The Fog-bark of Heron Neck

By J. K. Wilson

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The fog was rolling in thick and heavy one afternoon, a few years ago, as the Marie Louise rounded Hurricane Island, and headed into the sound, on its course for Carver's Harbor. It was the beginning of a "nasty" night, and navigation was every moment becoming more difficult and precarious.



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"Now I'll show you something that I'm sure you never saw or heard of before" said Captain Cutler.

"What is it?" I inquired eagerly. I had already found that there were a good many things along the enchanted coast of Maine that I had never seen or heard of before.

"A fog-bark."

"A fog bark? What, in the name of all that's curious, is that?"

The captain smiled quizzically. "Why, you have heard of fog-horns and fog-whistles, haven't you?"

"Of course."

"Well, this is the same thing - only different. Listen, now."

He pulled the cord above his head, and the little steamer gave a diabolical shriek. Almost immediately through the darkness on the starboard quarter came the sound of a dog's deep-voiced barking.

"There! Do you hear it?" he asked. "That's Captain Farnham's big dog. He has taught him to answer steamer signals, and we call him the 'fog-bark' of Heron Neck. He's a great help in a night like this, when it is too thick to see the light."

"Good!" said I. "There's a story back of it, of course; let's have it."

As we crept slowly along through the fog, with the whistle blowing at regular intervals, and the sounds of the dog's barking coming from the land now a little off

the quarter, now abeam, and now faintly astern until it died away altogether, the captain told me the simple facts that I am writing down for the lovers of man's great friend, the dog.

Carver's Harbor is on the southerly side of one of the many islands that fringe Maine's long drawn-out coast line. West of it is Hurricane Island. Green's Island, on the easterly side, thrusts a long extremity out seaward, which is called Heron Neck, from its resemblance in shape to the neck of that bird. On the point there is a lighthouse, but no fog-signal.

Rather, it should be said, there is no signal provided by the department at Washington. But although Uncle Sam knew nothing of it, and it was not listed among government properties, and no appropriation was asked or received for its maintenance, Captain Farnham, keeper of Heron Neck Light, had for three years had a very important and useful auxiliary in his work -a "fog-bark," if not a fog-horn.

It was a big, handsome Newfoundland dog, Nemo by name, after the great Captain Nemo of one of Jules Verne's most famous stories. Captain Farnham trained the dog to answer the signals of passing vessels by barking whenever he heard them.

As soon as the fog began to come in he seemed to realize that he was to be on duty, and went like a well-drilled soldier to his position at the extreme end of the Neck.

There he waited patiently until somewhere out of the murk came the sound of a whistle or a horn, to which he immediately responded by barking loudly. Sound carries well in a fog, and the intelligent creature's voice was easily heard a long distance, and was a sufficient warning over a large area of danger.

One captain declared that he could hear Nemo farther than the fog-horn on the other side of the sound.

The dog never tired of his task, but remained at his station through all weather until the fog lifted, and the passing sailors could see their way again. Probably more than one vessel was saved from wreck and disaster by the timely warning of this four-footed sentinel of the sea.

Naturally, Nemo was a prime favorite with those who had occasion to traverse these waters. As the local fishermen passed by in fair weather they blew their horns or whistles, and he came bounding down to the water's edge to return their salute, and to receive the biscuit and bits of meat that they threw ashore to him. That captain must have been in a great hurry, or much buffeted by head tides or contrary winds, who would not lay his course a little nearer the land for the sake of showing appreciation of the worth and services of this shaggy friend in need.

Nemo seemed to distinguish some of the boats from the rest, and to bestow upon them particular attention. Thus he always saluted with special eagerness and apparent delight the steamer Governor Bodwell, on its daily trips between Vinal Haven and Rockland. It was only necessary to say in his hearing, in the most casual way, "The Bodwell is coming," and he was up and away to the shore to greet the boat; and no matter how far inland he might be, the whistle at Hurricane always brought him to his post on the Neck before it passed the light.

"There's many a fellow," said Captain Cutler, reflectively, "there's many a fellow who walks about on two legs and who thinks no small things of himself, who isn't doing as much good in the world as that dog down on Heron Neck. Nemo is an important part of the lighthouse service on this bit of the coast, and if he were taken away a good many of us would go about in thick weather more carefully than we have to now. More than that; he's 'only a dog,' you say; but I tell you, sir, if that dog should be hurt or killed there would be more than one wet eye and sad heart in these parts."

He was not hurt of killed, but two or three years ago he resigned, as any two-legged sentinel might do as he approached old age, and now another dog, Rover, has been trained to do the work which Nemo performed for many years. Rover has a great many friends among the lobster fishermen.