

**A PIONEER VOYAGE TO
CALIFORNIA AND
ROUND THE WORLD,
1849 TO 1852, PP. 17-235**

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A Pioneer Voyage to California and Round the World, 1849 to 1852, pp. 17-235 by George Coffin & Gorham B. Coffin

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GEORGE COFFIN & GORHAM B. COFFIN

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CAPT. GEORGE COFFIN.

A Pioneer Voyage

to

California

and

Round the World

1849 to 1852

Ship Alhambra

Captain George Coffin

[1908]

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JUNE, 1908.

W. W. W. W.
JUN 10 1908
MADE

FOREWORD.

In publishing this work I take pleasure in submitting the following brief explanation: The author, Capt. George Coffin, is my father. Since his death the original manuscript in his own handwriting has come into my possession, and no copy has previously existed. In view of its great interest to all his family (of whom there are now many members) and as a tribute to his noble life and great qualities of heart and mind, and believing that the reading world are ever seeking light and knowledge, I deem its publication justified. In this spirit I offer it to the family and friends and to all those who may choose to read it, hoping that they will find in its pages some hitherto unrecorded historical events.

Sincerely,

GORHAM B. COFFIN.

CHICAGO, July 15, 1908.

*Cadmus
7 Nov. 1923*

PREFACE.

Having been, by the decree of fate, the freaks of fortune, the force of circumstances, the destiny of my horoscope, or by some other unseen influence, called or sent, drawn or driven at an advanced age, to wander 'round the globe, and to spend four years far away from my family, during which time, I have been in a peculiar manner the sport and football of some or all the agencies I have named,—I have now, while on my way home, and daily drawing nearer to my native land, thought to employ some of my leisure hours at sea, in recording some of my experience. I am doing this partly to amuse myself, but chiefly because I believe my journal will be interesting to the members of my family, for whose information and amusement I am bound to contribute all in my power, and to the head of which, my well beloved wife, this book is affectionately dedicated, as a feeble token of my estimation of her many virtues.

This record is drawn up partly from recollection and partly from notes and memoranda taken "en passant," but now when I look back on what has passed, it appears to me to have been a trance, a wonderful dream, a something unreal, a great blank in my existence.

I fancy this book will be kept as an heirloom in my family, and I here charge my children never to give away to despondency under misfortune. Should you be called to encounter disappointment and losses, remember your Grandfather and your Father; be honest, be firm, be resolute. Hope now, hope always; reflect that all things are under the direction of a Supreme Being, who "doeth all things well," and in the darkest hour seek consolation in that reflection.

Should these pages pass in review of other eyes, I trust they will look with favour on the simplicity of the style, remembering that it is intended only as A FAMILY SOUVENIR.

Geo. Coffin

had finished my dinner, I left to go on deck, and passing by this man's seat, I called his attention to me, and told him that my tables were set for gentlemen, and not for rowdies. He looked like a lawyer without a brief, but as he could not find anyone disposed to join him in growling, he was obliged to submit quietly to the rebuke, and before the passage was ended, he became the best friend I had among them and got up a complimentary letter to the owners.

Friday, April 19th.—A fine day, standing out the Gulf of Florida, Cat Key abreast, fell in with several ships bound down the gulf, sent a letter by one of them to the agents, in which I had the pleasure to say that we were all well on board. This letter was probably published and served to dispel the anxiety of friends, for it had been predicted that the cholera would break out on board, as the last ship that left New Orleans for California had lost several of her passengers by that distemper, during the first week out.

On the 20th we passed Matanilla, and I shaped a course so as to pass Bermuda fifteen miles to the south of it, which we did on the 30th. The wind prevailed from the south and was very light, which carried us to Long. 30°, Lat. 21° before we received the N. E. trades.

Saw the island of Saint Anthony on the 15th May. This is the northwest island of the group called Cape Verde Islands. It is a high, barren, uninviting spot. I saw no signs of animal life though we passed within five miles. These islands are very subject to drought and famine. A few years since I was in Havana, when three vessels came in there crowded with emigrants from the Cape Verdes; the poor wretches had been obliged to flee from starvation, and to let themselves out in competition with the slaves of Cuba. Oh! God of Justice! why such a difference in the social condition of Thy creatures?

Saw Brava the next day, and crossed the Equator on the 23rd. It has been one of the rules of the sea, to introduce green hands and passengers to King Neptune on passing the Line. On one of my voyages to India, I had some half a dozen passengers, scions of the codfish aristocracy of Boston; they were a wild set of boys, and I was not averse to the sailors' giving them

a taste of old Neptune's baptism on their promising me that they would be careful not to hurt them. We passed from North to South latitude during the afternoon, and when the shades of evening were falling, a hoarse voice was heard ahead hailing, "Ship aho-oo," to which one of the old salts who was on the lookout replied, "Halloo-oah."

"Heave your ship to, for I am coming on board."

The seamen now considering themselves under the immediate orders of the Sea God, without any reference to me or the mates, laid the maintopsail aback, and the ship's headway was stopped. The sailors had previously hoisted a barrel of water up into the foretop, leaving two of their number up there with it.

The rest of them were clustered on the forecastle, when old King Neptune was seen rising up over the bows, first his cap (a mess kid bottom up with a large tar brush for a plume), then a forehead of yellow metal, with two great holes for eyes and conchshells for eyeballs, a larger conch for a nose, and a mouth slit from side to side, and filled with small yellow shells for teeth. His neck cloth was a mat, with the corners of a tarpaulin standing out for a collar. He was loosely robed in a spare studding sail and his trident was (of course) the shark grain. He seated himself on the windlass and the sailors all made a profound obeisance to his Majesty.

The "B'hoys" on the quarter deck were enjoying themselves in singing "Dandy Jim" and "Old Dan Tucker," when Neptune made his appearance on deck, and they all went forward to see. Just as they came under the foretop Neptune in a speech was saying, "I rule on the sea, I cause the winds, and I order and it rains," and the sailors in the top capsized the barrel and down came a cataract upon the B'hoys.

It is a rule of the Sea King to initiate all his fresh subjects by shaving them with an iron hoop, having lathered them with a paint brush dipped in the cook's slush barrel, but he sometimes dispenses with this ceremony, in consideration of a fee of a bottle of rum. All the B'hoys but one preferred to pay the fee. That one was a Mr. Hall, a ministerial student, a miserable bigot, who had the *charity* to tell me that I was no Christian because I professed to be a Unitarian. He was a weak, conceited fool,