## Thompson's Island and Spectacle Island.

A SCOTTISH WORTHY.—THE BOSTON FARM SCHOOL.—A BOURNE OF DEAD HORSES.—APPLE ISLAND.

HOMPSON'S ISLAND is three miles from Long Wharf, one mile from Castle Island, a mile and a half from Savin Hill, and half a mile from Squantum, to which one may almost wade at very low tide. There are broad flats on the east and south, and deep channels on the north and west. The bar on the south has long been famous for its

delicious clams; and many a feast did the old provincial Dorchestrians enjoy on the adjacent shore. It is a narrow island, a mile long, with 157 acres of good and fertile soil, rising into two hills, and indented by a cove. The salt-water pond, which formerly covered part of the lowlands, has been dyked and drained, like a new Haarlem Sea, and its site is now occupied by fertile meadows. On West Head stands a pleasant grove, planted about the year 1840, by the Hon. Theodore Lyman, who also bequeathed \$10,000 to the Farm School. The trees which diversify the slopes produce excellent fruits, and the rich soil of the island brings forth notably good crops.

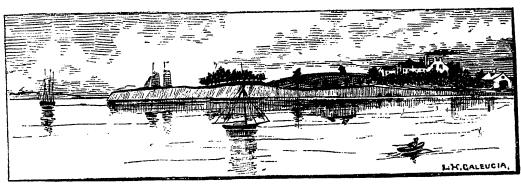
An ancient tradition says, that in 1619 Thompson examined the harborislands, in company with Masconomo, the sagamore of Agawam (who made an affidavit to this effect), seeking a proper place to establish his tradingpost; and chose the island which still bears his name, because it had a small river and a harbor for boats. In 1620 Miles Standish came hither with William Trevour, a sailor of the Mayflower, and named it Island Trevour, reporting, "and then no Natives there inhabiting, neither was there any signe of any that had been there that I could perceive, nor of many, many yeares after." Trevour made affidavit that he took possession in the name of Mr. David Thompson, gentleman, of London; who, indeed, soon afterwards secured a grant of the locality. He had been sent over by Gorges and Mason to superintend their settlement at Portsmouth; and, when Standish went thither to seek supplies for the starving Pilgrims, Thompson returned to Plymouth with him. From thence he and Gorges journeyed to Weymouth, and sailed from that embayed port to Portsmouth. They probably examined the island at this time; for in 1626 Thompson returned, and established here one of the first permanent settlements in the harbor, antedating Boston by several years. It was a trading-post, where

the Indians exchanged their beaver-furs and fish for the trinkets of civilization; and the same proprietor had a similar place on the Kennebec. The island was taken possession of as *vacuum domicilium*, to which no man had claim; and its advantages were vicinity to the sea, good anchorage under the lee of Castle Island, and vicinity to the Neponset Indians. Blackstone testified that he knew "ould Mr. Thompson," who chose this place for settlement because "there is a harbor in the island for a boat, which none of the rest of the islands had."

The Scottish island-lord took a deep and kindly interest in his Indian neighbors, concerning whom he had fantastic theories. In conversations with Morton of Merry-Mount, and his mysterious neighbor, Sir Christopher Gardiner, he maintained a belief that they were descended "from the scattered Trojans, after such time as Brutus left Latium." But he drove sharp bargains with the descendants of Priam and Paris, and piled up many a bale of peltries in his little castle of logs. Near by were Morton, and the Wessagusset colonists, and other isolated settlers, the unwitting pioneers of a great company. It was of these that Prince wrote, "To the south-east, near *Thompson's Island*, live some few *Planters more*. These were the *first* Planters of these Parts, having some small *Trade* with the Natives, for *Bever Skins*, which moved them to make their abode in those places, and are found of some help to the new colony."

Thompson was a Scottish gentleman, a traveller and scholar as well, and had been the London agent of Sir Ferdinando Gorges's company, for whose interests he had appeared even before the Privy Council. He died in 1628, leaving his wife and infant son to garrison the island, and to give generous hospitality to the colonists of Boston and Dorchester. After the arrival of the Puritan fleet, the good Episcopalian lady abandoned her snug Atlantis, and sailed away to where she could hear once more the familiar "Let your light so shine" in some distant prelatical realms. In 1634 Massachusetts granted the island to Dorchester, which leased it for twenty pounds a year, the revenue to be applied for a schoolmaster. It has been said that this was "the first public provision made for a free school in the world, by a direct tax or assessment on the inhabitants of a town." Fourteen years later came David's son, John Thompson, demanding his birthright, and bringing affidavits from Trevour, Standish, Blackstone, and Masconomo, to prove his claim. The General Court found his title good, and restored the island to him, giving to Dorchester, in lieu thereof, a thousand acres in the present town of Lunenburg. Six years later the Indian Winnequassam claimed the island, but was decided against by the courts. John Thompson returned to England, and sold his Western estate to two Bristol merchants. The region was well known by these people; for since 1622 ships of Bristol had visited the southern part of Boston Harbor, at the annual fishingseasons, exchanging guns and ammunition for beaver, martin, and musquash skins. For the next century and a half the island was used for farming, with but a single flurry of excitement, in 1775, when American foragers destroyed the houses, and lit up Quincy Bay with their flames.

