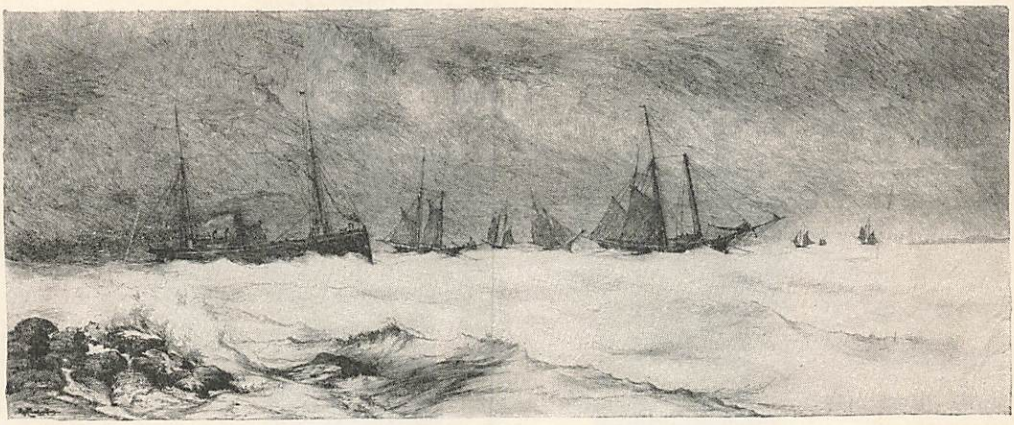


A SOU'WEST GALE.

IN GLOUCESTER HARBOR.

WITH PICTURES FROM ETCHINGS BY THE AUTHOR.

THE arm of land called the Eastern Point, stretching out from the town of Gloucester and forming its harbor, possesses more attractions for one fond of the sea than does any other place on the coast that I know. Its shore toward the sea is protected by an armor of granite that breaks the force of storms, and within its shelter ride safely at anchor great barks from Italy and Spain, the fishing-fleet, and picturesque coasters, with their deck-loads of hay and timber. In the background rise the foreign-looking towers of the city, and at its extreme point is the old Eastern Lighthouse. Opposite, guarding the other side, is the rock of Norman's Woe, and stretching back toward the city are the dark Manchester Hills.

It was this intimacy with the sea that led me to make the Point my home. I moved into a farmhouse, a comfortable building of the American country type, surrounded by great birch-trees, a row of which stretched along the sea-wall across the lawn at its back, and beneath which I have the whole harbor spread out before me. In front of the house lies the lake, bordered by old willows and covered with lily-pads. Beyond the lake are Brace's Rock, the cliffs, and the sea.

Although life on the Point is lovely enough in summer,—I know of no place in the North where there are more song-birds,—its real interest and beauty begin in the autumn. In spite of its bleak exposure, it is warmer than Boston or Gloucester itself; the air is bracing, of course—and such color! The trees around the farm-house are of all colors, from the dark green of the willows in shadow to the silver of the birches in sunlight; farther away, tall elms line the old fort-road. Grass meadows stretch up toward the hills, and gray rocks jut from the green. Over the meadow thence to the sea are blueberry-bushes and rich furze, changing with different seasons, making a brilliant carpet in pleasant weather, or softly toned into grays when clouds hide the sun. Then comes the delicate fringe of pale-green sea-grass, changing at another season into a golden yellow. All the gamut of color exists in rich profusion, from the deepest to the highest tones, tempered generally by the blues of the atmosphere. It is a place in which to live and study, like some of the old towns of France. My dog and cat take walks with me, and we enjoy them together; for Nature tempers us brutes into reasonable beings, and we find content in her society.

