

A HOME ON THE FUNDY SHORE

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SOME of my earliest memories are of summer days on the Bay of Fundy. My grandfather's home was on what was called the Bay Shore, on the outskirts of Saint John, New Brunswick. It was a house of many gables, and the grounds ran down in a gentle slope, through a series of meadows, to the beach. We were not allowed to go to the beach without one of the older people, mainly, I think, because a railway ran through the property a short distance above the shore. It was not a very important line; I do not think there could have been more than a train a day, and that was freight; but to us its passing was always an event. We never, if we could help it, failed to be on time to shout friendly greetings as it rumbled by. We stood in a row on the fence, as far up as we could climb, and watched the train until it disappeared around a bend, its cheerful, busy song, known to us as *Catch-a-Nigger, Catch-a-Nigger*, fading into silence. That fence was our boundary. We were not by any means model children, but I do not think it ever occurred to us to go beyond the fence without a grown-up. That would have been one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

There were at times as many as eight young people at the old place on the Bay Shore, and we came from homes as far apart as Ottawa and Halifax and Cambridge, Massachusetts. One of our fathers was in the public service at Ottawa, another was Professor of Modern History at Harvard, and the third had been Professor of English at Dalhousie. He had died a year or two before the time of which I am speaking.

On the whole, we got along very well together. The Cambridge contingent were girls, there was one other little girl from Ottawa, and the rest of us were boys. We spent as much time as we could on the beach, paddling about in the surf at high tide, or building sand castles on the shore. It was pleasant when the sun shone, but there was even a strange fascination about the gigantic banks of fog that often rolled in from the sea, and out of the midst of which would come the unearthly moaning of the fog-horn, crying, as we thought, *Go a-w-a-y boat, Go a-w-a-y Boat!*

When the tide was out, we raced over the wide, shining flats, or hunted in little forgotten pools among the rocks for shells and bright pebbles and other treasure trove, but particularly for fulse, that dark-red, tender seaweed that all Bluenoses eat with delight and all inlanders detest. Out near the mouth of the

harbour was a sombre, mysterious-looking ledge, upon which, as it became uncovered by the falling tide, we could sometimes see the comings and goings of a family of seals. At high tide we waded amongst water-worn rocks, about which the sea swirled, and with shouts of joy captured long, slippery ropes of kelp. Or we would slide gaily down a smooth, dark mass of basalt that lay half buried in the sand.

There was something peculiar about that ancient rock. It changed its size with the years, which no respectable rock had any right to do. I was a small boy when our visits to the Bay Shore came to an end. My grandfather's home had been very dear to me; none of it more so than the shore; and nothing on the shore more precious than this rock. In my dreams I constantly returned to it, climbing up its sides and coasting down its polished slope, playing King of the Castle, or resting in its shade after a wild game of Yankee Lie Low. And in those dreams the rock not only towered above me, but grew more and more imposing in each successive dream. Many years afterwards I returned to the Bay Shore, wandered with an uncle about the place, and drifted down to the beach. At first the shore seemed familiar, but then I became conscious of something lacking. "What have you done", I cried, "with the great black rock that stood here on the shore?"

"What rock?" said he.

"Why, the rock on which we used to slide."

"There it is", he replied, with a grin.

I could not believe it. The thing was simply incredible. The magnificent rampart of my childhood had dwindled to something so insignificant that it seemed like treason to one's youth to accept it as real.

This sort of disillusionment — "debunking" childhood's dreams, I suppose you might call it—takes different forms. In fact it is often, perhaps, not so much disillusionment as seeing things with different eyes. Most of us have had the experience of going back to *Alice in Wonderland* in our more mature years, and finding that what had appealed to the mind of childhood as a delightful fairy tale was, indeed, still that, but also an extraordinarily clever, though never bitter, satire.

The game of *Yankee Lie Low*, that I have mentioned, was to the children on the Bay Shore merely a form of *Hide and Seek*. A quarter of a century afterwards I happened to be doing some historical spadework, and, as I paused for a moment, out of a

dusty corner of my mind popped the name of this long-forgotten game. "By George!" I exclaimed. "Yankee Lie Low". Why, of course; it must have had its birth in some incident of the War of 1812. To us as children the name of the game had been meaningless. And then I grinned, as I remembered five little Canadians playing Yankee Lie Low with three little Americans, on the shores of the Bay of Fundy.

As I try to recapture the elusive memories of nearly sixty years ago I find among them incidents that meant nothing to me at the time, but took on a meaning in the light of later knowledge. My grandfather, who had died some years before I first saw the Bay Shore, was a ship-owner of Saint John, a shrewd merchant, whose graceful barques and brigantines had once sailed out of that port into the Seven Seas. We children watched with wonder and delight the fishing schooners sailing in and out of the harbour, or an odd brig carrying lumber to the Atlantic seaboard or overseas, but we did not and could not know that these dingy craft were all that remained of the glorious days of wooden ships and iron men, days when every New Brunswicker felt a personal pride in the "tall ships of Saint John".

