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From Out the Storied Past.

BUSINESS 100 YEARS AGO.

(H. F. SHORTIS.)

ARTICLE 6.

In my last communication I made reference to some of the old sealers, planters and master-mariners who made an epoch of their own in the history of our country as heroes of the frozen pans. I shall now endeavour to give a short biographical sketch of a few of them, fearing that in continuing my communications I may overlook them, having so much to describe in the invaluable letters of Mr. Kelson. To my mind these letters of Mr. Kelson are the real history of our country, as they embody within themselves the manners and customs of our people, the various business transactions, the fluctuations in trade, the chief articles of food and raiment in use, the means of communication with the outside world and the markets, and scores of other interesting matters which give us a thorough knowledge of the manner in which our ancestors lived and conducted their business 100 years ago. Another interesting item in these letters is how clearly they show the judgment and discrimination of our fellow-men with regard to character, the foresight displayed in providing against all possible future difficulties, the grasp possessed by them with regard to the markets abroad and the effects wars, epidemics, etc., would have upon the prices of our products. They seemed to be prepared for any and every emergency and warded off loss where others would be completely wiped out in the commercial cataclysms which have occurred at various periods in our history. With the very limited means of communication at their disposal in those days it is wonderful how they managed to keep in touch with the foreign markets, and conduct their business successfully, and, in many cases, pile up large fortunes, some of them retiring to England, Ireland and Scotland and subsequently occupying prominent positions in the political and civic affairs of these countries. We have only to look back at the Kemps, Bowrings, Grieves and many others to establish the truth of my statement. It has often been stated by so-called historians and during political campaigns that the merchants of Newfoundland were a hard-hearted, callous and grasping body of men. I deny this accusation from the experience in my own life, and I have it from those who have long passed away that our merchants, **as a rule,** were kind and considerate to those who dealt **honestly** with them, and were ever ready to extend a helping hand. McBraire was maligned by a certain historian who handed down an infamous falsehood when he stated that McBraire when he was leaving St. John's, waved his hand on board ship and exclaimed, "Good bye you d—— fools of Newfoundlanders!" McBraire did or said nothing of the kind. During the years of great depression McBraire was prepared for the coming events, and he took every precaution, warning the other merchants to do the same, which they omitted to do, and thus Water Street merchants in St. John's fell, one after the other, and a terrible state of affairs existed for some years. They would not take McBraire's advice, because he was not in the ring, in fact, a certain clique was always opposed to and jealous of him, and thus McBraire weathered the stormy times in the trade of our country and very many of the others went down with a smash. If McBraire was indifferent to the wants and requirements of the people of this country in adversity he would not have subscribed large sums of money in cases of misfortune, such as the great fire of 1846, and to all deserving charitable objects that were brought under his notice, as well as being the sincere friend of Newfoundlanders when they visited England, Ireland and Scotland. One particular body of monopolists was just as bitter, domineering and tyrannical towards the Scotch and Irish business men as it was possible to be, and as they had their ramifications in every branch of the public service they could do just as they pleased, and it has only been within the past thirty years or so that their self-constituted role of **de jure successiones** was smashed to smithereens and every man with brains and ability was given a chance to conduct business without being in the grasp of the octapus which so long controlled and muzzled the business affairs and liberty of the people of this country. For generations certain families occupied the chief positions in the country, handed down from father to son, until, at last, the people woke up, demanded their rights and obtained them. Why it was not so very many years ago that an Irishman and those outside the ring marked out by those petty tyrants, were permitted to erect chimneys in their houses, and old Mr. Vey, about 1828, had to erect a sort of tower on the top of his house, inside of which he built the chimney unknown to the authorities, who were beginning to lose ground in their power and influence and were afraid to pull it down. That was on the same ground as is situated the well-known tinsmith shop of Mr. Walter Clouston at the foot of Market House Hill in St. John's. The fact is this particular clique or combination thought for many years that they possessed exclusive rights to do as they pleased. But I digress and must return to the old heroes of Trinity I mentioned in my last letter.

