

PETER GOTT, THE CAPE ANN FISHERMAN. By J. RENOLES M. D. BOSTON: JOHN P. JEWETT & Co.; NEW YORK: SHELTON BLAKEMAN & Co.

Mr. Peter Gott, the hero of this narrative, may not be a veritable personage of flesh and blood, but at all events, he is a genuine representative man, and we follow him in his various fortunes with personal interest, as a type of the hardy, sun-burnt, bold-spirited and good-hearted fishermen of Massachusetts Bay. Pigeon Cove, a little rocky basin on Cape Ann, is well known to many of our summer tourists for its fine salt breezes and its delectable fresh fish, and it is at this renowned locality, that we are first introduced to the adventurous Peter. He had just caught a noble fare of cod and haddock, but before being sold to the hawkers, who were waiting on the shore, they must be dressed:

So, taking his clam bucket and reel, the fisherman goes to the fish-house where he keeps his gear, and depositing them in their proper places, he takes his hand-barrow, his oil bucket, and a sharp knife, and returns to his boat. Then placing his barrow across the bows, he takes his stand in the water by its side. Then seizing a fish by the head with his left hand, he makes a cut across the throat, just behind the gills; then slit down the belly with one stroke, he seizes the liver between the edge of his knife and the thumb of his right hand, and, detaching it from its connections, drops it into his oil-bucket which stands before him, towards the stern. Now dropping his knife upon a thwart, he seizes the whole mass of entrails in his right hand, and holding the fish firmly in his left, tears out the whole with a sudden jerk, and throws it into the water. Then he throws the fish into the barrow, and seizing another with his left hand, and his knife with his right, goes through with the same motions. Thus he proceeds with the rapidity and regularity of a machine, until the fish are all transferred from the bottom of the dory into the hand-barrow. He now carries up his oil-bucket and empties the livers into a cask or butt which he keeps for that purpose. He is now ready to dispose of his fish. If the boats are all in, and the fares are not very large, the hawkers will offer seventy-five cents a hundred. After a good deal of haggling, Peter gets eighty cents for his. Taking them to the scale, which stands near the passage leading down to the beach, they are found to weigh 150 pounds. They are now taken to the wagon of the purchaser, who pays Peter one dollar and twenty cents. He now returns to his boat, takes out his oars, dips up a bucket of water, washes out the boat, and throwing a bucket of water into it, rolls it over on its side and lets the water run out. Then carrying up his killick high on the beach, he gathers up his oars, and carries them to the fish-house. The houses are generally occupied in common by several dory men, each of whom pay rent for the corner in which he keeps his own gear.

Peter's mode of living, while pursuing his profession on the Banks, exhibits a variety not found on the bill of fare at the Astor House or Delmonico's.

Fishermen in those days ate much more fish on their trips, than they do at the present time. They were fitted out with a good supply of salt pork and molasses, with a plenty of Indian meal, a little flour and hard bread. Their bread was made of meal and water, with a little salt and molasses added, and baked upon tin sheets or pieces of barrel heads, before the fire. Once or twice a week they had tea made, by putting tea into a boiler and adding a quantity of molasses and boiling it as coffee is boiled. Coffee was seldom used at sea in those days, and their sugar was kept to sweeten their grog, which was duly served out to them twice a day. On Sunday, it was common to have a flour short-cake, which was prepared in the following way: The head was broken out of a flour barrel; the flour scooped out of the centre so as to make a basin-like cavity, sufficiently large for the cook's purpose; he then poured into it a pint of pork fat, which he had fried out of slices of salt pork, a quantity of molasses and a little hot water, and mixed in the flour until it was of the proper consistence. It was then taken out in a mass and baked in a Dutch oven over the fire. This is no contemptible dish, and contains nearly as many good qualities as Lord Peter's leg of mutton; and many a hearty breakfast of a Sunday morning do the fishermen make of it, with their pot of boiled tea. Those who have never tried a dish of boiled tea, will be surprised to find how good a substitute it is for coffee, especially if a little sweet milk is added just at the close of the boiling. In modern times, the fishermen are fitted out with much greater variety and abundance of food, than in those days of which we are speaking. Salt-pork and beef, potatoes, and cabbages, flour and hard bread of a superior quality from Johnson's bakery, and coffee three times a day, is their common fare. Cape Ann fishermen are famous for their good living. I have known men among them who have drunk their strong coffee three times a day for forty years, and, as if on purpose to prove the fallacy of all that has been said about the injurious effects of coffee, they have persisted in having good health for the whole

