undeterred by fearful rumours, were all anxious to

capture so famous and precious a fish; while the dogged crew eyed

askance, and with curses, the appalling beauty of the vast milky mass,

that lit up by a horizontal spangling sun, shifted and glistened like a

living opal in the blue morning sea. Gentlemen, a strange fatality

pervades the whole career of these events, as if verily mapped out

before the world itself was charted. The mutineer was the bowsman of

the mate, and when fast to a fish, it was his duty to sit next him,

while Radney stood up with his lance in the prow, and haul in or

slacken the line, at the word of command. Moreover, when the four boats

were lowered, the mate’s got the start; and none howled more fiercely

with delight than did Steelkilt, as he strained at his oar. After a

stiff pull, their harpooneer got fast, and, spear in hand, Radney

sprang to the bow. He was always a furious man, it seems, in a boat.

And now his bandaged cry was, to beach him on the whale’s topmost back.

Nothing loath, his bowsman hauled him up and up, through a blinding

foam that blent two whitenesses together; till of a sudden the boat

struck as against a sunken ledge, and keeling over, spilled out the

standing mate. That instant, as he fell on the whale’s slippery back,

the boat righted, and was dashed aside by the swell, while Radney was

tossed over into the sea, on the other flank of the whale. He struck

out through the spray, and, for an instant, was dimly seen through that

veil, wildly seeking to remove himself from the eye of Moby Dick. But

the whale rushed round in a sudden maelstrom; seized the swimmer

between his jaws; and rearing high up with him, plunged headlong again,

and went down.

“Meantime, at the first tap of the boat’s bottom, the Lakeman had

slackened the line, so as to drop astern from the whirlpool; calmly

looking on, he thought his own thoughts. But a sudden, terrific,

downward jerking of the boat, quickly brought his knife to the line. He

cut it; and the whale was free. But, at some distance, Moby Dick rose

again, with some tatters of Radney’s red woollen shirt, caught in the

teeth that had destroyed him. All four boats gave chase again; but the

whale eluded them, and finally wholly disappeared.

“In good time, the Town-Ho reached her port—a savage, solitary

place—where no civilized creature resided. There, headed by the

Lakeman, all but five or six of the foremastmen deliberately deserted

among the palms; eventually, as it turned out, seizing a large double

war-canoe of the savages, and setting sail for some other harbor.

“The ship’s company being reduced to but a handful, the captain called

upon the Islanders to assist him in the laborious business of heaving

down the ship to stop the leak. But to such unresting vigilance over

their dangerous allies was this small band of whites necessitated, both

by night and by day, and so extreme was the hard work they underwent,

that upon the vessel being ready again for sea, they were in such a

weakened condition that the captain durst not put off with them in so

heavy a vessel. After taking counsel with his officers, he anchored the

ship as far off shore as possible; loaded and ran out his two cannon

from the bows; stacked his muskets on the poop; and warning the

Islanders not to approach the ship at their peril, took one man with

him, and setting the sail of his best whale-boat, steered straight

before the wind for Tahiti, five hundred miles distant, to procure a

reinforcement to his crew.

“On the fourth day of the sail, a large canoe was descried, which

seemed to have touched at a low isle of corals. He steered away from

it; but the savage craft bore down on him; and soon the voice of

Steelkilt hailed him to heave to, or he would run him under water. The

captain presented a pistol. With one foot on each prow of the yoked

war-canoes, the Lakeman laughed him to scorn; assuring him that if the

pistol so much as clicked in the lock, he would bury him in bubbles and

foam.

“‘What do you want of me?’ cried the captain.

“‘Where are you bound? and for what are you bound?’ demanded Steelkilt;

‘no lies.’

“‘I am bound to Tahiti for more men.’

“‘Very good. Let me board you a moment—I come in peace.’ With that he

leaped from the canoe, swam to the boat; and climbing the gunwale,

stood face to face with the captain.

“‘Cross your arms, sir; throw back your head. Now, repeat after me. As

soon as Steelkilt leaves me, I swear to beach this boat on yonder

island, and remain there six days. If I do not, may lightnings strike

me!’

“‘A pretty scholar,’ laughed the Lakeman. ‘Adios, Senor!’ and leaping

into the sea, he swam back to his comrades.

“Watching the boat till it was fairly beached, and drawn up to the

roots of the cocoa-nut trees, Steelkilt made sail again, and in due

time arrived at Tahiti, his own place of destination. There, luck

befriended him; two ships were about to sail for France, and were

providentially in want of precisely that number of men which the sailor

headed. They embarked; and so for ever got the start of their former

captain, had he been at all minded to work them legal retribution.

“Some ten days after the French ships sailed, the whale-boat arrived,

and the captain was forced to enlist some of the more civilized

Tahitians, who had been somewhat used to the sea. Chartering a small

native schooner, he returned with them to his vessel; and finding all

right there, again resumed his cruisings.

“Where Steelkilt now is, gentlemen, none know; but upon the island of

Nantucket, the widow of Radney still turns to the sea which refuses to

give up its dead; still in dreams sees the awful white whale that

destroyed him. \* \* \* \*

“‘Are you through?’ said Don Sebastian, quietly.

“‘I am, Don.’

“‘Then I entreat you, tell me if to the best of your own convictions,

this your story is in substance really true? It is so passing

wonderful! Did you get it from an unquestionable source? Bear with me

if I seem to press.’

“‘Also bear with all of us, sir sailor; for we all join in Don

Sebastian’s suit,’ cried the company, with exceeding interest.

“‘Is there a copy of the Holy Evangelists in the Golden Inn,

gentlemen?’

“‘Nay,’ said Don Sebastian; ‘but I know a worthy priest near by, who

will quickly procure one for me. I go for it; but are you well advised?

this may grow too serious.’

“‘Will you be so good as to bring the priest also, Don?’

“‘Though there are no Auto-da-Fés in Lima now,’ said one of the company

to another; ‘I fear our sailor friend runs risk of the archiepiscopacy.

Let us withdraw more out of the moonlight. I see no need of this.’

“‘Excuse me for running after you, Don Sebastian; but may I also beg

that you will be particular in procuring the largest sized Evangelists

you can.’

\* \* \* \* \* \*

“‘This is the priest, he brings you the Evangelists,’ said Don

Sebastian, gravely, returning with a tall and solemn figure.

“‘Let me remove my hat. Now, venerable priest, further into the light,

and hold the Holy Book before me that I may touch it.

“‘So help me Heaven, and on my honor the story I have told ye,

gentlemen, is in substance and its great items, true. I know it to be

true; it happened on this ball; I trod the ship; I knew the crew; I

have seen and talked with Steelkilt since the death of Radney.’”

CHAPTER 55. Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales.

I shall ere long paint to you as well as one can without canvas,

something like the true form of the whale as he actually appears to the

eye of the whaleman when in his own absolute body the whale is moored

alongside the whale-ship so that he can be fairly stepped upon there.

It may be worth while, therefore, previously to advert to those curious

imaginary portraits of him which even down to the present day

confidently challenge the faith of the landsman. It is time to set the

world right in this matter, by proving such pictures of the whale all

wrong.

It may be that the primal source of all those pictorial delusions will

be found among the oldest Hindoo, Egyptian, and Grecian sculptures. For

ever since those inventive but unscrupulous times when on the marble

panellings of temples, the pedestals of statues, and on shields,

medallions, cups, and coins, the dolphin was drawn in scales of

chain-armor like Saladin’s, and a helmeted head like St. George’s; ever

since then has something of the same sort of license prevailed, not

only in most popular pictures of the whale, but in many scientific

presentations of him.

Now, by all odds, the most ancient extant portrait anyways purporting

to be the whale’s, is to be found in the famous cavern-pagoda of

Elephanta, in India. The Brahmins maintain that in the almost endless

sculptures of that immemorial pagoda, all the trades and pursuits,

every conceivable avocation of man, were prefigured ages before any of

them actually came into being. No wonder then, that in some sort our

noble profession of whaling should have been there shadowed forth. The

Hindoo whale referred to, occurs in a separate department of the wall,

depicting the incarnation of Vishnu in the form of leviathan, learnedly

known as the Matse Avatar. But though this sculpture is half man and

half whale, so as only to give the tail of the latter, yet that small

section of him is all wrong. It looks more like the tapering tail of an

anaconda, than the broad palms of the true whale’s majestic flukes.

But go to the old Galleries, and look now at a great Christian

painter’s portrait of this fish; for he succeeds no better than the

antediluvian Hindoo. It is Guido’s picture of Perseus rescuing

Andromeda from the sea-monster or whale. Where did Guido get the model

of such a strange creature as that? Nor does Hogarth, in painting the

same scene in his own “Perseus Descending,” make out one whit better.

The huge corpulence of that Hogarthian monster undulates on the

surface, scarcely drawing one inch of water. It has a sort of howdah on

its back, and its distended tusked mouth into which the billows are

rolling, might be taken for the Traitors’ Gate leading from the Thames

by water into the Tower. Then, there are the Prodromus whales of old

Scotch Sibbald, and Jonah’s whale, as depicted in the prints of old

Bibles and the cuts of old primers. What shall be said of these? As for

the book-binder’s whale winding like a vine-stalk round the stock of a

descending anchor—as stamped and gilded on the backs and title-pages of

many books both old and new—that is a very picturesque but purely

fabulous creature, imitated, I take it, from the like figures on

antique vases. Though universally denominated a dolphin, I nevertheless

call this book-binder’s fish an attempt at a whale; because it was so

intended when the device was first introduced. It was introduced by an

old Italian publisher somewhere about the 15th century, during the

Revival of Learning; and in those days, and even down to a

comparatively late period, dolphins were popularly supposed to be a

species of the Leviathan.

In the vignettes and other embellishments of some ancient books you

will at times meet with very curious touches at the whale, where all

manner of spouts, jets d’eau, hot springs and cold, Saratoga and

Baden-Baden, come bubbling up from his unexhausted brain. In the

title-page of the original edition of the “Advancement of Learning” you

will find some curious whales.

But quitting all these unprofessional attempts, let us glance at those

pictures of leviathan purporting to be sober, scientific delineations,

by those who know. In old Harris’s collection of voyages there are some

plates of whales extracted from a Dutch book of voyages, A.D. 1671,

entitled “A Whaling Voyage to Spitzbergen in the ship Jonas in the

Whale, Peter Peterson of Friesland, master.” In one of those plates the

whales, like great rafts of logs, are represented lying among

ice-isles, with white bears running over their living backs. In another

plate, the prodigious blunder is made of representing the whale with

perpendicular flukes.

Then again, there is an imposing quarto, written by one Captain

Colnett, a Post Captain in the English navy, entitled “A Voyage round

Cape Horn into the South Seas, for the purpose of extending the

Spermaceti Whale Fisheries.” In this book is an outline purporting to

be a “Picture of a Physeter or Spermaceti whale, drawn by scale from

one killed on the coast of Mexico, August, 1793, and hoisted on deck.”

I doubt not the captain had this veracious picture taken for the

benefit of his marines. To mention but one thing about it, let me say

that it has an eye which applied, according to the accompanying scale,

to a full grown sperm whale, would make the eye of that whale a

bow-window some five feet long. Ah, my gallant captain, why did ye not

give us Jonah looking out of that eye!

Nor are the most conscientious compilations of Natural History for the

benefit of the young and tender, free from the same heinousness of

mistake. Look at that popular work “Goldsmith’s Animated Nature.” In

the abridged London edition of 1807, there are plates of an alleged

“whale” and a “narwhale.” I do not wish to seem inelegant, but this

unsightly whale looks much like an amputated sow; and, as for the

narwhale, one glimpse at it is enough to amaze one, that in this

nineteenth century such a hippogriff could be palmed for genuine upon

any intelligent public of schoolboys.

Then, again, in 1825, Bernard Germain, Count de Lacépède, a great

naturalist, published a scientific systemized whale book, wherein are

several pictures of the different species of the Leviathan. All these

are not only incorrect, but the picture of the Mysticetus or Greenland

whale (that is to say, the Right whale), even Scoresby, a long

experienced man as touching that species, declares not to have its

counterpart in nature.

But the placing of the cap-sheaf to all this blundering business was

reserved for the scientific Frederick Cuvier, brother to the famous

Baron. In 1836, he published a Natural History of Whales, in which he

gives what he calls a picture of the Sperm Whale. Before showing that

picture to any Nantucketer, you had best provide for your summary

retreat from Nantucket. In a word, Frederick Cuvier’s Sperm Whale is

not a Sperm Whale, but a squash. Of course, he never had the benefit of

a whaling voyage (such men seldom have), but whence he derived that

picture, who can tell? Perhaps he got it as his scientific predecessor

in the same field, Desmarest, got one of his authentic abortions; that

is, from a Chinese drawing. And what sort of lively lads with the

pencil those Chinese are, many queer cups and saucers inform us.

As for the sign-painters’ whales seen in the streets hanging over the

shops of oil-dealers, what shall be said of them? They are generally

Richard III. whales, with dromedary humps, and very savage;

breakfasting on three or four sailor tarts, that is whaleboats full of

mariners: their deformities floundering in seas of blood and blue

paint.

But these manifold mistakes in depicting the whale are not so very

surprising after all. Consider! Most of the scientific drawings have

been taken from the stranded fish; and these are about as correct as a

drawing of a wrecked ship, with broken back, would correctly represent

the noble animal itself in all its undashed pride of hull and spars.

Though elephants have stood for their full-lengths, the living

Leviathan has never yet fairly floated himself for his portrait. The

living whale, in his full majesty and significance, is only to be seen

at sea in unfathomable waters; and afloat the vast bulk of him is out

of sight, like a launched line-of-battle ship; and out of that element

it is a thing eternally impossible for mortal man to hoist him bodily

into the air, so as to preserve all his mighty swells and undulations.

And, not to speak of the highly presumable difference of contour

between a young sucking whale and a full-grown Platonian Leviathan;

yet, even in the case of one of those young sucking whales hoisted to a

ship’s deck, such is then the outlandish, eel-like, limbered, varying

shape of him, that his precise expression the devil himself could not

catch.

But it may be fancied, that from the naked skeleton of the stranded

whale, accurate hints may be derived touching his true form. Not at

all. For it is one of the more curious things about this Leviathan,

that his skeleton gives very little idea of his general shape. Though

Jeremy Bentham’s skeleton, which hangs for candelabra in the library of

one of his executors, correctly conveys the idea of a burly-browed

utilitarian old gentleman, with all Jeremy’s other leading personal

characteristics; yet nothing of this kind could be inferred from any

leviathan’s articulated bones. In fact, as the great Hunter says, the

mere skeleton of the whale bears the same relation to the fully

invested and padded animal as the insect does to the chrysalis that so

roundingly envelopes it. This peculiarity is strikingly evinced in the

head, as in some part of this book will be incidentally shown. It is

also very curiously displayed in the side fin, the bones of which

almost exactly answer to the bones of the human hand, minus only the

thumb. This fin has four regular bone-fingers, the index, middle, ring,

and little finger. But all these are permanently lodged in their fleshy

covering, as the human fingers in an artificial covering. “However

recklessly the whale may sometimes serve us,” said humorous Stubb one

day, “he can never be truly said to handle us without mittens.”

For all these reasons, then, any way you may look at it, you must needs

conclude that the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world

which must remain unpainted to the last. True, one portrait may hit the

mark much nearer than another, but none can hit it with any very

considerable degree of exactness. So there is no earthly way of finding

out precisely what the whale really looks like. And the only mode in

which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by

going a whaling yourself; but by so doing, you run no small risk of

being eternally stove and sunk by him. Wherefore, it seems to me you

had best not be too fastidious in your curiosity touching this

Leviathan.

CHAPTER 56. Of the Less Erroneous Pictures of Whales, and the True

Pictures of Whaling Scenes.

In connexion with the monstrous pictures of whales, I am strongly

tempted here to enter upon those still more monstrous stories of them

which are to be found in certain books, both ancient and modern,

especially in Pliny, Purchas, Hackluyt, Harris, Cuvier, etc. But I pass

that matter by.

I know of only four published outlines of the great Sperm Whale;

Colnett’s, Huggins’s, Frederick Cuvier’s, and Beale’s. In the previous

chapter Colnett and Cuvier have been referred to. Huggins’s is far

better than theirs; but, by great odds, Beale’s is the best. All

Beale’s drawings of this whale are good, excepting the middle figure in

the picture of three whales in various attitudes, capping his second

chapter. His frontispiece, boats attacking Sperm Whales, though no

doubt calculated to excite the civil scepticism of some parlor men, is

admirably correct and life-like in its general effect. Some of the

Sperm Whale drawings in J. Ross Browne are pretty correct in contour;

but they are wretchedly engraved. That is not his fault though.

Of the Right Whale, the best outline pictures are in Scoresby; but they

are drawn on too small a scale to convey a desirable impression. He has

but one picture of whaling scenes, and this is a sad deficiency,

because it is by such pictures only, when at all well done, that you

can derive anything like a truthful idea of the living whale as seen by

his living hunters.

But, taken for all in all, by far the finest, though in some details

not the most correct, presentations of whales and whaling scenes to be

anywhere found, are two large French engravings, well executed, and

taken from paintings by one Garnery. Respectively, they represent

attacks on the Sperm and Right Whale. In the first engraving a noble

Sperm Whale is depicted in full majesty of might, just risen beneath

the boat from the profundities of the ocean, and bearing high in the

air upon his back the terrific wreck of the stoven planks. The prow of

the boat is partially unbroken, and is drawn just balancing upon the

monster’s spine; and standing in that prow, for that one single

incomputable flash of time, you behold an oarsman, half shrouded by the

incensed boiling spout of the whale, and in the act of leaping, as if

from a precipice. The action of the whole thing is wonderfully good and

true. The half-emptied line-tub floats on the whitened sea; the wooden

poles of the spilled harpoons obliquely bob in it; the heads of the

swimming crew are scattered about the whale in contrasting expressions

of affright; while in the black stormy distance the ship is bearing

down upon the scene. Serious fault might be found with the anatomical

details of this whale, but let that pass; since, for the life of me, I

could not draw so good a one.

In the second engraving, the boat is in the act of drawing alongside

the barnacled flank of a large running Right Whale, that rolls his

black weedy bulk in the sea like some mossy rock-slide from the

Patagonian cliffs. His jets are erect, full, and black like soot; so

that from so abounding a smoke in the chimney, you would think there

must be a brave supper cooking in the great bowels below. Sea fowls are

pecking at the small crabs, shell-fish, and other sea candies and

maccaroni, which the Right Whale sometimes carries on his pestilent

back. And all the while the thick-lipped leviathan is rushing through

the deep, leaving tons of tumultuous white curds in his wake, and

causing the slight boat to rock in the swells like a skiff caught nigh

the paddle-wheels of an ocean steamer. Thus, the foreground is all

raging commotion; but behind, in admirable artistic contrast, is the

glassy level of a sea becalmed, the drooping unstarched sails of the

powerless ship, and the inert mass of a dead whale, a conquered

fortress, with the flag of capture lazily hanging from the whale-pole

inserted into his spout-hole.

Who Garnery the painter is, or was, I know not. But my life for it he

was either practically conversant with his subject, or else

marvellously tutored by some experienced whaleman. The French are the

lads for painting action. Go and gaze upon all the paintings of Europe,

and where will you find such a gallery of living and breathing

commotion on canvas, as in that triumphal hall at Versailles; where the

beholder fights his way, pell-mell, through the consecutive great

battles of France; where every sword seems a flash of the Northern

Lights, and the successive armed kings and Emperors dash by, like a

charge of crowned centaurs? Not wholly unworthy of a place in that

gallery, are these sea battle-pieces of Garnery.

The natural aptitude of the French for seizing the picturesqueness of

things seems to be peculiarly evinced in what paintings and engravings

they have of their whaling scenes. With not one tenth of England’s

experience in the fishery, and not the thousandth part of that of the

Americans, they have nevertheless furnished both nations with the only

finished sketches at all capable of conveying the real spirit of the

whale hunt. For the most part, the English and American whale

draughtsmen seem entirely content with presenting the mechanical

outline of things, such as the vacant profile of the whale; which, so

far as picturesqueness of effect is concerned, is about tantamount to

sketching the profile of a pyramid. Even Scoresby, the justly renowned

Right whaleman, after giving us a stiff full length of the Greenland

whale, and three or four delicate miniatures of narwhales and

porpoises, treats us to a series of classical engravings of boat hooks,

chopping knives, and grapnels; and with the microscopic diligence of a

Leuwenhoeck submits to the inspection of a shivering world ninety-six

fac-similes of magnified Arctic snow crystals. I mean no disparagement

to the excellent voyager (I honor him for a veteran), but in so

important a matter it was certainly an oversight not to have procured

for every crystal a sworn affidavit taken before a Greenland Justice of

the Peace.

In addition to those fine engravings from Garnery, there are two other

French engravings worthy of note, by some one who subscribes himself

“H. Durand.” One of them, though not precisely adapted to our present

purpose, nevertheless deserves mention on other accounts. It is a quiet

noon-scene among the isles of the Pacific; a French whaler anchored,

inshore, in a calm, and lazily taking water on board; the loosened

sails of the ship, and the long leaves of the palms in the background,

both drooping together in the breezeless air. The effect is very fine,

when considered with reference to its presenting the hardy fishermen

under one of their few aspects of oriental repose. The other engraving

is quite a different affair: the ship hove-to upon the open sea, and in

the very heart of the Leviathanic life, with a Right Whale alongside;

the vessel (in the act of cutting-in) hove over to the monster as if to

a quay; and a boat, hurriedly pushing off from this scene of activity,

is about giving chase to whales in the distance. The harpoons and

lances lie levelled for use; three oarsmen are just setting the mast in

its hole; while from a sudden roll of the sea, the little craft stands

half-erect out of the water, like a rearing horse. From the ship, the

smoke of the torments of the boiling whale is going up like the smoke

over a village of smithies; and to windward, a black cloud, rising up

with earnest of squalls and rains, seems to quicken the activity of the

excited seamen.

CHAPTER 57. Of Whales in Paint; in Teeth; in Wood; in Sheet-Iron; in

Stone; in Mountains; in Stars.

On Tower-hill, as you go down to the London docks, you may have seen a

crippled beggar (or \_kedger\_, as the sailors say) holding a painted

board before him, representing the tragic scene in which he lost his

leg. There are three whales and three boats; and one of the boats

(presumed to contain the missing leg in all its original integrity) is

being crunched by the jaws of the foremost whale. Any time these ten

years, they tell me, has that man held up that picture, and exhibited

that stump to an incredulous world. But the time of his justification

has now come. His three whales are as good whales as were ever

published in Wapping, at any rate; and his stump as unquestionable a

stump as any you will find in the western clearings. But, though for

ever mounted on that stump, never a stump-speech does the poor whaleman

make; but, with downcast eyes, stands ruefully contemplating his own

amputation.

Throughout the Pacific, and also in Nantucket, and New Bedford, and Sag

Harbor, you will come across lively sketches of whales and

whaling-scenes, graven by the fishermen themselves on Sperm

Whale-teeth, or ladies’ busks wrought out of the Right Whale-bone, and

other like skrimshander articles, as the whalemen call the numerous

little ingenious contrivances they elaborately carve out of the rough

material, in their hours of ocean leisure. Some of them have little

boxes of dentistical-looking implements, specially intended for the

skrimshandering business. But, in general, they toil with their

jack-knives alone; and, with that almost omnipotent tool of the sailor,

they will turn you out anything you please, in the way of a mariner’s

fancy.

Long exile from Christendom and civilization inevitably restores a man

to that condition in which God placed him, \_i.e.\_ what is called

savagery. Your true whale-hunter is as much a savage as an Iroquois. I

myself am a savage, owning no allegiance but to the King of the

Cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him.

Now, one of the peculiar characteristics of the savage in his domestic

hours, is his wonderful patience of industry. An ancient Hawaiian

war-club or spear-paddle, in its full multiplicity and elaboration of

carving, is as great a trophy of human perseverance as a Latin lexicon.

For, with but a bit of broken sea-shell or a shark’s tooth, that

miraculous intricacy of wooden net-work has been achieved; and it has

cost steady years of steady application.

As with the Hawaiian savage, so with the white sailor-savage. With the

same marvellous patience, and with the same single shark’s tooth, of

his one poor jack-knife, he will carve you a bit of bone sculpture, not

quite as workmanlike, but as close packed in its maziness of design, as

the Greek savage, Achilles’s shield; and full of barbaric spirit and

suggestiveness, as the prints of that fine old Dutch savage, Albert

Durer.

Wooden whales, or whales cut in profile out of the small dark slabs of

the noble South Sea war-wood, are frequently met with in the

forecastles of American whalers. Some of them are done with much

accuracy.

At some old gable-roofed country houses you will see brass whales hung

by the tail for knockers to the road-side door. When the porter is

sleepy, the anvil-headed whale would be best. But these knocking whales

are seldom remarkable as faithful essays. On the spires of some

old-fashioned churches you will see sheet-iron whales placed there for

weather-cocks; but they are so elevated, and besides that are to all

intents and purposes so labelled with “\_Hands off!\_” you cannot examine

them closely enough to decide upon their merit.

In bony, ribby regions of the earth, where at the base of high broken

cliffs masses of rock lie strewn in fantastic groupings upon the plain,

you will often discover images as of the petrified forms of the

Leviathan partly merged in grass, which of a windy day breaks against

them in a surf of green surges.

Then, again, in mountainous countries where the traveller is

continually girdled by amphitheatrical heights; here and there from

some lucky point of view you will catch passing glimpses of the

profiles of whales defined along the undulating ridges. But you must be

a thorough whaleman, to see these sights; and not only that, but if you

wish to return to such a sight again, you must be sure and take the

exact intersecting latitude and longitude of your first stand-point,

else so chance-like are such observations of the hills, that your

precise, previous stand-point would require a laborious re-discovery;

like the Soloma Islands, which still remain incognita, though once

high-ruffed Mendanna trod them and old Figuera chronicled them.

Nor when expandingly lifted by your subject, can you fail to trace out

great whales in the starry heavens, and boats in pursuit of them; as

when long filled with thoughts of war the Eastern nations saw armies

locked in battle among the clouds. Thus at the North have I chased

Leviathan round and round the Pole with the revolutions of the bright

points that first defined him to me. And beneath the effulgent

Antarctic skies I have boarded the Argo-Navis, and joined the chase

against the starry Cetus far beyond the utmost stretch of Hydrus and

the Flying Fish.

With a frigate’s anchors for my bridle-bitts and fasces of harpoons for

spurs, would I could mount that whale and leap the topmost skies, to

see whether the fabled heavens with all their countless tents really

lie encamped beyond my mortal sight!

CHAPTER 58. Brit.

Steering north-eastward from the Crozetts, we fell in with vast meadows

of brit, the minute, yellow substance, upon which the Right Whale

largely feeds. For leagues and leagues it undulated round us, so that

we seemed to be sailing through boundless fields of ripe and golden

wheat.

On the second day, numbers of Right Whales were seen, who, secure from

the attack of a Sperm Whaler like the Pequod, with open jaws sluggishly

swam through the brit, which, adhering to the fringing fibres of that

wondrous Venetian blind in their mouths, was in that manner separated

from the water that escaped at the lip.

As morning mowers, who side by side slowly and seethingly advance their

scythes through the long wet grass of marshy meads; even so these

monsters swam, making a strange, grassy, cutting sound; and leaving

behind them endless swaths of blue upon the yellow sea.\*

\*That part of the sea known among whalemen as the “Brazil Banks” does

not bear that name as the Banks of Newfoundland do, because of there

being shallows and soundings there, but because of this remarkable

meadow-like appearance, caused by the vast drifts of brit continually

floating in those latitudes, where the Right Whale is often chased.

But it was only the sound they made as they parted the brit which at

all reminded one of mowers. Seen from the mast-heads, especially when

they paused and were stationary for a while, their vast black forms

looked more like lifeless masses of rock than anything else. And as in

the great hunting countries of India, the stranger at a distance will

sometimes pass on the plains recumbent elephants without knowing them

to be such, taking them for bare, blackened elevations of the soil;

even so, often, with him, who for the first time beholds this species

of the leviathans of the sea. And even when recognised at last, their

immense magnitude renders it very hard really to believe that such

bulky masses of overgrowth can possibly be instinct, in all parts, with

the same sort of life that lives in a dog or a horse.

Indeed, in other respects, you can hardly regard any creatures of the

deep with the same feelings that you do those of the shore. For though

some old naturalists have maintained that all creatures of the land are

of their kind in the sea; and though taking a broad general view of the

thing, this may very well be; yet coming to specialties, where, for

example, does the ocean furnish any fish that in disposition answers to

the sagacious kindness of the dog? The accursed shark alone can in any

generic respect be said to bear comparative analogy to him.

But though, to landsmen in general, the native inhabitants of the seas

have ever been regarded with emotions unspeakably unsocial and

repelling; though we know the sea to be an everlasting terra incognita,

so that Columbus sailed over numberless unknown worlds to discover his

one superficial western one; though, by vast odds, the most terrific of

all mortal disasters have immemorially and indiscriminately befallen

tens and hundreds of thousands of those who have gone upon the waters;

though but a moment’s consideration will teach, that however baby man

may brag of his science and skill, and however much, in a flattering

future, that science and skill may augment; yet for ever and for ever,

to the crack of doom, the sea will insult and murder him, and pulverize

the stateliest, stiffest frigate he can make; nevertheless, by the

continual repetition of these very impressions, man has lost that sense

of the full awfulness of the sea which aboriginally belongs to it.

The first boat we read of, floated on an ocean, that with Portuguese

vengeance had whelmed a whole world without leaving so much as a widow.

That same ocean rolls now; that same ocean destroyed the wrecked ships

of last year. Yea, foolish mortals, Noah’s flood is not yet subsided;

two thirds of the fair world it yet covers.

Wherein differ the sea and the land, that a miracle upon one is not a

miracle upon the other? Preternatural terrors rested upon the Hebrews,

when under the feet of Korah and his company the live ground opened and

swallowed them up for ever; yet not a modern sun ever sets, but in

precisely the same manner the live sea swallows up ships and crews.

But not only is the sea such a foe to man who is an alien to it, but it

is also a fiend to its own off-spring; worse than the Persian host who

murdered his own guests; sparing not the creatures which itself hath

spawned. Like a savage tigress that tossing in the jungle overlays her

own cubs, so the sea dashes even the mightiest whales against the

rocks, and leaves them there side by side with the split wrecks of

ships. No mercy, no power but its own controls it. Panting and snorting

like a mad battle steed that has lost its rider, the masterless ocean

overruns the globe.

Consider the subtleness of the sea; how its most dreaded creatures

glide under water, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously

hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure. Consider also the devilish

brilliance and beauty of many of its most remorseless tribes, as the

dainty embellished shape of many species of sharks. Consider, once

more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey

upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began.

Consider all this; and then turn to this green, gentle, and most docile

earth; consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a

strange analogy to something in yourself? For as this appalling ocean

surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one

insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the

horrors of the half known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that

isle, thou canst never return!

CHAPTER 59. Squid.

Slowly wading through the meadows of brit, the Pequod still held on her

way north-eastward towards the island of Java; a gentle air impelling

her keel, so that in the surrounding serenity her three tall tapering

masts mildly waved to that languid breeze, as three mild palms on a

plain. And still, at wide intervals in the silvery night, the lonely,

alluring jet would be seen.

But one transparent blue morning, when a stillness almost preternatural

spread over the sea, however unattended with any stagnant calm; when

the long burnished sun-glade on the waters seemed a golden finger laid

across them, enjoining some secrecy; when the slippered waves whispered

together as they softly ran on; in this profound hush of the visible

sphere a strange spectre was seen by Daggoo from the main-mast-head.

In the distance, a great white mass lazily rose, and rising higher and

higher, and disentangling itself from the azure, at last gleamed before

our prow like a snow-slide, new slid from the hills. Thus glistening

for a moment, as slowly it subsided, and sank. Then once more arose,

and silently gleamed. It seemed not a whale; and yet is this Moby Dick?

thought Daggoo. Again the phantom went down, but on re-appearing once

more, with a stiletto-like cry that startled every man from his nod,

the negro yelled out—“There! there again! there she breaches! right

ahead! The White Whale, the White Whale!”

Upon this, the seamen rushed to the yard-arms, as in swarming-time the

bees rush to the boughs. Bare-headed in the sultry sun, Ahab stood on

the bowsprit, and with one hand pushed far behind in readiness to wave

his orders to the helmsman, cast his eager glance in the direction

indicated aloft by the outstretched motionless arm of Daggoo.

Whether the flitting attendance of the one still and solitary jet had

gradually worked upon Ahab, so that he was now prepared to connect the

ideas of mildness and repose with the first sight of the particular

whale he pursued; however this was, or whether his eagerness betrayed

him; whichever way it might have been, no sooner did he distinctly

perceive the white mass, than with a quick intensity he instantly gave

orders for lowering.

The four boats were soon on the water; Ahab’s in advance, and all

swiftly pulling towards their prey. Soon it went down, and while, with

oars suspended, we were awaiting its reappearance, lo! in the same spot

where it sank, once more it slowly rose. Almost forgetting for the

moment all thoughts of Moby Dick, we now gazed at the most wondrous

phenomenon which the secret seas have hitherto revealed to mankind. A

vast pulpy mass, furlongs in length and breadth, of a glancing

cream-colour, lay floating on the water, innumerable long arms

radiating from its centre, and curling and twisting like a nest of

anacondas, as if blindly to clutch at any hapless object within reach.

No perceptible face or front did it have; no conceivable token of

either sensation or instinct; but undulated there on the billows, an

unearthly, formless, chance-like apparition of life.

As with a low sucking sound it slowly disappeared again, Starbuck still

gazing at the agitated waters where it had sunk, with a wild voice

exclaimed—“Almost rather had I seen Moby Dick and fought him, than to

have seen thee, thou white ghost!”

“What was it, Sir?” said Flask.

“The great live squid, which, they say, few whale-ships ever beheld,

and returned to their ports to tell of it.”

But Ahab said nothing; turning his boat, he sailed back to the vessel;

the rest as silently following.

Whatever superstitions the sperm whalemen in general have connected

with the sight of this object, certain it is, that a glimpse of it

being so very unusual, that circumstance has gone far to invest it with

portentousness. So rarely is it beheld, that though one and all of them

declare it to be the largest animated thing in the ocean, yet very few

of them have any but the most vague ideas concerning its true nature

and form; notwithstanding, they believe it to furnish to the sperm

whale his only food. For though other species of whales find their food

above water, and may be seen by man in the act of feeding, the

spermaceti whale obtains his whole food in unknown zones below the

surface; and only by inference is it that any one can tell of what,

precisely, that food consists. At times, when closely pursued, he will

disgorge what are supposed to be the detached arms of the squid; some

of them thus exhibited exceeding twenty and thirty feet in length. They

fancy that the monster to which these arms belonged ordinarily clings

by them to the bed of the ocean; and that the sperm whale, unlike other

species, is supplied with teeth in order to attack and tear it.

There seems some ground to imagine that the great Kraken of Bishop

Pontoppodan may ultimately resolve itself into Squid. The manner in

which the Bishop describes it, as alternately rising and sinking, with

some other particulars he narrates, in all this the two correspond. But

much abatement is necessary with respect to the incredible bulk he

assigns it.

By some naturalists who have vaguely heard rumors of the mysterious

creature, here spoken of, it is included among the class of

cuttle-fish, to which, indeed, in certain external respects it would

seem to belong, but only as the Anak of the tribe.

CHAPTER 60. The Line.

With reference to the whaling scene shortly to be described, as well as

for the better understanding of all similar scenes elsewhere presented,

I have here to speak of the magical, sometimes horrible whale-line.

The line originally used in the fishery was of the best hemp, slightly

vapored with tar, not impregnated with it, as in the case of ordinary

ropes; for while tar, as ordinarily used, makes the hemp more pliable

to the rope-maker, and also renders the rope itself more convenient to

the sailor for common ship use; yet, not only would the ordinary

quantity too much stiffen the whale-line for the close coiling to which

it must be subjected; but as most seamen are beginning to learn, tar in

general by no means adds to the rope’s durability or strength, however

much it may give it compactness and gloss.

Of late years the Manilla rope has in the American fishery almost

entirely superseded hemp as a material for whale-lines; for, though not

so durable as hemp, it is stronger, and far more soft and elastic; and

I will add (since there is an æsthetics in all things), is much more

handsome and becoming to the boat, than hemp. Hemp is a dusky, dark

fellow, a sort of Indian; but Manilla is as a golden-haired Circassian

to behold.

The whale-line is only two-thirds of an inch in thickness. At first

sight, you would not think it so strong as it really is. By experiment

its one and fifty yarns will each suspend a weight of one hundred and

twenty pounds; so that the whole rope will bear a strain nearly equal

to three tons. In length, the common sperm whale-line measures

something over two hundred fathoms. Towards the stern of the boat it is

spirally coiled away in the tub, not like the worm-pipe of a still

though, but so as to form one round, cheese-shaped mass of densely

bedded “sheaves,” or layers of concentric spiralizations, without any

hollow but the “heart,” or minute vertical tube formed at the axis of

the cheese. As the least tangle or kink in the coiling would, in

running out, infallibly take somebody’s arm, leg, or entire body off,

the utmost precaution is used in stowing the line in its tub. Some

harpooneers will consume almost an entire morning in this business,

carrying the line high aloft and then reeving it downwards through a

block towards the tub, so as in the act of coiling to free it from all

possible wrinkles and twists.

In the English boats two tubs are used instead of one; the same line

being continuously coiled in both tubs. There is some advantage in

this; because these twin-tubs being so small they fit more readily into

the boat, and do not strain it so much; whereas, the American tub,

nearly three feet in diameter and of proportionate depth, makes a

rather bulky freight for a craft whose planks are but one half-inch in

thickness; for the bottom of the whale-boat is like critical ice, which

will bear up a considerable distributed weight, but not very much of a

concentrated one. When the painted canvas cover is clapped on the

American line-tub, the boat looks as if it were pulling off with a

prodigious great wedding-cake to present to the whales.

Both ends of the line are exposed; the lower end terminating in an

eye-splice or loop coming up from the bottom against the side of the

tub, and hanging over its edge completely disengaged from everything.

This arrangement of the lower end is necessary on two accounts. First:

In order to facilitate the fastening to it of an additional line from a

neighboring boat, in case the stricken whale should sound so deep as to

threaten to carry off the entire line originally attached to the

harpoon. In these instances, the whale of course is shifted like a mug

of ale, as it were, from the one boat to the other; though the first

boat always hovers at hand to assist its consort. Second: This

arrangement is indispensable for common safety’s sake; for were the

lower end of the line in any way attached to the boat, and were the

whale then to run the line out to the end almost in a single, smoking

minute as he sometimes does, he would not stop there, for the doomed

boat would infallibly be dragged down after him into the profundity of

the sea; and in that case no town-crier would ever find her again.

Before lowering the boat for the chase, the upper end of the line is

taken aft from the tub, and passing round the loggerhead there, is

again carried forward the entire length of the boat, resting crosswise

upon the loom or handle of every man’s oar, so that it jogs against his

wrist in rowing; and also passing between the men, as they alternately

sit at the opposite gunwales, to the leaded chocks or grooves in the

extreme pointed prow of the boat, where a wooden pin or skewer the size

of a common quill, prevents it from slipping out. From the chocks it

hangs in a slight festoon over the bows, and is then passed inside the

boat again; and some ten or twenty fathoms (called box-line) being

coiled upon the box in the bows, it continues its way to the gunwale

still a little further aft, and is then attached to the short-warp—the

rope which is immediately connected with the harpoon; but previous to

that connexion, the short-warp goes through sundry mystifications too

tedious to detail.

Thus the whale-line folds the whole boat in its complicated coils,

twisting and writhing around it in almost every direction. All the

oarsmen are involved in its perilous contortions; so that to the timid

eye of the landsman, they seem as Indian jugglers, with the deadliest

snakes sportively festooning their limbs. Nor can any son of mortal

woman, for the first time, seat himself amid those hempen intricacies,

and while straining his utmost at the oar, bethink him that at any

unknown instant the harpoon may be darted, and all these horrible

contortions be put in play like ringed lightnings; he cannot be thus

circumstanced without a shudder that makes the very marrow in his bones

to quiver in him like a shaken jelly. Yet habit—strange thing! what

cannot habit accomplish?—Gayer sallies, more merry mirth, better jokes,

and brighter repartees, you never heard over your mahogany, than you

will hear over the half-inch white cedar of the whale-boat, when thus

hung in hangman’s nooses; and, like the six burghers of Calais before

King Edward, the six men composing the crew pull into the jaws of

death, with a halter around every neck, as you may say.

Perhaps a very little thought will now enable you to account for those

repeated whaling disasters—some few of which are casually chronicled—of

this man or that man being taken out of the boat by the line, and lost.

For, when the line is darting out, to be seated then in the boat, is

like being seated in the midst of the manifold whizzings of a

steam-engine in full play, when every flying beam, and shaft, and

wheel, is grazing you. It is worse; for you cannot sit motionless in

the heart of these perils, because the boat is rocking like a cradle,

and you are pitched one way and the other, without the slightest

warning; and only by a certain self-adjusting buoyancy and

simultaneousness of volition and action, can you escape being made a

Mazeppa of, and run away with where the all-seeing sun himself could

never pierce you out.

Again: as the profound calm which only apparently precedes and

prophesies of the storm, is perhaps more awful than the storm itself;

for, indeed, the calm is but the wrapper and envelope of the storm; and

contains it in itself, as the seemingly harmless rifle holds the fatal

powder, and the ball, and the explosion; so the graceful repose of the

line, as it silently serpentines about the oarsmen before being brought

into actual play—this is a thing which carries more of true terror than

any other aspect of this dangerous affair. But why say more? All men

live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their

necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death,

that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life.

And if you be a philosopher, though seated in the whale-boat, you would

not at heart feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before

your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side.

CHAPTER 61. Stubb Kills a Whale.

If to Starbuck the apparition of the Squid was a thing of portents, to

Queequeg it was quite a different object.

“When you see him ’quid,” said the savage, honing his harpoon in the

bow of his hoisted boat, “then you quick see him ’parm whale.”

The next day was exceedingly still and sultry, and with nothing special

to engage them, the Pequod’s crew could hardly resist the spell of

sleep induced by such a vacant sea. For this part of the Indian Ocean

through which we then were voyaging is not what whalemen call a lively

ground; that is, it affords fewer glimpses of porpoises, dolphins,

flying-fish, and other vivacious denizens of more stirring waters, than

those off the Rio de la Plata, or the in-shore ground off Peru.

It was my turn to stand at the foremast-head; and with my shoulders

leaning against the slackened royal shrouds, to and fro I idly swayed

in what seemed an enchanted air. No resolution could withstand it; in

that dreamy mood losing all consciousness, at last my soul went out of

my body; though my body still continued to sway as a pendulum will,

long after the power which first moved it is withdrawn.

Ere forgetfulness altogether came over me, I had noticed that the

seamen at the main and mizzen-mast-heads were already drowsy. So that

at last all three of us lifelessly swung from the spars, and for every

swing that we made there was a nod from below from the slumbering

helmsman. The waves, too, nodded their indolent crests; and across the

wide trance of the sea, east nodded to west, and the sun over all.

Suddenly bubbles seemed bursting beneath my closed eyes; like vices my

hands grasped the shrouds; some invisible, gracious agency preserved

me; with a shock I came back to life. And lo! close under our lee, not

forty fathoms off, a gigantic Sperm Whale lay rolling in the water like

the capsized hull of a frigate, his broad, glossy back, of an Ethiopian

hue, glistening in the sun’s rays like a mirror. But lazily undulating

in the trough of the sea, and ever and anon tranquilly spouting his

vapory jet, the whale looked like a portly burgher smoking his pipe of

a warm afternoon. But that pipe, poor whale, was thy last. As if struck

by some enchanter’s wand, the sleepy ship and every sleeper in it all

at once started into wakefulness; and more than a score of voices from

all parts of the vessel, simultaneously with the three notes from

aloft, shouted forth the accustomed cry, as the great fish slowly and

regularly spouted the sparkling brine into the air.

“Clear away the boats! Luff!” cried Ahab. And obeying his own order, he

dashed the helm down before the helmsman could handle the spokes.

The sudden exclamations of the crew must have alarmed the whale; and

ere the boats were down, majestically turning, he swam away to the

leeward, but with such a steady tranquillity, and making so few ripples

as he swam, that thinking after all he might not as yet be alarmed,

Ahab gave orders that not an oar should be used, and no man must speak

but in whispers. So seated like Ontario Indians on the gunwales of the

boats, we swiftly but silently paddled along; the calm not admitting of

the noiseless sails being set. Presently, as we thus glided in chase,

the monster perpendicularly flitted his tail forty feet into the air,

and then sank out of sight like a tower swallowed up.

“There go flukes!” was the cry, an announcement immediately followed by

Stubb’s producing his match and igniting his pipe, for now a respite

was granted. After the full interval of his sounding had elapsed, the

whale rose again, and being now in advance of the smoker’s boat, and

much nearer to it than to any of the others, Stubb counted upon the

honor of the capture. It was obvious, now, that the whale had at length

become aware of his pursuers. All silence of cautiousness was therefore

no longer of use. Paddles were dropped, and oars came loudly into play.

And still puffing at his pipe, Stubb cheered on his crew to the

assault.

Yes, a mighty change had come over the fish. All alive to his jeopardy,

he was going “head out”; that part obliquely projecting from the mad

yeast which he brewed.\*

\*It will be seen in some other place of what a very light substance the

entire interior of the sperm whale’s enormous head consists. Though

apparently the most massive, it is by far the most buoyant part about

him. So that with ease he elevates it in the air, and invariably does

so when going at his utmost speed. Besides, such is the breadth of the

upper part of the front of his head, and such the tapering cut-water

formation of the lower part, that by obliquely elevating his head, he

thereby may be said to transform himself from a bluff-bowed sluggish

galliot into a sharppointed New York pilot-boat.

“Start her, start her, my men! Don’t hurry yourselves; take plenty of

time—but start her; start her like thunder-claps, that’s all,” cried

Stubb, spluttering out the smoke as he spoke. “Start her, now; give ’em

the long and strong stroke, Tashtego. Start her, Tash, my boy—start

her, all; but keep cool, keep cool—cucumbers is the word—easy,

easy—only start her like grim death and grinning devils, and raise the

buried dead perpendicular out of their graves, boys—that’s all. Start

her!”

“Woo-hoo! Wa-hee!” screamed the Gay-Header in reply, raising some old

war-whoop to the skies; as every oarsman in the strained boat

involuntarily bounced forward with the one tremendous leading stroke

which the eager Indian gave.

But his wild screams were answered by others quite as wild. “Kee-hee!

Kee-hee!” yelled Daggoo, straining forwards and backwards on his seat,

like a pacing tiger in his cage.

“Ka-la! Koo-loo!” howled Queequeg, as if smacking his lips over a

mouthful of Grenadier’s steak. And thus with oars and yells the keels

cut the sea. Meanwhile, Stubb retaining his place in the van, still

encouraged his men to the onset, all the while puffing the smoke from

his mouth. Like desperadoes they tugged and they strained, till the

welcome cry was heard—“Stand up, Tashtego!—give it to him!” The harpoon

was hurled. “Stern all!” The oarsmen backed water; the same moment

something went hot and hissing along every one of their wrists. It was

the magical line. An instant before, Stubb had swiftly caught two

additional turns with it round the loggerhead, whence, by reason of its

increased rapid circlings, a hempen blue smoke now jetted up and

mingled with the steady fumes from his pipe. As the line passed round

and round the loggerhead; so also, just before reaching that point, it

blisteringly passed through and through both of Stubb’s hands, from

which the hand-cloths, or squares of quilted canvas sometimes worn at

these times, had accidentally dropped. It was like holding an enemy’s

sharp two-edged sword by the blade, and that enemy all the time

striving to wrest it out of your clutch.

“Wet the line! wet the line!” cried Stubb to the tub oarsman (him

seated by the tub) who, snatching off his hat, dashed sea-water into

it.\* More turns were taken, so that the line began holding its place.

The boat now flew through the boiling water like a shark all fins.

Stubb and Tashtego here changed places—stem for stern—a staggering

business truly in that rocking commotion.

\*Partly to show the indispensableness of this act, it may here be

stated, that, in the old Dutch fishery, a mop was used to dash the

running line with water; in many other ships, a wooden piggin, or

bailer, is set apart for that purpose. Your hat, however, is the most

convenient.

From the vibrating line extending the entire length of the upper part

of the boat, and from its now being more tight than a harpstring, you

would have thought the craft had two keels—one cleaving the water, the

other the air—as the boat churned on through both opposing elements at

once. A continual cascade played at the bows; a ceaseless whirling eddy

in her wake; and, at the slightest motion from within, even but of a

little finger, the vibrating, cracking craft canted over her spasmodic

gunwale into the sea. Thus they rushed; each man with might and main

clinging to his seat, to prevent being tossed to the foam; and the tall

form of Tashtego at the steering oar crouching almost double, in order

to bring down his centre of gravity. Whole Atlantics and Pacifics

seemed passed as they shot on their way, till at length the whale

somewhat slackened his flight.

“Haul in—haul in!” cried Stubb to the bowsman! and, facing round

towards the whale, all hands began pulling the boat up to him, while

yet the boat was being towed on. Soon ranging up by his flank, Stubb,

firmly planting his knee in the clumsy cleat, darted dart after dart

into the flying fish; at the word of command, the boat alternately

sterning out of the way of the whale’s horrible wallow, and then

ranging up for another fling.

The red tide now poured from all sides of the monster like brooks down

a hill. His tormented body rolled not in brine but in blood, which

bubbled and seethed for furlongs behind in their wake. The slanting sun

playing upon this crimson pond in the sea, sent back its reflection

into every face, so that they all glowed to each other like red men.

And all the while, jet after jet of white smoke was agonizingly shot

from the spiracle of the whale, and vehement puff after puff from the

mouth of the excited headsman; as at every dart, hauling in upon his

crooked lance (by the line attached to it), Stubb straightened it again

and again, by a few rapid blows against the gunwale, then again and

again sent it into the whale.

“Pull up—pull up!” he now cried to the bowsman, as the waning whale

relaxed in his wrath. “Pull up!—close to!” and the boat ranged along

the fish’s flank. When reaching far over the bow, Stubb slowly churned

his long sharp lance into the fish, and kept it there, carefully

churning and churning, as if cautiously seeking to feel after some gold

watch that the whale might have swallowed, and which he was fearful of

breaking ere he could hook it out. But that gold watch he sought was

the innermost life of the fish. And now it is struck; for, starting

from his trance into that unspeakable thing called his “flurry,” the

monster horribly wallowed in his blood, overwrapped himself in

impenetrable, mad, boiling spray, so that the imperilled craft,

instantly dropping astern, had much ado blindly to struggle out from

that phrensied twilight into the clear air of the day.

And now abating in his flurry, the whale once more rolled out into

view; surging from side to side; spasmodically dilating and contracting

his spout-hole, with sharp, cracking, agonized respirations. At last,

gush after gush of clotted red gore, as if it had been the purple lees

of red wine, shot into the frighted air; and falling back again, ran

dripping down his motionless flanks into the sea. His heart had burst!

“He’s dead, Mr. Stubb,” said Daggoo.

“Yes; both pipes smoked out!” and withdrawing his own from his mouth,

Stubb scattered the dead ashes over the water; and, for a moment, stood

thoughtfully eyeing the vast corpse he had made.

CHAPTER 62. The Dart.

A word concerning an incident in the last chapter.

According to the invariable usage of the fishery, the whale-boat pushes

off from the ship, with the headsman or whale-killer as temporary

steersman, and the harpooneer or whale-fastener pulling the foremost

oar, the one known as the harpooneer-oar. Now it needs a strong,

nervous arm to strike the first iron into the fish; for often, in what

is called a long dart, the heavy implement has to be flung to the

distance of twenty or thirty feet. But however prolonged and exhausting

the chase, the harpooneer is expected to pull his oar meanwhile to the

uttermost; indeed, he is expected to set an example of superhuman

activity to the rest, not only by incredible rowing, but by repeated

loud and intrepid exclamations; and what it is to keep shouting at the

top of one’s compass, while all the other muscles are strained and half

started—what that is none know but those who have tried it. For one, I

cannot bawl very heartily and work very recklessly at one and the same

time. In this straining, bawling state, then, with his back to the

fish, all at once the exhausted harpooneer hears the exciting

cry—“Stand up, and give it to him!” He now has to drop and secure his

oar, turn round on his centre half way, seize his harpoon from the

crotch, and with what little strength may remain, he essays to pitch it

somehow into the whale. No wonder, taking the whole fleet of whalemen

in a body, that out of fifty fair chances for a dart, not five are

successful; no wonder that so many hapless harpooneers are madly cursed

and disrated; no wonder that some of them actually burst their

blood-vessels in the boat; no wonder that some sperm whalemen are

absent four years with four barrels; no wonder that to many ship

owners, whaling is but a losing concern; for it is the harpooneer that

makes the voyage, and if you take the breath out of his body how can

you expect to find it there when most wanted!

Again, if the dart be successful, then at the second critical instant,

that is, when the whale starts to run, the boatheader and harpooneer

likewise start to running fore and aft, to the imminent jeopardy of

themselves and every one else. It is then they change places; and the

headsman, the chief officer of the little craft, takes his proper

station in the bows of the boat.

Now, I care not who maintains the contrary, but all this is both

foolish and unnecessary. The headsman should stay in the bows from

first to last; he should both dart the harpoon and the lance, and no

rowing whatever should be expected of him, except under circumstances

obvious to any fisherman. I know that this would sometimes involve a

slight loss of speed in the chase; but long experience in various

whalemen of more than one nation has convinced me that in the vast

majority of failures in the fishery, it has not by any means been so

much the speed of the whale as the before described exhaustion of the

harpooneer that has caused them.

To insure the greatest efficiency in the dart, the harpooneers of this

world must start to their feet from out of idleness, and not from out

of toil.

CHAPTER 63. The Crotch.

Out of the trunk, the branches grow; out of them, the twigs. So, in

productive subjects, grow the chapters.

The crotch alluded to on a previous page deserves independent mention.

It is a notched stick of a peculiar form, some two feet in length,

which is perpendicularly inserted into the starboard gunwale near the

bow, for the purpose of furnishing a rest for the wooden extremity of

the harpoon, whose other naked, barbed end slopingly projects from the

prow. Thereby the weapon is instantly at hand to its hurler, who

snatches it up as readily from its rest as a backwoodsman swings his

rifle from the wall. It is customary to have two harpoons reposing in

the crotch, respectively called the first and second irons.

But these two harpoons, each by its own cord, are both connected with

the line; the object being this: to dart them both, if possible, one

instantly after the other into the same whale; so that if, in the

coming drag, one should draw out, the other may still retain a hold. It

is a doubling of the chances. But it very often happens that owing to

the instantaneous, violent, convulsive running of the whale upon

receiving the first iron, it becomes impossible for the harpooneer,

however lightning-like in his movements, to pitch the second iron into

him. Nevertheless, as the second iron is already connected with the

line, and the line is running, hence that weapon must, at all events,

be anticipatingly tossed out of the boat, somehow and somewhere; else

the most terrible jeopardy would involve all hands. Tumbled into the

water, it accordingly is in such cases; the spare coils of box line

(mentioned in a preceding chapter) making this feat, in most instances,

prudently practicable. But this critical act is not always unattended

with the saddest and most fatal casualties.

Furthermore: you must know that when the second iron is thrown

overboard, it thenceforth becomes a dangling, sharp-edged terror,

skittishly curvetting about both boat and whale, entangling the lines,

or cutting them, and making a prodigious sensation in all directions.

Nor, in general, is it possible to secure it again until the whale is

fairly captured and a corpse.

Consider, now, how it must be in the case of four boats all engaging

one unusually strong, active, and knowing whale; when owing to these

qualities in him, as well as to the thousand concurring accidents of

such an audacious enterprise, eight or ten loose second irons may be

simultaneously dangling about him. For, of course, each boat is

supplied with several harpoons to bend on to the line should the first

one be ineffectually darted without recovery. All these particulars are

faithfully narrated here, as they will not fail to elucidate several

most important, however intricate passages, in scenes hereafter to be

painted.

CHAPTER 64. Stubb’s Supper.

Stubb’s whale had been killed some distance from the ship. It was a

calm; so, forming a tandem of three boats, we commenced the slow

business of towing the trophy to the Pequod. And now, as we eighteen

men with our thirty-six arms, and one hundred and eighty thumbs and

fingers, slowly toiled hour after hour upon that inert, sluggish corpse

in the sea; and it seemed hardly to budge at all, except at long

intervals; good evidence was hereby furnished of the enormousness of

the mass we moved. For, upon the great canal of Hang-Ho, or whatever

they call it, in China, four or five laborers on the foot-path will

draw a bulky freighted junk at the rate of a mile an hour; but this

grand argosy we towed heavily forged along, as if laden with pig-lead

in bulk.

Darkness came on; but three lights up and down in the Pequod’s

main-rigging dimly guided our way; till drawing nearer we saw Ahab

dropping one of several more lanterns over the bulwarks. Vacantly

eyeing the heaving whale for a moment, he issued the usual orders for

securing it for the night, and then handing his lantern to a seaman,

went his way into the cabin, and did not come forward again until

morning.

Though, in overseeing the pursuit of this whale, Captain Ahab had

evinced his customary activity, to call it so; yet now that the

creature was dead, some vague dissatisfaction, or impatience, or

despair, seemed working in him; as if the sight of that dead body

reminded him that Moby Dick was yet to be slain; and though a thousand

other whales were brought to his ship, all that would not one jot

advance his grand, monomaniac object. Very soon you would have thought

from the sound on the Pequod’s decks, that all hands were preparing to

cast anchor in the deep; for heavy chains are being dragged along the

deck, and thrust rattling out of the port-holes. But by those clanking

links, the vast corpse itself, not the ship, is to be moored. Tied by

the head to the stern, and by the tail to the bows, the whale now lies

with its black hull close to the vessel’s and seen through the darkness

of the night, which obscured the spars and rigging aloft, the two—ship

and whale, seemed yoked together like colossal bullocks, whereof one

reclines while the other remains standing.\*

\*A little item may as well be related here. The strongest and most

reliable hold which the ship has upon the whale when moored alongside,

is by the flukes or tail; and as from its greater density that part is

relatively heavier than any other (excepting the side-fins), its

flexibility even in death, causes it to sink low beneath the surface;

so that with the hand you cannot get at it from the boat, in order to

put the chain round it. But this difficulty is ingeniously overcome: a

small, strong line is prepared with a wooden float at its outer end,

and a weight in its middle, while the other end is secured to the ship.

By adroit management the wooden float is made to rise on the other side

of the mass, so that now having girdled the whale, the chain is readily

made to follow suit; and being slipped along the body, is at last

locked fast round the smallest part of the tail, at the point of

junction with its broad flukes or lobes.

If moody Ahab was now all quiescence, at least so far as could be known

on deck, Stubb, his second mate, flushed with conquest, betrayed an

unusual but still good-natured excitement. Such an unwonted bustle was

he in that the staid Starbuck, his official superior, quietly resigned

to him for the time the sole management of affairs. One small, helping

cause of all this liveliness in Stubb, was soon made strangely

manifest. Stubb was a high liver; he was somewhat intemperately fond of

the whale as a flavorish thing to his palate.

“A steak, a steak, ere I sleep! You, Daggoo! overboard you go, and cut

me one from his small!”

Here be it known, that though these wild fishermen do not, as a general

thing, and according to the great military maxim, make the enemy defray

the current expenses of the war (at least before realizing the proceeds

of the voyage), yet now and then you find some of these Nantucketers

who have a genuine relish for that particular part of the Sperm Whale

designated by Stubb; comprising the tapering extremity of the body.

About midnight that steak was cut and cooked; and lighted by two

lanterns of sperm oil, Stubb stoutly stood up to his spermaceti supper

at the capstan-head, as if that capstan were a sideboard. Nor was Stubb

the only banqueter on whale’s flesh that night. Mingling their

mumblings with his own mastications, thousands on thousands of sharks,

swarming round the dead leviathan, smackingly feasted on its fatness.

The few sleepers below in their bunks were often startled by the sharp

slapping of their tails against the hull, within a few inches of the

sleepers’ hearts. Peering over the side you could just see them (as

before you heard them) wallowing in the sullen, black waters, and

turning over on their backs as they scooped out huge globular pieces of

the whale of the bigness of a human head. This particular feat of the

shark seems all but miraculous. How at such an apparently unassailable

surface, they contrive to gouge out such symmetrical mouthfuls, remains

a part of the universal problem of all things. The mark they thus leave

on the whale, may best be likened to the hollow made by a carpenter in

countersinking for a screw.

Though amid all the smoking horror and diabolism of a sea-fight, sharks

will be seen longingly gazing up to the ship’s decks, like hungry dogs

round a table where red meat is being carved, ready to bolt down every

killed man that is tossed to them; and though, while the valiant

butchers over the deck-table are thus cannibally carving each other’s

live meat with carving-knives all gilded and tasselled, the sharks,

also, with their jewel-hilted mouths, are quarrelsomely carving away

under the table at the dead meat; and though, were you to turn the

whole affair upside down, it would still be pretty much the same thing,

that is to say, a shocking sharkish business enough for all parties;

and though sharks also are the invariable outriders of all slave ships

crossing the Atlantic, systematically trotting alongside, to be handy

in case a parcel is to be carried anywhere, or a dead slave to be

decently buried; and though one or two other like instances might be

set down, touching the set terms, places, and occasions, when sharks do

most socially congregate, and most hilariously feast; yet is there no

conceivable time or occasion when you will find them in such countless

numbers, and in gayer or more jovial spirits, than around a dead sperm

whale, moored by night to a whaleship at sea. If you have never seen

that sight, then suspend your decision about the propriety of

devil-worship, and the expediency of conciliating the devil.

But, as yet, Stubb heeded not the mumblings of the banquet that was

going on so nigh him, no more than the sharks heeded the smacking of

his own epicurean lips.

“Cook, cook!—where’s that old Fleece?” he cried at length, widening his

legs still further, as if to form a more secure base for his supper;

and, at the same time darting his fork into the dish, as if stabbing

with his lance; “cook, you cook!—sail this way, cook!”

The old black, not in any very high glee at having been previously

roused from his warm hammock at a most unseasonable hour, came

shambling along from his galley, for, like many old blacks, there was

something the matter with his knee-pans, which he did not keep well

scoured like his other pans; this old Fleece, as they called him, came

shuffling and limping along, assisting his step with his tongs, which,

after a clumsy fashion, were made of straightened iron hoops; this old

Ebony floundered along, and in obedience to the word of command, came

to a dead stop on the opposite side of Stubb’s sideboard; when, with

both hands folded before him, and resting on his two-legged cane, he

bowed his arched back still further over, at the same time sideways

inclining his head, so as to bring his best ear into play.

“Cook,” said Stubb, rapidly lifting a rather reddish morsel to his

mouth, “don’t you think this steak is rather overdone? You’ve been

beating this steak too much, cook; it’s too tender. Don’t I always say

that to be good, a whale-steak must be tough? There are those sharks

now over the side, don’t you see they prefer it tough and rare? What a

shindy they are kicking up! Cook, go and talk to ’em; tell ’em they are

welcome to help themselves civilly, and in moderation, but they must

keep quiet. Blast me, if I can hear my own voice. Away, cook, and

deliver my message. Here, take this lantern,” snatching one from his

sideboard; “now then, go and preach to ’em!”

Sullenly taking the offered lantern, old Fleece limped across the deck

to the bulwarks; and then, with one hand dropping his light low over

the sea, so as to get a good view of his congregation, with the other

hand he solemnly flourished his tongs, and leaning far over the side in

a mumbling voice began addressing the sharks, while Stubb, softly

crawling behind, overheard all that was said.

“Fellow-critters: I’se ordered here to say dat you must stop dat dam

noise dare. You hear? Stop dat dam smackin’ ob de lip! Massa Stubb say

dat you can fill your dam bellies up to de hatchings, but by Gor! you

must stop dat dam racket!”

“Cook,” here interposed Stubb, accompanying the word with a sudden slap

on the shoulder,—“Cook! why, damn your eyes, you mustn’t swear that way

when you’re preaching. That’s no way to convert sinners, cook!”

“Who dat? Den preach to him yourself,” sullenly turning to go.

“No, cook; go on, go on.”

“Well, den, Belubed fellow-critters:”—

“Right!” exclaimed Stubb, approvingly, “coax ’em to it; try that,” and

Fleece continued.

“Do you is all sharks, and by natur wery woracious, yet I zay to you,

fellow-critters, dat dat woraciousness—’top dat dam slappin’ ob de

tail! How you tink to hear, spose you keep up such a dam slappin’ and

bitin’ dare?”

“Cook,” cried Stubb, collaring him, “I won’t have that swearing. Talk

to ’em gentlemanly.”

Once more the sermon proceeded.

“Your woraciousness, fellow-critters, I don’t blame ye so much for; dat

is natur, and can’t be helped; but to gobern dat wicked natur, dat is

de pint. You is sharks, sartin; but if you gobern de shark in you, why

den you be angel; for all angel is not’ing more dan de shark well

goberned. Now, look here, bred’ren, just try wonst to be cibil, a

helping yourselbs from dat whale. Don’t be tearin’ de blubber out your

neighbour’s mout, I say. Is not one shark dood right as toder to dat

whale? And, by Gor, none on you has de right to dat whale; dat whale

belong to some one else. I know some o’ you has berry brig mout,

brigger dan oders; but den de brig mouts sometimes has de small

bellies; so dat de brigness of de mout is not to swaller wid, but to

bit off de blubber for de small fry ob sharks, dat can’t get into de

scrouge to help demselves.”

“Well done, old Fleece!” cried Stubb, “that’s Christianity; go on.”

“No use goin’ on; de dam willains will keep a scougin’ and slappin’

each oder, Massa Stubb; dey don’t hear one word; no use a-preachin’ to

such dam g’uttons as you call ’em, till dare bellies is full, and dare

bellies is bottomless; and when dey do get ’em full, dey wont hear you

den; for den dey sink in de sea, go fast to sleep on de coral, and

can’t hear not’ing at all, no more, for eber and eber.”

“Upon my soul, I am about of the same opinion; so give the benediction,

Fleece, and I’ll away to my supper.”

Upon this, Fleece, holding both hands over the fishy mob, raised his

shrill voice, and cried—

“Cussed fellow-critters! Kick up de damndest row as ever you can; fill

your dam’ bellies ’till dey bust—and den die.”

“Now, cook,” said Stubb, resuming his supper at the capstan; “stand

just where you stood before, there, over against me, and pay particular

attention.”

“All dention,” said Fleece, again stooping over upon his tongs in the

desired position.

“Well,” said Stubb, helping himself freely meanwhile; “I shall now go

back to the subject of this steak. In the first place, how old are you,

cook?”

“What dat do wid de ’teak,” said the old black, testily.

“Silence! How old are you, cook?”

“’Bout ninety, dey say,” he gloomily muttered.

“And you have lived in this world hard upon one hundred years, cook,

and don’t know yet how to cook a whale-steak?” rapidly bolting another

mouthful at the last word, so that morsel seemed a continuation of the

question. “Where were you born, cook?”

“’Hind de hatchway, in ferry-boat, goin’ ober de Roanoke.”

“Born in a ferry-boat! That’s queer, too. But I want to know what

country you were born in, cook!”

“Didn’t I say de Roanoke country?” he cried sharply.

“No, you didn’t, cook; but I’ll tell you what I’m coming to, cook. You

must go home and be born over again; you don’t know how to cook a

whale-steak yet.”

“Bress my soul, if I cook noder one,” he growled, angrily, turning

round to depart.

“Come back, cook;—here, hand me those tongs;—now take that bit of steak

there, and tell me if you think that steak cooked as it should be? Take

it, I say”—holding the tongs towards him—“take it, and taste it.”

Faintly smacking his withered lips over it for a moment, the old negro

muttered, “Best cooked ’teak I eber taste; joosy, berry joosy.”

“Cook,” said Stubb, squaring himself once more; “do you belong to the

church?”

“Passed one once in Cape-Down,” said the old man sullenly.

“And you have once in your life passed a holy church in Cape-Town,

where you doubtless overheard a holy parson addressing his hearers as

his beloved fellow-creatures, have you, cook! And yet you come here,

and tell me such a dreadful lie as you did just now, eh?” said Stubb.

“Where do you expect to go to, cook?”

“Go to bed berry soon,” he mumbled, half-turning as he spoke.

“Avast! heave to! I mean when you die, cook. It’s an awful question.

Now what’s your answer?”

“When dis old brack man dies,” said the negro slowly, changing his

whole air and demeanor, “he hisself won’t go nowhere; but some bressed

angel will come and fetch him.”

“Fetch him? How? In a coach and four, as they fetched Elijah? And fetch

him where?”

“Up dere,” said Fleece, holding his tongs straight over his head, and

keeping it there very solemnly.