Wreck of the "William."

In the fifties the brig William, Capt. Eagan, on a passage from Poole to Trinity became a total wreck near Torbay. The disaster occurred at 9 o'clock in the night in the month of February. Capt. Eagan went on deck and said to the mate William White, "it is very thick weather, Billy, and my reckoning will be run down in ten minutes, and I am going to heave to for the night." White looked out under the mainsail, saw land, and cried out "Hard down, land O!" and scarcely had he spoken when the man on lookout forward cried, "land." The vessel not having sufficient head-way, and the sea rough, mis-stayed and went on the rocks. Capt. Eagan turned to White and said, "Billy, if any man can reach the shore you are the man." White jumped in the water with a line, and failed twice, but on the third attempt he reached the rock with the line in his mouth. He made the line fast on shore and all the crew, with the exception of William Wiltshire, escaped. They did not know where they were, and walked a considerable distance until they found a resident's house in Torbay. Their clothes were frozen and some of them were terribly frost-bitten. They were well treated by the hospitable people of Torbay. Capt. Eagan lived for many years afterwards and brought in many loads of seals. The last vessel he was in was the brigt. Juno. He had his vessel employed in bringing coal from Sydney during the summer and fall, supplying the citizens with this necessary article. The last voyage he made to Hamburg, Germany, with oil, skins, etc., a vessel was sailing for Newfoundland, and Capt. Eagan wrote a letter, and sent his son, James, who was mate with him, on board the ship, but sad to relate the son was never heard of afterwards. It was thought that he was lost in the river owing to the strong tide. There was a mural tablet erected to Wiltshire in the old St. Paul's Church at Trinity, and is probably still to be seen in the Mortuary Chapel. Capt. Eagan went to Trinity from Grate's Cove when very young and amassed quite an amount of property. He had a beautiful dwelling house in which Magistrate Sweetland afterwards lived for many years. He had also two other houses one in South West Arm and the other on the Nuddick. He was a descendant of one of these Irish youngsters of whom Mr. Kelson writes.

Familiar Names.

The Colemans, Bartholomew and Joseph, were highly respected people and carried on the fisheries, both seal and cod for many years with great sucess. About 1854 Bartholomew left Green Island Cove and built a house in Trinity to have a good harbor for his vessels. About 1858 he had three full loads of seals lying off his premises one Sunday afternoon in the brigantines Challenge, Syren and Emerald Isle. They dealt largely with the great firm of Baine Johnston & Co., St. John's, and one year Mr. Robert Grieve presented Bart. with a splendid English gold watch and chain in consideration of his success at the fisheries. Joseph Coleman commanded the brigantine Noel at the sealfishery for several years. During the summer months Capt. George Gent, who afterwards died in Bombay, India, while in command of a large ship from a Scotch firm, had charge of the Noel. Capt. Stephen Crocker was also a great seal-killer and was a dealer of Baine Johnston & Co. For a number of years he commanded the brigantines Rescue, Oriental and other vessels. There were several brothers of the Conolly family, also seal-killers and planters. They had a fine brigantine called the Success, and were dealers of Bowring Bros.

Had Faith in Visions.

