

Photograph by Holloway

BOUND NORTH TO THE LABRADOR COAST

The Fleet on "The Labrador"

BY NORMAN DUNCAN

"THE Labrador" is a forbidding coast, indeed—naked, rugged, desolate, lying sombre in a mist. It is of weather-worn gray rock, broken at intervals by long ribs of black. In part it is low and ragged, slowly rising, by way of bare slopes and starved forest, to broken mountain ranges, which lie blue and bold in the inland waste. Elsewhere it rears from the edge of the sea in stupendous cliffs and lofty, rugged hills. There is no inviting stretch of shore the length of it—no sandy beach, no line of shingle, no grassy bank; the sea washes a thousand miles of jagged rock. Were it not for the harbors—innumerable and snugly sheltered from the winds and ground-swell of the open—there would be no navigating the waters of that region.

The Straits Shore, along which the great ships steam a nervous course, is

buoyed, lighted, minutely charted. The reefs and currents and tickles* and harbors are all known. A northeast gale, to be sure, raises a commotion in those parts, and fog and drift-ice add something to the chance of disaster; but, as they say, from one peril there are two ways of escape to three sheltered places. The schooners ride at anchor with harbor near at hand; while the gales are brewing, they fly to shelter. Thereabouts, fishing is dull toil, without adventure apart from the routine of danger—mere familiar peril, which is not adventure, properly speaking, at all.

"No, zur," say the skippers; "this ain't nothin' but hard work!"

To the north, however, where the Labrador fleet goes to fish, the coast is best sailed on the plan of the skipper of the

* A "tickle" is a narrow passage to a harbor or between two islands.

old *Twelve Brothers*. Said he, "You don't cotch *me* meddlin' with no land!" Past the Dead Islands, Snug Harbor, Domino Run, Devil's Lookout and the Quaker's Hat—beyond Johnny Paul's Rock and the Wolves, Sandwich Bay, Tumble-down Dick, Indian Harbor, and the White Cockade—past Cape Harrigan, the Farmyard Islands and the Hen and Chickens—far north to the great, craggy hills and strange peoples of Kikkertad-soak, Scoralik, Tunnulusoak, Nain, Okak, and, at last, to Cape Chidley itself—northward, every crooked mile of the way bold headlands, low outlying islands, sunken reefs, tides, fogs, great winds and snow make hard sailing of it.

It is an evil coast, ill-charted where charted at all; some part of the present-day map is based upon the guesswork of the eighteenth-century navigators. The skippers of the fishing-craft sail by guess and hearsay, by recollection and old rhymes: a heroic voyage, ventured every summer, for sake of the cod to be caught.

In the thousand harbors of Newfoundland, whence, in the spring, the fleet sails north—twenty-five thousand stout fellows in little ships—there sounds a call to this adventure. Granted only that the heart of the man is true, he hears a call—persuasive, insistent, inevitable: it is real as a bugle note. The lads' hero is the skipper who knows the waters "off Chidley"—some weather-beaten old fellow, thick and broad about the chest and lanky below, long-armed, hammer-fisted, with a frowzy beard, bushy brows, and clear blue eyes which are strong and quick to look. He is most glorious when in from the Labrador, still sea-booted, oilskin-

clad, dripping the spray of the night's gale from beard and sou'wester, with his feet on a wet deck, his fish dry below, and his big bow anchor gripping the bottom of the home port.

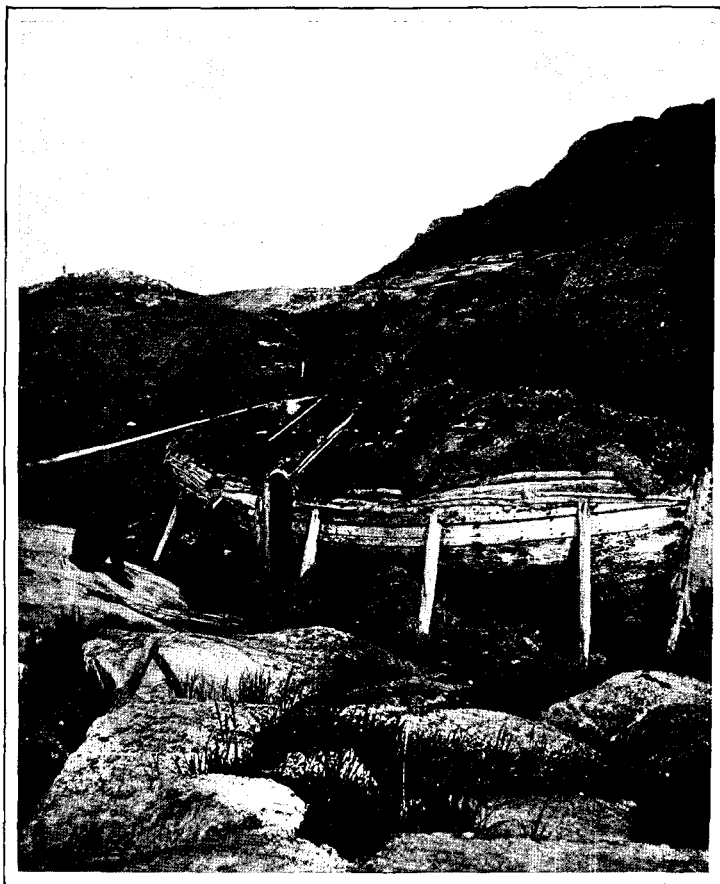
That's the man—that's the moment—to stir the deeps of the heart of Davy Roth o' Whaleback Harbor in Bonavist' Bay! Can the skipper say no more than, "Oh, I isn't been down no further 'n Indian," he is a commonplace fellow, however lucky with the fish; can he answer, with brisk pride, "How far down I been? Mugford, zur!" he earns some measure of respect; but let him once boast, "Oh, I been t' *Chidley*!" and he can do no more—win no more. The man who has sailed his schooner into the marvellous harbors of the far north—the man who