“So, then, you expect to go up into our main-top, do you, cook, when

you are dead? But don’t you know the higher you climb, the colder it

gets? Main-top, eh?”

“Didn’t say dat t’all,” said Fleece, again in the sulks.

“You said up there, didn’t you? and now look yourself, and see where

your tongs are pointing. But, perhaps you expect to get into heaven by

crawling through the lubber’s hole, cook; but, no, no, cook, you don’t

get there, except you go the regular way, round by the rigging. It’s a

ticklish business, but must be done, or else it’s no go. But none of us

are in heaven yet. Drop your tongs, cook, and hear my orders. Do ye

hear? Hold your hat in one hand, and clap t’other a’top of your heart,

when I’m giving my orders, cook. What! that your heart, there?—that’s

your gizzard! Aloft! aloft!—that’s it—now you have it. Hold it there

now, and pay attention.”

“All ’dention,” said the old black, with both hands placed as desired,

vainly wriggling his grizzled head, as if to get both ears in front at

one and the same time.

“Well then, cook, you see this whale-steak of yours was so very bad,

that I have put it out of sight as soon as possible; you see that,

don’t you? Well, for the future, when you cook another whale-steak for

my private table here, the capstan, I’ll tell you what to do so as not

to spoil it by overdoing. Hold the steak in one hand, and show a live

coal to it with the other; that done, dish it; d’ye hear? And now

to-morrow, cook, when we are cutting in the fish, be sure you stand by

to get the tips of his fins; have them put in pickle. As for the ends

of the flukes, have them soused, cook. There, now ye may go.”

But Fleece had hardly got three paces off, when he was recalled.

“Cook, give me cutlets for supper to-morrow night in the mid-watch.

D’ye hear? away you sail, then.—Halloa! stop! make a bow before you

go.—Avast heaving again! Whale-balls for breakfast—don’t forget.”

“Wish, by gor! whale eat him, ’stead of him eat whale. I’m bressed if

he ain’t more of shark dan Massa Shark hisself,” muttered the old man,

limping away; with which sage ejaculation he went to his hammock.

CHAPTER 65. The Whale as a Dish.

That mortal man should feed upon the creature that feeds his lamp, and,

like Stubb, eat him by his own light, as you may say; this seems so

outlandish a thing that one must needs go a little into the history and

philosophy of it.

It is upon record, that three centuries ago the tongue of the Right

Whale was esteemed a great delicacy in France, and commanded large

prices there. Also, that in Henry VIIIth’s time, a certain cook of the

court obtained a handsome reward for inventing an admirable sauce to be

eaten with barbacued porpoises, which, you remember, are a species of

whale. Porpoises, indeed, are to this day considered fine eating. The

meat is made into balls about the size of billiard balls, and being

well seasoned and spiced might be taken for turtle-balls or veal balls.

The old monks of Dunfermline were very fond of them. They had a great

porpoise grant from the crown.

The fact is, that among his hunters at least, the whale would by all

hands be considered a noble dish, were there not so much of him; but

when you come to sit down before a meat-pie nearly one hundred feet

long, it takes away your appetite. Only the most unprejudiced of men

like Stubb, nowadays partake of cooked whales; but the Esquimaux are

not so fastidious. We all know how they live upon whales, and have rare

old vintages of prime old train oil. Zogranda, one of their most famous

doctors, recommends strips of blubber for infants, as being exceedingly

juicy and nourishing. And this reminds me that certain Englishmen, who

long ago were accidentally left in Greenland by a whaling vessel—that

these men actually lived for several months on the mouldy scraps of

whales which had been left ashore after trying out the blubber. Among

the Dutch whalemen these scraps are called “fritters”; which, indeed,

they greatly resemble, being brown and crisp, and smelling something

like old Amsterdam housewives’ dough-nuts or oly-cooks, when fresh.

They have such an eatable look that the most self-denying stranger can

hardly keep his hands off.

But what further depreciates the whale as a civilized dish, is his

exceeding richness. He is the great prize ox of the sea, too fat to be

delicately good. Look at his hump, which would be as fine eating as the

buffalo’s (which is esteemed a rare dish), were it not such a solid

pyramid of fat. But the spermaceti itself, how bland and creamy that

is; like the transparent, half-jellied, white meat of a cocoanut in the

third month of its growth, yet far too rich to supply a substitute for

butter. Nevertheless, many whalemen have a method of absorbing it into

some other substance, and then partaking of it. In the long try watches

of the night it is a common thing for the seamen to dip their

ship-biscuit into the huge oil-pots and let them fry there awhile. Many

a good supper have I thus made.

In the case of a small Sperm Whale the brains are accounted a fine

dish. The casket of the skull is broken into with an axe, and the two

plump, whitish lobes being withdrawn (precisely resembling two large

puddings), they are then mixed with flour, and cooked into a most

delectable mess, in flavor somewhat resembling calves’ head, which is

quite a dish among some epicures; and every one knows that some young

bucks among the epicures, by continually dining upon calves’ brains, by

and by get to have a little brains of their own, so as to be able to

tell a calf’s head from their own heads; which, indeed, requires

uncommon discrimination. And that is the reason why a young buck with

an intelligent looking calf’s head before him, is somehow one of the

saddest sights you can see. The head looks a sort of reproachfully at

him, with an “Et tu Brute!” expression.

It is not, perhaps, entirely because the whale is so excessively

unctuous that landsmen seem to regard the eating of him with

abhorrence; that appears to result, in some way, from the consideration

before mentioned: \_i.e.\_ that a man should eat a newly murdered thing

of the sea, and eat it too by its own light. But no doubt the first man

that ever murdered an ox was regarded as a murderer; perhaps he was

hung; and if he had been put on his trial by oxen, he certainly would

have been; and he certainly deserved it if any murderer does. Go to the

meat-market of a Saturday night and see the crowds of live bipeds

staring up at the long rows of dead quadrupeds. Does not that sight

take a tooth out of the cannibal’s jaw? Cannibals? who is not a

cannibal? I tell you it will be more tolerable for the Fejee that

salted down a lean missionary in his cellar against a coming famine; it

will be more tolerable for that provident Fejee, I say, in the day of

judgment, than for thee, civilized and enlightened gourmand, who

nailest geese to the ground and feastest on their bloated livers in thy

paté-de-foie-gras.

But Stubb, he eats the whale by its own light, does he? and that is

adding insult to injury, is it? Look at your knife-handle, there, my

civilized and enlightened gourmand dining off that roast beef, what is

that handle made of?—what but the bones of the brother of the very ox

you are eating? And what do you pick your teeth with, after devouring

that fat goose? With a feather of the same fowl. And with what quill

did the Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Cruelty to

Ganders formally indite his circulars? It is only within the last month

or two that that society passed a resolution to patronize nothing but

steel pens.

CHAPTER 66. The Shark Massacre.

When in the Southern Fishery, a captured Sperm Whale, after long and

weary toil, is brought alongside late at night, it is not, as a general

thing at least, customary to proceed at once to the business of cutting

him in. For that business is an exceedingly laborious one; is not very

soon completed; and requires all hands to set about it. Therefore, the

common usage is to take in all sail; lash the helm a’lee; and then send

every one below to his hammock till daylight, with the reservation

that, until that time, anchor-watches shall be kept; that is, two and

two for an hour, each couple, the crew in rotation shall mount the deck

to see that all goes well.

But sometimes, especially upon the Line in the Pacific, this plan will

not answer at all; because such incalculable hosts of sharks gather

round the moored carcase, that were he left so for six hours, say, on a

stretch, little more than the skeleton would be visible by morning. In

most other parts of the ocean, however, where these fish do not so

largely abound, their wondrous voracity can be at times considerably

diminished, by vigorously stirring them up with sharp whaling-spades, a

procedure notwithstanding, which, in some instances, only seems to

tickle them into still greater activity. But it was not thus in the

present case with the Pequod’s sharks; though, to be sure, any man

unaccustomed to such sights, to have looked over her side that night,

would have almost thought the whole round sea was one huge cheese, and

those sharks the maggots in it.

Nevertheless, upon Stubb setting the anchor-watch after his supper was

concluded; and when, accordingly, Queequeg and a forecastle seaman came

on deck, no small excitement was created among the sharks; for

immediately suspending the cutting stages over the side, and lowering

three lanterns, so that they cast long gleams of light over the turbid

sea, these two mariners, darting their long whaling-spades, kept up an

incessant murdering of the sharks,\* by striking the keen steel deep

into their skulls, seemingly their only vital part. But in the foamy

confusion of their mixed and struggling hosts, the marksmen could not

always hit their mark; and this brought about new revelations of the

incredible ferocity of the foe. They viciously snapped, not only at

each other’s disembowelments, but like flexible bows, bent round, and

bit their own; till those entrails seemed swallowed over and over again

by the same mouth, to be oppositely voided by the gaping wound. Nor was

this all. It was unsafe to meddle with the corpses and ghosts of these

creatures. A sort of generic or Pantheistic vitality seemed to lurk in

their very joints and bones, after what might be called the individual

life had departed. Killed and hoisted on deck for the sake of his skin,

one of these sharks almost took poor Queequeg’s hand off, when he tried

to shut down the dead lid of his murderous jaw.

\*The whaling-spade used for cutting-in is made of the very best steel;

is about the bigness of a man’s spread hand; and in general shape,

corresponds to the garden implement after which it is named; only its

sides are perfectly flat, and its upper end considerably narrower than

the lower. This weapon is always kept as sharp as possible; and when

being used is occasionally honed, just like a razor. In its socket, a

stiff pole, from twenty to thirty feet long, is inserted for a handle.

“Queequeg no care what god made him shark,” said the savage,

agonizingly lifting his hand up and down; “wedder Fejee god or

Nantucket god; but de god wat made shark must be one dam Ingin.”

CHAPTER 67. Cutting In.

It was a Saturday night, and such a Sabbath as followed! Ex officio

professors of Sabbath breaking are all whalemen. The ivory Pequod was

turned into what seemed a shamble; every sailor a butcher. You would

have thought we were offering up ten thousand red oxen to the sea gods.

In the first place, the enormous cutting tackles, among other ponderous

things comprising a cluster of blocks generally painted green, and

which no single man can possibly lift—this vast bunch of grapes was

swayed up to the main-top and firmly lashed to the lower mast-head, the

strongest point anywhere above a ship’s deck. The end of the

hawser-like rope winding through these intricacies, was then conducted

to the windlass, and the huge lower block of the tackles was swung over

the whale; to this block the great blubber hook, weighing some one

hundred pounds, was attached. And now suspended in stages over the

side, Starbuck and Stubb, the mates, armed with their long spades,

began cutting a hole in the body for the insertion of the hook just

above the nearest of the two side-fins. This done, a broad,

semicircular line is cut round the hole, the hook is inserted, and the

main body of the crew striking up a wild chorus, now commence heaving

in one dense crowd at the windlass. When instantly, the entire ship

careens over on her side; every bolt in her starts like the nail-heads

of an old house in frosty weather; she trembles, quivers, and nods her

frighted mast-heads to the sky. More and more she leans over to the

whale, while every gasping heave of the windlass is answered by a

helping heave from the billows; till at last, a swift, startling snap

is heard; with a great swash the ship rolls upwards and backwards from

the whale, and the triumphant tackle rises into sight dragging after it

the disengaged semicircular end of the first strip of blubber. Now as

the blubber envelopes the whale precisely as the rind does an orange,

so is it stripped off from the body precisely as an orange is sometimes

stripped by spiralizing it. For the strain constantly kept up by the

windlass continually keeps the whale rolling over and over in the

water, and as the blubber in one strip uniformly peels off along the

line called the “scarf,” simultaneously cut by the spades of Starbuck

and Stubb, the mates; and just as fast as it is thus peeled off, and

indeed by that very act itself, it is all the time being hoisted higher

and higher aloft till its upper end grazes the main-top; the men at the

windlass then cease heaving, and for a moment or two the prodigious

blood-dripping mass sways to and fro as if let down from the sky, and

every one present must take good heed to dodge it when it swings, else

it may box his ears and pitch him headlong overboard.

One of the attending harpooneers now advances with a long, keen weapon

called a boarding-sword, and watching his chance he dexterously slices

out a considerable hole in the lower part of the swaying mass. Into

this hole, the end of the second alternating great tackle is then

hooked so as to retain a hold upon the blubber, in order to prepare for

what follows. Whereupon, this accomplished swordsman, warning all hands

to stand off, once more makes a scientific dash at the mass, and with a

few sidelong, desperate, lunging slicings, severs it completely in

twain; so that while the short lower part is still fast, the long upper

strip, called a blanket-piece, swings clear, and is all ready for

lowering. The heavers forward now resume their song, and while the one

tackle is peeling and hoisting a second strip from the whale, the other

is slowly slackened away, and down goes the first strip through the

main hatchway right beneath, into an unfurnished parlor called the

blubber-room. Into this twilight apartment sundry nimble hands keep

coiling away the long blanket-piece as if it were a great live mass of

plaited serpents. And thus the work proceeds; the two tackles hoisting

and lowering simultaneously; both whale and windlass heaving, the

heavers singing, the blubber-room gentlemen coiling, the mates

scarfing, the ship straining, and all hands swearing occasionally, by

way of assuaging the general friction.

CHAPTER 68. The Blanket.

I have given no small attention to that not unvexed subject, the skin

of the whale. I have had controversies about it with experienced

whalemen afloat, and learned naturalists ashore. My original opinion

remains unchanged; but it is only an opinion.

The question is, what and where is the skin of the whale? Already you

know what his blubber is. That blubber is something of the consistence

of firm, close-grained beef, but tougher, more elastic and compact, and

ranges from eight or ten to twelve and fifteen inches in thickness.

Now, however preposterous it may at first seem to talk of any

creature’s skin as being of that sort of consistence and thickness, yet

in point of fact these are no arguments against such a presumption;

because you cannot raise any other dense enveloping layer from the

whale’s body but that same blubber; and the outermost enveloping layer

of any animal, if reasonably dense, what can that be but the skin?

True, from the unmarred dead body of the whale, you may scrape off with

your hand an infinitely thin, transparent substance, somewhat

resembling the thinnest shreds of isinglass, only it is almost as

flexible and soft as satin; that is, previous to being dried, when it

not only contracts and thickens, but becomes rather hard and brittle. I

have several such dried bits, which I use for marks in my whale-books.

It is transparent, as I said before; and being laid upon the printed

page, I have sometimes pleased myself with fancying it exerted a

magnifying influence. At any rate, it is pleasant to read about whales

through their own spectacles, as you may say. But what I am driving at

here is this. That same infinitely thin, isinglass substance, which, I

admit, invests the entire body of the whale, is not so much to be

regarded as the skin of the creature, as the skin of the skin, so to

speak; for it were simply ridiculous to say, that the proper skin of

the tremendous whale is thinner and more tender than the skin of a

new-born child. But no more of this.

Assuming the blubber to be the skin of the whale; then, when this skin,

as in the case of a very large Sperm Whale, will yield the bulk of one

hundred barrels of oil; and, when it is considered that, in quantity,

or rather weight, that oil, in its expressed state, is only three

fourths, and not the entire substance of the coat; some idea may hence

be had of the enormousness of that animated mass, a mere part of whose

mere integument yields such a lake of liquid as that. Reckoning ten

barrels to the ton, you have ten tons for the net weight of only three

quarters of the stuff of the whale’s skin.

In life, the visible surface of the Sperm Whale is not the least among

the many marvels he presents. Almost invariably it is all over

obliquely crossed and re-crossed with numberless straight marks in

thick array, something like those in the finest Italian line

engravings. But these marks do not seem to be impressed upon the

isinglass substance above mentioned, but seem to be seen through it, as

if they were engraved upon the body itself. Nor is this all. In some

instances, to the quick, observant eye, those linear marks, as in a

veritable engraving, but afford the ground for far other delineations.

These are hieroglyphical; that is, if you call those mysterious cyphers

on the walls of pyramids hieroglyphics, then that is the proper word to

use in the present connexion. By my retentive memory of the

hieroglyphics upon one Sperm Whale in particular, I was much struck

with a plate representing the old Indian characters chiselled on the

famous hieroglyphic palisades on the banks of the Upper Mississippi.

Like those mystic rocks, too, the mystic-marked whale remains

undecipherable. This allusion to the Indian rocks reminds me of another

thing. Besides all the other phenomena which the exterior of the Sperm

Whale presents, he not seldom displays the back, and more especially

his flanks, effaced in great part of the regular linear appearance, by

reason of numerous rude scratches, altogether of an irregular, random

aspect. I should say that those New England rocks on the sea-coast,

which Agassiz imagines to bear the marks of violent scraping contact

with vast floating icebergs—I should say, that those rocks must not a

little resemble the Sperm Whale in this particular. It also seems to me

that such scratches in the whale are probably made by hostile contact

with other whales; for I have most remarked them in the large,

full-grown bulls of the species.

A word or two more concerning this matter of the skin or blubber of the

whale. It has already been said, that it is stript from him in long

pieces, called blanket-pieces. Like most sea-terms, this one is very

happy and significant. For the whale is indeed wrapt up in his blubber

as in a real blanket or counterpane; or, still better, an Indian poncho

slipt over his head, and skirting his extremity. It is by reason of

this cosy blanketing of his body, that the whale is enabled to keep

himself comfortable in all weathers, in all seas, times, and tides.

What would become of a Greenland whale, say, in those shuddering, icy

seas of the North, if unsupplied with his cosy surtout? True, other

fish are found exceedingly brisk in those Hyperborean waters; but

these, be it observed, are your cold-blooded, lungless fish, whose very

bellies are refrigerators; creatures, that warm themselves under the

lee of an iceberg, as a traveller in winter would bask before an inn

fire; whereas, like man, the whale has lungs and warm blood. Freeze his

blood, and he dies. How wonderful is it then—except after

explanation—that this great monster, to whom corporeal warmth is as

indispensable as it is to man; how wonderful that he should be found at

home, immersed to his lips for life in those Arctic waters! where, when

seamen fall overboard, they are sometimes found, months afterwards,

perpendicularly frozen into the hearts of fields of ice, as a fly is

found glued in amber. But more surprising is it to know, as has been

proved by experiment, that the blood of a Polar whale is warmer than

that of a Borneo negro in summer.

It does seem to me, that herein we see the rare virtue of a strong

individual vitality, and the rare virtue of thick walls, and the rare

virtue of interior spaciousness. Oh, man! admire and model thyself

after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice. Do thou, too,

live in this world without being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep

thy blood fluid at the Pole. Like the great dome of St. Peter’s, and

like the great whale, retain, O man! in all seasons a temperature of

thine own.

But how easy and how hopeless to teach these fine things! Of erections,

how few are domed like St. Peter’s! of creatures, how few vast as the

whale!

CHAPTER 69. The Funeral.

“Haul in the chains! Let the carcase go astern!”

The vast tackles have now done their duty. The peeled white body of the

beheaded whale flashes like a marble sepulchre; though changed in hue,

it has not perceptibly lost anything in bulk. It is still colossal.

Slowly it floats more and more away, the water round it torn and

splashed by the insatiate sharks, and the air above vexed with

rapacious flights of screaming fowls, whose beaks are like so many

insulting poniards in the whale. The vast white headless phantom floats

further and further from the ship, and every rod that it so floats,

what seem square roods of sharks and cubic roods of fowls, augment the

murderous din. For hours and hours from the almost stationary ship that

hideous sight is seen. Beneath the unclouded and mild azure sky, upon

the fair face of the pleasant sea, wafted by the joyous breezes, that

great mass of death floats on and on, till lost in infinite

perspectives.

There’s a most doleful and most mocking funeral! The sea-vultures all

in pious mourning, the air-sharks all punctiliously in black or

speckled. In life but few of them would have helped the whale, I ween,

if peradventure he had needed it; but upon the banquet of his funeral

they most piously do pounce. Oh, horrible vultureism of earth! from

which not the mightiest whale is free.

Nor is this the end. Desecrated as the body is, a vengeful ghost

survives and hovers over it to scare. Espied by some timid man-of-war

or blundering discovery-vessel from afar, when the distance obscuring

the swarming fowls, nevertheless still shows the white mass floating in

the sun, and the white spray heaving high against it; straightway the

whale’s unharming corpse, with trembling fingers is set down in the

log—\_shoals, rocks, and breakers hereabouts: beware!\_ And for years

afterwards, perhaps, ships shun the place; leaping over it as silly

sheep leap over a vacuum, because their leader originally leaped there

when a stick was held. There’s your law of precedents; there’s your

utility of traditions; there’s the story of your obstinate survival of

old beliefs never bottomed on the earth, and now not even hovering in

the air! There’s orthodoxy!

Thus, while in life the great whale’s body may have been a real terror

to his foes, in his death his ghost becomes a powerless panic to a

world.

Are you a believer in ghosts, my friend? There are other ghosts than

the Cock-Lane one, and far deeper men than Doctor Johnson who believe

in them.

CHAPTER 70. The Sphynx.

It should not have been omitted that previous to completely stripping

the body of the leviathan, he was beheaded. Now, the beheading of the

Sperm Whale is a scientific anatomical feat, upon which experienced

whale surgeons very much pride themselves: and not without reason.

Consider that the whale has nothing that can properly be called a neck;

on the contrary, where his head and body seem to join, there, in that

very place, is the thickest part of him. Remember, also, that the

surgeon must operate from above, some eight or ten feet intervening

between him and his subject, and that subject almost hidden in a

discoloured, rolling, and oftentimes tumultuous and bursting sea. Bear

in mind, too, that under these untoward circumstances he has to cut

many feet deep in the flesh; and in that subterraneous manner, without

so much as getting one single peep into the ever-contracting gash thus

made, he must skilfully steer clear of all adjacent, interdicted parts,

and exactly divide the spine at a critical point hard by its insertion

into the skull. Do you not marvel, then, at Stubb’s boast, that he

demanded but ten minutes to behead a sperm whale?

When first severed, the head is dropped astern and held there by a

cable till the body is stripped. That done, if it belong to a small

whale it is hoisted on deck to be deliberately disposed of. But, with a

full grown leviathan this is impossible; for the sperm whale’s head

embraces nearly one third of his entire bulk, and completely to suspend

such a burden as that, even by the immense tackles of a whaler, this

were as vain a thing as to attempt weighing a Dutch barn in jewellers’

scales.

The Pequod’s whale being decapitated and the body stripped, the head

was hoisted against the ship’s side—about half way out of the sea, so

that it might yet in great part be buoyed up by its native element. And

there with the strained craft steeply leaning over to it, by reason of

the enormous downward drag from the lower mast-head, and every yard-arm

on that side projecting like a crane over the waves; there, that

blood-dripping head hung to the Pequod’s waist like the giant

Holofernes’s from the girdle of Judith.

When this last task was accomplished it was noon, and the seamen went

below to their dinner. Silence reigned over the before tumultuous but

now deserted deck. An intense copper calm, like a universal yellow

lotus, was more and more unfolding its noiseless measureless leaves

upon the sea.

A short space elapsed, and up into this noiselessness came Ahab alone

from his cabin. Taking a few turns on the quarter-deck, he paused to

gaze over the side, then slowly getting into the main-chains he took

Stubb’s long spade—still remaining there after the whale’s

decapitation—and striking it into the lower part of the half-suspended

mass, placed its other end crutch-wise under one arm, and so stood

leaning over with eyes attentively fixed on this head.

It was a black and hooded head; and hanging there in the midst of so

intense a calm, it seemed the Sphynx’s in the desert. “Speak, thou vast

and venerable head,” muttered Ahab, “which, though ungarnished with a

beard, yet here and there lookest hoary with mosses; speak, mighty

head, and tell us the secret thing that is in thee. Of all divers, thou

hast dived the deepest. That head upon which the upper sun now gleams,

has moved amid this world’s foundations. Where unrecorded names and

navies rust, and untold hopes and anchors rot; where in her murderous

hold this frigate earth is ballasted with bones of millions of the

drowned; there, in that awful water-land, there was thy most familiar

home. Thou hast been where bell or diver never went; hast slept by many

a sailor’s side, where sleepless mothers would give their lives to lay

them down. Thou saw’st the locked lovers when leaping from their

flaming ship; heart to heart they sank beneath the exulting wave; true

to each other, when heaven seemed false to them. Thou saw’st the

murdered mate when tossed by pirates from the midnight deck; for hours

he fell into the deeper midnight of the insatiate maw; and his

murderers still sailed on unharmed—while swift lightnings shivered the

neighboring ship that would have borne a righteous husband to

outstretched, longing arms. O head! thou hast seen enough to split the

planets and make an infidel of Abraham, and not one syllable is thine!”

“Sail ho!” cried a triumphant voice from the main-mast-head.

“Aye? Well, now, that’s cheering,” cried Ahab, suddenly erecting

himself, while whole thunder-clouds swept aside from his brow. “That

lively cry upon this deadly calm might almost convert a better

man.—Where away?”

“Three points on the starboard bow, sir, and bringing down her breeze

to us!

“Better and better, man. Would now St. Paul would come along that way,

and to my breezelessness bring his breeze! O Nature, and O soul of man!

how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! not the

smallest atom stirs or lives on matter, but has its cunning duplicate

in mind.”

CHAPTER 71. The Jeroboam’s Story.

Hand in hand, ship and breeze blew on; but the breeze came faster than

the ship, and soon the Pequod began to rock.

By and by, through the glass the stranger’s boats and manned mast-heads

proved her a whale-ship. But as she was so far to windward, and

shooting by, apparently making a passage to some other ground, the

Pequod could not hope to reach her. So the signal was set to see what

response would be made.

Here be it said, that like the vessels of military marines, the ships

of the American Whale Fleet have each a private signal; all which

signals being collected in a book with the names of the respective

vessels attached, every captain is provided with it. Thereby, the whale

commanders are enabled to recognise each other upon the ocean, even at

considerable distances and with no small facility.

The Pequod’s signal was at last responded to by the stranger’s setting

her own; which proved the ship to be the Jeroboam of Nantucket.

Squaring her yards, she bore down, ranged abeam under the Pequod’s lee,

and lowered a boat; it soon drew nigh; but, as the side-ladder was

being rigged by Starbuck’s order to accommodate the visiting captain,

the stranger in question waved his hand from his boat’s stern in token

of that proceeding being entirely unnecessary. It turned out that the

Jeroboam had a malignant epidemic on board, and that Mayhew, her

captain, was fearful of infecting the Pequod’s company. For, though

himself and boat’s crew remained untainted, and though his ship was

half a rifle-shot off, and an incorruptible sea and air rolling and

flowing between; yet conscientiously adhering to the timid quarantine

of the land, he peremptorily refused to come into direct contact with

the Pequod.

But this did by no means prevent all communications. Preserving an

interval of some few yards between itself and the ship, the Jeroboam’s

boat by the occasional use of its oars contrived to keep parallel to

the Pequod, as she heavily forged through the sea (for by this time it

blew very fresh), with her main-topsail aback; though, indeed, at times

by the sudden onset of a large rolling wave, the boat would be pushed

some way ahead; but would be soon skilfully brought to her proper

bearings again. Subject to this, and other the like interruptions now

and then, a conversation was sustained between the two parties; but at

intervals not without still another interruption of a very different

sort.

Pulling an oar in the Jeroboam’s boat, was a man of a singular

appearance, even in that wild whaling life where individual

notabilities make up all totalities. He was a small, short, youngish

man, sprinkled all over his face with freckles, and wearing redundant

yellow hair. A long-skirted, cabalistically-cut coat of a faded walnut

tinge enveloped him; the overlapping sleeves of which were rolled up on

his wrists. A deep, settled, fanatic delirium was in his eyes.

So soon as this figure had been first descried, Stubb had

exclaimed—“That’s he! that’s he!—the long-togged scaramouch the

Town-Ho’s company told us of!” Stubb here alluded to a strange story

told of the Jeroboam, and a certain man among her crew, some time

previous when the Pequod spoke the Town-Ho. According to this account

and what was subsequently learned, it seemed that the scaramouch in

question had gained a wonderful ascendency over almost everybody in the

Jeroboam. His story was this:

He had been originally nurtured among the crazy society of Neskyeuna

Shakers, where he had been a great prophet; in their cracked, secret

meetings having several times descended from heaven by the way of a

trap-door, announcing the speedy opening of the seventh vial, which he

carried in his vest-pocket; but, which, instead of containing

gunpowder, was supposed to be charged with laudanum. A strange,

apostolic whim having seized him, he had left Neskyeuna for Nantucket,

where, with that cunning peculiar to craziness, he assumed a steady,

common-sense exterior, and offered himself as a green-hand candidate

for the Jeroboam’s whaling voyage. They engaged him; but straightway

upon the ship’s getting out of sight of land, his insanity broke out in

a freshet. He announced himself as the archangel Gabriel, and commanded

the captain to jump overboard. He published his manifesto, whereby he

set himself forth as the deliverer of the isles of the sea and

vicar-general of all Oceanica. The unflinching earnestness with which

he declared these things;—the dark, daring play of his sleepless,

excited imagination, and all the preternatural terrors of real

delirium, united to invest this Gabriel in the minds of the majority of

the ignorant crew, with an atmosphere of sacredness. Moreover, they

were afraid of him. As such a man, however, was not of much practical

use in the ship, especially as he refused to work except when he

pleased, the incredulous captain would fain have been rid of him; but

apprised that that individual’s intention was to land him in the first

convenient port, the archangel forthwith opened all his seals and

vials—devoting the ship and all hands to unconditional perdition, in

case this intention was carried out. So strongly did he work upon his

disciples among the crew, that at last in a body they went to the

captain and told him if Gabriel was sent from the ship, not a man of

them would remain. He was therefore forced to relinquish his plan. Nor

would they permit Gabriel to be any way maltreated, say or do what he

would; so that it came to pass that Gabriel had the complete freedom of

the ship. The consequence of all this was, that the archangel cared

little or nothing for the captain and mates; and since the epidemic had

broken out, he carried a higher hand than ever; declaring that the

plague, as he called it, was at his sole command; nor should it be

stayed but according to his good pleasure. The sailors, mostly poor

devils, cringed, and some of them fawned before him; in obedience to

his instructions, sometimes rendering him personal homage, as to a god.

Such things may seem incredible; but, however wondrous, they are true.

Nor is the history of fanatics half so striking in respect to the

measureless self-deception of the fanatic himself, as his measureless

power of deceiving and bedevilling so many others. But it is time to

return to the Pequod.

“I fear not thy epidemic, man,” said Ahab from the bulwarks, to Captain

Mayhew, who stood in the boat’s stern; “come on board.”

But now Gabriel started to his feet.

“Think, think of the fevers, yellow and bilious! Beware of the horrible

plague!”

“Gabriel! Gabriel!” cried Captain Mayhew; “thou must either—” But that

instant a headlong wave shot the boat far ahead, and its seethings

drowned all speech.

“Hast thou seen the White Whale?” demanded Ahab, when the boat drifted

back.

“Think, think of thy whale-boat, stoven and sunk! Beware of the

horrible tail!”

“I tell thee again, Gabriel, that—” But again the boat tore ahead as if

dragged by fiends. Nothing was said for some moments, while a

succession of riotous waves rolled by, which by one of those occasional

caprices of the seas were tumbling, not heaving it. Meantime, the

hoisted sperm whale’s head jogged about very violently, and Gabriel was

seen eyeing it with rather more apprehensiveness than his archangel

nature seemed to warrant.

When this interlude was over, Captain Mayhew began a dark story

concerning Moby Dick; not, however, without frequent interruptions from

Gabriel, whenever his name was mentioned, and the crazy sea that seemed

leagued with him.

It seemed that the Jeroboam had not long left home, when upon speaking

a whale-ship, her people were reliably apprised of the existence of

Moby Dick, and the havoc he had made. Greedily sucking in this

intelligence, Gabriel solemnly warned the captain against attacking the

White Whale, in case the monster should be seen; in his gibbering

insanity, pronouncing the White Whale to be no less a being than the

Shaker God incarnated; the Shakers receiving the Bible. But when, some

year or two afterwards, Moby Dick was fairly sighted from the

mast-heads, Macey, the chief mate, burned with ardour to encounter him;

and the captain himself being not unwilling to let him have the

opportunity, despite all the archangel’s denunciations and

forewarnings, Macey succeeded in persuading five men to man his boat.

With them he pushed off; and, after much weary pulling, and many

perilous, unsuccessful onsets, he at last succeeded in getting one iron

fast. Meantime, Gabriel, ascending to the main-royal mast-head, was

tossing one arm in frantic gestures, and hurling forth prophecies of

speedy doom to the sacrilegious assailants of his divinity. Now, while

Macey, the mate, was standing up in his boat’s bow, and with all the

reckless energy of his tribe was venting his wild exclamations upon the

whale, and essaying to get a fair chance for his poised lance, lo! a

broad white shadow rose from the sea; by its quick, fanning motion,

temporarily taking the breath out of the bodies of the oarsmen. Next

instant, the luckless mate, so full of furious life, was smitten bodily

into the air, and making a long arc in his descent, fell into the sea

at the distance of about fifty yards. Not a chip of the boat was

harmed, nor a hair of any oarsman’s head; but the mate for ever sank.

It is well to parenthesize here, that of the fatal accidents in the

Sperm-Whale Fishery, this kind is perhaps almost as frequent as any.

Sometimes, nothing is injured but the man who is thus annihilated;

oftener the boat’s bow is knocked off, or the thigh-board, in which the

headsman stands, is torn from its place and accompanies the body. But

strangest of all is the circumstance, that in more instances than one,

when the body has been recovered, not a single mark of violence is

discernible; the man being stark dead.

The whole calamity, with the falling form of Macey, was plainly

descried from the ship. Raising a piercing shriek—“The vial! the vial!”

Gabriel called off the terror-stricken crew from the further hunting of

the whale. This terrible event clothed the archangel with added

influence; because his credulous disciples believed that he had

specifically fore-announced it, instead of only making a general

prophecy, which any one might have done, and so have chanced to hit one

of many marks in the wide margin allowed. He became a nameless terror

to the ship.

Mayhew having concluded his narration, Ahab put such questions to him,

that the stranger captain could not forbear inquiring whether he

intended to hunt the White Whale, if opportunity should offer. To which

Ahab answered—“Aye.” Straightway, then, Gabriel once more started to

his feet, glaring upon the old man, and vehemently exclaimed, with

downward pointed finger—“Think, think of the blasphemer—dead, and down

there!—beware of the blasphemer’s end!”

Ahab stolidly turned aside; then said to Mayhew, “Captain, I have just

bethought me of my letter-bag; there is a letter for one of thy

officers, if I mistake not. Starbuck, look over the bag.”

Every whale-ship takes out a goodly number of letters for various

ships, whose delivery to the persons to whom they may be addressed,

depends upon the mere chance of encountering them in the four oceans.

Thus, most letters never reach their mark; and many are only received

after attaining an age of two or three years or more.

Soon Starbuck returned with a letter in his hand. It was sorely

tumbled, damp, and covered with a dull, spotted, green mould, in

consequence of being kept in a dark locker of the cabin. Of such a

letter, Death himself might well have been the post-boy.

“Can’st not read it?” cried Ahab. “Give it me, man. Aye, aye, it’s but

a dim scrawl;—what’s this?” As he was studying it out, Starbuck took a

long cutting-spade pole, and with his knife slightly split the end, to

insert the letter there, and in that way, hand it to the boat, without

its coming any closer to the ship.

Meantime, Ahab holding the letter, muttered, “Mr. Har—yes, Mr. Harry—(a

woman’s pinny hand,—the man’s wife, I’ll wager)—Aye—Mr. Harry Macey,

Ship Jeroboam;—why it’s Macey, and he’s dead!”

“Poor fellow! poor fellow! and from his wife,” sighed Mayhew; “but let

me have it.”

“Nay, keep it thyself,” cried Gabriel to Ahab; “thou art soon going

that way.”

“Curses throttle thee!” yelled Ahab. “Captain Mayhew, stand by now to

receive it”; and taking the fatal missive from Starbuck’s hands, he

caught it in the slit of the pole, and reached it over towards the

boat. But as he did so, the oarsmen expectantly desisted from rowing;

the boat drifted a little towards the ship’s stern; so that, as if by

magic, the letter suddenly ranged along with Gabriel’s eager hand. He

clutched it in an instant, seized the boat-knife, and impaling the

letter on it, sent it thus loaded back into the ship. It fell at Ahab’s

feet. Then Gabriel shrieked out to his comrades to give way with their

oars, and in that manner the mutinous boat rapidly shot away from the

Pequod.

As, after this interlude, the seamen resumed their work upon the jacket

of the whale, many strange things were hinted in reference to this wild

affair.

CHAPTER 72. The Monkey-Rope.

In the tumultuous business of cutting-in and attending to a whale,

there is much running backwards and forwards among the crew. Now hands

are wanted here, and then again hands are wanted there. There is no

staying in any one place; for at one and the same time everything has

to be done everywhere. It is much the same with him who endeavors the

description of the scene. We must now retrace our way a little. It was

mentioned that upon first breaking ground in the whale’s back, the

blubber-hook was inserted into the original hole there cut by the

spades of the mates. But how did so clumsy and weighty a mass as that

same hook get fixed in that hole? It was inserted there by my

particular friend Queequeg, whose duty it was, as harpooneer, to

descend upon the monster’s back for the special purpose referred to.

But in very many cases, circumstances require that the harpooneer shall

remain on the whale till the whole flensing or stripping operation is

concluded. The whale, be it observed, lies almost entirely submerged,

excepting the immediate parts operated upon. So down there, some ten

feet below the level of the deck, the poor harpooneer flounders about,

half on the whale and half in the water, as the vast mass revolves like

a tread-mill beneath him. On the occasion in question, Queequeg figured

in the Highland costume—a shirt and socks—in which to my eyes, at

least, he appeared to uncommon advantage; and no one had a better

chance to observe him, as will presently be seen.

Being the savage’s bowsman, that is, the person who pulled the bow-oar

in his boat (the second one from forward), it was my cheerful duty to

attend upon him while taking that hard-scrabble scramble upon the dead

whale’s back. You have seen Italian organ-boys holding a dancing-ape by

a long cord. Just so, from the ship’s steep side, did I hold Queequeg

down there in the sea, by what is technically called in the fishery a

monkey-rope, attached to a strong strip of canvas belted round his

waist.

It was a humorously perilous business for both of us. For, before we

proceed further, it must be said that the monkey-rope was fast at both

ends; fast to Queequeg’s broad canvas belt, and fast to my narrow

leather one. So that for better or for worse, we two, for the time,

were wedded; and should poor Queequeg sink to rise no more, then both

usage and honor demanded, that instead of cutting the cord, it should

drag me down in his wake. So, then, an elongated Siamese ligature

united us. Queequeg was my own inseparable twin brother; nor could I

any way get rid of the dangerous liabilities which the hempen bond

entailed.

So strongly and metaphysically did I conceive of my situation then,

that while earnestly watching his motions, I seemed distinctly to

perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock

company of two; that my free will had received a mortal wound; and that

another’s mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited

disaster and death. Therefore, I saw that here was a sort of

interregnum in Providence; for its even-handed equity never could have

so gross an injustice. And yet still further pondering—while I jerked

him now and then from between the whale and ship, which would threaten

to jam him—still further pondering, I say, I saw that this situation of

mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes; only, in

most cases, he, one way or other, has this Siamese connexion with a

plurality of other mortals. If your banker breaks, you snap; if your

apothecary by mistake sends you poison in your pills, you die. True,

you may say that, by exceeding caution, you may possibly escape these

and the multitudinous other evil chances of life. But handle Queequeg’s

monkey-rope heedfully as I would, sometimes he jerked it so, that I

came very near sliding overboard. Nor could I possibly forget that, do

what I would, I only had the management of one end of it.\*

\*The monkey-rope is found in all whalers; but it was only in the Pequod

that the monkey and his holder were ever tied together. This

improvement upon the original usage was introduced by no less a man

than Stubb, in order to afford the imperilled harpooneer the strongest

possible guarantee for the faithfulness and vigilance of his

monkey-rope holder.

I have hinted that I would often jerk poor Queequeg from between the

whale and the ship—where he would occasionally fall, from the incessant

rolling and swaying of both. But this was not the only jamming jeopardy

he was exposed to. Unappalled by the massacre made upon them during the

night, the sharks now freshly and more keenly allured by the before

pent blood which began to flow from the carcass—the rabid creatures

swarmed round it like bees in a beehive.

And right in among those sharks was Queequeg; who often pushed them

aside with his floundering feet. A thing altogether incredible were it

not that attracted by such prey as a dead whale, the otherwise

miscellaneously carnivorous shark will seldom touch a man.

Nevertheless, it may well be believed that since they have such a

ravenous finger in the pie, it is deemed but wise to look sharp to

them. Accordingly, besides the monkey-rope, with which I now and then

jerked the poor fellow from too close a vicinity to the maw of what

seemed a peculiarly ferocious shark—he was provided with still another

protection. Suspended over the side in one of the stages, Tashtego and

Daggoo continually flourished over his head a couple of keen

whale-spades, wherewith they slaughtered as many sharks as they could

reach. This procedure of theirs, to be sure, was very disinterested and

benevolent of them. They meant Queequeg’s best happiness, I admit; but

in their hasty zeal to befriend him, and from the circumstance that

both he and the sharks were at times half hidden by the blood-muddled

water, those indiscreet spades of theirs would come nearer amputating a

leg than a tail. But poor Queequeg, I suppose, straining and gasping

there with that great iron hook—poor Queequeg, I suppose, only prayed

to his Yojo, and gave up his life into the hands of his gods.

Well, well, my dear comrade and twin-brother, thought I, as I drew in

and then slacked off the rope to every swell of the sea—what matters

it, after all? Are you not the precious image of each and all of us men

in this whaling world? That unsounded ocean you gasp in, is Life; those

sharks, your foes; those spades, your friends; and what between sharks

and spades you are in a sad pickle and peril, poor lad.

But courage! there is good cheer in store for you, Queequeg. For now,

as with blue lips and blood-shot eyes the exhausted savage at last

climbs up the chains and stands all dripping and involuntarily

trembling over the side; the steward advances, and with a benevolent,

consolatory glance hands him—what? Some hot Cognac? No! hands him, ye

gods! hands him a cup of tepid ginger and water!

“Ginger? Do I smell ginger?” suspiciously asked Stubb, coming near.

“Yes, this must be ginger,” peering into the as yet untasted cup. Then

standing as if incredulous for a while, he calmly walked towards the

astonished steward slowly saying, “Ginger? ginger? and will you have

the goodness to tell me, Mr. Dough-Boy, where lies the virtue of

ginger? Ginger! is ginger the sort of fuel you use, Dough-boy, to

kindle a fire in this shivering cannibal? Ginger!—what the devil is

ginger? Sea-coal? firewood?—lucifer matches?—tinder?—gunpowder?—what

the devil is ginger, I say, that you offer this cup to our poor

Queequeg here.”

“There is some sneaking Temperance Society movement about this

business,” he suddenly added, now approaching Starbuck, who had just

come from forward. “Will you look at that kannakin, sir: smell of it,

if you please.” Then watching the mate’s countenance, he added, “The

steward, Mr. Starbuck, had the face to offer that calomel and jalap to

Queequeg, there, this instant off the whale. Is the steward an

apothecary, sir? and may I ask whether this is the sort of bitters by

which he blows back the life into a half-drowned man?”

“I trust not,” said Starbuck, “it is poor stuff enough.”

“Aye, aye, steward,” cried Stubb, “we’ll teach you to drug a

harpooneer; none of your apothecary’s medicine here; you want to poison

us, do ye? You have got out insurances on our lives and want to murder

us all, and pocket the proceeds, do ye?”

“It was not me,” cried Dough-Boy, “it was Aunt Charity that brought the

ginger on board; and bade me never give the harpooneers any spirits,

but only this ginger-jub—so she called it.”

“Ginger-jub! you gingerly rascal! take that! and run along with ye to

the lockers, and get something better. I hope I do no wrong, Mr.

Starbuck. It is the captain’s orders—grog for the harpooneer on a

whale.”

“Enough,” replied Starbuck, “only don’t hit him again, but—”

“Oh, I never hurt when I hit, except when I hit a whale or something of

that sort; and this fellow’s a weazel. What were you about saying,

sir?”

“Only this: go down with him, and get what thou wantest thyself.”

When Stubb reappeared, he came with a dark flask in one hand, and a

sort of tea-caddy in the other. The first contained strong spirits, and

was handed to Queequeg; the second was Aunt Charity’s gift, and that

was freely given to the waves.

CHAPTER 73. Stubb and Flask kill a Right Whale; and Then Have a Talk

over Him.

It must be borne in mind that all this time we have a Sperm Whale’s

prodigious head hanging to the Pequod’s side. But we must let it

continue hanging there a while till we can get a chance to attend to

it. For the present other matters press, and the best we can do now for

the head, is to pray heaven the tackles may hold.

Now, during the past night and forenoon, the Pequod had gradually

drifted into a sea, which, by its occasional patches of yellow brit,

gave unusual tokens of the vicinity of Right Whales, a species of the

Leviathan that but few supposed to be at this particular time lurking

anywhere near. And though all hands commonly disdained the capture of

those inferior creatures; and though the Pequod was not commissioned to

cruise for them at all, and though she had passed numbers of them near

the Crozetts without lowering a boat; yet now that a Sperm Whale had

been brought alongside and beheaded, to the surprise of all, the

announcement was made that a Right Whale should be captured that day,

if opportunity offered.

Nor was this long wanting. Tall spouts were seen to leeward; and two

boats, Stubb’s and Flask’s, were detached in pursuit. Pulling further

and further away, they at last became almost invisible to the men at

the mast-head. But suddenly in the distance, they saw a great heap of

tumultuous white water, and soon after news came from aloft that one or

both the boats must be fast. An interval passed and the boats were in

plain sight, in the act of being dragged right towards the ship by the

towing whale. So close did the monster come to the hull, that at first

it seemed as if he meant it malice; but suddenly going down in a

maelstrom, within three rods of the planks, he wholly disappeared from

view, as if diving under the keel. “Cut, cut!” was the cry from the

ship to the boats, which, for one instant, seemed on the point of being

brought with a deadly dash against the vessel’s side. But having plenty

of line yet in the tubs, and the whale not sounding very rapidly, they

paid out abundance of rope, and at the same time pulled with all their

might so as to get ahead of the ship. For a few minutes the struggle

was intensely critical; for while they still slacked out the tightened

line in one direction, and still plied their oars in another, the

contending strain threatened to take them under. But it was only a few

feet advance they sought to gain. And they stuck to it till they did

gain it; when instantly, a swift tremor was felt running like lightning

along the keel, as the strained line, scraping beneath the ship,

suddenly rose to view under her bows, snapping and quivering; and so

flinging off its drippings, that the drops fell like bits of broken

glass on the water, while the whale beyond also rose to sight, and once

more the boats were free to fly. But the fagged whale abated his speed,

and blindly altering his course, went round the stern of the ship

towing the two boats after him, so that they performed a complete

circuit.

Meantime, they hauled more and more upon their lines, till close

flanking him on both sides, Stubb answered Flask with lance for lance;

and thus round and round the Pequod the battle went, while the

multitudes of sharks that had before swum round the Sperm Whale’s body,

rushed to the fresh blood that was spilled, thirstily drinking at every

new gash, as the eager Israelites did at the new bursting fountains

that poured from the smitten rock.

At last his spout grew thick, and with a frightful roll and vomit, he

turned upon his back a corpse.

While the two headsmen were engaged in making fast cords to his flukes,

and in other ways getting the mass in readiness for towing, some

conversation ensued between them.

“I wonder what the old man wants with this lump of foul lard,” said

Stubb, not without some disgust at the thought of having to do with so

ignoble a leviathan.

“Wants with it?” said Flask, coiling some spare line in the boat’s bow,

“did you never hear that the ship which but once has a Sperm Whale’s

head hoisted on her starboard side, and at the same time a Right

Whale’s on the larboard; did you never hear, Stubb, that that ship can

never afterwards capsize?”

“Why not?

“I don’t know, but I heard that gamboge ghost of a Fedallah saying so,

and he seems to know all about ships’ charms. But I sometimes think

he’ll charm the ship to no good at last. I don’t half like that chap,

Stubb. Did you ever notice how that tusk of his is a sort of carved

into a snake’s head, Stubb?”

“Sink him! I never look at him at all; but if ever I get a chance of a

dark night, and he standing hard by the bulwarks, and no one by; look

down there, Flask”—pointing into the sea with a peculiar motion of both

hands—“Aye, will I! Flask, I take that Fedallah to be the devil in

disguise. Do you believe that cock and bull story about his having been

stowed away on board ship? He’s the devil, I say. The reason why you

don’t see his tail, is because he tucks it up out of sight; he carries

it coiled away in his pocket, I guess. Blast him! now that I think of

it, he’s always wanting oakum to stuff into the toes of his boots.”

“He sleeps in his boots, don’t he? He hasn’t got any hammock; but I’ve

seen him lay of nights in a coil of rigging.”

“No doubt, and it’s because of his cursed tail; he coils it down, do ye

see, in the eye of the rigging.”

“What’s the old man have so much to do with him for?”

“Striking up a swap or a bargain, I suppose.”

“Bargain?—about what?”

“Why, do ye see, the old man is hard bent after that White Whale, and

the devil there is trying to come round him, and get him to swap away

his silver watch, or his soul, or something of that sort, and then

he’ll surrender Moby Dick.”

“Pooh! Stubb, you are skylarking; how can Fedallah do that?”

“I don’t know, Flask, but the devil is a curious chap, and a wicked

one, I tell ye. Why, they say as how he went a sauntering into the old

flag-ship once, switching his tail about devilish easy and

gentlemanlike, and inquiring if the old governor was at home. Well, he

was at home, and asked the devil what he wanted. The devil, switching

his hoofs, up and says, ‘I want John.’ ‘What for?’ says the old

governor. ‘What business is that of yours,’ says the devil, getting

mad,—‘I want to use him.’ ‘Take him,’ says the governor—and by the

Lord, Flask, if the devil didn’t give John the Asiatic cholera before

he got through with him, I’ll eat this whale in one mouthful. But look

sharp—ain’t you all ready there? Well, then, pull ahead, and let’s get

the whale alongside.”

“I think I remember some such story as you were telling,” said Flask,

when at last the two boats were slowly advancing with their burden

towards the ship, “but I can’t remember where.”

“Three Spaniards? Adventures of those three bloody-minded soldadoes?

Did ye read it there, Flask? I guess ye did?”

“No: never saw such a book; heard of it, though. But now, tell me,

Stubb, do you suppose that that devil you was speaking of just now, was

the same you say is now on board the Pequod?”

“Am I the same man that helped kill this whale? Doesn’t the devil live

for ever; who ever heard that the devil was dead? Did you ever see any

parson a wearing mourning for the devil? And if the devil has a

latch-key to get into the admiral’s cabin, don’t you suppose he can

crawl into a porthole? Tell me that, Mr. Flask?”

“How old do you suppose Fedallah is, Stubb?”

“Do you see that mainmast there?” pointing to the ship; “well, that’s

the figure one; now take all the hoops in the Pequod’s hold, and string

along in a row with that mast, for oughts, do you see; well, that

wouldn’t begin to be Fedallah’s age. Nor all the coopers in creation

couldn’t show hoops enough to make oughts enough.”

“But see here, Stubb, I thought you a little boasted just now, that you

meant to give Fedallah a sea-toss, if you got a good chance. Now, if

he’s so old as all those hoops of yours come to, and if he is going to

live for ever, what good will it do to pitch him overboard—tell me

that?

“Give him a good ducking, anyhow.”

“But he’d crawl back.”

“Duck him again; and keep ducking him.”

“Suppose he should take it into his head to duck you, though—yes, and

drown you—what then?”

“I should like to see him try it; I’d give him such a pair of black

eyes that he wouldn’t dare to show his face in the admiral’s cabin

again for a long while, let alone down in the orlop there, where he

lives, and hereabouts on the upper decks where he sneaks so much. Damn

the devil, Flask; so you suppose I’m afraid of the devil? Who’s afraid

of him, except the old governor who daresn’t catch him and put him in

double-darbies, as he deserves, but lets him go about kidnapping

people; aye, and signed a bond with him, that all the people the devil

kidnapped, he’d roast for him? There’s a governor!”

“Do you suppose Fedallah wants to kidnap Captain Ahab?”

“Do I suppose it? You’ll know it before long, Flask. But I am going now

to keep a sharp look-out on him; and if I see anything very suspicious

going on, I’ll just take him by the nape of his neck, and say—Look

here, Beelzebub, you don’t do it; and if he makes any fuss, by the Lord

I’ll make a grab into his pocket for his tail, take it to the capstan,

and give him such a wrenching and heaving, that his tail will come

short off at the stump—do you see; and then, I rather guess when he

finds himself docked in that queer fashion, he’ll sneak off without the

poor satisfaction of feeling his tail between his legs.”

“And what will you do with the tail, Stubb?”

“Do with it? Sell it for an ox whip when we get home;—what else?”

“Now, do you mean what you say, and have been saying all along, Stubb?”

“Mean or not mean, here we are at the ship.”

The boats were here hailed, to tow the whale on the larboard side,

where fluke chains and other necessaries were already prepared for

securing him.

“Didn’t I tell you so?” said Flask; “yes, you’ll soon see this right

whale’s head hoisted up opposite that parmacetti’s.”

In good time, Flask’s saying proved true. As before, the Pequod steeply

leaned over towards the sperm whale’s head, now, by the counterpoise of

both heads, she regained her even keel; though sorely strained, you may

well believe. So, when on one side you hoist in Locke’s head, you go

over that way; but now, on the other side, hoist in Kant’s and you come

back again; but in very poor plight. Thus, some minds for ever keep

trimming boat. Oh, ye foolish! throw all these thunder-heads overboard,

and then you will float light and right.

In disposing of the body of a right whale, when brought alongside the

ship, the same preliminary proceedings commonly take place as in the

case of a sperm whale; only, in the latter instance, the head is cut

off whole, but in the former the lips and tongue are separately removed

and hoisted on deck, with all the well known black bone attached to

what is called the crown-piece. But nothing like this, in the present

case, had been done. The carcases of both whales had dropped astern;

and the head-laden ship not a little resembled a mule carrying a pair

of overburdening panniers.

Meantime, Fedallah was calmly eyeing the right whale’s head, and ever

and anon glancing from the deep wrinkles there to the lines in his own

hand. And Ahab chanced so to stand, that the Parsee occupied his

shadow; while, if the Parsee’s shadow was there at all it seemed only

to blend with, and lengthen Ahab’s. As the crew toiled on, Laplandish

speculations were bandied among them, concerning all these passing

things.

CHAPTER 74. The Sperm Whale’s Head—Contrasted View.

Here, now, are two great whales, laying their heads together; let us

join them, and lay together our own.

Of the grand order of folio leviathans, the Sperm Whale and the Right

Whale are by far the most noteworthy. They are the only whales

regularly hunted by man. To the Nantucketer, they present the two

extremes of all the known varieties of the whale. As the external

difference between them is mainly observable in their heads; and as a

head of each is this moment hanging from the Pequod’s side; and as we

may freely go from one to the other, by merely stepping across the

deck:—where, I should like to know, will you obtain a better chance to

study practical cetology than here?

In the first place, you are struck by the general contrast between

these heads. Both are massive enough in all conscience; but there is a

certain mathematical symmetry in the Sperm Whale’s which the Right

Whale’s sadly lacks. There is more character in the Sperm Whale’s head.

As you behold it, you involuntarily yield the immense superiority to

him, in point of pervading dignity. In the present instance, too, this

dignity is heightened by the pepper and salt colour of his head at the

summit, giving token of advanced age and large experience. In short, he

is what the fishermen technically call a “grey-headed whale.”

Let us now note what is least dissimilar in these heads—namely, the two

most important organs, the eye and the ear. Far back on the side of the

head, and low down, near the angle of either whale’s jaw, if you

narrowly search, you will at last see a lashless eye, which you would

fancy to be a young colt’s eye; so out of all proportion is it to the

magnitude of the head.

Now, from this peculiar sideway position of the whale’s eyes, it is

plain that he can never see an object which is exactly ahead, no more

than he can one exactly astern. In a word, the position of the whale’s

eyes corresponds to that of a man’s ears; and you may fancy, for

yourself, how it would fare with you, did you sideways survey objects

through your ears. You would find that you could only command some

thirty degrees of vision in advance of the straight side-line of sight;

and about thirty more behind it. If your bitterest foe were walking

straight towards you, with dagger uplifted in broad day, you would not

be able to see him, any more than if he were stealing upon you from

behind. In a word, you would have two backs, so to speak; but, at the

same time, also, two fronts (side fronts): for what is it that makes

the front of a man—what, indeed, but his eyes?

Moreover, while in most other animals that I can now think of, the eyes

are so planted as imperceptibly to blend their visual power, so as to

produce one picture and not two to the brain; the peculiar position of

the whale’s eyes, effectually divided as they are by many cubic feet of

solid head, which towers between them like a great mountain separating

two lakes in valleys; this, of course, must wholly separate the

impressions which each independent organ imparts. The whale, therefore,

must see one distinct picture on this side, and another distinct

picture on that side; while all between must be profound darkness and

nothingness to him. Man may, in effect, be said to look out on the

world from a sentry-box with two joined sashes for his window. But with

the whale, these two sashes are separately inserted, making two

distinct windows, but sadly impairing the view. This peculiarity of the

whale’s eyes is a thing always to be borne in mind in the fishery; and

to be remembered by the reader in some subsequent scenes.

A curious and most puzzling question might be started concerning this

visual matter as touching the Leviathan. But I must be content with a

hint. So long as a man’s eyes are open in the light, the act of seeing

is involuntary; that is, he cannot then help mechanically seeing

whatever objects are before him. Nevertheless, any one’s experience

will teach him, that though he can take in an undiscriminating sweep of

things at one glance, it is quite impossible for him, attentively, and

completely, to examine any two things—however large or however small—at

one and the same instant of time; never mind if they lie side by side

and touch each other. But if you now come to separate these two

objects, and surround each by a circle of profound darkness; then, in

order to see one of them, in such a manner as to bring your mind to

bear on it, the other will be utterly excluded from your contemporary

consciousness. How is it, then, with the whale? True, both his eyes, in

themselves, must simultaneously act; but is his brain so much more

comprehensive, combining, and subtle than man’s, that he can at the

same moment of time attentively examine two distinct prospects, one on

one side of him, and the other in an exactly opposite direction? If he

can, then is it as marvellous a thing in him, as if a man were able

simultaneously to go through the demonstrations of two distinct

problems in Euclid. Nor, strictly investigated, is there any

incongruity in this comparison.

It may be but an idle whim, but it has always seemed to me, that the

extraordinary vacillations of movement displayed by some whales when

beset by three or four boats; the timidity and liability to queer

frights, so common to such whales; I think that all this indirectly

proceeds from the helpless perplexity of volition, in which their

divided and diametrically opposite powers of vision must involve them.

But the ear of the whale is full as curious as the eye. If you are an

entire stranger to their race, you might hunt over these two heads for

hours, and never discover that organ. The ear has no external leaf

whatever; and into the hole itself you can hardly insert a quill, so

wondrously minute is it. It is lodged a little behind the eye. With

respect to their ears, this important difference is to be observed

between the sperm whale and the right. While the ear of the former has

an external opening, that of the latter is entirely and evenly covered

over with a membrane, so as to be quite imperceptible from without.

Is it not curious, that so vast a being as the whale should see the

world through so small an eye, and hear the thunder through an ear

which is smaller than a hare’s? But if his eyes were broad as the lens

of Herschel’s great telescope; and his ears capacious as the porches of

cathedrals; would that make him any longer of sight, or sharper of

hearing? Not at all.—Why then do you try to “enlarge” your mind?

Subtilize it.

Let us now with whatever levers and steam-engines we have at hand, cant

over the sperm whale’s head, that it may lie bottom up; then, ascending

by a ladder to the summit, have a peep down the mouth; and were it not

that the body is now completely separated from it, with a lantern we

might descend into the great Kentucky Mammoth Cave of his stomach. But

let us hold on here by this tooth, and look about us where we are. What

a really beautiful and chaste-looking mouth! from floor to ceiling,

lined, or rather papered with a glistening white membrane, glossy as

bridal satins.

But come out now, and look at this portentous lower jaw, which seems

like the long narrow lid of an immense snuff-box, with the hinge at one

end, instead of one side. If you pry it up, so as to get it overhead,

and expose its rows of teeth, it seems a terrific portcullis; and such,

alas! it proves to many a poor wight in the fishery, upon whom these

spikes fall with impaling force. But far more terrible is it to behold,

when fathoms down in the sea, you see some sulky whale, floating there

suspended, with his prodigious jaw, some fifteen feet long, hanging

straight down at right-angles with his body, for all the world like a

ship’s jib-boom. This whale is not dead; he is only dispirited; out of

sorts, perhaps; hypochondriac; and so supine, that the hinges of his

jaw have relaxed, leaving him there in that ungainly sort of plight, a

reproach to all his tribe, who must, no doubt, imprecate lock-jaws upon

him.

In most cases this lower jaw—being easily unhinged by a practised

artist—is disengaged and hoisted on deck for the purpose of extracting

the ivory teeth, and furnishing a supply of that hard white whalebone

with which the fishermen fashion all sorts of curious articles,

including canes, umbrella-stocks, and handles to riding-whips.

With a long, weary hoist the jaw is dragged on board, as if it were an

anchor; and when the proper time comes—some few days after the other

work—Queequeg, Daggoo, and Tashtego, being all accomplished dentists,

are set to drawing teeth. With a keen cutting-spade, Queequeg lances

the gums; then the jaw is lashed down to ringbolts, and a tackle being

rigged from aloft, they drag out these teeth, as Michigan oxen drag

stumps of old oaks out of wild wood lands. There are generally

forty-two teeth in all; in old whales, much worn down, but undecayed;

nor filled after our artificial fashion. The jaw is afterwards sawn

into slabs, and piled away like joists for building houses.

CHAPTER 75. The Right Whale’s Head—Contrasted View.

Crossing the deck, let us now have a good long look at the Right

Whale’s head.

As in general shape the noble Sperm Whale’s head may be compared to a

Roman war-chariot (especially in front, where it is so broadly

rounded); so, at a broad view, the Right Whale’s head bears a rather

inelegant resemblance to a gigantic galliot-toed shoe. Two hundred

years ago an old Dutch voyager likened its shape to that of a

shoemaker’s last. And in this same last or shoe, that old woman of the

nursery tale, with the swarming brood, might very comfortably be

lodged, she and all her progeny.

But as you come nearer to this great head it begins to assume different

aspects, according to your point of view. If you stand on its summit

and look at these two F-shaped spoutholes, you would take the whole

head for an enormous bass-viol, and these spiracles, the apertures in

its sounding-board. Then, again, if you fix your eye upon this strange,

crested, comb-like incrustation on the top of the mass—this green,

barnacled thing, which the Greenlanders call the “crown,” and the

Southern fishers the “bonnet” of the Right Whale; fixing your eyes

solely on this, you would take the head for the trunk of some huge oak,

with a bird’s nest in its crotch. At any rate, when you watch those

live crabs that nestle here on this bonnet, such an idea will be almost

sure to occur to you; unless, indeed, your fancy has been fixed by the

technical term “crown” also bestowed upon it; in which case you will

take great interest in thinking how this mighty monster is actually a

diademed king of the sea, whose green crown has been put together for

him in this marvellous manner. But if this whale be a king, he is a

very sulky looking fellow to grace a diadem. Look at that hanging lower

lip! what a huge sulk and pout is there! a sulk and pout, by

carpenter’s measurement, about twenty feet long and five feet deep; a

sulk and pout that will yield you some 500 gallons of oil and more.

A great pity, now, that this unfortunate whale should be hare-lipped.

The fissure is about a foot across. Probably the mother during an

important interval was sailing down the Peruvian coast, when

earthquakes caused the beach to gape. Over this lip, as over a slippery

threshold, we now slide into the mouth. Upon my word were I at

Mackinaw, I should take this to be the inside of an Indian wigwam. Good

Lord! is this the road that Jonah went? The roof is about twelve feet

high, and runs to a pretty sharp angle, as if there were a regular

ridge-pole there; while these ribbed, arched, hairy sides, present us

with those wondrous, half vertical, scimetar-shaped slats of whalebone,

say three hundred on a side, which depending from the upper part of the

head or crown bone, form those Venetian blinds which have elsewhere

been cursorily mentioned. The edges of these bones are fringed with

hairy fibres, through which the Right Whale strains the water, and in

whose intricacies he retains the small fish, when openmouthed he goes

through the seas of brit in feeding time. In the central blinds of

bone, as they stand in their natural order, there are certain curious

marks, curves, hollows, and ridges, whereby some whalemen calculate the

creature’s age, as the age of an oak by its circular rings. Though the

certainty of this criterion is far from demonstrable, yet it has the

savor of analogical probability. At any rate, if we yield to it, we

must grant a far greater age to the Right Whale than at first glance

will seem reasonable.

In old times, there seem to have prevailed the most curious fancies

concerning these blinds. One voyager in Purchas calls them the wondrous

“whiskers” inside of the whale’s mouth;\* another, “hogs’ bristles”; a

third old gentleman in Hackluyt uses the following elegant language:

“There are about two hundred and fifty fins growing on each side of his

upper \_chop\_, which arch over his tongue on each side of his mouth.”

\*This reminds us that the Right Whale really has a sort of whisker, or

rather a moustache, consisting of a few scattered white hairs on the

upper part of the outer end of the lower jaw. Sometimes these tufts

impart a rather brigandish expression to his otherwise solemn

countenance.

As every one knows, these same “hogs’ bristles,” “fins,” “whiskers,”

“blinds,” or whatever you please, furnish to the ladies their busks and

other stiffening contrivances. But in this particular, the demand has

long been on the decline. It was in Queen Anne’s time that the bone was

in its glory, the farthingale being then all the fashion. And as those

ancient dames moved about gaily, though in the jaws of the whale, as

you may say; even so, in a shower, with the like thoughtlessness, do we

nowadays fly under the same jaws for protection; the umbrella being a

tent spread over the same bone.

But now forget all about blinds and whiskers for a moment, and,

standing in the Right Whale’s mouth, look around you afresh. Seeing all

these colonnades of bone so methodically ranged about, would you not

think you were inside of the great Haarlem organ, and gazing upon its

thousand pipes? For a carpet to the organ we have a rug of the softest

Turkey—the tongue, which is glued, as it were, to the floor of the

mouth. It is very fat and tender, and apt to tear in pieces in hoisting

it on deck. This particular tongue now before us; at a passing glance I

should say it was a six-barreler; that is, it will yield you about that

amount of oil.

Ere this, you must have plainly seen the truth of what I started

with—that the Sperm Whale and the Right Whale have almost entirely

different heads. To sum up, then: in the Right Whale’s there is no

great well of sperm; no ivory teeth at all; no long, slender mandible

of a lower jaw, like the Sperm Whale’s. Nor in the Sperm Whale are

there any of those blinds of bone; no huge lower lip; and scarcely

anything of a tongue. Again, the Right Whale has two external

spout-holes, the Sperm Whale only one.

Look your last, now, on these venerable hooded heads, while they yet

lie together; for one will soon sink, unrecorded, in the sea; the other

will not be very long in following.

Can you catch the expression of the Sperm Whale’s there? It is the same

he died with, only some of the longer wrinkles in the forehead seem now

faded away. I think his broad brow to be full of a prairie-like

placidity, born of a speculative indifference as to death. But mark the

other head’s expression. See that amazing lower lip, pressed by

accident against the vessel’s side, so as firmly to embrace the jaw.

Does not this whole head seem to speak of an enormous practical

resolution in facing death? This Right Whale I take to have been a

Stoic; the Sperm Whale, a Platonian, who might have taken up Spinoza in

his latter years.

CHAPTER 76. The Battering-Ram.

Ere quitting, for the nonce, the Sperm Whale’s head, I would have you,

as a sensible physiologist, simply—particularly remark its front

aspect, in all its compacted collectedness. I would have you

investigate it now with the sole view of forming to yourself some

unexaggerated, intelligent estimate of whatever battering-ram power may

be lodged there. Here is a vital point; for you must either

satisfactorily settle this matter with yourself, or for ever remain an

infidel as to one of the most appalling, but not the less true events,

perhaps anywhere to be found in all recorded history.

You observe that in the ordinary swimming position of the Sperm Whale,

the front of his head presents an almost wholly vertical plane to the

water; you observe that the lower part of that front slopes

considerably backwards, so as to furnish more of a retreat for the long

socket which receives the boom-like lower jaw; you observe that the

mouth is entirely under the head, much in the same way, indeed, as

though your own mouth were entirely under your chin. Moreover you

observe that the whale has no external nose; and that what nose he

has—his spout hole—is on the top of his head; you observe that his eyes

and ears are at the sides of his head, nearly one third of his entire

length from the front. Wherefore, you must now have perceived that the

front of the Sperm Whale’s head is a dead, blind wall, without a single

organ or tender prominence of any sort whatsoever. Furthermore, you are

now to consider that only in the extreme, lower, backward sloping part

of the front of the head, is there the slightest vestige of bone; and

not till you get near twenty feet from the forehead do you come to the

full cranial development. So that this whole enormous boneless mass is

as one wad. Finally, though, as will soon be revealed, its contents

partly comprise the most delicate oil; yet, you are now to be apprised

of the nature of the substance which so impregnably invests all that

apparent effeminacy. In some previous place I have described to you how

the blubber wraps the body of the whale, as the rind wraps an orange.

