

X. A WALK UNDER THE SEA.

WHAT GOES ON IN THE OCEAN DEPTHS.

“THE sea! the sea!” shouted the companions of Balboa, as they caught the first glimpse of the Pacific from the heights of the American Isthmus. The sea has always inspired the wonder—often the veneration—of mankind. Its vastness and power overwhelm the imagination. Its permanence, its antiquity, form a bewildering conception. The same “far-sounding sea” roared in the hearing of the mariners of the remotest past. The same ocean floated the ships of the Tyrians and Carthaginians. Its mysterious depths aroused the superstitions of the ancients as they excite the intelligent curiosity of modern science. A “glorious mirror,” as Byron conceived it,

“Where the Almighty’s form
Glasses itself in tempests. * * * *
Boundless, endless, and sublime,
The image of eternity—the throne
Of the invisible.”

Let us stand on some bold headland and look out over the Atlantic. Let us plant ourselves on Sankaty Head, the eastern promontory of Nantucket, itself the “ultima Thule” of New England. The breakers roar along the beach. Across the billowy blue thought wanders to the European shore. Underneath the ruffled surface imagination pictures a world of curious and wonderful existences. There lie the skeletons of noble ships—there moulder the dead sailors of all nations—there rot invaluable cargoes—there sleep the mysteries of steamers which sailed out of sight of land and never returned—there swarm the sharks that desecrate the sacred forms of humanity which sink into their silent empire. Shall we venture among the dangers of the under-world? Yes, we invoke the magic protection which has made warriors invulnerable, and shielded adventurers upon the waters of Styx, and the fiery waves of Phlegethon.