has set eyes on the dark, dumpy little women who wear sealskin trousers, and carry babies on their backs—is the man for Davy Roth o' Bonavist' Bay. Aside from that, to have gone and come again—to have taken salt into strange seas and to have brought forth fish—is the incomparable achievement; and you may be sure that Davy knows it well enough. Says he, in his heart: "I'll do that when I'm growed up; 'n' I 'low I'll go further 'n he done—oncet I'm growed up!"

On winter nights, the lad gives ear to long tales of far-away harbors and queer folk. Of such are those which begin: "Well, 'twas the wonderfulest gale o' wind you ever seed—snowin' an' blowin', with the sea in mountains, an' it as black as a wolf's throat—an' we was somewheres off Cape Mugford. She were drivin' fair with a nor'east gale, with the shore somewheres handy t' peward. But, look! nar a one of us knowed where she



NORTHWARD WITH A FAIR WIND



A "BULLY BOAT" TURNED INTO A DWELLING

were to, 'less 'twas in the thick o' the Thirty Devil Reefs. . . ." To this he listens with wide-open eyes and mouth and ears, from his corner by the glowing stove; and says he, to himself, "I 'low I'd know where she were to, an I were skipper o' she!"

Just so, no doubt, the Scand'navian lads of a thousand years ago were moved by tales told o' winter nights.

In the early spring—when the sunlight is yellow and the warm winds blow and the melting snow drips over the cliffs and runs in little rivulets from the barren hills—in the harbors of all the coast the great fleet is made ready for the long adventure. The rocks echo the noise of hammer and saw and mallet and the song and shout of the workers. The new schooners—building the winter long at

the harbor side—are hurried to completion. The old craft—the weather-beaten, ragged oldcraft, which, it may be, have dodged the reefs and outlived the gales of forty seasons—are fitted with new spars, patched with new canvas and rope, calked anew, daubed anew, and, thus refitted, float brave enough on the quiet harbor water. There is no end to the bustle of labor on ships and nets—no end to the clatter of planning. From the skipper of the ten-ton *First Venture*, who sails with a crew of sons

bred for the purpose, to the powerful dealer who supplies on shares a fleet of seventeen fore-and-afters manned from the harbors of a great bay, there is hope in the hearts of all. Whatever the last season, every man is to make a good "voyage" now. This season—*this* season—there is to be fish a-plenty on the Labrador!

The future is bright as the new spring days. Aunt Matilda is to have a bonnet with feathers—when Skipper Thomas gets home from the Labrador. Little Johnny Tatt, he of the crooked back, is to know again the virtue of Pike's Pain Compound, at a dollar a bottle, warranted to cure—when daddy gets home from the Labrador. Skipper Bill's Lizzie, plump, blushing, merry-eyed, is to wed Jack Lute o' Burnt Arm—when Jack comes back from the Labrador. Every man's heart, and, indeed, most men's fortunes,



ON THE DECK OF THE MAIL-BOAT

are in the venture. The man who has nothing has yet the labor of his hands. Be he skipper, there is one to back his skill and honesty; be he hand, there is no lack of berths to choose from. Skippers stand upon their record and schooners upon their reputation; it's take your choice, for the hands are not too many: the skippers are timid or bold, as God made them; the schooners are lucky or not, as Fate determines. Every man has his chance. John Smith o' Twillingate provisions the *Lucky Queen* and gives her to the penniless Skipper Jim o' Yellow Tickle on shares. Old Tom Tatter o' Salmon Cove, with plea and argument, persuades the Four Arms trader to trust him once again with the *Busy Bee*. He'll get the fish *this* time. Nar a doubt of it! He'll be home in August—this year—loaded to the gunwale. God knows who pays the cash when the fish fail! God knows how the folk survive the disappointment! It is a great lottery of hope and fortune.