Just so with the head; but with this difference: about the head this

envelope, though not so thick, is of a boneless toughness, inestimable

by any man who has not handled it. The severest pointed harpoon, the

sharpest lance darted by the strongest human arm, impotently rebounds

from it. It is as though the forehead of the Sperm Whale were paved

with horses’ hoofs. I do not think that any sensation lurks in it.

Bethink yourself also of another thing. When two large, loaded Indiamen

chance to crowd and crush towards each other in the docks, what do the

sailors do? They do not suspend between them, at the point of coming

contact, any merely hard substance, like iron or wood. No, they hold

there a large, round wad of tow and cork, enveloped in the thickest and

toughest of ox-hide. That bravely and uninjured takes the jam which

would have snapped all their oaken handspikes and iron crow-bars. By

itself this sufficiently illustrates the obvious fact I drive at. But

supplementary to this, it has hypothetically occurred to me, that as

ordinary fish possess what is called a swimming bladder in them,

capable, at will, of distension or contraction; and as the Sperm Whale,

as far as I know, has no such provision in him; considering, too, the

otherwise inexplicable manner in which he now depresses his head

altogether beneath the surface, and anon swims with it high elevated

out of the water; considering the unobstructed elasticity of its

envelope; considering the unique interior of his head; it has

hypothetically occurred to me, I say, that those mystical lung-celled

honeycombs there may possibly have some hitherto unknown and

unsuspected connexion with the outer air, so as to be susceptible to

atmospheric distension and contraction. If this be so, fancy the

irresistibleness of that might, to which the most impalpable and

destructive of all elements contributes.

Now, mark. Unerringly impelling this dead, impregnable, uninjurable

wall, and this most buoyant thing within; there swims behind it all a

mass of tremendous life, only to be adequately estimated as piled wood

is—by the cord; and all obedient to one volition, as the smallest

insect. So that when I shall hereafter detail to you all the

specialities and concentrations of potency everywhere lurking in this

expansive monster; when I shall show you some of his more

inconsiderable braining feats; I trust you will have renounced all

ignorant incredulity, and be ready to abide by this; that though the

Sperm Whale stove a passage through the Isthmus of Darien, and mixed

the Atlantic with the Pacific, you would not elevate one hair of your

eye-brow. For unless you own the whale, you are but a provincial and

sentimentalist in Truth. But clear Truth is a thing for salamander

giants only to encounter; how small the chances for the provincials

then? What befell the weakling youth lifting the dread goddess’s veil

at Lais?

CHAPTER 77. The Great Heidelburgh Tun.

Now comes the Baling of the Case. But to comprehend it aright, you must

know something of the curious internal structure of the thing operated

upon.

Regarding the Sperm Whale’s head as a solid oblong, you may, on an

inclined plane, sideways divide it into two quoins,\* whereof the lower

is the bony structure, forming the cranium and jaws, and the upper an

unctuous mass wholly free from bones; its broad forward end forming the

expanded vertical apparent forehead of the whale. At the middle of the

forehead horizontally subdivide this upper quoin, and then you have two

almost equal parts, which before were naturally divided by an internal

wall of a thick tendinous substance.

\*Quoin is not a Euclidean term. It belongs to the pure nautical

mathematics. I know not that it has been defined before. A quoin is a

solid which differs from a wedge in having its sharp end formed by the

steep inclination of one side, instead of the mutual tapering of both

sides.

The lower subdivided part, called the junk, is one immense honeycomb of

oil, formed by the crossing and recrossing, into ten thousand

infiltrated cells, of tough elastic white fibres throughout its whole

extent. The upper part, known as the Case, may be regarded as the great

Heidelburgh Tun of the Sperm Whale. And as that famous great tierce is

mystically carved in front, so the whale’s vast plaited forehead forms

innumerable strange devices for the emblematical adornment of his

wondrous tun. Moreover, as that of Heidelburgh was always replenished

with the most excellent of the wines of the Rhenish valleys, so the tun

of the whale contains by far the most precious of all his oily

vintages; namely, the highly-prized spermaceti, in its absolutely pure,

limpid, and odoriferous state. Nor is this precious substance found

unalloyed in any other part of the creature. Though in life it remains

perfectly fluid, yet, upon exposure to the air, after death, it soon

begins to concrete; sending forth beautiful crystalline shoots, as when

the first thin delicate ice is just forming in water. A large whale’s

case generally yields about five hundred gallons of sperm, though from

unavoidable circumstances, considerable of it is spilled, leaks, and

dribbles away, or is otherwise irrevocably lost in the ticklish

business of securing what you can.

I know not with what fine and costly material the Heidelburgh Tun was

coated within, but in superlative richness that coating could not

possibly have compared with the silken pearl-coloured membrane, like

the lining of a fine pelisse, forming the inner surface of the Sperm

Whale’s case.

It will have been seen that the Heidelburgh Tun of the Sperm Whale

embraces the entire length of the entire top of the head; and since—as

has been elsewhere set forth—the head embraces one third of the whole

length of the creature, then setting that length down at eighty feet

for a good sized whale, you have more than twenty-six feet for the

depth of the tun, when it is lengthwise hoisted up and down against a

ship’s side.

As in decapitating the whale, the operator’s instrument is brought

close to the spot where an entrance is subsequently forced into the

spermaceti magazine; he has, therefore, to be uncommonly heedful, lest

a careless, untimely stroke should invade the sanctuary and wastingly

let out its invaluable contents. It is this decapitated end of the

head, also, which is at last elevated out of the water, and retained in

that position by the enormous cutting tackles, whose hempen

combinations, on one side, make quite a wilderness of ropes in that

quarter.

Thus much being said, attend now, I pray you, to that marvellous and—in

this particular instance—almost fatal operation whereby the Sperm

Whale’s great Heidelburgh Tun is tapped.

CHAPTER 78. Cistern and Buckets.

Nimble as a cat, Tashtego mounts aloft; and without altering his erect

posture, runs straight out upon the overhanging mainyard-arm, to the

part where it exactly projects over the hoisted Tun. He has carried

with him a light tackle called a whip, consisting of only two parts,

travelling through a single-sheaved block. Securing this block, so that

it hangs down from the yard-arm, he swings one end of the rope, till it

is caught and firmly held by a hand on deck. Then, hand-over-hand, down

the other part, the Indian drops through the air, till dexterously he

lands on the summit of the head. There—still high elevated above the

rest of the company, to whom he vivaciously cries—he seems some Turkish

Muezzin calling the good people to prayers from the top of a tower. A

short-handled sharp spade being sent up to him, he diligently searches

for the proper place to begin breaking into the Tun. In this business

he proceeds very heedfully, like a treasure-hunter in some old house,

sounding the walls to find where the gold is masoned in. By the time

this cautious search is over, a stout iron-bound bucket, precisely like

a well-bucket, has been attached to one end of the whip; while the

other end, being stretched across the deck, is there held by two or

three alert hands. These last now hoist the bucket within grasp of the

Indian, to whom another person has reached up a very long pole.

Inserting this pole into the bucket, Tashtego downward guides the

bucket into the Tun, till it entirely disappears; then giving the word

to the seamen at the whip, up comes the bucket again, all bubbling like

a dairy-maid’s pail of new milk. Carefully lowered from its height, the

full-freighted vessel is caught by an appointed hand, and quickly

emptied into a large tub. Then remounting aloft, it again goes through

the same round until the deep cistern will yield no more. Towards the

end, Tashtego has to ram his long pole harder and harder, and deeper

and deeper into the Tun, until some twenty feet of the pole have gone

down.

Now, the people of the Pequod had been baling some time in this way;

several tubs had been filled with the fragrant sperm; when all at once

a queer accident happened. Whether it was that Tashtego, that wild

Indian, was so heedless and reckless as to let go for a moment his

one-handed hold on the great cabled tackles suspending the head; or

whether the place where he stood was so treacherous and oozy; or

whether the Evil One himself would have it to fall out so, without

stating his particular reasons; how it was exactly, there is no telling

now; but, on a sudden, as the eightieth or ninetieth bucket came

suckingly up—my God! poor Tashtego—like the twin reciprocating bucket

in a veritable well, dropped head-foremost down into this great Tun of

Heidelburgh, and with a horrible oily gurgling, went clean out of

sight!

“Man overboard!” cried Daggoo, who amid the general consternation first

came to his senses. “Swing the bucket this way!” and putting one foot

into it, so as the better to secure his slippery hand-hold on the whip

itself, the hoisters ran him high up to the top of the head, almost

before Tashtego could have reached its interior bottom. Meantime, there

was a terrible tumult. Looking over the side, they saw the before

lifeless head throbbing and heaving just below the surface of the sea,

as if that moment seized with some momentous idea; whereas it was only

the poor Indian unconsciously revealing by those struggles the perilous

depth to which he had sunk.

At this instant, while Daggoo, on the summit of the head, was clearing

the whip—which had somehow got foul of the great cutting tackles—a

sharp cracking noise was heard; and to the unspeakable horror of all,

one of the two enormous hooks suspending the head tore out, and with a

vast vibration the enormous mass sideways swung, till the drunk ship

reeled and shook as if smitten by an iceberg. The one remaining hook,

upon which the entire strain now depended, seemed every instant to be

on the point of giving way; an event still more likely from the violent

motions of the head.

“Come down, come down!” yelled the seamen to Daggoo, but with one hand

holding on to the heavy tackles, so that if the head should drop, he

would still remain suspended; the negro having cleared the foul line,

rammed down the bucket into the now collapsed well, meaning that the

buried harpooneer should grasp it, and so be hoisted out.

“In heaven’s name, man,” cried Stubb, “are you ramming home a cartridge

there?—Avast! How will that help him; jamming that iron-bound bucket on

top of his head? Avast, will ye!”

“Stand clear of the tackle!” cried a voice like the bursting of a

rocket.

Almost in the same instant, with a thunder-boom, the enormous mass

dropped into the sea, like Niagara’s Table-Rock into the whirlpool; the

suddenly relieved hull rolled away from it, to far down her glittering

copper; and all caught their breath, as half swinging—now over the

sailors’ heads, and now over the water—Daggoo, through a thick mist of

spray, was dimly beheld clinging to the pendulous tackles, while poor,

buried-alive Tashtego was sinking utterly down to the bottom of the

sea! But hardly had the blinding vapor cleared away, when a naked

figure with a boarding-sword in his hand, was for one swift moment seen

hovering over the bulwarks. The next, a loud splash announced that my

brave Queequeg had dived to the rescue. One packed rush was made to the

side, and every eye counted every ripple, as moment followed moment,

and no sign of either the sinker or the diver could be seen. Some hands

now jumped into a boat alongside, and pushed a little off from the

ship.

“Ha! ha!” cried Daggoo, all at once, from his now quiet, swinging perch

overhead; and looking further off from the side, we saw an arm thrust

upright from the blue waves; a sight strange to see, as an arm thrust

forth from the grass over a grave.

“Both! both!—it is both!”—cried Daggoo again with a joyful shout; and

soon after, Queequeg was seen boldly striking out with one hand, and

with the other clutching the long hair of the Indian. Drawn into the

waiting boat, they were quickly brought to the deck; but Tashtego was

long in coming to, and Queequeg did not look very brisk.

Now, how had this noble rescue been accomplished? Why, diving after the

slowly descending head, Queequeg with his keen sword had made side

lunges near its bottom, so as to scuttle a large hole there; then

dropping his sword, had thrust his long arm far inwards and upwards,

and so hauled out poor Tash by the head. He averred, that upon first

thrusting in for him, a leg was presented; but well knowing that that

was not as it ought to be, and might occasion great trouble;—he had

thrust back the leg, and by a dexterous heave and toss, had wrought a

somerset upon the Indian; so that with the next trial, he came forth in

the good old way—head foremost. As for the great head itself, that was

doing as well as could be expected.

And thus, through the courage and great skill in obstetrics of

Queequeg, the deliverance, or rather, delivery of Tashtego, was

successfully accomplished, in the teeth, too, of the most untoward and

apparently hopeless impediments; which is a lesson by no means to be

forgotten. Midwifery should be taught in the same course with fencing

and boxing, riding and rowing.

I know that this queer adventure of the Gay-Header’s will be sure to

seem incredible to some landsmen, though they themselves may have

either seen or heard of some one’s falling into a cistern ashore; an

accident which not seldom happens, and with much less reason too than

the Indian’s, considering the exceeding slipperiness of the curb of the

Sperm Whale’s well.

But, peradventure, it may be sagaciously urged, how is this? We thought

the tissued, infiltrated head of the Sperm Whale, was the lightest and

most corky part about him; and yet thou makest it sink in an element of

a far greater specific gravity than itself. We have thee there. Not at

all, but I have ye; for at the time poor Tash fell in, the case had

been nearly emptied of its lighter contents, leaving little but the

dense tendinous wall of the well—a double welded, hammered substance,

as I have before said, much heavier than the sea water, and a lump of

which sinks in it like lead almost. But the tendency to rapid sinking

in this substance was in the present instance materially counteracted

by the other parts of the head remaining undetached from it, so that it

sank very slowly and deliberately indeed, affording Queequeg a fair

chance for performing his agile obstetrics on the run, as you may say.

Yes, it was a running delivery, so it was.

Now, had Tashtego perished in that head, it had been a very precious

perishing; smothered in the very whitest and daintiest of fragrant

spermaceti; coffined, hearsed, and tombed in the secret inner chamber

and sanctum sanctorum of the whale. Only one sweeter end can readily be

recalled—the delicious death of an Ohio honey-hunter, who seeking honey

in the crotch of a hollow tree, found such exceeding store of it, that

leaning too far over, it sucked him in, so that he died embalmed. How

many, think ye, have likewise fallen into Plato’s honey head, and

sweetly perished there?

CHAPTER 79. The Prairie.

To scan the lines of his face, or feel the bumps on the head of this

Leviathan; this is a thing which no Physiognomist or Phrenologist has

as yet undertaken. Such an enterprise would seem almost as hopeful as

for Lavater to have scrutinized the wrinkles on the Rock of Gibraltar,

or for Gall to have mounted a ladder and manipulated the Dome of the

Pantheon. Still, in that famous work of his, Lavater not only treats of

the various faces of men, but also attentively studies the faces of

horses, birds, serpents, and fish; and dwells in detail upon the

modifications of expression discernible therein. Nor have Gall and his

disciple Spurzheim failed to throw out some hints touching the

phrenological characteristics of other beings than man. Therefore,

though I am but ill qualified for a pioneer, in the application of

these two semi-sciences to the whale, I will do my endeavor. I try all

things; I achieve what I can.

Physiognomically regarded, the Sperm Whale is an anomalous creature. He

has no proper nose. And since the nose is the central and most

conspicuous of the features; and since it perhaps most modifies and

finally controls their combined expression; hence it would seem that

its entire absence, as an external appendage, must very largely affect

the countenance of the whale. For as in landscape gardening, a spire,

cupola, monument, or tower of some sort, is deemed almost indispensable

to the completion of the scene; so no face can be physiognomically in

keeping without the elevated open-work belfry of the nose. Dash the

nose from Phidias’s marble Jove, and what a sorry remainder!

Nevertheless, Leviathan is of so mighty a magnitude, all his

proportions are so stately, that the same deficiency which in the

sculptured Jove were hideous, in him is no blemish at all. Nay, it is

an added grandeur. A nose to the whale would have been impertinent. As

on your physiognomical voyage you sail round his vast head in your

jolly-boat, your noble conceptions of him are never insulted by the

reflection that he has a nose to be pulled. A pestilent conceit, which

so often will insist upon obtruding even when beholding the mightiest

royal beadle on his throne.

In some particulars, perhaps the most imposing physiognomical view to

be had of the Sperm Whale, is that of the full front of his head. This

aspect is sublime.

In thought, a fine human brow is like the East when troubled with the

morning. In the repose of the pasture, the curled brow of the bull has

a touch of the grand in it. Pushing heavy cannon up mountain defiles,

the elephant’s brow is majestic. Human or animal, the mystical brow is

as that great golden seal affixed by the German emperors to their

decrees. It signifies—“God: done this day by my hand.” But in most

creatures, nay in man himself, very often the brow is but a mere strip

of alpine land lying along the snow line. Few are the foreheads which

like Shakespeare’s or Melancthon’s rise so high, and descend so low,

that the eyes themselves seem clear, eternal, tideless mountain lakes;

and all above them in the forehead’s wrinkles, you seem to track the

antlered thoughts descending there to drink, as the Highland hunters

track the snow prints of the deer. But in the great Sperm Whale, this

high and mighty god-like dignity inherent in the brow is so immensely

amplified, that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the

Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other

object in living nature. For you see no one point precisely; not one

distinct feature is revealed; no nose, eyes, ears, or mouth; no face;

he has none, proper; nothing but that one broad firmament of a

forehead, pleated with riddles; dumbly lowering with the doom of boats,

and ships, and men. Nor, in profile, does this wondrous brow diminish;

though that way viewed its grandeur does not domineer upon you so. In

profile, you plainly perceive that horizontal, semi-crescentic

depression in the forehead’s middle, which, in man, is Lavater’s mark

of genius.

But how? Genius in the Sperm Whale? Has the Sperm Whale ever written a

book, spoken a speech? No, his great genius is declared in his doing

nothing particular to prove it. It is moreover declared in his

pyramidical silence. And this reminds me that had the great Sperm Whale

been known to the young Orient World, he would have been deified by

their child-magian thoughts. They deified the crocodile of the Nile,

because the crocodile is tongueless; and the Sperm Whale has no tongue,

or at least it is so exceedingly small, as to be incapable of

protrusion. If hereafter any highly cultured, poetical nation shall

lure back to their birth-right, the merry May-day gods of old; and

livingly enthrone them again in the now egotistical sky; in the now

unhaunted hill; then be sure, exalted to Jove’s high seat, the great

Sperm Whale shall lord it.

Champollion deciphered the wrinkled granite hieroglyphics. But there is

no Champollion to decipher the Egypt of every man’s and every being’s

face. Physiognomy, like every other human science, is but a passing

fable. If then, Sir William Jones, who read in thirty languages, could

not read the simplest peasant’s face in its profounder and more subtle

meanings, how may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of

the Sperm Whale’s brow? I but put that brow before you. Read it if you

can.

CHAPTER 80. The Nut.

If the Sperm Whale be physiognomically a Sphinx, to the phrenologist

his brain seems that geometrical circle which it is impossible to

square.

In the full-grown creature the skull will measure at least twenty feet

in length. Unhinge the lower jaw, and the side view of this skull is as

the side of a moderately inclined plane resting throughout on a level

base. But in life—as we have elsewhere seen—this inclined plane is

angularly filled up, and almost squared by the enormous superincumbent

mass of the junk and sperm. At the high end the skull forms a crater to

bed that part of the mass; while under the long floor of this crater—in

another cavity seldom exceeding ten inches in length and as many in

depth—reposes the mere handful of this monster’s brain. The brain is at

least twenty feet from his apparent forehead in life; it is hidden away

behind its vast outworks, like the innermost citadel within the

amplified fortifications of Quebec. So like a choice casket is it

secreted in him, that I have known some whalemen who peremptorily deny

that the Sperm Whale has any other brain than that palpable semblance

of one formed by the cubic-yards of his sperm magazine. Lying in

strange folds, courses, and convolutions, to their apprehensions, it

seems more in keeping with the idea of his general might to regard that

mystic part of him as the seat of his intelligence.

It is plain, then, that phrenologically the head of this Leviathan, in

the creature’s living intact state, is an entire delusion. As for his

true brain, you can then see no indications of it, nor feel any. The

whale, like all things that are mighty, wears a false brow to the

common world.

If you unload his skull of its spermy heaps and then take a rear view

of its rear end, which is the high end, you will be struck by its

resemblance to the human skull, beheld in the same situation, and from

the same point of view. Indeed, place this reversed skull (scaled down

to the human magnitude) among a plate of men’s skulls, and you would

involuntarily confound it with them; and remarking the depressions on

one part of its summit, in phrenological phrase you would say—This man

had no self-esteem, and no veneration. And by those negations,

considered along with the affirmative fact of his prodigious bulk and

power, you can best form to yourself the truest, though not the most

exhilarating conception of what the most exalted potency is.

But if from the comparative dimensions of the whale’s proper brain, you

deem it incapable of being adequately charted, then I have another idea

for you. If you attentively regard almost any quadruped’s spine, you

will be struck with the resemblance of its vertebræ to a strung

necklace of dwarfed skulls, all bearing rudimental resemblance to the

skull proper. It is a German conceit, that the vertebræ are absolutely

undeveloped skulls. But the curious external resemblance, I take it the

Germans were not the first men to perceive. A foreign friend once

pointed it out to me, in the skeleton of a foe he had slain, and with

the vertebræ of which he was inlaying, in a sort of basso-relievo, the

beaked prow of his canoe. Now, I consider that the phrenologists have

omitted an important thing in not pushing their investigations from the

cerebellum through the spinal canal. For I believe that much of a man’s

character will be found betokened in his backbone. I would rather feel

your spine than your skull, whoever you are. A thin joist of a spine

never yet upheld a full and noble soul. I rejoice in my spine, as in

the firm audacious staff of that flag which I fling half out to the

world.

Apply this spinal branch of phrenology to the Sperm Whale. His cranial

cavity is continuous with the first neck-vertebra; and in that vertebra

the bottom of the spinal canal will measure ten inches across, being

eight in height, and of a triangular figure with the base downwards. As

it passes through the remaining vertebræ the canal tapers in size, but

for a considerable distance remains of large capacity. Now, of course,

this canal is filled with much the same strangely fibrous substance—the

spinal cord—as the brain; and directly communicates with the brain. And

what is still more, for many feet after emerging from the brain’s

cavity, the spinal cord remains of an undecreasing girth, almost equal

to that of the brain. Under all these circumstances, would it be

unreasonable to survey and map out the whale’s spine phrenologically?

For, viewed in this light, the wonderful comparative smallness of his

brain proper is more than compensated by the wonderful comparative

magnitude of his spinal cord.

But leaving this hint to operate as it may with the phrenologists, I

would merely assume the spinal theory for a moment, in reference to the

Sperm Whale’s hump. This august hump, if I mistake not, rises over one

of the larger vertebræ, and is, therefore, in some sort, the outer

convex mould of it. From its relative situation then, I should call

this high hump the organ of firmness or indomitableness in the Sperm

Whale. And that the great monster is indomitable, you will yet have

reason to know.

CHAPTER 81. The Pequod Meets The Virgin.

The predestinated day arrived, and we duly met the ship Jungfrau,

Derick De Deer, master, of Bremen.

At one time the greatest whaling people in the world, the Dutch and

Germans are now among the least; but here and there at very wide

intervals of latitude and longitude, you still occasionally meet with

their flag in the Pacific.

For some reason, the Jungfrau seemed quite eager to pay her respects.

While yet some distance from the Pequod, she rounded to, and dropping a

boat, her captain was impelled towards us, impatiently standing in the

bows instead of the stern.

“What has he in his hand there?” cried Starbuck, pointing to something

wavingly held by the German. “Impossible!—a lamp-feeder!”

“Not that,” said Stubb, “no, no, it’s a coffee-pot, Mr. Starbuck; he’s

coming off to make us our coffee, is the Yarman; don’t you see that big

tin can there alongside of him?—that’s his boiling water. Oh! he’s all

right, is the Yarman.”

“Go along with you,” cried Flask, “it’s a lamp-feeder and an oil-can.

He’s out of oil, and has come a-begging.”

However curious it may seem for an oil-ship to be borrowing oil on the

whale-ground, and however much it may invertedly contradict the old

proverb about carrying coals to Newcastle, yet sometimes such a thing

really happens; and in the present case Captain Derick De Deer did

indubitably conduct a lamp-feeder as Flask did declare.

As he mounted the deck, Ahab abruptly accosted him, without at all

heeding what he had in his hand; but in his broken lingo, the German

soon evinced his complete ignorance of the White Whale; immediately

turning the conversation to his lamp-feeder and oil can, with some

remarks touching his having to turn into his hammock at night in

profound darkness—his last drop of Bremen oil being gone, and not a

single flying-fish yet captured to supply the deficiency; concluding by

hinting that his ship was indeed what in the Fishery is technically

called a \_clean\_ one (that is, an empty one), well deserving the name

of Jungfrau or the Virgin.

His necessities supplied, Derick departed; but he had not gained his

ship’s side, when whales were almost simultaneously raised from the

mast-heads of both vessels; and so eager for the chase was Derick, that

without pausing to put his oil-can and lamp-feeder aboard, he slewed

round his boat and made after the leviathan lamp-feeders.

Now, the game having risen to leeward, he and the other three German

boats that soon followed him, had considerably the start of the

Pequod’s keels. There were eight whales, an average pod. Aware of their

danger, they were going all abreast with great speed straight before

the wind, rubbing their flanks as closely as so many spans of horses in

harness. They left a great, wide wake, as though continually unrolling

a great wide parchment upon the sea.

Full in this rapid wake, and many fathoms in the rear, swam a huge,

humped old bull, which by his comparatively slow progress, as well as

by the unusual yellowish incrustations overgrowing him, seemed

afflicted with the jaundice, or some other infirmity. Whether this

whale belonged to the pod in advance, seemed questionable; for it is

not customary for such venerable leviathans to be at all social.

Nevertheless, he stuck to their wake, though indeed their back water

must have retarded him, because the white-bone or swell at his broad

muzzle was a dashed one, like the swell formed when two hostile

currents meet. His spout was short, slow, and laborious; coming forth

with a choking sort of gush, and spending itself in torn shreds,

followed by strange subterranean commotions in him, which seemed to

have egress at his other buried extremity, causing the waters behind

him to upbubble.

“Who’s got some paregoric?” said Stubb, “he has the stomach-ache, I’m

afraid. Lord, think of having half an acre of stomach-ache! Adverse

winds are holding mad Christmas in him, boys. It’s the first foul wind

I ever knew to blow from astern; but look, did ever whale yaw so

before? it must be, he’s lost his tiller.”

As an overladen Indiaman bearing down the Hindostan coast with a deck

load of frightened horses, careens, buries, rolls, and wallows on her

way; so did this old whale heave his aged bulk, and now and then partly

turning over on his cumbrous rib-ends, expose the cause of his devious

wake in the unnatural stump of his starboard fin. Whether he had lost

that fin in battle, or had been born without it, it were hard to say.

“Only wait a bit, old chap, and I’ll give ye a sling for that wounded

arm,” cried cruel Flask, pointing to the whale-line near him.

“Mind he don’t sling thee with it,” cried Starbuck. “Give way, or the

German will have him.”

With one intent all the combined rival boats were pointed for this one

fish, because not only was he the largest, and therefore the most

valuable whale, but he was nearest to them, and the other whales were

going with such great velocity, moreover, as almost to defy pursuit for

the time. At this juncture the Pequod’s keels had shot by the three

German boats last lowered; but from the great start he had had,

Derick’s boat still led the chase, though every moment neared by his

foreign rivals. The only thing they feared, was, that from being

already so nigh to his mark, he would be enabled to dart his iron

before they could completely overtake and pass him. As for Derick, he

seemed quite confident that this would be the case, and occasionally

with a deriding gesture shook his lamp-feeder at the other boats.

“The ungracious and ungrateful dog!” cried Starbuck; “he mocks and

dares me with the very poor-box I filled for him not five minutes

ago!”—then in his old intense whisper—“Give way, greyhounds! Dog to

it!”

“I tell ye what it is, men”—cried Stubb to his crew—“it’s against my

religion to get mad; but I’d like to eat that villainous

Yarman—Pull—won’t ye? Are ye going to let that rascal beat ye? Do ye

love brandy? A hogshead of brandy, then, to the best man. Come, why

don’t some of ye burst a blood-vessel? Who’s that been dropping an

anchor overboard—we don’t budge an inch—we’re becalmed. Halloo, here’s

grass growing in the boat’s bottom—and by the Lord, the mast there’s

budding. This won’t do, boys. Look at that Yarman! The short and long

of it is, men, will ye spit fire or not?”

“Oh! see the suds he makes!” cried Flask, dancing up and down—“What a

hump—Oh, \_do\_ pile on the beef—lays like a log! Oh! my lads, \_do\_

spring—slap-jacks and quahogs for supper, you know, my lads—baked clams

and muffins—oh, \_do\_, \_do\_, spring,—he’s a hundred barreller—don’t lose

him now—don’t oh, \_don’t!\_—see that Yarman—Oh, won’t ye pull for your

duff, my lads—such a sog! such a sogger! Don’t ye love sperm? There

goes three thousand dollars, men!—a bank!—a whole bank! The bank of

England!—Oh, \_do\_, \_do\_, \_do!\_—What’s that Yarman about now?”

At this moment Derick was in the act of pitching his lamp-feeder at the

advancing boats, and also his oil-can; perhaps with the double view of

retarding his rivals’ way, and at the same time economically

accelerating his own by the momentary impetus of the backward toss.

“The unmannerly Dutch dogger!” cried Stubb. “Pull now, men, like fifty

thousand line-of-battle-ship loads of red-haired devils. What d’ye say,

Tashtego; are you the man to snap your spine in two-and-twenty pieces

for the honor of old Gayhead? What d’ye say?”

“I say, pull like god-dam,”—cried the Indian.

Fiercely, but evenly incited by the taunts of the German, the Pequod’s

three boats now began ranging almost abreast; and, so disposed,

momentarily neared him. In that fine, loose, chivalrous attitude of the

headsman when drawing near to his prey, the three mates stood up

proudly, occasionally backing the after oarsman with an exhilarating

cry of, “There she slides, now! Hurrah for the white-ash breeze! Down

with the Yarman! Sail over him!”

But so decided an original start had Derick had, that spite of all

their gallantry, he would have proved the victor in this race, had not

a righteous judgment descended upon him in a crab which caught the

blade of his midship oarsman. While this clumsy lubber was striving to

free his white-ash, and while, in consequence, Derick’s boat was nigh

to capsizing, and he thundering away at his men in a mighty rage;—that

was a good time for Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask. With a shout, they took

a mortal start forwards, and slantingly ranged up on the German’s

quarter. An instant more, and all four boats were diagonically in the

whale’s immediate wake, while stretching from them, on both sides, was

the foaming swell that he made.

It was a terrific, most pitiable, and maddening sight. The whale was

now going head out, and sending his spout before him in a continual

tormented jet; while his one poor fin beat his side in an agony of

fright. Now to this hand, now to that, he yawed in his faltering

flight, and still at every billow that he broke, he spasmodically sank

in the sea, or sideways rolled towards the sky his one beating fin. So

have I seen a bird with clipped wing making affrighted broken circles

in the air, vainly striving to escape the piratical hawks. But the bird

has a voice, and with plaintive cries will make known her fear; but the

fear of this vast dumb brute of the sea, was chained up and enchanted

in him; he had no voice, save that choking respiration through his

spiracle, and this made the sight of him unspeakably pitiable; while

still, in his amazing bulk, portcullis jaw, and omnipotent tail, there

was enough to appal the stoutest man who so pitied.

Seeing now that but a very few moments more would give the Pequod’s

boats the advantage, and rather than be thus foiled of his game, Derick

chose to hazard what to him must have seemed a most unusually long

dart, ere the last chance would for ever escape.

But no sooner did his harpooneer stand up for the stroke, than all

three tigers—Queequeg, Tashtego, Daggoo—instinctively sprang to their

feet, and standing in a diagonal row, simultaneously pointed their

barbs; and darted over the head of the German harpooneer, their three

Nantucket irons entered the whale. Blinding vapors of foam and

white-fire! The three boats, in the first fury of the whale’s headlong

rush, bumped the German’s aside with such force, that both Derick and

his baffled harpooneer were spilled out, and sailed over by the three

flying keels.

“Don’t be afraid, my butter-boxes,” cried Stubb, casting a passing

glance upon them as he shot by; “ye’ll be picked up presently—all

right—I saw some sharks astern—St. Bernard’s dogs, you know—relieve

distressed travellers. Hurrah! this is the way to sail now. Every keel

a sunbeam! Hurrah!—Here we go like three tin kettles at the tail of a

mad cougar! This puts me in mind of fastening to an elephant in a

tilbury on a plain—makes the wheel-spokes fly, boys, when you fasten to

him that way; and there’s danger of being pitched out too, when you

strike a hill. Hurrah! this is the way a fellow feels when he’s going

to Davy Jones—all a rush down an endless inclined plane! Hurrah! this

whale carries the everlasting mail!”

But the monster’s run was a brief one. Giving a sudden gasp, he

tumultuously sounded. With a grating rush, the three lines flew round

the loggerheads with such a force as to gouge deep grooves in them;

while so fearful were the harpooneers that this rapid sounding would

soon exhaust the lines, that using all their dexterous might, they

caught repeated smoking turns with the rope to hold on; till at

last—owing to the perpendicular strain from the lead-lined chocks of

the boats, whence the three ropes went straight down into the blue—the

gunwales of the bows were almost even with the water, while the three

sterns tilted high in the air. And the whale soon ceasing to sound, for

some time they remained in that attitude, fearful of expending more

line, though the position was a little ticklish. But though boats have

been taken down and lost in this way, yet it is this “holding on,” as

it is called; this hooking up by the sharp barbs of his live flesh from

the back; this it is that often torments the Leviathan into soon rising

again to meet the sharp lance of his foes. Yet not to speak of the

peril of the thing, it is to be doubted whether this course is always

the best; for it is but reasonable to presume, that the longer the

stricken whale stays under water, the more he is exhausted. Because,

owing to the enormous surface of him—in a full grown sperm whale

something less than 2000 square feet—the pressure of the water is

immense. We all know what an astonishing atmospheric weight we

ourselves stand up under; even here, above-ground, in the air; how

vast, then, the burden of a whale, bearing on his back a column of two

hundred fathoms of ocean! It must at least equal the weight of fifty

atmospheres. One whaleman has estimated it at the weight of twenty

line-of-battle ships, with all their guns, and stores, and men on

board.

As the three boats lay there on that gently rolling sea, gazing down

into its eternal blue noon; and as not a single groan or cry of any

sort, nay, not so much as a ripple or a bubble came up from its depths;

what landsman would have thought, that beneath all that silence and

placidity, the utmost monster of the seas was writhing and wrenching in

agony! Not eight inches of perpendicular rope were visible at the bows.

Seems it credible that by three such thin threads the great Leviathan

was suspended like the big weight to an eight day clock. Suspended? and

to what? To three bits of board. Is this the creature of whom it was

once so triumphantly said—“Canst thou fill his skin with barbed irons?

or his head with fish-spears? The sword of him that layeth at him

cannot hold, the spear, the dart, nor the habergeon: he esteemeth iron

as straw; the arrow cannot make him flee; darts are counted as stubble;

he laugheth at the shaking of a spear!” This the creature? this he? Oh!

that unfulfilments should follow the prophets. For with the strength of

a thousand thighs in his tail, Leviathan had run his head under the

mountains of the sea, to hide him from the Pequod’s fish-spears!

In that sloping afternoon sunlight, the shadows that the three boats

sent down beneath the surface, must have been long enough and broad

enough to shade half Xerxes’ army. Who can tell how appalling to the

wounded whale must have been such huge phantoms flitting over his head!

“Stand by, men; he stirs,” cried Starbuck, as the three lines suddenly

vibrated in the water, distinctly conducting upwards to them, as by

magnetic wires, the life and death throbs of the whale, so that every

oarsman felt them in his seat. The next moment, relieved in great part

from the downward strain at the bows, the boats gave a sudden bounce

upwards, as a small icefield will, when a dense herd of white bears are

scared from it into the sea.

“Haul in! Haul in!” cried Starbuck again; “he’s rising.”

The lines, of which, hardly an instant before, not one hand’s breadth

could have been gained, were now in long quick coils flung back all

dripping into the boats, and soon the whale broke water within two

ship’s lengths of the hunters.

His motions plainly denoted his extreme exhaustion. In most land

animals there are certain valves or flood-gates in many of their veins,

whereby when wounded, the blood is in some degree at least instantly

shut off in certain directions. Not so with the whale; one of whose

peculiarities it is to have an entire non-valvular structure of the

blood-vessels, so that when pierced even by so small a point as a

harpoon, a deadly drain is at once begun upon his whole arterial

system; and when this is heightened by the extraordinary pressure of

water at a great distance below the surface, his life may be said to

pour from him in incessant streams. Yet so vast is the quantity of

blood in him, and so distant and numerous its interior fountains, that

he will keep thus bleeding and bleeding for a considerable period; even

as in a drought a river will flow, whose source is in the well-springs

of far-off and undiscernible hills. Even now, when the boats pulled

upon this whale, and perilously drew over his swaying flukes, and the

lances were darted into him, they were followed by steady jets from the

new made wound, which kept continually playing, while the natural

spout-hole in his head was only at intervals, however rapid, sending

its affrighted moisture into the air. From this last vent no blood yet

came, because no vital part of him had thus far been struck. His life,

as they significantly call it, was untouched.

As the boats now more closely surrounded him, the whole upper part of

his form, with much of it that is ordinarily submerged, was plainly

revealed. His eyes, or rather the places where his eyes had been, were

beheld. As strange misgrown masses gather in the knot-holes of the

noblest oaks when prostrate, so from the points which the whale’s eyes

had once occupied, now protruded blind bulbs, horribly pitiable to see.

But pity there was none. For all his old age, and his one arm, and his

blind eyes, he must die the death and be murdered, in order to light

the gay bridals and other merry-makings of men, and also to illuminate

the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to

all. Still rolling in his blood, at last he partially disclosed a

strangely discoloured bunch or protuberance, the size of a bushel, low

down on the flank.

“A nice spot,” cried Flask; “just let me prick him there once.”

“Avast!” cried Starbuck, “there’s no need of that!”

But humane Starbuck was too late. At the instant of the dart an

ulcerous jet shot from this cruel wound, and goaded by it into more

than sufferable anguish, the whale now spouting thick blood, with swift

fury blindly darted at the craft, bespattering them and their glorying

crews all over with showers of gore, capsizing Flask’s boat and marring

the bows. It was his death stroke. For, by this time, so spent was he

by loss of blood, that he helplessly rolled away from the wreck he had

made; lay panting on his side, impotently flapped with his stumped fin,

then over and over slowly revolved like a waning world; turned up the

white secrets of his belly; lay like a log, and died. It was most

piteous, that last expiring spout. As when by unseen hands the water is

gradually drawn off from some mighty fountain, and with half-stifled

melancholy gurglings the spray-column lowers and lowers to the

ground—so the last long dying spout of the whale.

Soon, while the crews were awaiting the arrival of the ship, the body

showed symptoms of sinking with all its treasures unrifled.

Immediately, by Starbuck’s orders, lines were secured to it at

different points, so that ere long every boat was a buoy; the sunken

whale being suspended a few inches beneath them by the cords. By very

heedful management, when the ship drew nigh, the whale was transferred

to her side, and was strongly secured there by the stiffest

fluke-chains, for it was plain that unless artificially upheld, the

body would at once sink to the bottom.

It so chanced that almost upon first cutting into him with the spade,

the entire length of a corroded harpoon was found imbedded in his

flesh, on the lower part of the bunch before described. But as the

stumps of harpoons are frequently found in the dead bodies of captured

whales, with the flesh perfectly healed around them, and no prominence

of any kind to denote their place; therefore, there must needs have

been some other unknown reason in the present case fully to account for

the ulceration alluded to. But still more curious was the fact of a

lance-head of stone being found in him, not far from the buried iron,

the flesh perfectly firm about it. Who had darted that stone lance? And

when? It might have been darted by some Nor’ West Indian long before

America was discovered.

What other marvels might have been rummaged out of this monstrous

cabinet there is no telling. But a sudden stop was put to further

discoveries, by the ship’s being unprecedentedly dragged over sideways

to the sea, owing to the body’s immensely increasing tendency to sink.

However, Starbuck, who had the ordering of affairs, hung on to it to

the last; hung on to it so resolutely, indeed, that when at length the

ship would have been capsized, if still persisting in locking arms with

the body; then, when the command was given to break clear from it, such

was the immovable strain upon the timber-heads to which the

fluke-chains and cables were fastened, that it was impossible to cast

them off. Meantime everything in the Pequod was aslant. To cross to the

other side of the deck was like walking up the steep gabled roof of a

house. The ship groaned and gasped. Many of the ivory inlayings of her

bulwarks and cabins were started from their places, by the unnatural

dislocation. In vain handspikes and crows were brought to bear upon the

immovable fluke-chains, to pry them adrift from the timberheads; and so

low had the whale now settled that the submerged ends could not be at

all approached, while every moment whole tons of ponderosity seemed

added to the sinking bulk, and the ship seemed on the point of going

over.

“Hold on, hold on, won’t ye?” cried Stubb to the body, “don’t be in

such a devil of a hurry to sink! By thunder, men, we must do something

or go for it. No use prying there; avast, I say with your handspikes,

and run one of ye for a prayer book and a pen-knife, and cut the big

chains.”

“Knife? Aye, aye,” cried Queequeg, and seizing the carpenter’s heavy

hatchet, he leaned out of a porthole, and steel to iron, began slashing

at the largest fluke-chains. But a few strokes, full of sparks, were

given, when the exceeding strain effected the rest. With a terrific

snap, every fastening went adrift; the ship righted, the carcase sank.

Now, this occasional inevitable sinking of the recently killed Sperm

Whale is a very curious thing; nor has any fisherman yet adequately

accounted for it. Usually the dead Sperm Whale floats with great

buoyancy, with its side or belly considerably elevated above the

surface. If the only whales that thus sank were old, meagre, and

broken-hearted creatures, their pads of lard diminished and all their

bones heavy and rheumatic; then you might with some reason assert that

this sinking is caused by an uncommon specific gravity in the fish so

sinking, consequent upon this absence of buoyant matter in him. But it

is not so. For young whales, in the highest health, and swelling with

noble aspirations, prematurely cut off in the warm flush and May of

life, with all their panting lard about them; even these brawny,

buoyant heroes do sometimes sink.

Be it said, however, that the Sperm Whale is far less liable to this

accident than any other species. Where one of that sort go down, twenty

Right Whales do. This difference in the species is no doubt imputable

in no small degree to the greater quantity of bone in the Right Whale;

his Venetian blinds alone sometimes weighing more than a ton; from this

incumbrance the Sperm Whale is wholly free. But there are instances

where, after the lapse of many hours or several days, the sunken whale

again rises, more buoyant than in life. But the reason of this is

obvious. Gases are generated in him; he swells to a prodigious

magnitude; becomes a sort of animal balloon. A line-of-battle ship

could hardly keep him under then. In the Shore Whaling, on soundings,

among the Bays of New Zealand, when a Right Whale gives token of

sinking, they fasten buoys to him, with plenty of rope; so that when

the body has gone down, they know where to look for it when it shall

have ascended again.

It was not long after the sinking of the body that a cry was heard from

the Pequod’s mast-heads, announcing that the Jungfrau was again

lowering her boats; though the only spout in sight was that of a

Fin-Back, belonging to the species of uncapturable whales, because of

its incredible power of swimming. Nevertheless, the Fin-Back’s spout is

so similar to the Sperm Whale’s, that by unskilful fishermen it is

often mistaken for it. And consequently Derick and all his host were

now in valiant chase of this unnearable brute. The Virgin crowding all

sail, made after her four young keels, and thus they all disappeared

far to leeward, still in bold, hopeful chase.

Oh! many are the Fin-Backs, and many are the Dericks, my friend.

CHAPTER 82. The Honor and Glory of Whaling.

There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the

true method.

The more I dive into this matter of whaling, and push my researches up

to the very spring-head of it so much the more am I impressed with its

great honorableness and antiquity; and especially when I find so many

great demi-gods and heroes, prophets of all sorts, who one way or other

have shed distinction upon it, I am transported with the reflection

that I myself belong, though but subordinately, to so emblazoned a

fraternity.

The gallant Perseus, a son of Jupiter, was the first whaleman; and to

the eternal honor of our calling be it said, that the first whale

attacked by our brotherhood was not killed with any sordid intent.

Those were the knightly days of our profession, when we only bore arms

to succor the distressed, and not to fill men’s lamp-feeders. Every one

knows the fine story of Perseus and Andromeda; how the lovely

Andromeda, the daughter of a king, was tied to a rock on the sea-coast,

and as Leviathan was in the very act of carrying her off, Perseus, the

prince of whalemen, intrepidly advancing, harpooned the monster, and

delivered and married the maid. It was an admirable artistic exploit,

rarely achieved by the best harpooneers of the present day; inasmuch as

this Leviathan was slain at the very first dart. And let no man doubt

this Arkite story; for in the ancient Joppa, now Jaffa, on the Syrian

coast, in one of the Pagan temples, there stood for many ages the vast

skeleton of a whale, which the city’s legends and all the inhabitants

asserted to be the identical bones of the monster that Perseus slew.

When the Romans took Joppa, the same skeleton was carried to Italy in

triumph. What seems most singular and suggestively important in this

story, is this: it was from Joppa that Jonah set sail.

Akin to the adventure of Perseus and Andromeda—indeed, by some supposed

to be indirectly derived from it—is that famous story of St. George and

the Dragon; which dragon I maintain to have been a whale; for in many

old chronicles whales and dragons are strangely jumbled together, and

often stand for each other. “Thou art as a lion of the waters, and as a

dragon of the sea,” saith Ezekiel; hereby, plainly meaning a whale; in

truth, some versions of the Bible use that word itself. Besides, it

would much subtract from the glory of the exploit had St. George but

encountered a crawling reptile of the land, instead of doing battle

with the great monster of the deep. Any man may kill a snake, but only

a Perseus, a St. George, a Coffin, have the heart in them to march

boldly up to a whale.

Let not the modern paintings of this scene mislead us; for though the

creature encountered by that valiant whaleman of old is vaguely

represented of a griffin-like shape, and though the battle is depicted

on land and the saint on horseback, yet considering the great ignorance

of those times, when the true form of the whale was unknown to artists;

and considering that as in Perseus’ case, St. George’s whale might have

crawled up out of the sea on the beach; and considering that the animal

ridden by St. George might have been only a large seal, or sea-horse;

bearing all this in mind, it will not appear altogether incompatible

with the sacred legend and the ancientest draughts of the scene, to

hold this so-called dragon no other than the great Leviathan himself.

In fact, placed before the strict and piercing truth, this whole story

will fare like that fish, flesh, and fowl idol of the Philistines,

Dagon by name; who being planted before the ark of Israel, his horse’s

head and both the palms of his hands fell off from him, and only the

stump or fishy part of him remained. Thus, then, one of our own noble

stamp, even a whaleman, is the tutelary guardian of England; and by

good rights, we harpooneers of Nantucket should be enrolled in the most

noble order of St. George. And therefore, let not the knights of that

honorable company (none of whom, I venture to say, have ever had to do

with a whale like their great patron), let them never eye a Nantucketer

with disdain, since even in our woollen frocks and tarred trowsers we

are much better entitled to St. George’s decoration than they.

Whether to admit Hercules among us or not, concerning this I long

remained dubious: for though according to the Greek mythologies, that

antique Crockett and Kit Carson—that brawny doer of rejoicing good

deeds, was swallowed down and thrown up by a whale; still, whether that

strictly makes a whaleman of him, that might be mooted. It nowhere

appears that he ever actually harpooned his fish, unless, indeed, from

the inside. Nevertheless, he may be deemed a sort of involuntary

whaleman; at any rate the whale caught him, if he did not the whale. I

claim him for one of our clan.

But, by the best contradictory authorities, this Grecian story of

Hercules and the whale is considered to be derived from the still more

ancient Hebrew story of Jonah and the whale; and vice versâ; certainly

they are very similar. If I claim the demi-god then, why not the

prophet?

Nor do heroes, saints, demigods, and prophets alone comprise the whole

roll of our order. Our grand master is still to be named; for like

royal kings of old times, we find the head waters of our fraternity in

nothing short of the great gods themselves. That wondrous oriental

story is now to be rehearsed from the Shaster, which gives us the dread

Vishnoo, one of the three persons in the godhead of the Hindoos; gives

us this divine Vishnoo himself for our Lord;—Vishnoo, who, by the first

of his ten earthly incarnations, has for ever set apart and sanctified

the whale. When Brahma, or the God of Gods, saith the Shaster, resolved

to recreate the world after one of its periodical dissolutions, he gave

birth to Vishnoo, to preside over the work; but the Vedas, or mystical

books, whose perusal would seem to have been indispensable to Vishnoo

before beginning the creation, and which therefore must have contained

something in the shape of practical hints to young architects, these

Vedas were lying at the bottom of the waters; so Vishnoo became

incarnate in a whale, and sounding down in him to the uttermost depths,

rescued the sacred volumes. Was not this Vishnoo a whaleman, then? even

as a man who rides a horse is called a horseman?

Perseus, St. George, Hercules, Jonah, and Vishnoo! there’s a

member-roll for you! What club but the whaleman’s can head off like

that?

CHAPTER 83. Jonah Historically Regarded.

Reference was made to the historical story of Jonah and the whale in

the preceding chapter. Now some Nantucketers rather distrust this

historical story of Jonah and the whale. But then there were some

sceptical Greeks and Romans, who, standing out from the orthodox pagans

of their times, equally doubted the story of Hercules and the whale,

and Arion and the dolphin; and yet their doubting those traditions did

not make those traditions one whit the less facts, for all that.

One old Sag-Harbor whaleman’s chief reason for questioning the Hebrew

story was this:—He had one of those quaint old-fashioned Bibles,

embellished with curious, unscientific plates; one of which represented

Jonah’s whale with two spouts in his head—a peculiarity only true with

respect to a species of the Leviathan (the Right Whale, and the

varieties of that order), concerning which the fishermen have this

saying, “A penny roll would choke him”; his swallow is so very small.

But, to this, Bishop Jebb’s anticipative answer is ready. It is not

necessary, hints the Bishop, that we consider Jonah as tombed in the

whale’s belly, but as temporarily lodged in some part of his mouth. And

this seems reasonable enough in the good Bishop. For truly, the Right

Whale’s mouth would accommodate a couple of whist-tables, and

comfortably seat all the players. Possibly, too, Jonah might have

ensconced himself in a hollow tooth; but, on second thoughts, the Right

Whale is toothless.

Another reason which Sag-Harbor (he went by that name) urged for his

want of faith in this matter of the prophet, was something obscurely in

reference to his incarcerated body and the whale’s gastric juices. But

this objection likewise falls to the ground, because a German exegetist

supposes that Jonah must have taken refuge in the floating body of a

\_dead\_ whale—even as the French soldiers in the Russian campaign turned

their dead horses into tents, and crawled into them. Besides, it has

been divined by other continental commentators, that when Jonah was

thrown overboard from the Joppa ship, he straightway effected his

escape to another vessel near by, some vessel with a whale for a

figure-head; and, I would add, possibly called “The Whale,” as some

craft are nowadays christened the “Shark,” the “Gull,” the “Eagle.” Nor

have there been wanting learned exegetists who have opined that the

whale mentioned in the book of Jonah merely meant a life-preserver—an

inflated bag of wind—which the endangered prophet swam to, and so was

saved from a watery doom. Poor Sag-Harbor, therefore, seems worsted all

round. But he had still another reason for his want of faith. It was

this, if I remember right: Jonah was swallowed by the whale in the

Mediterranean Sea, and after three days he was vomited up somewhere

within three days’ journey of Nineveh, a city on the Tigris, very much

more than three days’ journey across from the nearest point of the

Mediterranean coast. How is that?

But was there no other way for the whale to land the prophet within

that short distance of Nineveh? Yes. He might have carried him round by

the way of the Cape of Good Hope. But not to speak of the passage

through the whole length of the Mediterranean, and another passage up

the Persian Gulf and Red Sea, such a supposition would involve the

complete circumnavigation of all Africa in three days, not to speak of

the Tigris waters, near the site of Nineveh, being too shallow for any

whale to swim in. Besides, this idea of Jonah’s weathering the Cape of

Good Hope at so early a day would wrest the honor of the discovery of

that great headland from Bartholomew Diaz, its reputed discoverer, and

so make modern history a liar.

But all these foolish arguments of old Sag-Harbor only evinced his

foolish pride of reason—a thing still more reprehensible in him, seeing

that he had but little learning except what he had picked up from the

sun and the sea. I say it only shows his foolish, impious pride, and

abominable, devilish rebellion against the reverend clergy. For by a

Portuguese Catholic priest, this very idea of Jonah’s going to Nineveh

via the Cape of Good Hope was advanced as a signal magnification of the

general miracle. And so it was. Besides, to this day, the highly

enlightened Turks devoutly believe in the historical story of Jonah.

And some three centuries ago, an English traveller in old Harris’s

Voyages, speaks of a Turkish Mosque built in honor of Jonah, in which

Mosque was a miraculous lamp that burnt without any oil.

CHAPTER 84. Pitchpoling.

To make them run easily and swiftly, the axles of carriages are

anointed; and for much the same purpose, some whalers perform an

analogous operation upon their boat; they grease the bottom. Nor is it

to be doubted that as such a procedure can do no harm, it may possibly

be of no contemptible advantage; considering that oil and water are

hostile; that oil is a sliding thing, and that the object in view is to

make the boat slide bravely. Queequeg believed strongly in anointing

his boat, and one morning not long after the German ship Jungfrau

disappeared, took more than customary pains in that occupation;

crawling under its bottom, where it hung over the side, and rubbing in

the unctuousness as though diligently seeking to insure a crop of hair

from the craft’s bald keel. He seemed to be working in obedience to

some particular presentiment. Nor did it remain unwarranted by the

event.

Towards noon whales were raised; but so soon as the ship sailed down to

them, they turned and fled with swift precipitancy; a disordered

flight, as of Cleopatra’s barges from Actium.

Nevertheless, the boats pursued, and Stubb’s was foremost. By great

exertion, Tashtego at last succeeded in planting one iron; but the

stricken whale, without at all sounding, still continued his horizontal

flight, with added fleetness. Such unintermitted strainings upon the

planted iron must sooner or later inevitably extract it. It became

imperative to lance the flying whale, or be content to lose him. But to

haul the boat up to his flank was impossible, he swam so fast and

furious. What then remained?

Of all the wondrous devices and dexterities, the sleights of hand and

countless subtleties, to which the veteran whaleman is so often forced,

none exceed that fine manœuvre with the lance called pitchpoling. Small

sword, or broad sword, in all its exercises boasts nothing like it. It

is only indispensable with an inveterate running whale; its grand fact

and feature is the wonderful distance to which the long lance is

accurately darted from a violently rocking, jerking boat, under extreme

headway. Steel and wood included, the entire spear is some ten or

twelve feet in length; the staff is much slighter than that of the

harpoon, and also of a lighter material—pine. It is furnished with a

small rope called a warp, of considerable length, by which it can be

hauled back to the hand after darting.

But before going further, it is important to mention here, that though

the harpoon may be pitchpoled in the same way with the lance, yet it is

seldom done; and when done, is still less frequently successful, on

account of the greater weight and inferior length of the harpoon as

compared with the lance, which in effect become serious drawbacks. As a

general thing, therefore, you must first get fast to a whale, before

any pitchpoling comes into play.

Look now at Stubb; a man who from his humorous, deliberate coolness and

equanimity in the direst emergencies, was specially qualified to excel

in pitchpoling. Look at him; he stands upright in the tossed bow of the

flying boat; wrapt in fleecy foam, the towing whale is forty feet

ahead. Handling the long lance lightly, glancing twice or thrice along

its length to see if it be exactly straight, Stubb whistlingly gathers

up the coil of the warp in one hand, so as to secure its free end in

his grasp, leaving the rest unobstructed. Then holding the lance full

before his waistband’s middle, he levels it at the whale; when,

covering him with it, he steadily depresses the butt-end in his hand,

thereby elevating the point till the weapon stands fairly balanced upon

his palm, fifteen feet in the air. He minds you somewhat of a juggler,

balancing a long staff on his chin. Next moment with a rapid, nameless

impulse, in a superb lofty arch the bright steel spans the foaming

distance, and quivers in the life spot of the whale. Instead of

sparkling water, he now spouts red blood.

“That drove the spigot out of him!” cried Stubb. “’Tis July’s immortal

Fourth; all fountains must run wine today! Would now, it were old

Orleans whiskey, or old Ohio, or unspeakable old Monongahela! Then,

Tashtego, lad, I’d have ye hold a canakin to the jet, and we’d drink

round it! Yea, verily, hearts alive, we’d brew choice punch in the

spread of his spout-hole there, and from that live punch-bowl quaff the

living stuff.”

Again and again to such gamesome talk, the dexterous dart is repeated,

the spear returning to its master like a greyhound held in skilful

leash. The agonized whale goes into his flurry; the tow-line is

slackened, and the pitchpoler dropping astern, folds his hands, and

mutely watches the monster die.

CHAPTER 85. The Fountain.

That for six thousand years—and no one knows how many millions of ages

before—the great whales should have been spouting all over the sea, and

sprinkling and mistifying the gardens of the deep, as with so many

sprinkling or mistifying pots; and that for some centuries back,

thousands of hunters should have been close by the fountain of the

whale, watching these sprinklings and spoutings—that all this should

be, and yet, that down to this blessed minute (fifteen and a quarter

minutes past one o’clock P.M. of this sixteenth day of December, A.D.

1851), it should still remain a problem, whether these spoutings are,

after all, really water, or nothing but vapor—this is surely a

noteworthy thing.

Let us, then, look at this matter, along with some interesting items

contingent. Every one knows that by the peculiar cunning of their

gills, the finny tribes in general breathe the air which at all times

is combined with the element in which they swim; hence, a herring or a

cod might live a century, and never once raise its head above the

surface. But owing to his marked internal structure which gives him

regular lungs, like a human being’s, the whale can only live by

inhaling the disengaged air in the open atmosphere. Wherefore the

necessity for his periodical visits to the upper world. But he cannot

in any degree breathe through his mouth, for, in his ordinary attitude,

the Sperm Whale’s mouth is buried at least eight feet beneath the

surface; and what is still more, his windpipe has no connexion with his

mouth. No, he breathes through his spiracle alone; and this is on the

top of his head.

If I say, that in any creature breathing is only a function

indispensable to vitality, inasmuch as it withdraws from the air a

certain element, which being subsequently brought into contact with the

blood imparts to the blood its vivifying principle, I do not think I

shall err; though I may possibly use some superfluous scientific words.

Assume it, and it follows that if all the blood in a man could be

aerated with one breath, he might then seal up his nostrils and not

fetch another for a considerable time. That is to say, he would then

live without breathing. Anomalous as it may seem, this is precisely the

case with the whale, who systematically lives, by intervals, his full

hour and more (when at the bottom) without drawing a single breath, or

so much as in any way inhaling a particle of air; for, remember, he has

no gills. How is this? Between his ribs and on each side of his spine

he is supplied with a remarkable involved Cretan labyrinth of

vermicelli-like vessels, which vessels, when he quits the surface, are

completely distended with oxygenated blood. So that for an hour or

more, a thousand fathoms in the sea, he carries a surplus stock of

vitality in him, just as the camel crossing the waterless desert

carries a surplus supply of drink for future use in its four

supplementary stomachs. The anatomical fact of this labyrinth is

indisputable; and that the supposition founded upon it is reasonable

and true, seems the more cogent to me, when I consider the otherwise

inexplicable obstinacy of that leviathan in \_having his spoutings out\_,

as the fishermen phrase it. This is what I mean. If unmolested, upon

rising to the surface, the Sperm Whale will continue there for a period

of time exactly uniform with all his other unmolested risings. Say he

stays eleven minutes, and jets seventy times, that is, respires seventy

breaths; then whenever he rises again, he will be sure to have his

seventy breaths over again, to a minute. Now, if after he fetches a few

breaths you alarm him, so that he sounds, he will be always dodging up

again to make good his regular allowance of air. And not till those

seventy breaths are told, will he finally go down to stay out his full

term below. Remark, however, that in different individuals these rates

are different; but in any one they are alike. Now, why should the whale

thus insist upon having his spoutings out, unless it be to replenish

his reservoir of air, ere descending for good? How obvious is it, too,

that this necessity for the whale’s rising exposes him to all the fatal

hazards of the chase. For not by hook or by net could this vast

leviathan be caught, when sailing a thousand fathoms beneath the

sunlight. Not so much thy skill, then, O hunter, as the great

necessities that strike the victory to thee!

In man, breathing is incessantly going on—one breath only serving for

two or three pulsations; so that whatever other business he has to

attend to, waking or sleeping, breathe he must, or die he will. But the

Sperm Whale only breathes about one seventh or Sunday of his time.

It has been said that the whale only breathes through his spout-hole;

if it could truthfully be added that his spouts are mixed with water,

then I opine we should be furnished with the reason why his sense of

smell seems obliterated in him; for the only thing about him that at

all answers to his nose is that identical spout-hole; and being so

clogged with two elements, it could not be expected to have the power

of smelling. But owing to the mystery of the spout—whether it be water

or whether it be vapor—no absolute certainty can as yet be arrived at

on this head. Sure it is, nevertheless, that the Sperm Whale has no

proper olfactories. But what does he want of them? No roses, no

violets, no Cologne-water in the sea.

Furthermore, as his windpipe solely opens into the tube of his spouting

canal, and as that long canal—like the grand Erie Canal—is furnished

with a sort of locks (that open and shut) for the downward retention of

air or the upward exclusion of water, therefore the whale has no voice;

unless you insult him by saying, that when he so strangely rumbles, he

talks through his nose. But then again, what has the whale to say?

Seldom have I known any profound being that had anything to say to this

world, unless forced to stammer out something by way of getting a

living. Oh! happy that the world is such an excellent listener!

Now, the spouting canal of the Sperm Whale, chiefly intended as it is

for the conveyance of air, and for several feet laid along,

horizontally, just beneath the upper surface of his head, and a little

to one side; this curious canal is very much like a gas-pipe laid down

in a city on one side of a street. But the question returns whether

this gas-pipe is also a water-pipe; in other words, whether the spout

of the Sperm Whale is the mere vapor of the exhaled breath, or whether

that exhaled breath is mixed with water taken in at the mouth, and

discharged through the spiracle. It is certain that the mouth

indirectly communicates with the spouting canal; but it cannot be

proved that this is for the purpose of discharging water through the

spiracle. Because the greatest necessity for so doing would seem to be,

when in feeding he accidentally takes in water. But the Sperm Whale’s

food is far beneath the surface, and there he cannot spout even if he

would. Besides, if you regard him very closely, and time him with your

watch, you will find that when unmolested, there is an undeviating

rhyme between the periods of his jets and the ordinary periods of

respiration.

But why pester one with all this reasoning on the subject? Speak out!

You have seen him spout; then declare what the spout is; can you not

tell water from air? My dear sir, in this world it is not so easy to

settle these plain things. I have ever found your plain things the

knottiest of all. And as for this whale spout, you might almost stand

in it, and yet be undecided as to what it is precisely.

The central body of it is hidden in the snowy sparkling mist enveloping

it; and how can you certainly tell whether any water falls from it,

when, always, when you are close enough to a whale to get a close view

of his spout, he is in a prodigious commotion, the water cascading all

around him. And if at such times you should think that you really

perceived drops of moisture in the spout, how do you know that they are

not merely condensed from its vapor; or how do you know that they are

not those identical drops superficially lodged in the spout-hole

fissure, which is countersunk into the summit of the whale’s head? For

even when tranquilly swimming through the mid-day sea in a calm, with

his elevated hump sun-dried as a dromedary’s in the desert; even then,

the whale always carries a small basin of water on his head, as under a

blazing sun you will sometimes see a cavity in a rock filled up with

rain.

Nor is it at all prudent for the hunter to be over curious touching the

precise nature of the whale spout. It will not do for him to be peering

into it, and putting his face in it. You cannot go with your pitcher to

this fountain and fill it, and bring it away. For even when coming into

slight contact with the outer, vapory shreds of the jet, which will

often happen, your skin will feverishly smart, from the acridness of

the thing so touching it. And I know one, who coming into still closer

contact with the spout, whether with some scientific object in view, or

otherwise, I cannot say, the skin peeled off from his cheek and arm.

Wherefore, among whalemen, the spout is deemed poisonous; they try to

evade it. Another thing; I have heard it said, and I do not much doubt

it, that if the jet is fairly spouted into your eyes, it will blind

you. The wisest thing the investigator can do then, it seems to me, is

to let this deadly spout alone.

Still, we can hypothesize, even if we cannot prove and establish. My

hypothesis is this: that the spout is nothing but mist. And besides

other reasons, to this conclusion I am impelled, by considerations

touching the great inherent dignity and sublimity of the Sperm Whale; I

account him no common, shallow being, inasmuch as it is an undisputed

fact that he is never found on soundings, or near shores; all other

whales sometimes are. He is both ponderous and profound. And I am

convinced that from the heads of all ponderous profound beings, such as

Plato, Pyrrho, the Devil, Jupiter, Dante, and so on, there always goes

up a certain semi-visible steam, while in the act of thinking deep

thoughts. While composing a little treatise on Eternity, I had the

curiosity to place a mirror before me; and ere long saw reflected

there, a curious involved worming and undulation in the atmosphere over

my head. The invariable moisture of my hair, while plunged in deep

thought, after six cups of hot tea in my thin shingled attic, of an

August noon; this seems an additional argument for the above

supposition.

And how nobly it raises our conceit of the mighty, misty monster, to

behold him solemnly sailing through a calm tropical sea; his vast, mild

head overhung by a canopy of vapor, engendered by his incommunicable

contemplations, and that vapor—as you will sometimes see it—glorified

by a rainbow, as if Heaven itself had put its seal upon his thoughts.

For, d’ye see, rainbows do not visit the clear air; they only irradiate

vapor. And so, through all the thick mists of the dim doubts in my

mind, divine intuitions now and then shoot, enkindling my fog with a

heavenly ray. And for this I thank God; for all have doubts; many deny;

but doubts or denials, few along with them, have intuitions. Doubts of

all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly; this

combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man who

regards them both with equal eye.

CHAPTER 86. The Tail.

Other poets have warbled the praises of the soft eye of the antelope,

and the lovely plumage of the bird that never alights; less celestial,

I celebrate a tail.

Reckoning the largest sized Sperm Whale’s tail to begin at that point

of the trunk where it tapers to about the girth of a man, it comprises

upon its upper surface alone, an area of at least fifty square feet.

The compact round body of its root expands into two broad, firm, flat

palms or flukes, gradually shoaling away to less than an inch in

thickness. At the crotch or junction, these flukes slightly overlap,

then sideways recede from each other like wings, leaving a wide vacancy

between. In no living thing are the lines of beauty more exquisitely

defined than in the crescentic borders of these flukes. At its utmost

expansion in the full grown whale, the tail will considerably exceed

twenty feet across.

The entire member seems a dense webbed bed of welded sinews; but cut

into it, and you find that three distinct strata compose it:—upper,

middle, and lower. The fibres in the upper and lower layers, are long

and horizontal; those of the middle one, very short, and running

crosswise between the outside layers. This triune structure, as much as

anything else, imparts power to the tail. To the student of old Roman

walls, the middle layer will furnish a curious parallel to the thin

course of tiles always alternating with the stone in those wonderful

relics of the antique, and which undoubtedly contribute so much to the

great strength of the masonry.

But as if this vast local power in the tendinous tail were not enough,

the whole bulk of the leviathan is knit over with a warp and woof of

muscular fibres and filaments, which passing on either side the loins

and running down into the flukes, insensibly blend with them, and

largely contribute to their might; so that in the tail the confluent

measureless force of the whole whale seems concentrated to a point.

Could annihilation occur to matter, this were the thing to do it.

Nor does this—its amazing strength, at all tend to cripple the graceful

flexion of its motions; where infantileness of ease undulates through a

Titanism of power. On the contrary, those motions derive their most

appalling beauty from it. Real strength never impairs beauty or

harmony, but it often bestows it; and in everything imposingly

beautiful, strength has much to do with the magic. Take away the tied

tendons that all over seem bursting from the marble in the carved

Hercules, and its charm would be gone. As devout Eckerman lifted the

linen sheet from the naked corpse of Goethe, he was overwhelmed with

the massive chest of the man, that seemed as a Roman triumphal arch.

When Angelo paints even God the Father in human form, mark what

robustness is there. And whatever they may reveal of the divine love in

the Son, the soft, curled, hermaphroditical Italian pictures, in which

his idea has been most successfully embodied; these pictures, so

destitute as they are of all brawniness, hint nothing of any power, but

the mere negative, feminine one of submission and endurance, which on

all hands it is conceded, form the peculiar practical virtues of his

teachings.

Such is the subtle elasticity of the organ I treat of, that whether

wielded in sport, or in earnest, or in anger, whatever be the mood it

be in, its flexions are invariably marked by exceeding grace. Therein

no fairy’s arm can transcend it.

Five great motions are peculiar to it. First, when used as a fin for

progression; Second, when used as a mace in battle; Third, in sweeping;

Fourth, in lobtailing; Fifth, in peaking flukes.

