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MR. WEBSTER TO MR. BLATCHFORD

Boston, Sunday evening, eight o'clock. August 5, 1849.

My dear sir,—According to arrangement, we came up yesterday, in the ten o'clock train, but so many people came to see me, for one purpose or another, that I could not find time to write a line to you or anybody else. I found here your letter of Friday, and received this morning that of Saturday. I am grieved that little Julia does not find the sea-coast air to agree with her. Probably it is too tonic. I am not a practical judge in these matters, but as a general fact, I believe the air is of mighty importance in all these cases.

We had a fine rain of three or four hours last night, which I hope reached Marshfield. It looks as if this might also be a wet night. If to-morrow should be fair, we think of going to New Bedford, and perhaps to Nasahwn, Martha's Vineyard, or Nantucket. Our objects are not yet exactly defined. We were almost willing to get away from Marshfield, till it should be refreshed with rain.

Like you, I am disposed to ramble. I have no urgent professional business on hand, and am disposed to play. But in three weeks I must be looking out for the return of my annual affliction. What can I do with it? If they tell me it has not been known in Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, I shall stay there. Perhaps I am as likely to be benefited there as I should be at Halifax. I will write you "from the first port." I have been talking about blue fish and bass in the Vineyard Sound, and parts adjacent; but shall say nothing to you, until I shall have had some personal experience.

Fletcher came up yesterday morning, and went down last evening.

Yours truly, D. Webster.

P. S. Monday morning a quarter before five—The weather looks promising; we shall be off at eight o'clock. Take good care of yourself, and keep out of New York. I shall write you this evening from somewhere.

MR. WEBSTER TO MR. BLATCHFORD

Edgartown, sometimes called Old Town, Martha's Vineyard. August 7, 1849.

[Half-past five in the morning, and not another soul up in the house. A little rain last night, but a pretty fair and cool morning.]

My dear Sir,—We left Boston yesterday at eight, arrived at New Bedford, originally named " Bedford," by a Mr. Russell, in honor of the ducal family, then however only an earldom, of that title, at half-past ten. Waited some time for the boat, which the ladies occupied in driving round the city. Left New Bedford a quarter before two in the steamboat, dined on board, stopped to land passengers at Nashawn;

came through Wood's Hole, where the tide runs like Hellgate; stopped here also for passengers; this place is eighteen miles from New Bedford; then crossed the Vineyard Sound, seven miles to Holmes Hole, then landed, took seats in a public stage wagon, crossed over a level sandy country covered with shrub oaks, and arrived here at six exactly. Ten hours from Boston.

I thought I knew nobody here, but the hotel was soon full of friends, some of whom I well recollected, all tendering boats, men, tackle, &c., for fishing; guns and company for the plover plains; and carriages, with attendants, for the ladies. All sorts of expeditions were planned before we parted at ten o'clock. Among others these, namely; to-day blue fish; to-morrow, shooting on the plains; next day sword fish; the next a party to Gay Head, and so on. The ladies are delighted. I am looking round and meditating about locality, climate, ocean scenery, &c., that is, I have meditated in bed, and am now looking round by daylight.

It is a singular and charming spot. But of this more hereafter. I am going to see the blues this morning; and shall try to get this into mail this morning. You will hear again from me next mail, but I fear there is a mail only every other day.

Yours always, whether blue fish bite or not. But they will bite to-day.

D. W.

MR. WEBSTER TO MR. BLATCHFORD.

Ibid. Wednesday morning. August 8.

My dear Sir,—Yesterday morning I went forth for blue fish. The boatman steered direct for the Sound, five miles north, then doubled the eastern chop of the harbor, Cape Poge, called Pogue, where the light is, and ran along close to the shore on the eastern side of the island. The wind was unsteady and baffling, and much thwarted and perplexed the boatman, who intended to make a great day of it. At half-past nine o'clock we found fish, and practised our vocation at intervals, as the breeze would allow, till half-past one. We took forty-three fish, I think my takings were twenty-five. The boatman took a few, and a gentleman with us the rest.

Now to compare this with Duxbury Bay. The fish are more plenty, the range of going for them larger, and they are sure of being found every day somewhere. On the other hand, the best fishing is not so much protected by land, as the fishing in Duxbury. It is outside, as our fishing at home would be, if we fished from the mouth of Green Harbor River along the shore to the Gurnet. This is all very well when the wind is off shore, but when it blows on shore the sea of course would be rough.