In 1834 the proprietors of the Boston Farm School purchased the estate for \$6,000; and it was annexed to Boston, with the precious right reserved to the Dorchestrians of digging clams on its banks. A handsome brick building, 106 feet long, with a projection in the centre, was erected, with dining-hall and offices on first floor, schoolrooms on second floor, and dormitories above. In 1835 the Boston Asylum for Indigent Boys was united with the Farm School. There are about 100 boys (of from 8 to 17 years of age) on the island, for whom the school stands *in loco parentis*. Up at sunrise, and busied in practical studies and useful labors, the lads lead a happy and contented life; and their health is efficiently preserved by the



Thompson's Island, from South Boston.

pure air of the Bay and their frequent baths in the sea. Within two or three years a spacious new building has been erected, with gymnasium and work-shops, where the boys may receive a practical mechanical training. Some of the graduates of this school have occupied high and honorable positions in the outer world; and many of them visit the island in after-life to renew their memories of the place once so dear to them. The great catastrophe of the institution is now almost forgotten. It occurred in April, 1842, when a large boat, full of the boys, returning from a fishing-excursion down the harbor, was upset by a sudden squall, and twenty-three of the lads were drowned, besides the boatman and a teacher.

As a well-known citizen said, 40 years ago: "That little island reminds one of the old mythological fable of Latona, who, when she had no place on earth for her to bring forth and rear up her young, had an island created for her own special uses: and something like it exists here;

for when the boys who prowl about our city streets, fatherless, motherless, forlorn, and homeless, are discovered, this little Thompson's Island rises as a refuge for them; and here they are sheltered and educated, until they are fit to go forth into the great world, and battle manfully with it." It should be borne in mind that this is not a reformatory institution, but a homeschool for teaching practical farming and the common educational branches to indigent American boys of good character.

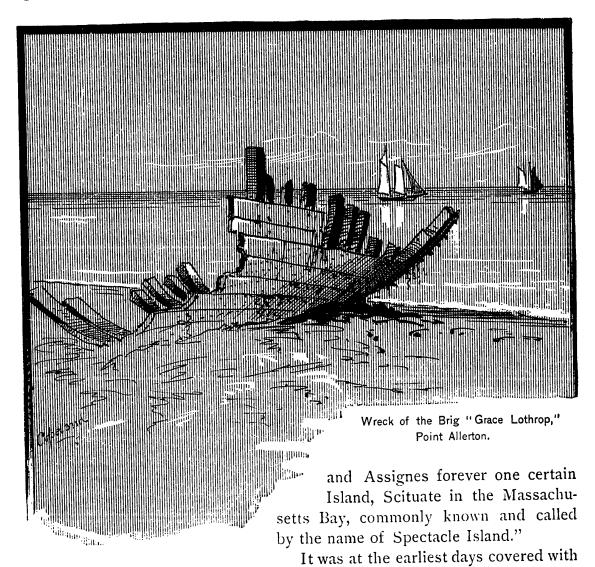
Hawthorne once visited the Farm School, and thus reported his experience: "A stroll round the island, examining the products, as wheat in sheaves on the stubble-field; oats somewhat blighted and spoiled; great pumpkins elsewhere; pastures; moving ground,—all cultivated by the boys. Their residence, a great brick building, painted green, and standing on the summit of a rising ground, exposed to the winds of the bay. Vessels flitting past; great ships with intricacy of rigging and various sails; schooners, sloops, with their one or two broad sheets of canvas; going on different tacks, so that the spectator might think that there was a different wind for each vessel, or that they scudded across the sea spontaneously, whither their own wills led them. The farm boys remain insulated, looking at the passing show, within sight of the city, yet having nothing to do with it; beholding their fellow-creatures skimming by them in winged machines, and steamboats snorting and puffing through the waves. Methinks an island would be the most desirable of all landed property, for it seems like a little world by itself; and the water may answer for the atmosphere that surrounds planets. The boys swinging, two together, standing up, and almost causing the ropes and their bodies to stretch out horizontally. On our departure they ranged themselves on the rails of the fence, and, being dressed in blue, looked not unlike a flock of pigeons."

