

The Cruise of the Cashalot



Drawings by Donald McKay

by **WALTER D. EDMONDS**

WE SAWED the last cut on the last tree and sat down side by side on the log. John got out a wad of Happy Days, when he saw that I was lighting my pipe, and stowed it away in his right cheek. His eye was taking in the river valley, with the canal beyond. Some plover were calling down the river, but he did not hear them. And then just as I was getting back my wind, he swung his eye round at me. "Say," said he, "did I ever tell you about my Uncle Ben?"

I

MY UNCLE Ben Meekum was kind of a dingy old coot. They say in his early days he was a pretty fat kind of a spark; but when I first remember him he'd married Aunt Em, and the two of them made just about the most respectable kind of home life a woman could want. Uncle Ben would load his boat, and him and Henry Plat, who done his driving, would get the old boat along with the aid of Ben's mules; but inside that boat the old lady ruled the roost.

It was kind of hard on a man, after he'd run a boat to suit his own notions for forty

year to have the bad luck to get married to Aunt Em. You couldn't spit out of the window or knock out your pipe on top of the stove or have a drink in your own cabin (or anywhere else for that matter), and she used to make him and Henry, who was bothered with soft feet, wash 'em every night before they come to supper. It was a pitiful sight to see them two old coots setting up on the roof of the cabin on a cold night and easing their toes into a basin. Every time he felt the touch of water, Henry'd say he was going to get loose and leave, but Uncle Ben'd beg him to stay.

"You can go ashore and get drunk, Henry," he'd say. "But I can't hardly swallow without the old girl's looking to see what I got in my teeth. Watter," he'd say, "has so saturated my inwards that another drop will just about make me sick."

But Henry'd never have gone off and left him. Them two had been boating it together ever since Uncle Ben'd got his boat, and Henry was just as scared of Aunt Em as Uncle Ben was. If he'd have left, he'd have been scared clean crazy of her coming after him.

I don't say Aunt Em was a bad woman, but

she was too big to live in a boat. She'd always been in heavy flesh and her blood pressure generally kept going up on her. Quick-tempered. And she could have taken on both of them old men at once if she'd been a-mind to, and she probably did when she got restive.

You see she belonged to my family, and Uncle Ben only got in by marrying her. His name was Meekum, and he had to take about everything that was coming to him.

He used to talk to Pa about it and ask what a man had ought to do, and Pa'd tell him, "Strop her up and if that don't work use the hone." But Uncle Ben'd shake his head and say Pa was a young man and then give Pa some of his own early history until he'd start off home with active ideas. But the minute the old lady'd get her eye on him, he'd lose his nerve.

It went on that way till the time Uncle Ben busted loose in New York and made a deal. He'd often thought before that of sneaking out on her; but she'd put all the money he used to keep on the boat in a bank in Boonville in her own name, because Uncle Ben couldn't read nor write, and she took the money the boat earned off of him as quick as it come in.

Well, sir, Uncle Ben did bust loose, and this is the way it happened.

II

THE SPRING of the year him and Henry had loaded up their boat with ice at Forestport and picked the old girl up at Boonville where they spent the winter in her mother's house and started off for New York.

They made a regulation haul to Albany and left their mules in the round barn and got into a tow on the Swiftsure and had the ride down the Hudson. All the way Uncle Ben kept considering what he'd get to haul back. Fertilizer would have made him a good haul, and he thought the trip to New Jersey after it might be pleasant. But Aunt Em wouldn't consider it. She said it would make the boat smell too strong.

She took a lot of pride in that boat even if it was Uncle Ben's. She'd had it painted up a good bright yellow with a white trim and she had the cabin fixed up dainty with curtains at the windows and the best geraniums on the Erie. She was a good hand to cook and keep house, and the best meals I ever ate I ate right there. She could make a pie to bring the watter

to a man's eyes. And it did look nice. It was all painted blue inside, with the cupboards white and the stove black and the pans always hanging in the same place. She had a little brass clock, too, that struck the hours with a bell. It didn't keep very good time, always being slow; but the way she polished it you would have thought it had come from the factory in the morning mail.

The boat's name was *Louisa* and you can see it laying in that set-back below Hawkinsville to-day, what's left of it.

