

Mar 25, 1895

WHALE STORIES WRONG.

THE NOISELESS SAIL IS USED IF THERE IS NO BREEZE.

The Cry is "Oh, —, b-l-o-w-s!" Says a Veteran Whaler—Accounts in Geographies That Should be Suppressed—The Different Kinds of Spouts—Three Men Aloft.

Generally speaking, it is safe to assert that there is much misapprehension about the way in which whales are sought for and captured. Pictorial geographies are largely responsible for misinformation on the subject. Down at the Ship News office at the Battery is one of these misleading books, a dog-eared, time-worn, much-soiled, entirely dusty, and generally worthless publication, which strayed into the office so long ago that no one can tell when or whence it came.

Many seafaring folk frequent the Ship News office, and into it there strolled last week one whose career as a plain merchant seaman, now abandoned for the more stormy one of literature, had been diversified with some whaling voyages in the Pacific. The visitor turned the leaves of the geography until he found on one begrimed page the picture of a harpooner, with weapon poised, ready for a fling at a whale, which was represented as standing on its head and bidding defiance to everything in the heavens above and the waters beneath.

The ex-hunter of big fishes said geographies of that sort ought to be suppressed. Then he told about whale hunting as was whale-hunting, and a reporter of the New York Times, who was there, became interested.

"There—she—blows," he says, in the way that landsman who know all about whaling from reading geographies and story books would make the hail. But those who seek the whale in his deep sea lair instead of in books tell about the sighting of the prey in these words, but with an intonation impossible to reproduce in print: "Oh, —, b-l-o-w-s!"

"It was in the old whaling bark Ohio, Capt. Ellis," said the narrator, "that I first made my whaling voyage. That was back in 1886. It is Pacific and Arctic whaling that I am speaking of."

"When cruising in those waters in search of whales, a whaler always keeps three men aloft during the daytime. An officer of the ship and that functionary of a whaling expedition known as the 'steerer' take their places in the crow's nest, on the main, and another, lookout is sent to the fore-topgallant cross-trees. All three of the lookouts are furnished with marine glasses, and throughout their tour of duty aloft they carefully scan the horizons in all directions.

"There may be days and days, with never a cry from aloft, and then, on a sudden, will be heard the welcome hail to the deck of 'Oh, —, b-l-o-w-s!' The cry electrifies a crew as does 'Sail, ho!' from a cruiser's masthead when an enemy is the quest."

"The captain immediately goes aloft and makes an examination of the spouter through his glass. In the Pacific and Arctic waters there are two kinds that he will have nothing to do with. The species he wants is the towhead and sperm. The ones he does not want are the finback, humpback and sulphur bottom. These may have other names, but they are not known by any other to whalers."

"The captain is enabled to tell what manner of whale it is by the nature of its spout. The sperm whale is distinguished by the full, bushy sort of fountain which it projects into the air. If the spouts are at frequent intervals, and if the water is thrown high in a slender jet, the captain says nothing that is nice, descends from his perch, and the vessel plods along her way. "But, if the stream is low and much dispersed, there is a bracing around of yards and a clearing away of whaleboats. All hands are called on deck, and four or five boats are manned and sent in pursuit of the whale. One boat is always kept in reserve in case of an emergency, but only enough men are kept on board to trim and work the ship."

"The boats set sail as soon as they have shoved clear of the ship's side, and then the real excitement of it all begins. I will tell you by-and-by where it ends. And I will tell you now where the main nonsense of this picture lies." He pointed to the misused despised geography.

"Whales have a most acute hearing, and the swish of the boat through the water, even when propelled by silent canvas, is often enough to frighten a whale, and then he is off like a locomotive. Now, as for oars and rowlocks such as are represented in this and most other pictures of whaling, capturing exploits, that is all rank absurdity. The splash of an oar would send a whale to the right about before you could get within a quarter of a mile of him. They are harder to creep up upon than are the wild deer of the forest."

"Therefore, the noiseless sail is used if there is any breeze, and if there is not, paddles such as the North American Indian uses in propelling his canoe are got out and the best boat pushed toward the leviathan by cautious dips. Care is taken never to splash water, and the men move about in the boat in stocking feet."

LOADING A COTTON SHIP.

Those who do it are the Highest-Paid Negroes in the World.

It is a problem in mechanics to load a cotton ship—to fill every cubic foot of freight room with the awkward rectangular bales—and some men so much more skilled than others in this science that it often makes a difference of 400 or 500 bales in a 2,000 ton ship and that amount of loss in the profit of the voyage. Therefore the stevedores and screwmen receive big wages, perhaps the largest that are paid to negroes anywhere in the world, for most of the longshoremen on the South Atlantic are of that race. In New Orleans they are nearly all white men—Italians, Swedes, and Irishmen—and the riots that we read about in the papers were due to

the introduction of negro packers and screwmen from Galveston to take the place of the whites.