Old skipper Jim Morris was a very successful seal-killer in the old Dart, new Dart and Arthur. He was so successful and so much thought of by Brooking & Co., that the firm sent for him from England, to visit that country, and he was granted one guinea per day while in London to see the sights. Capt. Nicholas Facey was also a successful seal-killer and master-mariner. He commanded the Isabel, Dart, Favorite Lass, Hope and many others and was noted for quick passages. He was a great believer in the prophecies or visions of Redmond Grace, the mysterious Irish immigrant, and he always sent letters to Redmond asking him if he would be fortunate, and strange to say Redmond's prophecies, for which he was noted, always turned out correct. Brookings did a large business in Trinity on the premises formerly occupied by Garland, and had many vessels sailing out of that port, such as the Dart, Arthur, Flash, Ariel, Alert. The last vessel Brooking had was called the Brooking (brig). She sailed from Trinity to Pernambuco, Brazil, with fish, took a load of sugar to Liverpool and was sold in 1868—the same year that Baine Johnston's brigt. Gypsy, Capt. George Field, was lost on a voyage to Spain. The Alert, Capt. Ainsworth, was lost the same year bound to Lisbon, Portugal. Pat Doherty was mate of her. When Rev. Mr. Bullock was chaplain on a man-of-war, a boy fell overboard in mid-ocean. Mr. Bullock jumped over and saved him. Many years after when Mr. Bullock was clergyman at Trinity, one Sunday, the captain of a warship attended church and saw the minister. "My, that's Bullock," said he. Mr. Bullock's brother was master of a warship named the Snap, which wintered in Trinity.

In the early fifties a vessel left Catalina for Trinity in February, and the captain, thinking he was around the Horse Chops, hauled in too soon for Trinity, and ran the vessel on the West Head of Green Cove. All hands were drowned except three who got from the yard to the ledge in the cliff, and remained there two days in cold and hunger, until a man out bird-hunting, hearing cries on shore from the cliff, went to their rescue, lowered ropes over cliff and pulled them up to safety. The ledge of the cliff, upon which they were, was so narrow that they could not move or sleep, fearing they would topple over into the sea or on the rocks, a distance of forty or fifty feet. But I must get on with Mr. Kelson's letters, or I shall be a centenarian before I have finished.

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Pleased With Cargo.

Trinity, Aug. 2nd, 1815.

Mr. Robert Slade.

Sir,—I hear Messrs. Sleat & Read's 'Venus' is now about ready to sail from Pond with a cargo of old fish and Mr. Garland's ship 'Brothers,' I understand left Bonavista Bay with a cargo only a fortnight ago. We have had occasion to repair a part of the Mary's rudder irons, and have met witf the greatest difficulty owing to the quality of the iron which is as brittle as glass. I must recommend you to send out some real Swedish, first opportunity, for such work. By a letter from Mr. Cox of Fogo, dated 22nd July, the prospect of a voyage is said to be gloomy unless a change for the better takes place very shortly. I have now the pleasure of congratulating you on the safe arrival here of all your vessels, the Active having just dropped anchor, since I wrote the foregoing, and I feel the greatest satisfaction in adding that from her invoice the cargo seems to be exactly what I wished for. I am well aware the difficulty and trouble atendant on collecting together such a variety of articles as you have sent out this Spring must be very great. I notice also the heavy amount of the invoices and you may depend on my best exertions in disposing of the goods in such a manner as to cover all expenses. Nothing will afford me greater happiness than to be able to make you good returns. I observe what you have said about not being able to charter a vessel with salt. I believe I shall be able to make it hold out. I forgot to mention before that I had from St. John's per Swallow 150 hhds. at 15/- pr. hhd., payable in the Fall, thinking my letter would not reach you in time to send any. Paddick has been well and useful this Spring and Summer, but I shall not think of keeping him past the Fall unless he agrees to a great reduction in wages. The man Simpson you sent out this Spring is so addicted to drinking I was obliged to turn him out of the sail-loft. Churchill's Room is now occupied by an adventurer from St. John's, connected with Hackett, a man who had been peddling round this neighborhood some years. I am sorry you were prevented by the disturbances in Europe from visiting Trinity and in hopes no obstacles will occur next season, I remain, Sir,

Your humble servant.

WM. KELSON.

P.S.—Ann Kelson begs her humble respects to Mrs. Slade and to return thanks for her present of pickles, etc.

Lunatic Passenger.

Trinity, Aug. 5th, 1815.

