Overland Monthly — September, 1892.

LOS FARALLONES DE LOS FRAYLES.



THIRTY miles from the heart of San Francisco lies a part of the city and county known to but few of its citizens. Only a few score persons a year visit the Farallones, and know how much of interest they hold and how much there is to them; for seen from the mainland, the islands are "hull down," as sailors say, and only the upper part of the hilltops is in sight The rest of the world knows almost as little of them as of the planet Mars. It sees their light: it suspects that they are inhabited,—and that is about the extent of its knowledge. It knows only a part of their name.

There are three separate Farallones:—North Farallones, a group of five sharp rocks rising abruptly from the sea, the tallest 155 feet high. They afford no anchorage or landing place. In very calm weather the Greek or Italian fishermen sometimes scramble up their sides to gather eggs, but not often; and in general the birds and seals live there undisturbed, guarded by dashing surf.

The Middle Farallon is a single rock, twenty-two feet high, more solitary and less inviting than the northern crags.

The South Farallones are by far the most important group. Here, with lesser islets around it, is an island three quarters of a mile long from east to west, and three fifths of a mile wide, its highest point 340 feet high. Its shape is so irregular that the map and the general views are the only means of giving an idea of it.

The islands are government property, devoted to the lighthouse service, and to visit them requires a special permit from the Lighthouse Inspector in charge of the Department. This permit is not easy to obtain. The Inspector knows of the impossibility of entertaining more than two or three people at a time in the keepers' houses, and while he is very polite to applicants for a permit to visit the island, they must show a more valid claim than a desire to see it before they succeed.

The Artist and I secured the coveted document early in June, and set about finding a means of getting to the Farallones and back. Our thoughts first turned to the government steamer that carries supplies to the light stations. We found that the Madroño makes her regular trips to the Farallones once a quarter. We hardly cared to fancy ourselves Napoleon on St. Helena for three whole months.

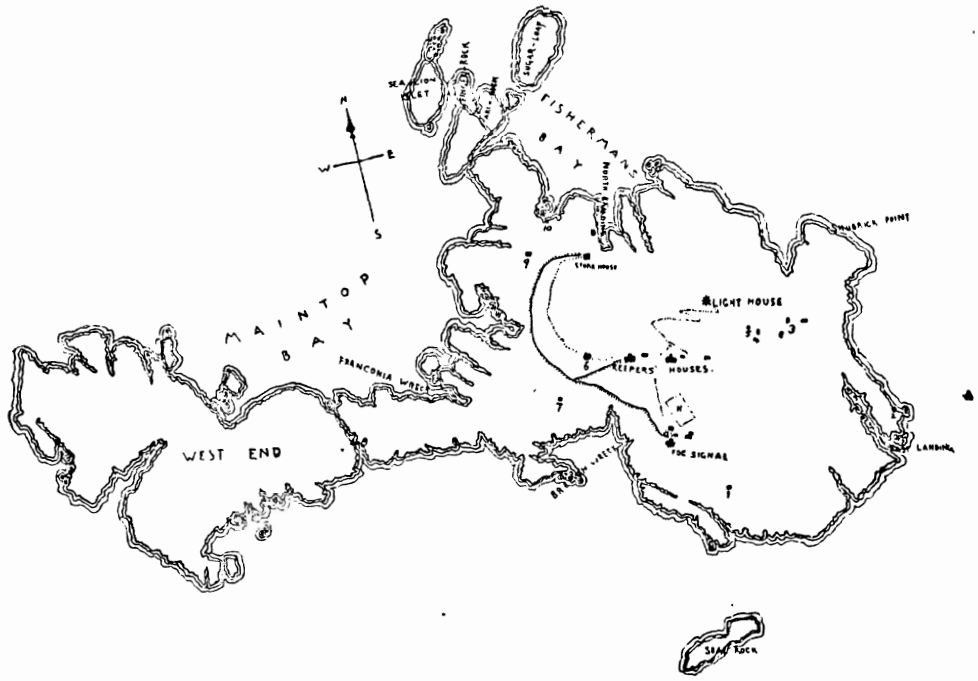
Then we learned that the tugs that go out to look for ships to tow in make the South Farallon an observing station. Application for a permit to go on a tug of the Spreckels line was kindly granted, but we were warned that the passage was extremely uncertain. If no tug is outside, one goes out each morning, starting at 3:30 o'clock, but usually it cannot be told till five or six o'clock in the afternoon whether or no a tug is to go out the next morning. A start by no means implies reaching the island; for the tug goes out to look for ships, not to go to the Farallon, and while on the way, if she sees an incoming ship at once makes for it.

An arrival at the island is not always followed by a landing; for the sea is at times so rough that no small boat can live, even on the most sheltered side, to

make the transfer to the shore. The chief keeper, Mr. Beeman, told me that he was once three whole weeks trying, by every means that offered to get to the island.

When the Artist and I went down to the wharf on Tuesday evening, June 7th, we found an unpromising situation. Two tugs were outside, and unless both came in, no tug would start next morning. We were about to give it up, but for soon the second tug was sighted, coming in with a tow, and Captain Scott of the Relief told us that he would go out in the morning. More than this, he gave us permission to sleep on the tug, and we were soon wrapped in our blankets on the cushions of the saloon seats.

At three o'clock we were wakened by movements aboard, and in a few minutes the tug was under way. At the very first glimmer of gray dawn the Artist



MAP OF THE SOUTH FARALLONES.

Outlines from a chart made in 1872 by E. F. Dickens, Aid U. S. Coast Survey. Used by permission of Professor Mendenhall, Chief of United States Coast Survey. 1, Blowhole. 2, Grotto. 3, Ruins of Russian houses. 4, Entrance to Cave. 5, Woman's Grave. 6, Old Stone Keeper's House, used now by egg pickers. 7, Jerry's Grave. 8, Bridge built of Wreckage over "Jordan." 9, Egg House. 10, Mineral Spring. 11, Cemented Rain Catchment Area.

waited to see the Honolulu steamer go out. She had been meant to start at noon, but had been detained by a difficulty with her machinery. Now she was cast off, and moved majestically out into the stream, swung round, took her course, and was off on her long voyage.

Meanwhile one of the outside tugs had been reported, and this encouraged us to wait. Our constancy was rewarded, looked out of the bulls eye, and saw so much promise of beauty that he at once turned out, and soon we were both on deck.

The tug was past Alcatraz and North Beach, and began to pitch in the Pacific swell as she went by Fort Point. It is useless to try to tell about that sunrise. The sunset view looking out of the Golden Gate is famous, but the sunrise view



"THE STREET."

looking in through the Gate is yet more wonderful. The morning mist has a fleeciness of texture that holds and is glorified by the early light; and the glimpse of landscape, of hill and plain and village seen in the radiance of coming day, seems like a view of the blessed country. We looked and looked and could not look enough, till the great sun by climbing over the upper rim of all the mists that covered the Contra Costa hills made himself too apparent, and resolved the gorgeous dream into the common light of day.