First: Being horizontal in its position, the Leviathan’s tail acts in a

different manner from the tails of all other sea creatures. It never

wriggles. In man or fish, wriggling is a sign of inferiority. To the

whale, his tail is the sole means of propulsion. Scroll-wise coiled

forwards beneath the body, and then rapidly sprung backwards, it is

this which gives that singular darting, leaping motion to the monster

when furiously swimming. His side-fins only serve to steer by.

Second: It is a little significant, that while one sperm whale only

fights another sperm whale with his head and jaw, nevertheless, in his

conflicts with man, he chiefly and contemptuously uses his tail. In

striking at a boat, he swiftly curves away his flukes from it, and the

blow is only inflicted by the recoil. If it be made in the unobstructed

air, especially if it descend to its mark, the stroke is then simply

irresistible. No ribs of man or boat can withstand it. Your only

salvation lies in eluding it; but if it comes sideways through the

opposing water, then partly owing to the light buoyancy of the

whale-boat, and the elasticity of its materials, a cracked rib or a

dashed plank or two, a sort of stitch in the side, is generally the

most serious result. These submerged side blows are so often received

in the fishery, that they are accounted mere child’s play. Some one

strips off a frock, and the hole is stopped.

Third: I cannot demonstrate it, but it seems to me, that in the whale

the sense of touch is concentrated in the tail; for in this respect

there is a delicacy in it only equalled by the daintiness of the

elephant’s trunk. This delicacy is chiefly evinced in the action of

sweeping, when in maidenly gentleness the whale with a certain soft

slowness moves his immense flukes from side to side upon the surface of

the sea; and if he feel but a sailor’s whisker, woe to that sailor,

whiskers and all. What tenderness there is in that preliminary touch!

Had this tail any prehensile power, I should straightway bethink me of

Darmonodes’ elephant that so frequented the flower-market, and with low

salutations presented nosegays to damsels, and then caressed their

zones. On more accounts than one, a pity it is that the whale does not

possess this prehensile virtue in his tail; for I have heard of yet

another elephant, that when wounded in the fight, curved round his

trunk and extracted the dart.

Fourth: Stealing unawares upon the whale in the fancied security of the

middle of solitary seas, you find him unbent from the vast corpulence

of his dignity, and kitten-like, he plays on the ocean as if it were a

hearth. But still you see his power in his play. The broad palms of his

tail are flirted high into the air; then smiting the surface, the

thunderous concussion resounds for miles. You would almost think a

great gun had been discharged; and if you noticed the light wreath of

vapor from the spiracle at his other extremity, you would think that

that was the smoke from the touch-hole.

Fifth: As in the ordinary floating posture of the leviathan the flukes

lie considerably below the level of his back, they are then completely

out of sight beneath the surface; but when he is about to plunge into

the deeps, his entire flukes with at least thirty feet of his body are

tossed erect in the air, and so remain vibrating a moment, till they

downwards shoot out of view. Excepting the sublime \_breach\_—somewhere

else to be described—this peaking of the whale’s flukes is perhaps the

grandest sight to be seen in all animated nature. Out of the bottomless

profundities the gigantic tail seems spasmodically snatching at the

highest heaven. So in dreams, have I seen majestic Satan thrusting

forth his tormented colossal claw from the flame Baltic of Hell. But in

gazing at such scenes, it is all in all what mood you are in; if in the

Dantean, the devils will occur to you; if in that of Isaiah, the

archangels. Standing at the mast-head of my ship during a sunrise that

crimsoned sky and sea, I once saw a large herd of whales in the east,

all heading towards the sun, and for a moment vibrating in concert with

peaked flukes. As it seemed to me at the time, such a grand embodiment

of adoration of the gods was never beheld, even in Persia, the home of

the fire worshippers. As Ptolemy Philopater testified of the African

elephant, I then testified of the whale, pronouncing him the most

devout of all beings. For according to King Juba, the military

elephants of antiquity often hailed the morning with their trunks

uplifted in the profoundest silence.

The chance comparison in this chapter, between the whale and the

elephant, so far as some aspects of the tail of the one and the trunk

of the other are concerned, should not tend to place those two opposite

organs on an equality, much less the creatures to which they

respectively belong. For as the mightiest elephant is but a terrier to

Leviathan, so, compared with Leviathan’s tail, his trunk is but the

stalk of a lily. The most direful blow from the elephant’s trunk were

as the playful tap of a fan, compared with the measureless crush and

crash of the sperm whale’s ponderous flukes, which in repeated

instances have one after the other hurled entire boats with all their

oars and crews into the air, very much as an Indian juggler tosses his

balls.\*

\*Though all comparison in the way of general bulk between the whale and

the elephant is preposterous, inasmuch as in that particular the

elephant stands in much the same respect to the whale that a dog does

to the elephant; nevertheless, there are not wanting some points of

curious similitude; among these is the spout. It is well known that the

elephant will often draw up water or dust in his trunk, and then

elevating it, jet it forth in a stream.

The more I consider this mighty tail, the more do I deplore my

inability to express it. At times there are gestures in it, which,

though they would well grace the hand of man, remain wholly

inexplicable. In an extensive herd, so remarkable, occasionally, are

these mystic gestures, that I have heard hunters who have declared them

akin to Free-Mason signs and symbols; that the whale, indeed, by these

methods intelligently conversed with the world. Nor are there wanting

other motions of the whale in his general body, full of strangeness,

and unaccountable to his most experienced assailant. Dissect him how I

may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will. But if I

know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much

more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my

back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen.

But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will

about his face, I say again he has no face.

CHAPTER 87. The Grand Armada.

The long and narrow peninsula of Malacca, extending south-eastward from

the territories of Birmah, forms the most southerly point of all Asia.

In a continuous line from that peninsula stretch the long islands of

Sumatra, Java, Bally, and Timor; which, with many others, form a vast

mole, or rampart, lengthwise connecting Asia with Australia, and

dividing the long unbroken Indian ocean from the thickly studded

oriental archipelagoes. This rampart is pierced by several sally-ports

for the convenience of ships and whales; conspicuous among which are

the straits of Sunda and Malacca. By the straits of Sunda, chiefly,

vessels bound to China from the west, emerge into the China seas.

Those narrow straits of Sunda divide Sumatra from Java; and standing

midway in that vast rampart of islands, buttressed by that bold green

promontory, known to seamen as Java Head; they not a little correspond

to the central gateway opening into some vast walled empire: and

considering the inexhaustible wealth of spices, and silks, and jewels,

and gold, and ivory, with which the thousand islands of that oriental

sea are enriched, it seems a significant provision of nature, that such

treasures, by the very formation of the land, should at least bear the

appearance, however ineffectual, of being guarded from the all-grasping

western world. The shores of the Straits of Sunda are unsupplied with

those domineering fortresses which guard the entrances to the

Mediterranean, the Baltic, and the Propontis. Unlike the Danes, these

Orientals do not demand the obsequious homage of lowered top-sails from

the endless procession of ships before the wind, which for centuries

past, by night and by day, have passed between the islands of Sumatra

and Java, freighted with the costliest cargoes of the east. But while

they freely waive a ceremonial like this, they do by no means renounce

their claim to more solid tribute.

Time out of mind the piratical proas of the Malays, lurking among the

low shaded coves and islets of Sumatra, have sallied out upon the

vessels sailing through the straits, fiercely demanding tribute at the

point of their spears. Though by the repeated bloody chastisements they

have received at the hands of European cruisers, the audacity of these

corsairs has of late been somewhat repressed; yet, even at the present

day, we occasionally hear of English and American vessels, which, in

those waters, have been remorselessly boarded and pillaged.

With a fair, fresh wind, the Pequod was now drawing nigh to these

straits; Ahab purposing to pass through them into the Javan sea, and

thence, cruising northwards, over waters known to be frequented here

and there by the Sperm Whale, sweep inshore by the Philippine Islands,

and gain the far coast of Japan, in time for the great whaling season

there. By these means, the circumnavigating Pequod would sweep almost

all the known Sperm Whale cruising grounds of the world, previous to

descending upon the Line in the Pacific; where Ahab, though everywhere

else foiled in his pursuit, firmly counted upon giving battle to Moby

Dick, in the sea he was most known to frequent; and at a season when he

might most reasonably be presumed to be haunting it.

But how now? in this zoned quest, does Ahab touch no land? does his

crew drink air? Surely, he will stop for water. Nay. For a long time,

now, the circus-running sun has raced within his fiery ring, and needs

no sustenance but what’s in himself. So Ahab. Mark this, too, in the

whaler. While other hulls are loaded down with alien stuff, to be

transferred to foreign wharves; the world-wandering whale-ship carries

no cargo but herself and crew, their weapons and their wants. She has a

whole lake’s contents bottled in her ample hold. She is ballasted with

utilities; not altogether with unusable pig-lead and kentledge. She

carries years’ water in her. Clear old prime Nantucket water; which,

when three years afloat, the Nantucketer, in the Pacific, prefers to

drink before the brackish fluid, but yesterday rafted off in casks,

from the Peruvian or Indian streams. Hence it is, that, while other

ships may have gone to China from New York, and back again, touching at

a score of ports, the whale-ship, in all that interval, may not have

sighted one grain of soil; her crew having seen no man but floating

seamen like themselves. So that did you carry them the news that

another flood had come; they would only answer—“Well, boys, here’s the

ark!”

Now, as many Sperm Whales had been captured off the western coast of

Java, in the near vicinity of the Straits of Sunda; indeed, as most of

the ground, roundabout, was generally recognised by the fishermen as an

excellent spot for cruising; therefore, as the Pequod gained more and

more upon Java Head, the look-outs were repeatedly hailed, and

admonished to keep wide awake. But though the green palmy cliffs of the

land soon loomed on the starboard bow, and with delighted nostrils the

fresh cinnamon was snuffed in the air, yet not a single jet was

descried. Almost renouncing all thought of falling in with any game

hereabouts, the ship had well nigh entered the straits, when the

customary cheering cry was heard from aloft, and ere long a spectacle

of singular magnificence saluted us.

But here be it premised, that owing to the unwearied activity with

which of late they have been hunted over all four oceans, the Sperm

Whales, instead of almost invariably sailing in small detached

companies, as in former times, are now frequently met with in extensive

herds, sometimes embracing so great a multitude, that it would almost

seem as if numerous nations of them had sworn solemn league and

covenant for mutual assistance and protection. To this aggregation of

the Sperm Whale into such immense caravans, may be imputed the

circumstance that even in the best cruising grounds, you may now

sometimes sail for weeks and months together, without being greeted by

a single spout; and then be suddenly saluted by what sometimes seems

thousands on thousands.

Broad on both bows, at the distance of some two or three miles, and

forming a great semicircle, embracing one half of the level horizon, a

continuous chain of whale-jets were up-playing and sparkling in the

noon-day air. Unlike the straight perpendicular twin-jets of the Right

Whale, which, dividing at top, fall over in two branches, like the

cleft drooping boughs of a willow, the single forward-slanting spout of

the Sperm Whale presents a thick curled bush of white mist, continually

rising and falling away to leeward.

Seen from the Pequod’s deck, then, as she would rise on a high hill of

the sea, this host of vapory spouts, individually curling up into the

air, and beheld through a blending atmosphere of bluish haze, showed

like the thousand cheerful chimneys of some dense metropolis, descried

of a balmy autumnal morning, by some horseman on a height.

As marching armies approaching an unfriendly defile in the mountains,

accelerate their march, all eagerness to place that perilous passage in

their rear, and once more expand in comparative security upon the

plain; even so did this vast fleet of whales now seem hurrying forward

through the straits; gradually contracting the wings of their

semicircle, and swimming on, in one solid, but still crescentic centre.

Crowding all sail the Pequod pressed after them; the harpooneers

handling their weapons, and loudly cheering from the heads of their yet

suspended boats. If the wind only held, little doubt had they, that

chased through these Straits of Sunda, the vast host would only deploy

into the Oriental seas to witness the capture of not a few of their

number. And who could tell whether, in that congregated caravan, Moby

Dick himself might not temporarily be swimming, like the worshipped

white-elephant in the coronation procession of the Siamese! So with

stun-sail piled on stun-sail, we sailed along, driving these leviathans

before us; when, of a sudden, the voice of Tashtego was heard, loudly

directing attention to something in our wake.

Corresponding to the crescent in our van, we beheld another in our

rear. It seemed formed of detached white vapors, rising and falling

something like the spouts of the whales; only they did not so

completely come and go; for they constantly hovered, without finally

disappearing. Levelling his glass at this sight, Ahab quickly revolved

in his pivot-hole, crying, “Aloft there, and rig whips and buckets to

wet the sails;—Malays, sir, and after us!”

As if too long lurking behind the headlands, till the Pequod should

fairly have entered the straits, these rascally Asiatics were now in

hot pursuit, to make up for their over-cautious delay. But when the

swift Pequod, with a fresh leading wind, was herself in hot chase; how

very kind of these tawny philanthropists to assist in speeding her on

to her own chosen pursuit,—mere riding-whips and rowels to her, that

they were. As with glass under arm, Ahab to-and-fro paced the deck; in

his forward turn beholding the monsters he chased, and in the after one

the bloodthirsty pirates chasing \_him\_; some such fancy as the above

seemed his. And when he glanced upon the green walls of the watery

defile in which the ship was then sailing, and bethought him that

through that gate lay the route to his vengeance, and beheld, how that

through that same gate he was now both chasing and being chased to his

deadly end; and not only that, but a herd of remorseless wild pirates

and inhuman atheistical devils were infernally cheering him on with

their curses;—when all these conceits had passed through his brain,

Ahab’s brow was left gaunt and ribbed, like the black sand beach after

some stormy tide has been gnawing it, without being able to drag the

firm thing from its place.

But thoughts like these troubled very few of the reckless crew; and

when, after steadily dropping and dropping the pirates astern, the

Pequod at last shot by the vivid green Cockatoo Point on the Sumatra

side, emerging at last upon the broad waters beyond; then, the

harpooneers seemed more to grieve that the swift whales had been

gaining upon the ship, than to rejoice that the ship had so

victoriously gained upon the Malays. But still driving on in the wake

of the whales, at length they seemed abating their speed; gradually the

ship neared them; and the wind now dying away, word was passed to

spring to the boats. But no sooner did the herd, by some presumed

wonderful instinct of the Sperm Whale, become notified of the three

keels that were after them,—though as yet a mile in their rear,—than

they rallied again, and forming in close ranks and battalions, so that

their spouts all looked like flashing lines of stacked bayonets, moved

on with redoubled velocity.

Stripped to our shirts and drawers, we sprang to the white-ash, and

after several hours’ pulling were almost disposed to renounce the

chase, when a general pausing commotion among the whales gave animating

token that they were now at last under the influence of that strange

perplexity of inert irresolution, which, when the fishermen perceive it

in the whale, they say he is gallied. The compact martial columns in

which they had been hitherto rapidly and steadily swimming, were now

broken up in one measureless rout; and like King Porus’ elephants in

the Indian battle with Alexander, they seemed going mad with

consternation. In all directions expanding in vast irregular circles,

and aimlessly swimming hither and thither, by their short thick

spoutings, they plainly betrayed their distraction of panic. This was

still more strangely evinced by those of their number, who, completely

paralysed as it were, helplessly floated like water-logged dismantled

ships on the sea. Had these Leviathans been but a flock of simple

sheep, pursued over the pasture by three fierce wolves, they could not

possibly have evinced such excessive dismay. But this occasional

timidity is characteristic of almost all herding creatures. Though

banding together in tens of thousands, the lion-maned buffaloes of the

West have fled before a solitary horseman. Witness, too, all human

beings, how when herded together in the sheepfold of a theatre’s pit,

they will, at the slightest alarm of fire, rush helter-skelter for the

outlets, crowding, trampling, jamming, and remorselessly dashing each

other to death. Best, therefore, withhold any amazement at the

strangely gallied whales before us, for there is no folly of the beasts

of the earth which is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men.

Though many of the whales, as has been said, were in violent motion,

yet it is to be observed that as a whole the herd neither advanced nor

retreated, but collectively remained in one place. As is customary in

those cases, the boats at once separated, each making for some one lone

whale on the outskirts of the shoal. In about three minutes’ time,

Queequeg’s harpoon was flung; the stricken fish darted blinding spray

in our faces, and then running away with us like light, steered

straight for the heart of the herd. Though such a movement on the part

of the whale struck under such circumstances, is in no wise

unprecedented; and indeed is almost always more or less anticipated;

yet does it present one of the more perilous vicissitudes of the

fishery. For as the swift monster drags you deeper and deeper into the

frantic shoal, you bid adieu to circumspect life and only exist in a

delirious throb.

As, blind and deaf, the whale plunged forward, as if by sheer power of

speed to rid himself of the iron leech that had fastened to him; as we

thus tore a white gash in the sea, on all sides menaced as we flew, by

the crazed creatures to and fro rushing about us; our beset boat was

like a ship mobbed by ice-isles in a tempest, and striving to steer

through their complicated channels and straits, knowing not at what

moment it may be locked in and crushed.

But not a bit daunted, Queequeg steered us manfully; now sheering off

from this monster directly across our route in advance; now edging away

from that, whose colossal flukes were suspended overhead, while all the

time, Starbuck stood up in the bows, lance in hand, pricking out of our

way whatever whales he could reach by short darts, for there was no

time to make long ones. Nor were the oarsmen quite idle, though their

wonted duty was now altogether dispensed with. They chiefly attended to

the shouting part of the business. “Out of the way, Commodore!” cried

one, to a great dromedary that of a sudden rose bodily to the surface,

and for an instant threatened to swamp us. “Hard down with your tail,

there!” cried a second to another, which, close to our gunwale, seemed

calmly cooling himself with his own fan-like extremity.

All whaleboats carry certain curious contrivances, originally invented

by the Nantucket Indians, called druggs. Two thick squares of wood of

equal size are stoutly clenched together, so that they cross each

other’s grain at right angles; a line of considerable length is then

attached to the middle of this block, and the other end of the line

being looped, it can in a moment be fastened to a harpoon. It is

chiefly among gallied whales that this drugg is used. For then, more

whales are close round you than you can possibly chase at one time. But

sperm whales are not every day encountered; while you may, then, you

must kill all you can. And if you cannot kill them all at once, you

must wing them, so that they can be afterwards killed at your leisure.

Hence it is, that at times like these the drugg, comes into

requisition. Our boat was furnished with three of them. The first and

second were successfully darted, and we saw the whales staggeringly

running off, fettered by the enormous sidelong resistance of the towing

drugg. They were cramped like malefactors with the chain and ball. But

upon flinging the third, in the act of tossing overboard the clumsy

wooden block, it caught under one of the seats of the boat, and in an

instant tore it out and carried it away, dropping the oarsman in the

boat’s bottom as the seat slid from under him. On both sides the sea

came in at the wounded planks, but we stuffed two or three drawers and

shirts in, and so stopped the leaks for the time.

It had been next to impossible to dart these drugged-harpoons, were it

not that as we advanced into the herd, our whale’s way greatly

diminished; moreover, that as we went still further and further from

the circumference of commotion, the direful disorders seemed waning. So

that when at last the jerking harpoon drew out, and the towing whale

sideways vanished; then, with the tapering force of his parting

momentum, we glided between two whales into the innermost heart of the

shoal, as if from some mountain torrent we had slid into a serene

valley lake. Here the storms in the roaring glens between the outermost

whales, were heard but not felt. In this central expanse the sea

presented that smooth satin-like surface, called a sleek, produced by

the subtle moisture thrown off by the whale in his more quiet moods.

Yes, we were now in that enchanted calm which they say lurks at the

heart of every commotion. And still in the distracted distance we

beheld the tumults of the outer concentric circles, and saw successive

pods of whales, eight or ten in each, swiftly going round and round,

like multiplied spans of horses in a ring; and so closely shoulder to

shoulder, that a Titanic circus-rider might easily have over-arched the

middle ones, and so have gone round on their backs. Owing to the

density of the crowd of reposing whales, more immediately surrounding

the embayed axis of the herd, no possible chance of escape was at

present afforded us. We must watch for a breach in the living wall that

hemmed us in; the wall that had only admitted us in order to shut us

up. Keeping at the centre of the lake, we were occasionally visited by

small tame cows and calves; the women and children of this routed host.

Now, inclusive of the occasional wide intervals between the revolving

outer circles, and inclusive of the spaces between the various pods in

any one of those circles, the entire area at this juncture, embraced by

the whole multitude, must have contained at least two or three square

miles. At any rate—though indeed such a test at such a time might be

deceptive—spoutings might be discovered from our low boat that seemed

playing up almost from the rim of the horizon. I mention this

circumstance, because, as if the cows and calves had been purposely

locked up in this innermost fold; and as if the wide extent of the herd

had hitherto prevented them from learning the precise cause of its

stopping; or, possibly, being so young, unsophisticated, and every way

innocent and inexperienced; however it may have been, these smaller

whales—now and then visiting our becalmed boat from the margin of the

lake—evinced a wondrous fearlessness and confidence, or else a still

becharmed panic which it was impossible not to marvel at. Like

household dogs they came snuffling round us, right up to our gunwales,

and touching them; till it almost seemed that some spell had suddenly

domesticated them. Queequeg patted their foreheads; Starbuck scratched

their backs with his lance; but fearful of the consequences, for the

time refrained from darting it.

But far beneath this wondrous world upon the surface, another and still

stranger world met our eyes as we gazed over the side. For, suspended

in those watery vaults, floated the forms of the nursing mothers of the

whales, and those that by their enormous girth seemed shortly to become

mothers. The lake, as I have hinted, was to a considerable depth

exceedingly transparent; and as human infants while suckling will

calmly and fixedly gaze away from the breast, as if leading two

different lives at the time; and while yet drawing mortal nourishment,

be still spiritually feasting upon some unearthly reminiscence;—even so

did the young of these whales seem looking up towards us, but not at

us, as if we were but a bit of Gulfweed in their new-born sight.

Floating on their sides, the mothers also seemed quietly eyeing us. One

of these little infants, that from certain queer tokens seemed hardly a

day old, might have measured some fourteen feet in length, and some six

feet in girth. He was a little frisky; though as yet his body seemed

scarce yet recovered from that irksome position it had so lately

occupied in the maternal reticule; where, tail to head, and all ready

for the final spring, the unborn whale lies bent like a Tartar’s bow.

The delicate side-fins, and the palms of his flukes, still freshly

retained the plaited crumpled appearance of a baby’s ears newly arrived

from foreign parts.

“Line! line!” cried Queequeg, looking over the gunwale; “him fast! him

fast!—Who line him! Who struck?—Two whale; one big, one little!”

“What ails ye, man?” cried Starbuck.

“Look-e here,” said Queequeg, pointing down.

As when the stricken whale, that from the tub has reeled out hundreds

of fathoms of rope; as, after deep sounding, he floats up again, and

shows the slackened curling line buoyantly rising and spiralling

towards the air; so now, Starbuck saw long coils of the umbilical cord

of Madame Leviathan, by which the young cub seemed still tethered to

its dam. Not seldom in the rapid vicissitudes of the chase, this

natural line, with the maternal end loose, becomes entangled with the

hempen one, so that the cub is thereby trapped. Some of the subtlest

secrets of the seas seemed divulged to us in this enchanted pond. We

saw young Leviathan amours in the deep.\*

\*The sperm whale, as with all other species of the Leviathan, but

unlike most other fish, breeds indifferently at all seasons; after a

gestation which may probably be set down at nine months, producing but

one at a time; though in some few known instances giving birth to an

Esau and Jacob:—a contingency provided for in suckling by two teats,

curiously situated, one on each side of the anus; but the breasts

themselves extend upwards from that. When by chance these precious

parts in a nursing whale are cut by the hunter’s lance, the mother’s

pouring milk and blood rivallingly discolour the sea for rods. The milk

is very sweet and rich; it has been tasted by man; it might do well

with strawberries. When overflowing with mutual esteem, the whales

salute \_more hominum\_.

And thus, though surrounded by circle upon circle of consternations and

affrights, did these inscrutable creatures at the centre freely and

fearlessly indulge in all peaceful concernments; yea, serenely revelled

in dalliance and delight. But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of

my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm;

and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down

and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy.

Meanwhile, as we thus lay entranced, the occasional sudden frantic

spectacles in the distance evinced the activity of the other boats,

still engaged in drugging the whales on the frontier of the host; or

possibly carrying on the war within the first circle, where abundance

of room and some convenient retreats were afforded them. But the sight

of the enraged drugged whales now and then blindly darting to and fro

across the circles, was nothing to what at last met our eyes. It is

sometimes the custom when fast to a whale more than commonly powerful

and alert, to seek to hamstring him, as it were, by sundering or

maiming his gigantic tail-tendon. It is done by darting a short-handled

cutting-spade, to which is attached a rope for hauling it back again. A

whale wounded (as we afterwards learned) in this part, but not

effectually, as it seemed, had broken away from the boat, carrying

along with him half of the harpoon line; and in the extraordinary agony

of the wound, he was now dashing among the revolving circles like the

lone mounted desperado Arnold, at the battle of Saratoga, carrying

dismay wherever he went.

But agonizing as was the wound of this whale, and an appalling

spectacle enough, any way; yet the peculiar horror with which he seemed

to inspire the rest of the herd, was owing to a cause which at first

the intervening distance obscured from us. But at length we perceived

that by one of the unimaginable accidents of the fishery, this whale

had become entangled in the harpoon-line that he towed; he had also run

away with the cutting-spade in him; and while the free end of the rope

attached to that weapon, had permanently caught in the coils of the

harpoon-line round his tail, the cutting-spade itself had worked loose

from his flesh. So that tormented to madness, he was now churning

through the water, violently flailing with his flexible tail, and

tossing the keen spade about him, wounding and murdering his own

comrades.

This terrific object seemed to recall the whole herd from their

stationary fright. First, the whales forming the margin of our lake

began to crowd a little, and tumble against each other, as if lifted by

half spent billows from afar; then the lake itself began faintly to

heave and swell; the submarine bridal-chambers and nurseries vanished;

in more and more contracting orbits the whales in the more central

circles began to swim in thickening clusters. Yes, the long calm was

departing. A low advancing hum was soon heard; and then like to the

tumultuous masses of block-ice when the great river Hudson breaks up in

Spring, the entire host of whales came tumbling upon their inner

centre, as if to pile themselves up in one common mountain. Instantly

Starbuck and Queequeg changed places; Starbuck taking the stern.

“Oars! Oars!” he intensely whispered, seizing the helm—“gripe your

oars, and clutch your souls, now! My God, men, stand by! Shove him off,

you Queequeg—the whale there!—prick him!—hit him! Stand up—stand up,

and stay so! Spring, men—pull, men; never mind their backs—scrape

them!—scrape away!”

The boat was now all but jammed between two vast black bulks, leaving a

narrow Dardanelles between their long lengths. But by desperate

endeavor we at last shot into a temporary opening; then giving way

rapidly, and at the same time earnestly watching for another outlet.

After many similar hair-breadth escapes, we at last swiftly glided into

what had just been one of the outer circles, but now crossed by random

whales, all violently making for one centre. This lucky salvation was

cheaply purchased by the loss of Queequeg’s hat, who, while standing in

the bows to prick the fugitive whales, had his hat taken clean from his

head by the air-eddy made by the sudden tossing of a pair of broad

flukes close by.

Riotous and disordered as the universal commotion now was, it soon

resolved itself into what seemed a systematic movement; for having

clumped together at last in one dense body, they then renewed their

onward flight with augmented fleetness. Further pursuit was useless;

but the boats still lingered in their wake to pick up what drugged

whales might be dropped astern, and likewise to secure one which Flask

had killed and waifed. The waif is a pennoned pole, two or three of

which are carried by every boat; and which, when additional game is at

hand, are inserted upright into the floating body of a dead whale, both

to mark its place on the sea, and also as token of prior possession,

should the boats of any other ship draw near.

The result of this lowering was somewhat illustrative of that sagacious

saying in the Fishery,—the more whales the less fish. Of all the

drugged whales only one was captured. The rest contrived to escape for

the time, but only to be taken, as will hereafter be seen, by some

other craft than the Pequod.

CHAPTER 88. Schools and Schoolmasters.

The previous chapter gave account of an immense body or herd of Sperm

Whales, and there was also then given the probable cause inducing those

vast aggregations.

Now, though such great bodies are at times encountered, yet, as must

have been seen, even at the present day, small detached bands are

occasionally observed, embracing from twenty to fifty individuals each.

Such bands are known as schools. They generally are of two sorts; those

composed almost entirely of females, and those mustering none but young

vigorous males, or bulls, as they are familiarly designated.

In cavalier attendance upon the school of females, you invariably see a

male of full grown magnitude, but not old; who, upon any alarm, evinces

his gallantry by falling in the rear and covering the flight of his

ladies. In truth, this gentleman is a luxurious Ottoman, swimming about

over the watery world, surroundingly accompanied by all the solaces and

endearments of the harem. The contrast between this Ottoman and his

concubines is striking; because, while he is always of the largest

leviathanic proportions, the ladies, even at full growth, are not more

than one-third of the bulk of an average-sized male. They are

comparatively delicate, indeed; I dare say, not to exceed half a dozen

yards round the waist. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied, that upon the

whole they are hereditarily entitled to \_en bon point\_.

It is very curious to watch this harem and its lord in their indolent

ramblings. Like fashionables, they are for ever on the move in

leisurely search of variety. You meet them on the Line in time for the

full flower of the Equatorial feeding season, having just returned,

perhaps, from spending the summer in the Northern seas, and so cheating

summer of all unpleasant weariness and warmth. By the time they have

lounged up and down the promenade of the Equator awhile, they start for

the Oriental waters in anticipation of the cool season there, and so

evade the other excessive temperature of the year.

When serenely advancing on one of these journeys, if any strange

suspicious sights are seen, my lord whale keeps a wary eye on his

interesting family. Should any unwarrantably pert young Leviathan

coming that way, presume to draw confidentially close to one of the

ladies, with what prodigious fury the Bashaw assails him, and chases

him away! High times, indeed, if unprincipled young rakes like him are

to be permitted to invade the sanctity of domestic bliss; though do

what the Bashaw will, he cannot keep the most notorious Lothario out of

his bed; for, alas! all fish bed in common. As ashore, the ladies often

cause the most terrible duels among their rival admirers; just so with

the whales, who sometimes come to deadly battle, and all for love. They

fence with their long lower jaws, sometimes locking them together, and

so striving for the supremacy like elks that warringly interweave their

antlers. Not a few are captured having the deep scars of these

encounters,—furrowed heads, broken teeth, scolloped fins; and in some

instances, wrenched and dislocated mouths.

But supposing the invader of domestic bliss to betake himself away at

the first rush of the harem’s lord, then is it very diverting to watch

that lord. Gently he insinuates his vast bulk among them again and

revels there awhile, still in tantalizing vicinity to young Lothario,

like pious Solomon devoutly worshipping among his thousand concubines.

Granting other whales to be in sight, the fishermen will seldom give

chase to one of these Grand Turks; for these Grand Turks are too lavish

of their strength, and hence their unctuousness is small. As for the

sons and the daughters they beget, why, those sons and daughters must

take care of themselves; at least, with only the maternal help. For

like certain other omnivorous roving lovers that might be named, my

Lord Whale has no taste for the nursery, however much for the bower;

and so, being a great traveller, he leaves his anonymous babies all

over the world; every baby an exotic. In good time, nevertheless, as

the ardour of youth declines; as years and dumps increase; as

reflection lends her solemn pauses; in short, as a general lassitude

overtakes the sated Turk; then a love of ease and virtue supplants the

love for maidens; our Ottoman enters upon the impotent, repentant,

admonitory stage of life, forswears, disbands the harem, and grown to

an exemplary, sulky old soul, goes about all alone among the meridians

and parallels saying his prayers, and warning each young Leviathan from

his amorous errors.

Now, as the harem of whales is called by the fishermen a school, so is

the lord and master of that school technically known as the

schoolmaster. It is therefore not in strict character, however

admirably satirical, that after going to school himself, he should then

go abroad inculcating not what he learned there, but the folly of it.

His title, schoolmaster, would very naturally seem derived from the

name bestowed upon the harem itself, but some have surmised that the

man who first thus entitled this sort of Ottoman whale, must have read

the memoirs of Vidocq, and informed himself what sort of a

country-schoolmaster that famous Frenchman was in his younger days, and

what was the nature of those occult lessons he inculcated into some of

his pupils.

The same secludedness and isolation to which the schoolmaster whale

betakes himself in his advancing years, is true of all aged Sperm

Whales. Almost universally, a lone whale—as a solitary Leviathan is

called—proves an ancient one. Like venerable moss-bearded Daniel Boone,

he will have no one near him but Nature herself; and her he takes to

wife in the wilderness of waters, and the best of wives she is, though

she keeps so many moody secrets.

The schools composing none but young and vigorous males, previously

mentioned, offer a strong contrast to the harem schools. For while

those female whales are characteristically timid, the young males, or

forty-barrel-bulls, as they call them, are by far the most pugnacious

of all Leviathans, and proverbially the most dangerous to encounter;

excepting those wondrous grey-headed, grizzled whales, sometimes met,

and these will fight you like grim fiends exasperated by a penal gout.

The Forty-barrel-bull schools are larger than the harem schools. Like a

mob of young collegians, they are full of fight, fun, and wickedness,

tumbling round the world at such a reckless, rollicking rate, that no

prudent underwriter would insure them any more than he would a riotous

lad at Yale or Harvard. They soon relinquish this turbulence though,

and when about three-fourths grown, break up, and separately go about

in quest of settlements, that is, harems.

Another point of difference between the male and female schools is

still more characteristic of the sexes. Say you strike a

Forty-barrel-bull—poor devil! all his comrades quit him. But strike a

member of the harem school, and her companions swim around her with

every token of concern, sometimes lingering so near her and so long, as

themselves to fall a prey.

CHAPTER 89. Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish.

The allusion to the waif and waif-poles in the last chapter but one,

necessitates some account of the laws and regulations of the whale

fishery, of which the waif may be deemed the grand symbol and badge.

It frequently happens that when several ships are cruising in company,

a whale may be struck by one vessel, then escape, and be finally killed

and captured by another vessel; and herein are indirectly comprised

many minor contingencies, all partaking of this one grand feature. For

example,—after a weary and perilous chase and capture of a whale, the

body may get loose from the ship by reason of a violent storm; and

drifting far away to leeward, be retaken by a second whaler, who, in a

calm, snugly tows it alongside, without risk of life or line. Thus the

most vexatious and violent disputes would often arise between the

fishermen, were there not some written or unwritten, universal,

undisputed law applicable to all cases.

Perhaps the only formal whaling code authorized by legislative

enactment, was that of Holland. It was decreed by the States-General in

A.D. 1695. But though no other nation has ever had any written whaling

law, yet the American fishermen have been their own legislators and

lawyers in this matter. They have provided a system which for terse

comprehensiveness surpasses Justinian’s Pandects and the By-laws of the

Chinese Society for the Suppression of Meddling with other People’s

Business. Yes; these laws might be engraven on a Queen Anne’s farthing,

or the barb of a harpoon, and worn round the neck, so small are they.

I. A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it.

II. A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it.

But what plays the mischief with this masterly code is the admirable

brevity of it, which necessitates a vast volume of commentaries to

expound it.

First: What is a Fast-Fish? Alive or dead a fish is technically fast,

when it is connected with an occupied ship or boat, by any medium at

all controllable by the occupant or occupants,—a mast, an oar, a

nine-inch cable, a telegraph wire, or a strand of cobweb, it is all the

same. Likewise a fish is technically fast when it bears a waif, or any

other recognised symbol of possession; so long as the party waifing it

plainly evince their ability at any time to take it alongside, as well

as their intention so to do.

These are scientific commentaries; but the commentaries of the whalemen

themselves sometimes consist in hard words and harder knocks—the

Coke-upon-Littleton of the fist. True, among the more upright and

honorable whalemen allowances are always made for peculiar cases, where

it would be an outrageous moral injustice for one party to claim

possession of a whale previously chased or killed by another party. But

others are by no means so scrupulous.

Some fifty years ago there was a curious case of whale-trover litigated

in England, wherein the plaintiffs set forth that after a hard chase of

a whale in the Northern seas; and when indeed they (the plaintiffs) had

succeeded in harpooning the fish; they were at last, through peril of

their lives, obliged to forsake not only their lines, but their boat

itself. Ultimately the defendants (the crew of another ship) came up

with the whale, struck, killed, seized, and finally appropriated it

before the very eyes of the plaintiffs. And when those defendants were

remonstrated with, their captain snapped his fingers in the plaintiffs’

teeth, and assured them that by way of doxology to the deed he had

done, he would now retain their line, harpoons, and boat, which had

remained attached to the whale at the time of the seizure. Wherefore

the plaintiffs now sued for the recovery of the value of their whale,

line, harpoons, and boat.

Mr. Erskine was counsel for the defendants; Lord Ellenborough was the

judge. In the course of the defence, the witty Erskine went on to

illustrate his position, by alluding to a recent crim. con. case,

wherein a gentleman, after in vain trying to bridle his wife’s

viciousness, had at last abandoned her upon the seas of life; but in

the course of years, repenting of that step, he instituted an action to

recover possession of her. Erskine was on the other side; and he then

supported it by saying, that though the gentleman had originally

harpooned the lady, and had once had her fast, and only by reason of

the great stress of her plunging viciousness, had at last abandoned

her; yet abandon her he did, so that she became a loose-fish; and

therefore when a subsequent gentleman re-harpooned her, the lady then

became that subsequent gentleman’s property, along with whatever

harpoon might have been found sticking in her.

Now in the present case Erskine contended that the examples of the

whale and the lady were reciprocally illustrative of each other.

These pleadings, and the counter pleadings, being duly heard, the very

learned judge in set terms decided, to wit,—That as for the boat, he

awarded it to the plaintiffs, because they had merely abandoned it to

save their lives; but that with regard to the controverted whale,

harpoons, and line, they belonged to the defendants; the whale, because

it was a Loose-Fish at the time of the final capture; and the harpoons

and line because when the fish made off with them, it (the fish)

acquired a property in those articles; and hence anybody who afterwards

took the fish had a right to them. Now the defendants afterwards took

the fish; ergo, the aforesaid articles were theirs.

A common man looking at this decision of the very learned Judge, might

possibly object to it. But ploughed up to the primary rock of the

matter, the two great principles laid down in the twin whaling laws

previously quoted, and applied and elucidated by Lord Ellenborough in

the above cited case; these two laws touching Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish,

I say, will, on reflection, be found the fundamentals of all human

jurisprudence; for notwithstanding its complicated tracery of

sculpture, the Temple of the Law, like the Temple of the Philistines,

has but two props to stand on.

Is it not a saying in every one’s mouth, Possession is half of the law:

that is, regardless of how the thing came into possession? But often

possession is the whole of the law. What are the sinews and souls of

Russian serfs and Republican slaves but Fast-Fish, whereof possession

is the whole of the law? What to the rapacious landlord is the widow’s

last mite but a Fast-Fish? What is yonder undetected villain’s marble

mansion with a door-plate for a waif; what is that but a Fast-Fish?

What is the ruinous discount which Mordecai, the broker, gets from poor

Woebegone, the bankrupt, on a loan to keep Woebegone’s family from

starvation; what is that ruinous discount but a Fast-Fish? What is the

Archbishop of Savesoul’s income of £100,000 seized from the scant bread

and cheese of hundreds of thousands of broken-backed laborers (all sure

of heaven without any of Savesoul’s help) what is that globular

£100,000 but a Fast-Fish? What are the Duke of Dunder’s hereditary

towns and hamlets but Fast-Fish? What to that redoubted harpooneer,

John Bull, is poor Ireland, but a Fast-Fish? What to that apostolic

lancer, Brother Jonathan, is Texas but a Fast-Fish? And concerning all

these, is not Possession the whole of the law?

But if the doctrine of Fast-Fish be pretty generally applicable, the

kindred doctrine of Loose-Fish is still more widely so. That is

internationally and universally applicable.

What was America in 1492 but a Loose-Fish, in which Columbus struck the

Spanish standard by way of waifing it for his royal master and

mistress? What was Poland to the Czar? What Greece to the Turk? What

India to England? What at last will Mexico be to the United States? All

Loose-Fish.

What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but

Loose-Fish? What all men’s minds and opinions but Loose-Fish? What is

the principle of religious belief in them but a Loose-Fish? What to the

ostentatious smuggling verbalists are the thoughts of thinkers but

Loose-Fish? What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish? And what

are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?

CHAPTER 90. Heads or Tails.

“De balena vero sufficit, si rex habeat caput, et regina caudam.”

\_Bracton, l. 3, c. 3.\_

Latin from the books of the Laws of England, which taken along with the

context, means, that of all whales captured by anybody on the coast of

that land, the King, as Honorary Grand Harpooneer, must have the head,

and the Queen be respectfully presented with the tail. A division

which, in the whale, is much like halving an apple; there is no

intermediate remainder. Now as this law, under a modified form, is to

this day in force in England; and as it offers in various respects a

strange anomaly touching the general law of Fast and Loose-Fish, it is

here treated of in a separate chapter, on the same courteous principle

that prompts the English railways to be at the expense of a separate

car, specially reserved for the accommodation of royalty. In the first

place, in curious proof of the fact that the above-mentioned law is

still in force, I proceed to lay before you a circumstance that

happened within the last two years.

It seems that some honest mariners of Dover, or Sandwich, or some one

of the Cinque Ports, had after a hard chase succeeded in killing and

beaching a fine whale which they had originally descried afar off from

the shore. Now the Cinque Ports are partially or somehow under the

jurisdiction of a sort of policeman or beadle, called a Lord Warden.

Holding the office directly from the crown, I believe, all the royal

emoluments incident to the Cinque Port territories become by assignment

his. By some writers this office is called a sinecure. But not so.

Because the Lord Warden is busily employed at times in fobbing his

perquisites; which are his chiefly by virtue of that same fobbing of

them.

Now when these poor sun-burnt mariners, bare-footed, and with their

trowsers rolled high up on their eely legs, had wearily hauled their

fat fish high and dry, promising themselves a good £150 from the

precious oil and bone; and in fantasy sipping rare tea with their

wives, and good ale with their cronies, upon the strength of their

respective shares; up steps a very learned and most Christian and

charitable gentleman, with a copy of Blackstone under his arm; and

laying it upon the whale’s head, he says—“Hands off! this fish, my

masters, is a Fast-Fish. I seize it as the Lord Warden’s.” Upon this

the poor mariners in their respectful consternation—so truly

English—knowing not what to say, fall to vigorously scratching their

heads all round; meanwhile ruefully glancing from the whale to the

stranger. But that did in nowise mend the matter, or at all soften the

hard heart of the learned gentleman with the copy of Blackstone. At

length one of them, after long scratching about for his ideas, made

bold to speak,

“Please, sir, who is the Lord Warden?”

“The Duke.”

“But the duke had nothing to do with taking this fish?”

“It is his.”

“We have been at great trouble, and peril, and some expense, and is all

that to go to the Duke’s benefit; we getting nothing at all for our

pains but our blisters?”

“It is his.”

“Is the Duke so very poor as to be forced to this desperate mode of

getting a livelihood?”

“It is his.”

“I thought to relieve my old bed-ridden mother by part of my share of

this whale.”

“It is his.”

“Won’t the Duke be content with a quarter or a half?”

“It is his.”

In a word, the whale was seized and sold, and his Grace the Duke of

Wellington received the money. Thinking that viewed in some particular

lights, the case might by a bare possibility in some small degree be

deemed, under the circumstances, a rather hard one, an honest clergyman

of the town respectfully addressed a note to his Grace, begging him to

take the case of those unfortunate mariners into full consideration. To

which my Lord Duke in substance replied (both letters were published)

that he had already done so, and received the money, and would be

obliged to the reverend gentleman if for the future he (the reverend

gentleman) would decline meddling with other people’s business. Is this

the still militant old man, standing at the corners of the three

kingdoms, on all hands coercing alms of beggars?

It will readily be seen that in this case the alleged right of the Duke

to the whale was a delegated one from the Sovereign. We must needs

inquire then on what principle the Sovereign is originally invested

with that right. The law itself has already been set forth. But Plowdon

gives us the reason for it. Says Plowdon, the whale so caught belongs

to the King and Queen, “because of its superior excellence.” And by the

soundest commentators this has ever been held a cogent argument in such

matters.

But why should the King have the head, and the Queen the tail? A reason

for that, ye lawyers!

In his treatise on “Queen-Gold,” or Queen-pinmoney, an old King’s Bench

author, one William Prynne, thus discourseth: “Ye tail is ye Queen’s,

that ye Queen’s wardrobe may be supplied with ye whalebone.” Now this

was written at a time when the black limber bone of the Greenland or

Right whale was largely used in ladies’ bodices. But this same bone is

not in the tail; it is in the head, which is a sad mistake for a

sagacious lawyer like Prynne. But is the Queen a mermaid, to be

presented with a tail? An allegorical meaning may lurk here.

There are two royal fish so styled by the English law writers—the whale

and the sturgeon; both royal property under certain limitations, and

nominally supplying the tenth branch of the crown’s ordinary revenue. I

know not that any other author has hinted of the matter; but by

inference it seems to me that the sturgeon must be divided in the same

way as the whale, the King receiving the highly dense and elastic head

peculiar to that fish, which, symbolically regarded, may possibly be

humorously grounded upon some presumed congeniality. And thus there

seems a reason in all things, even in law.

CHAPTER 91. The Pequod Meets The Rose-Bud.

“In vain it was to rake for Ambergriese in the paunch of this

Leviathan, insufferable fetor denying not inquiry.” \_Sir T. Browne,

V.E.\_

It was a week or two after the last whaling scene recounted, and when

we were slowly sailing over a sleepy, vapory, mid-day sea, that the

many noses on the Pequod’s deck proved more vigilant discoverers than

the three pairs of eyes aloft. A peculiar and not very pleasant smell

was smelt in the sea.

“I will bet something now,” said Stubb, “that somewhere hereabouts are

some of those drugged whales we tickled the other day. I thought they

would keel up before long.”

Presently, the vapors in advance slid aside; and there in the distance

lay a ship, whose furled sails betokened that some sort of whale must

be alongside. As we glided nearer, the stranger showed French colours

from his peak; and by the eddying cloud of vulture sea-fowl that

circled, and hovered, and swooped around him, it was plain that the

whale alongside must be what the fishermen call a blasted whale, that

is, a whale that has died unmolested on the sea, and so floated an

unappropriated corpse. It may well be conceived, what an unsavory odor

such a mass must exhale; worse than an Assyrian city in the plague,

when the living are incompetent to bury the departed. So intolerable

indeed is it regarded by some, that no cupidity could persuade them to

moor alongside of it. Yet are there those who will still do it;

notwithstanding the fact that the oil obtained from such subjects is of

a very inferior quality, and by no means of the nature of

attar-of-rose.

Coming still nearer with the expiring breeze, we saw that the Frenchman

had a second whale alongside; and this second whale seemed even more of

a nosegay than the first. In truth, it turned out to be one of those

problematical whales that seem to dry up and die with a sort of

prodigious dyspepsia, or indigestion; leaving their defunct bodies

almost entirely bankrupt of anything like oil. Nevertheless, in the

proper place we shall see that no knowing fisherman will ever turn up

his nose at such a whale as this, however much he may shun blasted

whales in general.

The Pequod had now swept so nigh to the stranger, that Stubb vowed he

recognised his cutting spade-pole entangled in the lines that were

knotted round the tail of one of these whales.

“There’s a pretty fellow, now,” he banteringly laughed, standing in the

ship’s bows, “there’s a jackal for ye! I well know that these Crappoes

of Frenchmen are but poor devils in the fishery; sometimes lowering

their boats for breakers, mistaking them for Sperm Whale spouts; yes,

and sometimes sailing from their port with their hold full of boxes of

tallow candles, and cases of snuffers, foreseeing that all the oil they

will get won’t be enough to dip the Captain’s wick into; aye, we all

know these things; but look ye, here’s a Crappo that is content with

our leavings, the drugged whale there, I mean; aye, and is content too

with scraping the dry bones of that other precious fish he has there.

Poor devil! I say, pass round a hat, some one, and let’s make him a

present of a little oil for dear charity’s sake. For what oil he’ll get

from that drugged whale there, wouldn’t be fit to burn in a jail; no,

not in a condemned cell. And as for the other whale, why, I’ll agree to

get more oil by chopping up and trying out these three masts of ours,

than he’ll get from that bundle of bones; though, now that I think of

it, it may contain something worth a good deal more than oil; yes,

ambergris. I wonder now if our old man has thought of that. It’s worth

trying. Yes, I’m for it;” and so saying he started for the

quarter-deck.

By this time the faint air had become a complete calm; so that whether

or no, the Pequod was now fairly entrapped in the smell, with no hope

of escaping except by its breezing up again. Issuing from the cabin,

Stubb now called his boat’s crew, and pulled off for the stranger.

Drawing across her bow, he perceived that in accordance with the

fanciful French taste, the upper part of her stem-piece was carved in

the likeness of a huge drooping stalk, was painted green, and for

thorns had copper spikes projecting from it here and there; the whole

terminating in a symmetrical folded bulb of a bright red colour. Upon

her head boards, in large gilt letters, he read “Bouton de

Rose,”—Rose-button, or Rose-bud; and this was the romantic name of this

aromatic ship.

Though Stubb did not understand the \_Bouton\_ part of the inscription,

yet the word \_rose\_, and the bulbous figure-head put together,

sufficiently explained the whole to him.

“A wooden rose-bud, eh?” he cried with his hand to his nose, “that will

do very well; but how like all creation it smells!”

Now in order to hold direct communication with the people on deck, he

had to pull round the bows to the starboard side, and thus come close

to the blasted whale; and so talk over it.

Arrived then at this spot, with one hand still to his nose, he

bawled—“Bouton-de-Rose, ahoy! are there any of you Bouton-de-Roses that

speak English?”

“Yes,” rejoined a Guernsey-man from the bulwarks, who turned out to be

the chief-mate.

“Well, then, my Bouton-de-Rose-bud, have you seen the White Whale?”

“\_What\_ whale?”

“The \_White\_ Whale—a Sperm Whale—Moby Dick, have ye seen him?

“Never heard of such a whale. Cachalot Blanche! White Whale—no.”

“Very good, then; good bye now, and I’ll call again in a minute.”

Then rapidly pulling back towards the Pequod, and seeing Ahab leaning

over the quarter-deck rail awaiting his report, he moulded his two

hands into a trumpet and shouted—“No, Sir! No!” Upon which Ahab

retired, and Stubb returned to the Frenchman.

He now perceived that the Guernsey-man, who had just got into the

chains, and was using a cutting-spade, had slung his nose in a sort of

bag.

“What’s the matter with your nose, there?” said Stubb. “Broke it?”

“I wish it was broken, or that I didn’t have any nose at all!” answered

the Guernsey-man, who did not seem to relish the job he was at very

much. “But what are you holding \_yours\_ for?”

“Oh, nothing! It’s a wax nose; I have to hold it on. Fine day, ain’t

it? Air rather gardenny, I should say; throw us a bunch of posies, will

ye, Bouton-de-Rose?”

“What in the devil’s name do you want here?” roared the Guernseyman,

flying into a sudden passion.

“Oh! keep cool—cool? yes, that’s the word! why don’t you pack those

whales in ice while you’re working at ’em? But joking aside, though; do

you know, Rose-bud, that it’s all nonsense trying to get any oil out of

such whales? As for that dried up one, there, he hasn’t a gill in his

whole carcase.”

“I know that well enough; but, d’ye see, the Captain here won’t believe

it; this is his first voyage; he was a Cologne manufacturer before. But

come aboard, and mayhap he’ll believe you, if he won’t me; and so I’ll

get out of this dirty scrape.”

“Anything to oblige ye, my sweet and pleasant fellow,” rejoined Stubb,

and with that he soon mounted to the deck. There a queer scene

presented itself. The sailors, in tasselled caps of red worsted, were

getting the heavy tackles in readiness for the whales. But they worked

rather slow and talked very fast, and seemed in anything but a good

humor. All their noses upwardly projected from their faces like so many

jib-booms. Now and then pairs of them would drop their work, and run up

to the mast-head to get some fresh air. Some thinking they would catch

the plague, dipped oakum in coal-tar, and at intervals held it to their

nostrils. Others having broken the stems of their pipes almost short

off at the bowl, were vigorously puffing tobacco-smoke, so that it

constantly filled their olfactories.

Stubb was struck by a shower of outcries and anathemas proceeding from

the Captain’s round-house abaft; and looking in that direction saw a

fiery face thrust from behind the door, which was held ajar from

within. This was the tormented surgeon, who, after in vain

remonstrating against the proceedings of the day, had betaken himself

to the Captain’s round-house (\_cabinet\_ he called it) to avoid the

pest; but still, could not help yelling out his entreaties and

indignations at times.

Marking all this, Stubb argued well for his scheme, and turning to the

Guernsey-man had a little chat with him, during which the stranger mate

expressed his detestation of his Captain as a conceited ignoramus, who

had brought them all into so unsavory and unprofitable a pickle.

Sounding him carefully, Stubb further perceived that the Guernsey-man

had not the slightest suspicion concerning the ambergris. He therefore

held his peace on that head, but otherwise was quite frank and

confidential with him, so that the two quickly concocted a little plan

for both circumventing and satirizing the Captain, without his at all

dreaming of distrusting their sincerity. According to this little plan

of theirs, the Guernsey-man, under cover of an interpreter’s office,

was to tell the Captain what he pleased, but as coming from Stubb; and

as for Stubb, he was to utter any nonsense that should come uppermost

in him during the interview.

By this time their destined victim appeared from his cabin. He was a

small and dark, but rather delicate looking man for a sea-captain, with

large whiskers and moustache, however; and wore a red cotton velvet

vest with watch-seals at his side. To this gentleman, Stubb was now

politely introduced by the Guernsey-man, who at once ostentatiously put

on the aspect of interpreting between them.

“What shall I say to him first?” said he.

“Why,” said Stubb, eyeing the velvet vest and the watch and seals, “you

may as well begin by telling him that he looks a sort of babyish to me,

though I don’t pretend to be a judge.”

“He says, Monsieur,” said the Guernsey-man, in French, turning to his

captain, “that only yesterday his ship spoke a vessel, whose captain

and chief-mate, with six sailors, had all died of a fever caught from a

blasted whale they had brought alongside.”

Upon this the captain started, and eagerly desired to know more.

“What now?” said the Guernsey-man to Stubb.

“Why, since he takes it so easy, tell him that now I have eyed him

carefully, I’m quite certain that he’s no more fit to command a

whale-ship than a St. Jago monkey. In fact, tell him from me he’s a

baboon.”

“He vows and declares, Monsieur, that the other whale, the dried one,

is far more deadly than the blasted one; in fine, Monsieur, he conjures

us, as we value our lives, to cut loose from these fish.”

Instantly the captain ran forward, and in a loud voice commanded his

crew to desist from hoisting the cutting-tackles, and at once cast

loose the cables and chains confining the whales to the ship.

“What now?” said the Guernsey-man, when the Captain had returned to

them.

“Why, let me see; yes, you may as well tell him now that—that—in fact,

tell him I’ve diddled him, and (aside to himself) perhaps somebody

else.”

“He says, Monsieur, that he’s very happy to have been of any service to

us.”

Hearing this, the captain vowed that they were the grateful parties

(meaning himself and mate) and concluded by inviting Stubb down into

his cabin to drink a bottle of Bordeaux.

“He wants you to take a glass of wine with him,” said the interpreter.

“Thank him heartily; but tell him it’s against my principles to drink

with the man I’ve diddled. In fact, tell him I must go.”

“He says, Monsieur, that his principles won’t admit of his drinking;

but that if Monsieur wants to live another day to drink, then Monsieur

had best drop all four boats, and pull the ship away from these whales,

for it’s so calm they won’t drift.”

By this time Stubb was over the side, and getting into his boat, hailed

the Guernsey-man to this effect,—that having a long tow-line in his

boat, he would do what he could to help them, by pulling out the

lighter whale of the two from the ship’s side. While the Frenchman’s

boats, then, were engaged in towing the ship one way, Stubb

benevolently towed away at his whale the other way, ostentatiously

slacking out a most unusually long tow-line.

Presently a breeze sprang up; Stubb feigned to cast off from the whale;

hoisting his boats, the Frenchman soon increased his distance, while

the Pequod slid in between him and Stubb’s whale. Whereupon Stubb

quickly pulled to the floating body, and hailing the Pequod to give

notice of his intentions, at once proceeded to reap the fruit of his

unrighteous cunning. Seizing his sharp boat-spade, he commenced an

excavation in the body, a little behind the side fin. You would almost

have thought he was digging a cellar there in the sea; and when at

length his spade struck against the gaunt ribs, it was like turning up

old Roman tiles and pottery buried in fat English loam. His boat’s crew

were all in high excitement, eagerly helping their chief, and looking

as anxious as gold-hunters.

And all the time numberless fowls were diving, and ducking, and

screaming, and yelling, and fighting around them. Stubb was beginning

to look disappointed, especially as the horrible nosegay increased,

when suddenly from out the very heart of this plague, there stole a

faint stream of perfume, which flowed through the tide of bad smells

without being absorbed by it, as one river will flow into and then

along with another, without at all blending with it for a time.

“I have it, I have it,” cried Stubb, with delight, striking something

in the subterranean regions, “a purse! a purse!”

Dropping his spade, he thrust both hands in, and drew out handfuls of

something that looked like ripe Windsor soap, or rich mottled old

cheese; very unctuous and savory withal. You might easily dent it with

your thumb; it is of a hue between yellow and ash colour. And this,

good friends, is ambergris, worth a gold guinea an ounce to any

druggist. Some six handfuls were obtained; but more was unavoidably

lost in the sea, and still more, perhaps, might have been secured were

it not for impatient Ahab’s loud command to Stubb to desist, and come

on board, else the ship would bid them good bye.

CHAPTER 92. Ambergris.

Now this ambergris is a very curious substance, and so important as an

article of commerce, that in 1791 a certain Nantucket-born Captain

Coffin was examined at the bar of the English House of Commons on that

subject. For at that time, and indeed until a comparatively late day,

the precise origin of ambergris remained, like amber itself, a problem

to the learned. Though the word ambergris is but the French compound

for grey amber, yet the two substances are quite distinct. For amber,

though at times found on the sea-coast, is also dug up in some far

inland soils, whereas ambergris is never found except upon the sea.

Besides, amber is a hard, transparent, brittle, odorless substance,

used for mouth-pieces to pipes, for beads and ornaments; but ambergris

is soft, waxy, and so highly fragrant and spicy, that it is largely

used in perfumery, in pastiles, precious candles, hair-powders, and

pomatum. The Turks use it in cooking, and also carry it to Mecca, for

the same purpose that frankincense is carried to St. Peter’s in Rome.

Some wine merchants drop a few grains into claret, to flavor it.

Who would think, then, that such fine ladies and gentlemen should

regale themselves with an essence found in the inglorious bowels of a

sick whale! Yet so it is. By some, ambergris is supposed to be the

cause, and by others the effect, of the dyspepsia in the whale. How to

cure such a dyspepsia it were hard to say, unless by administering

three or four boat loads of Brandreth’s pills, and then running out of

harm’s way, as laborers do in blasting rocks.

I have forgotten to say that there were found in this ambergris,

certain hard, round, bony plates, which at first Stubb thought might be

sailors’ trowsers buttons; but it afterwards turned out that they were

nothing more than pieces of small squid bones embalmed in that manner.

Now that the incorruption of this most fragrant ambergris should be

found in the heart of such decay; is this nothing? Bethink thee of that

saying of St. Paul in Corinthians, about corruption and incorruption;

how that we are sown in dishonor, but raised in glory. And likewise

call to mind that saying of Paracelsus about what it is that maketh the

best musk. Also forget not the strange fact that of all things of

ill-savor, Cologne-water, in its rudimental manufacturing stages, is

the worst.

I should like to conclude the chapter with the above appeal, but

cannot, owing to my anxiety to repel a charge often made against

whalemen, and which, in the estimation of some already biased minds,

might be considered as indirectly substantiated by what has been said

of the Frenchman’s two whales. Elsewhere in this volume the slanderous

aspersion has been disproved, that the vocation of whaling is

throughout a slatternly, untidy business. But there is another thing to

rebut. They hint that all whales always smell bad. Now how did this

odious stigma originate?

I opine, that it is plainly traceable to the first arrival of the

Greenland whaling ships in London, more than two centuries ago. Because

those whalemen did not then, and do not now, try out their oil at sea

as the Southern ships have always done; but cutting up the fresh

blubber in small bits, thrust it through the bung holes of large casks,

and carry it home in that manner; the shortness of the season in those

Icy Seas, and the sudden and violent storms to which they are exposed,

forbidding any other course. The consequence is, that upon breaking

into the hold, and unloading one of these whale cemeteries, in the

Greenland dock, a savor is given forth somewhat similar to that arising

from excavating an old city grave-yard, for the foundations of a

Lying-in Hospital.

I partly surmise also, that this wicked charge against whalers may be

likewise imputed to the existence on the coast of Greenland, in former

times, of a Dutch village called Schmerenburgh or Smeerenberg, which

latter name is the one used by the learned Fogo Von Slack, in his great

work on Smells, a text-book on that subject. As its name imports

(smeer, fat; berg, to put up), this village was founded in order to

afford a place for the blubber of the Dutch whale fleet to be tried

out, without being taken home to Holland for that purpose. It was a

collection of furnaces, fat-kettles, and oil sheds; and when the works

were in full operation certainly gave forth no very pleasant savor. But

all this is quite different with a South Sea Sperm Whaler; which in a

voyage of four years perhaps, after completely filling her hold with

oil, does not, perhaps, consume fifty days in the business of boiling

out; and in the state that it is casked, the oil is nearly scentless.

The truth is, that living or dead, if but decently treated, whales as a

species are by no means creatures of ill odor; nor can whalemen be

recognised, as the people of the middle ages affected to detect a Jew

in the company, by the nose. Nor indeed can the whale possibly be

otherwise than fragrant, when, as a general thing, he enjoys such high

health; taking abundance of exercise; always out of doors; though, it

is true, seldom in the open air. I say, that the motion of a Sperm

Whale’s flukes above water dispenses a perfume, as when a musk-scented

lady rustles her dress in a warm parlor. What then shall I liken the

Sperm Whale to for fragrance, considering his magnitude? Must it not be

to that famous elephant, with jewelled tusks, and redolent with myrrh,

which was led out of an Indian town to do honor to Alexander the Great?

CHAPTER 93. The Castaway.

It was but some few days after encountering the Frenchman, that a most

significant event befell the most insignificant of the Pequod’s crew;

an event most lamentable; and which ended in providing the sometimes

madly merry and predestinated craft with a living and ever accompanying

prophecy of whatever shattered sequel might prove her own.

Now, in the whale ship, it is not every one that goes in the boats.

Some few hands are reserved called ship-keepers, whose province it is

to work the vessel while the boats are pursuing the whale. As a general

thing, these ship-keepers are as hardy fellows as the men comprising

the boats’ crews. But if there happen to be an unduly slender, clumsy,

or timorous wight in the ship, that wight is certain to be made a

ship-keeper. It was so in the Pequod with the little negro Pippin by

nick-name, Pip by abbreviation. Poor Pip! ye have heard of him before;

ye must remember his tambourine on that dramatic midnight, so

gloomy-jolly.

In outer aspect, Pip and Dough-Boy made a match, like a black pony and

a white one, of equal developments, though of dissimilar colour, driven

in one eccentric span. But while hapless Dough-Boy was by nature dull

and torpid in his intellects, Pip, though over tender-hearted, was at

bottom very bright, with that pleasant, genial, jolly brightness

peculiar to his tribe; a tribe, which ever enjoy all holidays and

festivities with finer, freer relish than any other race. For blacks,

the year’s calendar should show naught but three hundred and sixty-five

Fourth of Julys and New Year’s Days. Nor smile so, while I write that

this little black was brilliant, for even blackness has its brilliancy;

behold yon lustrous ebony, panelled in king’s cabinets. But Pip loved

life, and all life’s peaceable securities; so that the panic-striking

business in which he had somehow unaccountably become entrapped, had

most sadly blurred his brightness; though, as ere long will be seen,

what was thus temporarily subdued in him, in the end was destined to be

luridly illumined by strange wild fires, that fictitiously showed him

off to ten times the natural lustre with which in his native Tolland

County in Connecticut, he had once enlivened many a fiddler’s frolic on

the green; and at melodious even-tide, with his gay ha-ha! had turned

the round horizon into one star-belled tambourine. So, though in the

clear air of day, suspended against a blue-veined neck, the

pure-watered diamond drop will healthful glow; yet, when the cunning

jeweller would show you the diamond in its most impressive lustre, he

lays it against a gloomy ground, and then lights it up, not by the sun,

but by some unnatural gases. Then come out those fiery effulgences,

infernally superb; then the evil-blazing diamond, once the divinest

symbol of the crystal skies, looks like some crown-jewel stolen from

the King of Hell. But let us to the story.

It came to pass, that in the ambergris affair Stubb’s after-oarsman

chanced so to sprain his hand, as for a time to become quite maimed;

and, temporarily, Pip was put into his place.

The first time Stubb lowered with him, Pip evinced much nervousness;

but happily, for that time, escaped close contact with the whale; and

therefore came off not altogether discreditably; though Stubb observing

him, took care, afterwards, to exhort him to cherish his courageousness

to the utmost, for he might often find it needful.

Now upon the second lowering, the boat paddled upon the whale; and as

the fish received the darted iron, it gave its customary rap, which

happened, in this instance, to be right under poor Pip’s seat. The

involuntary consternation of the moment caused him to leap, paddle in

hand, out of the boat; and in such a way, that part of the slack whale

line coming against his chest, he breasted it overboard with him, so as

to become entangled in it, when at last plumping into the water. That

instant the stricken whale started on a fierce run, the line swiftly

straightened; and presto! poor Pip came all foaming up to the chocks of

the boat, remorselessly dragged there by the line, which had taken

several turns around his chest and neck.

Tashtego stood in the bows. He was full of the fire of the hunt. He

hated Pip for a poltroon. Snatching the boat-knife from its sheath, he

suspended its sharp edge over the line, and turning towards Stubb,

exclaimed interrogatively, “Cut?” Meantime Pip’s blue, choked face

plainly looked, Do, for God’s sake! All passed in a flash. In less than

half a minute, this entire thing happened.

“Damn him, cut!” roared Stubb; and so the whale was lost and Pip was

saved.

So soon as he recovered himself, the poor little negro was assailed by

yells and execrations from the crew. Tranquilly permitting these

irregular cursings to evaporate, Stubb then in a plain, business-like,

but still half humorous manner, cursed Pip officially; and that done,

unofficially gave him much wholesome advice. The substance was, Never

jump from a boat, Pip, except—but all the rest was indefinite, as the

soundest advice ever is. Now, in general, \_Stick to the boat\_, is your

true motto in whaling; but cases will sometimes happen when \_Leap from

the boat\_, is still better. Moreover, as if perceiving at last that if

he should give undiluted conscientious advice to Pip, he would be

leaving him too wide a margin to jump in for the future; Stubb suddenly

dropped all advice, and concluded with a peremptory command, “Stick to

the boat, Pip, or by the Lord, I won’t pick you up if you jump; mind

that. We can’t afford to lose whales by the likes of you; a whale would

sell for thirty times what you would, Pip, in Alabama. Bear that in

mind, and don’t jump any more.” Hereby perhaps Stubb indirectly hinted,

that though man loved his fellow, yet man is a money-making animal,

which propensity too often interferes with his benevolence.

But we are all in the hands of the Gods; and Pip jumped again. It was

under very similar circumstances to the first performance; but this

time he did not breast out the line; and hence, when the whale started

to run, Pip was left behind on the sea, like a hurried traveller’s

trunk. Alas! Stubb was but too true to his word. It was a beautiful,

bounteous, blue day; the spangled sea calm and cool, and flatly

stretching away, all round, to the horizon, like gold-beater’s skin

hammered out to the extremest. Bobbing up and down in that sea, Pip’s

ebon head showed like a head of cloves. No boat-knife was lifted when

he fell so rapidly astern. Stubb’s inexorable back was turned upon him;

and the whale was winged. In three minutes, a whole mile of shoreless

ocean was between Pip and Stubb. Out from the centre of the sea, poor

Pip turned his crisp, curling, black head to the sun, another lonely

castaway, though the loftiest and the brightest.

Now, in calm weather, to swim in the open ocean is as easy to the

practised swimmer as to ride in a spring-carriage ashore. But the awful

lonesomeness is intolerable. The intense concentration of self in the

middle of such a heartless immensity, my God! who can tell it? Mark,

how when sailors in a dead calm bathe in the open sea—mark how closely

they hug their ship and only coast along her sides.

