

75.—SOME NOTES ON WHALES.

By JAMES TEMPLE. BROWN.

[From Letters to Prof. S. F. Baird.]

A CALF FINBACK ASHORE.

Several days ago a male finback calf became entangled in the net of a weir in Provincetown Harbor, and not being able to free itself was drowned. The blubber, which is thin and poor, but exceedingly tough and "leathery," filled two and a half ordinary flour barrels.

The baleen, in its natural state firmly attached to the gum and some adhering flesh, is of a light horn color and in a good state of preservation. Both sides of baleen have been put in pickle and Captain Atwood will send it to you if you care for it.

PROVINCETOWN, MASS., *October 14, 1882.*

WHALING ON HORSEBACK.

Shortly after my arrival I was taken with the sperm-whale grampus fever, and finding so many conflicting opinions, both as to the species and the point at which it came ashore, I resolved to investigate the matter.

I called on Capt. N. E. Atwood and learned that you had asked him to procure the skeleton if possible.* Captain Atwood told me that he had made arrangements to visit the outside of the cape yesterday, but owing to the heavy rain and easterly wind he was compelled to postpone the trip. I therefore made inquiry and found that the grampus had been washed ashore below Life Saving Station No. 9, near Parmet River. I interested Mr. Jonathan Cook, proprietor of the Long Point Oil Works, and in him found a ready worker. I proposed that he and I should start out and find "that fish," as he invariably termed it. His brief reply was: "If that fish is ashore, and if Professor Baird wants him, he will have to go to Washington." We mapped out our proposed journey, and found that in going and coming and in traversing the beach, we would be compelled to travel fully 25 miles. The roads were heavy, and we decided upon horses under the saddle as our means

* Captain Atwood had written to Professor Baird October 7, 1882, as follows: "Capt. Jonathan Cook says the blubber was brought to him, and that it was not a sperm whale which came ashore on the back of the cape. It had a dorsal fin, while a sperm whale has only a hump on its back. Besides, he thought the jaw different, but could not tell much about it, as the man who found it cut it up with an ax, and brought the blubber to the oil works in a broken condition. It was very poor and yielded only 12 gallons of oil. I have since seen a man from Truro who said the animal came ashore on the outside of the cape back of South Truro."—C. W. S.

of conveyance. We started this morning at 8.30 and returned at 4 p. m., after a cold and blustering ride in an easterly wind.

At this point I shall digress merely to show the reasonings of a man who is so well acquainted with this coast. Mr. Cook's argument was that if "that fish" came ashore near Parinet Harbor, on the "back side" of the cape, the carcass, or that which might be left of it, would certainly work to the "nor'ward," following the bend of the coast, and, judging from the time it had been ashore, and taking into consideration the point from which the wind had been blowing "fresh," he was fully satisfied that we would find it about 3 miles to the north of the point at which it first landed. He then pulled his hat over his eyes, stuck spurs into his horse, and away he went at a lively canter. He kept up this gait until we reached North Truro, a distance of 6 miles, where, much to my relief, we stopped to water the horses. Then away we went again, his sure-footed horse carrying him over sand flats, marshy grounds, through scrub pines and horribly distorted oaks, and I following helplessly.

Having arrived at a blind path leading through a gulch which he called "Long Nook Valley," he said he guessed "we would head him off here," and away we sped across the cape to the sea-shore. We descended a precipitous bank of sand, and felt the spray from the thundering surf which was madly dashing against the beach. My guide, pulling his hat closer over his eyes, plunged the spurs deeper in the flanks of his horse, which, elevating its rear legs and twisting its tail in a most peculiar manner, led me to believe that it premeditated throwing its rider into the surf.

After riding for about one-quarter of a mile to the south, Mr. Cook reined up before the head of the fish, which, true to his predictions, had been washed ashore 3 miles north of its first landing place. I immediately dismounted, and by means of a piece of driftwood cleared away the sand and turned over the mass, which proved to be a portion of the upper jaw or cranium of the cetacean. A fisherman who was picking up driftwood near by told us that no other fish of this kind had come ashore recently. He also said that he had seen the fish; that it was not a finback, nor a black fish, but that he supposed it was a young sperm whale. Upon questioning him he said that he had been living on that coast for sixty years, and had never seen anything like it before.

The cranium was far from perfect, having evidently been severed from the body in a very rough manner, being fractured and hacked at either end. We, however, looked carefully around for other portions of the carcass, marked the spot, and went on down the beach until we arrived at Station No. 9, having found the cranium about 2 miles north of this point, between No. 9 and Highland light. From the captain of Station No. 9, we learned that the remains of the fish had been washed out to sea, during the night, shortly after the blubber had been

removed. I was unwilling to think that the fish was irrevocably lost, and again questioned him. He evidently perceived that I was in doubt, and added that two of his men had seen the fish shortly after it had been killed, and returning to the station described it, and the peculiarity of its head. One of the crew who had not seen the fish, an old whaleman, said he thought it must be a young sperm whale.