"A square-rigger, inward bound," that is what the tugs are looking for, and that was the word that roused excitement on the Relief. At first she was hardly visible without a glass, but soon her lofty spars and cloud of canvas showed plainly. She was coming head on, with every stitch of canvas set. As we approached, it was seen that she was not the largest size, and when we could see past the first mast it proved that she was only a brigantine, much too small game for a fine tug like the Relief. "There's no money in brigs unless there are three or four of them," said the Captain in disgust.

We passed quite close to the stranger, and learned that she was the Consuelo, inward bound from Kahului, with Hawaiian sugar. Once more we were headed straight for the Farallones.

Soon after we passed the Whistling Buoy, with its bull-like roar as the swel raises it. Lying there at the outer edge of the Bar was the pilot-boat America, a crack boat in the races. The Captain hailed her, and was told that she had been outside two days and had seen no ships.

"What's that to the northward?" said Captain Scott, sweeping the horizon with his marine glass.

"A bark, outward bound," was the reply, and we held our course.

At six o'clock morning coffee was served, ship fashion, to all who went to the galley for it,— one of the best customs shipmen have, to my thinking.

The Farallones had been looming up all the time, and now we were within five or six miles of them. We began to feel sure that our luck would carry us through on the first try. But the Captain was not quite satisfied about that sail to the northward. A word to the helmsman, and the Relief turned at right angles to her former course, and went steaming away from our haven. About twenty minutes' progress in this direction brought us near enough the mysterious vessel to satisfy the Captain that she was really outward bound, and to our delight we were once more headed for the Farallones. We reached them at about seven o'clock,— early in the day to have gone through so much.

The tug lay in the little harbor made by the north rocks, and the island skiff came alongside, rowed by two of the Greek eggpickers. A box of goods and the mail was handed down into the skiff, and the Artist and I dropped ourselves into it with our scanty luggage.

A few minutes' row brought us into the little rockbound channel, hardly two boat-lengths wide, where the North Landing is. There are steps for use at high tide, and ropes and a derrick for hoisting goods, as well as davits for the skiff. But we landed at low tide, and our boat was beached on the little strip of sand at the end of the inlet. A lively

FINGER ROCK. ARCH ROCK. SUGAR LOAF.
THE NORTH LANDING.

Sugar Loaf is 200 feet high, and yet the Coast Pilot says the spray sometimes goes clean over it.

run to get out of reach of the next roller was made, and we were safely ashore.

We climbed up to the platform by the davits, and inquired of the group of men there for the keeper. They were all Greeks, but they understood our meaning.

"Keeper, he sleep yet. You taka the street. Find keeper house."

We took the street, that is, followed the rocky trail indicated around the hill to the south shore where the houses are. The impressions that crowded upon us in that walk of five minutes served to give a better idea of the islands than all we had been able to learn by diligent inquiry before.

The Farallones lie on the extreme western edge of the great continental plateau, the rising of which has made Western America. To the west of them the Pacific drops off suddenly to great depths. To the eastward the Gulf of the Farallones, as the Coast Pilot calls it, is nowhere very deep. Point Reyes, the North, Middle, and South Farallones, and certain shoals in line with them, seem to be a little spur from the Coast Range. Evidences are said to be found that the upward movement of this plateau edge still continues, but it is a geological change, and requires geological time to produce results.

They are evidently of igneous origin. The country rock of the South Farallon is a brownish granite, much fissured in irregular fractures, and so soft that it yields readily in most places to pick and bar. Where the surf acts directly on it it is somewhat rounded and smooth, but in general it is sharp and jagged, crested by pinnacles of fantastic shapes. In some places near the shore there seemed to be dykes of softer material, that had been worn away by the waves and weather, leaving square-sided channels that looked like the hasty or unskilled work of the stonecutter. In many places the waves have wrought curious shapes out of this yielding material,—arches, grottos, natural bridges, winding coves, pot holes, and basins. The rock seems to be made of the quartz crystals common in granites, but the connecting material is soft and crumbly. It is favorable for climbing about on, as there are innumerable crevices and irregularities for hand and foot, and it clings to the sole, where not lubricated with guano, as if you were walking on a coarse file. It cuts the leather badly; shoes wear out more in a day on the island than in a month's use on city pavements.

In one part of the main hill there is a cave, high above all wave action, that pierces the hill by a passage so low and narrow that it cannot be traversed even on hands and knees. I had to go on my elbows and stomach in a sort of vermicular wriggle, where it was most contracted. This passage is some seventy or eighty feet long, and leads into an apartment roughly globular in shape, perhaps thirty feet in diameter. From this is another passage, leading to a smaller room beyond. A passage so narrow that it cannot be explored leads from a point in the inner passage to some unknown outlet on the surface.

One of the tugboat captains, a man of portly person, once was urged and pushed by officious friends into this cave as far as the larger room, and it was found a very difficult thing to get him out. It is easier to enter crawling slightly upward than to go in the other direction. It was feared that the poor captain would have to stay there till hunger and anxiety had reduced his flesh sufficiently to allow of his exit.

This cave — as what cave has not? — has its legend of wealth buried in it by the Spanish buccaneers; and besides this, it has a more authentic and individual mystery.

When the cave was first entered by Americans, they found in the large room the well preserved skeleton of a woman.



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FARALLON CITY FROM THE SOUTH.

She had remarkably beautiful teeth, I was told by one who had seen the bones, and the skeleton was judged to be that of a white woman. More than this, no man knows,—how she got there, and when, and why,—these are open only to conjecture. They brought the bones out of the cave, and buried them up on the hillside under a cairn of stones.

But the cave and its legends has drawn us away from the geology of the island. I saw no rock that was not of the kind described, though I am told that there are masses of conglomerate at the West End; but pumice is found among the stones, and I picked up stones that looked like lava, of a dark liver color, and also specimens of a conglomerate made up of shells and pebbles connected by a dark slate-colored material. The soil of the island is composed of the coarse, sharp-edged sand formed from the disintegrated granite, of the pulverized bones of countless generations of seals, birds, and fishes, of shells, and through it all the washing of guano. The ocean allows but little accumulation of sand on the outlines of the islands. There are but three or four bits of beach in the ends of long channels in the rock, similar to the one described at the North Landing.

There is, I believe, but one spring on the Farallon,—a mineral spring in a little bight on the north side, within a few feet of the breakers. The water has a slightly yellowish color, such as would be given a glass of clear water by adding a teaspoonful of strong tea. Its taste is very pleasant, slightly acid, and a little puckery. It requires no analysis to show that there is iron in it, and there is an entire absence of suggestion of sulphur. The effect is mildly aperient, and the dwellers on the island prize it highly. They say one can drink it in unlimited quantities in hot weather without the distress that even rainwater causes.

The fresh water of the islanders is caught from the rains of winter, on a cemented catchment area that conducts it into large cisterns covered by brick domes. There is less rain at the Farallones than on the mainland, but more fog.

In the rainy season a considerable part of the soil is covered with vegetation. Foxtail grass and a sort of fleshy-leaved plant that resembled a dwarf mesembryanthemum with yellow or mauve blossoms, were the most common, but there were chickweed and pimpernel, and a few more familiar plants. In sheltered clefts I saw some plants that I judged to be eighteen inches high, but they were not accessible, and so could not be examined. On all exposed places, and few spots on the islands are not exposed places, the growths are kept down to a mat of two or three inches high by the fierceness of the winds.

