A VISIT TO NANTUCKET.

To the Editors of the Evening Post:

On the afternoon of one of the hottest days experienced in New York this summer, we took refuge on board the Fall River steamboat, bound on a trip to Cape Cod. The change from the overpowering sultriness of the city to the health-freighted coolness of the Sound can scarcely be done justice to. There are few more charming trips than the one from New York, eastward, through the Sound. The first few miles, traversing the environs of the city, are particularly interesting, and, were the interior administration of the establishments on Blackwell's Island and in other localities equal to their architectural aspect and neatness, the city might rejoice in the display of its institutions.

To any one who has never given his attention to the history of military engineering there is something in Fort Schuyler, on Throgg's Neck, more than strikes the eye of the ordinary observer, or even that of the soldier; I allude to the flanking *defences*—bastionettes, or tourelles—which serve as salients to the front. Their position reminded me very much of the flanking buttresses, or spur walls, of the ancient Egyptian military architecture, while their shape recalled the period when the round flanking-tower was merging into the angular bastion of San Michele, at Verona, the germ of the present system. Just such rounded, casemated or double-tier bastions thrust themselves forth from the enceinte of Soleure, or Solothurn, in Switzerland, and flank its gates.

After landing at Newport the steamer reached Fall River between five and six o'clock A. M. Breakfast was served on board, and then at a quarter past seven A. M. we took the Old Colony or Cape Cod Railroad, which brought us about eleven A. M. to Hyannis.

Along the route of this, the Cape Cod Railroad, what seemed most surprising was the existence of such a number of iron foundries and glass factories in a district which produces none of the raw materials requisite, and supplies nothing but labor. For the former, the ore and coal are brought from Pennsylvania, and then the iron is carried to New York for a market. Notwithstanding all this double expense for transportation, &c., the owners have made fortunes at the very time that the iron foundries of Pennsylvania were failing, although the soil, as it were, on which the works were built, produced all the necessary materials to keep them in operation. The same remark holds good, in a great measure, in regard to the glass works. How can this be accounted for?

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At Hyannis we were storm-bound by the miniature deluge which, in the latter part of August, swept through this, so to speak, isothermal region, at a place which few persons ever heard mentioned before, and we certainly never did until we "chanced" down in this region. And yet it is a place of some note to seafaring men—a harbor of refuge as well as the terminus of a railroad, and connected with Nantucket by steamboat. Sportsmen, also, should regard it with a favorable eye, for the throat of the harbor is one of the best blue-fishing grounds on our coast, so much so as to be almost "famous." The Island Home, Captain Nathan Mantel, formerly a whaling ship owner, which plies to and fro, is a craft well worthy remembrance, not only as regards seaworthiness, but also her obliging, intelligent and agreeable officers and crew, who, unlike the complements of most coasting steamers, are regular "old salts." To Mr. Robinson, of this boat, I am indebted for the discovery of Macy's very scarce records of Nantucket, which contain a fund of interesting information.

From Hyannis to Nantucket the distance in a straight line is about thirty miles, but the course followed by the steamboat makes it some three miles farther. The passage occupies, on an average, two hours and eighteen minutes, but is performed much quicker with a favoring wind and tide. Nothing can be more delightful in calm and clear weather, for the tourist no sooner looses sight of the main land than he perceives, from eighteen to twenty miles away, the two prominent steeples of the largest Nantucket churches rising out of the water, and then, gradually, the glistening crescent-shaped shore, from Great or Sandy Point, the north-eastern extremity of the island, to Smith's Point, its most southwestern, a trend of some thirty miles. From the sea both the island and the town of Nantucket present quite an agreeable appearance, but once on the shore and things look rather desolate. The streets are grass-grown to an extent which is the best evidence of the almost entire removal or decay of the business which once rendered this place so celebrated. But its present decline is not more wonderful to a close observer than its former attainment of such a commercial eminence and opulence, since the island is unproductive, and the harbor mud bottom, strange to say, in this region of sands never afforded over fourteen feet of water. On the bar itself—which stretches its hard, kelp-spotted sand completely across the entrance—there is never over eight or nine feet at the highest tides. When the place was at the height of its prosperity, with full cargoes, vessels were lifted over the bar—as at Amsterdam, in Holland—by means of *Camels*, whose operation was so expensive that nothing but a very lucrative business would justify their employment and maintenance in serviceable condition. Consequently, when trade decreased, they were soon permitted to go to destruction. Only a few years since, Nantucket is said to have possessed, according to different accounts, from 150 to 160 ocean whaling vessels. In 1841 the exact number was 159, of which 78 were ships, 6 brigs, 14 schooners, and 59 sloops; 160 ocean and 59 coasting vessels. Now, the highest estimate places the fleet at twenty; and even these are obliged to quit the harbor only half prepared for sea, and are towed over to Old or Edgar-Town, on Martha's Vineyard, to complete their fitting out and lading. Among the many casualties which combined to break down this famous old seaport, the most irreparable was a terrible fire which ruined many of the inhabitants, and drove a great number away from the island. Part of the burnt district has never been built up again. Many of those burnt out moved off, and the California gold fever is said to have enticed away full one-third of the remaining male population. The only other town or village on the island is a sort of modern Pompeii, named Siasconset, built on a bluff about fifty feet high, at the eastern extremity of the island, looking out immediately upon the Atlantic Ocean. Thence to Europe no land intervenes. This may be said to be the summer abode of those Nantuckeers whose means enables them to enjoy the luxury of a double residence, likewise of a few fishermen who gain a scanty subsistence by shark-fishing, for the sake of the oil derived from their livers and the manure afforded by their carcasses. It was once the seat of quite an extensive cod fishery. It is said that not over fourteen or fifteen families remain over winter in this queer, large village, which could accommodate ten times that number in its seventy tenements. There is a large hotel for the accommodation of bathers here, but it is shut up, and has not been open this season. A striking illustration of the primitive ways and morals of the population is the common use of *wooden* latches to the window-shutters *on the outside*. This is the queerest place into which a traveller ever rambled, being (built true old Saxon fashion) without regular streets. Were it only a little larger a stranger would be as much in need of a guide as if he had ventured into a labyrinth. What is more, the largest row of houses is so close to the sea that only a short time since a gale washed down several, and it would seem as if another heavy storm could not fail to sweep away a half dozen more. Beyond, and in full sight of this place, stretches that complication of reefs and shoals which renders this coast the dread of the mariner, and standing on the edge you can discern on either hand the [illegible] which denotes the existence of hidden dangers, beginning half a mile to seaward and reaching as far as the eye can distinguish.