My grandfather, as I saw him later through other eyes, had been a dour Puritan, stern and unbending, a man of the utmost integrity, a good citizen, but completely lacking in the saving sense of humour. A root-and-branch Prohibitionist, when Prohibitionists of any kind were rare, he once testified to the firmness of his faith by buying a cargo of rum and emptying it into Saint John harbour. My grandmother, a sweet-faced gentlewoman, whose piety and uprightness were enriched by sympathy and understanding, and who loved worth-while books, was as universally loved as her husband was universally respected. They both came of sturdy, United Empire Loyalist stock, and there is none better.

The old home on the Bay Shore was typical of many throughout the Maritime Provinces in the Eighties. It had few of the luxuries we now call necessities, but every one appeared to get along comfortably enough without them. There were no telephones or electric light or automobiles or radio, and cocktails had not yet been invented but we had wholesome food, the soft light of lamps or candles, and the joy of reading *Treasure Island* for the first time.

Not far from the Bay Shore was a settlement of Negroes, who had drifted up from the Southern States about the time of the Civil War. These coloured folk had, somewhat to the

embarrassment of the family, adopted it as a sort of substitute for the old Plantation Massa. Their attitude was that curious mixture of deference and childish familiarity characteristic of the race. Many years later, one of my aunts, then an elderly maiden lady, with the sense of humour her father had lacked, told me with glee of one of the coloured mammies saying to her: "Well, Miss 'Liza, never had a child. Well, that is 'urious. Some white folks is that way."

The house held many delightful possibilities for a group of restless children on a rainy day, and the elders were long-suffering. There were play rooms and attics and long halls and a covered passage that led to a barn that had above it a glorious loft full of hay, for these were the horse-and-buggy days before the automobile, incredible though it seems to-day that there could ever have been such days. Also there was in the pantry a molasses hogshead from the inner sides of which we were sometimes allowed to scrape delicious molasses sugar.

And when we were tired, there was a comfortable room, full of books, where we would sit on the floor around the grate fire, while my mother or one of her sisters read to us *Alice in Wonderland* or the *Hunting of the Snark*. The former was most popular with the girls, and the latter with the boys, probably because it was about a ship and sailors, though certainly a very queer ship and very odd sailors. There was also a new book called *Tom Sawyer* that was very popular with the boys, but thought by the girls not so nice as *Little Women*.

We all enjoyed having read to us the books of boys' adventure written by our uncle James De Mille, adventures in the Bay of Fundy and the Gulf of St. Lawrence; and also his nonsense verses, particularly the poem that brings in the Micmac names of New Brunswick rivers. It goes like this:

Sweet maiden of Passamaquoddy,
 Shall we seek for seclusion of souls
 Where the deep Mississippi meanders,
 Or the distant Saskatchewan rolls?
 Ah, no, in New Brunswick we'll find it,
 A sweetly sequestered nook
 Where the swift-gliding Skoodoowabskooksis
 Unites with the Skoodoowabskook.

And so forth.

In this room, in the old home on the Bay Shore, many of my uncle's books had been written, including *The Dodge Club*, a humorous story of travel, something in the manner of *Innocents*

Abroad. Curiously enough it was published by Harpers a few months before Mark Twain's more famous book.

Here, too, James and his brother Budd had edited a newspaper for twelve months, and got an immense amount of fun out of the experience. My mother told me the story long afterwards. The De Milles were strong supporters of Sir Leonard Tilley, who at this particular time was having strong opposition. The boys—they were both under twenty—launched their newspaper, and wrote everything in it except the advertisements, from editorials to electioneering squibs in prose and verse. They could often be heard, behind the closed door, roaring with laughter over the latest lampoon they had concocted.. At the end of the year their father, who of course had carried the financial burden, decided that he at least had had enough.

But to return to the children on the Bay Shore. We were always happy playing on the beach, or building bridges over a brooklet that ran down through the fields, or hunting for wild-flowers in a bit of woodland that covered part of the property. At the same time it was a rare treat to be taken over by ferry to Saint John. We usually walked down to the ferry, over a hill on which stood, and still stands, one of those curious round Martello towers, found in various parts of the country, and built many years ago for some obscure military purpose.

On one of these excursions we must have taken a different route which brought us past a rope-walk near the harbour, an ancient, down-at-heels rope-walk. Why that should have stuck in my memory, when so many other matters have gone, I know not, but to this day, the smell of tar at once brings back the decrepit manufactory of ship's rigging.

The ferry dock ran a long way out into the harbour, because of the extraordinarily high Fundy tides, and on either side of it were shining mud flats at low tide, which we examined with never-failing interest. Through the mud meandered little runlets of sea-water, and here and there were fragments of seaweed and all sorts of fascinating flotsam and jetsam, stranded until the next tide, while over it all was the rich, pungent smell of the ooze. Then there was the voyage across the harbour, the climb up the steep streets of the seaport, the fascinating shops, and the return journey, with, perhaps, a picnic tea on the lawn, or, even better, a bonfire on the beach.

Those were halcyon days, days of pure delight, on the Bay
Shore at Saint John, in the far-off early Eighties. To-day they
are only dreams of yesterday.

Past the lighthouse, past the nunbuoy,
Past the crimson, rising sun,
These our dreams go down the harbour
With the tall ships of Saint John.