One of the keepers has a small garden sheltered by a high board fence. In it he grows quite a variety of vegetables. Lettuce, turnips, radishes, onions, all have done well. The chief trouble is that the soil is too stimulating, owing to the guano. There were some cabbages planted a year or two ago. They came up finely, and were the pride of the keeper's heart. Every visitor had to see and admire the cabbage bed. But when it came time for those cabbages to settle down to business, and make heads, they failed to fulfill the hopes they had raised; they kept on growing upward, and soon



GULL.

went to seed. The keeper had to accept a good deal of humorous advice in the matter. He was told to put salt on his cabbages, and urged to tie them down with a string, so they could n't grow up, and would have to make a head.

Except the things I have mentioned, there is no vegetable growth on the island, not an attempt at a tree, nor a bit of chaparral.

The indigenous animal life of the non-aquatic sort is even more scanty. A small lizard is found under stones, but that is the only vertebrate. There are spiders and flies, but I saw no mosquitoes, crickets, or beetles.

But the aquatic life is abundant enough to make up for all lacks in other directions. Sir Francis Drake mentioned the islands as "The Islands of St. James, wherein are many seals and fowles." And there are "many seals and fowles" to this present.

Two of the little islets bear the names of Seal Rock and Sea Lion Islet, though the first to the southeast is known to the keepers as Saddle Rock, from its shape. The best view of the seals at ordinary times is to be had looking across the narrow channel that separates the Sea Lion Islet from its neighbor. This channel is only thirty or forty feet wide, and at a distance only a little greater the Artist and I stood for more than an hour watching the antics of the three score seals. They are hair seals. Their fur is of limited value, a value less in the case of the old bulls, because their hides are so rent and scarred by continual fights.

The largest of the bulls, sometimes fourteen feet long, establish themselves on a fixed part of the rock, and each gathers about him his harem of cow seals. The younger bulls are continually poaching on these preserves, and challenging the proprietor to do battle for possession. These fights are desperate; the bulls seize each other, catch as catch can, and tear out great mouthfuls of fur and flesh. When one is worsted till he can fight no more, he plunges into the salt water, and applies that severe but abundant liniment to his hurts.

The love making between the bulls and cows also bears much resemblance to a fight, playful seizing of bunches of fur, and simulated attacks with the open mouth. The cows fight among themselves, though not so fiercely as the bulls. A cow will seize another's young one by the nape of the neck, and toss it roughly away many feet over the rocks. This provokes reprisals, and a charge to recover the sprawling little victim. They never seem to be quiet long at a time, and their continual squirming and fighting makes their life appear a very uncomfortable one. In the water they are vastly more at home. Where we

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were, the water was so clear that we could see the bottom, and watch the swift and easy movements of these beasts so awkward on land.

The keepers shoot the seals for their oil, bristles, and other valuable parts, and sometimes mount the heads of the larger bulls for sale as ornaments. It requires a good shot and an experienced hunter to secure this game; for unless the bullet is instantly fatal the wounded seal at once dashes into the water and sinks out of reach. The hunter watches his chance, and picks out a seal that is lying so that the body cannot roll into the surf, and sends his bullet straight into the brain.

Unless wounded and cornered they will not attack a man; it is chiefly by their mad rush to the water that they endanger any one in their way. Mr. Beeman, Chief Keeper, told us of a narrow escape of his. He leaped down into a fissure of the rocks, and nearly landed on top of a very large bull. The startled animal darted away from him, and by chance farther back up the narrow fissure. As Mr. Beeman gathered himself together from his jump he saw that the old bull was preparing to charge. There was no room to allow him to pass and no possibility of scrambling up the rocks out of his way. To wound him would be worse than useless. It was bull or Beeman at the first shot. The fact that Mr. Beeman told the story shows the effect of the shot.

Far more abundant than the seals and far more interesting are the birds. Their cries are the most constant sound, their odor the prevailing smell, their multitudinous flitting the most constant sight, on the island. The chief product of the island in the San Francisco markets is their eggs, and the island is most widely known, except for its light, by the egg-picking industry.

There are eight kinds of birds that habitually nest on the Farallones in numbers.

1. The murre. This bird is often seen swimming in the Bay, when it much resembles a duck. It has a black head, slate-colored body, and white breast. When alarmed in the water, it either dives or flies off, splashing along the surface of the waves. It flies swiftly, with a whir of the wings almost as quick as a humming bird's; it never sails on motionless wing, as the gulls delight in doing, and looks under-sparred; that is, without much spread of wing for its bulk. On the rocks it sits upright like a penguin, and generally in great crowds. It is said by Nordhoff that the murre eats sea grasses and jelly fish, and that no other fish has ever been found in its stomach. It lays a very large egg for the size of the bird, the Farallon egg of the market. These eggs are remarkable for thick shells and great diversity in color and markings. They are about twice the size of a hen's egg, and are sometimes pure white, sometimes bluish green, sometimes pinkish. Some are splashed with black or brown all over, or near the larger end; some are streaked with vermicular markings of light brown, dark brown, purple, or yellow; some are covered all over with spatters of reddish brown. They are laid on the bare rocks, without the least attempt at a nest. One is the complement if undisturbed, but when they are taken a murre will lay as many as eight. There is a prevailing suspicion that these eggs are inferior to hen's eggs because of a fishy flavor. Few people order them or eat them by preference. Now, I do make solemn affirmation, to the support of which I can bring many trustworthy corroborating witnesses, that when these murre eggs are perfectly fresh there is absolutely no fishy or strong taste to them whatever; that they are rich, delicate, and altogether desirable,—dropped, fried, boiled, or cooked in any of the hundred ways known to Frenchmen. It is true that they acquire a rank taste sooner than hen's eggs, and that accounts for the

prejudice in some measure; for in greater part the prejudice is purely a prejudice. Most people are severely orthodox in the matter of eggs, and taste a new sort with a suspicion that not the best fresh-laid Plymouth Rock egg could stand.

It is certain that San Francisco dwellers in the summer time, if they eat at restaurants or buy cake or pies at the bakeries, consume a great many of these eggs. Twenty-five cents a dozen is the retail price, and the size of the egg is double that of the barnyard fowl's; so they are bought eagerly to the full extent of the supply, — something like four hundred dozen daily at the height of the season. When the Artist and I were there it was still early, and there were from fourteen to eighteen baskets of about twenty dozen each gathered daily. The season begins in June, or late in May, and lasts from six to eight weeks. The pickers net from fifteen to eighteen cents a dozen.

2. The gull is next to the murre in numbers, and is the most constant bird on the islands; for the others come there to nest, and migrate in the winter, while there are gulls all the year round. They are the Western gulls, the ordinary white birds with slate-colored back and upper surface of the wings, that are numerous and tame about the ferries in San Francisco. Their eggs too are good eating, though not so large as a murre's, but the shell is not nearly so thick, and so they are not much gathered for transportation. They are a dark olive brown, with darker brown splashes all over them. Three are the complement in a nest, which is built of dried grasses roughly shaped. The gulls are great robbers, and if they find a murre's egg unprotected, one swoops down on it and carries it off in his beak. Up in the air he goes, then drops the egg on a convenient rock, and descends to feast on its spilled contents. This thievish propensity makes the gulls no favorites with the eggpickers. No sooner are the murres driven from their cliffs by the approach of the pickers, than the gulls are busy carrying off the eggs, — "and they are better eggpickers than we are," one of the keepers ruefully said to me.