So the old lady'd said there'd be no fertilizer, and Uncle Ben had to agree. Him and Henry had had it all figured out, but Henry was riding on one of the other boats most of the time and so Uncle Ben got to New York without knowing what he was going to haul back.

Well, they tied up in the East River docks the same as usual waiting for a calmer day to get the boat across the harbor and they hadn't more than got to the Swiftsure office to pay off before the clerk handed Uncle Ben a letter for Aunt Em. Uncle Ben was an ignorant old bezabor when it come to civilized ideas. Pa used to say he'd been born with just as much sense as anybody else, but that he'd lost progress since then. When the clerk explained who the letter was for, Uncle Ben paid off, and him and Henry went back to the boat.

Uncle Ben walked right up the gang and down into the cabin. Getting a letter that way made him feel important.

"Wipe your feet," says Aunt Em.

"To hell with my feet," says Uncle Ben, "here's a letter, Em."

"For me?" she asks, and Uncle Ben says, "Yes, sir."

She dropped the potato she had commenced peeling into the wrong pan and grabbed that paper. It took her just a minute to figure it all out and she turned kind of pale.

"Ma's sick," she says, "I got to get right home. It says that she's real sick again with the sugar diabetes."

"I don't wonder," says Henry from the door, "the way she eats it with her coffee."

But Aunt Em didn't notice it. She was all dithery.

"I got to start right out," she says.

"And me unload this ice into the river?" asks Uncle Ben.

"You danged fool," she says. "Do you think

your cheap mules can get me home in time? Poor Ma, with such a son-in-law. It's a lucky thing she's got a daughter."

"Well," says Uncle Ben, "if you want to beat out the *Louisa* you'll have to take a train of cars."

And that's what she done. She got out her old satchel and her hat and she put off with them for the station as tight as she could make it.

"You come right home the minute you've got rid of that ice," she says.

"Yes, Em," says Uncle Ben.

"And you make Henry mop out the floor every other day and don't you set down after eating till you've done the dishes. And don't you dasst to use that new china set."

"No, Em," says Uncle Ben.

"And you put the money in the box when you get paid and don't you touch a penny."

And then the train took her off.

III

THERE AIN'T anybody to tell to-day how Uncle Ben commenced getting drunk, except only Henry Plat, and he wasn't very reliable that afternoon, and he's dead now. But he kept setting a pretty good pace right along till they got back to the boat. Anyhow, they got back, Uncle Ben hugging up a great big demi-john under each arm, and saying what an awful thing the sugar diabetes was for an old lady to have, and they took the ice across the harbor, and it was the first time in ten year Uncle Ben hadn't got sick making the voyage. He stood on the cabin set-back holding the sweep with his shirt unbuttoned and the spray slopping against his wishbone, and every time a gull hollered he'd look up against the sun. And Henry Plat, he lay on his stummick looking at Uncle Ben's nose and whiskers, full of admiration at the way watter in a man's inwards can dilute his drinks.

Well, sir, they unloaded that ice and they took a tow back to the East River dock, and half way across they seen a lot of boats rowing to beat the nation and right ahead of them the scaredest whale that ever got mixed in the traffic of New York. There was a lot in the papers

after how that whale got into the city anyhow, and they had pictures of it, and a picture of Uncle Ben a-standing on the *Louisa*, holding a cap in his hand and looking modest. After it was all over Uncle Ben had bought him a secondhand skipper's hat in a slopshop and let on how he'd been around the Horn in his early manhood.

But what happened was that that whale seen the old *Louisa* butting her stummick on the waves and I guess he thought she was another whale.

Uncle Ben seen her coming and yelled at Henry to look and tell him what in Crimus was coming and Henry looked and just hollered. Uncle Ben was always quick in a tight situation and he grabbed his horn and let out a good one on it, but the whale run up alongside of him and squirted the boat with watter and blood and Uncle Ben lost his temper and grabbed his boat hook and jammed it against the whale to keep her off and stuck her right in the eye. I guess the old bruit was pretty near exhausted because it just raised a fin and died right there.

