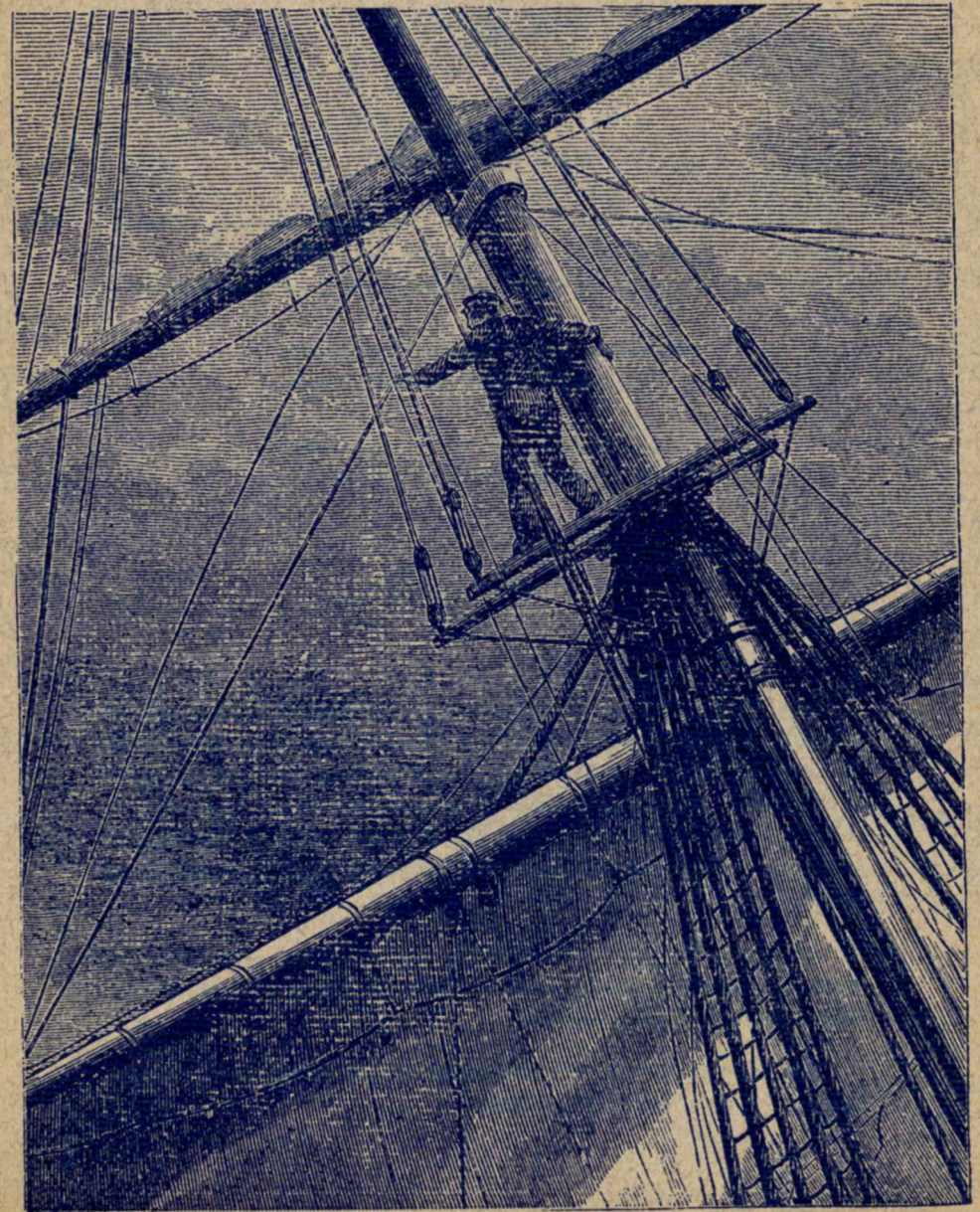


Let Your Light Shine

BY CHARLES H. BROWN



"THERE SHE BLOWS!"