I regarded this loss as a serious misfortune, for, from all accounts, it was evidently the same species that was found at North Dennis and Newport, which I believe is *Hyperödon bidens*.

The captain says that he has not known it to blow so heavy on that coast for ten years, and this may explain its presence on the beach, as well as its sudden disappearance, and it stands to reason, according to the theories of the fishermen, that it should, in an ordinary gale, either be washed upon the beach beyond the surf, or "work to the nor'ward," as did the cranium.

The cetacean evidently ventured too near the coast, and getting caught in the surf was "pitch-poled" (turned end over end) ashore, and becoming blinded and smothered in the sand and "trash" stirred up by the surf, was thrown helplessly upon the beach.

Black Manuel, a resident Portuguese fisherman, saw it struggling in the surf, and, with the assistance of five or six other men, caught hold of the fish while it was "fluking it lively," endeavoring to regain its native element. The men had all they could do to hold the fish until they finally succeeded in killing it with jack-knives. Having stripped off the blubber, Black Manuel detached the lower jaw, which is hopelessly gone. He then "cooked" it with the blubber and cut off some of the "lean" (flesh) to feed to his chickens. To this last operation Mr. Cook attributes the loss of the remains, as he says "when the lean was cut off, holes were made in the bilge (side) of the fish through which the water entered and worked the carcass to pieces." It is possible that some fragmentary remains may be found to the north of the place where the cranium now lies.

Mr. Cook made 12 gallons of oil from the blubber and lower jaw, and I am of the opinion that something definite may be determined in regard to the species by the gravity of the oil. The oil of a sperm whale grampus should have the same weight as that of the sperm whale. I am going to Mr. Cook's factory to-morrow to test the oil, and will send you a small bottle of the same.

Not being able to bring the cranium to Provincetown on horseback, and as our horses were pretty well tired out, and feeling satisfied that we could give Captain Atwood more definite information for his plans for to-morrow, we returned home. I immediately called on Captain Atwood, and requested him to have it brought in, if in his opinion it was worth preserving. We will go to-morrow to the point where his informant told him the fish came ashore, which is near Station No. 7, to the north of Highland light, and see the keeper, Captain Fisher, who, ac-

ording to report, has the flukes of this fish. From Station No. 7, Captain Atwood will follow the coast south until he comes to the cranium. This will cover the entire range of the fish and its fragments.

PROVINCETOWN, MASS., *October 15, 1882.*

I went to the oil works to-day to test and obtain a sample of the oil. It was not necessary to test the oil, as it had congealed, and was pure sperm. Mr. Cook, proprietor of the works, pronounced it oil from a "sperm whale calf," while others contended that the animal was the sperm whale grampus. At the factory Mr. Cook took some of the oil, placed it in a woolen cloth, and in the absence of an oil-press, placed the mass in a common iron vise and screwed it up tight. The oil ran freely through the cloth, leaving the pure sperm. The sample I send may have a peculiar odor since it was "cooked" by the steam process.

It may be of interest to add that the bones of the finback whales are steamed in order that they may be employed in the manufacture of a fertilizer. The ear bones are also steamed, but they are the only bones in the whale which are not affected by steam.

PROVINCETOWN, MASS., *October 16, 1882.*

FURTHER EXAMINATION OF THE STRANDED CETACEAN.

Captain Fisher, of Life-saving Station No. 7, Peaked Hill Bar, tells me that the remains of the fish came ashore near his station shortly after they were washed off the beach where they originally stranded south of Station No. 9. He states that they were then in good order. He to-day conducted Captain Atwood and myself to the flukes which we found in an advanced state of decomposition. These I measured. Across the flukes from tip to tip was 47 inches. The depth of the flukes from the last vertebra was 26 inches, and the outside measurement, from the tip to the last vertebra, was 31 inches.

Attached to the caudal fin, or rather forming the central portion of it, is about 10 inches of the vertebral column. This is about all the bone in this part of the animal except, perhaps, some very small bones forming the ramifications to both corners of the flukes. These, however, are composed largely of a cartilaginous substance, while the flukes are exceedingly tough blubber. The flukes were about half a mile north of Station No. 7, 10 miles north of where the fish originally stranded, and about 7 miles from where we found the cranium on the 15th instant.

After Captain Fisher and his men cut off the flukes the rest of the carcass disappeared. They thought it was washed off by the sea, but to ascertain if possibly it was covered by the shifting sands, Captain Fisher will probe the beach with a crowbar. He will also keep a look-out northward, as they might be washed ashore again. He will take care of the flukes, and should you care for the vertebræ he will remove the flesh and forward them.