Each wharf and warehouse company has its own gangs of packers and screwmen, and there is a good deal of rivalry among them as to the amount of work they can do and the number of bales they can get into the hold of a ship. The screwmen are divided into gangs of five, with a foreman, and the whole are under the direction of a chief stevedore, who is usually a white man, and acts as superintendent of the dock. Each gang occupies a hatchway of the steamer, and five men are all that can conveniently work in such a narrow space.

The cotton comes from the plantation on the cars or on flatboats. The bales as they leave the plantation are loosely packed—generally four feet high—and the first thing when they reach the dock is to tumble them into a hydraulic press, which reduces their bulk by one-half and makes it possible to pack twice as many in the hold of a steamer. The work is done rapidly and skillfully, and when it comes out of the press the bale is as hard as a stone wall. Then an ebony truckman, with his woolly hair filled with shreds of cotton, deftly inserts the iron prow of his truck under the bale, and with a sudden jerk throws it into position and starts with it across the plank to the ship. The truckman pass back and forth between the pile of bales and the ship in a procession, rapidly and in perfect time, and it is an awkward and "wuthless nigger," as the foreman said, who ever touches a bale with his hands. Some of them put on jaunty airs, strike attitudes, and introduce fancy steps as if they were at a cake walk, particularly when spectators are watching, but that is unprofessional, and the serious and self-respecting truckman "totes his bales" without trying to attract attention. They sing as they go, but for the life of me I could not catch the words, and when in an interval I asked one to repeat the verses he replied:

"Dayain't none. Dat wuz jes' de truckers' song."

The refrain sounded like "Oh rio rily oh oh rio rily oh," and was evidently nothing but gibberish. It appears that the several gangs have their own particular songs, and I judged from what they told me that the words were usually without meaning, or simply a series of rhythmical sounds with terminations that rhymed, invented by some one of their number and sung to familiar airs.

The truckman drops the bale at the edge of the dock, or tosses it by a jerk of the handles of his truck over the gunwales of the vessel; then a man adjust the grappling iron and shouts a signal to the engineer at the windlass, who turns his lever, and hoisting the bale into the air, lets it swiftly down into the hold, where the five artists are waiting to pack it away. It is hot work below, and the packers and screwmen are usually barefooted and naked above the waists, while perspiration rolls down their massive muscles. Each has a hook in his hand, and they seize and toss the 500-pound bales as a Japanese juggler plays with plates. Five hooks are in the cotton the instant it touches bottom, and they seem to work like a machine, for one does not pull one way and another another, but by a united, simultaneous effort the great package is lifted, and drops into the very place where the boss wants it to go.

Then at intervals they got out a big jack-screw that must weigh 500 pounds and crowd the bales together until the hold of the ship is one solid mass. One end of the jack-screw is placed against a bale and the end against a piece of heavy oak timber four or five inches square, which is notched to keep the screw from slipping, and can be inclined against the side of ship or one of its stanchions, so that a good purchase may be obtained. The screw is worked by a double crank, and one man holds it in position while the other four turn. That operation is called "hosing up."

All this is done to a musical accompaniment—I suppose a negro always sings when he works—but the songs of the screwmen are different from those of the truckmen, and the air that goes with the jack-screw is not the same that is sung when the screwmen are placing the bale in position. The first was a monotone on a low key, like the "O-o, o-o, 'ho-o-o-o" of sailors when they are hoisting sail, while the other had more melody and suggested the familiar air of,

"I lub my lub in de maw ing, I lub my lub at me."

I could not get the words if there were any, but in one of the hatchways it was evident that an original genius was improvising lines that contained personal allusions; and they created a great deal of amusement among the colored bystanders upon the deck and at times threw the other members of the gang into spasms of laughter until the boss stevedore came down upon them and ordered it stopped. The pronunciation and peculiar expressions of the Southern negro are almost a dialect of themselves, and cannot easily be understood by a stranger, so I lost the fun; but after the boss stopped and I was stepping away a sociable dandy remarked:

"He done sing 'bout de Cap'n, and he done sing 'bout you."

These stevedores have work only about six months in the year, but while they are at it they receive good pay. They work by the piece—that is, so much money for storing away so many bales, and the foreman, who gets the job and selects his own associates, gets one-half more than they. During the cotton season, for twelve or fourteen hours' work, he will average \$7.50 a day and they \$5, if they are skilful and energetic. The truckers are paid by the hour, and make from \$1.25 to \$1.50. Between seasons the screwmen engage in other occupations, cultivating gardens, doing plantation work, or following any trade that they may have learned; but they are universally regarded as superior beings, like bull fighters in Spain and baseball players in the United States.

