

How Two Newfoundland Vessels and Crews

Went to the Seal Fishery—One From Lisbon, Portugal, and the Other From Liverpool, England.

(H. F. SHORTIS.)

For the past forty years or more I have endeavored, to the best of my ability, to preserve the records of our former great sailing fleet and their crews, in their battles with the ice, the winds, and waves of the Arctic Ocean, and I flatter myself I have succeeded fairly well. These were the days when the hardihood, agility and seamanship of our countrymen shone forth in all its glory. The minds of the younger generation cannot grasp the adventures and escapes of our forefathers. Nothing seemed to daunt their energy, daring and enterprise. I have been an eye-witness, on several occasions, when they conquered all the storms and dangers of the Atlantic during winter months, and brought their ships into port, under juncos, when seamen of other nationalities would have abandoned them in mid-ocean, or perhaps, have lost their ships with all on board. They were indeed a hardy and fearless race, and well may we be proud of them. Their capability as sailors, their hardihood and contempt of danger, were fully recognized on both sides of the Atlantic, and it is no wonder that their services were eagerly sought after by the officials of the American Civil War, when 2,000 Newfoundland fishermen-sailors were employed during that period of fratricidal strife, and were ever to be found in the places of danger and responsibility. They had no fear, and they were fully trained on the square-riggers, many of them owned and commanded by their fathers or relatives, and when they went abroad to seek adventure they were always accepted

and well did they perform their tasks.

SAILED FROM LISBON.

But while our great sailing fleet always cleared for the seal fishery from the respective ports to which they belonged, there are, at least, two instances in which two of them sailed, one from Lisbon and the other from Liverpool. I knew the particulars of the vessel that sailed from Lisbon, many years ago, but it was only lately that I came across the particulars of the vessel that sailed from Liverpool to prosecute the seal fishery—and I think I am safe in saying these are the only two instances in the history of our country in which such romantic voyages have been made. I shall now give the details of the famous voyages, and I am sure it will be read with interest by the rising generation, and show the metal of which our ancestors were made. Captain Frank Taylor was master of the brigantine "Providence," and was one of the most successful and resourceful masters that ever fished out of Newfoundland, as the following story will abundantly prove. In the winter of 1837 the Taylors of Carbonara had about 2,500 quintals of fish held over for the Spring, but hearing of exceptionally high prices offered at Lisbon, they were tempted to market it, fearing these prices might slump before long. Our hero, Frank Taylor, volunteered to go across with it in his brigantine, the "Providence." He recognized that his chances of prosecuting the Seal fishery that Spring were very slim, and it was an impossibility to get back to Carbonara in time to put out for the "awiles." He made up his mind that there was one chance

for him, and that was to fit out his vessel at once, take all his guns and gear with him, and endeavor to return home on the back of the ice before the Seal fishery was over. He did this, and shipped twenty "picked" men with him, and you will see he had able and willing hands to drive the old vessel for all she was worth. After a good run across he sighted land in the latitude of the Bay of Biscay. He was met at once by a French man-of-war, who was then in search of a Barbary Rover, who had committed great depredations on French shipping. The man-of-war boarded him, and finding an extra large crew of men, made search of the hold and found guns for every man and a large supply of ammunition. There was no use in Capt. Frank giving any explanation—they only laughed at the thought of his going to the seal fishery, and considered it a miserable joke he was trying to play on them. Capt. Frank saw it was all up with him, and his only regret was that he had not offered fight to this d— Frenchman from the first, as he felt sure that with his able crew he could have kept them off. Anyway, they were aboard of him now, and took them prisoners, and carried them to Brest (France) as pirates.

TAKEN PRISONERS BY FRENCH.

Capt. Taylor at once got into communication with the British Ambassador at Paris, who fortunately recognized that Capt. Taylor was telling