Well, the other boats come up, and the men in them claimed the whale was theirs; but Uncle Ben had his boat hook well set in the bruit's eye and he wouldn't listen. Seems as if the whisky he drank was just about striking home, because he made a great impression and they laughed and asked one another what they would do with a whale anyhow, and pretty soon they asked Uncle Ben would he buy out their share. And he smacked his hand on his wallet and fishes out the money, and what with counting and the motion of the waves and Henry Plat he had only just enough left to pay for a tow up the river and get his mules out of the barn in Albany.

IV

WHEN THEY got back to the dock again and the watter got calm Henry Plat got up and commenced taking notice.

"What," he says, "are you going to do with that whale, Ben?" And then he remarks, "How Em's going to make you squeak when she finds out what you've spent your money on!"



But Uncle Ben was too likkered up for solid thought.

"Shut up, you poor bezabor," he says. "Em hasn't got nothing to say about this whale."

"No," says Henry, "I guess not."

Well, right then a lot of reporters come aboard and they begun asking questions. Uncle Ben got him his hat with gold braid and a shiny visor and had his picture took. And just after the whole of them had left, along comes a boat with a chesty bung in uniform that comes aboard and wants to know how long Uncle Ben aims to keep his property in New York harbor. Well, Uncle Ben gives him some drinks and says he'll get it out of the way pretty quick and salivates him handsome and that was that.

But he still had Henry Plat to talk to before he could get any rest.

"What am I going to do with it? What am I going to *do*?" and right there he got his idea. "Why," he says, "I'm going to load that whale aboard the *Louisa* and take her up the Erie."

"Be you, Ben? What are you going to do that for?"

"I'm going to show her for a nickel."

Henry sneered. "How much money will that make when anybody can look at her from the towpath for nothing?"

"You shut up," said Uncle Ben.

He'd got more up-and-coming every minute since Aunt Em had gone back to Boonville, and he wasn't going to let no bum bezabor like Henry Plat gum his fun. He just walks up the dock and goes off to the public library. Now he'd got a whale he wanted to know all about it. So he walks in and says to the lady, "Please show me your whales, Miss." Well, that caught her attention and she was a pretty girl and in two minutes had got the whole business out of Uncle Ben. "I want to find out what kind of a whale it is, and all about it."

Well, she took him through a lot of books, and they discovered about fourteen different kind of whale.

"What does he look like?" asks the lady.

"Well, ma'am, she's round, in

good flesh and kind of dark and she's got a pleasant eye."

"Oh," says the lady, and commenced educating Uncle Ben. . . .

When he come back about supper time, Henry asked him again what he aimed to do with his fish.

"Fish? That ain't no fish. My God, Henry, you're a ignorant bird all right. Why that's a mammal!"

"What," asks Henry, "is a mammal?"

Uncle Ben just looks him up and down.

"Henry," he says, "your mother was one."

"Do you want to fight?" asks Henry.

"No," says Uncle Ben. "You've been upset by this business, Henry. Of course, it's been different with me. I've been around the Horn in my young days. In my day I've speared more'n a hundred of this identical variety. I've got sperms, and speared narwhales, and blowed the very guts out of a killer oncet at three hundred yards with my old thirty-eight."

"What's the name of this variety?"

"It's a cash-a-lot."

Henry looks at him kind of wondering.

"Honest?" Uncle Ben nods to him. "Honest," he says.

"My God," says Henry, "maybe there is money in her after all."

"Listen, Henry, did you ever hear about a feller named Jonah?"

"Sure, he got swallowed by one of them animals."

"That's right, and then he got spit up.



Well, look here, Henry. Anybody that wants to can look at the outside of this whale for nothing, but them that want the whole works is going to have to pay me fifty cents."

"How're you going to show them the whole works, Ben?"

"I'm going to dig 'em out and make a room in his inside!"

Uncle Ben looks proud.