But had Stubb really abandoned the poor little negro to his fate? No;

he did not mean to, at least. Because there were two boats in his wake,

and he supposed, no doubt, that they would of course come up to Pip

very quickly, and pick him up; though, indeed, such considerations

towards oarsmen jeopardized through their own timidity, is not always

manifested by the hunters in all similar instances; and such instances

not unfrequently occur; almost invariably in the fishery, a coward, so

called, is marked with the same ruthless detestation peculiar to

military navies and armies.

But it so happened, that those boats, without seeing Pip, suddenly

spying whales close to them on one side, turned, and gave chase; and

Stubb’s boat was now so far away, and he and all his crew so intent

upon his fish, that Pip’s ringed horizon began to expand around him

miserably. By the merest chance the ship itself at last rescued him;

but from that hour the little negro went about the deck an idiot; such,

at least, they said he was. The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body

up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though.

Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of

the unwarped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes;

and the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the

joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous,

God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters

heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God’s foot upon the treadle of the

loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So

man’s insanity is heaven’s sense; and wandering from all mortal reason,

man comes at last to that celestial thought, which, to reason, is

absurd and frantic; and weal or woe, feels then uncompromised,

indifferent as his God.

For the rest, blame not Stubb too hardly. The thing is common in that

fishery; and in the sequel of the narrative, it will then be seen what

like abandonment befell myself.

CHAPTER 94. A Squeeze of the Hand.

That whale of Stubb’s, so dearly purchased, was duly brought to the

Pequod’s side, where all those cutting and hoisting operations

previously detailed, were regularly gone through, even to the baling of

the Heidelburgh Tun, or Case.

While some were occupied with this latter duty, others were employed in

dragging away the larger tubs, so soon as filled with the sperm; and

when the proper time arrived, this same sperm was carefully manipulated

ere going to the try-works, of which anon.

It had cooled and crystallized to such a degree, that when, with

several others, I sat down before a large Constantine’s bath of it, I

found it strangely concreted into lumps, here and there rolling about

in the liquid part. It was our business to squeeze these lumps back

into fluid. A sweet and unctuous duty! No wonder that in old times this

sperm was such a favourite cosmetic. Such a clearer! such a sweetener!

such a softener! such a delicious molifier! After having my hands in it

for only a few minutes, my fingers felt like eels, and began, as it

were, to serpentine and spiralise.

As I sat there at my ease, cross-legged on the deck; after the bitter

exertion at the windlass; under a blue tranquil sky; the ship under

indolent sail, and gliding so serenely along; as I bathed my hands

among those soft, gentle globules of infiltrated tissues, woven almost

within the hour; as they richly broke to my fingers, and discharged all

their opulence, like fully ripe grapes their wine; as I snuffed up that

uncontaminated aroma,—literally and truly, like the smell of spring

violets; I declare to you, that for the time I lived as in a musky

meadow; I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible

sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it; I almost began to credit

the old Paracelsan superstition that sperm is of rare virtue in

allaying the heat of anger; while bathing in that bath, I felt divinely

free from all ill-will, or petulance, or malice, of any sort

whatsoever.

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm

till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a

strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly

squeezing my co-laborers’ hands in it, mistaking their hands for the

gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving

feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually

squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as

much as to say,—Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish

any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come;

let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into

each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and

sperm of kindness.

Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, since

by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all

cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of

attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the

fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the

fireside, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready

to squeeze case eternally. In thoughts of the visions of the night, I

saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of

spermaceti.

Now, while discoursing of sperm, it behooves to speak of other things

akin to it, in the business of preparing the sperm whale for the

try-works.

First comes white-horse, so called, which is obtained from the tapering

part of the fish, and also from the thicker portions of his flukes. It

is tough with congealed tendons—a wad of muscle—but still contains some

oil. After being severed from the whale, the white-horse is first cut

into portable oblongs ere going to the mincer. They look much like

blocks of Berkshire marble.

Plum-pudding is the term bestowed upon certain fragmentary parts of the

whale’s flesh, here and there adhering to the blanket of blubber, and

often participating to a considerable degree in its unctuousness. It is

a most refreshing, convivial, beautiful object to behold. As its name

imports, it is of an exceedingly rich, mottled tint, with a bestreaked

snowy and golden ground, dotted with spots of the deepest crimson and

purple. It is plums of rubies, in pictures of citron. Spite of reason,

it is hard to keep yourself from eating it. I confess, that once I

stole behind the foremast to try it. It tasted something as I should

conceive a royal cutlet from the thigh of Louis le Gros might have

tasted, supposing him to have been killed the first day after the

venison season, and that particular venison season contemporary with an

unusually fine vintage of the vineyards of Champagne.

There is another substance, and a very singular one, which turns up in

the course of this business, but which I feel it to be very puzzling

adequately to describe. It is called slobgollion; an appellation

original with the whalemen, and even so is the nature of the substance.

It is an ineffably oozy, stringy affair, most frequently found in the

tubs of sperm, after a prolonged squeezing, and subsequent decanting. I

hold it to be the wondrously thin, ruptured membranes of the case,

coalescing.

Gurry, so called, is a term properly belonging to right whalemen, but

sometimes incidentally used by the sperm fishermen. It designates the

dark, glutinous substance which is scraped off the back of the

Greenland or right whale, and much of which covers the decks of those

inferior souls who hunt that ignoble Leviathan.

Nippers. Strictly this word is not indigenous to the whale’s

vocabulary. But as applied by whalemen, it becomes so. A whaleman’s

nipper is a short firm strip of tendinous stuff cut from the tapering

part of Leviathan’s tail: it averages an inch in thickness, and for the

rest, is about the size of the iron part of a hoe. Edgewise moved along

the oily deck, it operates like a leathern squilgee; and by nameless

blandishments, as of magic, allures along with it all impurities.

But to learn all about these recondite matters, your best way is at

once to descend into the blubber-room, and have a long talk with its

inmates. This place has previously been mentioned as the receptacle for

the blanket-pieces, when stript and hoisted from the whale. When the

proper time arrives for cutting up its contents, this apartment is a

scene of terror to all tyros, especially by night. On one side, lit by

a dull lantern, a space has been left clear for the workmen. They

generally go in pairs,—a pike-and-gaffman and a spade-man. The

whaling-pike is similar to a frigate’s boarding-weapon of the same

name. The gaff is something like a boat-hook. With his gaff, the

gaffman hooks on to a sheet of blubber, and strives to hold it from

slipping, as the ship pitches and lurches about. Meanwhile, the

spade-man stands on the sheet itself, perpendicularly chopping it into

the portable horse-pieces. This spade is sharp as hone can make it; the

spademan’s feet are shoeless; the thing he stands on will sometimes

irresistibly slide away from him, like a sledge. If he cuts off one of

his own toes, or one of his assistants’, would you be very much

astonished? Toes are scarce among veteran blubber-room men.

CHAPTER 95. The Cassock.

Had you stepped on board the Pequod at a certain juncture of this

post-mortemizing of the whale; and had you strolled forward nigh the

windlass, pretty sure am I that you would have scanned with no small

curiosity a very strange, enigmatical object, which you would have seen

there, lying along lengthwise in the lee scuppers. Not the wondrous

cistern in the whale’s huge head; not the prodigy of his unhinged lower

jaw; not the miracle of his symmetrical tail; none of these would so

surprise you, as half a glimpse of that unaccountable cone,—longer than

a Kentuckian is tall, nigh a foot in diameter at the base, and

jet-black as Yojo, the ebony idol of Queequeg. And an idol, indeed, it

is; or, rather, in old times, its likeness was. Such an idol as that

found in the secret groves of Queen Maachah in Judea; and for

worshipping which, King Asa, her son, did depose her, and destroyed the

idol, and burnt it for an abomination at the brook Kedron, as darkly

set forth in the 15th chapter of the First Book of Kings.

Look at the sailor, called the mincer, who now comes along, and

assisted by two allies, heavily backs the grandissimus, as the mariners

call it, and with bowed shoulders, staggers off with it as if he were a

grenadier carrying a dead comrade from the field. Extending it upon the

forecastle deck, he now proceeds cylindrically to remove its dark pelt,

as an African hunter the pelt of a boa. This done he turns the pelt

inside out, like a pantaloon leg; gives it a good stretching, so as

almost to double its diameter; and at last hangs it, well spread, in

the rigging, to dry. Ere long, it is taken down; when removing some

three feet of it, towards the pointed extremity, and then cutting two

slits for arm-holes at the other end, he lengthwise slips himself

bodily into it. The mincer now stands before you invested in the full

canonicals of his calling. Immemorial to all his order, this

investiture alone will adequately protect him, while employed in the

peculiar functions of his office.

That office consists in mincing the horse-pieces of blubber for the

pots; an operation which is conducted at a curious wooden horse,

planted endwise against the bulwarks, and with a capacious tub beneath

it, into which the minced pieces drop, fast as the sheets from a rapt

orator’s desk. Arrayed in decent black; occupying a conspicuous pulpit;

intent on bible leaves; what a candidate for an archbishopric, what a

lad for a Pope were this mincer!\*

\*Bible leaves! Bible leaves! This is the invariable cry from the mates

to the mincer. It enjoins him to be careful, and cut his work into as

thin slices as possible, inasmuch as by so doing the business of

boiling out the oil is much accelerated, and its quantity considerably

increased, besides perhaps improving it in quality.

CHAPTER 96. The Try-Works.

Besides her hoisted boats, an American whaler is outwardly

distinguished by her try-works. She presents the curious anomaly of the

most solid masonry joining with oak and hemp in constituting the

completed ship. It is as if from the open field a brick-kiln were

transported to her planks.

The try-works are planted between the foremast and mainmast, the most

roomy part of the deck. The timbers beneath are of a peculiar strength,

fitted to sustain the weight of an almost solid mass of brick and

mortar, some ten feet by eight square, and five in height. The

foundation does not penetrate the deck, but the masonry is firmly

secured to the surface by ponderous knees of iron bracing it on all

sides, and screwing it down to the timbers. On the flanks it is cased

with wood, and at top completely covered by a large, sloping, battened

hatchway. Removing this hatch we expose the great try-pots, two in

number, and each of several barrels’ capacity. When not in use, they

are kept remarkably clean. Sometimes they are polished with soapstone

and sand, till they shine within like silver punch-bowls. During the

night-watches some cynical old sailors will crawl into them and coil

themselves away there for a nap. While employed in polishing them—one

man in each pot, side by side—many confidential communications are

carried on, over the iron lips. It is a place also for profound

mathematical meditation. It was in the left hand try-pot of the Pequod,

with the soapstone diligently circling round me, that I was first

indirectly struck by the remarkable fact, that in geometry all bodies

gliding along the cycloid, my soapstone for example, will descend from

any point in precisely the same time.

Removing the fire-board from the front of the try-works, the bare

masonry of that side is exposed, penetrated by the two iron mouths of

the furnaces, directly underneath the pots. These mouths are fitted

with heavy doors of iron. The intense heat of the fire is prevented

from communicating itself to the deck, by means of a shallow reservoir

extending under the entire inclosed surface of the works. By a tunnel

inserted at the rear, this reservoir is kept replenished with water as

fast as it evaporates. There are no external chimneys; they open direct

from the rear wall. And here let us go back for a moment.

It was about nine o’clock at night that the Pequod’s try-works were

first started on this present voyage. It belonged to Stubb to oversee

the business.

“All ready there? Off hatch, then, and start her. You cook, fire the

works.” This was an easy thing, for the carpenter had been thrusting

his shavings into the furnace throughout the passage. Here be it said

that in a whaling voyage the first fire in the try-works has to be fed

for a time with wood. After that no wood is used, except as a means of

quick ignition to the staple fuel. In a word, after being tried out,

the crisp, shrivelled blubber, now called scraps or fritters, still

contains considerable of its unctuous properties. These fritters feed

the flames. Like a plethoric burning martyr, or a self-consuming

misanthrope, once ignited, the whale supplies his own fuel and burns by

his own body. Would that he consumed his own smoke! for his smoke is

horrible to inhale, and inhale it you must, and not only that, but you

must live in it for the time. It has an unspeakable, wild, Hindoo odor

about it, such as may lurk in the vicinity of funereal pyres. It smells

like the left wing of the day of judgment; it is an argument for the

pit.

By midnight the works were in full operation. We were clear from the

carcase; sail had been made; the wind was freshening; the wild ocean

darkness was intense. But that darkness was licked up by the fierce

flames, which at intervals forked forth from the sooty flues, and

illuminated every lofty rope in the rigging, as with the famed Greek

fire. The burning ship drove on, as if remorselessly commissioned to

some vengeful deed. So the pitch and sulphur-freighted brigs of the

bold Hydriote, Canaris, issuing from their midnight harbors, with broad

sheets of flame for sails, bore down upon the Turkish frigates, and

folded them in conflagrations.

The hatch, removed from the top of the works, now afforded a wide

hearth in front of them. Standing on this were the Tartarean shapes of

the pagan harpooneers, always the whale-ship’s stokers. With huge

pronged poles they pitched hissing masses of blubber into the scalding

pots, or stirred up the fires beneath, till the snaky flames darted,

curling, out of the doors to catch them by the feet. The smoke rolled

away in sullen heaps. To every pitch of the ship there was a pitch of

the boiling oil, which seemed all eagerness to leap into their faces.

Opposite the mouth of the works, on the further side of the wide wooden

hearth, was the windlass. This served for a sea-sofa. Here lounged the

watch, when not otherwise employed, looking into the red heat of the

fire, till their eyes felt scorched in their heads. Their tawny

features, now all begrimed with smoke and sweat, their matted beards,

and the contrasting barbaric brilliancy of their teeth, all these were

strangely revealed in the capricious emblazonings of the works. As they

narrated to each other their unholy adventures, their tales of terror

told in words of mirth; as their uncivilized laughter forked upwards

out of them, like the flames from the furnace; as to and fro, in their

front, the harpooneers wildly gesticulated with their huge pronged

forks and dippers; as the wind howled on, and the sea leaped, and the

ship groaned and dived, and yet steadfastly shot her red hell further

and further into the blackness of the sea and the night, and scornfully

champed the white bone in her mouth, and viciously spat round her on

all sides; then the rushing Pequod, freighted with savages, and laden

with fire, and burning a corpse, and plunging into that blackness of

darkness, seemed the material counterpart of her monomaniac commander’s

soul.

So seemed it to me, as I stood at her helm, and for long hours silently

guided the way of this fire-ship on the sea. Wrapped, for that

interval, in darkness myself, I but the better saw the redness, the

madness, the ghastliness of others. The continual sight of the fiend

shapes before me, capering half in smoke and half in fire, these at

last begat kindred visions in my soul, so soon as I began to yield to

that unaccountable drowsiness which ever would come over me at a

midnight helm.

But that night, in particular, a strange (and ever since inexplicable)

thing occurred to me. Starting from a brief standing sleep, I was

horribly conscious of something fatally wrong. The jaw-bone tiller

smote my side, which leaned against it; in my ears was the low hum of

sails, just beginning to shake in the wind; I thought my eyes were

open; I was half conscious of putting my fingers to the lids and

mechanically stretching them still further apart. But, spite of all

this, I could see no compass before me to steer by; though it seemed

but a minute since I had been watching the card, by the steady binnacle

lamp illuminating it. Nothing seemed before me but a jet gloom, now and

then made ghastly by flashes of redness. Uppermost was the impression,

that whatever swift, rushing thing I stood on was not so much bound to

any haven ahead as rushing from all havens astern. A stark, bewildered

feeling, as of death, came over me. Convulsively my hands grasped the

tiller, but with the crazy conceit that the tiller was, somehow, in

some enchanted way, inverted. My God! what is the matter with me?

thought I. Lo! in my brief sleep I had turned myself about, and was

fronting the ship’s stern, with my back to her prow and the compass. In

an instant I faced back, just in time to prevent the vessel from flying

up into the wind, and very probably capsizing her. How glad and how

grateful the relief from this unnatural hallucination of the night, and

the fatal contingency of being brought by the lee!

Look not too long in the face of the fire, O man! Never dream with thy

hand on the helm! Turn not thy back to the compass; accept the first

hint of the hitching tiller; believe not the artificial fire, when its

redness makes all things look ghastly. To-morrow, in the natural sun,

the skies will be bright; those who glared like devils in the forking

flames, the morn will show in far other, at least gentler, relief; the

glorious, golden, glad sun, the only true lamp—all others but liars!

Nevertheless the sun hides not Virginia’s Dismal Swamp, nor Rome’s

accursed Campagna, nor wide Sahara, nor all the millions of miles of

deserts and of griefs beneath the moon. The sun hides not the ocean,

which is the dark side of this earth, and which is two thirds of this

earth. So, therefore, that mortal man who hath more of joy than sorrow

in him, that mortal man cannot be true—not true, or undeveloped. With

books the same. The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the

truest of all books is Solomon’s, and Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered

steel of woe. “All is vanity.” ALL. This wilful world hath not got hold

of unchristian Solomon’s wisdom yet. But he who dodges hospitals and

jails, and walks fast crossing graveyards, and would rather talk of

operas than hell; calls Cowper, Young, Pascal, Rousseau, poor devils

all of sick men; and throughout a care-free lifetime swears by Rabelais

as passing wise, and therefore jolly;—not that man is fitted to sit

down on tomb-stones, and break the green damp mould with unfathomably

wondrous Solomon.

But even Solomon, he says, “the man that wandereth out of the way of

understanding shall remain” (\_i.e.\_, even while living) “in the

congregation of the dead.” Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it

invert thee, deaden thee; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom

that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a

Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest

gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny

spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is

in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle

is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar.

CHAPTER 97. The Lamp.

Had you descended from the Pequod’s try-works to the Pequod’s

forecastle, where the off duty watch were sleeping, for one single

moment you would have almost thought you were standing in some

illuminated shrine of canonized kings and counsellors. There they lay

in their triangular oaken vaults, each mariner a chiselled muteness; a

score of lamps flashing upon his hooded eyes.

In merchantmen, oil for the sailor is more scarce than the milk of

queens. To dress in the dark, and eat in the dark, and stumble in

darkness to his pallet, this is his usual lot. But the whaleman, as he

seeks the food of light, so he lives in light. He makes his berth an

Aladdin’s lamp, and lays him down in it; so that in the pitchiest night

the ship’s black hull still houses an illumination.

See with what entire freedom the whaleman takes his handful of

lamps—often but old bottles and vials, though—to the copper cooler at

the try-works, and replenishes them there, as mugs of ale at a vat. He

burns, too, the purest of oil, in its unmanufactured, and, therefore,

unvitiated state; a fluid unknown to solar, lunar, or astral

contrivances ashore. It is sweet as early grass butter in April. He

goes and hunts for his oil, so as to be sure of its freshness and

genuineness, even as the traveller on the prairie hunts up his own

supper of game.

CHAPTER 98. Stowing Down and Clearing Up.

Already has it been related how the great leviathan is afar off

descried from the mast-head; how he is chased over the watery moors,

and slaughtered in the valleys of the deep; how he is then towed

alongside and beheaded; and how (on the principle which entitled the

headsman of old to the garments in which the beheaded was killed) his

great padded surtout becomes the property of his executioner; how, in

due time, he is condemned to the pots, and, like Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abednego, his spermaceti, oil, and bone pass unscathed through the

fire;—but now it remains to conclude the last chapter of this part of

the description by rehearsing—singing, if I may—the romantic proceeding

of decanting off his oil into the casks and striking them down into the

hold, where once again leviathan returns to his native profundities,

sliding along beneath the surface as before; but, alas! never more to

rise and blow.

While still warm, the oil, like hot punch, is received into the

six-barrel casks; and while, perhaps, the ship is pitching and rolling

this way and that in the midnight sea, the enormous casks are slewed

round and headed over, end for end, and sometimes perilously scoot

across the slippery deck, like so many land slides, till at last

man-handled and stayed in their course; and all round the hoops, rap,

rap, go as many hammers as can play upon them, for now, \_ex officio\_,

every sailor is a cooper.

At length, when the last pint is casked, and all is cool, then the

great hatchways are unsealed, the bowels of the ship are thrown open,

and down go the casks to their final rest in the sea. This done, the

hatches are replaced, and hermetically closed, like a closet walled up.

In the sperm fishery, this is perhaps one of the most remarkable

incidents in all the business of whaling. One day the planks stream

with freshets of blood and oil; on the sacred quarter-deck enormous

masses of the whale’s head are profanely piled; great rusty casks lie

about, as in a brewery yard; the smoke from the try-works has besooted

all the bulwarks; the mariners go about suffused with unctuousness; the

entire ship seems great leviathan himself; while on all hands the din

is deafening.

But a day or two after, you look about you, and prick your ears in this

self-same ship; and were it not for the tell-tale boats and try-works,

you would all but swear you trod some silent merchant vessel, with a

most scrupulously neat commander. The unmanufactured sperm oil

possesses a singularly cleansing virtue. This is the reason why the

decks never look so white as just after what they call an affair of

oil. Besides, from the ashes of the burned scraps of the whale, a

potent lye is readily made; and whenever any adhesiveness from the back

of the whale remains clinging to the side, that lye quickly

exterminates it. Hands go diligently along the bulwarks, and with

buckets of water and rags restore them to their full tidiness. The soot

is brushed from the lower rigging. All the numerous implements which

have been in use are likewise faithfully cleansed and put away. The

great hatch is scrubbed and placed upon the try-works, completely

hiding the pots; every cask is out of sight; all tackles are coiled in

unseen nooks; and when by the combined and simultaneous industry of

almost the entire ship’s company, the whole of this conscientious duty

is at last concluded, then the crew themselves proceed to their own

ablutions; shift themselves from top to toe; and finally issue to the

immaculate deck, fresh and all aglow, as bridegrooms new-leaped from

out the daintiest Holland.

Now, with elated step, they pace the planks in twos and threes, and

humorously discourse of parlors, sofas, carpets, and fine cambrics;

propose to mat the deck; think of having hanging to the top; object not

to taking tea by moonlight on the piazza of the forecastle. To hint to

such musked mariners of oil, and bone, and blubber, were little short

of audacity. They know not the thing you distantly allude to. Away, and

bring us napkins!

But mark: aloft there, at the three mast heads, stand three men intent

on spying out more whales, which, if caught, infallibly will again soil

the old oaken furniture, and drop at least one small grease-spot

somewhere. Yes; and many is the time, when, after the severest

uninterrupted labors, which know no night; continuing straight through

for ninety-six hours; when from the boat, where they have swelled their

wrists with all day rowing on the Line,—they only step to the deck to

carry vast chains, and heave the heavy windlass, and cut and slash,

yea, and in their very sweatings to be smoked and burned anew by the

combined fires of the equatorial sun and the equatorial try-works;

when, on the heel of all this, they have finally bestirred themselves

to cleanse the ship, and make a spotless dairy room of it; many is the

time the poor fellows, just buttoning the necks of their clean frocks,

are startled by the cry of “There she blows!” and away they fly to

fight another whale, and go through the whole weary thing again. Oh! my

friends, but this is man-killing! Yet this is life. For hardly have we

mortals by long toilings extracted from this world’s vast bulk its

small but valuable sperm; and then, with weary patience, cleansed

ourselves from its defilements, and learned to live here in clean

tabernacles of the soul; hardly is this done, when—\_There she

blows!\_—the ghost is spouted up, and away we sail to fight some other

world, and go through young life’s old routine again.

Oh! the metempsychosis! Oh! Pythagoras, that in bright Greece, two

thousand years ago, did die, so good, so wise, so mild; I sailed with

thee along the Peruvian coast last voyage—and, foolish as I am, taught

thee, a green simple boy, how to splice a rope!

CHAPTER 99. The Doubloon.

Ere now it has been related how Ahab was wont to pace his quarter-deck,

taking regular turns at either limit, the binnacle and mainmast; but in

the multiplicity of other things requiring narration it has not been

added how that sometimes in these walks, when most plunged in his mood,

he was wont to pause in turn at each spot, and stand there strangely

eyeing the particular object before him. When he halted before the

binnacle, with his glance fastened on the pointed needle in the

compass, that glance shot like a javelin with the pointed intensity of

his purpose; and when resuming his walk he again paused before the

mainmast, then, as the same riveted glance fastened upon the riveted

gold coin there, he still wore the same aspect of nailed firmness, only

dashed with a certain wild longing, if not hopefulness.

But one morning, turning to pass the doubloon, he seemed to be newly

attracted by the strange figures and inscriptions stamped on it, as

though now for the first time beginning to interpret for himself in

some monomaniac way whatever significance might lurk in them. And some

certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little

worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher, except to sell

by the cartload, as they do hills about Boston, to fill up some morass

in the Milky Way.

Now this doubloon was of purest, virgin gold, raked somewhere out of

the heart of gorgeous hills, whence, east and west, over golden sands,

the head-waters of many a Pactolus flows. And though now nailed amidst

all the rustiness of iron bolts and the verdigris of copper spikes,

yet, untouchable and immaculate to any foulness, it still preserved its

Quito glow. Nor, though placed amongst a ruthless crew and every hour

passed by ruthless hands, and through the livelong nights shrouded with

thick darkness which might cover any pilfering approach, nevertheless

every sunrise found the doubloon where the sunset left it last. For it

was set apart and sanctified to one awe-striking end; and however

wanton in their sailor ways, one and all, the mariners revered it as

the white whale’s talisman. Sometimes they talked it over in the weary

watch by night, wondering whose it was to be at last, and whether he

would ever live to spend it.

Now those noble golden coins of South America are as medals of the sun

and tropic token-pieces. Here palms, alpacas, and volcanoes; sun’s

disks and stars; ecliptics, horns-of-plenty, and rich banners waving,

are in luxuriant profusion stamped; so that the precious gold seems

almost to derive an added preciousness and enhancing glories, by

passing through those fancy mints, so Spanishly poetic.

It so chanced that the doubloon of the Pequod was a most wealthy

example of these things. On its round border it bore the letters,

REPUBLICA DEL ECUADOR: QUITO. So this bright coin came from a country

planted in the middle of the world, and beneath the great equator, and

named after it; and it had been cast midway up the Andes, in the

unwaning clime that knows no autumn. Zoned by those letters you saw the

likeness of three Andes’ summits; from one a flame; a tower on another;

on the third a crowing cock; while arching over all was a segment of

the partitioned zodiac, the signs all marked with their usual

cabalistics, and the keystone sun entering the equinoctial point at

Libra.

Before this equatorial coin, Ahab, not unobserved by others, was now

pausing.

“There’s something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and

all other grand and lofty things; look here,—three peaks as proud as

Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the

courageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all

are Ahab; and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe,

which, like a magician’s glass, to each and every man in turn but

mirrors back his own mysterious self. Great pains, small gains for

those who ask the world to solve them; it cannot solve itself. Methinks

now this coined sun wears a ruddy face; but see! aye, he enters the

sign of storms, the equinox! and but six months before he wheeled out

of a former equinox at Aries! From storm to storm! So be it, then. Born

in throes, ’tis fit that man should live in pains and die in pangs! So

be it, then! Here’s stout stuff for woe to work on. So be it, then.”

“No fairy fingers can have pressed the gold, but devil’s claws must

have left their mouldings there since yesterday,” murmured Starbuck to

himself, leaning against the bulwarks. “The old man seems to read

Belshazzar’s awful writing. I have never marked the coin inspectingly.

He goes below; let me read. A dark valley between three mighty,

heaven-abiding peaks, that almost seem the Trinity, in some faint

earthly symbol. So in this vale of Death, God girds us round; and over

all our gloom, the sun of Righteousness still shines a beacon and a

hope. If we bend down our eyes, the dark vale shows her mouldy soil;

but if we lift them, the bright sun meets our glance half way, to

cheer. Yet, oh, the great sun is no fixture; and if, at midnight, we

would fain snatch some sweet solace from him, we gaze for him in vain!

This coin speaks wisely, mildly, truly, but still sadly to me. I will

quit it, lest Truth shake me falsely.”

“There now’s the old Mogul,” soliloquized Stubb by the try-works, “he’s

been twigging it; and there goes Starbuck from the same, and both with

faces which I should say might be somewhere within nine fathoms long.

And all from looking at a piece of gold, which did I have it now on

Negro Hill or in Corlaer’s Hook, I’d not look at it very long ere

spending it. Humph! in my poor, insignificant opinion, I regard this as

queer. I have seen doubloons before now in my voyagings; your doubloons

of old Spain, your doubloons of Peru, your doubloons of Chili, your

doubloons of Bolivia, your doubloons of Popayan; with plenty of gold

moidores and pistoles, and joes, and half joes, and quarter joes. What

then should there be in this doubloon of the Equator that is so killing

wonderful? By Golconda! let me read it once. Halloa! here’s signs and

wonders truly! That, now, is what old Bowditch in his Epitome calls the

zodiac, and what my almanac below calls ditto. I’ll get the almanac and

as I have heard devils can be raised with Daboll’s arithmetic, I’ll try

my hand at raising a meaning out of these queer curvicues here with the

Massachusetts calendar. Here’s the book. Let’s see now. Signs and

wonders; and the sun, he’s always among ’em. Hem, hem, hem; here they

are—here they go—all alive:—Aries, or the Ram; Taurus, or the Bull and

Jimimi! here’s Gemini himself, or the Twins. Well; the sun he wheels

among ’em. Aye, here on the coin he’s just crossing the threshold

between two of twelve sitting-rooms all in a ring. Book! you lie there;

the fact is, you books must know your places. You’ll do to give us the

bare words and facts, but we come in to supply the thoughts. That’s my

small experience, so far as the Massachusetts calendar, and Bowditch’s

navigator, and Daboll’s arithmetic go. Signs and wonders, eh? Pity if

there is nothing wonderful in signs, and significant in wonders!

There’s a clue somewhere; wait a bit; hist—hark! By Jove, I have it!

Look you, Doubloon, your zodiac here is the life of man in one round

chapter; and now I’ll read it off, straight out of the book. Come,

Almanack! To begin: there’s Aries, or the Ram—lecherous dog, he begets

us; then, Taurus, or the Bull—he bumps us the first thing; then Gemini,

or the Twins—that is, Virtue and Vice; we try to reach Virtue, when lo!

comes Cancer the Crab, and drags us back; and here, going from Virtue,

Leo, a roaring Lion, lies in the path—he gives a few fierce bites and

surly dabs with his paw; we escape, and hail Virgo, the Virgin! that’s

our first love; we marry and think to be happy for aye, when pop comes

Libra, or the Scales—happiness weighed and found wanting; and while we

are very sad about that, Lord! how we suddenly jump, as Scorpio, or the

Scorpion, stings us in the rear; we are curing the wound, when whang

come the arrows all round; Sagittarius, or the Archer, is amusing

himself. As we pluck out the shafts, stand aside! here’s the

battering-ram, Capricornus, or the Goat; full tilt, he comes rushing,

and headlong we are tossed; when Aquarius, or the Water-bearer, pours

out his whole deluge and drowns us; and to wind up with Pisces, or the

Fishes, we sleep. There’s a sermon now, writ in high heaven, and the

sun goes through it every year, and yet comes out of it all alive and

hearty. Jollily he, aloft there, wheels through toil and trouble; and

so, alow here, does jolly Stubb. Oh, jolly’s the word for aye! Adieu,

Doubloon! But stop; here comes little King-Post; dodge round the

try-works, now, and let’s hear what he’ll have to say. There; he’s

before it; he’ll out with something presently. So, so; he’s beginning.”

“I see nothing here, but a round thing made of gold, and whoever raises

a certain whale, this round thing belongs to him. So, what’s all this

staring been about? It is worth sixteen dollars, that’s true; and at

two cents the cigar, that’s nine hundred and sixty cigars. I won’t

smoke dirty pipes like Stubb, but I like cigars, and here’s nine

hundred and sixty of them; so here goes Flask aloft to spy ’em out.”

“Shall I call that wise or foolish, now; if it be really wise it has a

foolish look to it; yet, if it be really foolish, then has it a sort of

wiseish look to it. But, avast; here comes our old Manxman—the old

hearse-driver, he must have been, that is, before he took to the sea.

He luffs up before the doubloon; halloa, and goes round on the other

side of the mast; why, there’s a horse-shoe nailed on that side; and

now he’s back again; what does that mean? Hark! he’s muttering—voice

like an old worn-out coffee-mill. Prick ears, and listen!”

“If the White Whale be raised, it must be in a month and a day, when

the sun stands in some one of these signs. I’ve studied signs, and know

their marks; they were taught me two score years ago, by the old witch

in Copenhagen. Now, in what sign will the sun then be? The horse-shoe

sign; for there it is, right opposite the gold. And what’s the

horse-shoe sign? The lion is the horse-shoe sign—the roaring and

devouring lion. Ship, old ship! my old head shakes to think of thee.”

“There’s another rendering now; but still one text. All sorts of men in

one kind of world, you see. Dodge again! here comes Queequeg—all

tattooing—looks like the signs of the Zodiac himself. What says the

Cannibal? As I live he’s comparing notes; looking at his thigh bone;

thinks the sun is in the thigh, or in the calf, or in the bowels, I

suppose, as the old women talk Surgeon’s Astronomy in the back country.

And by Jove, he’s found something there in the vicinity of his thigh—I

guess it’s Sagittarius, or the Archer. No: he don’t know what to make

of the doubloon; he takes it for an old button off some king’s

trowsers. But, aside again! here comes that ghost-devil, Fedallah; tail

coiled out of sight as usual, oakum in the toes of his pumps as usual.

What does he say, with that look of his? Ah, only makes a sign to the

sign and bows himself; there is a sun on the coin—fire worshipper,

depend upon it. Ho! more and more. This way comes Pip—poor boy! would

he had died, or I; he’s half horrible to me. He too has been watching

all of these interpreters—myself included—and look now, he comes to

read, with that unearthly idiot face. Stand away again and hear him.

Hark!”

“I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look.”

“Upon my soul, he’s been studying Murray’s Grammar! Improving his mind,

poor fellow! But what’s that he says now—hist!”

“I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look.”

“Why, he’s getting it by heart—hist! again.”

“I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look.”

“Well, that’s funny.”

“And I, you, and he; and we, ye, and they, are all bats; and I’m a

crow, especially when I stand a’top of this pine tree here. Caw! caw!

caw! caw! caw! caw! Ain’t I a crow? And where’s the scare-crow? There

he stands; two bones stuck into a pair of old trowsers, and two more

poked into the sleeves of an old jacket.”

“Wonder if he means me?—complimentary!—poor lad!—I could go hang

myself. Any way, for the present, I’ll quit Pip’s vicinity. I can stand

the rest, for they have plain wits; but he’s too crazy-witty for my

sanity. So, so, I leave him muttering.”

“Here’s the ship’s navel, this doubloon here, and they are all on fire

to unscrew it. But, unscrew your navel, and what’s the consequence?

Then again, if it stays here, that is ugly, too, for when aught’s

nailed to the mast it’s a sign that things grow desperate. Ha, ha! old

Ahab! the White Whale; he’ll nail ye! This is a pine tree. My father,

in old Tolland county, cut down a pine tree once, and found a silver

ring grown over in it; some old darkey’s wedding ring. How did it get

there? And so they’ll say in the resurrection, when they come to fish

up this old mast, and find a doubloon lodged in it, with bedded oysters

for the shaggy bark. Oh, the gold! the precious, precious, gold! the

green miser’ll hoard ye soon! Hish! hish! God goes ’mong the worlds

blackberrying. Cook! ho, cook! and cook us! Jenny! hey, hey, hey, hey,

hey, Jenny, Jenny! and get your hoe-cake done!”

CHAPTER 100. Leg and Arm.

The Pequod, of Nantucket, Meets the Samuel Enderby, of London.

“Ship, ahoy! Hast seen the White Whale?”

So cried Ahab, once more hailing a ship showing English colours,

bearing down under the stern. Trumpet to mouth, the old man was

standing in his hoisted quarter-boat, his ivory leg plainly revealed to

the stranger captain, who was carelessly reclining in his own boat’s

bow. He was a darkly-tanned, burly, good-natured, fine-looking man, of

sixty or thereabouts, dressed in a spacious roundabout, that hung round

him in festoons of blue pilot-cloth; and one empty arm of this jacket

streamed behind him like the broidered arm of a hussar’s surcoat.

“Hast seen the White Whale?”

“See you this?” and withdrawing it from the folds that had hidden it,

he held up a white arm of sperm whale bone, terminating in a wooden

head like a mallet.

“Man my boat!” cried Ahab, impetuously, and tossing about the oars near

him—“Stand by to lower!”

In less than a minute, without quitting his little craft, he and his

crew were dropped to the water, and were soon alongside of the

stranger. But here a curious difficulty presented itself. In the

excitement of the moment, Ahab had forgotten that since the loss of his

leg he had never once stepped on board of any vessel at sea but his

own, and then it was always by an ingenious and very handy mechanical

contrivance peculiar to the Pequod, and a thing not to be rigged and

shipped in any other vessel at a moment’s warning. Now, it is no very

easy matter for anybody—except those who are almost hourly used to it,

like whalemen—to clamber up a ship’s side from a boat on the open sea;

for the great swells now lift the boat high up towards the bulwarks,

and then instantaneously drop it half way down to the kelson. So,

deprived of one leg, and the strange ship of course being altogether

unsupplied with the kindly invention, Ahab now found himself abjectly

reduced to a clumsy landsman again; hopelessly eyeing the uncertain

changeful height he could hardly hope to attain.

It has before been hinted, perhaps, that every little untoward

circumstance that befell him, and which indirectly sprang from his

luckless mishap, almost invariably irritated or exasperated Ahab. And

in the present instance, all this was heightened by the sight of the

two officers of the strange ship, leaning over the side, by the

perpendicular ladder of nailed cleets there, and swinging towards him a

pair of tastefully-ornamented man-ropes; for at first they did not seem

to bethink them that a one-legged man must be too much of a cripple to

use their sea bannisters. But this awkwardness only lasted a minute,

because the strange captain, observing at a glance how affairs stood,

cried out, “I see, I see!—avast heaving there! Jump, boys, and swing

over the cutting-tackle.”

As good luck would have it, they had had a whale alongside a day or two

previous, and the great tackles were still aloft, and the massive

curved blubber-hook, now clean and dry, was still attached to the end.

This was quickly lowered to Ahab, who at once comprehending it all,

slid his solitary thigh into the curve of the hook (it was like sitting

in the fluke of an anchor, or the crotch of an apple tree), and then

giving the word, held himself fast, and at the same time also helped to

hoist his own weight, by pulling hand-over-hand upon one of the running

parts of the tackle. Soon he was carefully swung inside the high

bulwarks, and gently landed upon the capstan head. With his ivory arm

frankly thrust forth in welcome, the other captain advanced, and Ahab,

putting out his ivory leg, and crossing the ivory arm (like two

sword-fish blades) cried out in his walrus way, “Aye, aye, hearty! let

us shake bones together!—an arm and a leg!—an arm that never can

shrink, d’ye see; and a leg that never can run. Where did’st thou see

the White Whale?—how long ago?”

“The White Whale,” said the Englishman, pointing his ivory arm towards

the East, and taking a rueful sight along it, as if it had been a

telescope; “there I saw him, on the Line, last season.”

“And he took that arm off, did he?” asked Ahab, now sliding down from

the capstan, and resting on the Englishman’s shoulder, as he did so.

“Aye, he was the cause of it, at least; and that leg, too?”

“Spin me the yarn,” said Ahab; “how was it?”

“It was the first time in my life that I ever cruised on the Line,”

began the Englishman. “I was ignorant of the White Whale at that time.

Well, one day we lowered for a pod of four or five whales, and my boat

fastened to one of them; a regular circus horse he was, too, that went

milling and milling round so, that my boat’s crew could only trim dish,

by sitting all their sterns on the outer gunwale. Presently up breaches

from the bottom of the sea a bouncing great whale, with a milky-white

head and hump, all crows’ feet and wrinkles.”

“It was he, it was he!” cried Ahab, suddenly letting out his suspended

breath.

“And harpoons sticking in near his starboard fin.”

“Aye, aye—they were mine—\_my\_ irons,” cried Ahab, exultingly—“but on!”

“Give me a chance, then,” said the Englishman, good-humoredly. “Well,

this old great-grandfather, with the white head and hump, runs all

afoam into the pod, and goes to snapping furiously at my fast-line!

“Aye, I see!—wanted to part it; free the fast-fish—an old trick—I know

him.”

“How it was exactly,” continued the one-armed commander, “I do not

know; but in biting the line, it got foul of his teeth, caught there

somehow; but we didn’t know it then; so that when we afterwards pulled

on the line, bounce we came plump on to his hump! instead of the other

whale’s; that went off to windward, all fluking. Seeing how matters

stood, and what a noble great whale it was—the noblest and biggest I

ever saw, sir, in my life—I resolved to capture him, spite of the

boiling rage he seemed to be in. And thinking the hap-hazard line would

get loose, or the tooth it was tangled to might draw (for I have a

devil of a boat’s crew for a pull on a whale-line); seeing all this, I

say, I jumped into my first mate’s boat—Mr. Mounttop’s here (by the

way, Captain—Mounttop; Mounttop—the captain);—as I was saying, I jumped

into Mounttop’s boat, which, d’ye see, was gunwale and gunwale with

mine, then; and snatching the first harpoon, let this old

great-grandfather have it. But, Lord, look you, sir—hearts and souls

alive, man—the next instant, in a jiff, I was blind as a bat—both eyes

out—all befogged and bedeadened with black foam—the whale’s tail

looming straight up out of it, perpendicular in the air, like a marble

steeple. No use sterning all, then; but as I was groping at midday,

with a blinding sun, all crown-jewels; as I was groping, I say, after

the second iron, to toss it overboard—down comes the tail like a Lima

tower, cutting my boat in two, leaving each half in splinters; and,

flukes first, the white hump backed through the wreck, as though it was

all chips. We all struck out. To escape his terrible flailings, I

seized hold of my harpoon-pole sticking in him, and for a moment clung

to that like a sucking fish. But a combing sea dashed me off, and at

the same instant, the fish, taking one good dart forwards, went down

like a flash; and the barb of that cursed second iron towing along near

me caught me here” (clapping his hand just below his shoulder); “yes,

caught me just here, I say, and bore me down to Hell’s flames, I was

thinking; when, when, all of a sudden, thank the good God, the barb

ript its way along the flesh—clear along the whole length of my

arm—came out nigh my wrist, and up I floated;—and that gentleman there

will tell you the rest (by the way, captain—Dr. Bunger, ship’s surgeon:

Bunger, my lad,—the captain). Now, Bunger boy, spin your part of the

yarn.”

The professional gentleman thus familiarly pointed out, had been all

the time standing near them, with nothing specific visible, to denote

his gentlemanly rank on board. His face was an exceedingly round but

sober one; he was dressed in a faded blue woollen frock or shirt, and

patched trowsers; and had thus far been dividing his attention between

a marlingspike he held in one hand, and a pill-box held in the other,

occasionally casting a critical glance at the ivory limbs of the two

crippled captains. But, at his superior’s introduction of him to Ahab,

he politely bowed, and straightway went on to do his captain’s bidding.

“It was a shocking bad wound,” began the whale-surgeon; “and, taking my

advice, Captain Boomer here, stood our old Sammy—”

“Samuel Enderby is the name of my ship,” interrupted the one-armed

captain, addressing Ahab; “go on, boy.”

“Stood our old Sammy off to the northward, to get out of the blazing

hot weather there on the Line. But it was no use—I did all I could; sat

up with him nights; was very severe with him in the matter of diet—”

“Oh, very severe!” chimed in the patient himself; then suddenly

altering his voice, “Drinking hot rum toddies with me every night, till

he couldn’t see to put on the bandages; and sending me to bed, half

seas over, about three o’clock in the morning. Oh, ye stars! he sat up

with me indeed, and was very severe in my diet. Oh! a great watcher,

and very dietetically severe, is Dr. Bunger. (Bunger, you dog, laugh

out! why don’t ye? You know you’re a precious jolly rascal.) But, heave

ahead, boy, I’d rather be killed by you than kept alive by any other

man.”

“My captain, you must have ere this perceived, respected sir”—said the

imperturbable godly-looking Bunger, slightly bowing to Ahab—“is apt to

be facetious at times; he spins us many clever things of that sort. But

I may as well say—en passant, as the French remark—that I myself—that

is to say, Jack Bunger, late of the reverend clergy—am a strict total

abstinence man; I never drink—”

“Water!” cried the captain; “he never drinks it; it’s a sort of fits to

him; fresh water throws him into the hydrophobia; but go on—go on with

the arm story.”

“Yes, I may as well,” said the surgeon, coolly. “I was about observing,

sir, before Captain Boomer’s facetious interruption, that spite of my

best and severest endeavors, the wound kept getting worse and worse;

the truth was, sir, it was as ugly gaping wound as surgeon ever saw;

more than two feet and several inches long. I measured it with the lead

line. In short, it grew black; I knew what was threatened, and off it

came. But I had no hand in shipping that ivory arm there; that thing is

against all rule”—pointing at it with the marlingspike—“that is the

captain’s work, not mine; he ordered the carpenter to make it; he had

that club-hammer there put to the end, to knock some one’s brains out

with, I suppose, as he tried mine once. He flies into diabolical

passions sometimes. Do ye see this dent, sir”—removing his hat, and

brushing aside his hair, and exposing a bowl-like cavity in his skull,

but which bore not the slightest scarry trace, or any token of ever

having been a wound—“Well, the captain there will tell you how that

came here; he knows.”

“No, I don’t,” said the captain, “but his mother did; he was born with

it. Oh, you solemn rogue, you—you Bunger! was there ever such another

Bunger in the watery world? Bunger, when you die, you ought to die in

pickle, you dog; you should be preserved to future ages, you rascal.”

“What became of the White Whale?” now cried Ahab, who thus far had been

impatiently listening to this by-play between the two Englishmen.

“Oh!” cried the one-armed captain, “oh, yes! Well; after he sounded, we

didn’t see him again for some time; in fact, as I before hinted, I

didn’t then know what whale it was that had served me such a trick,

till some time afterwards, when coming back to the Line, we heard about

Moby Dick—as some call him—and then I knew it was he.”

“Did’st thou cross his wake again?”

“Twice.”

“But could not fasten?”

“Didn’t want to try to: ain’t one limb enough? What should I do without

this other arm? And I’m thinking Moby Dick doesn’t bite so much as he

swallows.”

“Well, then,” interrupted Bunger, “give him your left arm for bait to

get the right. Do you know, gentlemen”—very gravely and mathematically

bowing to each Captain in succession—“Do you know, gentlemen, that the

digestive organs of the whale are so inscrutably constructed by Divine

Providence, that it is quite impossible for him to completely digest

even a man’s arm? And he knows it too. So that what you take for the

White Whale’s malice is only his awkwardness. For he never means to

swallow a single limb; he only thinks to terrify by feints. But

sometimes he is like the old juggling fellow, formerly a patient of

mine in Ceylon, that making believe swallow jack-knives, once upon a

time let one drop into him in good earnest, and there it stayed for a

twelvemonth or more; when I gave him an emetic, and he heaved it up in

small tacks, d’ye see. No possible way for him to digest that

jack-knife, and fully incorporate it into his general bodily system.

Yes, Captain Boomer, if you are quick enough about it, and have a mind

to pawn one arm for the sake of the privilege of giving decent burial

to the other, why in that case the arm is yours; only let the whale

have another chance at you shortly, that’s all.”

“No, thank ye, Bunger,” said the English Captain, “he’s welcome to the

arm he has, since I can’t help it, and didn’t know him then; but not to

another one. No more White Whales for me; I’ve lowered for him once,

and that has satisfied me. There would be great glory in killing him, I

know that; and there is a ship-load of precious sperm in him, but, hark

ye, he’s best let alone; don’t you think so, Captain?”—glancing at the

ivory leg.

“He is. But he will still be hunted, for all that. What is best let

alone, that accursed thing is not always what least allures. He’s all a

magnet! How long since thou saw’st him last? Which way heading?”

“Bless my soul, and curse the foul fiend’s,” cried Bunger, stoopingly

walking round Ahab, and like a dog, strangely snuffing; “this man’s

blood—bring the thermometer!—it’s at the boiling point!—his pulse makes

these planks beat!—sir!”—taking a lancet from his pocket, and drawing

near to Ahab’s arm.

“Avast!” roared Ahab, dashing him against the bulwarks—“Man the boat!

Which way heading?”

“Good God!” cried the English Captain, to whom the question was put.

“What’s the matter? He was heading east, I think.—Is your Captain

crazy?” whispering Fedallah.

But Fedallah, putting a finger on his lip, slid over the bulwarks to

take the boat’s steering oar, and Ahab, swinging the cutting-tackle

towards him, commanded the ship’s sailors to stand by to lower.

In a moment he was standing in the boat’s stern, and the Manilla men

were springing to their oars. In vain the English Captain hailed him.

With back to the stranger ship, and face set like a flint to his own,

Ahab stood upright till alongside of the Pequod.

CHAPTER 101. The Decanter.

Ere the English ship fades from sight, be it set down here, that she

hailed from London, and was named after the late Samuel Enderby,

merchant of that city, the original of the famous whaling house of

Enderby & Sons; a house which in my poor whaleman’s opinion, comes not

far behind the united royal houses of the Tudors and Bourbons, in point

of real historical interest. How long, prior to the year of our Lord

1775, this great whaling house was in existence, my numerous

fish-documents do not make plain; but in that year (1775) it fitted out

the first English ships that ever regularly hunted the Sperm Whale;

though for some score of years previous (ever since 1726) our valiant

Coffins and Maceys of Nantucket and the Vineyard had in large fleets

pursued that Leviathan, but only in the North and South Atlantic: not

elsewhere. Be it distinctly recorded here, that the Nantucketers were

the first among mankind to harpoon with civilized steel the great Sperm

Whale; and that for half a century they were the only people of the

whole globe who so harpooned him.

In 1778, a fine ship, the Amelia, fitted out for the express purpose,

and at the sole charge of the vigorous Enderbys, boldly rounded Cape

Horn, and was the first among the nations to lower a whale-boat of any

sort in the great South Sea. The voyage was a skilful and lucky one;

and returning to her berth with her hold full of the precious sperm,

the Amelia’s example was soon followed by other ships, English and

American, and thus the vast Sperm Whale grounds of the Pacific were

thrown open. But not content with this good deed, the indefatigable

house again bestirred itself: Samuel and all his Sons—how many, their

mother only knows—and under their immediate auspices, and partly, I

think, at their expense, the British government was induced to send the

sloop-of-war Rattler on a whaling voyage of discovery into the South

Sea. Commanded by a naval Post-Captain, the Rattler made a rattling

voyage of it, and did some service; how much does not appear. But this

is not all. In 1819, the same house fitted out a discovery whale ship

of their own, to go on a tasting cruise to the remote waters of Japan.

That ship—well called the “Syren”—made a noble experimental cruise; and

it was thus that the great Japanese Whaling Ground first became

generally known. The Syren in this famous voyage was commanded by a

Captain Coffin, a Nantucketer.

All honor to the Enderbies, therefore, whose house, I think, exists to

the present day; though doubtless the original Samuel must long ago

have slipped his cable for the great South Sea of the other world.

The ship named after him was worthy of the honor, being a very fast

sailer and a noble craft every way. I boarded her once at midnight

somewhere off the Patagonian coast, and drank good flip down in the

forecastle. It was a fine gam we had, and they were all trumps—every

soul on board. A short life to them, and a jolly death. And that fine

gam I had—long, very long after old Ahab touched her planks with his

ivory heel—it minds me of the noble, solid, Saxon hospitality of that

ship; and may my parson forget me, and the devil remember me, if I ever

lose sight of it. Flip? Did I say we had flip? Yes, and we flipped it

at the rate of ten gallons the hour; and when the squall came (for it’s

squally off there by Patagonia), and all hands—visitors and all—were

called to reef topsails, we were so top-heavy that we had to swing each

other aloft in bowlines; and we ignorantly furled the skirts of our

jackets into the sails, so that we hung there, reefed fast in the

howling gale, a warning example to all drunken tars. However, the masts

did not go overboard; and by and by we scrambled down, so sober, that

we had to pass the flip again, though the savage salt spray bursting

down the forecastle scuttle, rather too much diluted and pickled it to

my taste.

The beef was fine—tough, but with body in it. They said it was

bull-beef; others, that it was dromedary beef; but I do not know, for

certain, how that was. They had dumplings too; small, but substantial,

symmetrically globular, and indestructible dumplings. I fancied that

you could feel them, and roll them about in you after they were

swallowed. If you stooped over too far forward, you risked their

pitching out of you like billiard-balls. The bread—but that couldn’t be

helped; besides, it was an anti-scorbutic; in short, the bread

contained the only fresh fare they had. But the forecastle was not very

light, and it was very easy to step over into a dark corner when you

ate it. But all in all, taking her from truck to helm, considering the

dimensions of the cook’s boilers, including his own live parchment

boilers; fore and aft, I say, the Samuel Enderby was a jolly ship; of

good fare and plenty; fine flip and strong; crack fellows all, and

capital from boot heels to hat-band.

But why was it, think ye, that the Samuel Enderby, and some other

English whalers I know of—not all though—were such famous, hospitable

ships; that passed round the beef, and the bread, and the can, and the

joke; and were not soon weary of eating, and drinking, and laughing? I

will tell you. The abounding good cheer of these English whalers is

matter for historical research. Nor have I been at all sparing of

historical whale research, when it has seemed needed.

The English were preceded in the whale fishery by the Hollanders,

Zealanders, and Danes; from whom they derived many terms still extant

in the fishery; and what is yet more, their fat old fashions, touching

plenty to eat and drink. For, as a general thing, the English

merchant-ship scrimps her crew; but not so the English whaler. Hence,

in the English, this thing of whaling good cheer is not normal and

natural, but incidental and particular; and, therefore, must have some

special origin, which is here pointed out, and will be still further

elucidated.

During my researches in the Leviathanic histories, I stumbled upon an

ancient Dutch volume, which, by the musty whaling smell of it, I knew

must be about whalers. The title was, “Dan Coopman,” wherefore I

concluded that this must be the invaluable memoirs of some Amsterdam

cooper in the fishery, as every whale ship must carry its cooper. I was

reinforced in this opinion by seeing that it was the production of one

“Fitz Swackhammer.” But my friend Dr. Snodhead, a very learned man,

professor of Low Dutch and High German in the college of Santa Claus

and St. Pott’s, to whom I handed the work for translation, giving him a

box of sperm candles for his trouble—this same Dr. Snodhead, so soon as

he spied the book, assured me that “Dan Coopman” did not mean “The

Cooper,” but “The Merchant.” In short, this ancient and learned Low

Dutch book treated of the commerce of Holland; and, among other

subjects, contained a very interesting account of its whale fishery.

And in this chapter it was, headed, “Smeer,” or “Fat,” that I found a

long detailed list of the outfits for the larders and cellars of 180

sail of Dutch whalemen; from which list, as translated by Dr. Snodhead,

I transcribe the following:

400,000 lbs. of beef. 60,000 lbs. Friesland pork. 150,000 lbs. of stock

fish. 550,000 lbs. of biscuit. 72,000 lbs. of soft bread. 2,800 firkins

of butter. 20,000 lbs. Texel & Leyden cheese. 144,000 lbs. cheese

(probably an inferior article). 550 ankers of Geneva. 10,800 barrels of

beer.

Most statistical tables are parchingly dry in the reading; not so in

the present case, however, where the reader is flooded with whole

pipes, barrels, quarts, and gills of good gin and good cheer.

At the time, I devoted three days to the studious digesting of all this

beer, beef, and bread, during which many profound thoughts were

incidentally suggested to me, capable of a transcendental and Platonic

application; and, furthermore, I compiled supplementary tables of my

own, touching the probable quantity of stock-fish, etc., consumed by

every Low Dutch harpooneer in that ancient Greenland and Spitzbergen

whale fishery. In the first place, the amount of butter, and Texel and

Leyden cheese consumed, seems amazing. I impute it, though, to their

naturally unctuous natures, being rendered still more unctuous by the

nature of their vocation, and especially by their pursuing their game

in those frigid Polar Seas, on the very coasts of that Esquimaux

country where the convivial natives pledge each other in bumpers of

train oil.

The quantity of beer, too, is very large, 10,800 barrels. Now, as those

polar fisheries could only be prosecuted in the short summer of that

climate, so that the whole cruise of one of these Dutch whalemen,

including the short voyage to and from the Spitzbergen sea, did not

much exceed three months, say, and reckoning 30 men to each of their

fleet of 180 sail, we have 5,400 Low Dutch seamen in all; therefore, I

say, we have precisely two barrels of beer per man, for a twelve weeks’

allowance, exclusive of his fair proportion of that 550 ankers of gin.

Now, whether these gin and beer harpooneers, so fuddled as one might

fancy them to have been, were the right sort of men to stand up in a

boat’s head, and take good aim at flying whales; this would seem

somewhat improbable. Yet they did aim at them, and hit them too. But

this was very far North, be it remembered, where beer agrees well with

the constitution; upon the Equator, in our southern fishery, beer would

be apt to make the harpooneer sleepy at the mast-head and boozy in his

boat; and grievous loss might ensue to Nantucket and New Bedford.

But no more; enough has been said to show that the old Dutch whalers of

two or three centuries ago were high livers; and that the English

whalers have not neglected so excellent an example. For, say they, when

cruising in an empty ship, if you can get nothing better out of the

world, get a good dinner out of it, at least. And this empties the

decanter.

CHAPTER 102. A Bower in the Arsacides.

Hitherto, in descriptively treating of the Sperm Whale, I have chiefly

dwelt upon the marvels of his outer aspect; or separately and in detail

upon some few interior structural features. But to a large and thorough

sweeping comprehension of him, it behooves me now to unbutton him still

further, and untagging the points of his hose, unbuckling his garters,

and casting loose the hooks and the eyes of the joints of his innermost

bones, set him before you in his ultimatum; that is to say, in his

unconditional skeleton.

But how now, Ishmael? How is it, that you, a mere oarsman in the

fishery, pretend to know aught about the subterranean parts of the

whale? Did erudite Stubb, mounted upon your capstan, deliver lectures

on the anatomy of the Cetacea; and by help of the windlass, hold up a

specimen rib for exhibition? Explain thyself, Ishmael. Can you land a

full-grown whale on your deck for examination, as a cook dishes a

roast-pig? Surely not. A veritable witness have you hitherto been,

Ishmael; but have a care how you seize the privilege of Jonah alone;

the privilege of discoursing upon the joists and beams; the rafters,

ridge-pole, sleepers, and under-pinnings, making up the frame-work of

leviathan; and belike of the tallow-vats, dairy-rooms, butteries, and

cheeseries in his bowels.

I confess, that since Jonah, few whalemen have penetrated very far

beneath the skin of the adult whale; nevertheless, I have been blessed

with an opportunity to dissect him in miniature. In a ship I belonged

to, a small cub Sperm Whale was once bodily hoisted to the deck for his

poke or bag, to make sheaths for the barbs of the harpoons, and for the

heads of the lances. Think you I let that chance go, without using my

boat-hatchet and jack-knife, and breaking the seal and reading all the

contents of that young cub?

And as for my exact knowledge of the bones of the leviathan in their

gigantic, full grown development, for that rare knowledge I am indebted

to my late royal friend Tranquo, king of Tranque, one of the Arsacides.

For being at Tranque, years ago, when attached to the trading-ship Dey

of Algiers, I was invited to spend part of the Arsacidean holidays with

the lord of Tranque, at his retired palm villa at Pupella; a sea-side

glen not very far distant from what our sailors called Bamboo-Town, his

capital.

Among many other fine qualities, my royal friend Tranquo, being gifted

with a devout love for all matters of barbaric vertu, had brought

together in Pupella whatever rare things the more ingenious of his

people could invent; chiefly carved woods of wonderful devices,

chiselled shells, inlaid spears, costly paddles, aromatic canoes; and

all these distributed among whatever natural wonders, the

wonder-freighted, tribute-rendering waves had cast upon his shores.

Chief among these latter was a great Sperm Whale, which, after an

unusually long raging gale, had been found dead and stranded, with his

head against a cocoa-nut tree, whose plumage-like, tufted droopings

seemed his verdant jet. When the vast body had at last been stripped of

its fathom-deep enfoldings, and the bones become dust dry in the sun,

then the skeleton was carefully transported up the Pupella glen, where

a grand temple of lordly palms now sheltered it.

The ribs were hung with trophies; the vertebræ were carved with

Arsacidean annals, in strange hieroglyphics; in the skull, the priests

kept up an unextinguished aromatic flame, so that the mystic head again

sent forth its vapory spout; while, suspended from a bough, the

terrific lower jaw vibrated over all the devotees, like the hair-hung

sword that so affrighted Damocles.

It was a wondrous sight. The wood was green as mosses of the Icy Glen;

the trees stood high and haughty, feeling their living sap; the

industrious earth beneath was as a weaver’s loom, with a gorgeous

carpet on it, whereof the ground-vine tendrils formed the warp and

woof, and the living flowers the figures. All the trees, with all their

laden branches; all the shrubs, and ferns, and grasses; the

message-carrying air; all these unceasingly were active. Through the

lacings of the leaves, the great sun seemed a flying shuttle weaving

the unwearied verdure. Oh, busy weaver! unseen weaver!—pause!—one

word!—whither flows the fabric? what palace may it deck? wherefore all

these ceaseless toilings? Speak, weaver!—stay thy hand!—but one single

word with thee! Nay—the shuttle flies—the figures float from forth the

loom; the freshet-rushing carpet for ever slides away. The weaver-god,

he weaves; and by that weaving is he deafened, that he hears no mortal

voice; and by that humming, we, too, who look on the loom are deafened;

and only when we escape it shall we hear the thousand voices that speak

through it. For even so it is in all material factories. The spoken

words that are inaudible among the flying spindles; those same words

are plainly heard without the walls, bursting from the opened

casements. Thereby have villainies been detected. Ah, mortal! then, be

heedful; for so, in all this din of the great world’s loom, thy

subtlest thinkings may be overheard afar.

Now, amid the green, life-restless loom of that Arsacidean wood, the

great, white, worshipped skeleton lay lounging—a gigantic idler! Yet,

as the ever-woven verdant warp and woof intermixed and hummed around

him, the mighty idler seemed the cunning weaver; himself all woven over

with the vines; every month assuming greener, fresher verdure; but

himself a skeleton. Life folded Death; Death trellised Life; the grim

god wived with youthful Life, and begat him curly-headed glories.

Now, when with royal Tranquo I visited this wondrous whale, and saw the

skull an altar, and the artificial smoke ascending from where the real

jet had issued, I marvelled that the king should regard a chapel as an

object of vertu. He laughed. But more I marvelled that the priests

should swear that smoky jet of his was genuine. To and fro I paced

before this skeleton—brushed the vines aside—broke through the ribs—and

with a ball of Arsacidean twine, wandered, eddied long amid its many

winding, shaded colonnades and arbours. But soon my line was out; and

following it back, I emerged from the opening where I entered. I saw no

living thing within; naught was there but bones.

Cutting me a green measuring-rod, I once more dived within the

skeleton. From their arrow-slit in the skull, the priests perceived me

taking the altitude of the final rib, “How now!” they shouted; “Dar’st

thou measure this our god! That’s for us.” “Aye, priests—well, how long

do ye make him, then?” But hereupon a fierce contest rose among them,

concerning feet and inches; they cracked each other’s sconces with

their yard-sticks—the great skull echoed—and seizing that lucky chance,

I quickly concluded my own admeasurements.

These admeasurements I now propose to set before you. But first, be it

recorded, that, in this matter, I am not free to utter any fancied

measurement I please. Because there are skeleton authorities you can

refer to, to test my accuracy. There is a Leviathanic Museum, they tell

me, in Hull, England, one of the whaling ports of that country, where

they have some fine specimens of fin-backs and other whales. Likewise,

I have heard that in the museum of Manchester, in New Hampshire, they

have what the proprietors call “the only perfect specimen of a

Greenland or River Whale in the United States.” Moreover, at a place in

Yorkshire, England, Burton Constable by name, a certain Sir Clifford

Constable has in his possession the skeleton of a Sperm Whale, but of

moderate size, by no means of the full-grown magnitude of my friend

King Tranquo’s.

In both cases, the stranded whales to which these two skeletons

belonged, were originally claimed by their proprietors upon similar

grounds. King Tranquo seizing his because he wanted it; and Sir

Clifford, because he was lord of the seignories of those parts. Sir

Clifford’s whale has been articulated throughout; so that, like a great

chest of drawers, you can open and shut him, in all his bony

cavities—spread out his ribs like a gigantic fan—and swing all day upon

his lower jaw. Locks are to be put upon some of his trap-doors and

shutters; and a footman will show round future visitors with a bunch of

keys at his side. Sir Clifford thinks of charging twopence for a peep

at the whispering gallery in the spinal column; threepence to hear the

echo in the hollow of his cerebellum; and sixpence for the unrivalled

view from his forehead.

The skeleton dimensions I shall now proceed to set down are copied

verbatim from my right arm, where I had them tattooed; as in my wild

wanderings at that period, there was no other secure way of preserving

such valuable statistics. But as I was crowded for space, and wished

the other parts of my body to remain a blank page for a poem I was then

composing—at least, what untattooed parts might remain—I did not

trouble myself with the odd inches; nor, indeed, should inches at all

enter into a congenial admeasurement of the whale.

CHAPTER 103. Measurement of The Whale’s Skeleton.

In the first place, I wish to lay before you a particular, plain

statement, touching the living bulk of this leviathan, whose skeleton

we are briefly to exhibit. Such a statement may prove useful here.

According to a careful calculation I have made, and which I partly base

upon Captain Scoresby’s estimate, of seventy tons for the largest sized

Greenland whale of sixty feet in length; according to my careful

calculation, I say, a Sperm Whale of the largest magnitude, between

eighty-five and ninety feet in length, and something less than forty

feet in its fullest circumference, such a whale will weigh at least

ninety tons; so that, reckoning thirteen men to a ton, he would

considerably outweigh the combined population of a whole village of one

thousand one hundred inhabitants.

Think you not then that brains, like yoked cattle, should be put to

this leviathan, to make him at all budge to any landsman’s imagination?

Having already in various ways put before you his skull, spout-hole,

jaw, teeth, tail, forehead, fins, and divers other parts, I shall now

simply point out what is most interesting in the general bulk of his

unobstructed bones. But as the colossal skull embraces so very large a

proportion of the entire extent of the skeleton; as it is by far the

most complicated part; and as nothing is to be repeated concerning it

in this chapter, you must not fail to carry it in your mind, or under

your arm, as we proceed, otherwise you will not gain a complete notion

of the general structure we are about to view.

In length, the Sperm Whale’s skeleton at Tranque measured seventy-two

feet; so that when fully invested and extended in life, he must have

been ninety feet long; for in the whale, the skeleton loses about one

fifth in length compared with the living body. Of this seventy-two

feet, his skull and jaw comprised some twenty feet, leaving some fifty

feet of plain back-bone. Attached to this back-bone, for something less

than a third of its length, was the mighty circular basket of ribs

which once enclosed his vitals.

To me this vast ivory-ribbed chest, with the long, unrelieved spine,

extending far away from it in a straight line, not a little resembled

the hull of a great ship new-laid upon the stocks, when only some

twenty of her naked bow-ribs are inserted, and the keel is otherwise,

for the time, but a long, disconnected timber.

The ribs were ten on a side. The first, to begin from the neck, was

nearly six feet long; the second, third, and fourth were each

successively longer, till you came to the climax of the fifth, or one

of the middle ribs, which measured eight feet and some inches. From

that part, the remaining ribs diminished, till the tenth and last only

spanned five feet and some inches. In general thickness, they all bore

a seemly correspondence to their length. The middle ribs were the most

arched. In some of the Arsacides they are used for beams whereon to lay

footpath bridges over small streams.

In considering these ribs, I could not but be struck anew with the

circumstance, so variously repeated in this book, that the skeleton of

the whale is by no means the mould of his invested form. The largest of

the Tranque ribs, one of the middle ones, occupied that part of the

fish which, in life, is greatest in depth. Now, the greatest depth of

the invested body of this particular whale must have been at least

sixteen feet; whereas, the corresponding rib measured but little more

than eight feet. So that this rib only conveyed half of the true notion

of the living magnitude of that part. Besides, for some way, where I

now saw but a naked spine, all that had been once wrapped round with

tons of added bulk in flesh, muscle, blood, and bowels. Still more, for

the ample fins, I here saw but a few disordered joints; and in place of

the weighty and majestic, but boneless flukes, an utter blank!

How vain and foolish, then, thought I, for timid untravelled man to try

to comprehend aright this wondrous whale, by merely poring over his

dead attenuated skeleton, stretched in this peaceful wood. No. Only in

the heart of quickest perils; only when within the eddyings of his

angry flukes; only on the profound unbounded sea, can the fully

invested whale be truly and livingly found out.

But the spine. For that, the best way we can consider it is, with a

crane, to pile its bones high up on end. No speedy enterprise. But now

it’s done, it looks much like Pompey’s Pillar.

There are forty and odd vertebræ in all, which in the skeleton are not

locked together. They mostly lie like the great knobbed blocks on a

Gothic spire, forming solid courses of heavy masonry. The largest, a

middle one, is in width something less than three feet, and in depth

more than four. The smallest, where the spine tapers away into the

tail, is only two inches in width, and looks something like a white

billiard-ball. I was told that there were still smaller ones, but they

had been lost by some little cannibal urchins, the priest’s children,

who had stolen them to play marbles with. Thus we see how that the

spine of even the hugest of living things tapers off at last into

simple child’s play.