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DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

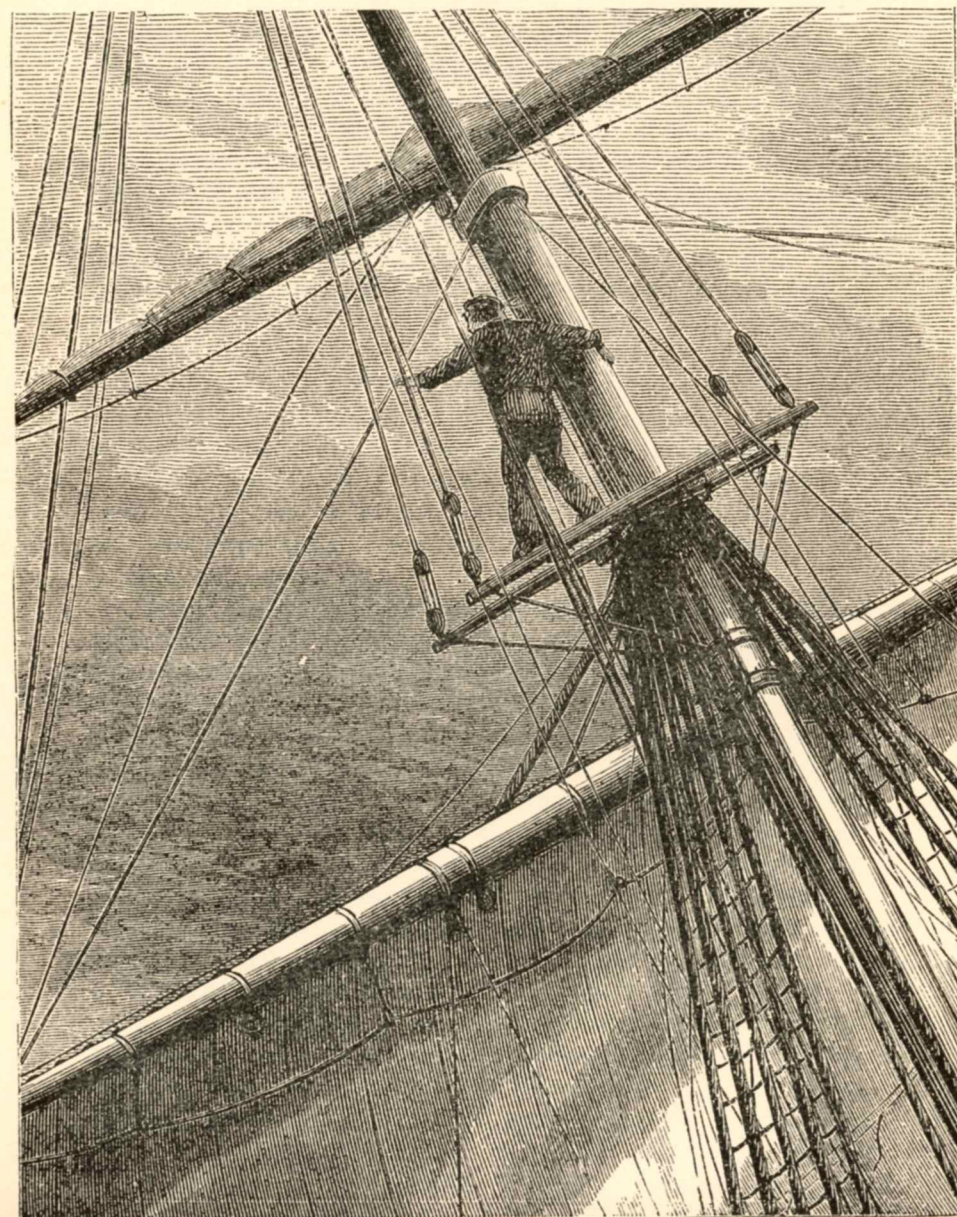
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I have been asked to give you a foreword of the objectives of the Dukes County Historical Society. They can be defined briefly: to collect and preserve the materials from which the history of this and the adjacent Islands of Dukes County may be written. Most definitions require illustration, illumination. A brief form of words seldom arouses interest or stirs the imagination. Without the intelligent co-operation of the public, and the aroused interest of thinking, perhaps speculative, minds, our work may fail. For these reasons I shall attempt only to illustrate my thoughts by historical examples, not to teach history.

The stuff from which history is made is largely documents, writings and printings on paper and parchment. They fall from the hands of man and from the rolls of the press like autumn leaves, and seldom are valued until they have become old and musty and often nearly illegible. I wish to impress upon you by examples taken from our history the importance of preserving recent and contemporary papers.