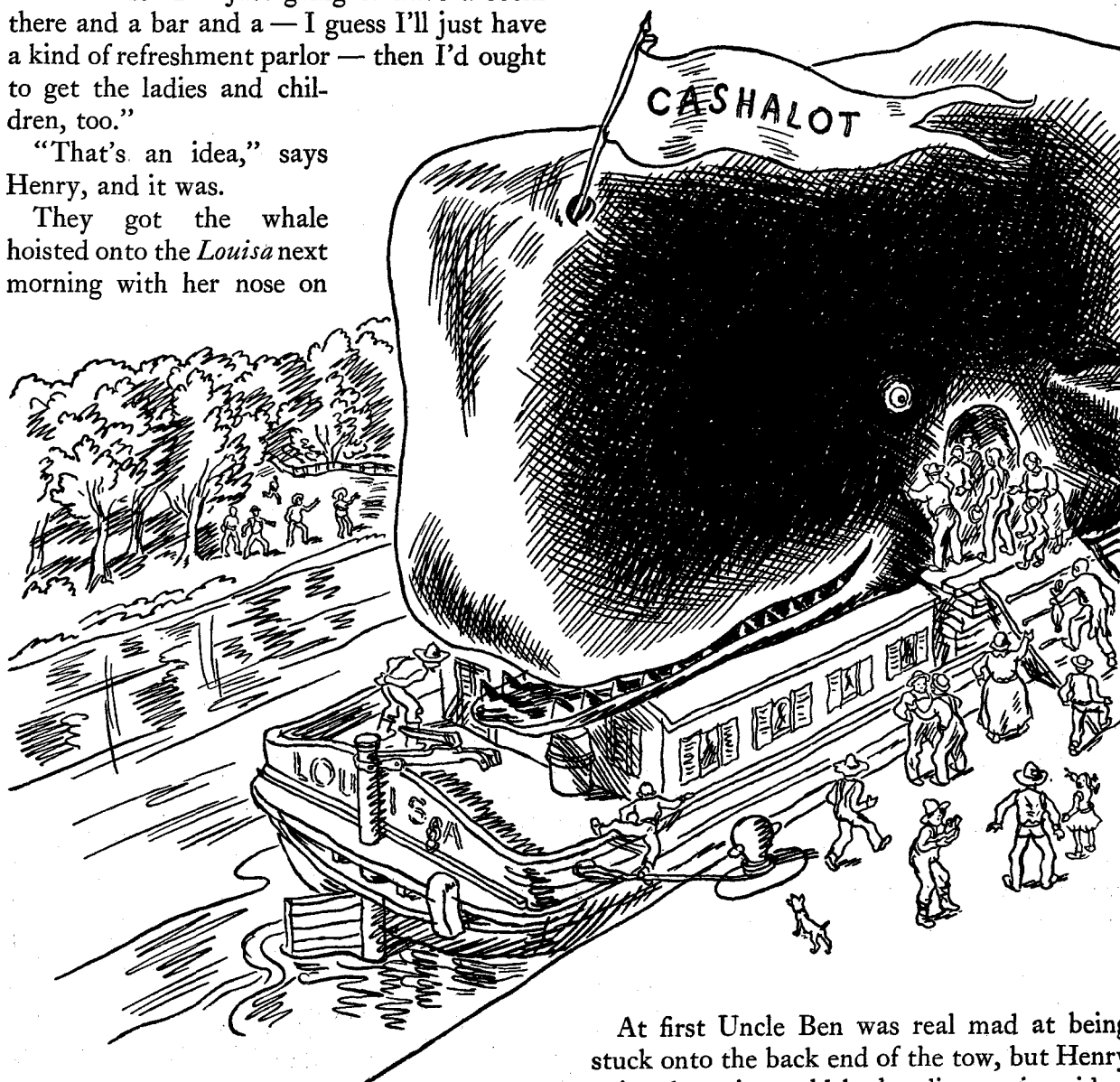
"But Ben," asks Henry, "if you dig them out, where in Sarah are you going to put them for people to see?"

"My God, Henry, can't you think of nothing but inwards? I'm just going to have a room there and a bar and a — I guess I'll just have a kind of refreshment parlor — then I'd ought to get the ladies and children, too."

"That's an idea," says Henry, and it was.

