

PACIFIC WHALES AT PLAY*

"There she blows. There she blows. There she blo-o-ws!" So shouted the mate of the "Morning Star" as that good little missionary ship lay lazily rolling in a dead calm to the leeward of the island of Apemama, one of the Gilbert Islands. These islands lie in the Pacific Ocean across the Equator, from north latitude about 4 degrees, to about the same south latitude, and in the longitude east of Greenwich from 178 degrees to 177 degrees. Apemama (pronounced Ah-pá-mah-mah) is just north of the line. Glad of any excitement we passengers all rushed on deck shouting "where." "Where," said the mate, "anywhere. Look about you." Sure enough, on all sides were the whales, genuine sperm whales. There were hundreds of them. The mate who had followed whaling for eighteen years before shipping on the "Morning Star" said he had never before seen so many in a school. Several came up under the port quarter, carelessly bumping againt the ship. One cow, about forty feet long, rose some thirty feet from the starboard quarter, and her two calves about ten feet long tumbled between her and the ship. A huge bull rose twenty-five yards off the starboard quarter, and lay there ten minutes. We could see his eye—about as big, it seemed, as a pig's eye—and his blowhole, about eight inches long, in a double curve. A sperm whale has but one blowhole, and that on his right side. On his back were barnacles in great bunches as big as bushel baskets; and on his right shoulder a great ugly looking scar, probably made by a harpoon in some fight with a whaler years before. After they had inspected the ship for half an hour or more the whole school began moving off to starboard. When those in the rear of the school were about a mile away the dinner bell rang. But simultaneously with that a shout rose from all on deck. One monster breached; that is he jumped clear out of the sea and fell with a great splash back into the water. Another, and another breached, some of them jumping clear up out of the sea—straight up—and so high that their flukes were clear of the water. Once two great big fellows rose side by side, clear out of the water, and with a lazy movement of their tails, they fell back away from each other. What a splash they made. All was quiet for a few minutes, and then the flukes stuck up out of the water, as if a hundred or more whales were standing on their heads under several acres of

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water, and then thrashing up and down they churned the sea into foam as they waved us their farewell Chautauqua salute with their tails. The show was over and we went down to dinner.

Whales — sperm whales usually — are seen around the Gilbert Islands. Once quite a school of them rose around my boat as I was returning to my house from a visit to a neighboring island. Ships do not often go there now and hunt them, though the hunting is getting better these days. Sixty years ago whalers would go to the Arctic in the Summer, and to the Line in Winter. West of the Gilbert Islands pearl shells are taken by the natives, and sold to trading vessels. Some are found about the Gilbert Islands, but not many. The trade is mostly copra or dried cocoanut meat. Forty-five years ago this was entirely in the hands of the English. Vessels came from Sydney, N. S. W., for copra. But later the Germans began to cut into the trade, the large firm of Hermsheim & Co., of Hamburg, establishing a station in the Marshall Islands, some three hundred miles northwest of the Gilbert Islands. They also gathered many valuable and beautiful shells, exquisitely beautiful and delicate pink and purple coral in the Marshall Islands. Some beautiful red, pink and yellow corals were also obtained at the Island of Apemama, of the Gilbert group. The natives take in exchange for those things prints, calicoes, clothing and tobacco. Schooners and brigantines of two to three hundred tons are best suited for that trade.

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