Over three centuries ago there lived in London a great nobleman, Henry Wriothesley, the third Earl of Southampton. He was the patron of poets and of the stage, and there existed between him and a certain play actor, one Will Shakespeare, a strange friendship, even love, which the actor expressed in immortal sonnets that have puzzled critics to this day. The Earl was the competitor of Sir Walter Raleigh for favor at the court of Queen Elizabeth, and, perhaps in imitation of Raleigh's Virginia ventures, he in 1602 fitted out an expedition under Captain Bartholomew Gosnold for discovery "in the north parts of Virginia."

On Friday, May 14th, 1602, Gosnold made land on the coast of Maine, then sailing south rounded Cape Cod, which he named, and on May 23rd discovered an island which he called Marthae's Vineyard. On May 25th he landed on another island, which he named Elizabeth's Isle. It was the present islands of Cuttyhunk and Nashawena then united by a sandy beach "to which the Indians from the main do oftentimes resort for fishing of crabs." Gosnold had with

him a party of colonists, "inhabitants," and of course the crew of the ship, the Concord of Dartmouth. The colonists landed on Elizabeth's Isle, and "for full three weeks and more did busy themselves well" in building a house and clearing and planting a garden. Then, on account of some quarrel of which we have only a hint in the published narratives of the voyage, they returned to England.

One of the party, John Brereton, published the story of their voyage to North Virginia in 1602. It is the earliest historical document of the kind published in England. This and another account by Gabriel Archer, a Gentleman Adventurer, and a brief letter from Captain Gosnold to his father are the only existing records of the voyage. The full report of Gosnold to the Earl which is known to have existed is lost. Brereton's "Brefe and True Relation" is in part the concise, straightforward log of a voyage of discovery, in part a glowing and poetic description of a newly discovered land, its scenery, woods, flowers, animals, birds, and fishes. This latter portion is almost metrical with the strong iambic roll of English verse.

Within the next eight years Will Shakespeare wrote the last and in some respects the finest of his plays, *The Tempest*. The scene is upon an island, the trees, the plants, the animals, the birds, the fishes, are described in the very words that John Brereton used in his tract. More, whole phrases from the "Brefe Relation" are reproduced, and fitted to Shakespearean blank verse. He must have read Brereton. The plot of *The Tempest* turns upon a quarrel between sailors and colonists. Its satire dwells upon the love of a savage for a drunken and incompetent butler. Such a quarrel, such incompetence and such drunkenness furnish a perfect explanation of the mysterious quarrels that caused the failure of the Earl's expedition. We know that Shakespeare sat at the Earl's table in London. It is a fair inference that he heard the story of this voyage from the lips of Brereton and his companions.

Gosnold's voyage lives in immortal fiction. More, it lives in eternal fact, for out of it grew Fort Popham and Plymouth and Boston, and even Concord and Bunker Hill. The men, the seamanship, the handicraft, the religion of the south of England begat them, and the first to adventure here were Gosnold and his company.

This is not my theory; it is the discovery of the late Dr.

Edward Everett Hale, endorsed by the Hon. Henry Cabot Lodge and illuminated and verified by the President of your Society, Mr. Marshall Shepard. The moral is double.

First: If the friends and families of Shakespeare and the Earl, or their successors within a century, had organized an historical society and preserved the letters, journals and notes of these two already great men, or, better still, had found the report of Gosnold's voyage and published it, the true beginnings of New England colonial enterprise would have been known, and one of the greatest puzzles of literature would have been solved.

To whom was this addressed?

"Lord of my love to whom in vassalage
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit.
To thee I send my written embassy
To witness duty, not to show my wit."

Or this?

"I may not evermore acknowledge thee
Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee shame
Nor thou with public kindness honor me."

Second: History is more than a two-sided shield of different colors. It is a many-sided prism. It has been illuminated by torches borne by men who thought they were driving the Chariot of the Sun. Because they lighted but one side they have been called false, where they only were feeble. All may be torch bearers, kings, captains, statesmen and common people, but in the long perspective that side which reflects the torches of the common people will be brightest, for "God made many of them." No one can forecast the final estimate of the importance of historical facts. Perhaps it may be the daily doings of your ancestors and mine that will stand out in the bright light of tomorrow. Let us preserve the record of them.

There is another lesson that may be taught by the same figure of speech, "let your light so shine before men." It sometimes happens that great events have occurred in obscure places. Sometimes the place is forgotten. This is unfortunate, for local color and influences often are important both in shaping the deed and guiding the doer. Every schoolboy knows the Rubicon, but who can name the little Scottish town where John Knox put on his leather jacket?