In point of size, the fish are not much different from those we found in Duxbury Bay, perhaps a little larger, but this may be owing to the advance of the season. I thought them remarkably fat and plump, and they pulled like horses. Once or twice we saw schools of them above water, leaping and frolicking. I thought as good fishing as any we had was when we lay at anchor, and threw the hook, at the end of a long line, into the foaming and roaring surf. One thing was new to me. You have seen on the surface of the sea, those smooth places, which fishermen and sailors call "slicks." We met with them yesterday, and our boatman made for them, whenever discovered. He said they were caused by the blue

fish chopping up their prey. That is to say, these voracious fellows get into a school of manhaden, which are too large to swallow whole, and they bite them into pieces, to suit their tastes. And the oil from this butchery, rising to the surface, makes the slick. Whatever the cause may be, we invariably found fish plenty whenever we came to a "slick." Passing to the southward, we came into the harbor, through an opening at the south end, three miles from the town. In reality, this opening is the best fishing-ground, and we should have done better to have proceeded to it directly in the morning. But our captain was ambitious, and hoped, I believe, to find greater fish outside. The Island of Chippaquiddick lies opposite the town here, and very near it, and is generally said to be an island in Edgartown harbor. This is not exactly so; you cannot navigate round the island keeping within the harbor, and not going to sea. In strictness it is not an island, but a peninsula connected with the main land on the seashore, at its southeast corner, by a narrow isthmus. See the map.

So much for blue-fish catching at Edgartown, August 7, 1849. To-day we have a bright morning, after rather a cool night. I am to try my hand at plover-shooting at seven o'clock.

Yours truly, whether fishing or shooting,

D. Webster.

MR. WEBSTER TO MR. BLATCHFORD

Ubi Supra. Wednesday evening, nine o'clock.

My Dear Sir,—I have made a poor hand to-day, among the plovers, though I have had a good deal of pleasant driving over the plains. The mode of shooting is from a wagon, after the manner of Hampstead. My eye is hardly quick enough to see the birds in the grass, and I am a little too much out of play to be sure of them when they rise. I remember once at Sandwich, having Fletcher in the chaise, and Julia in my lap, and holding them both, and also the reins in one hand, and shooting a plover on the wing, holding the gun in the other, the bird being so directly over head as to fall within two rods of the chaise.

My companion to-day Dr. Fisher, a principal man here, is an excellent shot. He killed a dozen birds. To-morrow we go to Gay Head with a number of ladies and gentlemen. It will be a long and sandy drive, thirty-six miles, going and coming. If the weather be good, I propose to try the blue fish again, and on Saturday to return to the main land. The boats have been out for sword-fish to-day; I shall see them in the morning. Good-night.

D. W.

MR. WEBSTER TO MR. BLATCHFORD

Ibid., August 10, ten a.m.

My dear Sir,—We went to Gay Head yesterday, a distance of twenty miles, and returned, tired and covered with dust, in the evening. The eastern end of the island is a sandy plain, the western a region of high, rocky hills. In both the roads are bad. But Gay Head is a place worth seeing. It is a remarkable promontory, at the western extremity of the island, one hundred and fifty feet high, with a

naked face, or escarpment, toward the sea. The cliff is not perpendicular, though nearly so, nor is it smooth or unbroken. It presents alternate ridges and depressions, or ravines, not always running in straight lines. The great peculiarity is the geological structure, which is exposed to view. The whole hill, generally speaking, seems to be clay, but this clay is of various colors, black, white, red, green, &c. Some of these colors are exceedingly bright, so that they present a very gay aspect; hence the name. In the afternoon sun, and especially when recently washed by rain, the appearance is splendid and gorgeous. Fossil remains are found, from the water up to the surface, in several of the clay strata. We picked up, or rather picked out, shark's teeth, and the vertebrae of some large fish, besides numerous shell-fish. Whales' teeth have been found very near the surface. Iron is also found, and pieces of charred wood, apparently limbs of trees, being exactly like charcoal. I do not know, or remember, what the geologists say of it, but I think it a great curiosity. It must have had, I imagine, a volcanic origin.

A light-house stands upon the height. When originally built it was found too high. It raised the lantern so far above the horizon, that mariners mistook it for a star. It became necessary, therefore, to lower the building. If this place were more accessible, it would be much visited. It is what Niagara would be, if instead of one hundred and fifty feet of falling water, it exhibited a perpendicular bank of that height, composed of lines strata, and sections of various earths, of brilliant and highly contrasted colors. From this place, New Bedford and Newport are to be seen, and even Block Island, in very clear weather. To-day we have a strong southeast gale, which forbids all fishing, and indeed all riding. I was in hopes of another morning with the blue fish. Yesterday, a gentleman took fifty in two hours, one weighing thirteen pounds. I do not know what is to happen in our waters from the enormous increase of these fish. It is a common opinion that they destroy or drive off several of the other valuable finny tribes. If this be so, it will be the more patriotic in you and me to take as many of them to the land as we can.