One of the Greeks saw a gull eating a shag's egg, — an egg considered useless for food, — and explained to me, "He no eata because he lika him. He eata just for *mean*."

They are said to eat the young murres also. After a murre has laid an egg she sits on it constantly, unless driven off by the men, and never leaves it unprotected a single moment until the young bird is able to accompany its parents for a swim in the ocean.

The disposition of the gull varies much with the season. Now in laying time they are peaceable and tame, looking on men as allies in their attacks on the murres. They do not take much to heart the plunder of their own nests. When they have young birds to protect they become savage, and do not hesitate to dash in the face of an intruder, or to snatch his cap from his head. This is an element of no little danger to the pickers toward the close of the season; for a sudden swoop of a gull on a man poised on the edge of a sheer precipice is not pleasant. Later still in the season the gulls become wild, and it is difficult to get within a stone's throw of one.

One day we saw one of the Greeks coming down the trail to the houses, holding a live gull by one wing. The other wing had been broken by a stone thrown by the Greek, but the bird was snapping viciously and effectively at the man's legs as he walked.

"He steala my cap," was the explanation, with an expression of disrepect. So this vengeful son of Athens — all Greeks come from Athens, so they say — tied his captive to a post, and threw stones at it till the bird was dead.

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3. Next in order of numerical strength, is the shag, or cormorant, though possibly the puffin is entitled to the place. There are three species of shag,— Brandt's, Baird's, and the Farallon. I learned to distinguish two. One was jet black all over, the other had white markings on its back. It has a long neck, and flies with it outstretched in a seemingly awkward position. They usually fly in pairs or fours, in the nesting season, and gather into longer trains flying one after another in other seasons. Its nest is set in clefts and shelves of the cliffs overhanging the sea, and is formed of a bunch of dried herbage. The eggs are very small for the size of the bird, long and pointed, a light blue when washed, but when gathered, covered with a layer of loose white lime. As mentioned, they are not used for eating, and it is said the white does not coagulate with heat. The shag has the reputation of being a very stupid bird. It is the largest of them all.

4. The tufted puffin, or sea parrot. The second name of the bird is quite descriptive, for it resembles very much a parrot, if a parrot were ever black with a white face, and a very red beak and feet. The two long tufts of white filaments that start from the head above the ears are not visible except close at hand. This bird lays one large, round, white egg, in the deeper clefts of the highest rocks. The nest I found was within a few feet of the light tower, and in so deep a cleft that I had to roll the egg out, using the whole length of my cane to reach it. The bird was not at home, or I might have had trouble, for they are said to fight savagely in defense of their nests.

5. The pigeon guillemot, or sea pigeon, comes next. Its home is to be found close to the water's edge, in the little coves and clefts of the rocks, and it delights to sit on a rock where it is almost reached by every return of the swell. It clings closer to the water than any bird of them all. It is of a dark slate color, with some white in the wing coverts, and it has brilliantly red feet. Its mouth and throat, when it opens the beak, is also bright red. In shape and appearance it well merits the name of pigeon, though somewhat larger. It nests in crevices, and the egg, about as large as a hen's egg, is light greenish blue, with brown and gray spots on it. The sea pigeon's voice would betray it instantly should it be taken for a tame pigeon, for it is sharp and shrill.

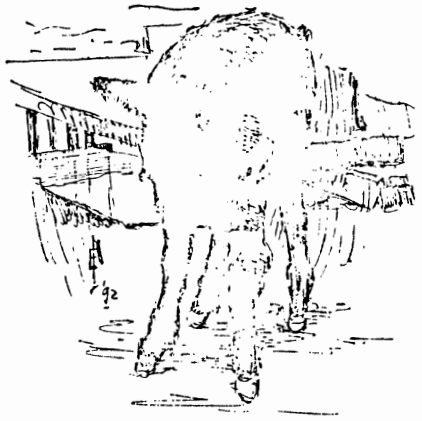
6. The smallest bird on the island comes next, — the rock wren. Yet the island could ill spare him, for he is a merry little fellow and has the only sweet voice among them. His little warble would not be noticed much, perhaps, among thrushes or larks; and yet it is pleasant to hear in this wild chorus of the harsh voices of sea birds. He would pass very well for a wren, except that he is not so much tilted up aft, and he has a very long bill. The egg is a dainty little thing, white, but given a pink tone by a multitude of little reddish-brown splashes. His nest is hard to find, for it is hidden deep, and he is an adept at misleading a person in search of it. This is strange, too, in a bird that never saw a school boy. Aside from this preference that you should not know where his nest is, the rock wren is a sociable fellow, and will hop round quite near you if you keep still, and sing his song from every little point of rocks in your neighborhood.

7. The auk, Cassin's auklet, is a night bird, and hides in clefts in the daytime. It is a gray bird, about as large as a pigeon. The egg, also, is much the size, color, and shape, of a pigeon's. When pulled out of the hiding place it had chosen into the daylight, a young one we had caught seemed to be quite blind, and sat quietly in my open hand, making no effort to fly. When released on the ground it found sight enough to discover a crevice near

at hand, and quickly crawled into it so far that it was lost to me.

8. The ashy petrel is a very rare bird; so rare that I saw no specimen to know it. It resembles the Mother Carey's chicken closely, differing in having some white markings on the wings. Its nest is hard to find, because of its scarcity, and because it is built deep in the rocky clefts. It is discovered best by smell; for the bird, its nest, and its eggs, have a strong musky odor.

This completes the catalogue of birds



JERRY, THE OLDEST INHABITANT.

usually to be found, but for the last two seasons there has been a family of strange visitors to this sea-girt island. An old crow and his wife have come here to rear their brood. It is a curiously incongruous sound to hear the familiar caws amid this querulous chorus of gulls, but though there is not a cornfield within at least sixteen miles of them, the crows seem to be perfectly contented.

The day when we first saw egg-picking,—they pick every day in the season,—the Greeks and the four keepers gathered in front of the old stone house that was long the only keeper's house, at about nine o'clock in the morning. The men were dressed for the work in egg blouses of cotton. Often the words "Extra Family," or the like, showed that they were made of flour sacks. They are quite loose, and are gathered at the waist with a stout string. They are cut with a V-shaped opening in front. The trousers are bound with cords at the ankle, so that they may not catch on the rocks. The shoes are peculiar, home-made for the special purpose, the tops of canvas, the soles of braided rope. These are not only more durable than leather on the jagged rocks, but are less apt to slip, and in them a man can climb up a cliff so steep that he looks ridiculously like a fly walking up a wall.

