

CLARA BELLE LEE.

A ROMANCE OF THE SEA.

Written for THE SCOUT, by C. F. Hinckley.
CHAPTER I.

A HOWLING gale of wind on the southern edge of the gulf stream, on the 5th day of May, 1850, time 3 o'clock—eight bells—in morning; watch on board the staunch new whale ship, Clara Belle Lee, of Nantucket. The ship was struggling through it, close hauled, under close-reefed foremain and mizzen topsails, foretopmast, staysail and forepennant. The Clara Belle Lee was a new ship, built on the ship railway at Brant Point, Nantucket, and was owned by Charles Lee, a wealthy ship owner of the island, and named after his only daughter. She was a five-boat ship. Every boat has a crew of six men and is commanded by one of the mates, who kills the whale after the boat-steerer fastens to it. Now any land lubber can kill a whale, for they lay off from him a safe distance, and you can shoot bombs into him until dead; but on the voyage of the Clara Belle Lee we had no bomb guns, and whales had to be killed by stout hearts, and strong arms to ply the lance.

The ship was riding gallantly the heavy seas that were constantly hurled against her by the tremendous force of the wind, and as she would slide down from the summit of one wave, into the valley of water below, it seemed as though she would not be able to surmount to the top of the next wave coming towering aloft as high as the fore top gallant yard. The ship was only three days out from home, outfitted for a two year's voyage to the South Atlantic and Indian oceans and the west coast of Africa, and was commanded by Captain Peter Coffin.

Capt. Coffin was one of Nantucket's crack whalers, and always made great voyages. Mr. Charles Swain was our chief officer. He was a Nantucket boy, only 25 years of age, and belonged to one of the old families of the island. He was a tall, good looking man, well educated, with brown hair, white even teeth, laughing blue eyes, and, taken all together, as handsome a specimen of the true American sailor as one would wish to see. Charles had fallen deeply in love with one of the island's fair daughters, sweet, charming Clara Belle Lee.

Our second officer was a noticeable contrast to Mr. Swain. He was an oldshellback, about 45 years old, stout, deep-chested, with a tremendous roll to his walk; a fine seaman and whale-man, but would never rise above his present position, on account of a habit he had, when on shore, of crooking his elbow too often, and, therefore could not be trusted with the command of a ship.

Mr. Hussey was our third officer and headed the larboard bow boat. There were two other mates, and with the boat-steerers, carpenters, coopers, blacksmith, cook, stewards and men forward, comprised a crew of fifty souls.

At that time there were not many steamships on the ocean, and sailors were a distinct class—different from the steamship sailor of today. Of course anybody can throw coal into a steamer's furnaces, but in the days I write of, sailors had to know how to rig a ship from her trucks to her keelson, and be able to send the royal yard and mast on deck in a gale of wind, if necessary.

The ship being just out from home was making heavy weather of it. The tryworks located beaft the foremast was covered with cord wood, that in the hurry of leaving port had not been stowed in the ship's hold. The hens, pigs, and Peter the goat, were making bad weather of it. The waves were becoming larger, and an ugly cross sea was rising. Eight bells had struck, and old Bill Francis—an old man-of-war man—had just roared down the fore-castle; gangway, "S-t-a-r-b-o-a-r-d w-a-t-e-r a-h-o-y!" when a sea that looked as high as a mountain, struck the ship on the starboard bow and swept on board, filling the deck full of water, and went dashing madly to and fro, sweeping everything before it, cord-wood, hen coops, pigs, carpenter chests, grindstone, and the ruff raff of a ship's deck, just out from home. You could feel the ship quiver and shake like a human being in distress. In the height of the confusion, the iron top gallant cap gave away, and down came the fore top gallant mast and royal mast, hanging by the back stays and rigger, threshing and tearing aloft and making a horrible din. The ship rolled so in the heavy seas, with the tons of water on her deck, that the larboard boat was unhooked from the davits and swept off in the darkness astern, closely followed by Peter, the goat who as he disappeared in the dark-

ness, looked at me and seemed to say: "You fellows can go to the devil, for there is no peace or comfort aboard of you. I think I will go with the gulf stream for awhile, and see if I can discover in the interest of science where it goes." But I do not think Peter succeeded, for I believe that is an unsettled question yet, with scientists. The old man,—all captains are called the old man on board of ship by the crew, though he may be a younger man than many of the crew,—came flying up the cabin gangway, clearing three steps at a jump. He took in the situation at a glance.

"We must get the ship before the wind at once, Mr. Swain, and on an even keel or we will never be able to clear away the wreck aloft. Are any of the men lost?"

