

**AN IDYL FROM
NANTUCKET**

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An Idyl from Nantucket by Robert Collyer

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ROBERT COLLYER

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NANTUCKET**

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*An Idyll from
Nantucket*

WITH A NOTE BY
REV. ROBERT COLLYER

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An Idyl from Nantucket.

NANTUCKET is an island off the coast of Massachusetts, the manuals tell us, some seventeen miles long by three to five wide. It stands well out in the ocean, as we learn for ourselves who love to go there, and is haunted by the ghosts of ancient mariners—whalers in truth, who made the place famous in their time, and wealthy, by scouring the seas in search of this most noble game, and were among the first men in this new world to prove that you *can* “draw out leviathan with an hook, and fill his skin with barbed irons,”

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when "he makes the sea boil like a pot, and part him among the merchants."

It is about the cleanest bit of land, so far as the white man is concerned, we know of on this planet, and was first settled about the year 1659, when a few families came over from the Puritan mainland to make a new home where they could be free from the yoke which had grown heavy there, and live their own life in their own way.

A good "Friend," now gone to her rest, who was born on the island, used to tell us about the life there when this century came in, and it was like a chapter from some realized Utopia. The standard of morals was so high and the safeguards so sure, that keeping the commandments was a matter of course. They were careful to treat the red man they found on the island as a poor human brother; took him with them on long voyages after whales, and found him a capital whaler; ploughed and sowed his

land for him in the spring, if the humor was on him to go "Indianing" round, instead of attending to it himself, and made one of them a justice of the peace to his own people, who adjudged in the first case that came before him that plaintiff and defendant were six and half-a-dozen, and ordered each of them a good, sound whipping.

The old breed lost its grip on the island a good many years ago, when their game was getting scarce in the two oceans, and in '49 the finer spirits set sail for San Francisco, when the news came to the island that gold had turned up there, and fortunes were to be made in a year. Then Nantucket had to take a back seat, with about one-third the population that swarmed on her when whaling was at its best, for the clean land brings "cleanness of teeth," as the Scripture saith, being mostly sand, and a thin sort of pasture, from which the tilth of uncounted centuries was blown into the

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sea when they cut down the timber and turned up the sod. But the place has been "discovered" again, and is slowly coming to the front as a safe refuge from the fervent fires that smite our cities in July and August, and as in all ways a pleasant place. With those wild, fresh downs running the whole length of the island, a bit of white heather here and there, and sweet fern, briar-roses and blackberries, and a deplorable sort of grape a fox would despise anyhow, if there were any on the island. Little lakes of sweet water, fed by springs so good to drink that the waters of the Nile would seem like marah to a true-born Nantucketer by comparison. A town worth a visit for its own sake, reminding you of the saying, "Queer as Dick's hatband, that went nine times round and then wouldn't tie," but with some right noble souls left, of the old fine strain, and some right noble mansions. "What's the matter there?" the writer said, pointing to one of

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them, which was falling away to ruin. "Well," the old salt answered, "I'll tell ye. That air house was left to a lot of fools who can't make ther fingers even the same length; one wants to ketch a' holt, and then another furdur in nor the rest, then the others turn in and rap 'em, an' so its a gitt'n sort o' out o' repair." And then about island and town the zone of the sea, where you can catch blue fish, sculp, plaice, and sharks—these last in great plenty, and so mighty in their wrath that it was a question with one man I know whether he should get the fellow out or it should get him in, a problem solved finally in his favor by the help of the laughter-loving editor of the *Burlington Hawkeye*.

Frederick Sanford belongs on Nantucket by birth and breeding, and a love for the place which grows deeper and sweeter with the years. He has great store of scrap-books and journals, together with "a routh of auld nic nackets,"