When the fifteen men had all gathered, Old George — 70 years old, and yet as active as any Greek of them all, does not spare himself the most arduous climbs — gave the word in pure modern Hellenic, and they moved off together. First they made their way past the Russian houses, and paused at the base of the cliff on Shubrick's Point. There they set down the baskets. At another word they separated, and began climbing over the hill as rapidly as they could. Their movements started a cloud of murres, which fluttered with a characteristic motion straight downward toward the water,—right in the picker's face, if he chanced to be below them.

The gulls were on hand, and as the murres were driven away from the cliffs the gulls swooped down and snatched the eggs away before the pickers could get to them. This is why it is necessary for the men to keep together, and work one place at a time. But the men got a good many; they scrambled over the rocks like cats, and went to places that fairly made us shudder to watch them. Soon their outlines showed as they came around the profile of the other side of the hill. But they were strangely altered. They moved with more care, and used their hands to help support the immense aldermanic development they had acquired. As they

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came back to the baskets some of them got down on all fours, and emptied their blouses, as though pouring potatoes from a sack. The thick shell of the eggs allows this, though some were broken in the process. Others who had emptied their pouches were sitting around wiping a chance-broken egg out of their blouses with a wisp of dry grass. The baskets, when full, were covered over with grass or weeds weighted with stones,— otherwise the gulls would have emptied them before the men came again. Next the men picked on the Lighthouse Hill, loftiest of all, but not most dangerous. Yet it was here that Keeper Cashin had a severe fall a year or two ago: he still wears a deep scar on his brow, as the result of his long tumble.

"That must have made you give up egg-picking for a while," I said to him.

"Yes, it was two weeks before I was out with them again."

The Artist and I could not go around the northeast side of the island from its roughness, though we amazed ourselves at the places we did climb to. We hurried around the other way, to see the men come down to the North Landing. As they were approaching it, still picking, we heard a cry. One of them had dislodged a great, jagged stone, and shouted to warn a comrade directly underneath. The warned man flattened against the rock, and the stone dashed by close to his head. Some of the men came with full blouses to the egg house near the landing; others brought the full baskets. They were set down near the house, tubs of salt water were brought, and the eggs were carefully washed. As they are laid on the bare rock,— no nest whatever,— they are apt to be soiled with guano, and it requires a good rubbing of each egg with a cloth to get it off.

During this process the gulls came and sat in a circle at a respectful distance, so that they might get the eggs that were broken and thrown away.

While some of the men were washing, a boatload of them did Sugar Loaf Rock. We could see them well from the egg house. The little boat was rowed to the rock, and turned so as to approach it stern first. As the swell lifted it to the rock, a man sprang out and climbed up the rocks. Soon a row of men were clambering right up the face of the rock,— shown in the picture (p. 229). It looked as impossible as to walk up the steepest side of Telegraph Hill. This, with Saddle Rock, was one day's picking.

Next day they did the West End, Arch and Finger rocks, and one or two more. The West End climb is a wonderful one; for here is the largest crowd of birds on the island. The air at times was so full of startled birds that they looked like a swarm of bees, and the water was in places almost hidden from sight by the multitudes that took refuge there.

To get to West End we had to cross over "Jordan," as the narrow, surf-washed passage is called. It is spanned by a very picturesque swinging bridge, made of pieces of water-worn wreckage. On the West End, too, is the place called the Great Rookery.

Here and on Finger Rock the men let themselves down by ropes to some difficult places. It looks risky to see a man dangling from a rope over a sheer precipice that overhangs the dashing surf. The men are perfectly hardened to it, and never seem to think of danger in any part of this perilous work.

The pickers in this way go over the same ground every other day, and cover all accessible points in two days. This insures the freshness of the eggs gathered, as between gulls and men they are thoroughly cleaned from the ground traversed by the pickers. There are enough inaccessible places to prevent any danger that the murres will diminish in numbers.

The eggs are stored in the egg house

till enough are gathered to make a load for the felucca that is at hand to take them to San Francisco.

There are many hens kept by the keepers; for these and the rabbits are often the only sources of fresh meat for weeks at a time. Their eggs, too, are needed, except in the laying time of the sea birds.

The rabbits were a surprise to us. On our way to the islands Captain Scott had mentioned that there were plenty of rabbits there, and the Artist smiled at me and I winked at the Artist, as if to say, "The Captain can spin a good yarn, can't he?" But the first thing that we noticed in our walk from the North Landing to the keepers' houses was the multitude of rabbits scurrying in every direction over the rocks. They are the descendants of the common domestic English rabbit, and are of many colors,—white, black, yellow, brown, and pinto. It is difficult for them to find enough soil to burrow in, but they find plenty of crannies that serve as ready-made burrows. They swarm everywhere, from the highest point of the hill, where the light is, to gullies that are swept by the surf at every tide. These last live so near the water that it half inclines one to believe the yarn that is told, that the Farallon rabbits have so changed their nature as to live on seaweed and shell-fish. The best proof, however, that the story is only a story is that the rabbits die off in great numbers as the herbage dries up in summer, until only a few of the tamer ones are left. These are fed at the house, and live in the door-yards with the hens. The keepers take pains not to frighten or shoot the tame ones, and they sometimes even enter the houses, and play round in the kitchen with the children. In the spring, as food becomes abundant, the rapid multiplication of the rabbits serves to repopulate the whole island.

And here is an object lesson and a warning. If ever this rabbit is allowed to get wild on the mainland of California it will soon become a pest as destructive as it has been in Australia.

But they are very useful on the Farallon in furnishing fresh meat to the keepers, as they are excellent eating. Served with the sharp sauce of the appetite given by the sea air, fried or fricasseed rabbit is a dish to receive eagerly and remember with gratitude. The keeper shoots them with a rifle, and on the occasion when I watched him, six shots secured six rabbits, with the heads hit so skillfully that they all but one came off with the skin.

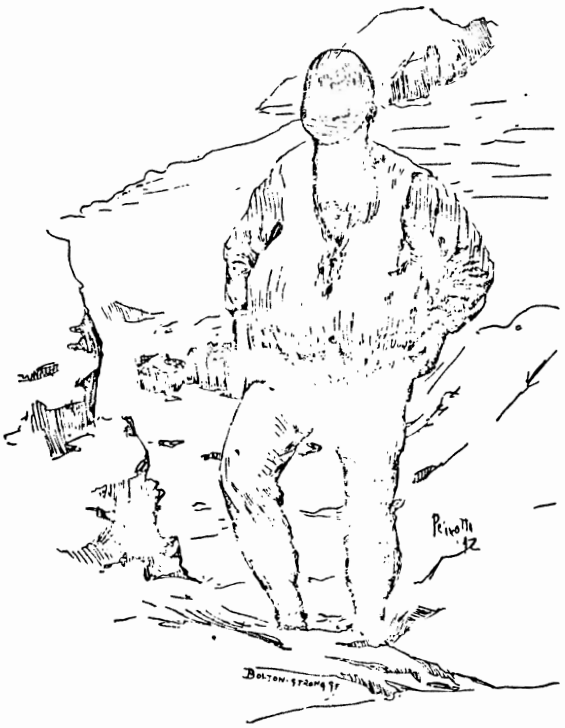
To describe in detail the forms of life that abound on the edges of the island would fill a book, and would require a biological expert, for it is marvelous in its variety and wonderful in its beauty. There are many kinds of fish to be caught from the rocks. The Farallon banks are recognized as being the most extensive known to our local fisheries. Among these are fine eels, the method of capture described to me thus:—

"You get rather a smallish hook and a stout line, and go down on the rocks at very low tide. You bait your hook and drop it right in the crack between two rocks. If there is an eel there, pretty soon you get a bite. You go kind of slow till he 's well hooked, and then you give a pull. The eel, he just wraps his tail round a rock and hangs on for all he 's worth. You pull and he pulls, till you think you 're trying to haul up the rock itself, and by and by, if everything holds, out comes your eel."