No one seems to have attached the least value to the fish except the

Portuguese, who was so anxious to obtain the blubber. Hence it was left to the mercies of the waves, and, appearing here and there on the coast, gave rise to different and conflicting reports.

HABITS OF THE SPERM WHALE GRAMPUS.

When the whalemén discover a school of these little, active creatures, from the lookout at the mast-head, believing them to be young sperm whales, they usually lower the boats for a capture. They are very wild and difficult to approach, and are consequently very rarely taken. When struck with a harpoon they suddenly "turn flukes" and descend to the depths below with astonishing celerity, taking all the line allotted to one boat, usually 300 fathoms. In this way fish, harpoon, and line are all lost. As soon as the whalemén perceive that the school is not composed of sperm whales they draw off, and the sportive fish pursues the even tenor of its way. Even when taken, as they are occasionally, they yield very little oil, on account of their smallness.

The whalemén distinguish the sperm whale grampus or "square-headed grampus," as they term it, from the young of *Physeter macrocephalus* by the spout. The former blows oftener at a rising, and the time of respiration is much shorter or "quicker."

The captains of these life-saving stations are generally just the men to know all about such rare specimens being cast upon the coast. The crews are often composed of fishermen and whalemén. Capt. Isaac J. Fisher, of Station No. 7, was at one time the captain of a whale-ship. As these men patrol the beach they have time and facilities for rendering you assistance.

PROVINCETOWN, MASS., October 18, 1882.

PLANS FOR OBTAINING HEAD AND SKELETON OF A SPERM WHALE.

The heads, including the case, junk, and white-horse, of all whales under 25 or 30 barrels, can, by the improved windlass power, be raised from the water and hoisted on deck, where they are dissected. The lower jaw-bone is wrenched from its socket separately and also landed on the deck. The heads of the larger whales are usually dissected in the water. It would, therefore, be easy, after saving the junk and the contents of the case, to preserve the osseous formation; but I am told it would be a difficult matter to obtain the skeleton of the body. The greatest difficulty seems to me, however, to lie in the fact that none of the fathers or forefathers of the present whalemén ever did such a thing.

I have been told that during July and August sperm whales are occasionally found off Cape Henry, Fortress Monroe, Hatteras, and even Charleston, S. C. Two boat crews could be hired from New Bedford and Provincetown, be taken on board the Fish Hawk, or such other vessel as you might indicate, and make a trip to those waters. Having killed the whale, it would be lashed to the sides of the Fish Hawk, flukes foremost, and towed to the beach at high tide. It could be photographed,

and during the process of dissection photographs could be made of the case, junk, white-horse, &c. Such a cruise could be made in about two weeks, and skeletons enough secured to supply the National Museum and perhaps to stagnate the market. Of course the boats' crews should be selected with the greatest care, and each be commanded by a competent officer.

NANTUCKET, MASS., *October 21, 1882.*

76.—A STRAY COD UP THE HUDSON.

By BARNET PHILLIPS.

[From a letter to Prof. S. F. Baird.]

Under date of yesterday Capt. Jacob LeRoy, of New Hamburg, N. Y., writes:

"The codfish that I caught here was taken in an ice net 100 meshes by 80 meshes square [long and wide] seined in two-thirds [contracted one-third on the cork-line]. This fish laid in the slack of net in a 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ -sized mesh. It was a female, all spawned out, and weighed 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds."

TIMES OFFICE,

New York, January 19, 1883.

77.—SUCCESS OF THE COD GILL-NET FISHERY.

[From the Cape Ann Weekly Advertiser, March 2, 1883.]

LARGE CODFISH.—Schooner Blue Jay, Capt. Charles Ellis, of this port, engaged in the Ipswich Bay net cod-fishery, landed a fare of 135 codfish at Rockport last week, which weighed 4,135 pounds, averaging over 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds each. This was the largest average by the fare that we have recorded.

In 1881, the schooner Morrill Boy, Capt. Russell G. Gill, jr., took on one trip, net-fishing, 319 fish, weighing 9,570 pounds, an average of 30 pounds. Last year, schooner David A. Osier, Capt. Warren Osier, landed a fare of 228 codfish, taken in nets, which weighed 6,500 pounds, an average of 28 pounds each. Two of these fish weighed 98 and 96 pounds respectively.

The net cod-fishing industry in Ipswich Bay continues to be a success, and it is probable that this method will become a permanent one in the shore fishery. It has now been pursued three seasons and has demonstrated its advantages over trawl fishing, in the large saving of expense for bait and the larger size of the fish secured, the smaller fish escaping through the meshes of the nets.