him the truth, and, like a true-born Briton, he at once went to Brest to the rescue of our hero. It was only after a period of very intricate diplomacy that he managed to convince the Frenchmen that they had made a mistake, and proved to them by the 2,500 quintals of codfish on board that the vessel was on a voyage from Newfoundland to a European market, and eventually secured the release of the brigantine "Providence" and her crew. Capt. Taylor continued his voyage to Lisbon and sold his fish at an excellent price. Any ordinary person would have been daunted with these delays, and glad to take it easy going home. It was now very near the first of March, and Capt. Taylor addressed his hardy crew, and told them there was still time to get a load of "awiles." He told them he had never missed a spring at the ice since he was twelve years of age, and the fire was in his blood now when he thought of all their folks at Carbonara getting ready for the slaughter. He wasn't going to miss it that year if they would work like he was ready to work himself. With such a leader what was a crowd of Newfoundlanders to say but that they were with him to the last and would carry the masts out of her if she didn't get there in time. They now set out from Lisbon for the seal fishery with the best wishes of their Portuguese friends, and probably a good jar to keep their feet warm. It was a hard voyage back, and many a time they had her rail under, but their spirits revived when they reached the latitude of the Funks, about the first of April, just in time to meet the seals drifting South, so they had been caught in Green Bay that Spring.

FORTUNA AUDACES JUVAT.

It shows how success will come to those who work for it, and fortune favors the brave. While it was no easy work for the men, still everything came their way, and although it seems incredible these twenty men secured 5,500 seals, and brought the old ship "Providence" safely into St. John's. One little incident that many might think not worth relating, but as I vouch for the truth of all, I want to show how exact Capt. Taylor was in all he tried to do. He hailed for 5,500, and only turned out 5,559, but found that the crew had

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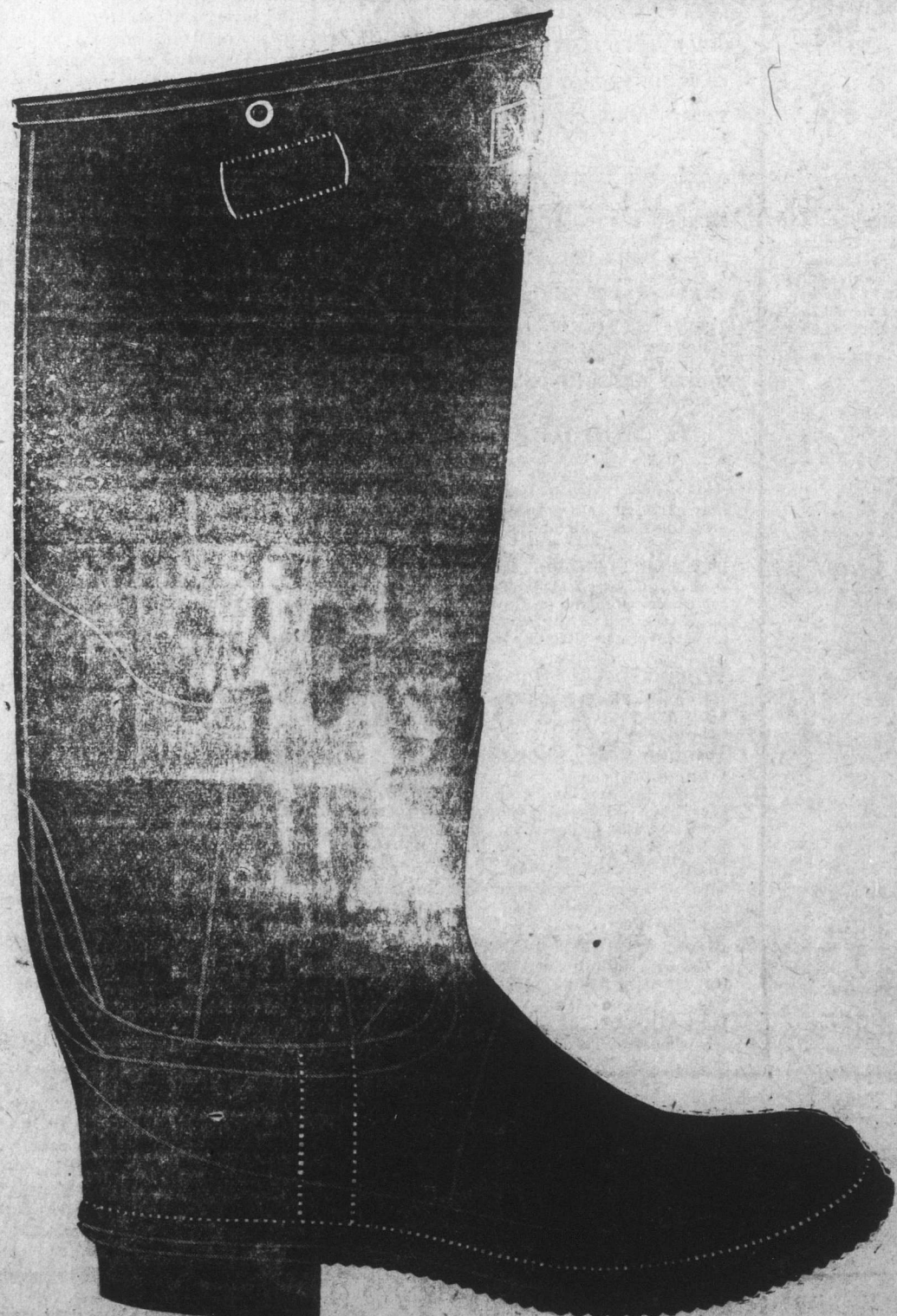
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rendered the fat from one seal to trim their lamps. You may be sure that Capt. Taylor's exploits were repeated in every store and office round St. John's, and he was the hero of the day. Such a voyage to the seal fishery has never been heard of before or since. I am not sure whether it was in the old Chamber of Commerce or not, but anyway the Mercantile body of St. John's had a special meeting for Capt. Taylor, praised his pluck, determination and adroitness in bringing success out of what appeared to be certain failure. They presented him with a "Union Jack" made of silk, with their compliments, as a souvenir of his famous exploit. In conclusion I have to acknowledge that I procured the facts of this story from the manuscript of my old friend, the late Claudius Watts, Esq. As I stated before there is a mine of historical facts to be gathered from that source still. Modern conditions have eliminated the dangers of the seal fishery to a great extent, but the success of our hardy fishermen who carried on this fishery during the first half of the past century will ever remain one of the most glorious periods of our history.