CHAPTER 104. The Fossil Whale.

From his mighty bulk the whale affords a most congenial theme whereon

to enlarge, amplify, and generally expatiate. Would you, you could not

compress him. By good rights he should only be treated of in imperial

folio. Not to tell over again his furlongs from spiracle to tail, and

the yards he measures about the waist; only think of the gigantic

involutions of his intestines, where they lie in him like great cables

and hawsers coiled away in the subterranean orlop-deck of a

line-of-battle-ship.

Since I have undertaken to manhandle this Leviathan, it behooves me to

approve myself omnisciently exhaustive in the enterprise; not

overlooking the minutest seminal germs of his blood, and spinning him

out to the uttermost coil of his bowels. Having already described him

in most of his present habitatory and anatomical peculiarities, it now

remains to magnify him in an archæological, fossiliferous, and

antediluvian point of view. Applied to any other creature than the

Leviathan—to an ant or a flea—such portly terms might justly be deemed

unwarrantably grandiloquent. But when Leviathan is the text, the case

is altered. Fain am I to stagger to this emprise under the weightiest

words of the dictionary. And here be it said, that whenever it has been

convenient to consult one in the course of these dissertations, I have

invariably used a huge quarto edition of Johnson, expressly purchased

for that purpose; because that famous lexicographer’s uncommon personal

bulk more fitted him to compile a lexicon to be used by a whale author

like me.

One often hears of writers that rise and swell with their subject,

though it may seem but an ordinary one. How, then, with me, writing of

this Leviathan? Unconsciously my chirography expands into placard

capitals. Give me a condor’s quill! Give me Vesuvius’ crater for an

inkstand! Friends, hold my arms! For in the mere act of penning my

thoughts of this Leviathan, they weary me, and make me faint with their

outreaching comprehensiveness of sweep, as if to include the whole

circle of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and

mastodons, past, present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas

of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe, not excluding

its suburbs. Such, and so magnifying, is the virtue of a large and

liberal theme! We expand to its bulk. To produce a mighty book, you

must choose a mighty theme. No great and enduring volume can ever be

written on the flea, though many there be who have tried it.

Ere entering upon the subject of Fossil Whales, I present my

credentials as a geologist, by stating that in my miscellaneous time I

have been a stone-mason, and also a great digger of ditches, canals and

wells, wine-vaults, cellars, and cisterns of all sorts. Likewise, by

way of preliminary, I desire to remind the reader, that while in the

earlier geological strata there are found the fossils of monsters now

almost completely extinct; the subsequent relics discovered in what are

called the Tertiary formations seem the connecting, or at any rate

intercepted links, between the antichronical creatures, and those whose

remote posterity are said to have entered the Ark; all the Fossil

Whales hitherto discovered belong to the Tertiary period, which is the

last preceding the superficial formations. And though none of them

precisely answer to any known species of the present time, they are yet

sufficiently akin to them in general respects, to justify their taking

rank as Cetacean fossils.

Detached broken fossils of pre-adamite whales, fragments of their bones

and skeletons, have within thirty years past, at various intervals,

been found at the base of the Alps, in Lombardy, in France, in England,

in Scotland, and in the States of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

Among the more curious of such remains is part of a skull, which in the

year 1779 was disinterred in the Rue Dauphine in Paris, a short street

opening almost directly upon the palace of the Tuileries; and bones

disinterred in excavating the great docks of Antwerp, in Napoleon’s

time. Cuvier pronounced these fragments to have belonged to some

utterly unknown Leviathanic species.

But by far the most wonderful of all Cetacean relics was the almost

complete vast skeleton of an extinct monster, found in the year 1842,

on the plantation of Judge Creagh, in Alabama. The awe-stricken

credulous slaves in the vicinity took it for the bones of one of the

fallen angels. The Alabama doctors declared it a huge reptile, and

bestowed upon it the name of Basilosaurus. But some specimen bones of

it being taken across the sea to Owen, the English Anatomist, it turned

out that this alleged reptile was a whale, though of a departed

species. A significant illustration of the fact, again and again

repeated in this book, that the skeleton of the whale furnishes but

little clue to the shape of his fully invested body. So Owen

rechristened the monster Zeuglodon; and in his paper read before the

London Geological Society, pronounced it, in substance, one of the most

extraordinary creatures which the mutations of the globe have blotted

out of existence.

When I stand among these mighty Leviathan skeletons, skulls, tusks,

jaws, ribs, and vertebræ, all characterized by partial resemblances to

the existing breeds of sea-monsters; but at the same time bearing on

the other hand similar affinities to the annihilated antichronical

Leviathans, their incalculable seniors; I am, by a flood, borne back to

that wondrous period, ere time itself can be said to have begun; for

time began with man. Here Saturn’s grey chaos rolls over me, and I

obtain dim, shuddering glimpses into those Polar eternities; when

wedged bastions of ice pressed hard upon what are now the Tropics; and

in all the 25,000 miles of this world’s circumference, not an

inhabitable hand’s breadth of land was visible. Then the whole world

was the whale’s; and, king of creation, he left his wake along the

present lines of the Andes and the Himmalehs. Who can show a pedigree

like Leviathan? Ahab’s harpoon had shed older blood than the Pharaoh’s.

Methuselah seems a school-boy. I look round to shake hands with Shem. I

am horror-struck at this antemosaic, unsourced existence of the

unspeakable terrors of the whale, which, having been before all time,

must needs exist after all humane ages are over.

But not alone has this Leviathan left his pre-adamite traces in the

stereotype plates of nature, and in limestone and marl bequeathed his

ancient bust; but upon Egyptian tablets, whose antiquity seems to claim

for them an almost fossiliferous character, we find the unmistakable

print of his fin. In an apartment of the great temple of Denderah, some

fifty years ago, there was discovered upon the granite ceiling a

sculptured and painted planisphere, abounding in centaurs, griffins,

and dolphins, similar to the grotesque figures on the celestial globe

of the moderns. Gliding among them, old Leviathan swam as of yore; was

there swimming in that planisphere, centuries before Solomon was

cradled.

Nor must there be omitted another strange attestation of the antiquity

of the whale, in his own osseous post-diluvian reality, as set down by

the venerable John Leo, the old Barbary traveller.

“Not far from the Sea-side, they have a Temple, the Rafters and Beams

of which are made of Whale-Bones; for Whales of a monstrous size are

oftentimes cast up dead upon that shore. The Common People imagine,

that by a secret Power bestowed by God upon the Temple, no Whale can

pass it without immediate death. But the truth of the Matter is, that

on either side of the Temple, there are Rocks that shoot two Miles into

the Sea, and wound the Whales when they light upon ’em. They keep a

Whale’s Rib of an incredible length for a Miracle, which lying upon the

Ground with its convex part uppermost, makes an Arch, the Head of which

cannot be reached by a Man upon a Camel’s Back. This Rib (says John

Leo) is said to have layn there a hundred Years before I saw it. Their

Historians affirm, that a Prophet who prophesy’d of Mahomet, came from

this Temple, and some do not stand to assert, that the Prophet Jonas

was cast forth by the Whale at the Base of the Temple.”

In this Afric Temple of the Whale I leave you, reader, and if you be a

Nantucketer, and a whaleman, you will silently worship there.

CHAPTER 105. Does the Whale’s Magnitude Diminish?—Will He Perish?

Inasmuch, then, as this Leviathan comes floundering down upon us from

the head-waters of the Eternities, it may be fitly inquired, whether,

in the long course of his generations, he has not degenerated from the

original bulk of his sires.

But upon investigation we find, that not only are the whales of the

present day superior in magnitude to those whose fossil remains are

found in the Tertiary system (embracing a distinct geological period

prior to man), but of the whales found in that Tertiary system, those

belonging to its latter formations exceed in size those of its earlier

ones.

Of all the pre-adamite whales yet exhumed, by far the largest is the

Alabama one mentioned in the last chapter, and that was less than

seventy feet in length in the skeleton. Whereas, we have already seen,

that the tape-measure gives seventy-two feet for the skeleton of a

large sized modern whale. And I have heard, on whalemen’s authority,

that Sperm Whales have been captured near a hundred feet long at the

time of capture.

But may it not be, that while the whales of the present hour are an

advance in magnitude upon those of all previous geological periods; may

it not be, that since Adam’s time they have degenerated?

Assuredly, we must conclude so, if we are to credit the accounts of

such gentlemen as Pliny, and the ancient naturalists generally. For

Pliny tells us of whales that embraced acres of living bulk, and

Aldrovandus of others which measured eight hundred feet in length—Rope

Walks and Thames Tunnels of Whales! And even in the days of Banks and

Solander, Cooke’s naturalists, we find a Danish member of the Academy

of Sciences setting down certain Iceland Whales (reydan-siskur, or

Wrinkled Bellies) at one hundred and twenty yards; that is, three

hundred and sixty feet. And Lacépède, the French naturalist, in his

elaborate history of whales, in the very beginning of his work (page

3), sets down the Right Whale at one hundred metres, three hundred and

twenty-eight feet. And this work was published so late as A.D. 1825.

But will any whaleman believe these stories? No. The whale of to-day is

as big as his ancestors in Pliny’s time. And if ever I go where Pliny

is, I, a whaleman (more than he was), will make bold to tell him so.

Because I cannot understand how it is, that while the Egyptian mummies

that were buried thousands of years before even Pliny was born, do not

measure so much in their coffins as a modern Kentuckian in his socks;

and while the cattle and other animals sculptured on the oldest

Egyptian and Nineveh tablets, by the relative proportions in which they

are drawn, just as plainly prove that the high-bred, stall-fed, prize

cattle of Smithfield, not only equal, but far exceed in magnitude the

fattest of Pharaoh’s fat kine; in the face of all this, I will not

admit that of all animals the whale alone should have degenerated.

But still another inquiry remains; one often agitated by the more

recondite Nantucketers. Whether owing to the almost omniscient

look-outs at the mast-heads of the whale-ships, now penetrating even

through Behring’s straits, and into the remotest secret drawers and

lockers of the world; and the thousand harpoons and lances darted along

all continental coasts; the moot point is, whether Leviathan can long

endure so wide a chase, and so remorseless a havoc; whether he must not

at last be exterminated from the waters, and the last whale, like the

last man, smoke his last pipe, and then himself evaporate in the final

puff.

Comparing the humped herds of whales with the humped herds of buffalo,

which, not forty years ago, overspread by tens of thousands the

prairies of Illinois and Missouri, and shook their iron manes and

scowled with their thunder-clotted brows upon the sites of populous

river-capitals, where now the polite broker sells you land at a dollar

an inch; in such a comparison an irresistible argument would seem

furnished, to show that the hunted whale cannot now escape speedy

extinction.

But you must look at this matter in every light. Though so short a

period ago—not a good lifetime—the census of the buffalo in Illinois

exceeded the census of men now in London, and though at the present day

not one horn or hoof of them remains in all that region; and though the

cause of this wondrous extermination was the spear of man; yet the far

different nature of the whale-hunt peremptorily forbids so inglorious

an end to the Leviathan. Forty men in one ship hunting the Sperm Whales

for forty-eight months think they have done extremely well, and thank

God, if at last they carry home the oil of forty fish. Whereas, in the

days of the old Canadian and Indian hunters and trappers of the West,

when the far west (in whose sunset suns still rise) was a wilderness

and a virgin, the same number of moccasined men, for the same number of

months, mounted on horse instead of sailing in ships, would have slain

not forty, but forty thousand and more buffaloes; a fact that, if need

were, could be statistically stated.

Nor, considered aright, does it seem any argument in favour of the

gradual extinction of the Sperm Whale, for example, that in former

years (the latter part of the last century, say) these Leviathans, in

small pods, were encountered much oftener than at present, and, in

consequence, the voyages were not so prolonged, and were also much more

remunerative. Because, as has been elsewhere noticed, those whales,

influenced by some views to safety, now swim the seas in immense

caravans, so that to a large degree the scattered solitaries, yokes,

and pods, and schools of other days are now aggregated into vast but

widely separated, unfrequent armies. That is all. And equally

fallacious seems the conceit, that because the so-called whale-bone

whales no longer haunt many grounds in former years abounding with

them, hence that species also is declining. For they are only being

driven from promontory to cape; and if one coast is no longer enlivened

with their jets, then, be sure, some other and remoter strand has been

very recently startled by the unfamiliar spectacle.

Furthermore: concerning these last mentioned Leviathans, they have two

firm fortresses, which, in all human probability, will for ever remain

impregnable. And as upon the invasion of their valleys, the frosty

Swiss have retreated to their mountains; so, hunted from the savannas

and glades of the middle seas, the whale-bone whales can at last resort

to their Polar citadels, and diving under the ultimate glassy barriers

and walls there, come up among icy fields and floes; and in a charmed

circle of everlasting December, bid defiance to all pursuit from man.

But as perhaps fifty of these whale-bone whales are harpooned for one

cachalot, some philosophers of the forecastle have concluded that this

positive havoc has already very seriously diminished their battalions.

But though for some time past a number of these whales, not less than

13,000, have been annually slain on the nor’ west coast by the

Americans alone; yet there are considerations which render even this

circumstance of little or no account as an opposing argument in this

matter.

Natural as it is to be somewhat incredulous concerning the populousness

of the more enormous creatures of the globe, yet what shall we say to

Harto, the historian of Goa, when he tells us that at one hunting the

King of Siam took 4,000 elephants; that in those regions elephants are

numerous as droves of cattle in the temperate climes. And there seems

no reason to doubt that if these elephants, which have now been hunted

for thousands of years, by Semiramis, by Porus, by Hannibal, and by all

the successive monarchs of the East—if they still survive there in

great numbers, much more may the great whale outlast all hunting, since

he has a pasture to expatiate in, which is precisely twice as large as

all Asia, both Americas, Europe and Africa, New Holland, and all the

Isles of the sea combined.

Moreover: we are to consider, that from the presumed great longevity of

whales, their probably attaining the age of a century and more,

therefore at any one period of time, several distinct adult generations

must be contemporary. And what that is, we may soon gain some idea of,

by imagining all the grave-yards, cemeteries, and family vaults of

creation yielding up the live bodies of all the men, women, and

children who were alive seventy-five years ago; and adding this

countless host to the present human population of the globe.

Wherefore, for all these things, we account the whale immortal in his

species, however perishable in his individuality. He swam the seas

before the continents broke water; he once swam over the site of the

Tuileries, and Windsor Castle, and the Kremlin. In Noah’s flood he

despised Noah’s Ark; and if ever the world is to be again flooded, like

the Netherlands, to kill off its rats, then the eternal whale will

still survive, and rearing upon the topmost crest of the equatorial

flood, spout his frothed defiance to the skies.

CHAPTER 106. Ahab’s Leg.

The precipitating manner in which Captain Ahab had quitted the Samuel

Enderby of London, had not been unattended with some small violence to

his own person. He had lighted with such energy upon a thwart of his

boat that his ivory leg had received a half-splintering shock. And when

after gaining his own deck, and his own pivot-hole there, he so

vehemently wheeled round with an urgent command to the steersman (it

was, as ever, something about his not steering inflexibly enough);

then, the already shaken ivory received such an additional twist and

wrench, that though it still remained entire, and to all appearances

lusty, yet Ahab did not deem it entirely trustworthy.

And, indeed, it seemed small matter for wonder, that for all his

pervading, mad recklessness, Ahab did at times give careful heed to the

condition of that dead bone upon which he partly stood. For it had not

been very long prior to the Pequod’s sailing from Nantucket, that he

had been found one night lying prone upon the ground, and insensible;

by some unknown, and seemingly inexplicable, unimaginable casualty, his

ivory limb having been so violently displaced, that it had stake-wise

smitten, and all but pierced his groin; nor was it without extreme

difficulty that the agonizing wound was entirely cured.

Nor, at the time, had it failed to enter his monomaniac mind, that all

the anguish of that then present suffering was but the direct issue of

a former woe; and he too plainly seemed to see, that as the most

poisonous reptile of the marsh perpetuates his kind as inevitably as

the sweetest songster of the grove; so, equally with every felicity,

all miserable events do naturally beget their like. Yea, more than

equally, thought Ahab; since both the ancestry and posterity of Grief

go further than the ancestry and posterity of Joy. For, not to hint of

this: that it is an inference from certain canonic teachings, that

while some natural enjoyments here shall have no children born to them

for the other world, but, on the contrary, shall be followed by the

joy-childlessness of all hell’s despair; whereas, some guilty mortal

miseries shall still fertilely beget to themselves an eternally

progressive progeny of griefs beyond the grave; not at all to hint of

this, there still seems an inequality in the deeper analysis of the

thing. For, thought Ahab, while even the highest earthly felicities

ever have a certain unsignifying pettiness lurking in them, but, at

bottom, all heartwoes, a mystic significance, and, in some men, an

archangelic grandeur; so do their diligent tracings-out not belie the

obvious deduction. To trail the genealogies of these high mortal

miseries, carries us at last among the sourceless primogenitures of the

gods; so that, in the face of all the glad, hay-making suns, and soft

cymballing, round harvest-moons, we must needs give in to this: that

the gods themselves are not for ever glad. The ineffaceable, sad

birth-mark in the brow of man, is but the stamp of sorrow in the

signers.

Unwittingly here a secret has been divulged, which perhaps might more

properly, in set way, have been disclosed before. With many other

particulars concerning Ahab, always had it remained a mystery to some,

why it was, that for a certain period, both before and after the

sailing of the Pequod, he had hidden himself away with such

Grand-Lama-like exclusiveness; and, for that one interval, sought

speechless refuge, as it were, among the marble senate of the dead.

Captain Peleg’s bruited reason for this thing appeared by no means

adequate; though, indeed, as touching all Ahab’s deeper part, every

revelation partook more of significant darkness than of explanatory

light. But, in the end, it all came out; this one matter did, at least.

That direful mishap was at the bottom of his temporary recluseness. And

not only this, but to that ever-contracting, dropping circle ashore,

who, for any reason, possessed the privilege of a less banned approach

to him; to that timid circle the above hinted casualty—remaining, as it

did, moodily unaccounted for by Ahab—invested itself with terrors, not

entirely underived from the land of spirits and of wails. So that,

through their zeal for him, they had all conspired, so far as in them

lay, to muffle up the knowledge of this thing from others; and hence it

was, that not till a considerable interval had elapsed, did it

transpire upon the Pequod’s decks.

But be all this as it may; let the unseen, ambiguous synod in the air,

or the vindictive princes and potentates of fire, have to do or not

with earthly Ahab, yet, in this present matter of his leg, he took

plain practical procedures;—he called the carpenter.

And when that functionary appeared before him, he bade him without

delay set about making a new leg, and directed the mates to see him

supplied with all the studs and joists of jaw-ivory (Sperm Whale) which

had thus far been accumulated on the voyage, in order that a careful

selection of the stoutest, clearest-grained stuff might be secured.

This done, the carpenter received orders to have the leg completed that

night; and to provide all the fittings for it, independent of those

pertaining to the distrusted one in use. Moreover, the ship’s forge was

ordered to be hoisted out of its temporary idleness in the hold; and,

to accelerate the affair, the blacksmith was commanded to proceed at

once to the forging of whatever iron contrivances might be needed.

CHAPTER 107. The Carpenter.

Seat thyself sultanically among the moons of Saturn, and take high

abstracted man alone; and he seems a wonder, a grandeur, and a woe. But

from the same point, take mankind in mass, and for the most part, they

seem a mob of unnecessary duplicates, both contemporary and hereditary.

But most humble though he was, and far from furnishing an example of

the high, humane abstraction; the Pequod’s carpenter was no duplicate;

hence, he now comes in person on this stage.

Like all sea-going ship carpenters, and more especially those belonging

to whaling vessels, he was, to a certain off-handed, practical extent,

alike experienced in numerous trades and callings collateral to his

own; the carpenter’s pursuit being the ancient and outbranching trunk

of all those numerous handicrafts which more or less have to do with

wood as an auxiliary material. But, besides the application to him of

the generic remark above, this carpenter of the Pequod was singularly

efficient in those thousand nameless mechanical emergencies continually

recurring in a large ship, upon a three or four years’ voyage, in

uncivilized and far-distant seas. For not to speak of his readiness in

ordinary duties:—repairing stove boats, sprung spars, reforming the

shape of clumsy-bladed oars, inserting bull’s eyes in the deck, or new

tree-nails in the side planks, and other miscellaneous matters more

directly pertaining to his special business; he was moreover

unhesitatingly expert in all manner of conflicting aptitudes, both

useful and capricious.

The one grand stage where he enacted all his various parts so manifold,

was his vice-bench; a long rude ponderous table furnished with several

vices, of different sizes, and both of iron and of wood. At all times

except when whales were alongside, this bench was securely lashed

athwartships against the rear of the Try-works.

A belaying pin is found too large to be easily inserted into its hole:

the carpenter claps it into one of his ever-ready vices, and

straightway files it smaller. A lost land-bird of strange plumage

strays on board, and is made a captive: out of clean shaved rods of

right-whale bone, and cross-beams of sperm whale ivory, the carpenter

makes a pagoda-looking cage for it. An oarsman sprains his wrist: the

carpenter concocts a soothing lotion. Stubb longed for vermillion stars

to be painted upon the blade of his every oar; screwing each oar in his

big vice of wood, the carpenter symmetrically supplies the

constellation. A sailor takes a fancy to wear shark-bone ear-rings: the

carpenter drills his ears. Another has the toothache: the carpenter out

pincers, and clapping one hand upon his bench bids him be seated there;

but the poor fellow unmanageably winces under the unconcluded

operation; whirling round the handle of his wooden vice, the carpenter

signs him to clap his jaw in that, if he would have him draw the tooth.

Thus, this carpenter was prepared at all points, and alike indifferent

and without respect in all. Teeth he accounted bits of ivory; heads he

deemed but top-blocks; men themselves he lightly held for capstans. But

while now upon so wide a field thus variously accomplished and with

such liveliness of expertness in him, too; all this would seem to argue

some uncommon vivacity of intelligence. But not precisely so. For

nothing was this man more remarkable, than for a certain impersonal

stolidity as it were; impersonal, I say; for it so shaded off into the

surrounding infinite of things, that it seemed one with the general

stolidity discernible in the whole visible world; which while

pauselessly active in uncounted modes, still eternally holds its peace,

and ignores you, though you dig foundations for cathedrals. Yet was

this half-horrible stolidity in him, involving, too, as it appeared, an

all-ramifying heartlessness;—yet was it oddly dashed at times, with an

old, crutch-like, antediluvian, wheezing humorousness, not unstreaked

now and then with a certain grizzled wittiness; such as might have

served to pass the time during the midnight watch on the bearded

forecastle of Noah’s ark. Was it that this old carpenter had been a

life-long wanderer, whose much rolling, to and fro, not only had

gathered no moss; but what is more, had rubbed off whatever small

outward clingings might have originally pertained to him? He was a

stript abstract; an unfractioned integral; uncompromised as a new-born

babe; living without premeditated reference to this world or the next.

You might almost say, that this strange uncompromisedness in him

involved a sort of unintelligence; for in his numerous trades, he did

not seem to work so much by reason or by instinct, or simply because he

had been tutored to it, or by any intermixture of all these, even or

uneven; but merely by a kind of deaf and dumb, spontaneous literal

process. He was a pure manipulator; his brain, if he had ever had one,

must have early oozed along into the muscles of his fingers. He was

like one of those unreasoning but still highly useful, \_multum in

parvo\_, Sheffield contrivances, assuming the exterior—though a little

swelled—of a common pocket knife; but containing, not only blades of

various sizes, but also screw-drivers, cork-screws, tweezers, awls,

pens, rulers, nail-filers, countersinkers. So, if his superiors wanted

to use the carpenter for a screw-driver, all they had to do was to open

that part of him, and the screw was fast: or if for tweezers, take him

up by the legs, and there they were.

Yet, as previously hinted, this omnitooled, open-and-shut carpenter,

was, after all, no mere machine of an automaton. If he did not have a

common soul in him, he had a subtle something that somehow anomalously

did its duty. What that was, whether essence of quicksilver, or a few

drops of hartshorn, there is no telling. But there it was; and there it

had abided for now some sixty years or more. And this it was, this same

unaccountable, cunning life-principle in him; this it was, that kept

him a great part of the time soliloquizing; but only like an

unreasoning wheel, which also hummingly soliloquizes; or rather, his

body was a sentry-box and this soliloquizer on guard there, and talking

all the time to keep himself awake.

CHAPTER 108. Ahab and the Carpenter.

The Deck—First Night Watch.

(\_Carpenter standing before his vice-bench, and by the light of two

lanterns busily filing the ivory joist for the leg, which joist is

firmly fixed in the vice. Slabs of ivory, leather straps, pads, screws,

and various tools of all sorts lying about the bench. Forward, the red

flame of the forge is seen, where the blacksmith is at work.\_)

Drat the file, and drat the bone! That is hard which should be soft,

and that is soft which should be hard. So we go, who file old jaws and

shinbones. Let’s try another. Aye, now, this works better (\_sneezes\_).

Halloa, this bone dust is (\_sneezes\_)—why it’s (\_sneezes\_)—yes it’s

(\_sneezes\_)—bless my soul, it won’t let me speak! This is what an old

fellow gets now for working in dead lumber. Saw a live tree, and you

don’t get this dust; amputate a live bone, and you don’t get it

(\_sneezes\_). Come, come, you old Smut, there, bear a hand, and let’s

have that ferule and buckle-screw; I’ll be ready for them presently.

Lucky now (\_sneezes\_) there’s no knee-joint to make; that might puzzle

a little; but a mere shinbone—why it’s easy as making hop-poles; only I

should like to put a good finish on. Time, time; if I but only had the

time, I could turn him out as neat a leg now as ever (\_sneezes\_)

scraped to a lady in a parlor. Those buckskin legs and calves of legs

I’ve seen in shop windows wouldn’t compare at all. They soak water,

they do; and of course get rheumatic, and have to be doctored

(\_sneezes\_) with washes and lotions, just like live legs. There; before

I saw it off, now, I must call his old Mogulship, and see whether the

length will be all right; too short, if anything, I guess. Ha! that’s

the heel; we are in luck; here he comes, or it’s somebody else, that’s

certain.

AHAB (\_advancing\_). (\_During the ensuing scene, the carpenter continues

sneezing at times.\_)

Well, manmaker!

Just in time, sir. If the captain pleases, I will now mark the length.

Let me measure, sir.

Measured for a leg! good. Well, it’s not the first time. About it!

There; keep thy finger on it. This is a cogent vice thou hast here,

carpenter; let me feel its grip once. So, so; it does pinch some.

Oh, sir, it will break bones—beware, beware!

No fear; I like a good grip; I like to feel something in this slippery

world that can hold, man. What’s Prometheus about there?—the

blacksmith, I mean—what’s he about?

He must be forging the buckle-screw, sir, now.

Right. It’s a partnership; he supplies the muscle part. He makes a

fierce red flame there!

Aye, sir; he must have the white heat for this kind of fine work.

Um-m. So he must. I do deem it now a most meaning thing, that that old

Greek, Prometheus, who made men, they say, should have been a

blacksmith, and animated them with fire; for what’s made in fire must

properly belong to fire; and so hell’s probable. How the soot flies!

This must be the remainder the Greek made the Africans of. Carpenter,

when he’s through with that buckle, tell him to forge a pair of steel

shoulder-blades; there’s a pedlar aboard with a crushing pack.

Sir?

Hold; while Prometheus is about it, I’ll order a complete man after a

desirable pattern. Imprimis, fifty feet high in his socks; then, chest

modelled after the Thames Tunnel; then, legs with roots to ’em, to stay

in one place; then, arms three feet through the wrist; no heart at all,

brass forehead, and about a quarter of an acre of fine brains; and let

me see—shall I order eyes to see outwards? No, but put a sky-light on

top of his head to illuminate inwards. There, take the order, and away.

Now, what’s he speaking about, and who’s he speaking to, I should like

to know? Shall I keep standing here? (\_aside\_).

’Tis but indifferent architecture to make a blind dome; here’s one. No,

no, no; I must have a lantern.

Ho, ho! That’s it, hey? Here are two, sir; one will serve my turn.

What art thou thrusting that thief-catcher into my face for, man?

Thrusted light is worse than presented pistols.

I thought, sir, that you spoke to carpenter.

Carpenter? why that’s—but no;—a very tidy, and, I may say, an extremely

gentlemanlike sort of business thou art in here, carpenter;—or would’st

thou rather work in clay?

Sir?—Clay? clay, sir? That’s mud; we leave clay to ditchers, sir.

The fellow’s impious! What art thou sneezing about?

Bone is rather dusty, sir.

Take the hint, then; and when thou art dead, never bury thyself under

living people’s noses.

Sir?—oh! ah!—I guess so;—yes—oh, dear!

Look ye, carpenter, I dare say thou callest thyself a right good

workmanlike workman, eh? Well, then, will it speak thoroughly well for

thy work, if, when I come to mount this leg thou makest, I shall

nevertheless feel another leg in the same identical place with it; that

is, carpenter, my old lost leg; the flesh and blood one, I mean. Canst

thou not drive that old Adam away?

Truly, sir, I begin to understand somewhat now. Yes, I have heard

something curious on that score, sir; how that a dismasted man never

entirely loses the feeling of his old spar, but it will be still

pricking him at times. May I humbly ask if it be really so, sir?

It is, man. Look, put thy live leg here in the place where mine once

was; so, now, here is only one distinct leg to the eye, yet two to the

soul. Where thou feelest tingling life; there, exactly there, there to

a hair, do I. Is’t a riddle?

I should humbly call it a poser, sir.

Hist, then. How dost thou know that some entire, living, thinking thing

may not be invisibly and uninterpenetratingly standing precisely where

thou now standest; aye, and standing there in thy spite? In thy most

solitary hours, then, dost thou not fear eavesdroppers? Hold, don’t

speak! And if I still feel the smart of my crushed leg, though it be

now so long dissolved; then, why mayst not thou, carpenter, feel the

fiery pains of hell for ever, and without a body? Hah!

Good Lord! Truly, sir, if it comes to that, I must calculate over

again; I think I didn’t carry a small figure, sir.

Look ye, pudding-heads should never grant premises.—How long before the

leg is done?

Perhaps an hour, sir.

Bungle away at it then, and bring it to me (\_turns to go\_). Oh, Life!

Here I am, proud as Greek god, and yet standing debtor to this

blockhead for a bone to stand on! Cursed be that mortal

inter-indebtedness which will not do away with ledgers. I would be free

as air; and I’m down in the whole world’s books. I am so rich, I could

have given bid for bid with the wealthiest Prætorians at the auction of

the Roman empire (which was the world’s); and yet I owe for the flesh

in the tongue I brag with. By heavens! I’ll get a crucible, and into

it, and dissolve myself down to one small, compendious vertebra. So.

CARPENTER (\_resuming his work\_).

Well, well, well! Stubb knows him best of all, and Stubb always says

he’s queer; says nothing but that one sufficient little word queer;

he’s queer, says Stubb; he’s queer—queer, queer; and keeps dinning it

into Mr. Starbuck all the time—queer—sir—queer, queer, very queer. And

here’s his leg! Yes, now that I think of it, here’s his bedfellow! has

a stick of whale’s jaw-bone for a wife! And this is his leg; he’ll

stand on this. What was that now about one leg standing in three

places, and all three places standing in one hell—how was that? Oh! I

don’t wonder he looked so scornful at me! I’m a sort of

strange-thoughted sometimes, they say; but that’s only haphazard-like.

Then, a short, little old body like me, should never undertake to wade

out into deep waters with tall, heron-built captains; the water chucks

you under the chin pretty quick, and there’s a great cry for

life-boats. And here’s the heron’s leg! long and slim, sure enough!

Now, for most folks one pair of legs lasts a lifetime, and that must be

because they use them mercifully, as a tender-hearted old lady uses her

roly-poly old coach-horses. But Ahab; oh he’s a hard driver. Look,

driven one leg to death, and spavined the other for life, and now wears

out bone legs by the cord. Halloa, there, you Smut! bear a hand there

with those screws, and let’s finish it before the resurrection fellow

comes a-calling with his horn for all legs, true or false, as

brewery-men go round collecting old beer barrels, to fill ’em up again.

What a leg this is! It looks like a real live leg, filed down to

nothing but the core; he’ll be standing on this to-morrow; he’ll be

taking altitudes on it. Halloa! I almost forgot the little oval slate,

smoothed ivory, where he figures up the latitude. So, so; chisel, file,

and sand-paper, now!

CHAPTER 109. Ahab and Starbuck in the Cabin.

According to usage they were pumping the ship next morning; and lo! no

inconsiderable oil came up with the water; the casks below must have

sprung a bad leak. Much concern was shown; and Starbuck went down into

the cabin to report this unfavourable affair.\*

\*In Sperm-whalemen with any considerable quantity of oil on board, it

is a regular semi-weekly duty to conduct a hose into the hold, and

drench the casks with sea-water; which afterwards, at varying

intervals, is removed by the ship’s pumps. Hereby the casks are sought

to be kept damply tight; while by the changed character of the

withdrawn water, the mariners readily detect any serious leakage in the

precious cargo.

Now, from the South and West the Pequod was drawing nigh to Formosa and

the Bashee Isles, between which lies one of the tropical outlets from

the China waters into the Pacific. And so Starbuck found Ahab with a

general chart of the oriental archipelagoes spread before him; and

another separate one representing the long eastern coasts of the

Japanese islands—Niphon, Matsmai, and Sikoke. With his snow-white new

ivory leg braced against the screwed leg of his table, and with a long

pruning-hook of a jack-knife in his hand, the wondrous old man, with

his back to the gangway door, was wrinkling his brow, and tracing his

old courses again.

“Who’s there?” hearing the footstep at the door, but not turning round

to it. “On deck! Begone!”

“Captain Ahab mistakes; it is I. The oil in the hold is leaking, sir.

We must up Burtons and break out.”

“Up Burtons and break out? Now that we are nearing Japan; heave-to here

for a week to tinker a parcel of old hoops?”

“Either do that, sir, or waste in one day more oil than we may make

good in a year. What we come twenty thousand miles to get is worth

saving, sir.”

“So it is, so it is; if we get it.”

“I was speaking of the oil in the hold, sir.”

“And I was not speaking or thinking of that at all. Begone! Let it

leak! I’m all aleak myself. Aye! leaks in leaks! not only full of leaky

casks, but those leaky casks are in a leaky ship; and that’s a far

worse plight than the Pequod’s, man. Yet I don’t stop to plug my leak;

for who can find it in the deep-loaded hull; or how hope to plug it,

even if found, in this life’s howling gale? Starbuck! I’ll not have the

Burtons hoisted.”

“What will the owners say, sir?”

“Let the owners stand on Nantucket beach and outyell the Typhoons. What

cares Ahab? Owners, owners? Thou art always prating to me, Starbuck,

about those miserly owners, as if the owners were my conscience. But

look ye, the only real owner of anything is its commander; and hark ye,

my conscience is in this ship’s keel.—On deck!”

“Captain Ahab,” said the reddening mate, moving further into the cabin,

with a daring so strangely respectful and cautious that it almost

seemed not only every way seeking to avoid the slightest outward

manifestation of itself, but within also seemed more than half

distrustful of itself; “A better man than I might well pass over in

thee what he would quickly enough resent in a younger man; aye, and in

a happier, Captain Ahab.”

“Devils! Dost thou then so much as dare to critically think of me?—On

deck!”

“Nay, sir, not yet; I do entreat. And I do dare, sir—to be forbearing!

Shall we not understand each other better than hitherto, Captain Ahab?”

Ahab seized a loaded musket from the rack (forming part of most

South-Sea-men’s cabin furniture), and pointing it towards Starbuck,

exclaimed: “There is one God that is Lord over the earth, and one

Captain that is lord over the Pequod.—On deck!”

For an instant in the flashing eyes of the mate, and his fiery cheeks,

you would have almost thought that he had really received the blaze of

the levelled tube. But, mastering his emotion, he half calmly rose, and

as he quitted the cabin, paused for an instant and said: “Thou hast

outraged, not insulted me, sir; but for that I ask thee not to beware

of Starbuck; thou wouldst but laugh; but let Ahab beware of Ahab;

beware of thyself, old man.”

“He waxes brave, but nevertheless obeys; most careful bravery that!”

murmured Ahab, as Starbuck disappeared. “What’s that he said—Ahab

beware of Ahab—there’s something there!” Then unconsciously using the

musket for a staff, with an iron brow he paced to and fro in the little

cabin; but presently the thick plaits of his forehead relaxed, and

returning the gun to the rack, he went to the deck.

“Thou art but too good a fellow, Starbuck,” he said lowly to the mate;

then raising his voice to the crew: “Furl the t’gallant-sails, and

close-reef the top-sails, fore and aft; back the main-yard; up Burton,

and break out in the main-hold.”

It were perhaps vain to surmise exactly why it was, that as respecting

Starbuck, Ahab thus acted. It may have been a flash of honesty in him;

or mere prudential policy which, under the circumstance, imperiously

forbade the slightest symptom of open disaffection, however transient,

in the important chief officer of his ship. However it was, his orders

were executed; and the Burtons were hoisted.

CHAPTER 110. Queequeg in His Coffin.

Upon searching, it was found that the casks last struck into the hold

were perfectly sound, and that the leak must be further off. So, it

being calm weather, they broke out deeper and deeper, disturbing the

slumbers of the huge ground-tier butts; and from that black midnight

sending those gigantic moles into the daylight above. So deep did they

go; and so ancient, and corroded, and weedy the aspect of the lowermost

puncheons, that you almost looked next for some mouldy corner-stone

cask containing coins of Captain Noah, with copies of the posted

placards, vainly warning the infatuated old world from the flood.

Tierce after tierce, too, of water, and bread, and beef, and shooks of

staves, and iron bundles of hoops, were hoisted out, till at last the

piled decks were hard to get about; and the hollow hull echoed under

foot, as if you were treading over empty catacombs, and reeled and

rolled in the sea like an air-freighted demijohn. Top-heavy was the

ship as a dinnerless student with all Aristotle in his head. Well was

it that the Typhoons did not visit them then.

Now, at this time it was that my poor pagan companion, and fast

bosom-friend, Queequeg, was seized with a fever, which brought him nigh

to his endless end.

Be it said, that in this vocation of whaling, sinecures are unknown;

dignity and danger go hand in hand; till you get to be Captain, the

higher you rise the harder you toil. So with poor Queequeg, who, as

harpooneer, must not only face all the rage of the living whale, but—as

we have elsewhere seen—mount his dead back in a rolling sea; and

finally descend into the gloom of the hold, and bitterly sweating all

day in that subterraneous confinement, resolutely manhandle the

clumsiest casks and see to their stowage. To be short, among whalemen,

the harpooneers are the holders, so called.

Poor Queequeg! when the ship was about half disembowelled, you should

have stooped over the hatchway, and peered down upon him there; where,

stripped to his woollen drawers, the tattooed savage was crawling about

amid that dampness and slime, like a green spotted lizard at the bottom

of a well. And a well, or an ice-house, it somehow proved to him, poor

pagan; where, strange to say, for all the heat of his sweatings, he

caught a terrible chill which lapsed into a fever; and at last, after

some days’ suffering, laid him in his hammock, close to the very sill

of the door of death. How he wasted and wasted away in those few

long-lingering days, till there seemed but little left of him but his

frame and tattooing. But as all else in him thinned, and his

cheek-bones grew sharper, his eyes, nevertheless, seemed growing fuller

and fuller; they became of a strange softness of lustre; and mildly but

deeply looked out at you there from his sickness, a wondrous testimony

to that immortal health in him which could not die, or be weakened. And

like circles on the water, which, as they grow fainter, expand; so his

eyes seemed rounding and rounding, like the rings of Eternity. An awe

that cannot be named would steal over you as you sat by the side of

this waning savage, and saw as strange things in his face, as any

beheld who were bystanders when Zoroaster died. For whatever is truly

wondrous and fearful in man, never yet was put into words or books. And

the drawing near of Death, which alike levels all, alike impresses all

with a last revelation, which only an author from the dead could

adequately tell. So that—let us say it again—no dying Chaldee or Greek

had higher and holier thoughts than those, whose mysterious shades you

saw creeping over the face of poor Queequeg, as he quietly lay in his

swaying hammock, and the rolling sea seemed gently rocking him to his

final rest, and the ocean’s invisible flood-tide lifted him higher and

higher towards his destined heaven.

Not a man of the crew but gave him up; and, as for Queequeg himself,

what he thought of his case was forcibly shown by a curious favour he

asked. He called one to him in the grey morning watch, when the day was

just breaking, and taking his hand, said that while in Nantucket he had

chanced to see certain little canoes of dark wood, like the rich

war-wood of his native isle; and upon inquiry, he had learned that all

whalemen who died in Nantucket, were laid in those same dark canoes,

and that the fancy of being so laid had much pleased him; for it was

not unlike the custom of his own race, who, after embalming a dead

warrior, stretched him out in his canoe, and so left him to be floated

away to the starry archipelagoes; for not only do they believe that the

stars are isles, but that far beyond all visible horizons, their own

mild, uncontinented seas, interflow with the blue heavens; and so form

the white breakers of the milky way. He added, that he shuddered at the

thought of being buried in his hammock, according to the usual

sea-custom, tossed like something vile to the death-devouring sharks.

No: he desired a canoe like those of Nantucket, all the more congenial

to him, being a whaleman, that like a whale-boat these coffin-canoes

were without a keel; though that involved but uncertain steering, and

much lee-way adown the dim ages.

Now, when this strange circumstance was made known aft, the carpenter

was at once commanded to do Queequeg’s bidding, whatever it might

include. There was some heathenish, coffin-coloured old lumber aboard,

which, upon a long previous voyage, had been cut from the aboriginal

groves of the Lackaday islands, and from these dark planks the coffin

was recommended to be made. No sooner was the carpenter apprised of the

order, than taking his rule, he forthwith with all the indifferent

promptitude of his character, proceeded into the forecastle and took

Queequeg’s measure with great accuracy, regularly chalking Queequeg’s

person as he shifted the rule.

“Ah! poor fellow! he’ll have to die now,” ejaculated the Long Island

sailor.

Going to his vice-bench, the carpenter for convenience sake and general

reference, now transferringly measured on it the exact length the

coffin was to be, and then made the transfer permanent by cutting two

notches at its extremities. This done, he marshalled the planks and his

tools, and to work.

When the last nail was driven, and the lid duly planed and fitted, he

lightly shouldered the coffin and went forward with it, inquiring

whether they were ready for it yet in that direction.

Overhearing the indignant but half-humorous cries with which the people

on deck began to drive the coffin away, Queequeg, to every one’s

consternation, commanded that the thing should be instantly brought to

him, nor was there any denying him; seeing that, of all mortals, some

dying men are the most tyrannical; and certainly, since they will

shortly trouble us so little for evermore, the poor fellows ought to be

indulged.

Leaning over in his hammock, Queequeg long regarded the coffin with an

attentive eye. He then called for his harpoon, had the wooden stock

drawn from it, and then had the iron part placed in the coffin along

with one of the paddles of his boat. All by his own request, also,

biscuits were then ranged round the sides within: a flask of fresh

water was placed at the head, and a small bag of woody earth scraped up

in the hold at the foot; and a piece of sail-cloth being rolled up for

a pillow, Queequeg now entreated to be lifted into his final bed, that

he might make trial of its comforts, if any it had. He lay without

moving a few minutes, then told one to go to his bag and bring out his

little god, Yojo. Then crossing his arms on his breast with Yojo

between, he called for the coffin lid (hatch he called it) to be placed

over him. The head part turned over with a leather hinge, and there lay

Queequeg in his coffin with little but his composed countenance in

view. “Rarmai” (it will do; it is easy), he murmured at last, and

signed to be replaced in his hammock.

But ere this was done, Pip, who had been slily hovering near by all

this while, drew nigh to him where he lay, and with soft sobbings, took

him by the hand; in the other, holding his tambourine.

“Poor rover! will ye never have done with all this weary roving? where

go ye now? But if the currents carry ye to those sweet Antilles where

the beaches are only beat with water-lilies, will ye do one little

errand for me? Seek out one Pip, who’s now been missing long: I think

he’s in those far Antilles. If ye find him, then comfort him; for he

must be very sad; for look! he’s left his tambourine behind;—I found

it. Rig-a-dig, dig, dig! Now, Queequeg, die; and I’ll beat ye your

dying march.”

“I have heard,” murmured Starbuck, gazing down the scuttle, “that in

violent fevers, men, all ignorance, have talked in ancient tongues; and

that when the mystery is probed, it turns out always that in their

wholly forgotten childhood those ancient tongues had been really spoken

in their hearing by some lofty scholars. So, to my fond faith, poor

Pip, in this strange sweetness of his lunacy, brings heavenly vouchers

of all our heavenly homes. Where learned he that, but there?—Hark! he

speaks again: but more wildly now.”

“Form two and two! Let’s make a General of him! Ho, where’s his

harpoon? Lay it across here.—Rig-a-dig, dig, dig! huzza! Oh for a game

cock now to sit upon his head and crow! Queequeg dies game!—mind ye

that; Queequeg dies game!—take ye good heed of that; Queequeg dies

game! I say; game, game, game! but base little Pip, he died a coward;

died all a’shiver;—out upon Pip! Hark ye; if ye find Pip, tell all the

Antilles he’s a runaway; a coward, a coward, a coward! Tell them he

jumped from a whale-boat! I’d never beat my tambourine over base Pip,

and hail him General, if he were once more dying here. No, no! shame

upon all cowards—shame upon them! Let ’em go drown like Pip, that

jumped from a whale-boat. Shame! shame!”

During all this, Queequeg lay with closed eyes, as if in a dream. Pip

was led away, and the sick man was replaced in his hammock.

But now that he had apparently made every preparation for death; now

that his coffin was proved a good fit, Queequeg suddenly rallied; soon

there seemed no need of the carpenter’s box: and thereupon, when some

expressed their delighted surprise, he, in substance, said, that the

cause of his sudden convalescence was this;—at a critical moment, he

had just recalled a little duty ashore, which he was leaving undone;

and therefore had changed his mind about dying: he could not die yet,

he averred. They asked him, then, whether to live or die was a matter

of his own sovereign will and pleasure. He answered, certainly. In a

word, it was Queequeg’s conceit, that if a man made up his mind to

live, mere sickness could not kill him: nothing but a whale, or a gale,

or some violent, ungovernable, unintelligent destroyer of that sort.

Now, there is this noteworthy difference between savage and civilized;

that while a sick, civilized man may be six months convalescing,

generally speaking, a sick savage is almost half-well again in a day.

So, in good time my Queequeg gained strength; and at length after

sitting on the windlass for a few indolent days (but eating with a

vigorous appetite) he suddenly leaped to his feet, threw out his arms

and legs, gave himself a good stretching, yawned a little bit, and then

springing into the head of his hoisted boat, and poising a harpoon,

pronounced himself fit for a fight.

With a wild whimsiness, he now used his coffin for a sea-chest; and

emptying into it his canvas bag of clothes, set them in order there.

Many spare hours he spent, in carving the lid with all manner of

grotesque figures and drawings; and it seemed that hereby he was

striving, in his rude way, to copy parts of the twisted tattooing on

his body. And this tattooing had been the work of a departed prophet

and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written

out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a

mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in

his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one

volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own

live heart beat against them; and these mysteries were therefore

destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon

they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last. And this thought

it must have been which suggested to Ahab that wild exclamation of his,

when one morning turning away from surveying poor Queequeg—“Oh,

devilish tantalization of the gods!”

CHAPTER 111. The Pacific.

When gliding by the Bashee isles we emerged at last upon the great

South Sea; were it not for other things, I could have greeted my dear

Pacific with uncounted thanks, for now the long supplication of my

youth was answered; that serene ocean rolled eastwards from me a

thousand leagues of blue.

There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently

awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath; like those

fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod over the buried Evangelist St.

John. And meet it is, that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery

prairies and Potters’ Fields of all four continents, the waves should

rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly; for here, millions of

mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all

that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing

like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by

their restlessness.

To any meditative Magian rover, this serene Pacific, once beheld, must

ever after be the sea of his adoption. It rolls the midmost waters of

the world, the Indian ocean and Atlantic being but its arms. The same

waves wash the moles of the new-built Californian towns, but yesterday

planted by the recentest race of men, and lave the faded but still

gorgeous skirts of Asiatic lands, older than Abraham; while all between

float milky-ways of coral isles, and low-lying, endless, unknown

Archipelagoes, and impenetrable Japans. Thus this mysterious, divine

Pacific zones the world’s whole bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to

it; seems the tide-beating heart of earth. Lifted by those eternal

swells, you needs must own the seductive god, bowing your head to Pan.

But few thoughts of Pan stirred Ahab’s brain, as standing like an iron

statue at his accustomed place beside the mizen rigging, with one

nostril he unthinkingly snuffed the sugary musk from the Bashee isles

(in whose sweet woods mild lovers must be walking), and with the other

consciously inhaled the salt breath of the new found sea; that sea in

which the hated White Whale must even then be swimming. Launched at

length upon these almost final waters, and gliding towards the Japanese

cruising-ground, the old man’s purpose intensified itself. His firm

lips met like the lips of a vice; the Delta of his forehead’s veins

swelled like overladen brooks; in his very sleep, his ringing cry ran

through the vaulted hull, “Stern all! the White Whale spouts thick

blood!”

CHAPTER 112. The Blacksmith.

Availing himself of the mild, summer-cool weather that now reigned in

these latitudes, and in preparation for the peculiarly active pursuits

shortly to be anticipated, Perth, the begrimed, blistered old

blacksmith, had not removed his portable forge to the hold again, after

concluding his contributory work for Ahab’s leg, but still retained it

on deck, fast lashed to ringbolts by the foremast; being now almost

incessantly invoked by the headsmen, and harpooneers, and bowsmen to do

some little job for them; altering, or repairing, or new shaping their

various weapons and boat furniture. Often he would be surrounded by an

eager circle, all waiting to be served; holding boat-spades,

pike-heads, harpoons, and lances, and jealously watching his every

sooty movement, as he toiled. Nevertheless, this old man’s was a

patient hammer wielded by a patient arm. No murmur, no impatience, no

petulance did come from him. Silent, slow, and solemn; bowing over

still further his chronically broken back, he toiled away, as if toil

were life itself, and the heavy beating of his hammer the heavy beating

of his heart. And so it was.—Most miserable!

A peculiar walk in this old man, a certain slight but painful appearing

yawing in his gait, had at an early period of the voyage excited the

curiosity of the mariners. And to the importunity of their persisted

questionings he had finally given in; and so it came to pass that every

one now knew the shameful story of his wretched fate.

Belated, and not innocently, one bitter winter’s midnight, on the road

running between two country towns, the blacksmith half-stupidly felt

the deadly numbness stealing over him, and sought refuge in a leaning,

dilapidated barn. The issue was, the loss of the extremities of both

feet. Out of this revelation, part by part, at last came out the four

acts of the gladness, and the one long, and as yet uncatastrophied

fifth act of the grief of his life’s drama.

He was an old man, who, at the age of nearly sixty, had postponedly

encountered that thing in sorrow’s technicals called ruin. He had been

an artisan of famed excellence, and with plenty to do; owned a house

and garden; embraced a youthful, daughter-like, loving wife, and three

blithe, ruddy children; every Sunday went to a cheerful-looking church,

planted in a grove. But one night, under cover of darkness, and further

concealed in a most cunning disguisement, a desperate burglar slid into

his happy home, and robbed them all of everything. And darker yet to

tell, the blacksmith himself did ignorantly conduct this burglar into

his family’s heart. It was the Bottle Conjuror! Upon the opening of

that fatal cork, forth flew the fiend, and shrivelled up his home. Now,

for prudent, most wise, and economic reasons, the blacksmith’s shop was

in the basement of his dwelling, but with a separate entrance to it; so

that always had the young and loving healthy wife listened with no

unhappy nervousness, but with vigorous pleasure, to the stout ringing

of her young-armed old husband’s hammer; whose reverberations, muffled

by passing through the floors and walls, came up to her, not unsweetly,

in her nursery; and so, to stout Labor’s iron lullaby, the blacksmith’s

infants were rocked to slumber.

Oh, woe on woe! Oh, Death, why canst thou not sometimes be timely?

Hadst thou taken this old blacksmith to thyself ere his full ruin came

upon him, then had the young widow had a delicious grief, and her

orphans a truly venerable, legendary sire to dream of in their after

years; and all of them a care-killing competency. But Death plucked

down some virtuous elder brother, on whose whistling daily toil solely

hung the responsibilities of some other family, and left the worse than

useless old man standing, till the hideous rot of life should make him

easier to harvest.

Why tell the whole? The blows of the basement hammer every day grew

more and more between; and each blow every day grew fainter than the

last; the wife sat frozen at the window, with tearless eyes,

glitteringly gazing into the weeping faces of her children; the bellows

fell; the forge choked up with cinders; the house was sold; the mother

dived down into the long church-yard grass; her children twice followed

her thither; and the houseless, familyless old man staggered off a

vagabond in crape; his every woe unreverenced; his grey head a scorn to

flaxen curls!

Death seems the only desirable sequel for a career like this; but Death

is only a launching into the region of the strange Untried; it is but

the first salutation to the possibilities of the immense Remote, the

Wild, the Watery, the Unshored; therefore, to the death-longing eyes of

such men, who still have left in them some interior compunctions

against suicide, does the all-contributed and all-receptive ocean

alluringly spread forth his whole plain of unimaginable, taking

terrors, and wonderful, new-life adventures; and from the hearts of

infinite Pacifics, the thousand mermaids sing to them—“Come hither,

broken-hearted; here is another life without the guilt of intermediate

death; here are wonders supernatural, without dying for them. Come

hither! bury thyself in a life which, to your now equally abhorred and

abhorring, landed world, is more oblivious than death. Come hither! put

up \_thy\_ gravestone, too, within the churchyard, and come hither, till

we marry thee!”

Hearkening to these voices, East and West, by early sunrise, and by

fall of eve, the blacksmith’s soul responded, Aye, I come! And so Perth

went a-whaling.

CHAPTER 113. The Forge.

With matted beard, and swathed in a bristling shark-skin apron, about

mid-day, Perth was standing between his forge and anvil, the latter

placed upon an iron-wood log, with one hand holding a pike-head in the

coals, and with the other at his forge’s lungs, when Captain Ahab came

along, carrying in his hand a small rusty-looking leathern bag. While

yet a little distance from the forge, moody Ahab paused; till at last,

Perth, withdrawing his iron from the fire, began hammering it upon the

anvil—the red mass sending off the sparks in thick hovering flights,

some of which flew close to Ahab.

“Are these thy Mother Carey’s chickens, Perth? they are always flying

in thy wake; birds of good omen, too, but not to all;—look here, they

burn; but thou—thou liv’st among them without a scorch.”

“Because I am scorched all over, Captain Ahab,” answered Perth, resting

for a moment on his hammer; “I am past scorching; not easily can’st

thou scorch a scar.”

“Well, well; no more. Thy shrunk voice sounds too calmly, sanely woeful

to me. In no Paradise myself, I am impatient of all misery in others

that is not mad. Thou should’st go mad, blacksmith; say, why dost thou

not go mad? How can’st thou endure without being mad? Do the heavens

yet hate thee, that thou can’st not go mad?—What wert thou making

there?”

“Welding an old pike-head, sir; there were seams and dents in it.”

“And can’st thou make it all smooth again, blacksmith, after such hard

usage as it had?”

“I think so, sir.”

“And I suppose thou can’st smoothe almost any seams and dents; never

mind how hard the metal, blacksmith?”

“Aye, sir, I think I can; all seams and dents but one.”

“Look ye here, then,” cried Ahab, passionately advancing, and leaning

with both hands on Perth’s shoulders; “look ye here—\_here\_—can ye

smoothe out a seam like this, blacksmith,” sweeping one hand across his

ribbed brow; “if thou could’st, blacksmith, glad enough would I lay my

head upon thy anvil, and feel thy heaviest hammer between my eyes.

Answer! Can’st thou smoothe this seam?”

“Oh! that is the one, sir! Said I not all seams and dents but one?”

“Aye, blacksmith, it is the one; aye, man, it is unsmoothable; for

though thou only see’st it here in my flesh, it has worked down into

the bone of my skull—\_that\_ is all wrinkles! But, away with child’s

play; no more gaffs and pikes to-day. Look ye here!” jingling the

leathern bag, as if it were full of gold coins. “I, too, want a harpoon

made; one that a thousand yoke of fiends could not part, Perth;

something that will stick in a whale like his own fin-bone. There’s the

stuff,” flinging the pouch upon the anvil. “Look ye, blacksmith, these

are the gathered nail-stubbs of the steel shoes of racing horses.”

“Horse-shoe stubbs, sir? Why, Captain Ahab, thou hast here, then, the

best and stubbornest stuff we blacksmiths ever work.”

“I know it, old man; these stubbs will weld together like glue from the

melted bones of murderers. Quick! forge me the harpoon. And forge me

first, twelve rods for its shank; then wind, and twist, and hammer

these twelve together like the yarns and strands of a tow-line. Quick!

I’ll blow the fire.”

When at last the twelve rods were made, Ahab tried them, one by one, by

spiralling them, with his own hand, round a long, heavy iron bolt. “A

flaw!” rejecting the last one. “Work that over again, Perth.”

This done, Perth was about to begin welding the twelve into one, when

Ahab stayed his hand, and said he would weld his own iron. As, then,

with regular, gasping hems, he hammered on the anvil, Perth passing to

him the glowing rods, one after the other, and the hard pressed forge

shooting up its intense straight flame, the Parsee passed silently, and

bowing over his head towards the fire, seemed invoking some curse or

some blessing on the toil. But, as Ahab looked up, he slid aside.

“What’s that bunch of lucifers dodging about there for?” muttered

Stubb, looking on from the forecastle. “That Parsee smells fire like a

fusee; and smells of it himself, like a hot musket’s powder-pan.”

At last the shank, in one complete rod, received its final heat; and as

Perth, to temper it, plunged it all hissing into the cask of water near

by, the scalding steam shot up into Ahab’s bent face.

“Would’st thou brand me, Perth?” wincing for a moment with the pain;

“have I been but forging my own branding-iron, then?”

“Pray God, not that; yet I fear something, Captain Ahab. Is not this

harpoon for the White Whale?”

“For the white fiend! But now for the barbs; thou must make them

thyself, man. Here are my razors—the best of steel; here, and make the

barbs sharp as the needle-sleet of the Icy Sea.”

For a moment, the old blacksmith eyed the razors as though he would

fain not use them.

“Take them, man, I have no need for them; for I now neither shave, sup,

nor pray till—but here—to work!”

Fashioned at last into an arrowy shape, and welded by Perth to the

shank, the steel soon pointed the end of the iron; and as the

blacksmith was about giving the barbs their final heat, prior to

tempering them, he cried to Ahab to place the water-cask near.

“No, no—no water for that; I want it of the true death-temper. Ahoy,

there! Tashtego, Queequeg, Daggoo! What say ye, pagans! Will ye give me

as much blood as will cover this barb?” holding it high up. A cluster

of dark nods replied, Yes. Three punctures were made in the heathen

flesh, and the White Whale’s barbs were then tempered.

“Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!”

deliriously howled Ahab, as the malignant iron scorchingly devoured the

baptismal blood.

Now, mustering the spare poles from below, and selecting one of

hickory, with the bark still investing it, Ahab fitted the end to the

socket of the iron. A coil of new tow-line was then unwound, and some

fathoms of it taken to the windlass, and stretched to a great tension.

Pressing his foot upon it, till the rope hummed like a harp-string,

then eagerly bending over it, and seeing no strandings, Ahab exclaimed,

“Good! and now for the seizings.”

At one extremity the rope was unstranded, and the separate spread yarns

were all braided and woven round the socket of the harpoon; the pole

was then driven hard up into the socket; from the lower end the rope

was traced half-way along the pole’s length, and firmly secured so,

with intertwistings of twine. This done, pole, iron, and rope—like the

Three Fates—remained inseparable, and Ahab moodily stalked away with

the weapon; the sound of his ivory leg, and the sound of the hickory

pole, both hollowly ringing along every plank. But ere he entered his

cabin, light, unnatural, half-bantering, yet most piteous sound was

heard. Oh, Pip! thy wretched laugh, thy idle but unresting eye; all thy

strange mummeries not unmeaningly blended with the black tragedy of the

melancholy ship, and mocked it!

CHAPTER 114. The Gilder.

Penetrating further and further into the heart of the Japanese cruising

ground, the Pequod was soon all astir in the fishery. Often, in mild,

pleasant weather, for twelve, fifteen, eighteen, and twenty hours on

the stretch, they were engaged in the boats, steadily pulling, or

sailing, or paddling after the whales, or for an interlude of sixty or

seventy minutes calmly awaiting their uprising; though with but small

success for their pains.

At such times, under an abated sun; afloat all day upon smooth, slow

heaving swells; seated in his boat, light as a birch canoe; and so

sociably mixing with the soft waves themselves, that like hearth-stone

cats they purr against the gunwale; these are the times of dreamy

quietude, when beholding the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the

ocean’s skin, one forgets the tiger heart that pants beneath it; and

would not willingly remember, that this velvet paw but conceals a

remorseless fang.

These are the times, when in his whale-boat the rover softly feels a

certain filial, confident, land-like feeling towards the sea; that he

regards it as so much flowery earth; and the distant ship revealing

only the tops of her masts, seems struggling forward, not through high

rolling waves, but through the tall grass of a rolling prairie: as when

the western emigrants’ horses only show their erected ears, while their

hidden bodies widely wade through the amazing verdure.

The long-drawn virgin vales; the mild blue hill-sides; as over these

there steals the hush, the hum; you almost swear that play-wearied

children lie sleeping in these solitudes, in some glad May-time, when

the flowers of the woods are plucked. And all this mixes with your most

mystic mood; so that fact and fancy, half-way meeting, interpenetrate,

and form one seamless whole.

Nor did such soothing scenes, however temporary, fail of at least as

temporary an effect on Ahab. But if these secret golden keys did seem

to open in him his own secret golden treasuries, yet did his breath

upon them prove but tarnishing.

Oh, grassy glades! oh, ever vernal endless landscapes in the soul; in

ye,—though long parched by the dead drought of the earthy life,—in ye,

men yet may roll, like young horses in new morning clover; and for some

few fleeting moments, feel the cool dew of the life immortal on them.

Would to God these blessed calms would last. But the mingled, mingling

threads of life are woven by warp and woof: calms crossed by storms, a

storm for every calm. There is no steady unretracing progress in this

life; we do not advance through fixed gradations, and at the last one

pause:—through infancy’s unconscious spell, boyhood’s thoughtless

faith, adolescence’ doubt (the common doom), then scepticism, then

disbelief, resting at last in manhood’s pondering repose of If. But

once gone through, we trace the round again; and are infants, boys, and

men, and Ifs eternally. Where lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor

no more? In what rapt ether sails the world, of which the weariest will

never weary? Where is the foundling’s father hidden? Our souls are like

those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of

our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it.

And that same day, too, gazing far down from his boat’s side into that

same golden sea, Starbuck lowly murmured:—

“Loveliness unfathomable, as ever lover saw in his young bride’s

eye!—Tell me not of thy teeth-tiered sharks, and thy kidnapping

cannibal ways. Let faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory; I look deep

down and do believe.”

And Stubb, fish-like, with sparkling scales, leaped up in that same

golden light:—

“I am Stubb, and Stubb has his history; but here Stubb takes oaths that

he has always been jolly!”

CHAPTER 115. The Pequod Meets The Bachelor.

And jolly enough were the sights and the sounds that came bearing down

before the wind, some few weeks after Ahab’s harpoon had been welded.

It was a Nantucket ship, the Bachelor, which had just wedged in her

last cask of oil, and bolted down her bursting hatches; and now, in

glad holiday apparel, was joyously, though somewhat vain-gloriously,

sailing round among the widely-separated ships on the ground, previous

to pointing her prow for home.

The three men at her mast-head wore long streamers of narrow red

bunting at their hats; from the stern, a whale-boat was suspended,

bottom down; and hanging captive from the bowsprit was seen the long

lower jaw of the last whale they had slain. Signals, ensigns, and jacks

of all colours were flying from her rigging, on every side. Sideways

lashed in each of her three basketed tops were two barrels of sperm;

above which, in her top-mast cross-trees, you saw slender breakers of

the same precious fluid; and nailed to her main truck was a brazen

lamp.

As was afterwards learned, the Bachelor had met with the most

surprising success; all the more wonderful, for that while cruising in

the same seas numerous other vessels had gone entire months without

securing a single fish. Not only had barrels of beef and bread been

given away to make room for the far more valuable sperm, but additional

supplemental casks had been bartered for, from the ships she had met;

and these were stowed along the deck, and in the captain’s and

officers’ state-rooms. Even the cabin table itself had been knocked

into kindling-wood; and the cabin mess dined off the broad head of an

oil-butt, lashed down to the floor for a centrepiece. In the

forecastle, the sailors had actually caulked and pitched their chests,

and filled them; it was humorously added, that the cook had clapped a

head on his largest boiler, and filled it; that the steward had plugged

his spare coffee-pot and filled it; that the harpooneers had headed the

sockets of their irons and filled them; that indeed everything was

filled with sperm, except the captain’s pantaloons pockets, and those

he reserved to thrust his hands into, in self-complacent testimony of

his entire satisfaction.

As this glad ship of good luck bore down upon the moody Pequod, the

barbarian sound of enormous drums came from her forecastle; and drawing

still nearer, a crowd of her men were seen standing round her huge

try-pots, which, covered with the parchment-like \_poke\_ or stomach skin

of the black fish, gave forth a loud roar to every stroke of the

clenched hands of the crew. On the quarter-deck, the mates and

harpooneers were dancing with the olive-hued girls who had eloped with

them from the Polynesian Isles; while suspended in an ornamented boat,

firmly secured aloft between the foremast and mainmast, three Long

Island negroes, with glittering fiddle-bows of whale ivory, were

presiding over the hilarious jig. Meanwhile, others of the ship’s

company were tumultuously busy at the masonry of the try-works, from

which the huge pots had been removed. You would have almost thought

they were pulling down the cursed Bastille, such wild cries they

raised, as the now useless brick and mortar were being hurled into the

sea.

Lord and master over all this scene, the captain stood erect on the

ship’s elevated quarter-deck, so that the whole rejoicing drama was

full before him, and seemed merely contrived for his own individual

diversion.

And Ahab, he too was standing on his quarter-deck, shaggy and black,

with a stubborn gloom; and as the two ships crossed each other’s

wakes—one all jubilations for things passed, the other all forebodings

as to things to come—their two captains in themselves impersonated the

whole striking contrast of the scene.

“Come aboard, come aboard!” cried the gay Bachelor’s commander, lifting

a glass and a bottle in the air.

“Hast seen the White Whale?” gritted Ahab in reply.

“No; only heard of him; but don’t believe in him at all,” said the

other good-humoredly. “Come aboard!”

“Thou art too damned jolly. Sail on. Hast lost any men?”

“Not enough to speak of—two islanders, that’s all;—but come aboard, old

hearty, come along. I’ll soon take that black from your brow. Come

along, will ye (merry’s the play); a full ship and homeward-bound.”

“How wondrous familiar is a fool!” muttered Ahab; then aloud, “Thou art

a full ship and homeward bound, thou sayst; well, then, call me an

empty ship, and outward-bound. So go thy ways, and I will mine. Forward

there! Set all sail, and keep her to the wind!”

And thus, while the one ship went cheerily before the breeze, the other

stubbornly fought against it; and so the two vessels parted; the crew

of the Pequod looking with grave, lingering glances towards the

receding Bachelor; but the Bachelor’s men never heeding their gaze for

the lively revelry they were in. And as Ahab, leaning over the

taffrail, eyed the homeward-bound craft, he took from his pocket a

small vial of sand, and then looking from the ship to the vial, seemed

thereby bringing two remote associations together, for that vial was

filled with Nantucket soundings.

CHAPTER 116. The Dying Whale.

Not seldom in this life, when, on the right side, fortune’s favourites

sail close by us, we, though all adroop before, catch somewhat of the

rushing breeze, and joyfully feel our bagging sails fill out. So seemed

it with the Pequod. For next day after encountering the gay Bachelor,

whales were seen and four were slain; and one of them by Ahab.

It was far down the afternoon; and when all the spearings of the

crimson fight were done: and floating in the lovely sunset sea and sky,

sun and whale both stilly died together; then, such a sweetness and

such plaintiveness, such inwreathing orisons curled up in that rosy

air, that it almost seemed as if far over from the deep green convent

valleys of the Manilla isles, the Spanish land-breeze, wantonly turned

sailor, had gone to sea, freighted with these vesper hymns.