When, at last, word comes south that

the ice is clearing from the coast, the vessels spread their little wings to the first favoring winds; and in a week—two weeks or three—the last of the Labrador-men have gone “down north.” The way is spread with dangers—the perils of ice and wind and reef and black fog. These are infinitely strong: the craft are tiny before them; but the hearts of the men are greater far than the toil and peril of the way. Little ships, indeed, they are—not great vessels, with a towering spread of canvas, whose security is in open water; the Labrador fleet is a fleet of doughty schooners—a white cloud of sail whose escape is into harbor. Most are little more than open boats: you must stoop when you enter the cabin, you can stand on the rail and rock them; they are of ten tons burden, of twenty, thirty, fifty, rarely of eighty or a hundred; and most are sailed by the hands that builded them in the harbors from which they hail.

It makes a man's heart swell and flutter to watch them dig their noses into the swelling seas—to see them heel and leap and make the white dust fly—to feel the

rush of the wet wind that drives them, and to hear the swish of the frothy waste they toss upon—to know that the gray path of a thousand miles is every league of the way beset with peril. Brave craft, these—brave hearts to sail them! Hopeful hearts they carry—sad hearts they leave behind. The man who looks on turns to the suddy coast, lying low and black in the west—and to the leaden, ice-strewn seas of the north—and to the murky night creeping in from the open sea; and it may be that he sighs, and sighs again, while he watches the driving mist obscure the fleet behind.

The gusts and great waves of open water—of the free, wide sea. I mean, over which a ship may safely drive while the weather exhausts its evil mood—are menace enough for the stoutest heart. But the voyage of the Labrador fleet is inshore—a winding course among the islands, or a straight one from headland to headland, of a coast off which reefs lie thick: low-lying, jagged ledges, washed by the sea in heavy weather; barren hills, rising abruptly—and all isolated—from safe water; sunken rocks, disclosed, upon approach, only by the green swirl above them. Countless they are—scattered everywhere, hidden and disclosed. They lie in the mouths of harbors, they lie close to the coast, they lie offshore; they run twenty miles out to sea. Here is no plain sailing; the skipper must be sure of the way—or choose it gingerly: else the hidden rock will inevitably “pick him up.”

To know the submerged rocks of one harbor and the neighboring coast, however evil the place, is small accomplishment. The Newfoundland lad of seven years would count himself his father's shame if he failed in so little. High tide and low tide, quiet sea and heavy swell, he will know where he can take the punt—the depth of water, to an inch, which overlies the danger spots. But here are a hundred harbors—a thousand miles of coast—with reefs and islands scattered like dust the length of it. The Labrador skipper must know it all like his own back yard—not in sunny weather alone, but in the night, when the headlands are like black clouds ahead, and in the mist, when the noise of breakers tells him all that he may know of his whereabouts. A flash of white in the gray distance, a thud

and swish from a hidden place: the one is his beacon, the other his fog-horn. It is enough; he crawls into harbor.

You may chart rocks, and beware of them; but—it is a proverb on the coast—“there's no chart for icebergs.” The Labrador current is charged with them—hard, dead-white glacier ice from the Arctic: massive bergs, innumerable, all the while shifting with tide and current and wind. What with flocs and bergs—vast fields of drift-ice—the way north in the spring is most perilous. The skippers are in haste to make their berths: it is a race from the south for best places; they push on—push into the thick of the ice—long before the coast is clear of the first of the drift. The same bergs—widely scattered, diminished in number, dwarfed by the milder climate—give the transatlantic passenger evil dreams: somewhere in the night, somewhere in the mist, thinks he, they may lie; and he shudders. The skipper of the Labrador schooner *knows* that they lie thick around him: there is no surmise; when the night fell, when the fog closed in, there were a hundred to be counted from the masthead.

Violent winds are always to be feared—swift, overwhelming hurricanes: winds that catch the fleet unaware and wreck it in a night. They are not frequent; but they *do* blow—will again blow, no man can tell when. In such a gale, forty vessels were driven on a lee shore; in another, eighty were wrecked overnight—two thousand fishermen cast away, the coast littered with splinters of ships—and, once (it is but an incident), a schooner was torn from her anchors and flung on the rocks forty feet above the high-water mark. These are exceptional storms; the common Labrador gale is not so violent, but evil enough in its own way. It is a northeaster, of which the barometer more often than not gives fair warning; day after day it blows, cold, wet, foggy, dispiriting, increasing in violence, subsiding, returning again, until courage and strength are both worn out. Meantime, it stirs up the sea; the waves break over islands thirty feet high, and leap fifty feet up the sides of the precipices.