They got the whale hoisted onto the *Louisa* next morning with her nose on

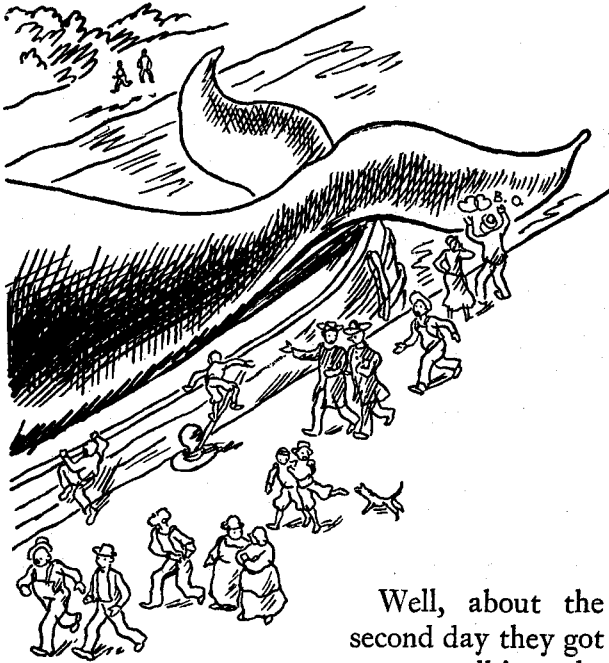
Well, the old *Louisa* was the first boat in that line; but along about Spuytenduyvil the wind changed to the north and the rest of the boats made the Tug change the line to put her on the back end. They'd thought at first a whale was a pretty handsome thing to examine, but about there Uncle Ben and Henry had got through the outside layer of fat. You could see them any time, burrowing in like a couple of beagles digging out a woodchuck. They had little shovels very sharp and they certainly made progress.



the cabin roof and the rest of her laying along the pit beams and the stable and her tail hanging over the front end. Then they joined their tow and started back for Albany.

At first Uncle Ben was real mad at being stuck onto the back end of the tow, but Henry pointed out it would be handier getting rid of the insides so he didn't argue very hard. He was having too good a time. He hadn't had likker in that long that now he had it he couldn't smell nothing but drink. Henry wasn't so well fixed. And what with digging back of

Uncle Ben and getting the throwout he was so danged greasy that he wouldn't dasst to scratch a match along his back end, no sir, not even without his pants. No sir, and what's more he wasn't fitted out for hard work and he couldn't keep up with Uncle Ben. That old coot was just about possessed. He'd got a dish towel tied around his beard and cotton in his ears and even at that about every ten minutes he had to walk out and let himself drean over the edge.



Well, about the second day they got pretty well into the core. They'd mixed themselves a mess of beans down in the cabin and Henry wanted to lay down on his bed, but Uncle Ben hadn't time. He kept explaining, "I got to get the outfit in afore we get to Water-vliet." So up he went and walked in and the first stroke he took he went through between two bones and the yell he let out come right out of the whale's mouth and Henry come a-running.

"Where've you reached to, Ben?" he asks.

Uncle Ben didn't know. He was kind of puzzled, inside and looking out, and Henry looks around too, and says, "I don't see where that feller Jonah managed to get along. I don't believe he was a whole week down inside like us are here. Anyway the ventilation's horrid."

"You poor twerp," says Uncle Ben. "This ain't the same whale."

"I don't see what that's got to do with it."

"No, you've never been around the Horn.

But I have and I've seen whales blow out the bad air fifty feet high."

"If there was that much pressure of bad air, I don't see how Jonah lasted out a minute."

"Well, maybe he was that kind of a feller," says Uncle Ben.

Well, when they got the insides into the river, Uncle Ben begun to fashion out a room. "Right here," he says, "is going to be the refreshment tables for the ladies. I'll get them in Albany. We won't need so many cheers, with what we got in the cabin. And then," he says, "seeing as how the lighting ain't very good I'll arrange a winder on each side." He stood there looking around kind of pleased and wondering. "Henry," he says, "what kind of curtains do you think would go best with these walls?"

Right then some blubber went into the back of Henry's neck and got the best of him.

"You're going to need something waterproof to wall this room," he says.

"Nonsense," says Uncle Ben, but it was a hot day and he discovered for himself there was a leak in the roof. But his ideas had got pretty well formed. And by the time he'd showed the outside of his whale in Troy for fifteen cents he'd got the inside all fitted out. And when he hauled out to number one, the whole contraption did make a display.