As I have said, the rocks that the surf beats upon are worn into grottos, basins, and potholes, innumerable, and these are made beautiful by a wonderful variety of marine life. Abalones and mussels abound, and barnacles of various kinds, white and pink. Perhaps the best way of giving an idea of the beauty of some of these places is, by describing the most striking that we saw, though there are many almost as fine. One day at

low tide Mr. Beeman took the Artist and me to see the "grotto," as it is called. We followed him to the East Landing, and turning round a point of rocks, scrambled down to the edge of the surf. Then by a quick run as the roller receded, we made our way over the slippery sea-weeded rocks into the grotto. It was a sight to take one's breath away! The Artist, who had been mourning before that he had not brought his color box, was beside himself. The roof of the cavern, whether from infusoria kept alive by the spray, or from seepage through its roof of mineral substances, was brilliant with orange and green; the rocks, sides and back, of a warm red-brown color. The floor was nearly taken up with a series of basins filled with water clear as a diamond, renewed by each dash of the rollers; and these basins were lined, sides and bottom, with such a bewildering array of color and form as no artificial aquarium on earth can equal.

Light green anemones, lavender and deeper purple sea urchins, orange and purple starfishes, irridescent mussels, red and black crabs, corals and sponges, seaweeds, bright green, olive, white, pink, and brown, some quite large and others the daintiest possible films,— all this color arranged seemingly with the utmost cunning, so that there should be wondrous contrasts and harmonies, and not a single discord. It was a sight to live in the memory as long as life lasts.



A LOAD OF EGGS.

But we had to tear ourselves away, and make the rapid retreat that the waves compelled. Mr. Beeman showed us a little ledge in the uppermost corner, and told us he had once been obliged to climb up to it, and wait over a tide, in great danger of being swept off by the swell that nearly fills the grotto at high tide. The rise of tide is about five feet.

I have nearly completed the list of living forms on the island. There are, beside the ones mentioned, a dog and three goats. There is no cat there, as I was made aware when I tried to ingratiate myself with the keeper's baby by mewing for her. The poor little thing looked at me with wild eyes, and pursed up her lips to cry; she had never heard the sound before. It seems as if there ought to be a cat there, but then there are no rats or mice.

The only acquaintance we made with the goats was to wonder at the taste of the old billy, when we saw him come up to the keeper and beg for a chew of tobacco; a regular habit of his, it seems.

And here is the place to speak of Jerry. We did not see him, he had been dead some weeks; but we saw his grave, and the sweet perfume of his life of good deeds still lingers in the spot he labored in faithfully and long.

Jerry was an ass, but if it be supposed that that is a term that implies stupidity, an indignant denial will come from all that knew him. He was by far the oldest inhabitant of the island, and he filled the place of oldest inhabitant to perfection. He knew more about the weather signs than any other person (the term seems quite proper) on the island, — was the best barometer they had, the keepers say. From twelve to twenty-four hours before a storm Jerry would announce it unmistakably, by showing great excitement, and standing with his nose in the direction from which the storm was coming, and snorting violently.

He had once nearly hung himself with his halter in the barn, and after that no amount of moral or physical suasion would prevail on him to go into that barn again. In very cold and wet weather he sometimes took shelter in the coalshed, but the barn was a dangerous place.

His duties were to act as locomotive on the little railroad that connects the North Landing with the keeper's houses and the siren. Other tasks were to pack the oil up the hill to the light, two five-gallon cans on each side of his pack saddle, and to walk around the windlass that hauls coal and heavy articles up on the platform of the North Landing. This last job he did not approve of, and he learned to know the whistle of the government steamer Madroño, and when it came bringing supplies Jerry would hide so securely in the rocks that it sometimes took a large part of the day to find him. He vastly preferred to play with the children, and allowed them to swarm up his legs, or pull his tail, without an attempt at a kick. He was fond of cake, and used to come up and paw on the porch to beg for it. One day a visiting friend made some cookies, and set them down near the window to cool. When she returned to look at them, she was horrified to find them gone, and Jerry's ears just disappearing from the window.

But it is useless to try to give all the anecdotes that are to be told of Jerry; for he is a theme on which every man, woman, and child that can talk at all, of the islanders is eloquent. Another donkey is coming to take his place, but for many a long year Jerry will be remembered and loved.

There remains to be told the story of the human occupation of the Farallones. They were discovered — Scammon says in the OVERLAND for July, 1875 — by Ferrelo in 1543, but Sir Francis Drake was the first to give a particular description of "The Islands of St. James" as he called them. In 1579 he landed on them to refit and stock up with seal meat.

In 1775 Bodega and Maurelle gave the islands the name Los Farallones de los Frayles, in honor of the monks who had discovered San Francisco Bay in 1769. *Farallon* means a small, pointed island.

The first settlement on the islands was by the Russians, but the date is not given by any authority I can find. They

came to hunt seals and to fish, and made quite a permanent stay, as is witnessed by the remains of five or six stone huts that they built on the southeast slope. It is not recorded that the Mexicans ever made any enduring stay on the Farallon, and records are wanting up to 1850, when there began to be regular trips to the islands for the purpose of gathering eggs for the new city of San Francisco.

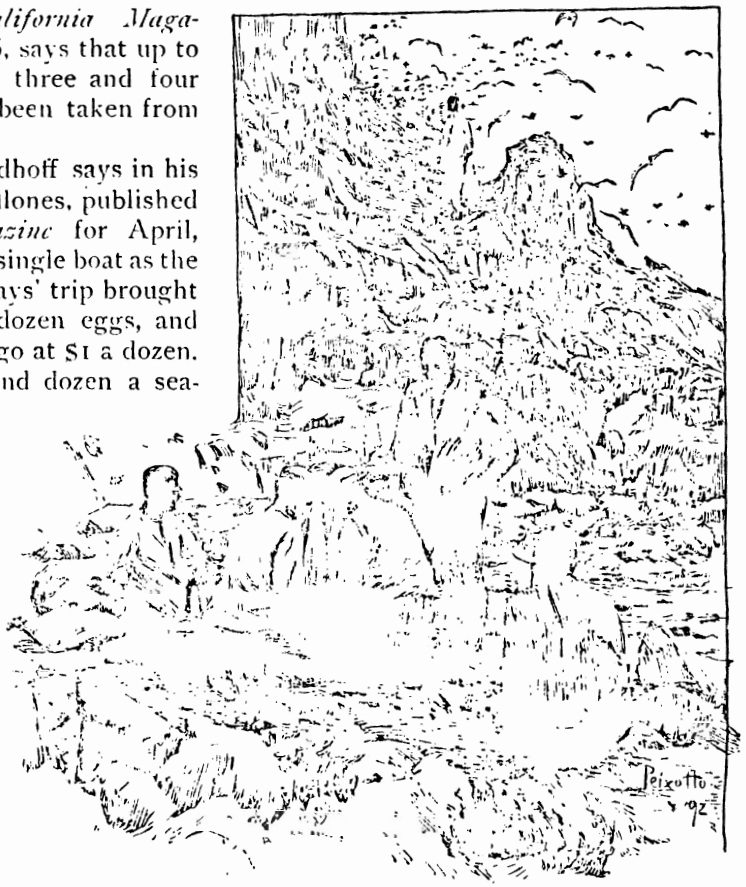
A writer in the second number of *Hutching's California Magazine*, August, 1856, says that up to that date between three and four million eggs had been taken from the island.

