



Etchings of a Whaling Cruise: With Notes of a Sojourn on the Island of Zanzibar, and a Brief History of the Whale Fishery, in Its Past and Present Condition (Classic Reprint)

J. Ross Browne

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Excerpt from Etchings of a Whaling Cruise: With Notes of a Sojourn on the Island of Zanzibar, and a Brief History of the Whale Fishery, in Its Past and Present Condition

There are now in active employment more than seven hundred whaling vessels belonging to the New England States, manned by nearly twenty thousand hardy and intrepid men. It is a reproach to the American people that, in this age of moral reform, the protecting arm of the law has not reached these daring adventurers. We are indebted to them for the extension of our commerce in foreign countries; for valuable additions to our stock of knowledge; for all the benefits resulting from their discoveries and researches in remote parts of the world; and yet they are the most oppressed class of men in existence. History scarcely furnishes a parallel for the deeds of cruelty committed upon them during their long and perilous voyages.

The startling increase of crime in the whale fishery demands a remedy. Scarcely a vessel arrives in port that does not bring intelligence of a mutiny. Are the murderous wrongs which compel men to rise up and throw off the burden of oppression unworthy of notice? Will none make the attempt to arrest their fearful progress? Such a state of things surely calls for investigation. My limited experience enables me to point out some of the causes of crime on the high seas. If it be possible to diminish them by more attention to the welfare and comfort of the crews, and to the punishment of masters, not only for positive acts of cruelty, but for morally degrading those under their command, justice certainly requires that the remedy should be speedily carried into effect.

So far as relates to myself personally, I take this opportunity of stating, that during the unpleasant term of my servitude before the mast, I was treated as well by the captain and officers as they were capable of treating any common sailor.

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