A bale of cotton weighs from 450 to 500 pounds, and skilful packers can get from 9,000 to 10,000 bales in a 1,500-ton ship. The number of bales a ship will carry in-

creases rapidly with its tonnage. For example, a 1,000-ton ship will carry 6,000 bales, a 1,500-ton ship 9,000, a 2,000-ton ship 15,000, and a 3,000-ton ship 30,000 bales.

AN INFANT PHENOMENON.

Her Mind Taxed to Please the Curious Crowds.

A poor little infant phenomenon has been exhibited in Boston the past week. On the stage perched in a high chair one saw a tiny wisp of a yellow-haired child of four years old, whose little bare arms are hardly larger than macaroni sticks.

She proved to be in truth a phenomenon of the most marvellous type. She could remember anything, no matter how long or complicated, which she was told. It was explained that she did not understand the things she rattled off with such facility, that she did not read or write or know the difference in values of figures.

This poor little tot was called upon to answer a string of questions so long that her examiner, a grown man, was obliged to have them recorded on a voluminous scroll for he could not remember them. The child told a multitude of facts about bible history and American history, gave the population of innumerable places, the rise and fall in figures of the scale of our national debt; not forgetting the cents even, and so many other facts requiring a memory of figures that we cannot recall them. Her most astonishing feat was the recital of the capitals of all the states in twenty-four seconds. Every nerve of the little body seemed quivering with the effort the child had to make. Then the audience

were requested to ask for the capitals of any states they pleased, and in every case the little girl returned the right answer.

The man, or shall we say mercenary and degraded creature, who exhibited this poor little unfortunate, claims that the child's brain is simply a phonograph which faithfully repeats everything spoken to it. But no one in his right senses can really believe that the delicate fibres of a little child's brain can be worked upon and taxed and no harm to the growing organ result. The brain is not an Edison machine.

The great audience applauded and laughed at the automatic wit of this pitiful atom of humanity, who was thus taxed for their amusement.

But all the while the heart of the editor of the Standard Junior was crying out: "Oh you poor little darling! Will not some one snatch you away from the curious gaze of this great gaping crowd? Is there no one to lay a wee dolly in your lap, and bid you play, as Jean Valjean once bade little Cosette in Victor Hugo's immortal book 'Les Miserables'?"

The Gerry law cannot touch this memory child, for she does not sing or dance. Yet how much more natural to a child are singing and dancing than this dreadful cramming of dead and uninteresting facts into a tiny brain. It is a well known fact that these infant phenomena rarely live to grow up, or else go through life with dwarfed intellects.

As a Means of Defence.

Some time ago, the jealousy existing between the troopers of a certain cavalry regiment and their comrades of the 41st Foot—both quartered in the same city—culminated in open encounters in the streets, in which the belts of the infantry and the riding whips of the cavalry played a prominent part. As the outcome of one

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of these encounters, about a dozen of the members of the infantry regiment appeared before their colonel one morning. The majority of the culprits confessed their guilt and threw themselves on the mercy of the court; but one, a son of Erin, on being charged, sought refuge in prevarication.

"Did you use your belt in the affray?" asked the colonel.

"I was not wearing it, sor," readily replied Dennis, to the evident astonishment of his fellow prisoners.

"Indeed! Who gave you permission to leave the barracks without it?"

"Sure I had it on, sor, when I left the barracks," was the reply.

"I thought you said you were not wearing it?" thundered the colonel, in a passion.

"No more I wasn't, yer 'anner," reiterated Dennis. "I was using it to defend meself wid."

The Colored Sentinel and the Password.

Washington, hearing that the colored sentinels could not be trusted, went out one night to ascertain if the report was correct. The countersign was "Cambridge" and the general, disguised, as he thought, by a large overcoat, approached a colored sentry.

"Who goes there?" cried the sentinel.

"A friend," replied Washington.

"Friend, advance unarmed and give the countersign," said the colored man.

Washington came up and said "Roxbury."

"No sah," was the response.

"Medford," said Washington.

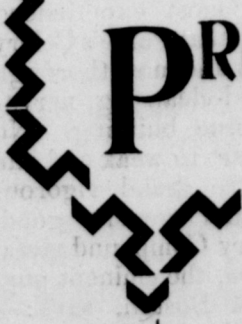
"No sah," returned the colored soldier.

"Charleston," said Washington.

The colored man immediately exclaimed,

"I tell you, Massa Washington, no man go by here 'out be say Cambridge!"

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