Just after leaving Nantucket for this type of Goldsmith's Deserted Village the traveller is arrested by a large sign-board, whose inscription seems a greater joke than ever entered the mind of a contributor to *Punch*, *Yankee Doodle*, or any other comic journal. This sign bears in large letters the admonition, "Don't cut the Roads." Now, considering that the road is bounded by the will of the driver and traverses a sandless tract, it would be difficult for a stranger to decide where the highway actually ran in order to avoid cutting it. Then again, the space which most individuals would consider the road, say a hundred and fifty feet in width, is so deeply and thoroughly rutted that it would puzzle the very best driver to add a single new rut to the multitude of old ones. A very skilful and patient whip might accomplish the feat—none other need attempt it. One of the inhabitants, whose attention was drawn to these facts, fairly exploded when he arrived at a comprehension of the case.

As there is an agricultural society and agricultural grounds upon the island, likewise farm-houses and enclosures, it is to be supposed that the land may be rendered productive at a large outlay, but with the exception of a few small patches, the interval between Nantucket and Siasconset is one dreary waste of sand, sparsely grown with wild dune, or beach or sea-shore grass, whortleberry and blackberry bushes. The island is said to have once been covered with forests, but at present trees of any size are perfect rarities. Efforts, however, are making to remedy this in a measure, and we passed several plantations of thousands of diminutive yellow pines, brought hither from the adjacent mainland, whose coast itself can boast of but very few respectable trees.

Nor must I dismiss Nantucket without describing the "leathern conveniency" which conveyed us over its apparent desert "plains"—a district which, if it had been covered with verdure, would have been beautiful in its undulations, and the peculiar disposition of the land, subsiding here and there to pretty little curious ponds, and dotted with cattle and sheep which pick up a scanty subsistence in its swales. Formerly sheep-rearing was a source of comparative wealth to the people, and the sheep-shearing a holiday kept with greater *eclat* than the Fourth of July. Booths filled with commodities made it like a fair, and music and dancing a perfect *fete*. Well, our carriage was one of the old-fashioned lofty pumpkin-shaped coaches—such, perhaps, as the fairy transmuted the pumpkin into for the use of Cinderella—in vogue a generation since, and had been doing service upon the island twenty-five years. The harness was in keeping, consisting of not a strap more than was absolutely necessary for draft; saddle and breeching there was none, and as to solidity there was enough raw material in each pair of traces to furnish material for a whole set of light wagon harness. Finally the horses were equal to the rest of the establishment. One was a horse in spirit at all events, but his mate, I am satisfied, was intended for a cow, for nothing but a cow ever had such a gait, or flourished its legs about so circularly awkward. When we got out upon the downs and plunged into the ruts and sand, I feared that our cattle would never bring us back. But thanks to four quarts of Indian meal I charitably bestowed upon them, and the indefatigable exercise of our John's whip, they did bring us safe back to the Ocean House, where we found excellent quarters as to cleanliness, sufficiency and attention.

A few remarks, suggested by Obed Macy's scarce history of his native island, will form an appropriate conclusion to this account of our visit.

Its formation of drift or sand, with here and there scattered beds of blue clay, and also of peat, sparse boulders of granite, few of which can be termed rocks, and scattered stones, appears to have early suggested to each of its inquiring inhabitants,

"Whence sprang my native isle?"

This question and its consideration has been embodied in a few glib verses by a fellow-citizen, of which we quote three:

"Was it from ocean's coral caves,
Toss'd by old Neptune to the waves,
A gift in every gale?
And will he not, some future day,
In wonder at its lengthen'd stay,
Back hurl it to the sea?

"Or was it severed from the shore
Of neighboring lands, in days of yore,
By strong volcanic shock;
Hurled into the Atlantic main
A barren sandy, dreary plain,
A bit without a rock?

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"Hence! all ye light, fantastic schemes,
Turning with fancy's flimsy dreams,
No more my thoughts beguile.
It is not in your power to tell
Who tow'd it up on ocean's swell,
From what empyrean realms it fell,
Or whence my native isle."

That it was once comparatively productive is attested by the crops garnered in the last century. One hundred years since it exported corn, wheat and other products, after supplying a population larger than it boasts at present. To be sure its inhabitants depended upon the sea in a great measure for their subsistence, but still vegetables and grain must have constituted the greater portion of it. Then it was well wooded, also. Now, groups of trees of any size are almost curiosities. There is no doubt the island gradually decreases in size, but the diminution is so irregular that it furnishes no data for a calculation as to when or whether the island will be utterly swallowed up by the sea. To the north the inroads of the ocean are more apparent than in the east and south. To the west there appears to be no change of any consequence. However, Mr. Macy leaves the impression upon his reader that the island must eventually disappear, and winds up his chapter on this interesting subject in these words, with which we take leave of our readers: "In consequence of hard and repeated storms, such has been the waste, that the final destruction would seem to be the easy work of a very few centuries."

Axenon.