Reefs, drift-ice, wind and sea—and over all the fog: thick, wide-spread, per-

sistent, swift in coming, mysterious in movement; it compounds the dangers. It blinds men—they curse it, while they grope along: a desperate business, indeed, thus to run by guess where positive knowledge of the way merely mitigates the peril. There are days when the fog lies like a thick blanket on the face of the sea, hiding the head-sails from the man at the wheel; it is night on deck, and broad day—with the sun in a blue sky—at the masthead; the schooner is steered by a man aloft. The *Always Loaded*, sixty tons and bound home with a cargo that did honor to her name, struck one of the outlying islands so suddenly, so violently, that the lookout in the bow, who had been peering into the mist, was pitched headlong into the surf. The *Daughter*, running blind with a fair, light wind—she had been lost for a day—ran full tilt into a cliff; the men ran forward from the soggy gloom of the after-deck into—bright sunshine at the bow! It is the fog that wrecks ships. "Oh, I runned her ashore," says the castaway skipper. "Thick? Why, *sure*, 'twas thick!" So men hate it, fear it, avoid it when they can, which is seldom; they are not afraid of wind and sea, but there are times when they shake in their sea-boots, if the black fog catches them out of harbor.

At Indian Harbor I went aboard the schooner *Jolly Crew*. It was a raw, foggy day, with a fresh northeast gale blowing, and a high sea running outside the harbor. They were splitting fish on deck; the skiff was just in from the trap—she was still wet with spray.

"I sails with me sons an' gran'sons, zur," said the skipper, smiling. "Sure, I be a old feller t' be down the Labrador, isn't I, zur?"

He did not mean that. He was proud of his age and strength—glad that he was still able "t' be at the fishin'."

"'Tis a wonder you've lived through it all," said I.

He laughed. "An' why, zur?" he asked.

"Many's the ship wrecked on this coast," I answered.

"Oh no, zur," said he; "not so many, zur, as you might think. Down this way, zur, *we knows how t' sail!*"

That was a succinct explanation of very much that had puzzled me.

"Ah, well," said I, "'tis a hard life."

"Hard?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Yes," I answered; "'tis a hard life—the fishin'."

"Oh no, zur," said he, quietly, looking up from his work. "'Tis just—just *life!*"

They do, indeed, know how "t' sail." The Newfoundland government, niggardly and utterly independable when the good of the fisherfolk is concerned, of whatever complexion the government may chance to be, but prodigal to an extraordinary degree when individual self-interests are at stake—this is a delicate way of putting an unpleasant truth,—keeps no light burning beyond the Strait of Belle Isle; the best it does, I believe, is to give wrecked seamen free passage home. Under these difficult circumstances, no seamen save Newfoundlanders, who are the most skilful and courageous of all, could sail that coast: and they only because they are born to follow the sea—there is no escape for them—and are bred to sailing from their earliest years.

"What you going to be when you grow up?" I once asked a lad on the far north-east coast.

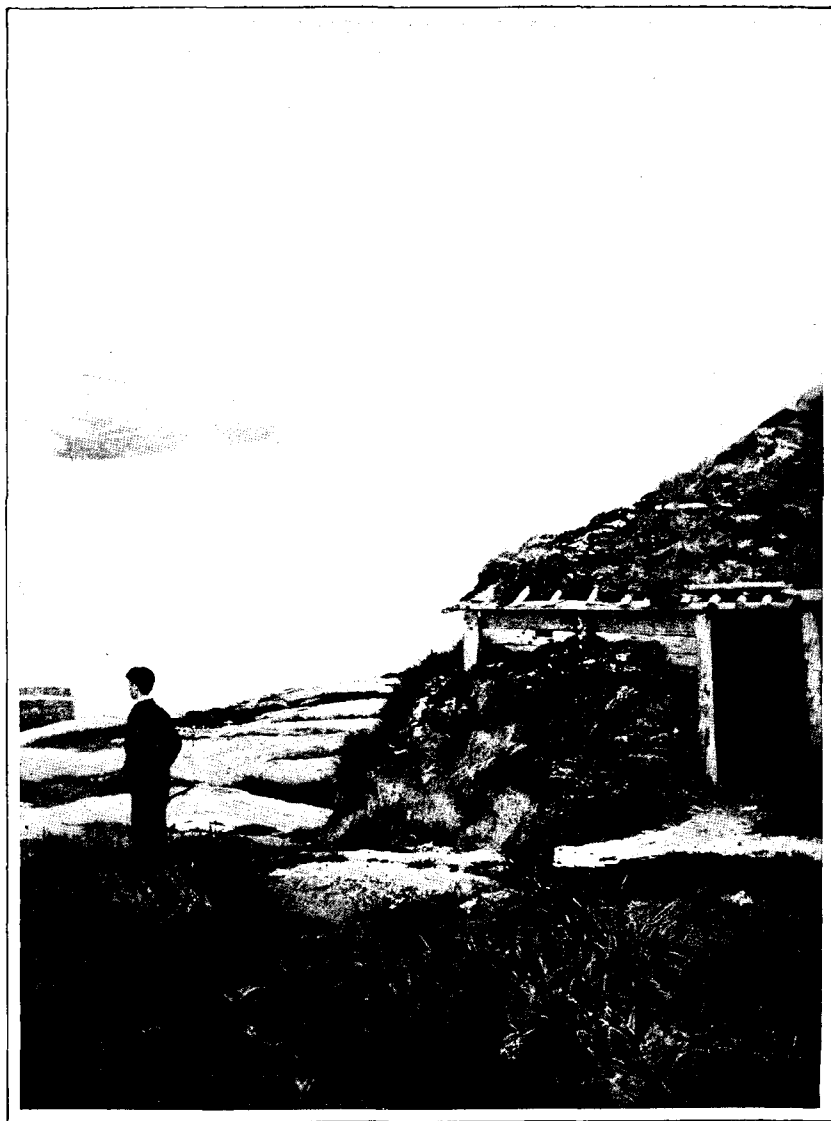
He looked at me in vast astonishment.