The views from Thompson's Island are full of variety and beauty, especially from the high ground about the house, and include broad expanses of azure sea, and many a snug little island. The nearest and most conspicuous of these is Spectacle Island, with its busy colony of manipulators of defunct animals, its myriads of spiders, and its unhallowed perfumes. Here is exemplified the commendable Old-World thrift, by which useless refuse is converted into products of value, by the aid of ingenuity and industry.

Spectacle Island covers about sixty acres, its graceful trim bluffs being of about equal size. Sailing down the harbor, after Castle Island is passed, the bold headland of Spectacle is seen on the right, with a large barn on its summit, as the only sign of human occupancy. From other points appear the rendering-works and their chimneys, low down, near the Bridge of the Nose.

As early as the year 1666 Spectacle Island (even then so-called) was, for

the most part, owned by the Bill family, who continued to hold it for nearly a century. In 1684 Samuel Bill bought it from the son of Wampatuck, the chief of the Massachusetts Indians, who inherited his father's authority over the fast-diminishing tribe. The deed (now in the possession of Mr. F. J. Ward) begins thus: "By these presents I Do fully, freely, absolutely give, grant, sell, enfeaffe, and convey unto the said Samuel Bill his heyeres



trees; and Winthrop relates that a party of thirty men came down here one bright January day, to cut wood. They were overtaken with wind and snow, followed by extreme cold; and so, the harbor freezing, except for a narrow channel, it was with great difficulty that a few found themselves able to get as far towards home as Castle Island, while several were carried

to get as far towards home as Castle Island, while several were carried through the ice to the Brewsters, where they remained two days, with neither food nor fire, suffering intensely from the extreme cold.

When the tide is low, the aptness of the name Spectacle is very evident;

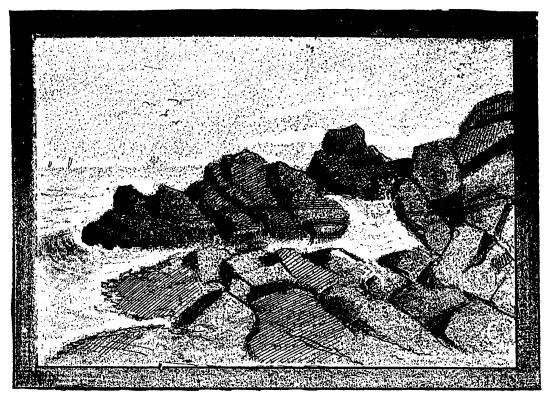
for then the island is seen to consist of two nearly equal parts, connected by a narrow isthmus. Both these parts, anciently called the East and West Spectacles, are high, — the northerly one being a bold bluff, facing the channel. In 1717 a part of the island, "on the cleft or brow of the southerly highland," was sold by Mr. Bill to the town; and here a hospital was built, and used for eighteen years, when it was for some cause removed to Rainsford Island. In 1728, when H. M. S. Sheerness lay just off Spectacle Island, the last duel was fought upon Boston Common, and young Phillips killed Woodbridge. At midnight he was put on board the vessel. She sailed at dawn, and his forfeited life was safe from the Puritan gibbet.

When Sir Francis Wheeler's fleet arrived here, after its unsuccessful expedition against Martinique, with yellow-fever on board, Boston wanted Spectacle Island for a quarantine hospital. In 1739 the estate once more belonged to the Bill family, who sold it, in 1742, to Edward Bromfield, a prominent citizen of Boston. For many decades thereafter, excursionparties from the happy little colonial town used to come hither on summer days, and encamp on the breezy slopes, or prepare their gypsy dinners over driftwood fires on the beach. In 1742 the hay which had been made here was hauled to South Boston on the ice, amid much provincial merriment. But the waters in this direction were not always safe to unarmed excursionists; for very novel dangers haunted the sea. In that famous week of September, 1726, when twenty bears were killed within two miles of Boston, the unfortunate beasts seem to have concluded that they might find more peaceful shelter down the harbor. Two were slain while swimming from Spectacle Island to an adjacent shore; and, a little farther out in the channel, a boat suffered a fierce attack from a large bear, which was beaten off, with great difficulty, by the use of boat-hooks and oars.