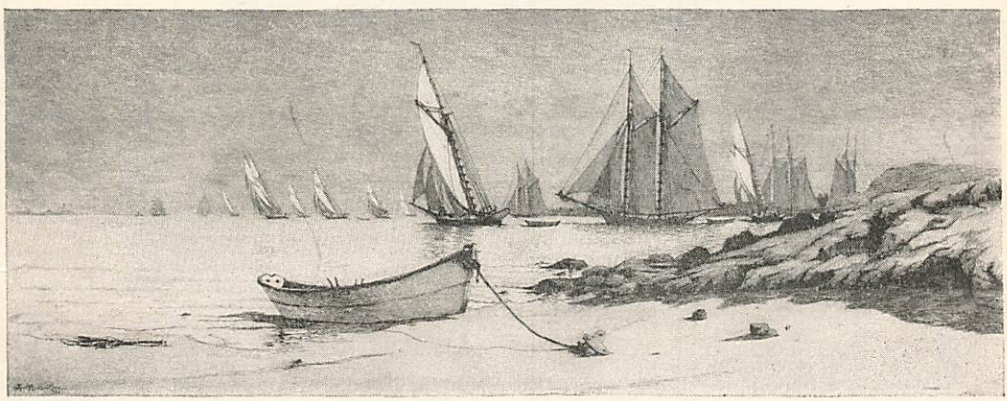
From the high land on the middle of the Point the shore stretches off to Thatcher's Island, with its two needle-like lighthouses, and down the coast on a fair day the eye can make out Plymouth: one of real New England faith and enthusiasm can almost see the Rock. You take in the whole sweep of ocean, horizon, and sky. The vessels lie anchored at your feet in still waters, and the town nestles comfortably in the distance. One afternoon I was watching the schooners sailing out on their mackerel-trips. All sail was set, even to the great stay-sails high up between the masts, the wind being fair from the northeast. Two or three coasters were at anchor, with mainsails up to keep their noses pointed toward the wind; the sun was shining, but far down toward Marblehead the sky was black. One or two schooners anchored near shore were taking in their canvas, a sure

sign that the barometer was falling. Another, pointing out under full sail, came about. The sky and water in the west had turned so dark a purple that the usually brown seaweed showed a golden yellow. A lull came in the wind, allowing a dull rumble of thunder to roll from Manchester; a vivid fork of lightning shot across the sky with a splitting shock, and a low-lying yellow cloud of dust rose from Magnolia. The wind was starting from the west with a rush; all the ships were brought up to meet it; and sails were coming down with a run, a brilliant, uncanny white against the intense black sky. The schooners were almost human in their panic as the fierce squall broke and the rain came down as though the heavens had been ripped open.

Such storms seldom touch the Point; tearing in from the sea, they pass over the harbor toward Annisquam, and in as short a time as it takes them to come up, they have swept out again. Then the sun shines out against the clouds piled up in the east; the vessels pluck up fresh courage, and are again on their courses, or have come quietly to anchor. The great arch of a rainbow stretches from north to south, and the day dies in a glowing mass of splendor. As the stars appear faintly through the deep blue, the riding lights dot the harbor, the green of a new arrival creeping slowly to her berth; then come the splash of an anchor, the rattle of a cable; and night is here.

Some evenings, when the wind has died away, leaving the air damp with heavy dew, the quiet of the harbor is often intensified by a chance noise. The cry of a man on shore hailing a schooner to send a boat for him will only make the quiet doubly still. One has an instinctive desire to go out and tell him to hush. The road along the beach was my regular evening walk, to get the letters and New York paper. Generally it was a pleasant one, and even in bad weather, when I was rigged in oilskins and carried a lantern, it served only as an appetizer to a snug evening before the fire. One night in February I had gone as usual for the mail. The air was heavy with moisture; the night very dark and still. The glare from the town made the atmosphere brilliant in that direction, and the yellow lights of the vessels were reflected in the calm water almost to my feet. The only sound came from the booming foghorn on Thatcher's Island. A gentle wind sprang up, ruffling the reflections, and brought across the water to the ear the sound of a band playing in Gloucester.

That was the only time I remember when loneliness became oppressive. The music was not of the classic order, nor of the quieter kind, dreamy and soft, but of the real city German-band sort. I smelt New York, heard the abominable street-cars, saw the carriages driving fast to a dinner or the opera with a bit of white something inside, and I felt homesick. The hoarse whistle of a steamer offshore interrupted the music and my memories. Then the fog-bell sounded at the Point, and a white cloud of steaming vapor poured in from the sea and rushed past me over the harbor, blotting out the lights, the water, and everything but loneliness. My wretched lantern kept company with me on one side, and my ghostly shadow clung to me against the mist on the other. The trees dripped big drops that seemed to crawl in under my sou'wester and down my neck, and the salt air was fishy. That bad music had upset my contentment.