"What you going to *be*, what you going to *do*," I repeated, "when you grow up?" Still he did not comprehend. "Eh?" he said.

"What you going to work at," said I, in desperation, "when you're a man?"

"Oh, zur," he answered, understanding at last, "I isn't clever enough t' be a parson!"

And so it went without saying that he was to fish for a living! It is no wonder, then, that the skippers of the fleet know "how t' sail." The remarkable quality of the sea-captains who come from among them impressively attests the fact—not only their quality as sailors, but as men of spirit and proud courage. There is one—now a captain of a coastal boat on the Newfoundland shore—who takes his steamer into a ticklish harbor of a thick, dark night, when everything is black ahead and roundabout, steering only by the echo of the ship's whistle! There is



SCHOONERS AT ANCHOR IN THE FOG

another, a confident seaman, a bluff, high-spirited fellow, who was once delayed by bitter winter weather—an inky night, with ice about, the snow flying, the seas heavy with frost, the wind blowing a gale.

“Where have you been?” they asked him, sarcastically, from the head office.

The captain had been on the bridge all night.

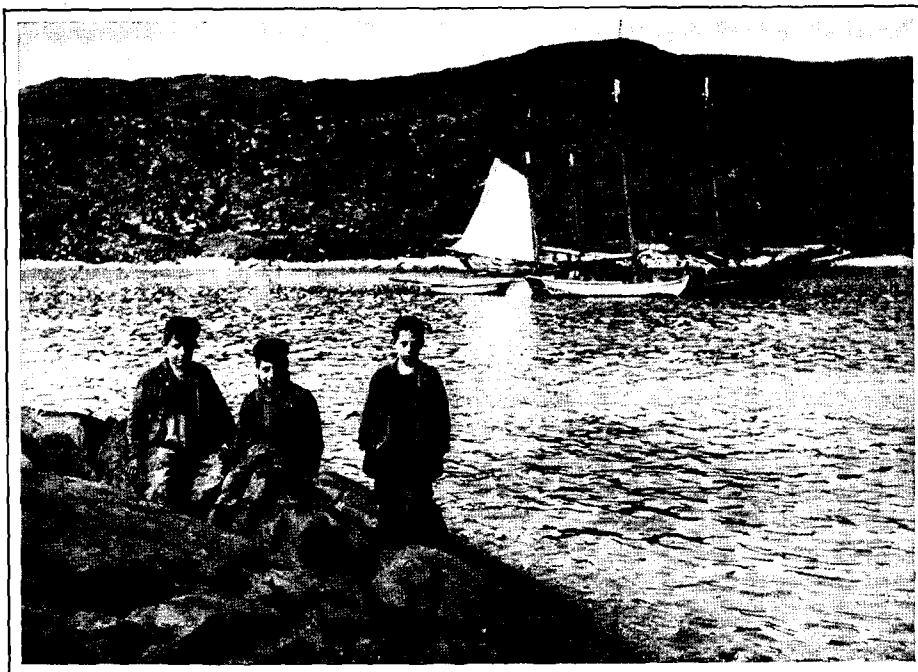
“Berry-picking,” was his laconic despatch in reply.

There is another—also the captain of a coastal steamer—who thought it wise to lie in harbor through a stormy night in the early winter.

“What detains you?” came a message from the head office.

“It is not a fit night for a vessel to be at sea,” the captain replied; and thereupon he turned in, believing the matter to be at an end.

The captain had been concerned for his vessel—not for his life; nor yet for



FISHER LADS ASHORE

his comfort. But the underling at the head office misinterpreted the message.

"What do we pay you for?" he telegraphed.

So the captain took the ship out to sea. Men say that she went out of commission the next day, and that it cost the company a thousand dollars to refit her.

It is to be remarked that a wreck on the Labrador coast excites no wide surprise. Never a season passes but some schooners are cast away. But that is merely the fortune of fishing: the folk are used to expecting catastrophe; when it comes, they accept it quietly. To the man from the south the marvel is not that some are lost, but that many safely return. Wrecked folk, of course, sorrow for the lost schooner; but they appear not to be moved at all by the happy issue which still leaves them their lives. They complain of fate for having robbed them of their schooner and their season's labor; it does not seem to occur to them that they might with propriety thank their lucky stars for having granted them the delight of once again

setting their feet on solid ground. They seem not to think of their lives; a fair generalization would be that they are quite without thought of fear in so far as life is concerned. It may be that habit, if I may so call it, has dulled their sense of peril. Not that they are wickedly callous, not that they are contemptuous; merely accustomed to the monotony of the thing.