Sir,—Captain Gaynor being still here this is merely to say I have prevailed on him to carry (after paying Mr. Garland 8 guineas and Gaynor 5 guineas for passage, etc.), one of our servants, John Meade, who has unfortunately become deprived of his senses. There was no hope of recovery here, or the least chance of my getting rid of him any other way. It will be an expense to you, no doubt, before we can procure him a passage to his native country, but expense and loss in such a case cannot be avoided. Our planters, J. and W. Dawley, have a man in the same way, and I undertook to do the best I could for them, which, of course, being our dealers I could not with propriety refuse. I sent that man to the St. John's Hospital, but he soon made his escape from thence, and is now here after having travelled through the country to New Harbor, from which place Mr. Garland's people sent him to me. Everything attending Dawley's man is of course at their expense, and which they are able and have bound themselves to pay. I enclose Meade's account which is settled with respect to wages agreeably to the custom of Trinity, and also a letter of credit addressed to him by Hervey, of Youghall. I remain, sir, busy discharging the "Active."

Your humble servant.

WM. KELSON.

Neither Mr. Garland nor Capt. Gaynor has any further demand to make for Meade's passage and attendance, etc., Mr. Durell being satisfied with the 8 guineas for passage and the Captain with the 5 guineas for taking care of him. Begging reference to my other letters on board the "Augustus." I remain, sir,

Your humble servant,

WM. KELSON.

P.S.—If Meade should recover, I should not wish you to engage him again. I enclose a certificate of Meade being out of his senses by the only medical gentleman we have at present in the Harbor, Mr. Clinch having gone to St. John's sometime since. The certificate was signed by Mr. Durell and Meade's certificate also enclosed.

To England, Via Oporto.

Trinity, August 30, 1815.

Mr. Robert Slade.

Sir,—This is intended via Oporto per "John and Elizabeth," with 2900 qtls. of new merchantable fish, exclusive of the Captain's venture of 44 qtls., and which I have taken all possible care to ship in good order. The vessel being so much larger than the "Alpha," I considered it too great a risk to load her off hand warm off a beach or out of boats as we have frequently done with her small cargo. The whole has been put into the store to press cool for some days, and the damp fish picked out. Had this not been done she might have sailed perhaps a week or ten days earlier, but, even more, such is the precarious nature af the first catching fish that I should be afraid to order her on a long voyage up the Straits. Mr. Garland has had pass down the Bay a few days since, two small cargoes (Hope and Dolphin) for market, and the Amy (his first cargo out of Trinity) sailed on the 27th. She had in, I am informed, besides new fish, a quantity of salmon and about 800 qtls. of old—where she was ordered I have not yet heard. The accounts from all the different markets are so bad that it is impossible to foresee or judge which will be the best. Besides the recommendation of a short voyage for the early cured fish which never will keep like the lafer catch, I had that of wanting salt to begin next season in all probability the "John and Elizabeth" to carry home the oil in the Fall, and add to that the prospects of a market up the Mediterranean being no better than at other places. These circumstances combined made me determine on sending Capt. Hamon to Oporto. The "Ganet," as I before advised, is taking in fish at Catalina, the "Active" I shall soon begin loading with that article here, and the "George" too, when she returns from St. Andrew's. For the "Alpha" when she comes back, I hope to raise a cargo also, although the fishery this season, has not been so productive as last year, by at least one-third, and which I hope is a circumstance which our correspondents at the fish markets have not considered or thought of, when forwarding their disheartening accounts. I am sorry the price of fish is so high in St. John's, 22s. 6d. and 23s. as we must be governed by them here. At present we have no price settled, neither have I made the least shadow of an agreement with anyone respecting new fish further than this, to give our dealers as much as any established House may give in Trinity, Catlaina or Bonavista. I don't expect we shall give more than 20s. 6d. or 21s. for the first. In the latter part of the season it may be less, and it may be more, it is impossible to say, as there is no knowieg what effect the shortness of the catch may have on the market when it becomes generally known. I fear from the number if adventurers the Trade in this quarter will be much injured. The Bay and Harbour seem to be getting quite full. At Old Perlican are Ryland, Durell & Co., March, Dalton, Ryan and several others. At Hant's Harbor, just established, Bickley Angel & Co. At Heart's Delight, Parker, Bulley, Job & Co., At Churchill's Room in Trinity, Lang, Hackett & Co. At Carbonear (on a large scale) Hutton McLea & Co. All from St. John's which place seems to be sending forth a torrent of merchants, pedlars and speculators. How they are supported is a mystery. Our "Swallow" has been a trip to Hant's Harbor and Old Perlican for dry fish, and brought back 600 qtls., i. e. there is no chance of disposing of goods to the least advantage when the St. John's people show themselves. At those places Dalton and Ryan were selling bread of excellent quality at 25s. per bag; salt at 15s. per hhd., and everything else proportionately, and I am informed they give 22s. for fish. Capt. Rosllans is in the "May" collecting fish at the two Bonaventures. The "Swallow" will proceed again, and our three boats also I shall continue cruising for Produce. The "Cosmopolite" I shall soon send into a northern bay for stocks to saw into heading, of which article we are extremely short, and which it is impossible to procure any other way.