First, the two mules, a couple of scrummy old screws, had had their harness blacked and tassels and rings hung out to hide the bare spots in their hides till they sounded like a circus parade. And then the towline had a twist of yeller cloth on it and a big bow ribbon. And then come Henry Plat. Uncle Ben had rigged out the poor bezabor in a secondhand coachman's outfit, and he had a top hat with a ribbon bouquet on it and a coat with tails — and Henry's back end wasn't the kind to carry tails, it stuck out between — and white pants like knickers and a pink westcoat, and then there was the boots with flesh tops. Henry had tried them out in Albany, but they pinched him so that he hollered and argued till Uncle Ben allowed him to go back to the old boots he always wore and the red socks Aunt Em knitted him for Christmas. But even then the poor twerk's whiskers and little eyes looked kind of wistful as if the clothes had got him and was taking him somewhere where he didn't want to go.

But then come the boat. They had kind of

washed her outside but she looked a little greasy; but as Uncle Ben said, everybody had seen a bullhead boat anyway. It was the whale they'd look at. And sure enough there was the whale stretched out on the boat, looking Uncle Ben right in the eye where he stood steering. She had a door in her side opposite the gang, and a flag stuck into her nose hole saying CASHALOT in green letters. And over the door was a sign saying "Be a Jonah for fifty cents." And underneath it said, "Complete equipment."

And that wasn't all. Getting familiar with the whale the way he had had made Uncle Ben kind of affectionate and he wanted her to look her best; so he'd got a pair of glass eyes off an oculist in Albany which was as big as apples and he'd arranged them in her, which gave her a real active appearance. He himself got a sailor's coat and his hat and a new tie and done the steering. Every time he come to a village he blew on his horn and put into the dock.

And the whole town come down. And danged near everyone would go inside the whale. It certainly was rigged out.

Uncle Ben'd built a regular room out of matched lumber and he had a winder on the far side opposite the door, and a chair and table in the front end, and a bunk and a stove running through a double pipe, which he didn't never get up his nerve to light. And on the shelf in the back end he had a cupboard with all Aunt Em's best china set out. And as he told the people, it was all real shipshape and very actively arranged all but the plumbing.

And a lot of those farmers thought all whales was rigged out like that and commenced to take the Bible seriously after.

Well, the first day Uncle Ben paid all his expenses, and every day he went along he made more money, because the word got into the

papers and there was the picture took of him in New York and a picture of the complete whale, and even of the mules and Henry Plat. Farmers come from fifty miles away to intercept the creature and get a look at his insides.

But what was more important, Uncle Ben began to get more owdacious every day. By now he had killed whales in his early days with his bare hands, this one he'd fixed with his boat hook — you could read

it in the papers — but of course he was getting old, and the number he had shot with his old thirty-eight was financially extraordinary. He showed you the thirty-eight to prove it and the notches he had cut in it for woodchucks became whales. He could look any man in the eye, and spit on a dime. You'd never have guessed he'd ever have been married to Aunt Em. And I don't suppose he ever remembered her at all. When he wasn't talking whale or serving tea to the ladies, he was having a snort on his own.



You won't believe it maybe, but that old coot had made over a thousand dollars before he got to Rome. And by now the Utica papers had the whole story and described the boat and the china and remarked on the pattern, which was in forget-me-nots and roses, and Henry Plat begun to wonder if it wasn't about time they heered from Aunt Em.

But by the time they got to Rome there had been a week of hot weather and the whale had swollen some and on the last day Uncle Ben had to do some trimming to get her under the bridges. And when he done that, even though he'd been living in that whale for two weeks, he had to admit that she was getting higher. And every day after that, the more he trimmed her the higher she got, and at Rome for the first time, the price of admission went down a quarter. But Uncle Ben had become a regular

Wall Street wizard and he bought out two perfumery peddlers and did a handsome business in that line.