In the years following Gosnold's voyage these Islands

had been the vogue in London and the south of England, particularly in Court circles. Shakespeare chose a popular subject when he wrote *The Tempest*.

Raleigh fitted out an expedition under Martin Pring in 1603 which brought back sassafrass; Southampton and Sir Ferdinando Gorges one to search for gold on Martha's Vineyard; Captain John Smith one for the same purpose. One of Smith's ships, the *Long Robert*, was the first slave trader on the New England coast. Smith says, "Thomas Hunt, Master of this ship (when I was gone) betraid foure and twenty of those poore Salvages aboard his ship; and most dishonestly and inhumanly carried them to Maligo and there sold those silly Salvages for Rials of eight." Also the Plymouth Company had been formed, made several fruitless ventures for gold and fur and fish and one feeble attempt of colonization at Fort Popham. Then Plymouth was founded, almost by chance, and struggled on sustained by donations of corn from kindly Indians and money and provisions from friends across the sea, where, at length, a brewer's son pulled down a throne, built in its place a commonwealth and endowed it with a far-sighted plan of maritime supremacy and colonial enterprise.

Boston, Newbury, Gloucester and Watertown had been founded, and the great Puritan immigration of the thirties peopled the wilderness with that strange, psalm-singing race of amphibious fighters, who alike could shatter the Armada and the squadron of Prince Rupert at Marston Moor.

A Puritan merchant from the south of England in 1641 obtained a grant of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, and his son, a young preacher, with some neighbors from Watertown made the first settlement here at Edgartown. The Plymouth company had been dissolved and its lands in this region partitioned between the Earl of Sterling and Sir Ferdinando Gorges. The descriptions of the partition were vague. Thomas Mayhew, Senior, the father of the young preacher, of the same name, in order to be doubly secure took title from both Sterling and Gorges. The settlement prospered. The climate was mild, the soil warm and fairly fertile. Whales were so abundant that they frequently became stranded and furnished oil for the White, and food for the Indian inhabitants. The streams in the spring ran silver with spawning fish, natural meadows furnished hay and pasture, and the clearings of the Indians, bought for a beaver

hat or a few trinkets, rich gardens. The son preached and prayed with the Indians and his labors were blessed by the grace of God, the favor of the Lord Protector, and the contributions of pious brethren beyond the sea. In the next twenty years some of the Indians learned from the Mayhews how to pray and preach and many of the white colonists learned from the Indians how to catch fish and whales. Then came the deluge.

In England the iron hand that forged the Ironsides was palsied, and the clear eye that previsioned a greater England beyond the Atlantic was sightless, and "Carlie came to his ain again." He came from France, with his courtiers and courtesans, and they corrupted the manners, the morals and the language of England for a hundred years. With them came one great man, Edward Hyde, Lord Clarendon, the father-in-law of the king's pusillanimous brother, James Stewart, Duke of York and Albany, afterwards James the Second of England. Some mistress or minister was wise enough to advise Charles well and Clarendon was made Lord Chancellor and Premier of England. At home he governed well, with a mixture of force and conciliation, and became rich from the spoils of the more affluent and offensive Puritans. He had one very serious problem, his son-in-law.

James, the heir presumptive to the Crown, had all the vices and none of the graces of his brother. Even his mistresses were ugly. If Clarendon's daughter was to become Queen Consort of England, if his granddaughters were to sit on the throne in their own right, some way of making James respected if not loved must be found. The Duke of York had one small talent, that for petty details of naval affairs, enough to have made him "an under clerk in some dock yard." In recognition of this ability he was made Lord High Admiral of England, and Warden of the Cinque Ports. The navy was popular. With good tutors he might share its popularity. Perhaps the greatest danger was across the sea. Massachusetts had given asylum to many a stern fighting man of Cromwell's Ironsides, many a skilled sailor from the Channel Ports. Even the Regicides of the king's father had found shelter in New England. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the preachings of the Cottons and the Mathers, the people of Massachusetts were, to their French neighbors, the "Turbulent Bostonais." Force at such distance and with such people was out of the question and

Clarendon determined on a policy calculated to conciliate the Puritans beyond the sea and make James at least in appearance respected at home. He would have Charles create an empire in America with his pen and let James redeem it with his sword. Of course it could not be in Massachusetts. There, the pen of a Stewart was no mightier than his sword, for in spite of both they, as Clarendon said, "had already well nigh ripened to a Commonwealth."