Foreigners No Good.

When I stated in my letter No. 3 that the "youngsters" per "Alpha" were the best I had seen, I ought to have excepted the foreigners Jonsick and Simmers. They soon showed what kind of fellows they were. I tried to get them off to dealers, but could not, as the Planters have an aversion to any youngsters but English. Care should therefore be taken never to engage any others, excepting Irish. I have had a great deal of trouble with Jonsick. He soon got tired of work, stole one of our punts in the height of the fishery, and attempted to desert. I caught him in the middle of Bay, lodged him in gaol for a week and on his promising good behaviour for the future, let him out and tried him again. He was not many days before he again refused to work, and in addition to that injustice, declared to several of the servants that if I did not send him home he would set fire to the Room and then cut his own throat. The moment this reached my ears, I, of course, was alarmed, had him immediately imprisoned until an opportunity offered for St. John's, to which place I have sent him, in hopes of never seeing anything more of him. I have before in my letter No. 6 hinted to you respecting the disposition of Joseph Curl and I now enclose more copies of letters to and from Catalina in order that you may be able to judge what may be best to be done. Unless circumstances induce me to alter my opinion between this and the Fall, I shall certainly remove him at the close of the business. Our collection of fish at Trinity amounts at present to between 4 and 5,000 qtls., and as the weather of the last 7 or 8 days has been fine and a continuance seems likely, I have no doubt but the "Active" will soon be dispatched. Curl, I have no doubt, is a good servant, but as his temper is of such a jealous nature, as not to admit of an assistant in the shop and Counting House (branches which he is not competent to fill) I shall not hesitate at saying I think him unfit to have the management of a concern such as yours at Catalina. Please inform Messrs. John Slade & Co. that I write Mr. Cox every opportunity enclosing him extracts and copies of my letters from Portugal. The last hhd. of Tobacco we had from Liverpool is very good. It will soon be gone, and I wish you could secure some more of the same quality. My letters Nos. 11, 12 and 13 went per Mr. Garland's "Augusta" for Poole on the 4th inst., and as I have forwarded copies via St. John's, I consider it superfluous to do the same per this chance. I take the liberty of enclosing a Fogo letter for Messrs. John Slade & Co., and wishing the "John and Elizabeth" a better market than the late accounts from abroad seem to warrant. I remain, sir, with best endeavours.

Your humble servant.

WM. KELSON.

August 31st, 1815.

I have directed Capt. Hamon to call off Port Bar, on Messrs. Page Noble & Co., and if the cargo be discharged there or at any other Port, in time, to take in a good ballast of salt and return to me. Should the cargo unfortunately meet with no market without going a long distance and thereby be detained till too late to think of beating out here, in that case, to take a freight for some Port or a ballast of salt for Poole agreeably to your letter No. 11.

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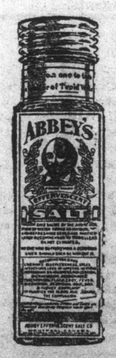

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