By this time, too, Henry Plat had become used to his uniform and was beginning to regret that the smell was getting so bad it threatened to stop the show. He hadn't ever had so many free drinks in his life before, nor had he ever had such light hauling to do. His breathing system had got used to blubber; and he felt real apprehensive when, sure enough, there was Aunt Em on the dock, in front of the crowd, with her bag in her hand and her hat over her eyes, looking half as big as the whale and more than twice as powerful.

She'd been reading the papers. She didn't even look at the mules or Henry Plat or the yellor bow on the towline, and if her nose was working she didn't even show it.

She waited till the boat had tied up and the gang come out and then she marched right aboard.

Uncle Ben come down the gang walk.

"Hullo Emmy," he says, and Henry was real startled to hear him so cool.

She stopped right still and kind of shivered.

"You runty little spider," she was always naming him by an insect, "is this the way you spend our money? Is this the way you hurry home to the bedside of your blessed mother-in-law?"

Uncle Ben sounded patient.

"I was detained on business," he says.

"Business?"

Henry Plat kept feeling little cold winds climbing up the inside of them white pants. But then he seen Uncle Ben wink.

"Well, old girl," he says out loud, "welcome home. I'm surprised you was so long gone, but, now you're back, you're welcome."

He must have had that speech all figured out, I guess.

The crowd let out a cheer. Here was the whale killer being met by his loving wife. Crowds like that kind of thing. If there'd only been a baby on hand for Uncle Ben to use he could have collected a dollar, instead of twenty-five cents.

Well, Aunt Em took a look at the crowd and went below without talking.

In a minute up she come hollering mad. "Where's my chiney?" she hollers. And outside of the condition of the blankets, the fat had

come through onto her Bible and the brass clock was running about forty-two hours a day with the oil that had got into it and striking faster than a man could wind it. Her curtains was streaked and the geraniums looked kind of sickly, and there hadn't been a dish washed in two weeks.

But she couldn't make no headway into that whale, it was jam full of humans, and when she finally did get in she slipped on the floor and set down.

Uncle Ben helped her onto her feet and begun to explain the inside workings of that cashalot. And when he come to the money in it, Aunt Em was impressed. Even she could see that Uncle Ben was the killer of a whale, and wasn't scared of a woman any more, and so she commenced to cry.

"Look at my chiney, look at what you have done to my pretty boat," she says. "How can I expect to live in a cabin full of a smell like that?"

"If you don't like it, Emmy, you can go home," says Uncle Ben.

But there was too much money involved. She stayed, and when she complained again, Uncle Ben told her to try whisky; and danged if she didn't do it. She got mellowed and mellowed, and when the price of admission had to drop to two for a nickel, she didn't even open the winders; and when they had to sell the whale for fertilizer in Rochester, for eighty cents, and Uncle Ben said to her, "This smell of fish is kind of strong. You'd better give the boat a good clean up," she didn't say a word but got right to work. Even when Henry Plat come in with his boots on, she didn't say a word.