On the Hudson and in New Jersey were the Colonies of the Dutch, feebly held, and east of these were the Islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket with their dependencies, which had never belonged to either the Massachusetts or Plymouth colony, and their title was doubtful. The stage was set. Clarendon's first step was to buy these Islands from the heirs of the Earl of Sterling for thirty-five hundred pounds. This may seem strange, considering their comparative insignificance today, but it should be remembered that they had been, previous to the Commonwealth, much in the eye of Court circles and in 1663, as now, they had great strategic value in naval warfare, and New Amsterdam could not be wrested from the Dutch without such war.

On March 12, 1664, King Charles granted to his brother James the "Province of New York, including Long Island, Martins Vineyard, Nantucket, & all ye Islands adjacent." By a fair construction of the deeds of partition of the Plymouth company these latter Islands were within the Gorges' grant, but geographic knowledge was scant and Prime Ministers were powerful. The signature of Charles on the charter made Thomas Mayhew and his Puritan neighbors on the Vineyard vassals of a popish Prince. The zealous and godly son had been lost at sea and the father had taken up his mission and had preached and prayed with the Indians and received generous contributions from England. He was perfectly willing to worship the rising sun, but he knew that the sun of the Stewarts had a sudden way of setting. He now was an old man and, either from age or caution, did nothing.

Matters drifted along till 1669, when an historical event, which has since repeated itself at the Vineyard and aroused interest in New York, happened, and the Governor of the Province of New York, Francis Lovelace, wrote a letter from which the following is an excerpt:

"Thomas Mayhew, Esq.," etc.

"Sr."

"The Shipwracke of a certaine Barke . . . wch . . . was driuen on Shoare at Martins Vineyard out of wch said Barke, as I am informed, there haue beene about 40 hogsheads of Rumme saued."

Lovelace continues by directing Mayhew to give an account of his stewardship over the salvaged vessel and cargo and particularly to send the "Rumme" to New York forthwith. Mayhew was slow to respond, but the next year he sent his grandson, Matthew Mayhew, a young man of twenty-two, and under the law of primo geniture, the heir of his lost father's moiety of the Island, to New York.

Young Matthew was a man of parts, and had been educated at Cambridge at the expense of the Puritan Missionary Societies of London. Lovelace had been a "Gentleman of His Majesty's Privy Council," and as such had sat at the council table with Lord Clarendon. Doubtless Clarendon had given him strict and detailed instructions for the Government of the Province of New York. The Governor found young Mayhew a ready and intelligent assistant in that work so far as it pertained to these Islands. Matthew returned to the Vineyard and the next summer accompanied his aged grandfather to New York. At a session of the Governor and Council of that Province, lasting for a week, both the Mayhews were present. On the first day it was determined that the towns on the Vineyard, now known as Edgartown and West Tisbury, "shall have patents of confirmation." On the second day Thomas Mayhew was made "Governor of the Island called Martins or Martha's Vineyard during his natural life." On the succeeding days the scheme of government which Clarendon must have devised was carefully applied to the conditions existing on the Vineyard. The Governor was to have a Council of Assistants elected by the people and a General Court, also elective, which could enact laws civil and criminal. The Governor was to have no power of veto, only a "double casting vote" in case of disagreement, and he was given authority to negotiate treaties with Indian tribes. No such strong and yet liberal scheme of vice-regal government was established under the British flag for many a year.

The fine hand of Clarendon's statesmanship appeared in the town charters. They were engrossed on parchment, were attested by the Secretary of the Province, Matthias

Nicolls, and bore the signature of Francis Lovelace over his seal and the great seal of the Province of New York. They bore the date July 8th, 1671, and after the descriptions of the lands included within the boundaries of the two towns were identical in form. They provided that the inhabitants of the towns should have preserved to them forever their civil rights and their rights and privileges in the "Lands, Soyles, Woods, Meadows, Pastures, Marshes, Waters, Fishing, Hawking, Hunting & Fowling within ye Bounds & Limits afore-described. . . . The tenure whereof is to be according to ye Custom of ye Manor of East Greenwich in ye County of Kent in England, in free & common soccage & by fealty only." They were carefully drawn. The draft must have been put in Lovelace's hand before he left London. No man is known to have been on this side of the water at that early day of sufficient technical skill to have drawn them.