Most men—I hesitate to say all—have been wrecked; every man, woman, and child who has sailed the Labrador has narrowly escaped, at least. The fashion of that escape is sometimes almost incredible. There are times, in these wild northern seas, when the man is but a pygmy before the forces into the thick of whose dread passion his calling by chance takes him. The schooner *All's Well* (which is a fictitious name) was helpless in the wind and sea and whirling snow of a great blizzard. At dusk she was driven inshore—no man knew where. Strange cliffs loomed in the snow ahead; breakers—they were within stone's throw—flashed and thundered to port and starboard; the ship was driving swiftly into the surf. When she was fairly upon the

rocks, Skipper John, then a hand aboard (it was he who told me the story), ran below and tumbled into his bunk, believing it to be the better place to drown in. "Well, lads," said he to the men in the forecabin, "we got t' go this time. 'Tis no use goin' on deck." But the ship drove through a tickle no wider than twice her beam and came suddenly into the quiet water of a harbor!

The *Army Lass*, bound north, was lost in the fog. They hove her to. All hands knew that she lay somewhere near the coast. The skipper needed a sight of the rocks—just a glimpse of some headland or island—to pick the course. It was important that he should have it. There was an iceberg floating near; it was massive; it appeared to be steady—and the sea was quiet. From the top of it, he thought (the fog was dense and seemed to be lying low), he might see far and near. His crew put him on the ice with the quarter-boat and then hung off a bit. He clambered up the side of the berg. Near the summit he had to cut his foothold with an axe. This was unfortunate; for he gave the great white mass one blow too many. It split under his feet. He fell headlong into the widening crevice. But he was apparently not a whit the worse for it when his boat's crew picked him up.

A schooner—let her be called the *Good Fortune*—running through dense fog, with a fair, high wind and all sail set, struck a "twin" iceberg bow on. She was wrecked in a flash: her jib-boom was rammed into her forecabin; her bows were stove in; her topmast snapped and came crashing to the deck. Then she fell away from the ice; whereupon the wind caught her, turned her about, and drove her, stern foremost, into a narrow passage which lay between the two towering sections of the "twin." She scraped along, striking the ice on either side; and with every blow, down came fragments from above. "It rained chunks," said the old skipper who told me the story. "You couldn't tell, look! what minute you'd get knocked on the head." The falling ice made great havoc with the deck-works; the boats were crushed; the "house" was stove in; the deck was littered with ice. But the *Good Fortune* drove safely through, was rigged with makeshift sails, made harbor, was re-

fitted by all hands—the Labrador men can build a ship with an axe—and continued her voyage.

"A dunderhead," say the folk, "can *catch* fish; but it takes a *man* t' find un." It is a chase; and, as the coast proverb has it, "the fish have no bells." It is estimated that there are 7000 square miles of fishing-banks off the Labrador coast. There will be fish somewhere—not everywhere; not every man will "use his salt" (the schooners go north loaded with salt for curing) or "get his load." In the beginning—this is when the ice first clears away—there is a race for berths. It takes clever, reckless sailing and alert action to secure the best. I am reminded of a skipper who by hard driving to windward and good luck came first of all to a favorable harbor. It was then night, and his crew was weary, so he put off running out his trap-lead until morning; but in the night the wind changed, and when he awoke at dawn there were two other schooners lying quietly at anchor near by and the berths had been "staked." When the traps are down, there follows a period of anxious waiting. Where are the fish? There are no telegraph-lines on that coast. The news must be spread by word of mouth. When, at last, it comes, there is a sudden change of plan—a wild rush to the more favored grounds.

It is in this scramble that many a skipper makes his great mistake. I was talking with a disconsolate young fellow in a northern harbor where the fish were running thick. The schooners were fast loading; but he had no berth, and was doing but poorly with the passing days.

"If I hadn't—if I *only* hadn't—took up me trap when I did," said he, "I'd been loaded an' off home. Sure, zur, would you believe it? but I had the berth off the point. Off the point—the berth off the point!" he repeated, earnestly, his eyes wide. "An', look! I hears they's a great run o' fish t' Cutthroat Tickle. So I up with me trap, for I'd been gettin' nothin'; an'—an'—would you believe it? but the man that put his down where I took mine up took a hundred quintal*"

* A quintal is, roughly, a hundred pounds. One hundred quintals of green fish are equal, roughly, to thirty of dry, which, at \$3, would amount to \$90.

out o' that berth next marnin'! An' he'll load," he groaned, "afore the week's out!"