As the nineteenth century advanced, Spectacle was more and more favored by summer visitors, until one Woodroffe opened a house of entertainment in 1847. Here the current events were discussed by parties of grave citizens,—the annexation of California, the election of President Taylor, the rise of settlements in the prairie territories,—while the savory dishes of sea-products were in preparation, and the high-flavored punch underwent assimilation.

In 1857 the island was bought, for \$15,000, by Nahum Ward, who founded here a large establishment for rendering dead horses, still in possession and full activity. At this time there stood here two brick powder-houses, two dwellings, and a wharf. Many buildings have been erected since, to accommodate the extensive and increasing business. In 1872 the lucrative industry of rendering cattle-bones was introduced; and in 1874 came the rendering of tallow and suet. The tanks are of iron, and all possible precautions are taken to prevent odors from getting abroad in the

harbor. Every day the steam-tug and barges pertaining to the company go down from their wharf on Federal Street, laden with dead horses and refuse from slaughter-houses; "which matter," says Mr. Ward, "if it were allowed to remain in the city for three days in summer, would cause a plague." There are 30 men employed on the island, and 13 families dwell there. The vegetable-gardens cover 5 acres, and the mowing-land 37 acres. About 2,000 dead horses are received here yearly, from points within ten miles; and their products are hides, hair, oil, and bones. This, however,



Rocks on the Outer Brewster.

is not a leading feature of the business, the main part of which is connected with cattle-bones and tallow. Other articles of manufacture are glue-stock and neat's-foot oil. Surely this must be one of the Isles of Greece; but even the harbor muse flouts it, thus:—

"The next, for frolic, once was fam'd,
In ancient happy time;
And long, has Spectacle been nam'd,
A name unfit for rhyme."

Apple Island, which is seen on the left, as one sails down the harbor, is nearly three miles from Boston, and just off the shore of Winthrop. It is always noticed among the first, simply because of its rare grace, rising in a gentle slope from the water's edge, — such a perfect shape, crowned with

waving elms fifty or more years old, proud and beautiful, and marking the island at once as unlike any other. At low water it is for some distance surrounded by flats, and becomes difficult of access. In very early times Apple Island belonged to Boston, and was used (like the other islands) chiefly for pasturage; but having a rich soil, and being well sheltered, it became in time private property, owned in 1723 by the Hon. Thomas Hutchinson, father of Gov. Hutchinson, who was the author of the History of Massachusetts. It passed in 1802, by will, to an English mariner, who, living in Northumberland and knowing little about it, allowed the property to decay, and the island to lie idle. About this time Mr. Marsh, an Englishman, being attracted by its beauty, and perhaps by its fitness as a home for Britannic insularity, settled there with his family, and became so attached to the soil that he resolved upon owning it; and, after many an unsuccessful search, at last (in 1822) found the proprietor of the island, buying it of him for \$550. Black Jack was Marsh's negro servant, well known about the harbor, and at one time much talked about on account of his brutal treatment by certain naval officers, who charged him with helping a sailor to desert. By the exertions of Samuel McCleary, he was enabled to recover heavy damages from his assailants. Here Marsh lived, contented and happy, until the age of sixty-six, when he died (in 1833), and was then, by his own request, buried upon the western slope of his beautiful island-home. The funeral was attended by many gentlemen from Boston. Two years later the house was burned, leaving the island again lonely.

The island covers nearly ten acres, and belongs to Boston, in virtue of a payment of \$3,750, made in 1867. Aside from the irregular athletics and ichthyophagous picnics of the North-street gladiators, it finds conspicuous use in the annals of destruction. Here many a famous old ship, by lapse of years and buffetings of alien seas grown decrepit and useless, has been hauled up on the beach and burned, in order to get at the metal used in her construction. There is a kind of pathos in the final sacrifice of these trusty old vessels, whose keels, no more to plough the yielding waves, are dragged across the muddy flats, and abandoned to the flames. Dismantled and forsaken, the flames riot along the venerable hulls, crackling through the deserted cabins, and throwing out their wild banners from the falling spars. At such times the island is wrapped in rolling smoke, and glows like Stromboli, among the waves, while the lower harbor is illuminated by a baleful light. In a few hours nothing remains but the stock of the junkmerchant. Among the victims of this lurid shore, burned at the stake in the name of the copper-market and the iron-trade, have been the famous old steamships, James Adger, destroyed in 1858: the Baltic, the last of the Collins line; and the Ontario, one of the immense wooden steamships built at Newburyport for the transatlantic trade.