AN HISTORICAL EPOCH.

I shall now give another episode that happened in the fifties of the past century, which also forms an epoch in our country's history, and would be treated as a romance emanating from the fertile mind of a Marryat or some other popular writer, were I not fortified with all the facts and details of the notable event:—

BRIGHT IRON DUKE.

Fitted Out And Sailed From Liverpool For Seal fishery.

About the year 1857, young Capt. Joe Houghlan in the brigantine "Iron Duke," owned by S. March & Sons, took a load of oil to Liverpool, and after discharging cargo, Capt. Joe telegraphed to London and Greenock for the agents to hunt up all the Newfoundland sailors who were in those ports. His object was to procure twenty-five men to prosecute the seal fishery on his way out to St. John's. They succeeded in mustering up the required number, amongst them being such hardy, experienced and practical seamen as William Galway, Larry Grace, John Redmond, Peter Aspell and others, who were in the barque "Snowdon," owned by Messrs. Job Bros. & Co., who were paid off there. They purchased boats, pokers, guns and all the necessary paraphernalia for prosecuting the seal fishery in Liverpool, and cleared at the Custom House for Newfoundland. They left Liverpool in February, and made a quick run out to the Funks, having struck the ice about 150 miles off the above island. When they arrived at the icefields amongst the great sailing fleet, the outpost sentinels were astonished at the beautiful boats with which they were supplied, and upon hearing her exclaim: "dames, there's some skipper of she." The boats were of a far superior quality to our regular punts, and

were built of cedar, under Joe Houghlan's inspection. They had oak frames. Notwithstanding the many difficulties, they succeeded in securing 1,200 seals, old and young, and the crew shared a fairly good amount of wind. They arrived in St. John's about 25th April, and the entire population turned out to give them a hearty welcome, and young Capt. Joe was the hero of the hour. He was late in getting on the coast, and was driven South, with the continuance of Northwest gales. It must be remembered that the good ship "Iron Duke" had to force through 150 or 200 miles of ice to the Westward, in the teeth of heavy sales of wind. Only for the crew, he had Capt. Joe could never have succeeded. All

the men were used to the seal fishery, but like the majority of our sailors in those days, after arriving from Labrador or shore fishery, they shipped on board foreign vessels, and made voyages to Brazil, the Mediterranean and elsewhere. Many of them, who were paid off in England and Scotland, remained away for years, finding it difficult to get a ship returning to Newfoundland, and others, unfortunately, shipped on deeper water voyages, as the sailors call it, to India, China, Japan, Australia and other countries, and have never returned. Being noted for their hardihood, agility and seamanship, they were eagerly sought after by all masters in every port they visited. I know a few

who returned after twenty, thirty, even forty years, having sailed the greater part of the globe.

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