A FAIR MORNING.

A winter's gale is always good and entertaining company, and a walk to the lighthouse sure to be exciting. The harbor is crowded with craft, coasters tugging at their anchors, burying their noses in the heavy southwest sea that rolls across the harbor. The more graceful fishermen courtesy to the black lighthouse-



THE SAILING OF THE SCHOONER.

tender and to the high, white steamers bound to Portland and Nova Scotia. Far out, many another craft under reefed foresail and jib is making for safety, sinking half-mast deep between the heavy seas. Seaward the cliffs are pouring cataracts of salt water inland, the very waves seeming glad to get ashore. A great angry, gray-green wall gathers together, and, as the back-wash runs out, piles up, and then hurls itself onward with dull thunder—to rise in a cutting mass of spray as it tears over the rocks. As darkness comes on, you climb over the slippery stone to a safe place, watching the ocean getting blacker and the rising columns of spray more ghostly; the shrieking wind and the noise of the waters sound like the cries of men cast away. I can almost see the wreckage to which they must be clinging, and it becomes too real to enjoy. I turn to go home, almost pitching headlong in my haste. I know absolutely that it is all imagination, yet as a great souse of spray comes pounding upon my back I do not linger. That last dash seems almost an evidence of contempt on the part of the ocean, and as I scramble into the furze and bushes inland I have very little breath with which to give a sigh of relief. The farm-house looks wonderfully cheerful as I pass the stone woman of Eastern Point standing grim in the gathering darkness, and as I take a last look at the rising and falling lights of the harbor my dog welcomes me into cozy comfort. The wind has risen and brought driving sleet, that dread of sailors. The house trembles with the shock

of the blast as it beats against the window-pane, and my thoughts and sympathies turn toward the man at the wheel, the fishermen in their dories on the Banks, or the helpless schooner, broken from her moorings on the Georges, going to destruction, and carrying death in her path to another.

Sunshine gladdens the earth when I wake; the wind is fresh from the west, and a clear blue sky reflects itself in the water. Already those transient guests, the steamers, are crossing the Dog Bar, pitching in the brilliant seas, and rising with a white mantle of foam. The rattle of the pawls, the creaking of blocks, the clank, clank of the windlass, and the slowly rising white sails, tell that soon all will be tearing on their courses with a bone in their teeth. It is a very forlorn old hooker that cannot shine as a beauty on such a morning. High up in the heavens white clouds throw down again the brilliant sunshine. It is a day when darkest life seems good.

My dory is called the *Folly*, but her name must have been a jest. I never knew a steadier boat at her moorings, and in going about, unless you put the helm hard alee long before you intended to bring up into the wind, she 'd bump into anything a quarter of a mile away. Had she only been worthy of her name, I could have blessed her with other than my ordinary thoughts on such an occasion. She has carried me out many a time at sunrise when the 'longshore fishermen were at their nets and lobster-pots, set only a few rods from land. Their boats were of all colors, faded by the wind and sea into perfect harmony with the water and sky. Their sails were of all shades of brownish gray and blue-white, all massed together around a herring- or mackerel-net, where men in yellow oil-skins were scooping in the fish, glistening as they shook off the last drop of their dear home with energetic flappings, and accommodated themselves to circumstances by losing their breath. Then as the *Folly* bore down upon them, just as likely stern first as not, threatening to break up their pleasant and fishy conversation into uncomplimentary fragments, I would bring up alongside of a kind, considerate friend whom I had paid high for fresh fish, and watch the scene. Many of the men in the dories were old commanders of schooners, their eyes bloodshot from long watching and driving salt spray. Too old to go on voyages, they cannot cast aside the habit of a life, but sail daily out to sea with a few clams or herring for bait, to haul in uncertain rock-cod, to jig for mackerel, or to have an old-time swear at cunners, dog-fish, and sculpins. I know one who is blind, but who hires a man to sail him out to sea in his dory every day, in order that he may not go to pieces on land. As they jibe the booms over and sail away past the lighthouse, leaving me and the *Folly* to wonder how we are most easily to get back to breakfast, I hear the wheezing echo of a laugh as some one calls, "Push on the mast, mister, and let her bile." As I laboriously get the *Folly's* head around, and haul in the sheet to drift home any way she kindly will, the mackerel-schooners are coming out. Their sails are in deep blue shadow, tipped and edged with brilliant white where they belly around to the sunlight, their gently rising bows awaking the water into a bright ripple.