of that time. But fish fresh, or corned was the principal article of food at the time when Peter made his first trip to the Banks.

Do the lovers of lobster salad know the antecedents of their favorite refection? Lobsters are taken in a sort of baskets called lobsterpots. These are about three feet long, and two feet wide, of semi-cylindrical form, that is, the bottom is flat, and the sides and top are in the form of an ear. At each end is an opening for the ingress of the lobster; around this opening are placed short flexible pieces of wood, projecting into the basket, so arranged that they will easily separate and allow the lobster to enter, but their points close together after him and prevent his escape. They have a door upon the top, through which the lobster is taken out.

A long line is attached to these pots; a heavy stone, sufficient to sink them, is placed in them, and they are baited with the heads or offal of fresh fish, and sunk to the bottom at about low water mark; the other end of the line is made fast to a block of light wood, called a buoy. The fishermen go out with their wherries, freighted with these pots, and drop them at short intervals along the shore. During the season of lobster-fishing which lasts from March to July, hundreds of these buoys may be seen bobbing up and down like so many seals' heads. The fishermen visit them every morning, draw them up alongside of their boats, take out the lobsters, replenish the bait, and drop them again into the water. The lobsters, when first taken, are very fierce, and seize with their strong pincers upon whatever may be within their reach. When thrown together into the boat, they will grapple with each other and tear off each other's feelers and legs. Without much care in handling them, the fingers of the fisherman get many a good bite. To prevent them from injuring each other, the fishermen provide sharp-pointed wooden pegs, which they insert into the joint or hinge of their pincers, which prevents them from closing. When they have visited all their pots, they row to their landing place. If they now wish to preserve them for several days, they put them into a long box or kennel, made of plank and bored full of holes, which is moored in the water at a little distance from the shore. If they wish to prepare them immediately for market, they are taken ashore in hand-barrow and carried to a sort of shed, in which is fixed a large cauldron. This is filled with water. A brisk fire is kindled under this kettle, and when the water boils, the living, crawling, squirming lobsters are thrown into it and covered with a heavy plank cover. Here they are kept boiling until their colour, which when taken out of the water was a dark green, becomes a bright scarlet. They are now ready for the market. In this state we see them for sale on the stalls in our cities and hawked about the streets.

Peter Gott, too, found the mackerel a rather queer fish:

The habits of these fish are very peculiar. And although they have been taken in immense numbers for three-quarters of a century, their habits are not well understood. They often move in great bodies, apparently filling the ocean for miles in extent. They are found near the surface. Sometimes they will take the hook with the greatest eagerness. At other times, not a mackerel will bite for days, although millions of them are visible in the water. When they are in the mood for taking the bait, ten, twenty, and even thirty barrels are taken by a single vessel in a few hours. They usually bite most freely soon after sunrise in the morning and toward sunset in the evening. They all cease to bite about the same time, as if they were actuated by a common impulse. They are easily frightened, and will then descend into deep water. It has often happened, that a fleet of vessels has been lying off the Cape, a mile or two from the shore, in the midst of a shoal of mackerel, and taking them rapidly upon their decks, when the firing of a gun or the blast of a rock would send every mackerel fathoms deep into the water, as suddenly as though they had been converted into so many pigs of lead; and perhaps it would be some hours before they would reappear. They are caught most abundantly near the shore and very rarely out of sight of land.

