

A LIFE OF HARDSHIP.

HOW THE NEWFOUNDLAND FISHERMEN LIVE.

The Uncertain Calling of Those who get Their Living From the Sea—Wrecks From the Viewpoint of the Thrifty Native—What Their Diet Consists of.

The life of the average Newfoundland fisherman is not more toilsome, perhaps, than that of the other laboring millions of the world, but it is certainly more uncertain and perilous. His life has been described as four months' hard work and eight months' play. This, I think, is an exaggeration of the playtime, and it we say that half the year he is fishing and the other half taking a 'spell,' as he calls it, we shall be nearer the mark.

During the season the industrious coast fisherman is afloat in his boat almost before it is daylight, and sails or rows, according as the wind is, to his fishing ground. Unless the cod are uncommonly plentiful, the shore sees him no more until nightfall. On his small craft he possesses the means of making a fire, and there he cooks himself one of the fish he has caught brews a cup of tea, and eats his doughboy. His consumption of tea is enormous, and that, with the leaden qualities of the dough boy, which is nothing but a round lump of cooked dough, no doubt tends to produce the dyspepsia which is so common among the population. Even during the season there are a great many days when the gales prevent him from going to sea. It is fortunate if these are fair days, for then he can busy himself helping the women to 'make' the fish. If wet, however, there is nothing usually to be done but sit around in ignoble inaction.

His fare is of the simplest kind. I have more than once seen the preparation of the evening meal of a man who had been away since dawn, and who might be expected to have a rare appetite against his return. The good wife had filled a small pan with flour, among which she poured sufficient molasses to knead it into a dough. After rolling this into two cakes she placed one on a plate and strewed a little of the preserves of the wild raspberry on it. The other "bannock" was placed on top, and after a judicious firing in the oven, behold pie. And, oh, such a pie! Guiltless of yeast or rising of any sort, it was truly unleavened bread. I had the opportunity of indulging in this satisfying fare subsequently, and my respect for the Newfoundland man rose as I considered how many generations he has endured this and yet refrained from homicide. This, however, was but a confection—the solid food consisted of a generous share of turnips and potatoes mashed up together. Pots and pots of tea, sweetened with molasses and milkless, and bread without butter, completed the repast. It cannot be said that the Newfoundland fisherman keeps himself poor, with riotous living.

When he is in a situation to earn wages and board himself, his expenditures on housekeeping are of the most parsimonious description. On Belle Island the wage is 10 cents an hour, and as in the long summer days the hours are many, the earnings of the men are considered handsome. Their families are not on the island, and the work men erect little hovels in the neighboring woods where as many of them sleep as can be packed under its roof. The great concern is to send as much money back to the good wife and little ones as possible, so that there may be a full larder or what they consider a full larder, all winter when the work closes down. For this purpose these poor fellows live on about \$4 a month. Indeed \$4 is considered the maximum. There is no baker on the island and they have, accordingly, to enlist the services of the resident fisher women to bake bread for them, the charge for this service being 10 cents a stone. On week days no flesh passes the lips of the great majority of them, but on Sunday it is usual to have a feast—namely, pork and cabbage. This is considered a banquet that even an American millionaire might think himself lucky in sharing.

Fishing is notoriously an uncertain calling. The motions of fish are past all understanding. One season they will visit every part of these shores and those of Labrador in their countless shoals. The next season certain bays or even a whole shore will almost be deserted. The herring are especially fickle and there are places that were once good herring grounds that have scarcely seen a herring for many years. All sorts of theories are advanced to account for this, some of them ridiculous enough. But the fact remains, and when the fish fail to turn up in numbers at the accustomed place, destitution follows. From a very early period the government has granted relief in such cases. It is far easier to start doling out public funds than to stop, and it has now become a regular affair. The effect of such doles may readily be imagined. The baser look for them,

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and the higher minded soon accept the philosophy that they have as much right to get a share as anyone else.

Another phase of Newfoundland life that should not be dismissed without a reference is in respect to the wrecks which the boisterous seas cast upon the shore. Newfoundland fishermen as a body have undoubtedly been slandered in regard to this matter in the past. They used to be represented, especially in American sensational papers, as a parcel of ghouls, lighting false fires on the rocks, juring vessels to their doom. I need not go so far as to say that such crime was unknown. As there are train wreckers in other lands, it may be there are equally abandoned wretches in this, capable of leading a vessel to destruction. But the point is that no positive proof of such practices has been furnished. It is easy for a captain to excuse his own faulty seamanship by stories about misleading lights. It is a fact nevertheless, that when vessels have gone ashore they have been unmercifully looted. Indeed so common was this crime that European maritime countries brought the matter under the attention of the Imperial Government some years ago. The authorities of Newfoundland put forth strenuous efforts to put the practice down. Judge Prowse, a man of great resources, immense energy, knowledge of character and skill in detecting crime, was commissioned to invoke the rigors of the law for the repression of the offence. He went vigorously to work, and by stern measures made it at least very unsafe to indulge in

wrecking. The prevalence of the custom was undoubtedly checked, and the matter set in its true light as a serious breach of the laws.

