

On the Water

Stories from Maritime America

“Coast of Peru”

Performed by Bob Webb

[image label]

A view of whaling, from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, March 3, 1910

By the mid-19th century, American whaling ships were fishing for sperm whales mostly in the Pacific Ocean, and a common stop for supplies and fresh food was the port of Tumbez on the north coast of Peru. This song celebrates the chase and capture of a sperm whale; other versions often add anticipation of a port call.

Come all of you whalemens who're cruising for sperm,
Come all of you sailors what's rounded Cape Horn,
For our captain has told us, we all believe it's true,
There's plenty of sperm whales on the coast of Peru.

Now we've rounded Cape Horn and we're now on Peru,
We're all of one mind and we know what we do,
Our boats are all rigged, boys, our mastheads well manned,
Our riggin' rove light and our signals well planned.

'Twas early one morning just about five o'clock,
When the man in the mainmast cries "Yonder she spouts!"
"Where away?" says the captain and the answer from aloft:
"Three points on the lee bow, scarce two miles off!"

Well, it's "Lower your boats, boys, and be of good cheer,
Get your lines in your tubs and your tackle-falls clear,
Hoist away, then swing, stand by each boat's crew,
Lower away, lower away" as the mainyard swings to.

Well, we got our boats down and we made the good start,
"Lay on," says Captain Bunker, "I'm hell with the long dart!"
The harpoon we thrust in and the whale sped away,
But there's one thing for sure, lads, we give it fair play.

Well, we got back 'longside and we got the lance in,
And in just o'er an hour she's rolled out her fin,
The whale is cut in, me boys, tried out and stowed down,
It's worth more to us than five hundred pounds.



Now here's a health to all whalemens, boys, drink it down, do,
Likewise to the *Bengal* and her jolly crew,
And those who want money, I'd advise you to go
To the coast of Peru where them sperm whales do blow

