

MONTAUK POINT.

ITS INDIANS AND TRADITIONS—THE FAMOUS LIGHT-HOUSE.

Long Island in outline is a topographical fish, the bifurcated strips of land on the eastern end forming the tail, while the broken and rounding shore at the western extremity does not look unlike a head on the map. The sand strip on the south dividing the Great South Bay and lesser bays from the Atlantic Ocean will serve as fins. The south-eastern prong of the tail is the famous Montauk Point—the first land seen by the mariner when bound for the port of New-York, and the white tower of its famous light-house holds the vision of the departing sailor till it seems to rise from the water on the horizon.

The peninsula is an extensive and wild tract of land, some twenty miles or more in length, and in portions not more than a stone's throw in width. There was a rumor during the Winter that a party of New-York capitalists had purchased an extensive tract of land on the peninsula with the intention of erecting thereon a mammoth Summer hotel, and if this is done, the now wild and desolate region will doubtless become a fashionable resort. Excepting that portion belonging to the Government, and occupied by the light-house, and the Indian fields, the peninsula has been owned for many years by an incorporated company, and the lands have been used as pasturage for several herds of cattle, which are guarded by herdsmen who inhabit the shanties observed here and there. The humble shanties of fishermen dot the shores of Neapeague Bay, and there are also herabouts several fish factories. The bony menhaden, or moss-bunker, abounds in these waters, and millions of them are annually netted, thousands being sometimes taken in one haul. They are used for manure and for oil. A road leads from East Hampton through the peninsula to the light-house; though a pleasanter way to reach the only point of interest to most tourists is the sail from Sag Harbor, as landing is easy on the north shore. The drive is over a hilly country, with little shade. The south shore is rocky and sandy, with a stunted growth of grass and shrubs, like many other portions of that side of Long Island; while on the north shore, as also elsewhere on the same line, the land inclines to hill, and there is in places a fine growth of trees, and vegetation is possible. A revenue-boat guards the northern shore, and smuggling has been detected in the coves of Neapeague Bay, into which many vessels seek refuge when the storm catches them so near the land.

A few hours' walk from East Hampton, an ancient and flourishing hamlet, will leave civilization behind. The Indian reservation embraces a portion of the peninsula—the home of the remnant of the once powerful Montauk tribe of Indians, one of the original thirteen that ruled the island of Sewanhaka. These Indians consist of several families, and in the neighborhood are contemptuously considered half-breeds, though the elders claim to be pure blooded, and one of them the lineal ruler of the tribe. At best they are degenerate representatives of a once illustrious and noble race; for, if not deteriorated by miscegenation, they have become so by dissipation, now resembling their progenitors only in respect to their love of fire-water and indolence, not indulging in the hardy sports they might indulge in, and eking out a miserable living by menial services. Their own statements are very contradictory, some evidently wishing to be considered genuine Indians, while others vehemently disdain the connection. They are dark-skinned rather than copper-hued, and the tendency to "kink" in the hair of many leaves no doubt as to their pedigree. There are, however, several tall, well-formed, straight-haired men among them, who are undoubtedly "pure Indian." The leading and "royal family" is that of Pharaoh, and evidently all in the settlement belong to the family, or, at all events, bear the name. One of this family is putatively the king or chieftain; but there never was a more impotent and poverty-stricken ruler, being, in fact, no ruler at all, not even by courtesy. It is said that these full-bloods are the most industrious in cultivating the ground allotted to them, and probably, if thought something of by the whites, and not regarded and treated as a worthless community, they would do much better. They dwell in rudely-constructed huts or shanties, and the half-breeds are much in the majority. It is needless to add that they are a source of trouble to the township.

Though the Indians are disappearing so fast many of their traditions and names are still remembered. Nearly all the Aboriginal designations of localities have been retained, and some of the traditions, no doubt forgotten by the Indians themselves, have been treasured by the whites. Neapeague, Culloden, Shagunaway, Womponomon, Kongonock, and Narragansett are names bestowed by the Aborigines to different localities. To us they possess little significance, but in the Indian language they felicitously indicate the characteristics of the localities. For instance, Montaukett, the name of the peninsula, signifies hilly land.