When the fish are running, the work is mercilessly hard; it is kept up night and day; there is no sleep for man or child, save, it may be, an hour's slumber where they toil, just before dawn. The schooner lies at anchor in the harbor, safe enough from wind and sea; the rocks, surrounding the basin in which she lies, keep the harbor water placid forever. But the men set the traps in the open sea, somewhere off the heads, or near one of the outlying islands; it may be miles from the anchorage of the schooner. They put out at dawn—before dawn, rather; for they aim to be at the trap just when the light is strong enough for the hauling. When the skiff is loaded, they put back to harbor in haste, throw the fish on deck, split them, salt them, lay them neatly in the hold, and put out to the trap again. I have seen the harbors—then crowded with fishing-craft—fairly ablaze with light at midnight. Torches were flaring on the decks and in the turf huts on the rocks ashore. The night was quiet; there was not a sound from the tired workers; but the flaring lights made known that the wild, bleak, far-away place—a basin in the midst of barren, uninhabited hills—was still astir with the day's work.

At such times, the toil at the oars, and at the splitting-table,* whether on deck or in the stages—and the lack of sleep, and the icy winds and cold salt spray—is all bitter cruel to suffer. The Labrador fisherman will not readily admit that he lives a hard life; but if you suggest that when the fish are running it may be somewhat more toilsome than lives lived elsewhere, he will grant you something.

"Oh, ay," he'll drawl, "when the fish is runnin', 'tis a bit hard."

I learned from a child—he was merry, brave, fond of the adventure—that fishing is a pleasant business in the sunny mid-summer months; but that when, late in the fall, the skiff puts out to the trap at dawn, it is wise to plunge one's hands deep in the water before taking the oars, no matter how much it hurts, for one's wrists are then covered with salt-water

* A "clever hand" can split—that is, clean—thirty fish in a minute.

sores and one's palms are cracked, even though one take the precaution of wearing a brass chain—that, oh yes! it is wise to plunge one's hands in the cold water, as quick as may be; for thus one may "limber 'em up" before the trap is reached.

"'Tis not hard, now," said he. "But, oh—oo—oo! when the big nor'easters blow! Oo—oo!" he repeated, with a shrug and a sage shake of the head; "'tis won-der-ful hard those times!"

The return is small. The crews are comprised of from five to ten men, with, occasionally, a sturdy maid for cook, to whom is given \$30 for her season's work; some old hands will sail on no ship with a male cook, for, as one of them said, "Sure, some o' thim min can't boil water without burnin' it!" A good season's catch is one hundred quintals of dry fish a man. A simple calculation—with some knowledge of certain factors which I need not state—makes it plain that a man must himself catch, as his share of the trap, 30,000 fish if he is to net a living wage. If his return is \$250 he is in the happiest fortune—richly rewarded, beyond his dreams, for his summer's work. One-half of that is sufficient to give any modest man a warm glow of content and pride. Often—it depends largely upon chance and the skill of his skipper—the catch is so poor that he must make the best of \$25 or \$30. It must not be supposed that the return is always in cash; it is usually in trade, which is quite a different thing—in Newfoundland.

The schooners take many passengers north in the spring. Such are called "freighters" on the coast; they are put ashore at such harbors as they elect, and, for passage for themselves, families, and gear, pay upon the return voyage twenty-five cents for every hundredweight of fish caught. As a matter of course, the vessels are preposterously overcrowded. Dr. Grenfell, of the Deep Sea Mission, tells of counting thirty-four men and sixteen women (no mention was made of children) aboard a nineteen-ton schooner, then on the long, rough voyage to the north. The men fish from the coast in small boats just as the more prosperous "green-fish catchers" put out from the schooners. Meantime, they live in mud



A HOME PORT IN NEWFOUNDLAND

huts, which are inviting or otherwise, as the womenfolk go; some are damp, cave-like, ill-savored, crowded; others are airy, cozy, the floors spread deep with powdered shell, the whole immaculately kept. When the party is landed, the women sweep out the last of the winter's snow, the men build great fires on the floors; indeed, the huts are soon ready for occupancy. At best, they are tiny places—much like children's play-houses. There was once a tall man who did not quite fit the sleeping-place assigned him; but with great good nature he cut a hole in the wall, built a miniature addition for his feet, and slept the summer through at comfortable full length. It is a great outing for the children; they romp on the rocks, toddle over the nearer hills, sleep in the sunshine; but if they are eight years old, as one said—or well grown at five or seven—they must do their little share of work.

Withal, the Labradormen are of a simple, God-fearing, clean-lived, hardy race of men. There was once a woman who made boast of her high connection in England, as women will the wide

world over; and when she was questioned concerning the position the boasted relative occupied, replied, "Oh, *he's* Superintendent o' Foreign Governments!" There was an austere old Christian who on a Sunday morning left his trap—his whole fortune—lie in the path of a destroying iceberg rather than desecrate the Lord's day by taking it out of the water. Both political parties in Newfoundland shamelessly deceive the credulous fisherfolk; there was a childlike old fellow who, when asked, "And what will you do if there *is* no fish?" confidently answered: "Oh, they's goin' t' be a new Gov'ment. *He'll* take care o' we!" There was a sturdy son of the coast who deserted his schooner at sea and swam ashore. But he had mistaken a barren island for the mainland, which was yet far off; and there he lived, without food, for twenty-seven days! When he was picked up, his condition was such as may not be described (the Labrador fly is a vicious insect); he was unconscious, but he survived to fish many another season.