Mr. Charles Nordhoff says in his article on the Farallones, published in *Harper's Magazine* for April, 1874, that in 1853 a single boat as the result of a three days' trip brought in one thousand dozen eggs, and sold the whole cargo at $1 a dozen. Twenty-five thousand dozen a season were brought in year after year; for those were flush times and eggs were extremely scarce. By 1873 the product had lessened to about fifteen thousand dozen a season, which is not far from that of the present year.

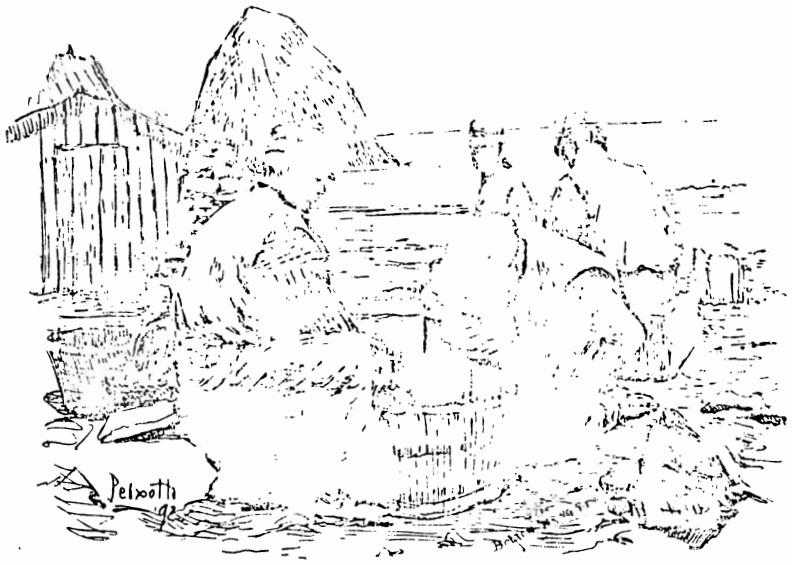
In 1855 the light was established. In 1856 the Farallon Egg Company was formed, and bought off the fancied rights of other companies after some disturbances and fights between rival companies. There were two or three persons shot in these troubles.

On Nov. 9, 1858, the worst Farallon wreck on record took place; the ship Lucas was lost, and twenty-three lives.

In 1859 a whistle was built over a natural blow-hole in the rocks, and the force of the waves as they rushed into the connecting channel blew the whistle. This, up to 1871, was the only fog signal. In that year it was destroyed by the breakers. The hole is still shown to visitors, and even with no whistle attached makes quite a bellow as the air rushes up through the narrow passage. A three or four pound stone dropped in at the proper time is violently hurled back. A sailor was once taken to see it, and to test its force held his hat over the opening,—at the wrong moment unfortunately, for it was snatched from his hand by the downward suction of a receding billow. He stood a moment



EMPTYING THE BLOUSES.



WASHING THE EGGS.

to see if it would come back, but in vain, and then turned away remarking, "That 's a hell of a hole!"

In 1862 a young man who had joined the eggpickers for fun lost his footing and was dashed to pieces.

September 20, 1880, the present fog siren was set up.

In 1881 there had been so much trouble with the egg company that it was deemed necessary to eject its men from the island. Accordingly, on May 23d, the government steamer, Manzanita took out the United States marshal, an officer, and twenty soldiers, to do the work. There was no resistance. Eleven eggpickers and their movables were brought to San Francisco, and their huts were razed. For this action the egg company began a suit for damages against the United States District Attorney, who had ordered the ejectment. The suit may still be pending, for all that is known about it.

The company had grown so arrogant over its supposed vested rights, that it even denied to the keepers the right of gathering eggs. Mr. Thompson, Clerk to the Inspector, told me how the keeper of that time, Mr. Hess, came in one day with a long face to tell how the hirelings of the egg company had found him a few days before with his blouse full of eggs, and had upset him and rolled him down the rocks, making a sad scramble of the eggs.

In 1882 the American ship Franconia went ashore in Franconia Cove, on the West End rocks, and in the following year the British ship Bremen met a like fate. She struck just in front of the siren. As Captain Scott graphically expressed it, "The keeper was working his machine, and the first he knew the other fellow jumped right in on top of him."

Both of these wrecks were due to dense fog and the absence of wind. The ships did not discover the island till right upon it, and they had not steerage way enough to prevent the heavy swell from setting them over on the rocks.

The present regular inhabitants of the island are the four keepers, wives of three of them, and seven children, fourteen souls all told. During the egg sea-

son from eight to eleven Greeks are there egg-picking. This is now done in partnership with the keepers and by their consent. It is recognized that the Greeks have no rights there whatever. In the beginning of every season they are formally warned off the island, and then suffered to remain during good behavior at the will of the keeper. This is winked at by the Inspector, but the least trouble would cause another expulsion. This seems to be the only way to deal with the Greeks; for as one of the keepers told me, "They are an ungrateful set. They think an American don't know anything,—the Greeks know it all."



THE BRIDGE OVER "JORDAN."

The Farallon light is the principal lighthouse on this Coast,—the first one that mariners look for on approaching San Francisco. It is set, as has been said, on the top of the highest hill, 360 feet above the sea, of which twenty feet is the height of the tower. The trail zigzags up the hill at a pretty steep grade. Mr. Beeman told me that he had had to crawl up that grade on hands and knees in the gutter beside the trail, to avoid being blown off by the fierce sou'wester.

The tower is built of stone and iron. On entering it, it was easy to see that here is the most important and carefully kept thing on the island. No spot mars the white paint of the walls, and strips of matting are laid in the passages to keep the floors from being touched by feet. We went up the winding stair and at last emerged in the lantern.

It is a Fresnel light of the first order, the lantern is twelve feet high and eight feet in diameter. It has eight sides, each made up of concentric prisms about a bullseye in the center. There are 33 prisms about the bullseyes, and the glass of the thickest is about six inches through. The whole lantern revolves about the lamp by clockwork once in eight minutes. As a bullseye passes any given point, that point receives the concentrated light from all the prisms for about thirteen seconds, and then is left in darkness for the rest of the minute till the next bullseye turns toward it. This is what makes the flash,—eight rays of light traversing the horizon continuously, showing alternate light and darkness, as an object is in a ray or between two rays. The lamp has five concentric wicks, and is fed by an elaborate contrivance to keep a continuous and copious supply of oil for each wick. It burns about five gallons of oil a night. The light is a beautiful object, the prisms are finely polished, and show rainbows in every direction, the brasses are bright, and the most loving and scrupulous care is put on every-

thing in the tower. One keeper with an artistic turn has painted landscapes and patriotic emblems on many of the panels.