What does the phrase in free and common soccage by fealty mean? It is a legal phrase, a translation into Norman French of an older term, gavelkind, used by the Saxons. It represented the most liberal tenure known to English law which was perhaps the one rock which the Norman Conquest had not submerged. It signified that in the south of England, especially in the garden County of Kent, there was a body of freeholders, Franklins, who held their land free from feudal service and enjoyed the fruits of their fields free from tithes and taxes, yielding only loyalty, fealty, to the representative of the sovereign, the Lord Proprietor.

It was a coincidence only that the King was the Lord of the Manor of East Greenwich, but it was a very shrewd move on the part of Clarendon, thus to remind the colonists that the beneficent system which he was founding was the King's own.

What was Clarendon seeking to accomplish? He has left no record of his plans, but it is a fair inference that he intended to found on this Island, a strategic point between New York and Boston, a fair, fertile and resourceful land at the very threshold of Massachusetts, a system so liberal yet strong that it should attract many a good man who was smarting under the theocracy of the Mathers and the plutocracy of the merchants in Boston. The experiment failed of direct results, Clarendon was disgraced, and his successors knew or cared little for his plans to rehabilitate his son-in-law and create a colonial empire.

The Mayhews took advantage of this indifference to extend their authority till they became the petty tyrants of the Vineyard's fields. Then came the capture of New York by the Dutch. The people of the Vineyard first attempted to set up an independent government of their own and later applied to Massachusetts for annexation. Then New York was restored to the British crown; a second charter confirming the first was signed by Charles. Next, James succeeded to the throne, ruled, ruined and ran away; and the granddaughter of Edward Hyde became Queen Mary of England. Her husband, William of Orange, as joint sovereign, was even a greater statesman than her grandfather. He conducted the affairs of state in person.

The American colonies applied for new charters. At first it was proposed to annex Plymouth to New York as the Vineyard had been annexed in 1663, but William's sound judgment prevailed. Plymouth and the Vineyard both were Puritan. Such brethren seldom dwell together in harmony and there was little prospect that they would ever live in harmony with the Dutch settlers of New York and New Jersey.

It was decided that Dukes County, then including Nantucket, should be annexed to the newly created Province of Massachusetts. There was one difficulty however; under the Lovelace charters the Vineyard citizens had been granted greater liberties than those which the inhabitants of either the Old Colony or of Massachusetts had enjoyed. To reduce them to the status of other Massachusetts towns would have been tyrannous, and to create a province with diverse liberties would have been to localize aristocracy. Already William had seen the results of such a policy in his new kingdom.

On October 7, 1691, the great charter of William and Mary was signed. It granted to the freeholders of Massachusetts the same rights that Lovelace had granted to the Vineyard twenty-eight years before. It established the land tenure for Massachusetts almost by the same words which had been employed in the Vineyard charters "in free and common soccage."

Thus the old, free Saxon system passed from Kent to Martha's Vineyard, from Martha's Vineyard to Massachusetts and afterwards to New England and the entire republic of the United States.

The significance of this ancient tenure is forgotten today. Little we think when we read that we are to hold our lands in fee simple that we still are tenants, tenants by fealty to the sovereign, the people. That we should render to that sovereign the wealth that it has created by public security and public improvements, and in turn that we should demand from that sovereign the wealth that we create by the labor of our hands or brains. Surely the husbandman is worthy of his harvest and the laborer not of his hire, but of his product.

I have related this incident from our history somewhat at length, for it seems to me the most important of the story of three centuries, in order to show that in a sense we may write history, not the final word, perhaps, but we may and should so illuminate our side of the prism that it may be seen and fairly judged.

The two charters still exist in the original parchments. They are priceless. They are worthy of care and veneration. They have known neglect and suffered mutilation.

There is one branch of history that should be written here and now, partly because it is unwritten, but more because the men and materials now are here.

There is no history of the whaling industry. There are chronicles, bare lists of ships, voyages and catches. There are numerous works of fiction supposedly based on the experience of their authors. Most of these have been written by men who had made one or two voyages only, and they have unduly stressed the dangers, brutality and romances of the industry. One, now much in vogue, is known to have been written by a man who spent only fifteen months on board a whaleship under a Vineyard captain, and though it purports, in the interstices of most lurid fiction, to give a detailed account of the history and methods of whaling, it is evident that most of its facts were obtained from books and not from experience. That strange jumble of fact and fancy is the work of a disordered mind. The result of such writing is a sort of fictitious history of whaling with a vocabulary fictitious and unknown on the deck of a ship.