The mail-boat picked up Skipper Thomas of Carbonar—then master of a



HAULING THE TRAP

loaded schooner—at a small harbor near the Straits. His crew carried him aboard; for he was desperately ill, and wanted to die at home, where his children were.

"He's wonderful bad," said one of the men. "He've consumption."

"I'm just wantin' t' die at home," he said, again and again. "Just that—just where my children be!"

All hearts were with him in that last struggle—but no man dared hope; for the old skipper had already beaten off death longer than death is wont to wait, and his strength was near spent.

"Were you sick when you sailed for the Labrador in the spring?" they asked him.

"Oh, ay," said he; "I were terrible bad then."

"Then why," they said—"why did you come at all?"

They say he looked up in mild surprise. "I had t' make me livin'," he answered, simply.

His coffin was knocked together on the forward deck next morning—with Carbonear a day's sail beyond.

The fleet goes home in the early fall.

The schooners are loaded—some so low with the catch that the water washes into the scuppers. "You could wash your hands on her deck," is the skipper's proudest boast. The feat of seamanship, I do not doubt, is not elsewhere equalled. It is an inspiring sight to see the doughty little craft beating into the wind on a gray day. The harvesting of a field of grain is good to look upon; but I think that there can be no more stirring sight in all the world, no sight more quickly to melt a man's heart, more deeply to move him to love men and bless God, than the sight of the Labrador fleet beating home loaded—toil done, dangers past; the home port at the end of a run with a fair wind. The home-coming, I fancy, is much like the return of the viking ships to the old Norwegian harbors must have been. The lucky skippers strut the village roads with swelling chests, heroes in the sight of all; the old men, long past their labor, listen to new tales and spin old yarns; the maids and the lads renew their interrupted love-makings. There is great rejoicing—feasting, merrymaking, hearty thanksgiving.

Thanks be to God, the fleet's home!

The Cenotaph

BY MARY TRACY EARLE

DANE found himself pacing the sidewalk in front of Mrs. Petrie's door, without the courage to go up the steps and ring. After all, in recalling himself he would only recall the saddest hours of her life. They had seen each other constantly for nearly a year, and his memory could unroll the whole time in a long panoramic succession of meetings; but what was she likely to remember of him, except the day when she had followed him from her husband's room and he had told her there was no hope, and that other day when her husband died? Their acquaintance had not stopped then, otherwise it would be impossible for him to think of recalling himself without some definite excuse, but he felt that her recollection of him must stop at the moment when she lifted her eyes from Donald Petrie's face to his to make sure that nothing else could be done. It had been one of those cases where, until the last, there is hope of a temporary respite, and the possibility of gaining it had obliged him to stay in the room until the very end. Afterwards he had wished that he had left them alone together and forfeited the slender chance which could have given the dying man only a day or two at the best. She had not seemed to think him an intruder; he had been so impersonal to her, so entirely an appliance for prolonging her husband's life, that he doubted if she had been conscious of his presence, but the look of her face had haunted him in the five intervening years, and it came between him and his purpose whenever he drew near her door.

When he last saw her she was still in her deepest mourning, and the stricken expression had not left her. She had been glad to see him—pathetically, tenderly glad,—yet the meeting had evidently made her grief more poignant, and to him the pain of it had been unbearable. He had been waiting since for some sign

that her life had regained its poise. She wrote occasionally to one of his sisters, but although the black border on her note-paper disappeared, the letters were still those of a woman unalterably sad. Dane was sure that in some ways she showed her heart more frankly in them than she would to a friend with whom her acquaintance was more intimate and who could compare them with her daily life, making them a key to her actions; and he pictured her trying to take up her interests, yet shrinking from human contacts. He could even see her face, calm now, and gaining lines of strength, yet haunted by that look—a cry without voice or words—which bound him to her, yet held him away. In his vision of her she was always wearing black, and the pallor of the sick-room which he had been shocked to find still upon her face when he saw her last was now fixed as a part of her in his memory.

A carriage had been waiting at the door when he came, and was still there when he went up the steps. The place was an old house, humanized by long occupation as a private dwelling, but now made over into apartments; its entrance offered no questionable pretension of boy in uniform, but Dane was familiar with the rites by which one is admitted through locked doors which no visible attendant opens. He stepped into the vestibule, rang the Petrie bell, and put his hand on the door-knob, ready to take advantage of the moment, in the midst of mysterious and nervous clickings, when the latch would yield; but before the hidden contrivances could do their work the door was opened by people on their way out, and he found himself facing Eva Petrie.

His first knowledge, beyond recognition, was that of her radiance. There was a faint yet entirely vital glow upon her rounded cheeks, her eyes and lips were smiling, and her dress, only half con-