Some extraordinary stories are told with regard to it. It is related, for example, that in the division of the spoil in one instance two men claimed a piano. Neither would abandon his right, and it was finally resolved to saw the instrument in two, one man keeping the treble and the other the bass. As all the pianos of which I have any knowledge have a backbone of metal, I am inclined to doubt this picturesque yarn. Judge Prowse, however, is my authority for the statement that the fisherman formerly regarded the vessels thrown on his beach as legitimate sources of emolument. Every marriage in one settlement a few winters ago was celebrated in champagne, that being part of the cargo of an embayed steamer. One old lady, who was a witness in a case before the Judge, said, whimperingly, that she did not know what the derelict vessel meant by coming up on the rocks 'to tempt the poor men.' Another notorious wrecker seriously remarked when a steamer came ashore with nothing on her but ballast, that it was a cruel stroke of Providence to follow up a bad fishing season with a Norwegian tramp loaded with stone.

Literature and Farming.

Farming was the first employment on this globe, and it is still the basis of all other occupations. This is a truth sometimes forgotten by people who think they have risen in the world since their grandfathers raised corn or potatoes.

In a remote little Southern settlement a 'literary' was held not long ago as a sort of mental stimulus to the community. The meeting had scarcely been called to order when old Silas Whittaker obtained the floor, and forthwith began a homely dissertation on 'todder-pulling and cotton picking, which bade fair to last well into the next hour. The schoolma'am, who had a word or two to say herself about Longfellow and the American poets grew restive. At length she rose to a point of order. 'I'd like it explained,' said she, 'what corn raising and toddler-pulling have to do with a literary meeting.' 'Wal,' said Silas, 'it's got jest this ter do with it: Ef it warn't fer corn 'n' cotton 'n' bacon 'n' greens, there wouldn't be a literary man in the hull country, blame it there would.'

Bead Lightning.

During a thunder-storm at Ithaca, N. Y. last summer a writer for The Companion was surprised to observe several times in succession, a short luminous streak which appeared at a particular point in the clouds and remained visible about two seconds at a time. It was probably an example of the rare phenomenon called bead-lightning, described by Prof. Elihu Thomson at the

Lots of Practice.

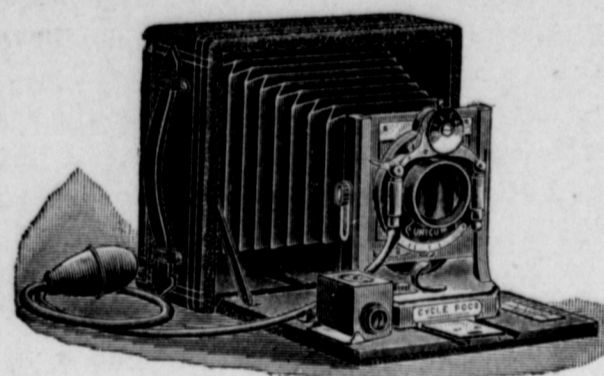
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recent meeting of the American Association. When seen to advantage it resembles a string of luminous beads hung in a cloud, the beads being somewhat elliptical and the ends of their axes in the line of their discharge being colored red and purple respectively. As seen at Ithaca the line was viewed nearly end on, and there was only a suggestion of color visible.

Shopping for a Railroad.

Nowadays women are making new careers for themselves along a hundred different lines, but not many are likely to follow in the steps of Mrs. Reeds, of Chicago. She began business as a professional shopper for persons living where shopping facilities are meagre, but she has enlarged the scope of her operation to an extraordinary extent.

Now, according to Leslie's Weekly, she

buys everythings, from gingham aprons to locomotives. In fact, locomotives and all other railroad equipments have become her specialty. She has recently been appointed purchasing agent of the new Pacific & Northern Idaho Railroad and has already purchased many tons of railway machinery, steel rails and other railroad appurtenances.

She has not yet relinquished her general shopping business, but says it is easier to buy a locomotive than a new spring bonnet. She is the only woman on record who goes 'shopping' in steel works and machine shops, but she is very fond of the work, and has proved that it can be done with eminent success by a woman.

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Patsy—'Cause you can't.

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