"I believe not sir," answered Mr. Swain, "but it is hard to tell in this Egyptian darkness. All hands stand by the weather braces there, and haul away lively, boys, as the ship pays off. Drop the foresail there! Hard up with that wheel!" and watching a favorable opportunity, the foresail was dropped and sheated home, by the combined efforts of forty men, though not without nearly blowing from the yard. The gallant ship paid slowly off before the wind and went scudding away, as though glad to escape buffeting with the angry waves of the stormy gulf stream. The pace was tremendous, fully twenty miles an hour. However we now made good weather of it. The angry seas would chase swiftly after us but failing to overtake us, would break and fall away, only to give place to others, who seemed determined on overtaking us, and leap on board over the stern of the ship. After one hour of hard work by both watches in the fore riggin', the foretop gallant mast and wreckage was cleared and sent on deck, just as a faint streak of light on the eastern horizon showed that day was about to break. The last man from aloft was about to jump on deck, when, glancing ahead, he stopped, looked hard, and yelled:

"Breakers ahead!"

The Capt. gave one leap and landed on the poop. One glance was sufficient.

"Hard down! Hard down with that wheel, for your lives, and be damned to you!" he yelled in an agony of excitement.

One of the boat-steerers standing by jumped to help the men at the wheel, and the wheel spun around as, answering nobly to her helm, the gallant ship luffing up quickly, shot by, with no room to spare.

A large 2,000 ton ship, bottom up, the wild waves making white water as they dashed madly over her, the copper sheathing on her bottom glistening in the darkness, the phosphorus in the water gleaming with a chill, dull glare, producing the same effect, on a large scale, that rubbing a match on your hand does in the darkness.

"Meet her! Meet her with the wheel," roared Capt. Coffin, "or we will be aback and go down stern foremost!"

And I noticed his face, naturally red, was as white as a sheet. However the noble ship was soon scudding away again as nicely as ever, and the last we saw of the wreck was as it receded from us astern, looking ugly and grim as it disappeared in the darkness.

It was a close shave. Nothing but quick work and masterly seamanship saved us, for if we had run into that sunken ship on that wild night in the gulf stream, it would have been goodbye. We soon would have gone down the gulf stream with no ship under us, at a speed of five miles an hour—the rate the gulf stream flows.

With the rising of the sun, the wind went down, and by 7 a. m.—eight bells—we shook the reefs out of the topsails. Breakfast being over the captain came on deck, and after looking around the horizon, said:

"Mr. Swain, you may give her the top gallant sails. I am anxious to get through the gulf stream, and man the mastsheads."

As the men jumped on the rail to go aloft, and the ship's crew being on deck, Capt. Coffin raised his voice and said:

"Raise them up, boys. Ten dollars and a pound of tobacco for every whale the fluke chain goes over, and \$500 to the man that raises the most whales on the voyage, that we secure!"

Bounties were given in those days to encourage the sailors to keep a sharp lookout for whales. A man with a good eyesight was a prize, and received better pay than others. Whale-men ship, not for so much a month, but for a share in the voyage or "lay" as it is termed. Thus a man receiving the "75 lay" has one barrel of oil in every seventy-five barrels captured. If they paid wages, sailors would not care whether they ever caught a whale or not. The more oil the more money at the end of the voyage.

By 10 a. m. there was only a whole sail breeze blowing and the ship had sailed out of the indigo colored water of the gulf stream into the blue water of the ocean. The contrast was great. The water of the ocean was alive with fish, skipjacks, albacores, banitas, dolphins, flying fish and also several finchbacks swimming around. We saw several large pieces of squid floating by the ship. Sperm whales feed on squid, and it is a very good sign of whales if you see pieces of squid around.

"Lively ground! Lively ground," said Capt. Coffin to Mr. Chadwick who was standing by, and puffing at a very short black pipe. "We ought to see whales soon now, that we are through the gulf. Keep a sharp lookout up there!"

"Aye, aye, sir," came back the answer from aloft.

However it was not until late in the afternoon before the lookouts aloft raised whales. A large school of sperm whales, off the lee beam two miles and a half.

All was now hurry and bustle on board of the ship. The boat-steerers and each boat's crew placing the line tubs and craft into the boats, and swinging the boats loose from the cranes, ready for lowering. The officers and men hurrying down from the mast heads; the top gallant sails and all light sails taken in so that the ship-keeper's crew would be able to handle the ship easily when the men were away in the boats.

Soon the whales were in sight from the deck, and a fine sight it was. There was fully fifty of them in the school, swimming along side by side, going slowly to leeward, unsuspecting of danger. Now and then a whale would stop and stand on his head in the water with his body two-thirds in the air, swinging his immense flukes first on one side and then on the other, making a complete half circle of his tail in the air. The noise of the concussion when his flukes struck the water could be heard on board of the ship. Others were playing and shooting their immense bodies out of the water, their full length—seventy-five or one hundred feet—and then falling back on the water with a crash, making foam and white water of the blue water of the ocean for a long distance around. It was a magnificent sight, but we had no time to view them longer, for the short-steam order of the captain rang out on the air, to hoist and swing the boats.