Mackerel, it seems, are fond of an early breakfast, and the discovery of this oddity of taste was a stepping-stone to Peter's fortune and fame:

He laid his course for Mount Desert Island, and lay for several days in the vicinity of the island. Soon signs of mackerel began to appear. They threw over their baited hooks, and now and then caught a mackerel. They continued in this way for several days fishing through the whole day, and at the end of the week had taken two barrels of poor, small fish. Some of the crew were getting discouraged, when suddenly one morning, just as the sun was rising, they found themselves surrounded by mackerel ready to take the hook the instant it touched the water. They would seize the bait, whether large or small, with the greatest avidity. They took them on to the deck with great rapidity, jorking them from the hook as

soon as they were over the rail, and dropping the hook again instantly into the water. So voracious were the fish, that they would oftentimes seize the bare, unbaited hook, almost before it struck the water. This exciting scene continued about two hours, when all of a sudden they ceased to bite, and not another fish could they induce to take even the best-baited hook. Finding they could catch no more, they ceased their labour and partook of their breakfast, which the cook had had ready for them more than an hour. After breakfast, they dressed and salted their fish, and found they had taken twenty barrels in two hours. After cleaning the deck they again threw over their hooks, but few mackerel were to be seen, and of those which they saw swimming about the vessel only one now and then would take the hook.

The next morning the same scene was repeated. They turned out at daylight and chopped into small pieces with a hatchet upon a block the smallest of the mackerel which they had caught the preceding morning, and which they had preserved in a barrel of salt water for this purpose. They thus prepared two or three bushels of bait, that the time might be lost in preparing it after the fish began to bite. Just before sunrise they began their work and this morning they took fifteen barrels. They could not account for these singular movements of the fish. But they did not forget them; and learned to be always ready to try their fortune with the rising of the sun. This accidental discovery, that mackerel had a habit of feeding early in the morning, contributed greatly to the success of their voyage.

Clam-digging has many temptations for the fisherman of Massachusetts, and the worthy Peter engages in the business on a large scale.

About this time the business of digging clams was engaged in by a large number of persons. They are salted and preserved in barrels, and used by fishermen as bait for codfish. For many years past the digging and salting of clams for Boston market has been an important business. These shell-fish abound in the extensive flats at the mouth of Squam River, Essex River and Ipswich River. These flats are daily covered by the tide, and afford the feeding ground which the clams require. They multiply with astonishing rapidity. They are dug in the winter and spring. The business furnishes employment for men and boys, that in former years were occupied in winter fishing. The work is done, of course, at low tide. When the tide is out, on pleasant winter days, one will often see gangs of ten, twenty or fifty men and boys busily employed in turning up the mud on the flats and picking up the clams into buckets. The implement which they use is a stout fork with three flat prongs, each about an inch wide and ten or twelve inches long. The men go out on the flats in wherries, when the tide is retiring, and push an oar into the mud, and make fast the boat to it, and as soon as the water has left the boat, commence operations. When a bucket is filled, it is emptied into the boat. They continue their work until the tide comes in again sufficiently to float the boat, when they pull to the wharf. On many places on the shores of these flats there are groups of small huts, ten or twelve feet square, with stone chimneys running up on the outside, furnished within with a small stove and two or three stools for seats. The clams are deposited in these huts, and in those parts of the day when the tide is in, so that the men cannot work out on the flats, and in stormy weather, they are employed in shocking them, as it is called, that is, in opening the shell and taking out the clam, which is done with a small, stout knife. As the clams are taken from the shell, they are dropped into a bucket; when the bucket is filled, they are emptied into a barrel. Around these huts, it is not uncommon to see heaps of clam shells larger than the huts themselves, the accumulations of the winter's labor. The clam diggers sell the produce of their labor to traders, who send their teams around to the huts weekly or daily, according to the weather, and carry them to their store-houses and repack and salt them, and head them up in barrels, when they are ready for the market.

The whole volume is permeated with a similar "ancient and fish-like" savor, and will be relished or its naturalness by all who have any interest in the land or water between the capes of Massachusetts.

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