The four keepers divide the night into watches, thus:—

William A. Beeman, Chief,.....Sunset to 9 P. M.
Cyrus J. Cain.....9 P. M. to 12 M.
Edward P. Cashin.....12 M. to 3 A. M.
Thomas L. Winthar.....3 A. M. to Sunrise

sets of machinists' and carpenters' tools,—it will be seen that they have not much time to think how lonely their life is. I could not discover, except in the eagerness with which new reading matter was welcomed, any sign that time was heavy on their hands, or that they were oppressed by the constant sound of the surges that come to the island

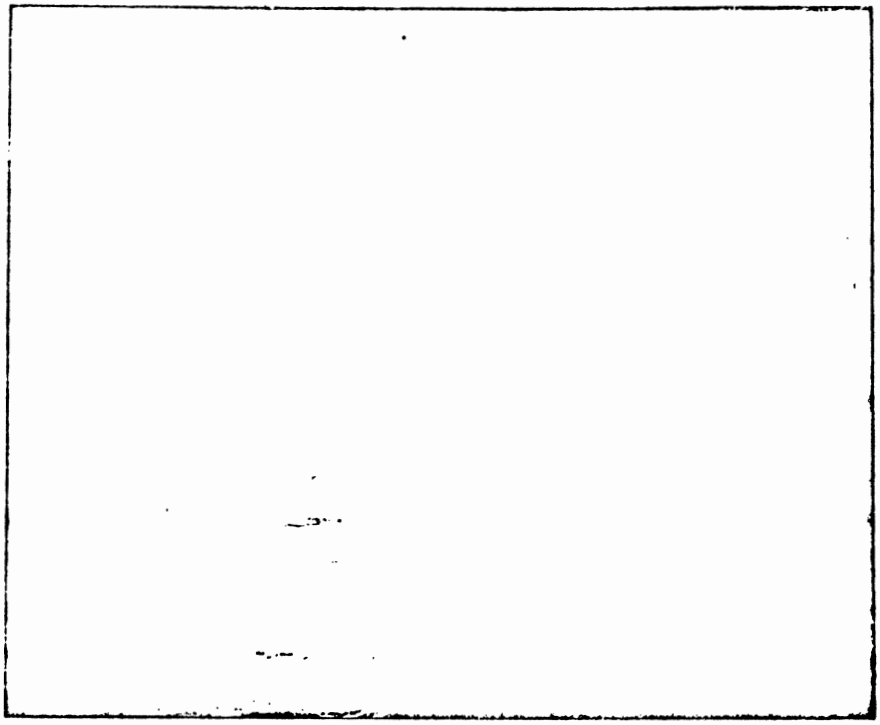


THE LIGHT KEEPER ON DUTY.

When the siren is to be kept going, and there is often need for it for days at a time, the keepers go from the light to the siren, and serve a second watch there. There are electric signals from the tower to the siren and also to the keepers' houses. When it is considered that the keepers have to do all the repairing and some new construction,—for they have a forge, a lathe, and full

from thousands of leagues of unbroken ocean.

Often for weeks together not a word comes to them from the outside world, and they cannot see even the ships go by because of the fog. But that is not all the time. The tugs of the two rival lines, the Spreckels and the "Red-Stack," as it is commonly known, make of the island an observation sta-



A FOGGY SUNSET FROM THE TUG.

tion. Their captains climb the hill to view the horizon through their glasses, and use many an artifice and stratagem to get the advantage of first reaching an inbound ship. Just now the Spreckels line is ahead; for they have taken to the island a fine long telescope, and keep it in the tower. This allows their captains to distinguish the cut of a stranger's jib some forty miles to sea. The tugboat men are welcomed by the keepers, for they bring mail, fresh provisions, and news from the outside world.

When the Artist and I wanted to come home after three days on the island, the tug Active, Captain Marshall, was lying at the anchorage in the early morning. The Captain came ashore, and readily agreed to take us to San Francisco. The keeper warned us that we must be on hand when a ship was seen, for, he said, the Captain grew so excited then that he would wait for nothing.

No ship came all day, and at six o'clock we thought it best to go on board the tug, as it was likely that the first daylight would show some sail that had come up in the night.

We were made comfortable on the tug, if there can be comfort on a tug rolling at anchor in the heavy Pacific swell. In the morning, Sunday, nothing was to be seen, and all day we looked in vain for our ship to come in. The sailors went on shore for an outing in the afternoon, and brought back a lot of abalones, which they cleaned and we afterwards ate. They are good when well prepared,—cut thin, and pounded to a pulp to make them tender, and then fried. They also brought several rabbits that they caught by wild scrambles in the rocks, and some eggs. One sailor said he knew his eggs were fresh laid, for they were warm when he got them!

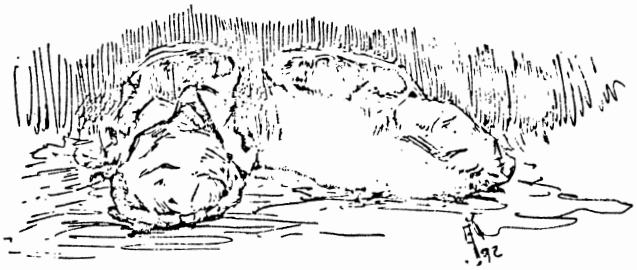
Another night, — this one of fog as well as of heavy rolling and pitching, — and the siren was singing her sweet bass

song a few hundred yards away. In the early morning we got under way and steamed around the island in the fog, to see if we could find a ship. Then the tug was allowed to drift in the trough of a sea that rolled her so that water came in first over one rail and then the other, while the sailors fished for flounders. The line out was so long that it soon blistered the Artist's and my fingers to pull it in with its heavy sinker, even when there were no fish on the hooks. So we possessed our souls in patience all that day.

The tug had now been out three days, with no sign of a tow, and the fresh meat began to be short. On these tugs, when the steward begins to feed the captain on salt horse, that is taken as a hint that it is time to go back to San Francisco and let another tug come out. So towards evening we headed for the Golden Gate. As we steamed by the islands, we paused only to signal to the keepers, and after some cruising reached San Francisco about seven o'clock in the evening, after forty-eight hours on the tug.

This ended a trip, which from unfailing good luck, and still more from the great kindness shown us by Mr. Beeman, his good wife, and all the people on the island, and by the tugboat men, was in every way a success.

Charles S. Greene.



EGG PICKER'S SHOES.

TO INA D. COOLBRITH.

THE soft tones of thy lute
Have all too long been mute;
Ah, take it once again,
And thrill us now as then!

Breathe its sweet lips apart,
And wake that silent heart;
Too long has it been dumb,
Waiting for spring to come.