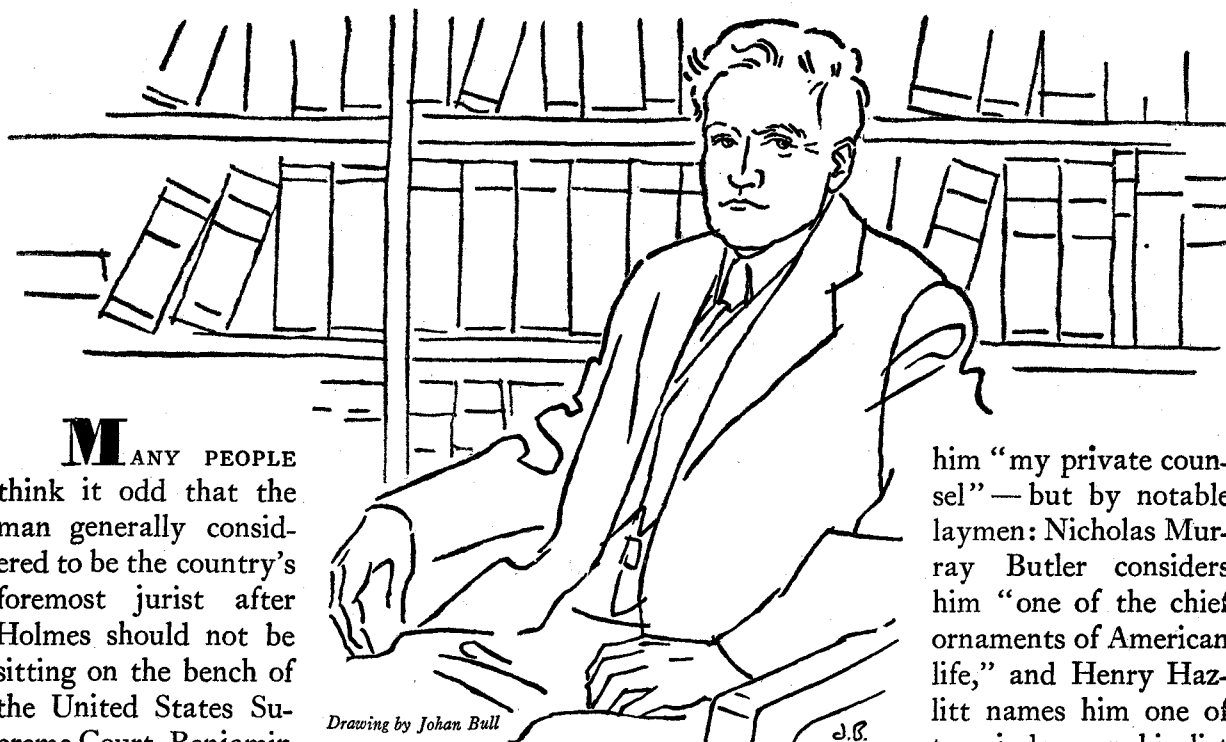
And Uncle Ben just set in the cabin looking on, having his evening snort, and looking at them two glass eyes hung up where the geraniums used to set. He'd put his money in a bank himself, and his heart had gone with that whale, and Aunt Em wanted to keep what was left. Once she'd been unloosed by whisky, she turned out a fond woman.

They worked the *Louisa* back through hogs and potatoes to grain until she was as nice as ever. But Uncle Ben had become a kind of old mariner, and Aunt Em continued a changed woman till she died, and if you want to see them glass eyes, my Pa has got them in his house.

Philosopher-at-Law

The Career of Judge Benjamin Cardozo

by **JOSEPH PERCIVAL POLLARD**



MANY PEOPLE think it odd that the man generally considered to be the country's foremost jurist after Holmes should not be sitting on the bench of the United States Supreme Court. Benjamin Cardozo himself would be the last to think it strange, for the man's modesty is as inescapable as his judicial wisdom and his philosophic power. Addressing a lawyers' luncheon a few years ago, Cardozo recalled Charles Francis Adams's sigh of satisfaction, as he looked over the years, that he had gone through life without making a conspicuous ass of himself. "That, I may say in passing, is my own pæan of jubilation at the end of each judicial year."

Thus the one state judge who has become a judge of national prominence, the only jurist besides Holmes who furnishes law school professors a touch of awe for their lectures, the man whose name is sure to be mentioned in courtrooms and legislative halls and wherever help is needed to win a victory for humanitarian rights, for fair dealing and good conscience. He is acclaimed not alone by lawyers — Charles Evans Hughes once said he was the best qualified man ever to head the New York judiciary, Alfred E. Smith affectionately calls

him "my private counsel" — but by notable laymen: Nicholas Murray Butler considers him "one of the chief ornaments of American life," and Henry Hazlitt names him one of two judges on his list

of our first ten intellectual leaders. But ability is not always the important criterion in Supreme Court appointments; our political arrangement makes geography more impressive when New York is already twice represented on the high tribunal, and social prejudice may play a part when it already includes one Jew.

As Chief Judge of the New York Court of Appeals, Benjamin Nathan Cardozo wields a power almost as great as that of Supreme Court judges, and, where mere money is the important factor in the litigation, even a little greater. Problems of commercial and corporation law involving millions of dollars, coming up from the financial center of the world, are settled once and for all when they are settled by the highest court of New York State, for they cannot go to Washington unless a federal question is in issue. The New York court's rulings on business transactions naturally have a vital effect on the rest of the country. But the New York court's determination of human