Perhaps it is a result of this that the importance of Nantucket in the whale fisheries has been misunderstood, if not misrepresented. Unquestionably Nantucket was the cradle of whaling, but it was not its birthplace. This industry began on Long Island, Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard before

Nantucket had a white inhabitant. As early as 1653 regulations were prescribed by the freeholders of the Vineyard for the cutting in of whales, and records show that in 1669 the Vineyard was equipped with tryworks for the production of oil. It has been erroneously supposed that this related entirely to "drift whales" that had died and been cast upon the beach after becoming "gallied" in shallow water. A drift whale, especially in summer, soon becomes "blasted" and after a few days is of little value for oil. Probably most of the whales secured in these early times were the catch of the shore whalers, for look-outs and try-yards are known to have existed on the south shore of this Island in the earliest times.

The Indians undoubtedly taught the white settlers the most important part of whaling, the "going onto" (approaching) the whale, which required great skill, courage and knowledge of the animal's habits. For this reason the early boat's crews were half Indian and half White. From that day to this the best of whalers could be found among the Indians of Martha's Vineyard.

Recently I have examined the crew lists of numerous Nantucket ships which carried Indian boat steerers, and I have found that, with one exception, these men bore the names of well known Vineyard families. It is my opinion that whoever James Lopar was, Nantucket learned the art of whaling from Vineyarders white and red.

It has long been the custom of writers to make nearly all whalers hail from Nantucket and New Bedford. This is because the majority of whaleships were owned there. An examination of the records will show that even in the heyday of blubber at Nantucket, if I may mix a metaphor, a large proportion of her ships were officered by Vineyard men. When whaling out of New Bedford was at its peak our Island furnished probably a majority of the successful officers and in that last and perhaps most exciting chapter of whaling, the hunt of the great bowheads amid the Arctic ice, the first and last voyages were made by Vineyard ships and men and an almost unbroken succession of "big voyages" must be credited to Vineyard captains. Many of them are here today or soon will return to their Island home.

History from the mouths of the men who have made it is the most valuable and thrilling. Let me impress upon you the importance of collecting and preserving the letters and

private journals of all whalemén. Official log books often represent the quarter deck view only. Let me ask you who are the descendants or friends of Vineyard whalemén to set down on paper your recollections of their tales, and when we have collected our material we will be able to prove one thing that may surprise the unthinking landsman, namely, that the whaleship, her boats and gear, were the greatest achievement of American inventive genius on the sea.

Fulton's steamboat was improved upon by England and Germany more than by America. The ironclads of the Civil War were copied and improved by European powers from which we recently have re-copied. The clipper ship spread her wide wings in the sun of the China trade for a brief day and was outbuilt by England.

No foreign nation has improved on the whaleship. She was the result of long experiment and many inventions by experienced and very intelligent men, and in her final form was the best adjustment of means to an end that ever put out to sea. Her decks were trodden by the best navigators that ever "took the sun," the shrewdest pilots that ever sailed uncharted seas, and her standards of skill and courage were so high that they became a commonplace. No amateur could handle harpoon and lance. No coward long could "head a boat."

There is one other branch of whaling literature which we should seek out and preserve. Scattered through journals, scrap books and letters is a considerable body of verse, some written at sea, some by wives, sweethearts and friends of those at sea. I have seen such poems of more than ordinary merit of form, but their charm for me is in their descriptive power, their humor and pathos. No vocation ever so circumstanced men for poetic thought. Mostly it found expression in quaint and apt nautical phrases, fore-castle epigrams and picturesque oaths. But often the lonely watch succeeded by the most exciting chase known to man, strange shores and stranger people, the yearning for home, rude passions repressed by ruder discipline, wrecks and hunger and thirst and sudden death were told in homely but touching verse.

You ask me why whaling produced no great poet. My answer is that it did, one perhaps the greatest of his day and our Country. His most quoted poem with its refrain, "Sail on! Sail on!" was conceived, if not composed, on the deck

of a whaleship and not a little of his spirit of revolt and his scorn of convention must have been aroused there. There is another who in spite of his faults and follies reached the farthest height of imaginative, colorful writing in that borderland of verse which many now are exploring. Herman Melvill is worth reading for what he might have been.

Therefore, fellow members of our society, I ask you to sail on, to follow the whaleship into every sea, to know and make known her master and men, to gauge and check her cargo, frequently to make harbor in the rooms of our Society and at the end of your explorations faithfully to turn over your papers and "settle your voyage."