The officers were grouped at the mainmast and were preparing to go into their respective boats when the captain spoke up and said, "Mr. Swain." The captain always addresses his remarks to the first officer, and the other officers understand the remarks as addressed to them all. "Mr. Swain, lower away the boats, try to fasten to several of them if you can, look out and do not get stove, if you get fast, work lively on them." "Aye, aye, sir," answered our first officer, "lower away the boats there." There was a grand rush for the boats, by the different crews. There is a great rivalry on board of whalerships among different boat crews. Every day's occurrences are posted up in the log book in the evening by the first officer, and at the end of a voyage the owners read the book and the officer that has the most whales logged against his name stands the best show for promotion in rank and "lay" on following voyages. The five beautiful, light thirty-foot clipper whaleboats seemed to strike the water together. The boat's falls were unhooked and hauled on deck by the shipkeeper's crew. The boat's masts were stepped, sails hoisted, and with every man sitting on the weather gunwale of his boat we sailed swiftly down towards the whales. It was only a few minutes after leaving the ship before we were in the suds. Our boat to the larboard, Mr. Swain's was slightly in the lead, and we glided swiftly in between two of the monsters. "Stand up Clay," said Mr. Swain to his boatsteerers, "but hold your hand until we are up abreast of his hump. Take that big fellow on the fore bow! Now is your time! Give it to him! Bully for you! Give him your second iron! That's right! Slack away on that sheet! What in the devil are you holding on to that sheet for?" The last remark was addressed to me, for when the boatsteerer fastened to the whale it seemed to me as though the boat was standing on end, and instead of letting go of the sheet to the boat sail as I should have done, I was holding on to it with one hand for dear life, and wildly brandishing a boat bucket with the other in my excitement. However as it was my first whale I was excusable. Our whale had sounded and the line was slowly going around the loggerhead, snubbed up hard by our boatsteerer. It kept one man pouring water in the line tub and on the log-

gerhead to keep the rope from firing the boat. The smoke came in clouds from the friction of the surging rope. The boat's head was dragged down to the level of the water, with her stern high in the air by the heavy drag of the sounding whale. The stout, new one-inch manilla rope was as rigid as a bar of iron, as Clay slowly slacked away to keep the whale from taking the boat down with him. Our line was over two-thirds gone from the line tub and still the whale kept on going down.

Mr. Hussey was fast to a large whale. His whale did not sound but was going to windward like a house afire, towing the boat after him at railroad speed.

Mr. Chadwick was unable to fasten to a whale and pulled up close to us to help if necessary.

"Is he going to take your line, Mr. Swain," sung out the second officer.

"I am afraid so. You had better overhaul your line and pass it to me. Work lively! work lively, Mr. Chadwick."

"Aye, aye, sir," answered the second officer, and the waist boat crew prepared to pass us their line.

"Hold on, Mr. Chadwick, we shall not want your line," said Mr. Swain.

This countermanding of his first order was caused by our line suddenly slacking up, and we knew that our whale was about to come to the surface.

Soon we could see the air bubbles rising to the surface and our whale in a few moments broke water not fifty feet from the boat. A fine, large hundred barrel sperm whale. He straightened out his immense body and swept around in a half circle, closely followed by another large whale that had evidently sounded with him.

"Fasten to that loose whale, Mr. Chadwick," roared Mr. Swain in a high state of excitement.

"Lay me on, Clay Bunker! lay me on if you love me! pull ahead boys! bend your backs to those oars."

Our heavy sixteen-foot oak oars seemed to bend double as, answering nobly to our officers' entreaty, we swept the bow of the boat upon the whale's hump and held her there.

It was all Mr. Swain wanted. With a "bully for you boys!" he shoved the long, keen, deadly lance deep down into the whale's body and kept it there for a second or two, churning it around in the vitals of the whale. Soon we had him flying the red flag—spouting blood.

"That will do boys," said Mr. Swain. "Steam all, back water hard, away with her, he is going into his flurry."

The dying agonies of the whale were awful to look at. The sea was dyed with blood and white water for a long distance around, caused by his struggles in his dying agonies. Soon he ceased to struggle, rolled over on his side, cutting out his fin, and our first whale for the Clara Belle Lee was dead. We gave three mighty cheers for our victory, and then glanced around to see what had become of our other boats. Mr. Chadwick's whale was sporting thick blood. He did not have to clear away a lance for the harpooner's irons in fastening to him had found his life.

Mr. Hussey was about three miles up to windward with his whale dead. After about three hours hard work the whales were alongside of the ship with the fluke chains on them, and by 7 p. m.—eight bells in the dog watch—the cutting fall was up and everything was ready for cutting in at daybreak.

Mr. Chadwick stood looking over the ship's side at the dead whales, surging with the rise and fall of the ship at their fluke chains. "So ends an eventful day," he soliloquized. "This morning fighting with a terrific gale of wind in the gulf stream, very nearly destroyed by a wreck; and this evening with \$12,000 worth of good spermaceti alongside the ship. Such is life on the ocean."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

The City Council.

A meeting of the city council was held at the city hall on Saturday the 3d of January. The newly elected officers were seated and the new mayor delivered his message which we print elsewhere in this paper. The treasurer's report was referred back to him for correction. Recorder Thomson was instructed to solicit bids for the city printing during the ensuing year.

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