Soothed again, but only soothed to deeper gloom, Ahab, who had sterned

off from the whale, sat intently watching his final wanings from the

now tranquil boat. For that strange spectacle observable in all sperm

whales dying—the turning sunwards of the head, and so expiring—that

strange spectacle, beheld of such a placid evening, somehow to Ahab

conveyed a wondrousness unknown before.

“He turns and turns him to it,—how slowly, but how steadfastly, his

homage-rendering and invoking brow, with his last dying motions. He too

worships fire; most faithful, broad, baronial vassal of the sun!—Oh

that these too-favouring eyes should see these too-favouring sights.

Look! here, far water-locked; beyond all hum of human weal or woe; in

these most candid and impartial seas; where to traditions no rocks

furnish tablets; where for long Chinese ages, the billows have still

rolled on speechless and unspoken to, as stars that shine upon the

Niger’s unknown source; here, too, life dies sunwards full of faith;

but see! no sooner dead, than death whirls round the corpse, and it

heads some other way.

“Oh, thou dark Hindoo half of nature, who of drowned bones hast builded

thy separate throne somewhere in the heart of these unverdured seas;

thou art an infidel, thou queen, and too truly speakest to me in the

wide-slaughtering Typhoon, and the hushed burial of its after calm. Nor

has this thy whale sunwards turned his dying head, and then gone round

again, without a lesson to me.

“Oh, trebly hooped and welded hip of power! Oh, high aspiring,

rainbowed jet!—that one strivest, this one jettest all in vain! In

vain, oh whale, dost thou seek intercedings with yon all-quickening

sun, that only calls forth life, but gives it not again. Yet dost thou,

darker half, rock me with a prouder, if a darker faith. All thy

unnamable imminglings float beneath me here; I am buoyed by breaths of

once living things, exhaled as air, but water now.

“Then hail, for ever hail, O sea, in whose eternal tossings the wild

fowl finds his only rest. Born of earth, yet suckled by the sea; though

hill and valley mothered me, ye billows are my foster-brothers!”

CHAPTER 117. The Whale Watch.

The four whales slain that evening had died wide apart; one, far to

windward; one, less distant, to leeward; one ahead; one astern. These

last three were brought alongside ere nightfall; but the windward one

could not be reached till morning; and the boat that had killed it lay

by its side all night; and that boat was Ahab’s.

The waif-pole was thrust upright into the dead whale’s spout-hole; and

the lantern hanging from its top, cast a troubled flickering glare upon

the black, glossy back, and far out upon the midnight waves, which

gently chafed the whale’s broad flank, like soft surf upon a beach.

Ahab and all his boat’s crew seemed asleep but the Parsee; who

crouching in the bow, sat watching the sharks, that spectrally played

round the whale, and tapped the light cedar planks with their tails. A

sound like the moaning in squadrons over Asphaltites of unforgiven

ghosts of Gomorrah, ran shuddering through the air.

Started from his slumbers, Ahab, face to face, saw the Parsee; and

hooped round by the gloom of the night they seemed the last men in a

flooded world. “I have dreamed it again,” said he.

“Of the hearses? Have I not said, old man, that neither hearse nor

coffin can be thine?”

“And who are hearsed that die on the sea?”

“But I said, old man, that ere thou couldst die on this voyage, two

hearses must verily be seen by thee on the sea; the first not made by

mortal hands; and the visible wood of the last one must be grown in

America.”

“Aye, aye! a strange sight that, Parsee:—a hearse and its plumes

floating over the ocean with the waves for the pall-bearers. Ha! Such a

sight we shall not soon see.”

“Believe it or not, thou canst not die till it be seen, old man.”

“And what was that saying about thyself?”

“Though it come to the last, I shall still go before thee thy pilot.”

“And when thou art so gone before—if that ever befall—then ere I can

follow, thou must still appear to me, to pilot me still?—Was it not so?

Well, then, did I believe all ye say, oh my pilot! I have here two

pledges that I shall yet slay Moby Dick and survive it.”

“Take another pledge, old man,” said the Parsee, as his eyes lighted up

like fire-flies in the gloom—“Hemp only can kill thee.”

“The gallows, ye mean.—I am immortal then, on land and on sea,” cried

Ahab, with a laugh of derision;—“Immortal on land and on sea!”

Both were silent again, as one man. The grey dawn came on, and the

slumbering crew arose from the boat’s bottom, and ere noon the dead

whale was brought to the ship.

CHAPTER 118. The Quadrant.

The season for the Line at length drew near; and every day when Ahab,

coming from his cabin, cast his eyes aloft, the vigilant helmsman would

ostentatiously handle his spokes, and the eager mariners quickly run to

the braces, and would stand there with all their eyes centrally fixed

on the nailed doubloon; impatient for the order to point the ship’s

prow for the equator. In good time the order came. It was hard upon

high noon; and Ahab, seated in the bows of his high-hoisted boat, was

about taking his wonted daily observation of the sun to determine his

latitude.

Now, in that Japanese sea, the days in summer are as freshets of

effulgences. That unblinkingly vivid Japanese sun seems the blazing

focus of the glassy ocean’s immeasurable burning-glass. The sky looks

lacquered; clouds there are none; the horizon floats; and this

nakedness of unrelieved radiance is as the insufferable splendors of

God’s throne. Well that Ahab’s quadrant was furnished with coloured

glasses, through which to take sight of that solar fire. So, swinging

his seated form to the roll of the ship, and with his

astrological-looking instrument placed to his eye, he remained in that

posture for some moments to catch the precise instant when the sun

should gain its precise meridian. Meantime while his whole attention

was absorbed, the Parsee was kneeling beneath him on the ship’s deck,

and with face thrown up like Ahab’s, was eyeing the same sun with him;

only the lids of his eyes half hooded their orbs, and his wild face was

subdued to an earthly passionlessness. At length the desired

observation was taken; and with his pencil upon his ivory leg, Ahab

soon calculated what his latitude must be at that precise instant. Then

falling into a moment’s revery, he again looked up towards the sun and

murmured to himself: “Thou sea-mark! thou high and mighty Pilot! thou

tellest me truly where I \_am\_—but canst thou cast the least hint where

I \_shall\_ be? Or canst thou tell where some other thing besides me is

this moment living? Where is Moby Dick? This instant thou must be

eyeing him. These eyes of mine look into the very eye that is even now

beholding him; aye, and into the eye that is even now equally beholding

the objects on the unknown, thither side of thee, thou sun!”

Then gazing at his quadrant, and handling, one after the other, its

numerous cabalistical contrivances, he pondered again, and muttered:

“Foolish toy! babies’ plaything of haughty Admirals, and Commodores,

and Captains; the world brags of thee, of thy cunning and might; but

what after all canst thou do, but tell the poor, pitiful point, where

thou thyself happenest to be on this wide planet, and the hand that

holds thee: no! not one jot more! Thou canst not tell where one drop of

water or one grain of sand will be to-morrow noon; and yet with thy

impotence thou insultest the sun! Science! Curse thee, thou vain toy;

and cursed be all the things that cast man’s eyes aloft to that heaven,

whose live vividness but scorches him, as these old eyes are even now

scorched with thy light, O sun! Level by nature to this earth’s horizon

are the glances of man’s eyes; not shot from the crown of his head, as

if God had meant him to gaze on his firmament. Curse thee, thou

quadrant!” dashing it to the deck, “no longer will I guide my earthly

way by thee; the level ship’s compass, and the level dead-reckoning, by

log and by line; \_these\_ shall conduct me, and show me my place on the

sea. Aye,” lighting from the boat to the deck, “thus I trample on thee,

thou paltry thing that feebly pointest on high; thus I split and

destroy thee!”

As the frantic old man thus spoke and thus trampled with his live and

dead feet, a sneering triumph that seemed meant for Ahab, and a

fatalistic despair that seemed meant for himself—these passed over the

mute, motionless Parsee’s face. Unobserved he rose and glided away;

while, awestruck by the aspect of their commander, the seamen clustered

together on the forecastle, till Ahab, troubledly pacing the deck,

shouted out—“To the braces! Up helm!—square in!”

In an instant the yards swung round; and as the ship half-wheeled upon

her heel, her three firm-seated graceful masts erectly poised upon her

long, ribbed hull, seemed as the three Horatii pirouetting on one

sufficient steed.

Standing between the knight-heads, Starbuck watched the Pequod’s

tumultuous way, and Ahab’s also, as he went lurching along the deck.

“I have sat before the dense coal fire and watched it all aglow, full

of its tormented flaming life; and I have seen it wane at last, down,

down, to dumbest dust. Old man of oceans! of all this fiery life of

thine, what will at length remain but one little heap of ashes!”

“Aye,” cried Stubb, “but sea-coal ashes—mind ye that, Mr.

Starbuck—sea-coal, not your common charcoal. Well, well; I heard Ahab

mutter, ‘Here some one thrusts these cards into these old hands of

mine; swears that I must play them, and no others.’ And damn me, Ahab,

but thou actest right; live in the game, and die in it!”

CHAPTER 119. The Candles.

Warmest climes but nurse the cruellest fangs: the tiger of Bengal

crouches in spiced groves of ceaseless verdure. Skies the most

effulgent but basket the deadliest thunders: gorgeous Cuba knows

tornadoes that never swept tame northern lands. So, too, it is, that in

these resplendent Japanese seas the mariner encounters the direst of

all storms, the Typhoon. It will sometimes burst from out that

cloudless sky, like an exploding bomb upon a dazed and sleepy town.

Towards evening of that day, the Pequod was torn of her canvas, and

bare-poled was left to fight a Typhoon which had struck her directly

ahead. When darkness came on, sky and sea roared and split with the

thunder, and blazed with the lightning, that showed the disabled masts

fluttering here and there with the rags which the first fury of the

tempest had left for its after sport.

Holding by a shroud, Starbuck was standing on the quarter-deck; at

every flash of the lightning glancing aloft, to see what additional

disaster might have befallen the intricate hamper there; while Stubb

and Flask were directing the men in the higher hoisting and firmer

lashing of the boats. But all their pains seemed naught. Though lifted

to the very top of the cranes, the windward quarter boat (Ahab’s) did

not escape. A great rolling sea, dashing high up against the reeling

ship’s high teetering side, stove in the boat’s bottom at the stern,

and left it again, all dripping through like a sieve.

“Bad work, bad work! Mr. Starbuck,” said Stubb, regarding the wreck,

“but the sea will have its way. Stubb, for one, can’t fight it. You

see, Mr. Starbuck, a wave has such a great long start before it leaps,

all round the world it runs, and then comes the spring! But as for me,

all the start I have to meet it, is just across the deck here. But

never mind; it’s all in fun: so the old song says;”—(\_sings\_.)

Oh! jolly is the gale, And a joker is the whale, A’ flourishin’ his

tail,— Such a funny, sporty, gamy, jesty, joky, hoky-poky lad, is the

Ocean, oh!

The scud all a flyin’, That’s his flip only foamin’; When he stirs in

the spicin’,— Such a funny, sporty, gamy, jesty, joky, hoky-poky lad,

is the Ocean, oh!

Thunder splits the ships, But he only smacks his lips, A tastin’ of

this flip,— Such a funny, sporty, gamy, jesty, joky, hoky-poky lad,

is the Ocean, oh!

“Avast Stubb,” cried Starbuck, “let the Typhoon sing, and strike his

harp here in our rigging; but if thou art a brave man thou wilt hold

thy peace.”

“But I am not a brave man; never said I was a brave man; I am a coward;

and I sing to keep up my spirits. And I tell you what it is, Mr.

Starbuck, there’s no way to stop my singing in this world but to cut my

throat. And when that’s done, ten to one I sing ye the doxology for a

wind-up.”

“Madman! look through my eyes if thou hast none of thine own.”

“What! how can you see better of a dark night than anybody else, never

mind how foolish?”

“Here!” cried Starbuck, seizing Stubb by the shoulder, and pointing his

hand towards the weather bow, “markest thou not that the gale comes

from the eastward, the very course Ahab is to run for Moby Dick? the

very course he swung to this day noon? now mark his boat there; where

is that stove? In the stern-sheets, man; where he is wont to stand—his

stand-point is stove, man! Now jump overboard, and sing away, if thou

must!

“I don’t half understand ye: what’s in the wind?”

“Yes, yes, round the Cape of Good Hope is the shortest way to

Nantucket,” soliloquized Starbuck suddenly, heedless of Stubb’s

question. “The gale that now hammers at us to stave us, we can turn it

into a fair wind that will drive us towards home. Yonder, to windward,

all is blackness of doom; but to leeward, homeward—I see it lightens up

there; but not with the lightning.”

At that moment in one of the intervals of profound darkness, following

the flashes, a voice was heard at his side; and almost at the same

instant a volley of thunder peals rolled overhead.

“Who’s there?”

“Old Thunder!” said Ahab, groping his way along the bulwarks to his

pivot-hole; but suddenly finding his path made plain to him by elbowed

lances of fire.

Now, as the lightning rod to a spire on shore is intended to carry off

the perilous fluid into the soil; so the kindred rod which at sea some

ships carry to each mast, is intended to conduct it into the water. But

as this conductor must descend to considerable depth, that its end may

avoid all contact with the hull; and as moreover, if kept constantly

towing there, it would be liable to many mishaps, besides interfering

not a little with some of the rigging, and more or less impeding the

vessel’s way in the water; because of all this, the lower parts of a

ship’s lightning-rods are not always overboard; but are generally made

in long slender links, so as to be the more readily hauled up into the

chains outside, or thrown down into the sea, as occasion may require.

“The rods! the rods!” cried Starbuck to the crew, suddenly admonished

to vigilance by the vivid lightning that had just been darting

flambeaux, to light Ahab to his post. “Are they overboard? drop them

over, fore and aft. Quick!”

“Avast!” cried Ahab; “let’s have fair play here, though we be the

weaker side. Yet I’ll contribute to raise rods on the Himmalehs and

Andes, that all the world may be secured; but out on privileges! Let

them be, sir.”

“Look aloft!” cried Starbuck. “The corpusants! the corpusants!”

All the yard-arms were tipped with a pallid fire; and touched at each

tri-pointed lightning-rod-end with three tapering white flames, each of

the three tall masts was silently burning in that sulphurous air, like

three gigantic wax tapers before an altar.

“Blast the boat! let it go!” cried Stubb at this instant, as a swashing

sea heaved up under his own little craft, so that its gunwale violently

jammed his hand, as he was passing a lashing. “Blast it!”—but slipping

backward on the deck, his uplifted eyes caught the flames; and

immediately shifting his tone he cried—“The corpusants have mercy on us

all!”

To sailors, oaths are household words; they will swear in the trance of

the calm, and in the teeth of the tempest; they will imprecate curses

from the topsail-yard-arms, when most they teeter over to a seething

sea; but in all my voyagings, seldom have I heard a common oath when

God’s burning finger has been laid on the ship; when His “Mene, Mene,

Tekel Upharsin” has been woven into the shrouds and the cordage.

While this pallidness was burning aloft, few words were heard from the

enchanted crew; who in one thick cluster stood on the forecastle, all

their eyes gleaming in that pale phosphorescence, like a far away

constellation of stars. Relieved against the ghostly light, the

gigantic jet negro, Daggoo, loomed up to thrice his real stature, and

seemed the black cloud from which the thunder had come. The parted

mouth of Tashtego revealed his shark-white teeth, which strangely

gleamed as if they too had been tipped by corpusants; while lit up by

the preternatural light, Queequeg’s tattooing burned like Satanic blue

flames on his body.

The tableau all waned at last with the pallidness aloft; and once more

the Pequod and every soul on her decks were wrapped in a pall. A moment

or two passed, when Starbuck, going forward, pushed against some one.

It was Stubb. “What thinkest thou now, man; I heard thy cry; it was not

the same in the song.”

“No, no, it wasn’t; I said the corpusants have mercy on us all; and I

hope they will, still. But do they only have mercy on long faces?—have

they no bowels for a laugh? And look ye, Mr. Starbuck—but it’s too dark

to look. Hear me, then: I take that mast-head flame we saw for a sign

of good luck; for those masts are rooted in a hold that is going to be

chock a’ block with sperm-oil, d’ye see; and so, all that sperm will

work up into the masts, like sap in a tree. Yes, our three masts will

yet be as three spermaceti candles—that’s the good promise we saw.”

At that moment Starbuck caught sight of Stubb’s face slowly beginning

to glimmer into sight. Glancing upwards, he cried: “See! see!” and once

more the high tapering flames were beheld with what seemed redoubled

supernaturalness in their pallor.

“The corpusants have mercy on us all,” cried Stubb, again.

At the base of the mainmast, full beneath the doubloon and the flame,

the Parsee was kneeling in Ahab’s front, but with his head bowed away

from him; while near by, from the arched and overhanging rigging, where

they had just been engaged securing a spar, a number of the seamen,

arrested by the glare, now cohered together, and hung pendulous, like a

knot of numbed wasps from a drooping, orchard twig. In various

enchanted attitudes, like the standing, or stepping, or running

skeletons in Herculaneum, others remained rooted to the deck; but all

their eyes upcast.

“Aye, aye, men!” cried Ahab. “Look up at it; mark it well; the white

flame but lights the way to the White Whale! Hand me those mainmast

links there; I would fain feel this pulse, and let mine beat against

it; blood against fire! So.”

Then turning—the last link held fast in his left hand, he put his foot

upon the Parsee; and with fixed upward eye, and high-flung right arm,

he stood erect before the lofty tri-pointed trinity of flames.

“Oh! thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as Persian

once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that

to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I

now know that thy right worship is defiance. To neither love nor

reverence wilt thou be kind; and e’en for hate thou canst but kill; and

all are killed. No fearless fool now fronts thee. I own thy speechless,

placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will

dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. In the midst of

the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. Though but a

point at best; whencesoe’er I came; wheresoe’er I go; yet while I

earthly live, the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her royal

rights. But war is pain, and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form of

love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; but at thy highest, come as mere

supernal power; and though thou launchest navies of full-freighted

worlds, there’s that in here that still remains indifferent. Oh, thou

clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of

fire, I breathe it back to thee.”

[\_Sudden, repeated flashes of lightning; the nine flames leap

lengthwise to thrice their previous height; Ahab, with the rest, closes

his eyes, his right hand pressed hard upon them.\_]

“I own thy speechless, placeless power; said I not so? Nor was it wrung

from me; nor do I now drop these links. Thou canst blind; but I can

then grope. Thou canst consume; but I can then be ashes. Take the

homage of these poor eyes, and shutter-hands. I would not take it. The

lightning flashes through my skull; mine eye-balls ache and ache; my

whole beaten brain seems as beheaded, and rolling on some stunning

ground. Oh, oh! Yet blindfold, yet will I talk to thee. Light though

thou be, thou leapest out of darkness; but I am darkness leaping out of

light, leaping out of thee! The javelins cease; open eyes; see, or not?

There burn the flames! Oh, thou magnanimous! now I do glory in my

genealogy. But thou art but my fiery father; my sweet mother, I know

not. Oh, cruel! what hast thou done with her? There lies my puzzle; but

thine is greater. Thou knowest not how came ye, hence callest thyself

unbegotten; certainly knowest not thy beginning, hence callest thyself

unbegun. I know that of me, which thou knowest not of thyself, oh, thou

omnipotent. There is some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear

spirit, to whom all thy eternity is but time, all thy creativeness

mechanical. Through thee, thy flaming self, my scorched eyes do dimly

see it. Oh, thou foundling fire, thou hermit immemorial, thou too hast

thy incommunicable riddle, thy unparticipated grief. Here again with

haughty agony, I read my sire. Leap! leap up, and lick the sky! I leap

with thee; I burn with thee; would fain be welded with thee; defyingly

I worship thee!”

“The boat! the boat!” cried Starbuck, “look at thy boat, old man!”

Ahab’s harpoon, the one forged at Perth’s fire, remained firmly lashed

in its conspicuous crotch, so that it projected beyond his whale-boat’s

bow; but the sea that had stove its bottom had caused the loose leather

sheath to drop off; and from the keen steel barb there now came a

levelled flame of pale, forked fire. As the silent harpoon burned there

like a serpent’s tongue, Starbuck grasped Ahab by the arm—“God, God is

against thee, old man; forbear! ’tis an ill voyage! ill begun, ill

continued; let me square the yards, while we may, old man, and make a

fair wind of it homewards, to go on a better voyage than this.”

Overhearing Starbuck, the panic-stricken crew instantly ran to the

braces—though not a sail was left aloft. For the moment all the aghast

mate’s thoughts seemed theirs; they raised a half mutinous cry. But

dashing the rattling lightning links to the deck, and snatching the

burning harpoon, Ahab waved it like a torch among them; swearing to

transfix with it the first sailor that but cast loose a rope’s end.

Petrified by his aspect, and still more shrinking from the fiery dart

that he held, the men fell back in dismay, and Ahab again spoke:—

“All your oaths to hunt the White Whale are as binding as mine; and

heart, soul, and body, lungs and life, old Ahab is bound. And that ye

may know to what tune this heart beats; look ye here; thus I blow out

the last fear!” And with one blast of his breath he extinguished the

flame.

As in the hurricane that sweeps the plain, men fly the neighborhood of

some lone, gigantic elm, whose very height and strength but render it

so much the more unsafe, because so much the more a mark for

thunderbolts; so at those last words of Ahab’s many of the mariners did

run from him in a terror of dismay.

CHAPTER 120. The Deck Towards the End of the First Night Watch.

\_Ahab standing by the helm. Starbuck approaching him.\_

“We must send down the main-top-sail yard, sir. The band is working

loose and the lee lift is half-stranded. Shall I strike it, sir?”

“Strike nothing; lash it. If I had sky-sail poles, I’d sway them up

now.”

“Sir!—in God’s name!—sir?”

“Well.”

“The anchors are working, sir. Shall I get them inboard?”

“Strike nothing, and stir nothing, but lash everything. The wind rises,

but it has not got up to my table-lands yet. Quick, and see to it.—By

masts and keels! he takes me for the hunch-backed skipper of some

coasting smack. Send down my main-top-sail yard! Ho, gluepots! Loftiest

trucks were made for wildest winds, and this brain-truck of mine now

sails amid the cloud-scud. Shall I strike that? Oh, none but cowards

send down their brain-trucks in tempest time. What a hooroosh aloft

there! I would e’en take it for sublime, did I not know that the colic

is a noisy malady. Oh, take medicine, take medicine!”

CHAPTER 121. Midnight.—The Forecastle Bulwarks.

\_Stubb and Flask mounted on them, and passing additional lashings over

the anchors there hanging.\_

“No, Stubb; you may pound that knot there as much as you please, but

you will never pound into me what you were just now saying. And how

long ago is it since you said the very contrary? Didn’t you once say

that whatever ship Ahab sails in, that ship should pay something extra

on its insurance policy, just as though it were loaded with powder

barrels aft and boxes of lucifers forward? Stop, now; didn’t you say

so?”

“Well, suppose I did? What then? I’ve part changed my flesh since that

time, why not my mind? Besides, supposing we \_are\_ loaded with powder

barrels aft and lucifers forward; how the devil could the lucifers get

afire in this drenching spray here? Why, my little man, you have pretty

red hair, but you couldn’t get afire now. Shake yourself; you’re

Aquarius, or the water-bearer, Flask; might fill pitchers at your coat

collar. Don’t you see, then, that for these extra risks the Marine

Insurance companies have extra guarantees? Here are hydrants, Flask.

But hark, again, and I’ll answer ye the other thing. First take your

leg off from the crown of the anchor here, though, so I can pass the

rope; now listen. What’s the mighty difference between holding a mast’s

lightning-rod in the storm, and standing close by a mast that hasn’t

got any lightning-rod at all in a storm? Don’t you see, you

timber-head, that no harm can come to the holder of the rod, unless the

mast is first struck? What are you talking about, then? Not one ship in

a hundred carries rods, and Ahab,—aye, man, and all of us,—were in no

more danger then, in my poor opinion, than all the crews in ten

thousand ships now sailing the seas. Why, you King-Post, you, I suppose

you would have every man in the world go about with a small

lightning-rod running up the corner of his hat, like a militia

officer’s skewered feather, and trailing behind like his sash. Why

don’t ye be sensible, Flask? it’s easy to be sensible; why don’t ye,

then? any man with half an eye can be sensible.”

“I don’t know that, Stubb. You sometimes find it rather hard.”

“Yes, when a fellow’s soaked through, it’s hard to be sensible, that’s

a fact. And I am about drenched with this spray. Never mind; catch the

turn there, and pass it. Seems to me we are lashing down these anchors

now as if they were never going to be used again. Tying these two

anchors here, Flask, seems like tying a man’s hands behind him. And

what big generous hands they are, to be sure. These are your iron

fists, hey? What a hold they have, too! I wonder, Flask, whether the

world is anchored anywhere; if she is, she swings with an uncommon long

cable, though. There, hammer that knot down, and we’ve done. So; next

to touching land, lighting on deck is the most satisfactory. I say,

just wring out my jacket skirts, will ye? Thank ye. They laugh at

long-togs so, Flask; but seems to me, a long tailed coat ought always

to be worn in all storms afloat. The tails tapering down that way,

serve to carry off the water, d’ye see. Same with cocked hats; the

cocks form gable-end eave-troughs, Flask. No more monkey-jackets and

tarpaulins for me; I must mount a swallow-tail, and drive down a

beaver; so. Halloa! whew! there goes my tarpaulin overboard; Lord,

Lord, that the winds that come from heaven should be so unmannerly!

This is a nasty night, lad.”

CHAPTER 122. Midnight Aloft.—Thunder and Lightning.

\_The main-top-sail yard\_.—\_Tashtego passing new lashings around it\_.

“Um, um, um. Stop that thunder! Plenty too much thunder up here. What’s

the use of thunder? Um, um, um. We don’t want thunder; we want rum;

give us a glass of rum. Um, um, um!”

CHAPTER 123. The Musket.

During the most violent shocks of the Typhoon, the man at the Pequod’s

jaw-bone tiller had several times been reelingly hurled to the deck by

its spasmodic motions, even though preventer tackles had been attached

to it—for they were slack—because some play to the tiller was

indispensable.

In a severe gale like this, while the ship is but a tossed shuttlecock

to the blast, it is by no means uncommon to see the needles in the

compasses, at intervals, go round and round. It was thus with the

Pequod’s; at almost every shock the helmsman had not failed to notice

the whirling velocity with which they revolved upon the cards; it is a

sight that hardly anyone can behold without some sort of unwonted

emotion.

Some hours after midnight, the Typhoon abated so much, that through the

strenuous exertions of Starbuck and Stubb—one engaged forward and the

other aft—the shivered remnants of the jib and fore and main-top-sails

were cut adrift from the spars, and went eddying away to leeward, like

the feathers of an albatross, which sometimes are cast to the winds

when that storm-tossed bird is on the wing.

The three corresponding new sails were now bent and reefed, and a

storm-trysail was set further aft; so that the ship soon went through

the water with some precision again; and the course—for the present,

East-south-east—which he was to steer, if practicable, was once more

given to the helmsman. For during the violence of the gale, he had only

steered according to its vicissitudes. But as he was now bringing the

ship as near her course as possible, watching the compass meanwhile,

lo! a good sign! the wind seemed coming round astern; aye, the foul

breeze became fair!

Instantly the yards were squared, to the lively song of “\_Ho! the fair

wind! oh-ye-ho, cheerly men!\_” the crew singing for joy, that so

promising an event should so soon have falsified the evil portents

preceding it.

In compliance with the standing order of his commander—to report

immediately, and at any one of the twenty-four hours, any decided

change in the affairs of the deck,—Starbuck had no sooner trimmed the

yards to the breeze—however reluctantly and gloomily,—than he

mechanically went below to apprise Captain Ahab of the circumstance.

Ere knocking at his state-room, he involuntarily paused before it a

moment. The cabin lamp—taking long swings this way and that—was burning

fitfully, and casting fitful shadows upon the old man’s bolted door,—a

thin one, with fixed blinds inserted, in place of upper panels. The

isolated subterraneousness of the cabin made a certain humming silence

to reign there, though it was hooped round by all the roar of the

elements. The loaded muskets in the rack were shiningly revealed, as

they stood upright against the forward bulkhead. Starbuck was an

honest, upright man; but out of Starbuck’s heart, at that instant when

he saw the muskets, there strangely evolved an evil thought; but so

blent with its neutral or good accompaniments that for the instant he

hardly knew it for itself.

“He would have shot me once,” he murmured, “yes, there’s the very

musket that he pointed at me;—that one with the studded stock; let me

touch it—lift it. Strange, that I, who have handled so many deadly

lances, strange, that I should shake so now. Loaded? I must see. Aye,

aye; and powder in the pan;—that’s not good. Best spill it?—wait. I’ll

cure myself of this. I’ll hold the musket boldly while I think.—I come

to report a fair wind to him. But how fair? Fair for death and

doom,—\_that’s\_ fair for Moby Dick. It’s a fair wind that’s only fair

for that accursed fish.—The very tube he pointed at me!—the very one;

\_this\_ one—I hold it here; he would have killed me with the very thing

I handle now.—Aye and he would fain kill all his crew. Does he not say

he will not strike his spars to any gale? Has he not dashed his

heavenly quadrant? and in these same perilous seas, gropes he not his

way by mere dead reckoning of the error-abounding log? and in this very

Typhoon, did he not swear that he would have no lightning-rods? But

shall this crazed old man be tamely suffered to drag a whole ship’s

company down to doom with him?—Yes, it would make him the wilful

murderer of thirty men and more, if this ship come to any deadly harm;

and come to deadly harm, my soul swears this ship will, if Ahab have

his way. If, then, he were this instant—put aside, that crime would not

be his. Ha! is he muttering in his sleep? Yes, just there,—in there,

he’s sleeping. Sleeping? aye, but still alive, and soon awake again. I

can’t withstand thee, then, old man. Not reasoning; not remonstrance;

not entreaty wilt thou hearken to; all this thou scornest. Flat

obedience to thy own flat commands, this is all thou breathest. Aye,

and say’st the men have vow’d thy vow; say’st all of us are Ahabs.

Great God forbid!—But is there no other way? no lawful way?—Make him a

prisoner to be taken home? What! hope to wrest this old man’s living

power from his own living hands? Only a fool would try it. Say he were

pinioned even; knotted all over with ropes and hawsers; chained down to

ring-bolts on this cabin floor; he would be more hideous than a caged

tiger, then. I could not endure the sight; could not possibly fly his

howlings; all comfort, sleep itself, inestimable reason would leave me

on the long intolerable voyage. What, then, remains? The land is

hundreds of leagues away, and locked Japan the nearest. I stand alone

here upon an open sea, with two oceans and a whole continent between me

and law.—Aye, aye, ’tis so.—Is heaven a murderer when its lightning

strikes a would-be murderer in his bed, tindering sheets and skin

together?—And would I be a murderer, then, if”—and slowly, stealthily,

and half sideways looking, he placed the loaded musket’s end against

the door.

“On this level, Ahab’s hammock swings within; his head this way. A

touch, and Starbuck may survive to hug his wife and child again.—Oh

Mary! Mary!—boy! boy! boy!—But if I wake thee not to death, old man,

who can tell to what unsounded deeps Starbuck’s body this day week may

sink, with all the crew! Great God, where art Thou? Shall I? shall

I?—The wind has gone down and shifted, sir; the fore and main topsails

are reefed and set; she heads her course.”

“Stern all! Oh Moby Dick, I clutch thy heart at last!”

Such were the sounds that now came hurtling from out the old man’s

tormented sleep, as if Starbuck’s voice had caused the long dumb dream

to speak.

The yet levelled musket shook like a drunkard’s arm against the panel;

Starbuck seemed wrestling with an angel; but turning from the door, he

placed the death-tube in its rack, and left the place.

“He’s too sound asleep, Mr. Stubb; go thou down, and wake him, and tell

him. I must see to the deck here. Thou know’st what to say.”

CHAPTER 124. The Needle.

Next morning the not-yet-subsided sea rolled in long slow billows of

mighty bulk, and striving in the Pequod’s gurgling track, pushed her on

like giants’ palms outspread. The strong, unstaggering breeze abounded

so, that sky and air seemed vast outbellying sails; the whole world

boomed before the wind. Muffled in the full morning light, the

invisible sun was only known by the spread intensity of his place;

where his bayonet rays moved on in stacks. Emblazonings, as of crowned

Babylonian kings and queens, reigned over everything. The sea was as a

crucible of molten gold, that bubblingly leaps with light and heat.

Long maintaining an enchanted silence, Ahab stood apart; and every time

the tetering ship loweringly pitched down her bowsprit, he turned to

eye the bright sun’s rays produced ahead; and when she profoundly

settled by the stern, he turned behind, and saw the sun’s rearward

place, and how the same yellow rays were blending with his undeviating

wake.

“Ha, ha, my ship! thou mightest well be taken now for the sea-chariot

of the sun. Ho, ho! all ye nations before my prow, I bring the sun to

ye! Yoke on the further billows; hallo! a tandem, I drive the sea!”

But suddenly reined back by some counter thought, he hurried towards

the helm, huskily demanding how the ship was heading.

“East-sou-east, sir,” said the frightened steersman.

“Thou liest!” smiting him with his clenched fist. “Heading East at this

hour in the morning, and the sun astern?”

Upon this every soul was confounded; for the phenomenon just then

observed by Ahab had unaccountably escaped every one else; but its very

blinding palpableness must have been the cause.

Thrusting his head half way into the binnacle, Ahab caught one glimpse

of the compasses; his uplifted arm slowly fell; for a moment he almost

seemed to stagger. Standing behind him Starbuck looked, and lo! the two

compasses pointed East, and the Pequod was as infallibly going West.

But ere the first wild alarm could get out abroad among the crew, the

old man with a rigid laugh exclaimed, “I have it! It has happened

before. Mr. Starbuck, last night’s thunder turned our compasses—that’s

all. Thou hast before now heard of such a thing, I take it.”

“Aye; but never before has it happened to me, sir,” said the pale mate,

gloomily.

Here, it must needs be said, that accidents like this have in more than

one case occurred to ships in violent storms. The magnetic energy, as

developed in the mariner’s needle, is, as all know, essentially one

with the electricity beheld in heaven; hence it is not to be much

marvelled at, that such things should be. Instances where the lightning

has actually struck the vessel, so as to smite down some of the spars

and rigging, the effect upon the needle has at times been still more

fatal; all its loadstone virtue being annihilated, so that the before

magnetic steel was of no more use than an old wife’s knitting needle.

But in either case, the needle never again, of itself, recovers the

original virtue thus marred or lost; and if the binnacle compasses be

affected, the same fate reaches all the others that may be in the ship;

even were the lowermost one inserted into the kelson.

Deliberately standing before the binnacle, and eyeing the transpointed

compasses, the old man, with the sharp of his extended hand, now took

the precise bearing of the sun, and satisfied that the needles were

exactly inverted, shouted out his orders for the ship’s course to be

changed accordingly. The yards were hard up; and once more the Pequod

thrust her undaunted bows into the opposing wind, for the supposed fair

one had only been juggling her.

Meanwhile, whatever were his own secret thoughts, Starbuck said

nothing, but quietly he issued all requisite orders; while Stubb and

Flask—who in some small degree seemed then to be sharing his

feelings—likewise unmurmuringly acquiesced. As for the men, though some

of them lowly rumbled, their fear of Ahab was greater than their fear

of Fate. But as ever before, the pagan harpooneers remained almost

wholly unimpressed; or if impressed, it was only with a certain

magnetism shot into their congenial hearts from inflexible Ahab’s.

For a space the old man walked the deck in rolling reveries. But

chancing to slip with his ivory heel, he saw the crushed copper

sight-tubes of the quadrant he had the day before dashed to the deck.

“Thou poor, proud heaven-gazer and sun’s pilot! yesterday I wrecked

thee, and to-day the compasses would fain have wrecked me. So, so. But

Ahab is lord over the level loadstone yet. Mr. Starbuck—a lance without

a pole; a top-maul, and the smallest of the sail-maker’s needles.

Quick!”

Accessory, perhaps, to the impulse dictating the thing he was now about

to do, were certain prudential motives, whose object might have been to

revive the spirits of his crew by a stroke of his subtile skill, in a

matter so wondrous as that of the inverted compasses. Besides, the old

man well knew that to steer by transpointed needles, though clumsily

practicable, was not a thing to be passed over by superstitious

sailors, without some shudderings and evil portents.

“Men,” said he, steadily turning upon the crew, as the mate handed him

the things he had demanded, “my men, the thunder turned old Ahab’s

needles; but out of this bit of steel Ahab can make one of his own,

that will point as true as any.”

Abashed glances of servile wonder were exchanged by the sailors, as

this was said; and with fascinated eyes they awaited whatever magic

might follow. But Starbuck looked away.

With a blow from the top-maul Ahab knocked off the steel head of the

lance, and then handing to the mate the long iron rod remaining, bade

him hold it upright, without its touching the deck. Then, with the

maul, after repeatedly smiting the upper end of this iron rod, he

placed the blunted needle endwise on the top of it, and less strongly

hammered that, several times, the mate still holding the rod as before.

Then going through some small strange motions with it—whether

indispensable to the magnetizing of the steel, or merely intended to

augment the awe of the crew, is uncertain—he called for linen thread;

and moving to the binnacle, slipped out the two reversed needles there,

and horizontally suspended the sail-needle by its middle, over one of

the compass-cards. At first, the steel went round and round, quivering

and vibrating at either end; but at last it settled to its place, when

Ahab, who had been intently watching for this result, stepped frankly

back from the binnacle, and pointing his stretched arm towards it,

exclaimed,—“Look ye, for yourselves, if Ahab be not lord of the level

loadstone! The sun is East, and that compass swears it!”

One after another they peered in, for nothing but their own eyes could

persuade such ignorance as theirs, and one after another they slunk

away.

In his fiery eyes of scorn and triumph, you then saw Ahab in all his

fatal pride.

CHAPTER 125. The Log and Line.

While now the fated Pequod had been so long afloat this voyage, the log

and line had but very seldom been in use. Owing to a confident reliance

upon other means of determining the vessel’s place, some merchantmen,

and many whalemen, especially when cruising, wholly neglect to heave

the log; though at the same time, and frequently more for form’s sake

than anything else, regularly putting down upon the customary slate the

course steered by the ship, as well as the presumed average rate of

progression every hour. It had been thus with the Pequod. The wooden

reel and angular log attached hung, long untouched, just beneath the

railing of the after bulwarks. Rains and spray had damped it; sun and

wind had warped it; all the elements had combined to rot a thing that

hung so idly. But heedless of all this, his mood seized Ahab, as he

happened to glance upon the reel, not many hours after the magnet

scene, and he remembered how his quadrant was no more, and recalled his

frantic oath about the level log and line. The ship was sailing

plungingly; astern the billows rolled in riots.

“Forward, there! Heave the log!”

Two seamen came. The golden-hued Tahitian and the grizzly Manxman.

“Take the reel, one of ye, I’ll heave.”

They went towards the extreme stern, on the ship’s lee side, where the

deck, with the oblique energy of the wind, was now almost dipping into

the creamy, sidelong-rushing sea.

The Manxman took the reel, and holding it high up, by the projecting

handle-ends of the spindle, round which the spool of line revolved, so

stood with the angular log hanging downwards, till Ahab advanced to

him.

Ahab stood before him, and was lightly unwinding some thirty or forty

turns to form a preliminary hand-coil to toss overboard, when the old

Manxman, who was intently eyeing both him and the line, made bold to

speak.

“Sir, I mistrust it; this line looks far gone, long heat and wet have

spoiled it.”

“’Twill hold, old gentleman. Long heat and wet, have they spoiled thee?

Thou seem’st to hold. Or, truer perhaps, life holds thee; not thou it.”

“I hold the spool, sir. But just as my captain says. With these grey

hairs of mine ’tis not worth while disputing, ’specially with a

superior, who’ll ne’er confess.”

“What’s that? There now’s a patched professor in Queen Nature’s

granite-founded College; but methinks he’s too subservient. Where wert

thou born?”

“In the little rocky Isle of Man, sir.”

“Excellent! Thou’st hit the world by that.”

“I know not, sir, but I was born there.”

“In the Isle of Man, hey? Well, the other way, it’s good. Here’s a man

from Man; a man born in once independent Man, and now unmanned of Man;

which is sucked in—by what? Up with the reel! The dead, blind wall

butts all inquiring heads at last. Up with it! So.”

The log was heaved. The loose coils rapidly straightened out in a long

dragging line astern, and then, instantly, the reel began to whirl. In

turn, jerkingly raised and lowered by the rolling billows, the towing

resistance of the log caused the old reelman to stagger strangely.

“Hold hard!”

Snap! the overstrained line sagged down in one long festoon; the

tugging log was gone.

“I crush the quadrant, the thunder turns the needles, and now the mad

sea parts the log-line. But Ahab can mend all. Haul in here, Tahitian;

reel up, Manxman. And look ye, let the carpenter make another log, and

mend thou the line. See to it.”

“There he goes now; to him nothing’s happened; but to me, the skewer

seems loosening out of the middle of the world. Haul in, haul in,

Tahitian! These lines run whole, and whirling out: come in broken, and

dragging slow. Ha, Pip? come to help; eh, Pip?”

“Pip? whom call ye Pip? Pip jumped from the whale-boat. Pip’s missing.

Let’s see now if ye haven’t fished him up here, fisherman. It drags

hard; I guess he’s holding on. Jerk him, Tahiti! Jerk him off; we haul

in no cowards here. Ho! there’s his arm just breaking water. A hatchet!

a hatchet! cut it off—we haul in no cowards here. Captain Ahab! sir,

sir! here’s Pip, trying to get on board again.”

“Peace, thou crazy loon,” cried the Manxman, seizing him by the arm.

“Away from the quarter-deck!”

“The greater idiot ever scolds the lesser,” muttered Ahab, advancing.

“Hands off from that holiness! Where sayest thou Pip was, boy?

“Astern there, sir, astern! Lo! lo!”

“And who art thou, boy? I see not my reflection in the vacant pupils of

thy eyes. Oh God! that man should be a thing for immortal souls to

sieve through! Who art thou, boy?”

“Bell-boy, sir; ship’s-crier; ding, dong, ding! Pip! Pip! Pip! One

hundred pounds of clay reward for Pip; five feet high—looks

cowardly—quickest known by that! Ding, dong, ding! Who’s seen Pip the

coward?”

“There can be no hearts above the snow-line. Oh, ye frozen heavens!

look down here. Ye did beget this luckless child, and have abandoned

him, ye creative libertines. Here, boy; Ahab’s cabin shall be Pip’s

home henceforth, while Ahab lives. Thou touchest my inmost centre, boy;

thou art tied to me by cords woven of my heart-strings. Come, let’s

down.”

“What’s this? here’s velvet shark-skin,” intently gazing at Ahab’s

hand, and feeling it. “Ah, now, had poor Pip but felt so kind a thing

as this, perhaps he had ne’er been lost! This seems to me, sir, as a

man-rope; something that weak souls may hold by. Oh, sir, let old Perth

now come and rivet these two hands together; the black one with the

white, for I will not let this go.”

“Oh, boy, nor will I thee, unless I should thereby drag thee to worse

horrors than are here. Come, then, to my cabin. Lo! ye believers in

gods all goodness, and in man all ill, lo you! see the omniscient gods

oblivious of suffering man; and man, though idiotic, and knowing not

what he does, yet full of the sweet things of love and gratitude. Come!

I feel prouder leading thee by thy black hand, than though I grasped an

Emperor’s!”

“There go two daft ones now,” muttered the old Manxman. “One daft with

strength, the other daft with weakness. But here’s the end of the

rotten line—all dripping, too. Mend it, eh? I think we had best have a

new line altogether. I’ll see Mr. Stubb about it.”

CHAPTER 126. The Life-Buoy.

Steering now south-eastward by Ahab’s levelled steel, and her progress

solely determined by Ahab’s level log and line; the Pequod held on her

path towards the Equator. Making so long a passage through such

unfrequented waters, descrying no ships, and ere long, sideways

impelled by unvarying trade winds, over waves monotonously mild; all

these seemed the strange calm things preluding some riotous and

desperate scene.

At last, when the ship drew near to the outskirts, as it were, of the

Equatorial fishing-ground, and in the deep darkness that goes before

the dawn, was sailing by a cluster of rocky islets; the watch—then

headed by Flask—was startled by a cry so plaintively wild and

unearthly—like half-articulated wailings of the ghosts of all Herod’s

murdered Innocents—that one and all, they started from their reveries,

and for the space of some moments stood, or sat, or leaned all

transfixedly listening, like the carved Roman slave, while that wild

cry remained within hearing. The Christian or civilized part of the

crew said it was mermaids, and shuddered; but the pagan harpooneers

remained unappalled. Yet the grey Manxman—the oldest mariner of

all—declared that the wild thrilling sounds that were heard, were the

voices of newly drowned men in the sea.

Below in his hammock, Ahab did not hear of this till grey dawn, when he

came to the deck; it was then recounted to him by Flask, not

unaccompanied with hinted dark meanings. He hollowly laughed, and thus

explained the wonder.

Those rocky islands the ship had passed were the resort of great

numbers of seals, and some young seals that had lost their dams, or

some dams that had lost their cubs, must have risen nigh the ship and

kept company with her, crying and sobbing with their human sort of

wail. But this only the more affected some of them, because most

mariners cherish a very superstitious feeling about seals, arising not

only from their peculiar tones when in distress, but also from the

human look of their round heads and semi-intelligent faces, seen

peeringly uprising from the water alongside. In the sea, under certain

circumstances, seals have more than once been mistaken for men.

But the bodings of the crew were destined to receive a most plausible

confirmation in the fate of one of their number that morning. At

sun-rise this man went from his hammock to his mast-head at the fore;

and whether it was that he was not yet half waked from his sleep (for

sailors sometimes go aloft in a transition state), whether it was thus

with the man, there is now no telling; but, be that as it may, he had

not been long at his perch, when a cry was heard—a cry and a

rushing—and looking up, they saw a falling phantom in the air; and

looking down, a little tossed heap of white bubbles in the blue of the

sea.

The life-buoy—a long slender cask—was dropped from the stern, where it

always hung obedient to a cunning spring; but no hand rose to seize it,

and the sun having long beat upon this cask it had shrunken, so that it

slowly filled, and that parched wood also filled at its every pore; and

the studded iron-bound cask followed the sailor to the bottom, as if to

yield him his pillow, though in sooth but a hard one.

And thus the first man of the Pequod that mounted the mast to look out

for the White Whale, on the White Whale’s own peculiar ground; that man

was swallowed up in the deep. But few, perhaps, thought of that at the

time. Indeed, in some sort, they were not grieved at this event, at

least as a portent; for they regarded it, not as a foreshadowing of

evil in the future, but as the fulfilment of an evil already presaged.

They declared that now they knew the reason of those wild shrieks they

had heard the night before. But again the old Manxman said nay.

The lost life-buoy was now to be replaced; Starbuck was directed to see

to it; but as no cask of sufficient lightness could be found, and as in

the feverish eagerness of what seemed the approaching crisis of the

voyage, all hands were impatient of any toil but what was directly

connected with its final end, whatever that might prove to be;

therefore, they were going to leave the ship’s stern unprovided with a

buoy, when by certain strange signs and inuendoes Queequeg hinted a

hint concerning his coffin.

“A life-buoy of a coffin!” cried Starbuck, starting.

“Rather queer, that, I should say,” said Stubb.

“It will make a good enough one,” said Flask, “the carpenter here can

arrange it easily.”

“Bring it up; there’s nothing else for it,” said Starbuck, after a

melancholy pause. “Rig it, carpenter; do not look at me so—the coffin,

I mean. Dost thou hear me? Rig it.”

“And shall I nail down the lid, sir?” moving his hand as with a hammer.

“Aye.”

“And shall I caulk the seams, sir?” moving his hand as with a

caulking-iron.

“Aye.”

“And shall I then pay over the same with pitch, sir?” moving his hand

as with a pitch-pot.

“Away! what possesses thee to this? Make a life-buoy of the coffin, and

no more.—Mr. Stubb, Mr. Flask, come forward with me.”

“He goes off in a huff. The whole he can endure; at the parts he

baulks. Now I don’t like this. I make a leg for Captain Ahab, and he

wears it like a gentleman; but I make a bandbox for Queequeg, and he

won’t put his head into it. Are all my pains to go for nothing with

that coffin? And now I’m ordered to make a life-buoy of it. It’s like

turning an old coat; going to bring the flesh on the other side now. I

don’t like this cobbling sort of business—I don’t like it at all; it’s

undignified; it’s not my place. Let tinkers’ brats do tinkerings; we

are their betters. I like to take in hand none but clean, virgin,

fair-and-square mathematical jobs, something that regularly begins at

the beginning, and is at the middle when midway, and comes to an end at

the conclusion; not a cobbler’s job, that’s at an end in the middle,

and at the beginning at the end. It’s the old woman’s tricks to be

giving cobbling jobs. Lord! what an affection all old women have for

tinkers. I know an old woman of sixty-five who ran away with a

bald-headed young tinker once. And that’s the reason I never would work

for lonely widow old women ashore, when I kept my job-shop in the

Vineyard; they might have taken it into their lonely old heads to run

off with me. But heigh-ho! there are no caps at sea but snow-caps. Let

me see. Nail down the lid; caulk the seams; pay over the same with

pitch; batten them down tight, and hang it with the snap-spring over

the ship’s stern. Were ever such things done before with a coffin? Some

superstitious old carpenters, now, would be tied up in the rigging, ere

they would do the job. But I’m made of knotty Aroostook hemlock; I

don’t budge. Cruppered with a coffin! Sailing about with a grave-yard

tray! But never mind. We workers in woods make bridal-bedsteads and

card-tables, as well as coffins and hearses. We work by the month, or

by the job, or by the profit; not for us to ask the why and wherefore

of our work, unless it be too confounded cobbling, and then we stash it

if we can. Hem! I’ll do the job, now, tenderly. I’ll have me—let’s

see—how many in the ship’s company, all told? But I’ve forgotten. Any

way, I’ll have me thirty separate, Turk’s-headed life-lines, each three

feet long hanging all round to the coffin. Then, if the hull go down,

there’ll be thirty lively fellows all fighting for one coffin, a sight

not seen very often beneath the sun! Come hammer, caulking-iron,

pitch-pot, and marling-spike! Let’s to it.”

CHAPTER 127. The Deck.

\_The coffin laid upon two line-tubs, between the vice-bench and the

open hatchway; the Carpenter caulking its seams; the string of twisted

oakum slowly unwinding from a large roll of it placed in the bosom of

his frock.—Ahab comes slowly from the cabin-gangway, and hears Pip

following him.\_

“Back, lad; I will be with ye again presently. He goes! Not this hand

complies with my humor more genially than that boy.—Middle aisle of a

church! What’s here?”

“Life-buoy, sir. Mr. Starbuck’s orders. Oh, look, sir! Beware the

hatchway!”

“Thank ye, man. Thy coffin lies handy to the vault.”

“Sir? The hatchway? oh! So it does, sir, so it does.”

“Art not thou the leg-maker? Look, did not this stump come from thy

shop?”

“I believe it did, sir; does the ferrule stand, sir?”

“Well enough. But art thou not also the undertaker?”

“Aye, sir; I patched up this thing here as a coffin for Queequeg; but

they’ve set me now to turning it into something else.”

“Then tell me; art thou not an arrant, all-grasping, intermeddling,

monopolising, heathenish old scamp, to be one day making legs, and the

next day coffins to clap them in, and yet again life-buoys out of those

same coffins? Thou art as unprincipled as the gods, and as much of a

jack-of-all-trades.”

“But I do not mean anything, sir. I do as I do.”

“The gods again. Hark ye, dost thou not ever sing working about a

coffin? The Titans, they say, hummed snatches when chipping out the

craters for volcanoes; and the grave-digger in the play sings, spade in

hand. Dost thou never?”

“Sing, sir? Do I sing? Oh, I’m indifferent enough, sir, for that; but

the reason why the grave-digger made music must have been because there

was none in his spade, sir. But the caulking mallet is full of it. Hark

to it.”

“Aye, and that’s because the lid there’s a sounding-board; and what in

all things makes the sounding-board is this—there’s naught beneath. And

yet, a coffin with a body in it rings pretty much the same, Carpenter.

Hast thou ever helped carry a bier, and heard the coffin knock against

the churchyard gate, going in?

“Faith, sir, I’ve——”

“Faith? What’s that?”

“Why, faith, sir, it’s only a sort of exclamation-like—that’s all,

sir.”

“Um, um; go on.”

“I was about to say, sir, that——”

“Art thou a silk-worm? Dost thou spin thy own shroud out of thyself?

Look at thy bosom! Despatch! and get these traps out of sight.”

“He goes aft. That was sudden, now; but squalls come sudden in hot

latitudes. I’ve heard that the Isle of Albemarle, one of the

Gallipagos, is cut by the Equator right in the middle. Seems to me some

sort of Equator cuts yon old man, too, right in his middle. He’s always

under the Line—fiery hot, I tell ye! He’s looking this way—come, oakum;

quick. Here we go again. This wooden mallet is the cork, and I’m the

professor of musical glasses—tap, tap!”

(\_Ahab to himself\_.)

“There’s a sight! There’s a sound! The greyheaded woodpecker tapping

the hollow tree! Blind and dumb might well be envied now. See! that

thing rests on two line-tubs, full of tow-lines. A most malicious wag,

that fellow. Rat-tat! So man’s seconds tick! Oh! how immaterial are all

materials! What things real are there, but imponderable thoughts? Here

now’s the very dreaded symbol of grim death, by a mere hap, made the

expressive sign of the help and hope of most endangered life. A

life-buoy of a coffin! Does it go further? Can it be that in some

spiritual sense the coffin is, after all, but an immortality-preserver!

I’ll think of that. But no. So far gone am I in the dark side of earth,

that its other side, the theoretic bright one, seems but uncertain

twilight to me. Will ye never have done, Carpenter, with that accursed

sound? I go below; let me not see that thing here when I return again.

Now, then, Pip, we’ll talk this over; I do suck most wondrous

philosophies from thee! Some unknown conduits from the unknown worlds

must empty into thee!”

CHAPTER 128. The Pequod Meets The Rachel.

Next day, a large ship, the Rachel, was descried, bearing directly down

upon the Pequod, all her spars thickly clustering with men. At the time

the Pequod was making good speed through the water; but as the

broad-winged windward stranger shot nigh to her, the boastful sails all

fell together as blank bladders that are burst, and all life fled from

the smitten hull.

“Bad news; she brings bad news,” muttered the old Manxman. But ere her

commander, who, with trumpet to mouth, stood up in his boat; ere he

could hopefully hail, Ahab’s voice was heard.

“Hast seen the White Whale?”

“Aye, yesterday. Have ye seen a whale-boat adrift?”

Throttling his joy, Ahab negatively answered this unexpected question;

and would then have fain boarded the stranger, when the stranger

captain himself, having stopped his vessel’s way, was seen descending

her side. A few keen pulls, and his boat-hook soon clinched the

Pequod’s main-chains, and he sprang to the deck. Immediately he was

recognised by Ahab for a Nantucketer he knew. But no formal salutation

was exchanged.

“Where was he?—not killed!—not killed!” cried Ahab, closely advancing.

“How was it?”

It seemed that somewhat late on the afternoon of the day previous,

while three of the stranger’s boats were engaged with a shoal of

whales, which had led them some four or five miles from the ship; and

while they were yet in swift chase to windward, the white hump and head

of Moby Dick had suddenly loomed up out of the water, not very far to

leeward; whereupon, the fourth rigged boat—a reserved one—had been

instantly lowered in chase. After a keen sail before the wind, this

fourth boat—the swiftest keeled of all—seemed to have succeeded in

fastening—at least, as well as the man at the mast-head could tell

anything about it. In the distance he saw the diminished dotted boat;

and then a swift gleam of bubbling white water; and after that nothing

more; whence it was concluded that the stricken whale must have

indefinitely run away with his pursuers, as often happens. There was

some apprehension, but no positive alarm, as yet. The recall signals

were placed in the rigging; darkness came on; and forced to pick up her

three far to windward boats—ere going in quest of the fourth one in the

precisely opposite direction—the ship had not only been necessitated to

leave that boat to its fate till near midnight, but, for the time, to

increase her distance from it. But the rest of her crew being at last

safe aboard, she crowded all sail—stunsail on stunsail—after the

missing boat; kindling a fire in her try-pots for a beacon; and every

other man aloft on the look-out. But though when she had thus sailed a

sufficient distance to gain the presumed place of the absent ones when

last seen; though she then paused to lower her spare boats to pull all

around her; and not finding anything, had again dashed on; again

paused, and lowered her boats; and though she had thus continued doing

till daylight; yet not the least glimpse of the missing keel had been

seen.

The story told, the stranger Captain immediately went on to reveal his

object in boarding the Pequod. He desired that ship to unite with his

own in the search; by sailing over the sea some four or five miles

apart, on parallel lines, and so sweeping a double horizon, as it were.

“I will wager something now,” whispered Stubb to Flask, “that some one

in that missing boat wore off that Captain’s best coat; mayhap, his

watch—he’s so cursed anxious to get it back. Who ever heard of two

pious whale-ships cruising after one missing whale-boat in the height

of the whaling season? See, Flask, only see how pale he looks—pale in

the very buttons of his eyes—look—it wasn’t the coat—it must have been

the—”

“My boy, my own boy is among them. For God’s sake—I beg, I

conjure”—here exclaimed the stranger Captain to Ahab, who thus far had

but icily received his petition. “For eight-and-forty hours let me

charter your ship—I will gladly pay for it, and roundly pay for it—if

there be no other way—for eight-and-forty hours only—only that—you

must, oh, you must, and you \_shall\_ do this thing.”

“His son!” cried Stubb, “oh, it’s his son he’s lost! I take back the

coat and watch—what says Ahab? We must save that boy.”

“He’s drowned with the rest on ’em, last night,” said the old Manx

sailor standing behind them; “I heard; all of ye heard their spirits.”

Now, as it shortly turned out, what made this incident of the Rachel’s

the more melancholy, was the circumstance, that not only was one of the

Captain’s sons among the number of the missing boat’s crew; but among

the number of the other boat’s crews, at the same time, but on the

other hand, separated from the ship during the dark vicissitudes of the

chase, there had been still another son; as that for a time, the

wretched father was plunged to the bottom of the cruellest perplexity;

which was only solved for him by his chief mate’s instinctively

adopting the ordinary procedure of a whale-ship in such emergencies,

that is, when placed between jeopardized but divided boats, always to

pick up the majority first. But the captain, for some unknown

constitutional reason, had refrained from mentioning all this, and not

till forced to it by Ahab’s iciness did he allude to his one yet

missing boy; a little lad, but twelve years old, whose father with the

earnest but unmisgiving hardihood of a Nantucketer’s paternal love, had

thus early sought to initiate him in the perils and wonders of a

vocation almost immemorially the destiny of all his race. Nor does it

unfrequently occur, that Nantucket captains will send a son of such

tender age away from them, for a protracted three or four years’ voyage

in some other ship than their own; so that their first knowledge of a

whaleman’s career shall be unenervated by any chance display of a

father’s natural but untimely partiality, or undue apprehensiveness and

concern.

Meantime, now the stranger was still beseeching his poor boon of Ahab;

and Ahab still stood like an anvil, receiving every shock, but without

the least quivering of his own.

“I will not go,” said the stranger, “till you say \_aye\_ to me. Do to me

as you would have me do to you in the like case. For \_you\_ too have a

boy, Captain Ahab—though but a child, and nestling safely at home now—a

child of your old age too—Yes, yes, you relent; I see it—run, run, men,

now, and stand by to square in the yards.”

“Avast,” cried Ahab—“touch not a rope-yarn”; then in a voice that

prolongingly moulded every word—“Captain Gardiner, I will not do it.

Even now I lose time. Good-bye, good-bye. God bless ye, man, and may I

forgive myself, but I must go. Mr. Starbuck, look at the binnacle

watch, and in three minutes from this present instant warn off all

strangers: then brace forward again, and let the ship sail as before.”

Hurriedly turning, with averted face, he descended into his cabin,

leaving the strange captain transfixed at this unconditional and utter

rejection of his so earnest suit. But starting from his enchantment,

Gardiner silently hurried to the side; more fell than stepped into his

boat, and returned to his ship.

Soon the two ships diverged their wakes; and long as the strange vessel

was in view, she was seen to yaw hither and thither at every dark spot,

however small, on the sea. This way and that her yards were swung

round; starboard and larboard, she continued to tack; now she beat

against a head sea; and again it pushed her before it; while all the

while, her masts and yards were thickly clustered with men, as three

tall cherry trees, when the boys are cherrying among the boughs.

But by her still halting course and winding, woeful way, you plainly

saw that this ship that so wept with spray, still remained without

comfort. She was Rachel, weeping for her children, because they were

not.

CHAPTER 129. The Cabin.

(\_Ahab moving to go on deck; Pip catches him by the hand to follow.\_)

“Lad, lad, I tell thee thou must not follow Ahab now. The hour is

coming when Ahab would not scare thee from him, yet would not have thee

by him. There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my

malady. Like cures like; and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most

desired health. Do thou abide below here, where they shall serve thee,

as if thou wert the captain. Aye, lad, thou shalt sit here in my own

screwed chair; another screw to it, thou must be.”

“No, no, no! ye have not a whole body, sir; do ye but use poor me for

your one lost leg; only tread upon me, sir; I ask no more, so I remain

a part of ye.”

“Oh! spite of million villains, this makes me a bigot in the fadeless

fidelity of man!—and a black! and crazy!—but methinks like-cures-like

applies to him too; he grows so sane again.”

“They tell me, sir, that Stubb did once desert poor little Pip, whose

drowned bones now show white, for all the blackness of his living skin.

But I will never desert ye, sir, as Stubb did him. Sir, I must go with

ye.”

“If thou speakest thus to me much more, Ahab’s purpose keels up in him.

I tell thee no; it cannot be.”

“Oh good master, master, master!

“Weep so, and I will murder thee! have a care, for Ahab too is mad.

Listen, and thou wilt often hear my ivory foot upon the deck, and still

know that I am there. And now I quit thee. Thy hand!—Met! True art

thou, lad, as the circumference to its centre. So: God for ever bless

thee; and if it come to that,—God for ever save thee, let what will

befall.”

(\_Ahab goes; Pip steps one step forward.\_)

“Here he this instant stood; I stand in his air,—but I’m alone. Now

were even poor Pip here I could endure it, but he’s missing. Pip! Pip!

Ding, dong, ding! Who’s seen Pip? He must be up here; let’s try the

door. What? neither lock, nor bolt, nor bar; and yet there’s no opening

it. It must be the spell; he told me to stay here: Aye, and told me

this screwed chair was mine. Here, then, I’ll seat me, against the

transom, in the ship’s full middle, all her keel and her three masts

before me. Here, our old sailors say, in their black seventy-fours

great admirals sometimes sit at table, and lord it over rows of

captains and lieutenants. Ha! what’s this? epaulets! epaulets! the

epaulets all come crowding! Pass round the decanters; glad to see ye;

fill up, monsieurs! What an odd feeling, now, when a black boy’s host

to white men with gold lace upon their coats!—Monsieurs, have ye seen

one Pip?—a little negro lad, five feet high, hang-dog look, and

cowardly! Jumped from a whale-boat once;—seen him? No! Well then, fill

up again, captains, and let’s drink shame upon all cowards! I name no

names. Shame upon them! Put one foot upon the table. Shame upon all

cowards.—Hist! above there, I hear ivory—Oh, master! master! I am

indeed down-hearted when you walk over me. But here I’ll stay, though

this stern strikes rocks; and they bulge through; and oysters come to

join me.”

CHAPTER 130. The Hat.

And now that at the proper time and place, after so long and wide a

preliminary cruise, Ahab,—all other whaling waters swept—seemed to have

chased his foe into an ocean-fold, to slay him the more securely there;

now, that he found himself hard by the very latitude and longitude

where his tormenting wound had been inflicted; now that a vessel had

been spoken which on the very day preceding had actually encountered

Moby Dick;—and now that all his successive meetings with various ships

contrastingly concurred to show the demoniac indifference with which

the white whale tore his hunters, whether sinning or sinned against;

now it was that there lurked a something in the old man’s eyes, which

it was hardly sufferable for feeble souls to see. As the unsetting

polar star, which through the livelong, arctic, six months’ night

sustains its piercing, steady, central gaze; so Ahab’s purpose now

fixedly gleamed down upon the constant midnight of the gloomy crew. It

domineered above them so, that all their bodings, doubts, misgivings,

fears, were fain to hide beneath their souls, and not sprout forth a

single spear or leaf.

In this foreshadowing interval too, all humor, forced or natural,

vanished. Stubb no more strove to raise a smile; Starbuck no more

strove to check one. Alike, joy and sorrow, hope and fear, seemed

ground to finest dust, and powdered, for the time, in the clamped

mortar of Ahab’s iron soul. Like machines, they dumbly moved about the

deck, ever conscious that the old man’s despot eye was on them.

But did you deeply scan him in his more secret confidential hours; when

he thought no glance but one was on him; then you would have seen that

even as Ahab’s eyes so awed the crew’s, the inscrutable Parsee’s glance

awed his; or somehow, at least, in some wild way, at times affected it.

Such an added, gliding strangeness began to invest the thin Fedallah

now; such ceaseless shudderings shook him; that the men looked dubious

at him; half uncertain, as it seemed, whether indeed he were a mortal

substance, or else a tremulous shadow cast upon the deck by some unseen

being’s body. And that shadow was always hovering there. For not by

night, even, had Fedallah ever certainly been known to slumber, or go

below. He would stand still for hours: but never sat or leaned; his wan

but wondrous eyes did plainly say—We two watchmen never rest.

Nor, at any time, by night or day could the mariners now step upon the

deck, unless Ahab was before them; either standing in his pivot-hole,

or exactly pacing the planks between two undeviating limits,—the

main-mast and the mizen; or else they saw him standing in the

cabin-scuttle,—his living foot advanced upon the deck, as if to step;

his hat slouched heavily over his eyes; so that however motionless he

stood, however the days and nights were added on, that he had not swung

in his hammock; yet hidden beneath that slouching hat, they could never

tell unerringly whether, for all this, his eyes were really closed at

times; or whether he was still intently scanning them; no matter,

though he stood so in the scuttle for a whole hour on the stretch, and

the unheeded night-damp gathered in beads of dew upon that stone-carved

coat and hat. The clothes that the night had wet, the next day’s

sunshine dried upon him; and so, day after day, and night after night;

he went no more beneath the planks; whatever he wanted from the cabin

that thing he sent for.

He ate in the same open air; that is, his two only meals,—breakfast and

dinner: supper he never touched; nor reaped his beard; which darkly

grew all gnarled, as unearthed roots of trees blown over, which still

grow idly on at naked base, though perished in the upper verdure. But

though his whole life was now become one watch on deck; and though the

Parsee’s mystic watch was without intermission as his own; yet these

two never seemed to speak—one man to the other—unless at long intervals

some passing unmomentous matter made it necessary. Though such a potent

spell seemed secretly to join the twain; openly, and to the awe-struck

crew, they seemed pole-like asunder. If by day they chanced to speak

one word; by night, dumb men were both, so far as concerned the

slightest verbal interchange. At times, for longest hours, without a

single hail, they stood far parted in the starlight; Ahab in his

scuttle, the Parsee by the mainmast; but still fixedly gazing upon each

other; as if in the Parsee Ahab saw his forethrown shadow, in Ahab the

Parsee his abandoned substance.

And yet, somehow, did Ahab—in his own proper self, as daily, hourly,

and every instant, commandingly revealed to his subordinates,—Ahab

seemed an independent lord; the Parsee but his slave. Still again both

seemed yoked together, and an unseen tyrant driving them; the lean

shade siding the solid rib. For be this Parsee what he may, all rib and

keel was solid Ahab.

At the first faintest glimmering of the dawn, his iron voice was heard

from aft,—“Man the mast-heads!”—and all through the day, till after

sunset and after twilight, the same voice every hour, at the striking

of the helmsman’s bell, was heard—“What d’ye see?—sharp! sharp!”

But when three or four days had slided by, after meeting the

children-seeking Rachel; and no spout had yet been seen; the monomaniac

old man seemed distrustful of his crew’s fidelity; at least, of nearly

all except the Pagan harpooneers; he seemed to doubt, even, whether

Stubb and Flask might not willingly overlook the sight he sought. But

if these suspicions were really his, he sagaciously refrained from

verbally expressing them, however his actions might seem to hint them.

“I will have the first sight of the whale myself,”—he said. “Aye! Ahab

must have the doubloon!” and with his own hands he rigged a nest of

basketed bowlines; and sending a hand aloft, with a single sheaved

block, to secure to the main-mast head, he received the two ends of the

downward-reeved rope; and attaching one to his basket prepared a pin

for the other end, in order to fasten it at the rail. This done, with

that end yet in his hand and standing beside the pin, he looked round

upon his crew, sweeping from one to the other; pausing his glance long

upon Daggoo, Queequeg, Tashtego; but shunning Fedallah; and then

settling his firm relying eye upon the chief mate, said,—“Take the

rope, sir—I give it into thy hands, Starbuck.” Then arranging his

person in the basket, he gave the word for them to hoist him to his

perch, Starbuck being the one who secured the rope at last; and

afterwards stood near it. And thus, with one hand clinging round the

royal mast, Ahab gazed abroad upon the sea for miles and miles,—ahead,

astern, this side, and that,—within the wide expanded circle commanded

at so great a height.