In the museum of the Long Island Historical Society, in Brooklyn, there is a goodly-sized rock which was for a number of years gone by an object of interest to tourists on Montauk Point. It stood near the large pond, and was at one time much larger, pieces of it having been chipped away by tourists as souvenirs; so much so indeed that the rock would probably in course of time have been destroyed altogether had it not been removed to a place of safety by a gentleman taking an interest in the matter, and subsequently transferred to the Historical Society. On this stone there is an impression of a human foot, distinct enough to be legible. Tradition has it that this foot-print was made by the foot of a young warrior who, driven to despair by unrequited love, leaped from the rock into the pond, leaving an indentation of his right foot in the soft rock. Another account declares that the footprint is that of the evil spirit, who escaped after an encounter with the good spirit by leaping from this rock into the pond. The reader may accept whichever version he pleases.

All traces of "Sachem's Hole" were obliterated by the extension of the turnpike from East Hampton to the light-house. In 1651 in conveying the remains of an illustrious chieftain from Shelter Island to Montaukett for interment, the cortège rested on the line of the turnpike, near East Hampton, and the spot where the head of the corpse rested on the ground was marked by a slight excavation. For years the hole remained—every passing Indian sweeping it out clear of drift. It is not out of place here to observe that there are few traces of old Indian burial places on the peninsula, yet from this tradition there is reason to infer it was a popular burying ground with them.

Years ago there was a wood in the vicinity of the western end of the peninsula, which was remarkable as the locale of a peculiar noise like that of a boy "whooping," and it was popularly supposed the woods were haunted by the ghost of a boy, whom it was alleged had been murdered therein. It is needless to say that the wood was always avoided, especially in the night time. In the neighborhood the mere mention of the locality was sufficient to inspire terror. A sturdy farmer, however, purchased the right to cut the wood down, and bravely went about his work. He made short work of the "whooping boy," for he silenced him forever. Moreover, he accounted for the strange noise by the discovery that two of the trees had so grown together and interlaced that their branches in several places formed whistles for the wind. From the eastern extremity of the peninsula the ocean view is grand, sublime—as fine, perhaps, as any on the coast. Some interesting wild flowers can be discovered in the tall grass, and curious rocky formations attract attention along the shores. Furious breakers dash myriads of variously-colored pebbles on the southern shore, along which there is the never-ending roar of the surf, while on the other side the water is tranquil and the shore as smooth as a floor. In this season of the year, some very curious seaweed can be gathered here, especially among the rocks. There are several varieties, one of which, a species of ribbon-grass, dries beautifully. On the southern shore is the wrecking station, with the long life-boat and other life-saving apparatus, ready at a moment's notice to be launched into the surf. It is some years, however, since the long-boat has been required. The last wreck of importance was that of an emigrant ship, some years ago. As early as 1795 there was a light located here. The present light-house is a great improvement, and one of the finest in this world. It was built in 1860, on the high rocky eminence at the extreme end of the peninsula, so that the more hardy breakers leap up and lick its base. The exact location of the light is 40° 4' 13" latitude, and 71° 51' 6" longitude. It is a fixed light, varied by white flashes in intervals of two minutes, visible twenty miles. The tower, built of brick, is ninety-seven feet high from the base. It is 172 feet above the sea. The view to be

obtained from the gallery is a grand one, as it affords a bird's-eye view of Gardiner's Islands, Gull Islands, and Fisher's Islands, the Connecticut shore, and Block Island. Ocean steamers pass in the distance, and heavily-laden merchantmen tack to and fro.

The light requires the attention of a keeper and two or three assistants. The oil is kept in a tank at the base and pumped up eight gallons at a time. A curious story is told regarding the apparatus: The lantern is octagonal shaped, with two revolving glasses of the finest order. It was exhibited by the French Government at the New-York Crystal Palace, and afterward presented to the United States Government and taken to Washington. It remained in Washington several years, and then was sold to a speculator at a ridiculously low figure. Shortly after an act was passed to rebuild and improve the Montauk Point, when it was found that the French light was needed, so it was purchased back by the Government at considerable cost. The flame is as big round as a man's head, and an immense quantity of oil is annually consumed. Everything is arranged and managed with the regularity of clock-work, and a housewife would envy the skill and industry that keeps the brasses and polished steel so clean and bright.

Lodging can be obtained in the light-house keeper's dwelling by visitors who wish to stop over night, and a register of visitors is kept, but so difficult is the peninsula of access that tourists are comparatively few, and sportsmen do not as yet often frequent this wild ocean-bound region.