In summer the fishermen are off after mackerel, following the schools of fish up and down the coast. Very often they only chase delusive hopes. They catch the mackerel in long seines, and sometimes they take more than they can handle, the net breaks, and then instead of joy there is interlarded sorrow. When the catch has been good, the schooner floats in at sundown, generally with just wind enough to give the skipper at the wheel excuse for idleness, while the crew are busy splitting and cleaning the mackerel. As they come to anchor off the farm-house, flares are lighted, and the work goes on. Then the bay looks like an American Venetian fête, if there is such a thing, and daylight finds a tired crew sleeping the sleep of men who have earned their wages honestly.

The fisherman's life on the Banks and the Georges in winter is a very hard one, though they live well on board — better than on shore. They have to, that they may stand the excessive cold; and their pay is like their lives, a floating doubt. The voyage is made on shares. From the gross profits of the catch are deducted the cost of bait and ice, and one fourth of one per cent. for the Widows' and Orphans' Fund. One half of the net "stock," as it is called, goes to the owners of the vessel, the other half to the crew, from which is deducted each man's share of the crew's expenses; that is, cook's wages, water, medicine-chest, etc. They sail away full of hope and with a full larder. Arrived on the grounds, they anchor in about forty or fifty fathoms, and set their trawls. These are long lines, anchored on the bottom, and extending out from the schooner many hundreds of yards. To these, at intervals of a fathom (the distance varies for different fish), are attached shorter lines. These lines have to be attended in dories, each containing two men, who haul, bait, and land the fish in the boat, to be transferred to the schooner. Herein lie the danger and hardship, for the strong tides of the Banks and the shoal water pile up great combing seas. The cold is cruel, and the work hard. Suddenly down comes a fog, not the soft mist of summer or autumn, but a thick, heavy bank, soaked through with the penetrating cold of

the icebergs further north. Horns are blown from the vessel, but every year many dories are lost. One would think that common sense, if not law, would make each dory carry a breaker of water and pilot-bread; but none do, and either experience does not teach or the fishermen like such chances, for year after year comes the same old story of a lost dory and two men with the skipper and his crew, and the dread that must be theirs of telling who it is that is missing. Once I used to see an old man and a young woman on the rocks where I was painting. They came regularly every morning and afternoon, and carried an ancient telescope with which they searched the horizon. But the sea kept its secret from them, and the overdue



THE RETURN OF THE SCHOONER.

starved or dead of thirst. When the fog lifts they are many miles from their schooner, and are carried by the swift tides they know not whither. Then come days of hunger and thirst; hands are frozen to the oars; madness haunts them; and then—death. Sometimes they make land or are picked up by a passing vessel, in which case they often return before their own schooner; but that great happiness is rare. Then their vessel, which so gaily sailed out past the light, comes home with her flag at half-mast.

I HAVE sat under the trees on a morning when returning spring softens and lights up everything, and the birds have come, and the leaves are just breaking from their winter sheathing. Slowly a schooner rounds the Point, with her flag at half-mast. It is impossible to be careless in thought for that day; no matter what joy may be in your heart, you feel schooner never came. She had been out for four months, a long time for a voyage, but they could not give up that hope which was then their sole interest in life.

But a schooner's home-coming is generally of a brighter cast, and you find yourself quite as much in sympathy with the fishermen's joys as with their sorrows. Usually they sweep in from the northeast over a blue sea, and, passing the red buoy on the Dog Bar, turn the tiller for a straight and fair course up the harbor past Ten Pond Island. But they may come with a heavy fog. Then there is a screeching tug that seems to go out to patrol the coast, warning vessels off the rocks. She really hopes to find one so near danger that her assistance will be grateful to a wearied crew; or if the wind is light, as it generally is in a fog, she counts on the crew's impatience to get ashore. The fee is made up by the tired-out fishermen, and they pass up the harbor in luxurious ease.

R. Cleveland Coxe.