When in working with his hands at some lofty almost isolated place in

the rigging, which chances to afford no foothold, the sailor at sea is

hoisted up to that spot, and sustained there by the rope; under these

circumstances, its fastened end on deck is always given in strict

charge to some one man who has the special watch of it. Because in such

a wilderness of running rigging, whose various different relations

aloft cannot always be infallibly discerned by what is seen of them at

the deck; and when the deck-ends of these ropes are being every few

minutes cast down from the fastenings, it would be but a natural

fatality, if, unprovided with a constant watchman, the hoisted sailor

should by some carelessness of the crew be cast adrift and fall all

swooping to the sea. So Ahab’s proceedings in this matter were not

unusual; the only strange thing about them seemed to be, that Starbuck,

almost the one only man who had ever ventured to oppose him with

anything in the slightest degree approaching to decision—one of those

too, whose faithfulness on the look-out he had seemed to doubt

somewhat;—it was strange, that this was the very man he should select

for his watchman; freely giving his whole life into such an otherwise

distrusted person’s hands.

Now, the first time Ahab was perched aloft; ere he had been there ten

minutes; one of those red-billed savage sea-hawks which so often fly

incommodiously close round the manned mast-heads of whalemen in these

latitudes; one of these birds came wheeling and screaming round his

head in a maze of untrackably swift circlings. Then it darted a

thousand feet straight up into the air; then spiralized downwards, and

went eddying again round his head.

But with his gaze fixed upon the dim and distant horizon, Ahab seemed

not to mark this wild bird; nor, indeed, would any one else have marked

it much, it being no uncommon circumstance; only now almost the least

heedful eye seemed to see some sort of cunning meaning in almost every

sight.

“Your hat, your hat, sir!” suddenly cried the Sicilian seaman, who

being posted at the mizen-mast-head, stood directly behind Ahab, though

somewhat lower than his level, and with a deep gulf of air dividing

them.

But already the sable wing was before the old man’s eyes; the long

hooked bill at his head: with a scream, the black hawk darted away with

his prize.

An eagle flew thrice round Tarquin’s head, removing his cap to replace

it, and thereupon Tanaquil, his wife, declared that Tarquin would be

king of Rome. But only by the replacing of the cap was that omen

accounted good. Ahab’s hat was never restored; the wild hawk flew on

and on with it; far in advance of the prow: and at last disappeared;

while from the point of that disappearance, a minute black spot was

dimly discerned, falling from that vast height into the sea.

CHAPTER 131. The Pequod Meets The Delight.

The intense Pequod sailed on; the rolling waves and days went by; the

life-buoy-coffin still lightly swung; and another ship, most miserably

misnamed the Delight, was descried. As she drew nigh, all eyes were

fixed upon her broad beams, called shears, which, in some

whaling-ships, cross the quarter-deck at the height of eight or nine

feet; serving to carry the spare, unrigged, or disabled boats.

Upon the stranger’s shears were beheld the shattered, white ribs, and

some few splintered planks, of what had once been a whale-boat; but you

now saw through this wreck, as plainly as you see through the peeled,

half-unhinged, and bleaching skeleton of a horse.

“Hast seen the White Whale?”

“Look!” replied the hollow-cheeked captain from his taffrail; and with

his trumpet he pointed to the wreck.

“Hast killed him?”

“The harpoon is not yet forged that ever will do that,” answered the

other, sadly glancing upon a rounded hammock on the deck, whose

gathered sides some noiseless sailors were busy in sewing together.

“Not forged!” and snatching Perth’s levelled iron from the crotch, Ahab

held it out, exclaiming—“Look ye, Nantucketer; here in this hand I hold

his death! Tempered in blood, and tempered by lightning are these

barbs; and I swear to temper them triply in that hot place behind the

fin, where the White Whale most feels his accursed life!”

“Then God keep thee, old man—see’st thou that”—pointing to the

hammock—“I bury but one of five stout men, who were alive only

yesterday; but were dead ere night. Only \_that\_ one I bury; the rest

were buried before they died; you sail upon their tomb.” Then turning

to his crew—“Are ye ready there? place the plank then on the rail, and

lift the body; so, then—Oh! God”—advancing towards the hammock with

uplifted hands—“may the resurrection and the life——”

“Brace forward! Up helm!” cried Ahab like lightning to his men.

But the suddenly started Pequod was not quick enough to escape the

sound of the splash that the corpse soon made as it struck the sea; not

so quick, indeed, but that some of the flying bubbles might have

sprinkled her hull with their ghostly baptism.

As Ahab now glided from the dejected Delight, the strange life-buoy

hanging at the Pequod’s stern came into conspicuous relief.

“Ha! yonder! look yonder, men!” cried a foreboding voice in her wake.

“In vain, oh, ye strangers, ye fly our sad burial; ye but turn us your

taffrail to show us your coffin!”

CHAPTER 132. The Symphony.

It was a clear steel-blue day. The firmaments of air and sea were

hardly separable in that all-pervading azure; only, the pensive air was

transparently pure and soft, with a woman’s look, and the robust and

man-like sea heaved with long, strong, lingering swells, as Samson’s

chest in his sleep.

Hither, and thither, on high, glided the snow-white wings of small,

unspeckled birds; these were the gentle thoughts of the feminine air;

but to and fro in the deeps, far down in the bottomless blue, rushed

mighty leviathans, sword-fish, and sharks; and these were the strong,

troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea.

But though thus contrasting within, the contrast was only in shades and

shadows without; those two seemed one; it was only the sex, as it were,

that distinguished them.

Aloft, like a royal czar and king, the sun seemed giving this gentle

air to this bold and rolling sea; even as bride to groom. And at the

girdling line of the horizon, a soft and tremulous motion—most seen

here at the equator—denoted the fond, throbbing trust, the loving

alarms, with which the poor bride gave her bosom away.

Tied up and twisted; gnarled and knotted with wrinkles; haggardly firm

and unyielding; his eyes glowing like coals, that still glow in the

ashes of ruin; untottering Ahab stood forth in the clearness of the

morn; lifting his splintered helmet of a brow to the fair girl’s

forehead of heaven.

Oh, immortal infancy, and innocency of the azure! Invisible winged

creatures that frolic all round us! Sweet childhood of air and sky! how

oblivious were ye of old Ahab’s close-coiled woe! But so have I seen

little Miriam and Martha, laughing-eyed elves, heedlessly gambol around

their old sire; sporting with the circle of singed locks which grew on

the marge of that burnt-out crater of his brain.

Slowly crossing the deck from the scuttle, Ahab leaned over the side

and watched how his shadow in the water sank and sank to his gaze, the

more and the more that he strove to pierce the profundity. But the

lovely aromas in that enchanted air did at last seem to dispel, for a

moment, the cankerous thing in his soul. That glad, happy air, that

winsome sky, did at last stroke and caress him; the step-mother world,

so long cruel—forbidding—now threw affectionate arms round his stubborn

neck, and did seem to joyously sob over him, as if over one, that

however wilful and erring, she could yet find it in her heart to save

and to bless. From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into

the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee

drop.

Starbuck saw the old man; saw him, how he heavily leaned over the side;

and he seemed to hear in his own true heart the measureless sobbing

that stole out of the centre of the serenity around. Careful not to

touch him, or be noticed by him, he yet drew near to him, and stood

there.

Ahab turned.

“Starbuck!”

“Sir.”

“Oh, Starbuck! it is a mild, mild wind, and a mild looking sky. On such

a day—very much such a sweetness as this—I struck my first whale—a

boy-harpooneer of eighteen! Forty—forty—forty years ago!—ago! Forty

years of continual whaling! forty years of privation, and peril, and

storm-time! forty years on the pitiless sea! for forty years has Ahab

forsaken the peaceful land, for forty years to make war on the horrors

of the deep! Aye and yes, Starbuck, out of those forty years I have not

spent three ashore. When I think of this life I have led; the

desolation of solitude it has been; the masoned, walled-town of a

Captain’s exclusiveness, which admits but small entrance to any

sympathy from the green country without—oh, weariness! heaviness!

Guinea-coast slavery of solitary command!—when I think of all this;

only half-suspected, not so keenly known to me before—and how for forty

years I have fed upon dry salted fare—fit emblem of the dry nourishment

of my soil!—when the poorest landsman has had fresh fruit to his daily

hand, and broken the world’s fresh bread to my mouldy crusts—away,

whole oceans away, from that young girl-wife I wedded past fifty, and

sailed for Cape Horn the next day, leaving but one dent in my marriage

pillow—wife? wife?—rather a widow with her husband alive! Aye, I

widowed that poor girl when I married her, Starbuck; and then, the

madness, the frenzy, the boiling blood and the smoking brow, with

which, for a thousand lowerings old Ahab has furiously, foamingly

chased his prey—more a demon than a man!—aye, aye! what a forty years’

fool—fool—old fool, has old Ahab been! Why this strife of the chase?

why weary, and palsy the arm at the oar, and the iron, and the lance?

how the richer or better is Ahab now? Behold. Oh, Starbuck! is it not

hard, that with this weary load I bear, one poor leg should have been

snatched from under me? Here, brush this old hair aside; it blinds me,

that I seem to weep. Locks so grey did never grow but from out some

ashes! But do I look very old, so very, very old, Starbuck? I feel

deadly faint, bowed, and humped, as though I were Adam, staggering

beneath the piled centuries since Paradise. God! God! God!—crack my

heart!—stave my brain!—mockery! mockery! bitter, biting mockery of grey

hairs, have I lived enough joy to wear ye; and seem and feel thus

intolerably old? Close! stand close to me, Starbuck; let me look into a

human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to

gaze upon God. By the green land; by the bright hearth-stone! this is

the magic glass, man; I see my wife and my child in thine eye. No, no;

stay on board, on board!—lower not when I do; when branded Ahab gives

chase to Moby Dick. That hazard shall not be thine. No, no! not with

the far away home I see in that eye!”

“Oh, my Captain! my Captain! noble soul! grand old heart, after all!

why should any one give chase to that hated fish! Away with me! let us

fly these deadly waters! let us home! Wife and child, too, are

Starbuck’s—wife and child of his brotherly, sisterly, play-fellow

youth; even as thine, sir, are the wife and child of thy loving,

longing, paternal old age! Away! let us away!—this instant let me alter

the course! How cheerily, how hilariously, O my Captain, would we bowl

on our way to see old Nantucket again! I think, sir, they have some

such mild blue days, even as this, in Nantucket.”

“They have, they have. I have seen them—some summer days in the

morning. About this time—yes, it is his noon nap now—the boy

vivaciously wakes; sits up in bed; and his mother tells him of me, of

cannibal old me; how I am abroad upon the deep, but will yet come back

to dance him again.”

“’Tis my Mary, my Mary herself! She promised that my boy, every

morning, should be carried to the hill to catch the first glimpse of

his father’s sail! Yes, yes! no more! it is done! we head for

Nantucket! Come, my Captain, study out the course, and let us away!

See, see! the boy’s face from the window! the boy’s hand on the hill!”

But Ahab’s glance was averted; like a blighted fruit tree he shook, and

cast his last, cindered apple to the soil.

“What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what

cozening, hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor

commands me; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep

pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the time; recklessly

making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart, I durst not

so much as dare? Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this

arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errand-boy

in heaven; nor one single star can revolve, but by some invisible

power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one small brain

think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does that thinking, does

that living, and not I. By heaven, man, we are turned round and round

in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike. And all

the time, lo! that smiling sky, and this unsounded sea! Look! see yon

Albicore! who put it into him to chase and fang that flying-fish? Where

do murderers go, man! Who’s to doom, when the judge himself is dragged

to the bar? But it is a mild, mild wind, and a mild looking sky; and

the air smells now, as if it blew from a far-away meadow; they have

been making hay somewhere under the slopes of the Andes, Starbuck, and

the mowers are sleeping among the new-mown hay. Sleeping? Aye, toil we

how we may, we all sleep at last on the field. Sleep? Aye, and rust

amid greenness; as last year’s scythes flung down, and left in the

half-cut swaths—Starbuck!”

But blanched to a corpse’s hue with despair, the Mate had stolen away.

Ahab crossed the deck to gaze over on the other side; but started at

two reflected, fixed eyes in the water there. Fedallah was motionlessly

leaning over the same rail.

CHAPTER 133. The Chase—First Day.

That night, in the mid-watch, when the old man—as his wont at

intervals—stepped forth from the scuttle in which he leaned, and went

to his pivot-hole, he suddenly thrust out his face fiercely, snuffing

up the sea air as a sagacious ship’s dog will, in drawing nigh to some

barbarous isle. He declared that a whale must be near. Soon that

peculiar odor, sometimes to a great distance given forth by the living

sperm whale, was palpable to all the watch; nor was any mariner

surprised when, after inspecting the compass, and then the dog-vane,

and then ascertaining the precise bearing of the odor as nearly as

possible, Ahab rapidly ordered the ship’s course to be slightly

altered, and the sail to be shortened.

The acute policy dictating these movements was sufficiently vindicated

at daybreak, by the sight of a long sleek on the sea directly and

lengthwise ahead, smooth as oil, and resembling in the pleated watery

wrinkles bordering it, the polished metallic-like marks of some swift

tide-rip, at the mouth of a deep, rapid stream.

“Man the mast-heads! Call all hands!”

Thundering with the butts of three clubbed handspikes on the forecastle

deck, Daggoo roused the sleepers with such judgment claps that they

seemed to exhale from the scuttle, so instantaneously did they appear

with their clothes in their hands.

“What d’ye see?” cried Ahab, flattening his face to the sky.

“Nothing, nothing sir!” was the sound hailing down in reply.

“T’gallant sails!—stunsails! alow and aloft, and on both sides!”

All sail being set, he now cast loose the life-line, reserved for

swaying him to the main royal-mast head; and in a few moments they were

hoisting him thither, when, while but two thirds of the way aloft, and

while peering ahead through the horizontal vacancy between the

main-top-sail and top-gallant-sail, he raised a gull-like cry in the

air. “There she blows!—there she blows! A hump like a snow-hill! It is

Moby Dick!”

Fired by the cry which seemed simultaneously taken up by the three

look-outs, the men on deck rushed to the rigging to behold the famous

whale they had so long been pursuing. Ahab had now gained his final

perch, some feet above the other look-outs, Tashtego standing just

beneath him on the cap of the top-gallant-mast, so that the Indian’s

head was almost on a level with Ahab’s heel. From this height the whale

was now seen some mile or so ahead, at every roll of the sea revealing

his high sparkling hump, and regularly jetting his silent spout into

the air. To the credulous mariners it seemed the same silent spout they

had so long ago beheld in the moonlit Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

“And did none of ye see it before?” cried Ahab, hailing the perched men

all around him.

“I saw him almost that same instant, sir, that Captain Ahab did, and I

cried out,” said Tashtego.

“Not the same instant; not the same—no, the doubloon is mine, Fate

reserved the doubloon for me. \_I\_ only; none of ye could have raised

the White Whale first. There she blows!—there she blows!—there she

blows! There again!—there again!” he cried, in long-drawn, lingering,

methodic tones, attuned to the gradual prolongings of the whale’s

visible jets. “He’s going to sound! In stunsails! Down

top-gallant-sails! Stand by three boats. Mr. Starbuck, remember, stay

on board, and keep the ship. Helm there! Luff, luff a point! So;

steady, man, steady! There go flukes! No, no; only black water! All

ready the boats there? Stand by, stand by! Lower me, Mr. Starbuck;

lower, lower,—quick, quicker!” and he slid through the air to the deck.

“He is heading straight to leeward, sir,” cried Stubb, “right away from

us; cannot have seen the ship yet.”

“Be dumb, man! Stand by the braces! Hard down the helm!—brace up!

Shiver her!—shiver her!—So; well that! Boats, boats!”

Soon all the boats but Starbuck’s were dropped; all the boat-sails

set—all the paddles plying; with rippling swiftness, shooting to

leeward; and Ahab heading the onset. A pale, death-glimmer lit up

Fedallah’s sunken eyes; a hideous motion gnawed his mouth.

Like noiseless nautilus shells, their light prows sped through the sea;

but only slowly they neared the foe. As they neared him, the ocean grew

still more smooth; seemed drawing a carpet over its waves; seemed a

noon-meadow, so serenely it spread. At length the breathless hunter

came so nigh his seemingly unsuspecting prey, that his entire dazzling

hump was distinctly visible, sliding along the sea as if an isolated

thing, and continually set in a revolving ring of finest, fleecy,

greenish foam. He saw the vast, involved wrinkles of the slightly

projecting head beyond. Before it, far out on the soft Turkish-rugged

waters, went the glistening white shadow from his broad, milky

forehead, a musical rippling playfully accompanying the shade; and

behind, the blue waters interchangeably flowed over into the moving

valley of his steady wake; and on either hand bright bubbles arose and

danced by his side. But these were broken again by the light toes of

hundreds of gay fowl softly feathering the sea, alternate with their

fitful flight; and like to some flag-staff rising from the painted hull

of an argosy, the tall but shattered pole of a recent lance projected

from the white whale’s back; and at intervals one of the cloud of

soft-toed fowls hovering, and to and fro skimming like a canopy over

the fish, silently perched and rocked on this pole, the long tail

feathers streaming like pennons.

A gentle joyousness—a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested

the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter swimming away with

ravished Europa clinging to his graceful horns; his lovely, leering

eyes sideways intent upon the maid; with smooth bewitching fleetness,

rippling straight for the nuptial bower in Crete; not Jove, not that

great majesty Supreme! did surpass the glorified White Whale as he so

divinely swam.

On each soft side—coincident with the parted swell, that but once

leaving him, then flowed so wide away—on each bright side, the whale

shed off enticings. No wonder there had been some among the hunters who

namelessly transported and allured by all this serenity, had ventured

to assail it; but had fatally found that quietude but the vesture of

tornadoes. Yet calm, enticing calm, oh, whale! thou glidest on, to all

who for the first time eye thee, no matter how many in that same way

thou may’st have bejuggled and destroyed before.

And thus, through the serene tranquillities of the tropical sea, among

waves whose hand-clappings were suspended by exceeding rapture, Moby

Dick moved on, still withholding from sight the full terrors of his

submerged trunk, entirely hiding the wrenched hideousness of his jaw.

But soon the fore part of him slowly rose from the water; for an

instant his whole marbleized body formed a high arch, like Virginia’s

Natural Bridge, and warningly waving his bannered flukes in the air,

the grand god revealed himself, sounded, and went out of sight.

Hoveringly halting, and dipping on the wing, the white sea-fowls

longingly lingered over the agitated pool that he left.

With oars apeak, and paddles down, the sheets of their sails adrift,

the three boats now stilly floated, awaiting Moby Dick’s reappearance.

“An hour,” said Ahab, standing rooted in his boat’s stern; and he gazed

beyond the whale’s place, towards the dim blue spaces and wide wooing

vacancies to leeward. It was only an instant; for again his eyes seemed

whirling round in his head as he swept the watery circle. The breeze

now freshened; the sea began to swell.

“The birds!—the birds!” cried Tashtego.

In long Indian file, as when herons take wing, the white birds were now

all flying towards Ahab’s boat; and when within a few yards began

fluttering over the water there, wheeling round and round, with joyous,

expectant cries. Their vision was keener than man’s; Ahab could

discover no sign in the sea. But suddenly as he peered down and down

into its depths, he profoundly saw a white living spot no bigger than a

white weasel, with wonderful celerity uprising, and magnifying as it

rose, till it turned, and then there were plainly revealed two long

crooked rows of white, glistening teeth, floating up from the

undiscoverable bottom. It was Moby Dick’s open mouth and scrolled jaw;

his vast, shadowed bulk still half blending with the blue of the sea.

The glittering mouth yawned beneath the boat like an open-doored marble

tomb; and giving one sidelong sweep with his steering oar, Ahab whirled

the craft aside from this tremendous apparition. Then, calling upon

Fedallah to change places with him, went forward to the bows, and

seizing Perth’s harpoon, commanded his crew to grasp their oars and

stand by to stern.

Now, by reason of this timely spinning round the boat upon its axis,

its bow, by anticipation, was made to face the whale’s head while yet

under water. But as if perceiving this stratagem, Moby Dick, with that

malicious intelligence ascribed to him, sidelingly transplanted

himself, as it were, in an instant, shooting his pleated head

lengthwise beneath the boat.

Through and through; through every plank and each rib, it thrilled for

an instant, the whale obliquely lying on his back, in the manner of a

biting shark, slowly and feelingly taking its bows full within his

mouth, so that the long, narrow, scrolled lower jaw curled high up into

the open air, and one of the teeth caught in a row-lock. The bluish

pearl-white of the inside of the jaw was within six inches of Ahab’s

head, and reached higher than that. In this attitude the White Whale

now shook the slight cedar as a mildly cruel cat her mouse. With

unastonished eyes Fedallah gazed, and crossed his arms; but the

tiger-yellow crew were tumbling over each other’s heads to gain the

uttermost stern.

And now, while both elastic gunwales were springing in and out, as the

whale dallied with the doomed craft in this devilish way; and from his

body being submerged beneath the boat, he could not be darted at from

the bows, for the bows were almost inside of him, as it were; and while

the other boats involuntarily paused, as before a quick crisis

impossible to withstand, then it was that monomaniac Ahab, furious with

this tantalizing vicinity of his foe, which placed him all alive and

helpless in the very jaws he hated; frenzied with all this, he seized

the long bone with his naked hands, and wildly strove to wrench it from

its gripe. As now he thus vainly strove, the jaw slipped from him; the

frail gunwales bent in, collapsed, and snapped, as both jaws, like an

enormous shears, sliding further aft, bit the craft completely in

twain, and locked themselves fast again in the sea, midway between the

two floating wrecks. These floated aside, the broken ends drooping, the

crew at the stern-wreck clinging to the gunwales, and striving to hold

fast to the oars to lash them across.

At that preluding moment, ere the boat was yet snapped, Ahab, the first

to perceive the whale’s intent, by the crafty upraising of his head, a

movement that loosed his hold for the time; at that moment his hand had

made one final effort to push the boat out of the bite. But only

slipping further into the whale’s mouth, and tilting over sideways as

it slipped, the boat had shaken off his hold on the jaw; spilled him

out of it, as he leaned to the push; and so he fell flat-faced upon the

sea.

Ripplingly withdrawing from his prey, Moby Dick now lay at a little

distance, vertically thrusting his oblong white head up and down in the

billows; and at the same time slowly revolving his whole spindled body;

so that when his vast wrinkled forehead rose—some twenty or more feet

out of the water—the now rising swells, with all their confluent waves,

dazzlingly broke against it; vindictively tossing their shivered spray

still higher into the air.\* So, in a gale, the but half baffled Channel

billows only recoil from the base of the Eddystone, triumphantly to

overleap its summit with their scud.

\*This motion is peculiar to the sperm whale. It receives its

designation (pitchpoling) from its being likened to that preliminary

up-and-down poise of the whale-lance, in the exercise called

pitchpoling, previously described. By this motion the whale must best

and most comprehensively view whatever objects may be encircling him.

But soon resuming his horizontal attitude, Moby Dick swam swiftly round

and round the wrecked crew; sideways churning the water in his vengeful

wake, as if lashing himself up to still another and more deadly

assault. The sight of the splintered boat seemed to madden him, as the

blood of grapes and mulberries cast before Antiochus’s elephants in the

book of Maccabees. Meanwhile Ahab half smothered in the foam of the

whale’s insolent tail, and too much of a cripple to swim,—though he

could still keep afloat, even in the heart of such a whirlpool as that;

helpless Ahab’s head was seen, like a tossed bubble which the least

chance shock might burst. From the boat’s fragmentary stern, Fedallah

incuriously and mildly eyed him; the clinging crew, at the other

drifting end, could not succor him; more than enough was it for them to

look to themselves. For so revolvingly appalling was the White Whale’s

aspect, and so planetarily swift the ever-contracting circles he made,

that he seemed horizontally swooping upon them. And though the other

boats, unharmed, still hovered hard by; still they dared not pull into

the eddy to strike, lest that should be the signal for the instant

destruction of the jeopardized castaways, Ahab and all; nor in that

case could they themselves hope to escape. With straining eyes, then,

they remained on the outer edge of the direful zone, whose centre had

now become the old man’s head.

Meantime, from the beginning all this had been descried from the ship’s

mast heads; and squaring her yards, she had borne down upon the scene;

and was now so nigh, that Ahab in the water hailed her!—“Sail on

the”—but that moment a breaking sea dashed on him from Moby Dick, and

whelmed him for the time. But struggling out of it again, and chancing

to rise on a towering crest, he shouted,—“Sail on the whale!—Drive him

off!”

The Pequod’s prows were pointed; and breaking up the charmed circle,

she effectually parted the white whale from his victim. As he sullenly

swam off, the boats flew to the rescue.

Dragged into Stubb’s boat with blood-shot, blinded eyes, the white

brine caking in his wrinkles; the long tension of Ahab’s bodily

strength did crack, and helplessly he yielded to his body’s doom: for a

time, lying all crushed in the bottom of Stubb’s boat, like one trodden

under foot of herds of elephants. Far inland, nameless wails came from

him, as desolate sounds from out ravines.

But this intensity of his physical prostration did but so much the more

abbreviate it. In an instant’s compass, great hearts sometimes condense

to one deep pang, the sum total of those shallow pains kindly diffused

through feebler men’s whole lives. And so, such hearts, though summary

in each one suffering; still, if the gods decree it, in their life-time

aggregate a whole age of woe, wholly made up of instantaneous

intensities; for even in their pointless centres, those noble natures

contain the entire circumferences of inferior souls.

“The harpoon,” said Ahab, half way rising, and draggingly leaning on

one bended arm—“is it safe?”

“Aye, sir, for it was not darted; this is it,” said Stubb, showing it.

“Lay it before me;—any missing men?”

“One, two, three, four, five;—there were five oars, sir, and here are

five men.”

“That’s good.—Help me, man; I wish to stand. So, so, I see him! there!

there! going to leeward still; what a leaping spout!—Hands off from me!

The eternal sap runs up in Ahab’s bones again! Set the sail; out oars;

the helm!”

It is often the case that when a boat is stove, its crew, being picked

up by another boat, help to work that second boat; and the chase is

thus continued with what is called double-banked oars. It was thus now.

But the added power of the boat did not equal the added power of the

whale, for he seemed to have treble-banked his every fin; swimming with

a velocity which plainly showed, that if now, under these

circumstances, pushed on, the chase would prove an indefinitely

prolonged, if not a hopeless one; nor could any crew endure for so long

a period, such an unintermitted, intense straining at the oar; a thing

barely tolerable only in some one brief vicissitude. The ship itself,

then, as it sometimes happens, offered the most promising intermediate

means of overtaking the chase. Accordingly, the boats now made for her,

and were soon swayed up to their cranes—the two parts of the wrecked

boat having been previously secured by her—and then hoisting everything

to her side, and stacking her canvas high up, and sideways

outstretching it with stun-sails, like the double-jointed wings of an

albatross; the Pequod bore down in the leeward wake of Moby-Dick. At

the well known, methodic intervals, the whale’s glittering spout was

regularly announced from the manned mast-heads; and when he would be

reported as just gone down, Ahab would take the time, and then pacing

the deck, binnacle-watch in hand, so soon as the last second of the

allotted hour expired, his voice was heard.—“Whose is the doubloon now?

D’ye see him?” and if the reply was, No, sir! straightway he commanded

them to lift him to his perch. In this way the day wore on; Ahab, now

aloft and motionless; anon, unrestingly pacing the planks.

As he was thus walking, uttering no sound, except to hail the men

aloft, or to bid them hoist a sail still higher, or to spread one to a

still greater breadth—thus to and fro pacing, beneath his slouched hat,

at every turn he passed his own wrecked boat, which had been dropped

upon the quarter-deck, and lay there reversed; broken bow to shattered

stern. At last he paused before it; and as in an already over-clouded

sky fresh troops of clouds will sometimes sail across, so over the old

man’s face there now stole some such added gloom as this.

Stubb saw him pause; and perhaps intending, not vainly, though, to

evince his own unabated fortitude, and thus keep up a valiant place in

his Captain’s mind, he advanced, and eyeing the wreck exclaimed—“The

thistle the ass refused; it pricked his mouth too keenly, sir; ha! ha!”

“What soulless thing is this that laughs before a wreck? Man, man! did

I not know thee brave as fearless fire (and as mechanical) I could

swear thou wert a poltroon. Groan nor laugh should be heard before a

wreck.”

“Aye, sir,” said Starbuck drawing near, “’tis a solemn sight; an omen,

and an ill one.”

“Omen? omen?—the dictionary! If the gods think to speak outright to

man, they will honorably speak outright; not shake their heads, and

give an old wives’ darkling hint.—Begone! Ye two are the opposite poles

of one thing; Starbuck is Stubb reversed, and Stubb is Starbuck; and ye

two are all mankind; and Ahab stands alone among the millions of the

peopled earth, nor gods nor men his neighbors! Cold, cold—I shiver!—How

now? Aloft there! D’ye see him? Sing out for every spout, though he

spout ten times a second!”

The day was nearly done; only the hem of his golden robe was rustling.

Soon, it was almost dark, but the look-out men still remained unset.

“Can’t see the spout now, sir;—too dark”—cried a voice from the air.

“How heading when last seen?”

“As before, sir,—straight to leeward.”

“Good! he will travel slower now ’tis night. Down royals and

top-gallant stun-sails, Mr. Starbuck. We must not run over him before

morning; he’s making a passage now, and may heave-to a while. Helm

there! keep her full before the wind!—Aloft! come down!—Mr. Stubb, send

a fresh hand to the fore-mast head, and see it manned till

morning.”—Then advancing towards the doubloon in the main-mast—“Men,

this gold is mine, for I earned it; but I shall let it abide here till

the White Whale is dead; and then, whosoever of ye first raises him,

upon the day he shall be killed, this gold is that man’s; and if on

that day I shall again raise him, then, ten times its sum shall be

divided among all of ye! Away now!—the deck is thine, sir!”

And so saying, he placed himself half way within the scuttle, and

slouching his hat, stood there till dawn, except when at intervals

rousing himself to see how the night wore on.

CHAPTER 134. The Chase—Second Day.

At day-break, the three mast-heads were punctually manned afresh.

“D’ye see him?” cried Ahab after allowing a little space for the light

to spread.

“See nothing, sir.”

“Turn up all hands and make sail! he travels faster than I thought

for;—the top-gallant sails!—aye, they should have been kept on her all

night. But no matter—’tis but resting for the rush.”

Here be it said, that this pertinacious pursuit of one particular

whale, continued through day into night, and through night into day, is

a thing by no means unprecedented in the South sea fishery. For such is

the wonderful skill, prescience of experience, and invincible

confidence acquired by some great natural geniuses among the Nantucket

commanders; that from the simple observation of a whale when last

descried, they will, under certain given circumstances, pretty

accurately foretell both the direction in which he will continue to

swim for a time, while out of sight, as well as his probable rate of

progression during that period. And, in these cases, somewhat as a

pilot, when about losing sight of a coast, whose general trending he

well knows, and which he desires shortly to return to again, but at

some further point; like as this pilot stands by his compass, and takes

the precise bearing of the cape at present visible, in order the more

certainly to hit aright the remote, unseen headland, eventually to be

visited: so does the fisherman, at his compass, with the whale; for

after being chased, and diligently marked, through several hours of

daylight, then, when night obscures the fish, the creature’s future

wake through the darkness is almost as established to the sagacious

mind of the hunter, as the pilot’s coast is to him. So that to this

hunter’s wondrous skill, the proverbial evanescence of a thing writ in

water, a wake, is to all desired purposes well nigh as reliable as the

steadfast land. And as the mighty iron Leviathan of the modern railway

is so familiarly known in its every pace, that, with watches in their

hands, men time his rate as doctors that of a baby’s pulse; and lightly

say of it, the up train or the down train will reach such or such a

spot, at such or such an hour; even so, almost, there are occasions

when these Nantucketers time that other Leviathan of the deep,

according to the observed humor of his speed; and say to themselves, so

many hours hence this whale will have gone two hundred miles, will have

about reached this or that degree of latitude or longitude. But to

render this acuteness at all successful in the end, the wind and the

sea must be the whaleman’s allies; for of what present avail to the

becalmed or windbound mariner is the skill that assures him he is

exactly ninety-three leagues and a quarter from his port? Inferable

from these statements, are many collateral subtile matters touching the

chase of whales.

The ship tore on; leaving such a furrow in the sea as when a

cannon-ball, missent, becomes a plough-share and turns up the level

field.

“By salt and hemp!” cried Stubb, “but this swift motion of the deck

creeps up one’s legs and tingles at the heart. This ship and I are two

brave fellows!—Ha, ha! Some one take me up, and launch me, spine-wise,

on the sea,—for by live-oaks! my spine’s a keel. Ha, ha! we go the gait

that leaves no dust behind!”

“There she blows—she blows!—she blows!—right ahead!” was now the

mast-head cry.

“Aye, aye!” cried Stubb, “I knew it—ye can’t escape—blow on and split

your spout, O whale! the mad fiend himself is after ye! blow your

trump—blister your lungs!—Ahab will dam off your blood, as a miller

shuts his watergate upon the stream!”

And Stubb did but speak out for well nigh all that crew. The frenzies

of the chase had by this time worked them bubblingly up, like old wine

worked anew. Whatever pale fears and forebodings some of them might

have felt before; these were not only now kept out of sight through the

growing awe of Ahab, but they were broken up, and on all sides routed,

as timid prairie hares that scatter before the bounding bison. The hand

of Fate had snatched all their souls; and by the stirring perils of the

previous day; the rack of the past night’s suspense; the fixed,

unfearing, blind, reckless way in which their wild craft went plunging

towards its flying mark; by all these things, their hearts were bowled

along. The wind that made great bellies of their sails, and rushed the

vessel on by arms invisible as irresistible; this seemed the symbol of

that unseen agency which so enslaved them to the race.

They were one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all;

though it was put together of all contrasting things—oak, and maple,

and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp—yet all these ran into each

other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced

and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities

of the crew, this man’s valor, that man’s fear; guilt and guiltiness,

all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that

fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to.

The rigging lived. The mast-heads, like the tops of tall palms, were

outspreadingly tufted with arms and legs. Clinging to a spar with one

hand, some reached forth the other with impatient wavings; others,

shading their eyes from the vivid sunlight, sat far out on the rocking

yards; all the spars in full bearing of mortals, ready and ripe for

their fate. Ah! how they still strove through that infinite blueness to

seek out the thing that might destroy them!

“Why sing ye not out for him, if ye see him?” cried Ahab, when, after

the lapse of some minutes since the first cry, no more had been heard.

“Sway me up, men; ye have been deceived; not Moby Dick casts one odd

jet that way, and then disappears.”

It was even so; in their headlong eagerness, the men had mistaken some

other thing for the whale-spout, as the event itself soon proved; for

hardly had Ahab reached his perch; hardly was the rope belayed to its

pin on deck, when he struck the key-note to an orchestra, that made the

air vibrate as with the combined discharges of rifles. The triumphant

halloo of thirty buckskin lungs was heard, as—much nearer to the ship

than the place of the imaginary jet, less than a mile ahead—Moby Dick

bodily burst into view! For not by any calm and indolent spoutings; not

by the peaceable gush of that mystic fountain in his head, did the

White Whale now reveal his vicinity; but by the far more wondrous

phenomenon of breaching. Rising with his utmost velocity from the

furthest depths, the Sperm Whale thus booms his entire bulk into the

pure element of air, and piling up a mountain of dazzling foam, shows

his place to the distance of seven miles and more. In those moments,

the torn, enraged waves he shakes off, seem his mane; in some cases,

this breaching is his act of defiance.

“There she breaches! there she breaches!” was the cry, as in his

immeasurable bravadoes the White Whale tossed himself salmon-like to

Heaven. So suddenly seen in the blue plain of the sea, and relieved

against the still bluer margin of the sky, the spray that he raised,

for the moment, intolerably glittered and glared like a glacier; and

stood there gradually fading and fading away from its first sparkling

intensity, to the dim mistiness of an advancing shower in a vale.

“Aye, breach your last to the sun, Moby Dick!” cried Ahab, “thy hour

and thy harpoon are at hand!—Down! down all of ye, but one man at the

fore. The boats!—stand by!”

Unmindful of the tedious rope-ladders of the shrouds, the men, like

shooting stars, slid to the deck, by the isolated backstays and

halyards; while Ahab, less dartingly, but still rapidly was dropped

from his perch.

“Lower away,” he cried, so soon as he had reached his boat—a spare one,

rigged the afternoon previous. “Mr. Starbuck, the ship is thine—keep

away from the boats, but keep near them. Lower, all!”

As if to strike a quick terror into them, by this time being the first

assailant himself, Moby Dick had turned, and was now coming for the

three crews. Ahab’s boat was central; and cheering his men, he told

them he would take the whale head-and-head,—that is, pull straight up

to his forehead,—a not uncommon thing; for when within a certain limit,

such a course excludes the coming onset from the whale’s sidelong

vision. But ere that close limit was gained, and while yet all three

boats were plain as the ship’s three masts to his eye; the White Whale

churning himself into furious speed, almost in an instant as it were,

rushing among the boats with open jaws, and a lashing tail, offered

appalling battle on every side; and heedless of the irons darted at him

from every boat, seemed only intent on annihilating each separate plank

of which those boats were made. But skilfully manœuvred, incessantly

wheeling like trained chargers in the field; the boats for a while

eluded him; though, at times, but by a plank’s breadth; while all the

time, Ahab’s unearthly slogan tore every other cry but his to shreds.

But at last in his untraceable evolutions, the White Whale so crossed

and recrossed, and in a thousand ways entangled the slack of the three

lines now fast to him, that they foreshortened, and, of themselves,

warped the devoted boats towards the planted irons in him; though now

for a moment the whale drew aside a little, as if to rally for a more

tremendous charge. Seizing that opportunity, Ahab first paid out more

line: and then was rapidly hauling and jerking in upon it again—hoping

that way to disencumber it of some snarls—when lo!—a sight more savage

than the embattled teeth of sharks!

Caught and twisted—corkscrewed in the mazes of the line, loose harpoons

and lances, with all their bristling barbs and points, came flashing

and dripping up to the chocks in the bows of Ahab’s boat. Only one

thing could be done. Seizing the boat-knife, he critically reached

within—through—and then, without—the rays of steel; dragged in the line

beyond, passed it, inboard, to the bowsman, and then, twice sundering

the rope near the chocks—dropped the intercepted fagot of steel into

the sea; and was all fast again. That instant, the White Whale made a

sudden rush among the remaining tangles of the other lines; by so

doing, irresistibly dragged the more involved boats of Stubb and Flask

towards his flukes; dashed them together like two rolling husks on a

surf-beaten beach, and then, diving down into the sea, disappeared in a

boiling maelstrom, in which, for a space, the odorous cedar chips of

the wrecks danced round and round, like the grated nutmeg in a swiftly

stirred bowl of punch.

While the two crews were yet circling in the waters, reaching out after

the revolving line-tubs, oars, and other floating furniture, while

aslope little Flask bobbed up and down like an empty vial, twitching

his legs upwards to escape the dreaded jaws of sharks; and Stubb was

lustily singing out for some one to ladle him up; and while the old

man’s line—now parting—admitted of his pulling into the creamy pool to

rescue whom he could;—in that wild simultaneousness of a thousand

concreted perils,—Ahab’s yet unstricken boat seemed drawn up towards

Heaven by invisible wires,—as, arrow-like, shooting perpendicularly

from the sea, the White Whale dashed his broad forehead against its

bottom, and sent it, turning over and over, into the air; till it fell

again—gunwale downwards—and Ahab and his men struggled out from under

it, like seals from a sea-side cave.

The first uprising momentum of the whale—modifying its direction as he

struck the surface—involuntarily launched him along it, to a little

distance from the centre of the destruction he had made; and with his

back to it, he now lay for a moment slowly feeling with his flukes from

side to side; and whenever a stray oar, bit of plank, the least chip or

crumb of the boats touched his skin, his tail swiftly drew back, and

came sideways smiting the sea. But soon, as if satisfied that his work

for that time was done, he pushed his pleated forehead through the

ocean, and trailing after him the intertangled lines, continued his

leeward way at a traveller’s methodic pace.

As before, the attentive ship having descried the whole fight, again

came bearing down to the rescue, and dropping a boat, picked up the

floating mariners, tubs, oars, and whatever else could be caught at,

and safely landed them on her decks. Some sprained shoulders, wrists,

and ankles; livid contusions; wrenched harpoons and lances;

inextricable intricacies of rope; shattered oars and planks; all these

were there; but no fatal or even serious ill seemed to have befallen

any one. As with Fedallah the day before, so Ahab was now found grimly

clinging to his boat’s broken half, which afforded a comparatively easy

float; nor did it so exhaust him as the previous day’s mishap.

But when he was helped to the deck, all eyes were fastened upon him; as

instead of standing by himself he still half-hung upon the shoulder of

Starbuck, who had thus far been the foremost to assist him. His ivory

leg had been snapped off, leaving but one short sharp splinter.

“Aye, aye, Starbuck, ’tis sweet to lean sometimes, be the leaner who he

will; and would old Ahab had leaned oftener than he has.”

“The ferrule has not stood, sir,” said the carpenter, now coming up; “I

put good work into that leg.”

“But no bones broken, sir, I hope,” said Stubb with true concern.

“Aye! and all splintered to pieces, Stubb!—d’ye see it.—But even with a

broken bone, old Ahab is untouched; and I account no living bone of

mine one jot more me, than this dead one that’s lost. Nor white whale,

nor man, nor fiend, can so much as graze old Ahab in his own proper and

inaccessible being. Can any lead touch yonder floor, any mast scrape

yonder roof?—Aloft there! which way?”

“Dead to leeward, sir.”

“Up helm, then; pile on the sail again, ship keepers! down the rest of

the spare boats and rig them—Mr. Starbuck away, and muster the boat’s

crews.”

“Let me first help thee towards the bulwarks, sir.”

“Oh, oh, oh! how this splinter gores me now! Accursed fate! that the

unconquerable captain in the soul should have such a craven mate!”

“Sir?”

“My body, man, not thee. Give me something for a cane—there, that

shivered lance will do. Muster the men. Surely I have not seen him yet.

By heaven it cannot be!—missing?—quick! call them all.”

The old man’s hinted thought was true. Upon mustering the company, the

Parsee was not there.

“The Parsee!” cried Stubb—“he must have been caught in——”

“The black vomit wrench thee!—run all of ye above, alow, cabin,

forecastle—find him—not gone—not gone!”

But quickly they returned to him with the tidings that the Parsee was

nowhere to be found.

“Aye, sir,” said Stubb—“caught among the tangles of your line—I thought

I saw him dragging under.”

“\_My\_ line! \_my\_ line? Gone?—gone? What means that little word?—What

death-knell rings in it, that old Ahab shakes as if he were the belfry.

The harpoon, too!—toss over the litter there,—d’ye see it?—the forged

iron, men, the white whale’s—no, no, no,—blistered fool! this hand did

dart it!—’tis in the fish!—Aloft there! Keep him nailed—Quick!—all

hands to the rigging of the boats—collect the oars—harpooneers! the

irons, the irons!—hoist the royals higher—a pull on all the

sheets!—helm there! steady, steady for your life! I’ll ten times girdle

the unmeasured globe; yea and dive straight through it, but I’ll slay

him yet!”

“Great God! but for one single instant show thyself,” cried Starbuck;

“never, never wilt thou capture him, old man—In Jesus’ name no more of

this, that’s worse than devil’s madness. Two days chased; twice stove

to splinters; thy very leg once more snatched from under thee; thy evil

shadow gone—all good angels mobbing thee with warnings:—what more

wouldst thou have?—Shall we keep chasing this murderous fish till he

swamps the last man? Shall we be dragged by him to the bottom of the

sea? Shall we be towed by him to the infernal world? Oh, oh,—Impiety

and blasphemy to hunt him more!”

“Starbuck, of late I’ve felt strangely moved to thee; ever since that

hour we both saw—thou know’st what, in one another’s eyes. But in this

matter of the whale, be the front of thy face to me as the palm of this

hand—a lipless, unfeatured blank. Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This

whole act’s immutably decreed. ’Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion

years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates’ lieutenant; I act

under orders. Look thou, underling! that thou obeyest mine.—Stand round

me, men. Ye see an old man cut down to the stump; leaning on a shivered

lance; propped up on a lonely foot. ’Tis Ahab—his body’s part; but

Ahab’s soul’s a centipede, that moves upon a hundred legs. I feel

strained, half stranded, as ropes that tow dismasted frigates in a

gale; and I may look so. But ere I break, ye’ll hear me crack; and till

ye hear \_that\_, know that Ahab’s hawser tows his purpose yet. Believe

ye, men, in the things called omens? Then laugh aloud, and cry encore!

For ere they drown, drowning things will twice rise to the surface;

then rise again, to sink for evermore. So with Moby Dick—two days he’s

floated—tomorrow will be the third. Aye, men, he’ll rise once more,—but

only to spout his last! D’ye feel brave men, brave?”

“As fearless fire,” cried Stubb.

“And as mechanical,” muttered Ahab. Then as the men went forward, he

muttered on: “The things called omens! And yesterday I talked the same

to Starbuck there, concerning my broken boat. Oh! how valiantly I seek

to drive out of others’ hearts what’s clinched so fast in mine!—The

Parsee—the Parsee!—gone, gone? and he was to go before:—but still was

to be seen again ere I could perish—How’s that?—There’s a riddle now

might baffle all the lawyers backed by the ghosts of the whole line of

judges:—like a hawk’s beak it pecks my brain. \_I’ll\_, \_I’ll\_ solve it,

though!”

When dusk descended, the whale was still in sight to leeward.

So once more the sail was shortened, and everything passed nearly as on

the previous night; only, the sound of hammers, and the hum of the

grindstone was heard till nearly daylight, as the men toiled by

lanterns in the complete and careful rigging of the spare boats and

sharpening their fresh weapons for the morrow. Meantime, of the broken

keel of Ahab’s wrecked craft the carpenter made him another leg; while

still as on the night before, slouched Ahab stood fixed within his

scuttle; his hid, heliotrope glance anticipatingly gone backward on its

dial; sat due eastward for the earliest sun.

CHAPTER 135. The Chase.—Third Day.

The morning of the third day dawned fair and fresh, and once more the

solitary night-man at the fore-mast-head was relieved by crowds of the

daylight look-outs, who dotted every mast and almost every spar.

“D’ye see him?” cried Ahab; but the whale was not yet in sight.

“In his infallible wake, though; but follow that wake, that’s all. Helm

there; steady, as thou goest, and hast been going. What a lovely day

again! were it a new-made world, and made for a summer-house to the

angels, and this morning the first of its throwing open to them, a

fairer day could not dawn upon that world. Here’s food for thought, had

Ahab time to think; but Ahab never thinks; he only feels, feels, feels;

\_that’s\_ tingling enough for mortal man! to think’s audacity. God only

has that right and privilege. Thinking is, or ought to be, a coolness

and a calmness; and our poor hearts throb, and our poor brains beat too

much for that. And yet, I’ve sometimes thought my brain was very

calm—frozen calm, this old skull cracks so, like a glass in which the

contents turned to ice, and shiver it. And still this hair is growing

now; this moment growing, and heat must breed it; but no, it’s like

that sort of common grass that will grow anywhere, between the earthy

clefts of Greenland ice or in Vesuvius lava. How the wild winds blow

it; they whip it about me as the torn shreds of split sails lash the

tossed ship they cling to. A vile wind that has no doubt blown ere this

through prison corridors and cells, and wards of hospitals, and

ventilated them, and now comes blowing hither as innocent as fleeces.

Out upon it!—it’s tainted. Were I the wind, I’d blow no more on such a

wicked, miserable world. I’d crawl somewhere to a cave, and slink

there. And yet, ’tis a noble and heroic thing, the wind! who ever

conquered it? In every fight it has the last and bitterest blow. Run

tilting at it, and you but run through it. Ha! a coward wind that

strikes stark naked men, but will not stand to receive a single blow.

Even Ahab is a braver thing—a nobler thing than \_that\_. Would now the

wind but had a body; but all the things that most exasperate and

outrage mortal man, all these things are bodiless, but only bodiless as

objects, not as agents. There’s a most special, a most cunning, oh, a

most malicious difference! And yet, I say again, and swear it now, that

there’s something all glorious and gracious in the wind. These warm

Trade Winds, at least, that in the clear heavens blow straight on, in

strong and steadfast, vigorous mildness; and veer not from their mark,

however the baser currents of the sea may turn and tack, and mightiest

Mississippies of the land swift and swerve about, uncertain where to go

at last. And by the eternal Poles! these same Trades that so directly

blow my good ship on; these Trades, or something like them—something so

unchangeable, and full as strong, blow my keeled soul along! To it!

Aloft there! What d’ye see?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“Nothing! and noon at hand! The doubloon goes a-begging! See the sun!

Aye, aye, it must be so. I’ve oversailed him. How, got the start? Aye,

he’s chasing \_me\_ now; not I, \_him\_—that’s bad; I might have known it,

too. Fool! the lines—the harpoons he’s towing. Aye, aye, I have run him

by last night. About! about! Come down, all of ye, but the regular look

outs! Man the braces!”

Steering as she had done, the wind had been somewhat on the Pequod’s

quarter, so that now being pointed in the reverse direction, the braced

ship sailed hard upon the breeze as she rechurned the cream in her own

white wake.

“Against the wind he now steers for the open jaw,” murmured Starbuck to

himself, as he coiled the new-hauled main-brace upon the rail. “God

keep us, but already my bones feel damp within me, and from the inside

wet my flesh. I misdoubt me that I disobey my God in obeying him!”

“Stand by to sway me up!” cried Ahab, advancing to the hempen basket.

“We should meet him soon.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” and straightway Starbuck did Ahab’s bidding, and once

more Ahab swung on high.

A whole hour now passed; gold-beaten out to ages. Time itself now held

long breaths with keen suspense. But at last, some three points off the

weather bow, Ahab descried the spout again, and instantly from the

three mast-heads three shrieks went up as if the tongues of fire had

voiced it.

“Forehead to forehead I meet thee, this third time, Moby Dick! On deck

there!—brace sharper up; crowd her into the wind’s eye. He’s too far

off to lower yet, Mr. Starbuck. The sails shake! Stand over that

helmsman with a top-maul! So, so; he travels fast, and I must down. But

let me have one more good round look aloft here at the sea; there’s

time for that. An old, old sight, and yet somehow so young; aye, and

not changed a wink since I first saw it, a boy, from the sand-hills of

Nantucket! The same!—the same!—the same to Noah as to me. There’s a

soft shower to leeward. Such lovely leewardings! They must lead

somewhere—to something else than common land, more palmy than the

palms. Leeward! the white whale goes that way; look to windward, then;

the better if the bitterer quarter. But good bye, good bye, old

mast-head! What’s this?—green? aye, tiny mosses in these warped cracks.

No such green weather stains on Ahab’s head! There’s the difference now

between man’s old age and matter’s. But aye, old mast, we both grow old

together; sound in our hulls, though, are we not, my ship? Aye, minus a

leg, that’s all. By heaven this dead wood has the better of my live

flesh every way. I can’t compare with it; and I’ve known some ships

made of dead trees outlast the lives of men made of the most vital

stuff of vital fathers. What’s that he said? he should still go before

me, my pilot; and yet to be seen again? But where? Will I have eyes at

the bottom of the sea, supposing I descend those endless stairs? and

all night I’ve been sailing from him, wherever he did sink to. Aye,

aye, like many more thou told’st direful truth as touching thyself, O

Parsee; but, Ahab, there thy shot fell short. Good-bye, mast-head—keep

a good eye upon the whale, the while I’m gone. We’ll talk to-morrow,

nay, to-night, when the white whale lies down there, tied by head and

tail.”

He gave the word; and still gazing round him, was steadily lowered

through the cloven blue air to the deck.

In due time the boats were lowered; but as standing in his shallop’s

stern, Ahab just hovered upon the point of the descent, he waved to the

mate,—who held one of the tackle-ropes on deck—and bade him pause.

“Starbuck!”

“Sir?”

“For the third time my soul’s ship starts upon this voyage, Starbuck.”

“Aye, sir, thou wilt have it so.”

“Some ships sail from their ports, and ever afterwards are missing,

Starbuck!”

“Truth, sir: saddest truth.”

“Some men die at ebb tide; some at low water; some at the full of the

flood;—and I feel now like a billow that’s all one crested comb,

Starbuck. I am old;—shake hands with me, man.”

Their hands met; their eyes fastened; Starbuck’s tears the glue.

“Oh, my captain, my captain!—noble heart—go not—go not!—see, it’s a

brave man that weeps; how great the agony of the persuasion then!”

“Lower away!”—cried Ahab, tossing the mate’s arm from him. “Stand by

the crew!”

In an instant the boat was pulling round close under the stern.

“The sharks! the sharks!” cried a voice from the low cabin-window

there; “O master, my master, come back!”

But Ahab heard nothing; for his own voice was high-lifted then; and the

boat leaped on.

Yet the voice spake true; for scarce had he pushed from the ship, when

numbers of sharks, seemingly rising from out the dark waters beneath

the hull, maliciously snapped at the blades of the oars, every time

they dipped in the water; and in this way accompanied the boat with

their bites. It is a thing not uncommonly happening to the whale-boats

in those swarming seas; the sharks at times apparently following them

in the same prescient way that vultures hover over the banners of

marching regiments in the east. But these were the first sharks that

had been observed by the Pequod since the White Whale had been first

descried; and whether it was that Ahab’s crew were all such

tiger-yellow barbarians, and therefore their flesh more musky to the

senses of the sharks—a matter sometimes well known to affect

them,—however it was, they seemed to follow that one boat without

molesting the others.

“Heart of wrought steel!” murmured Starbuck gazing over the side, and

following with his eyes the receding boat—“canst thou yet ring boldly

to that sight?—lowering thy keel among ravening sharks, and followed by

them, open-mouthed to the chase; and this the critical third day?—For

when three days flow together in one continuous intense pursuit; be

sure the first is the morning, the second the noon, and the third the

evening and the end of that thing—be that end what it may. Oh! my God!

what is this that shoots through me, and leaves me so deadly calm, yet

expectant,—fixed at the top of a shudder! Future things swim before me,

as in empty outlines and skeletons; all the past is somehow grown dim.

Mary, girl! thou fadest in pale glories behind me; boy! I seem to see

but thy eyes grown wondrous blue. Strangest problems of life seem

clearing; but clouds sweep between—Is my journey’s end coming? My legs

feel faint; like his who has footed it all day. Feel thy heart,—beats

it yet? Stir thyself, Starbuck!—stave it off—move, move! speak

aloud!—Mast-head there! See ye my boy’s hand on the hill?—Crazed;—aloft

there!—keep thy keenest eye upon the boats:—mark well the whale!—Ho!

again!—drive off that hawk! see! he pecks—he tears the vane”—pointing

to the red flag flying at the main-truck—“Ha! he soars away with

it!—Where’s the old man now? see’st thou that sight, oh Ahab!—shudder,

shudder!”

The boats had not gone very far, when by a signal from the mast-heads—a

downward pointed arm, Ahab knew that the whale had sounded; but

intending to be near him at the next rising, he held on his way a

little sideways from the vessel; the becharmed crew maintaining the

profoundest silence, as the head-beat waves hammered and hammered

against the opposing bow.

“Drive, drive in your nails, oh ye waves! to their uttermost heads

drive them in! ye but strike a thing without a lid; and no coffin and

no hearse can be mine:—and hemp only can kill me! Ha! ha!”

Suddenly the waters around them slowly swelled in broad circles; then

quickly upheaved, as if sideways sliding from a submerged berg of ice,

swiftly rising to the surface. A low rumbling sound was heard; a

subterraneous hum; and then all held their breaths; as bedraggled with

trailing ropes, and harpoons, and lances, a vast form shot lengthwise,

but obliquely from the sea. Shrouded in a thin drooping veil of mist,

it hovered for a moment in the rainbowed air; and then fell swamping

back into the deep. Crushed thirty feet upwards, the waters flashed for

an instant like heaps of fountains, then brokenly sank in a shower of

flakes, leaving the circling surface creamed like new milk round the

marble trunk of the whale.

“Give way!” cried Ahab to the oarsmen, and the boats darted forward to

the attack; but maddened by yesterday’s fresh irons that corroded in

him, Moby Dick seemed combinedly possessed by all the angels that fell

from heaven. The wide tiers of welded tendons overspreading his broad

white forehead, beneath the transparent skin, looked knitted together;

as head on, he came churning his tail among the boats; and once more

flailed them apart; spilling out the irons and lances from the two

mates’ boats, and dashing in one side of the upper part of their bows,

but leaving Ahab’s almost without a scar.

While Daggoo and Queequeg were stopping the strained planks; and as the

whale swimming out from them, turned, and showed one entire flank as he

shot by them again; at that moment a quick cry went up. Lashed round

and round to the fish’s back; pinioned in the turns upon turns in

which, during the past night, the whale had reeled the involutions of

the lines around him, the half torn body of the Parsee was seen; his

sable raiment frayed to shreds; his distended eyes turned full upon old

Ahab.

The harpoon dropped from his hand.

“Befooled, befooled!”—drawing in a long lean breath—“Aye, Parsee! I see

thee again.—Aye, and thou goest before; and this, \_this\_ then is the

hearse that thou didst promise. But I hold thee to the last letter of

thy word. Where is the second hearse? Away, mates, to the ship! those

boats are useless now; repair them if ye can in time, and return to me;

if not, Ahab is enough to die—Down, men! the first thing that but

offers to jump from this boat I stand in, that thing I harpoon. Ye are

not other men, but my arms and my legs; and so obey me.—Where’s the

whale? gone down again?”

But he looked too nigh the boat; for as if bent upon escaping with the

corpse he bore, and as if the particular place of the last encounter

had been but a stage in his leeward voyage, Moby Dick was now again

steadily swimming forward; and had almost passed the ship,—which thus

far had been sailing in the contrary direction to him, though for the

present her headway had been stopped. He seemed swimming with his

utmost velocity, and now only intent upon pursuing his own straight

path in the sea.

“Oh! Ahab,” cried Starbuck, “not too late is it, even now, the third

day, to desist. See! Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that

madly seekest him!”

Setting sail to the rising wind, the lonely boat was swiftly impelled

to leeward, by both oars and canvas. And at last when Ahab was sliding

by the vessel, so near as plainly to distinguish Starbuck’s face as he

leaned over the rail, he hailed him to turn the vessel about, and

follow him, not too swiftly, at a judicious interval. Glancing upwards,

he saw Tashtego, Queequeg, and Daggoo, eagerly mounting to the three

mast-heads; while the oarsmen were rocking in the two staved boats

which had but just been hoisted to the side, and were busily at work in

repairing them. One after the other, through the port-holes, as he

sped, he also caught flying glimpses of Stubb and Flask, busying

themselves on deck among bundles of new irons and lances. As he saw all

this; as he heard the hammers in the broken boats; far other hammers

seemed driving a nail into his heart. But he rallied. And now marking

that the vane or flag was gone from the main-mast-head, he shouted to

Tashtego, who had just gained that perch, to descend again for another

flag, and a hammer and nails, and so nail it to the mast.

Whether fagged by the three days’ running chase, and the resistance to

his swimming in the knotted hamper he bore; or whether it was some

latent deceitfulness and malice in him: whichever was true, the White

Whale’s way now began to abate, as it seemed, from the boat so rapidly

nearing him once more; though indeed the whale’s last start had not

been so long a one as before. And still as Ahab glided over the waves

the unpitying sharks accompanied him; and so pertinaciously stuck to

the boat; and so continually bit at the plying oars, that the blades

became jagged and crunched, and left small splinters in the sea, at

almost every dip.

“Heed them not! those teeth but give new rowlocks to your oars. Pull

on! ’tis the better rest, the shark’s jaw than the yielding water.”

“But at every bite, sir, the thin blades grow smaller and smaller!”

“They will last long enough! pull on!—But who can tell”—he

muttered—“whether these sharks swim to feast on the whale or on

Ahab?—But pull on! Aye, all alive, now—we near him. The helm! take the

helm! let me pass,”—and so saying two of the oarsmen helped him forward

to the bows of the still flying boat.

At length as the craft was cast to one side, and ran ranging along with

the White Whale’s flank, he seemed strangely oblivious of its

advance—as the whale sometimes will—and Ahab was fairly within the

smoky mountain mist, which, thrown off from the whale’s spout, curled

round his great, Monadnock hump; he was even thus close to him; when,

with body arched back, and both arms lengthwise high-lifted to the

poise, he darted his fierce iron, and his far fiercer curse into the

hated whale. As both steel and curse sank to the socket, as if sucked

into a morass, Moby Dick sideways writhed; spasmodically rolled his

nigh flank against the bow, and, without staving a hole in it, so

suddenly canted the boat over, that had it not been for the elevated

part of the gunwale to which he then clung, Ahab would once more have

been tossed into the sea. As it was, three of the oarsmen—who foreknew

not the precise instant of the dart, and were therefore unprepared for

its effects—these were flung out; but so fell, that, in an instant two

of them clutched the gunwale again, and rising to its level on a

combing wave, hurled themselves bodily inboard again; the third man

helplessly dropping astern, but still afloat and swimming.

Almost simultaneously, with a mighty volition of ungraduated,

instantaneous swiftness, the White Whale darted through the weltering

sea. But when Ahab cried out to the steersman to take new turns with

the line, and hold it so; and commanded the crew to turn round on their

seats, and tow the boat up to the mark; the moment the treacherous line

felt that double strain and tug, it snapped in the empty air!

“What breaks in me? Some sinew cracks!—’tis whole again; oars! oars!

Burst in upon him!”

Hearing the tremendous rush of the sea-crashing boat, the whale wheeled

round to present his blank forehead at bay; but in that evolution,

catching sight of the nearing black hull of the ship; seemingly seeing

in it the source of all his persecutions; bethinking it—it may be—a

larger and nobler foe; of a sudden, he bore down upon its advancing

prow, smiting his jaws amid fiery showers of foam.

Ahab staggered; his hand smote his forehead. “I grow blind; hands!

stretch out before me that I may yet grope my way. Is’t night?”

“The whale! The ship!” cried the cringing oarsmen.

“Oars! oars! Slope downwards to thy depths, O sea, that ere it be for

ever too late, Ahab may slide this last, last time upon his mark! I

see: the ship! the ship! Dash on, my men! Will ye not save my ship?”

But as the oarsmen violently forced their boat through the

sledge-hammering seas, the before whale-smitten bow-ends of two planks

burst through, and in an instant almost, the temporarily disabled boat

lay nearly level with the waves; its half-wading, splashing crew,

trying hard to stop the gap and bale out the pouring water.

Meantime, for that one beholding instant, Tashtego’s mast-head hammer

remained suspended in his hand; and the red flag, half-wrapping him as

with a plaid, then streamed itself straight out from him, as his own

forward-flowing heart; while Starbuck and Stubb, standing upon the

bowsprit beneath, caught sight of the down-coming monster just as soon

as he.

“The whale, the whale! Up helm, up helm! Oh, all ye sweet powers of

air, now hug me close! Let not Starbuck die, if die he must, in a

woman’s fainting fit. Up helm, I say—ye fools, the jaw! the jaw! Is

this the end of all my bursting prayers? all my life-long fidelities?

Oh, Ahab, Ahab, lo, thy work. Steady! helmsman, steady. Nay, nay! Up

helm again! He turns to meet us! Oh, his unappeasable brow drives on

towards one, whose duty tells him he cannot depart. My God, stand by me

now!”

“Stand not by me, but stand under me, whoever you are that will now

help Stubb; for Stubb, too, sticks here. I grin at thee, thou grinning

whale! Who ever helped Stubb, or kept Stubb awake, but Stubb’s own

unwinking eye? And now poor Stubb goes to bed upon a mattrass that is

all too soft; would it were stuffed with brushwood! I grin at thee,

thou grinning whale! Look ye, sun, moon, and stars! I call ye assassins

of as good a fellow as ever spouted up his ghost. For all that, I would

yet ring glasses with ye, would ye but hand the cup! Oh, oh! oh, oh!

thou grinning whale, but there’ll be plenty of gulping soon! Why fly ye

not, O Ahab! For me, off shoes and jacket to it; let Stubb die in his

drawers! A most mouldy and over salted death, though;—cherries!

cherries! cherries! Oh, Flask, for one red cherry ere we die!”

“Cherries? I only wish that we were where they grow. Oh, Stubb, I hope

my poor mother’s drawn my part-pay ere this; if not, few coppers will

now come to her, for the voyage is up.”

From the ship’s bows, nearly all the seamen now hung inactive; hammers,

bits of plank, lances, and harpoons, mechanically retained in their

hands, just as they had darted from their various employments; all

their enchanted eyes intent upon the whale, which from side to side

strangely vibrating his predestinating head, sent a broad band of

overspreading semicircular foam before him as he rushed. Retribution,

swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of

all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead

smote the ship’s starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled. Some fell

flat upon their faces. Like dislodged trucks, the heads of the

harpooneers aloft shook on their bull-like necks. Through the breach,

they heard the waters pour, as mountain torrents down a flume.

“The ship! The hearse!—the second hearse!” cried Ahab from the boat;

“its wood could only be American!”

Diving beneath the settling ship, the whale ran quivering along its

keel; but turning under water, swiftly shot to the surface again, far

off the other bow, but within a few yards of Ahab’s boat, where, for a

time, he lay quiescent.

“I turn my body from the sun. What ho, Tashtego! let me hear thy

hammer. Oh! ye three unsurrendered spires of mine; thou uncracked keel;

and only god-bullied hull; thou firm deck, and haughty helm, and

Pole-pointed prow,—death-glorious ship! must ye then perish, and

without me? Am I cut off from the last fond pride of meanest

shipwrecked captains? Oh, lonely death on lonely life! Oh, now I feel

my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief. Ho, ho! from all your

furthest bounds, pour ye now in, ye bold billows of my whole foregone

life, and top this one piled comber of my death! Towards thee I roll,

thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with

thee; from hell’s heart I stab at thee; for hate’s sake I spit my last

breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool!

and since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still

chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! \_Thus\_, I give up

the spear!”

The harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward; with igniting

velocity the line ran through the grooves;—ran foul. Ahab stooped to

clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him round the

neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was

shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone. Next instant, the

heavy eye-splice in the rope’s final end flew out of the stark-empty

tub, knocked down an oarsman, and smiting the sea, disappeared in its

depths.

For an instant, the tranced boat’s crew stood still; then turned. “The

ship? Great God, where is the ship?” Soon they through dim, bewildering

mediums saw her sidelong fading phantom, as in the gaseous Fata

Morgana; only the uppermost masts out of water; while fixed by

infatuation, or fidelity, or fate, to their once lofty perches, the

pagan harpooneers still maintained their sinking lookouts on the sea.

And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its

crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning,

animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the

smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight.

But as the last whelmings intermixingly poured themselves over the

sunken head of the Indian at the mainmast, leaving a few inches of the

erect spar yet visible, together with long streaming yards of the flag,

which calmly undulated, with ironical coincidings, over the destroying

billows they almost touched;—at that instant, a red arm and a hammer

hovered backwardly uplifted in the open air, in the act of nailing the

flag faster and yet faster to the subsiding spar. A sky-hawk that

tauntingly had followed the main-truck downwards from its natural home

among the stars, pecking at the flag, and incommoding Tashtego there;

this bird now chanced to intercept its broad fluttering wing between

the hammer and the wood; and simultaneously feeling that etherial

thrill, the submerged savage beneath, in his death-gasp, kept his

hammer frozen there; and so the bird of heaven, with archangelic

shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive

form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which, like

Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of

heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it.

Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen

white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the

great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago.

Epilogue

“AND I ONLY AM ESCAPED ALONE TO TELL THEE” Job.

The drama’s done. Why then here does any one step forth?—Because one

did survive the wreck.

It so chanced, that after the Parsee’s disappearance, I was he whom the

Fates ordained to take the place of Ahab’s bowsman, when that bowsman

assumed the vacant post; the same, who, when on the last day the three

men were tossed from out of the rocking boat, was dropped astern. So,

floating on the margin of the ensuing scene, and in full sight of it,

when the halfspent suction of the sunk ship reached me, I was then, but

slowly, drawn towards the closing vortex. When I reached it, it had

subsided to a creamy pool. Round and round, then, and ever contracting

towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly

wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, gaining that

vital centre, the black bubble upward burst; and now, liberated by

reason of its cunning spring, and, owing to its great buoyancy, rising

with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea,

fell over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin, for almost

one whole day and night, I floated on a soft and dirgelike main. The

unharming sharks, they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths;

the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks. On the second day, a

sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the

devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing

children, only found another orphan.

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