We propose to leave this place to-morrow morning, at seven o'clock, take the boat at Holmes Hole at half-past eight, and be at Wood's Hole, (Falmouth, on Cape Cod,) by nine. There is a good house, and we shall probably stay till Monday, making in the mean time a call on Mr. Swain, on the near island of Nasahwn. I doubt whether we shall go to Boston on our return. I think of sending for our wagon to meet us either at New Bedford or Bridgewater.

Yours, truly,
D. W.

MR. SAMUEL HALL TO MR. WEBSTER

East Boston, August 11, 1849.

Dear Sir,—Your favor of 3d instant has been received, expressing your indebtedness to Captain Forbes and myself, for the beautiful schooner *Lapwing*, which we have fitted up for your enjoyment. If we have accomplished the object we had in view, that is, to give you something as a token of respect to you, both as a public man and a private citizen, it will be gratifying to me, and I am sure it will be to Captain Forbes.

You express a desire that I should visit your place and ascertain how well the *Lapwing* sails, and also what these waters yield in the way of cod and haddock. Sir, nothing would give me greater

pleasure than to pay a visit to your mansion and my native town, which is Marshfield, and take a trip to Brant Rock, where I have spent so many days, in days gone by, with Seth Peterson, Chandler Oldham, Wm. Barstow, Captain Samuel Baker, and Uncle Charles Baker, as we were wont to call him, and many others that I could mention, in shooting coots and loons, and catching the cod and haddock; but I am doubtful if I shall be able to do it this season, as the business is very pressing, and, together with my private affairs, makes it difficult for me to leave even for a few days.

I am, dear Sir, with great respect, yours,

Sam'l Hall.

MR. WEBSTER TO MR. BLATCHFORD

Wood's Hole, August 12, seven a.m.

My dear Sir,—This place, sometimes called "Woodville," is the southern point of Falmouth, in the county of Barnstable, and is exactly opposite to the eastern end of Nasahwn Island. There is a passage or strait between the two, through which vessels bound from New Bedford to the East, or *vice versa*, usually pass. The current is rapid at the flow of the tide, the water not very deep and full of rocks. It has long been distinguished as a place for trailing for bass. It is a high promontory of some extent, and uneven surface, with a snug little harbor, which causes it to be called a hole. It has a fine view of Buzzard's Bay and New Bedford, Martha's Vineyard, the Sound, and Nasahwn. In point of position, and in regard to prospect, it is the handsomest place in these regions. Mr. Ticknor has passed several summers here. He says it is most remarkable for the uniform temperature of its atmosphere, hardly varying a few degrees for weeks, and even months, in the summer. It is almost an island.

We arrived here yesterday at ten, in the boat from the Vineyard, and should have gone at once over to Nashawn, to visit Mr. Swain, but the morning was quite rainy, and we deferred that pleasure to Monday. In the afternoon, I went out in the boat, and caught some fish, namely, tautog and skippog, the same, I suppose, as are called "Porgie " in New York. They were all small.

To-day we go to church at Falmouth town, a very handsome village, four miles off. Falmouth is a large, handsome township, with Buzzard's Bay on the west, and Vineyard Sound on the south. To-morrow we propose to visit Mr. Swain, and on Tuesday proceed either to Boston or Marshfield. I have had no letters since I left Boston last Monday, the 6th. When I get my letters, I shall find among them, I trust, some from you, informing me how you are, and where you are, and what you propose. For myself, I think I shall stay at home this week, and go to New Hampshire early in the week ensuing, say 20th, 21st, or 22d. Very likely I shall be at Franklin when my catarrh arrives but there is nothing to restrain my movements to particular days, or to require a fixed plan. My health is exceedingly good. I have hardly had a complaining hour since I arrived at home in July.

From the room in which I write this, I overlook the Vineyard Sound, and see the land of the Vineyard, of course, quite plain; it being but five miles off. The number of vessels which pass up and down this Sound is prodigious. A hundred of them sometimes put into Holmes Hole in a day, if a head wind arise. Nearly all the coasting trade between the East and South, goes through this passage, as do often ships from South America, the West Indies, and India. I was told that in the height of the late Mr. Gray's business in navigation, five ships of his from China and Canton, were in Holmes Hole at the

same time. Ships come this way to avoid the south shoals of Nantucket, which stretch off fifty miles to the southeast from the visible part of that vast and extensive sand-bank. Of late years, however, since improved chronometers make shipmasters more sure of their longitude in thick weather, it has become more usual to keep to the eastward, and make no land till they see Cape Cod.

You will be glad that I have arrived at length to the bottom of the last page.

Yours, always truly,
Dan'l Webster.