

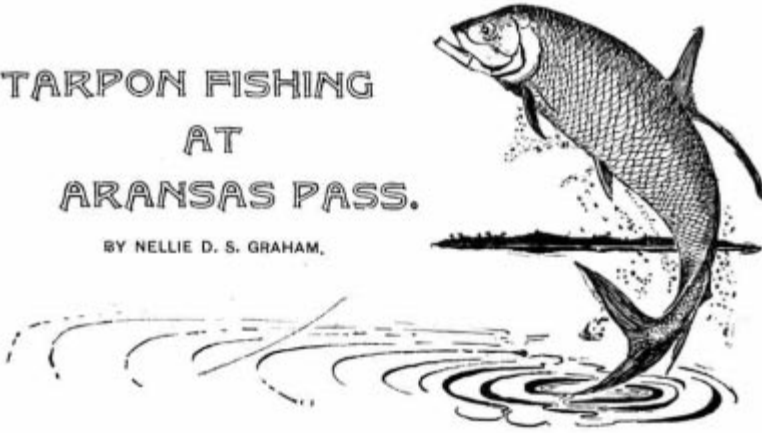
Painted for Outing by Albert Hencke.

See "Tarpon Fishing at Aransas Pass" (p. 473.)

THE RED-RIBBON TARPON AT ARANSAS.

TARPON FISHING AT ARANSAS PASS.

BY NELLIE D. S. GRAHAM.



WE had been spending a long, lovely February at San Antonio. We had reveled among the crooked, narrow Mexican streets, with their curious little houses; we had wandered among the ruins of the Old Missions, and had followed the caretaker of the Alamo about, as she related with eloquence the romantic story of Davie Crockett, Travis, and their handful of brave Texas riflemen, who held the fort against a multitude of Mexicans. We had spent long, dreamy, sunlit days at San Pedro Park feeding the swans that swam so proudly on the breast of the clear waters of the noted San Pedro Springs,

Our hearts had echoed the bugle-call as it sounded through the glorious air, calling the blue-coated troops to drill, on those splendid review grounds of the second finest fort in these United States. Then, too, we had wandered through the Mexican quarters, eating "hot tamales" and "Chile con carne," which those picturesque people serve at their all-night suppers, with a keen relish. There seemed nothing lacking to make the traveler's heart content, save a touch of sport, and then we chanced to learn of the sportsman's delight—tarpon—in the beautiful Aransas Pass.

Preparations were hastily completed to spend a week at the little fishermen's settlement on Mustang Island—Tarpon. The island is about ten miles long and is inhabited by thirty fishermen's families, who live there the year round. Sturdy, splendid fellows they are, too, their brawny arms and frank, good-humored faces browned by their life on the dancing waves.

The most important and best-known establishment on the island is the "Seaside Hotel," which faces the long wharf, and has sheltered scores of happy parties for dozens of years. It is presided over by Frank Hetfield and his jolly wife, who are just the people to make the weary sportsman comfortable. It is a roomy frame building, or rather two buildings joined together with a long board-walk; one part containing the, office, sleeping-rooms, and rest veranda a large, open porch, filled with comfortable cots, where during the heat of the early afternoon the angler reclines and waits for the witching hour when the festive tarpon plays)—while the other has the large dining-room, kitchen, and laundry therein, with pleasant sleeping apartments above. The table fare is excellent.

We left San Antonio over the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad, at three o'clock in the afternoon, arriving at Rockport, two hundred and sixty miles away, between ten and eleven at night.

Rockport is a quiet little fishing village—nothing else—and I was heartily glad when, after a night in the great unfurnished barracks of a hotel (the remnants of a boom), Captain Sam Gray, who carries Uncle Sam's mail in his natty little sailboat, down to Tarpon, came to tell us to get aboard.

Tarpon is fifteen miles from Rockport, down the Aransas Bay, and with a fair wind we reached Mustang Island after two hours' delightful sail. It was the fifteenth of March, and old fishermen had told us at Rockport that we were much too early for tarpon, but

we resolved to have a try, just the same. We found we were not the only sportsmen on the island thus early in the season, nor were we to have the honor of landing the first tarpon. Mr. J. H. Haskell, of Chicago, and his son, a lad of twelve years, had been there three days and had already landed a big fish. According to the custom of the island, the first tarpon pulled in is awarded the blue ribbon; the second one, the red ribbon, and the third, the white ribbon. We decided to have a try for the red ribbon, since Mr. Haskell had carried off the blue one.

To that end we set about hiring our boat and boatman and buying our fishing tackle. We succeeded in engaging a sturdy, brown-legged, handsome lad named John Franzolig, who had a very comfortable flat skiff, with a broad, cushioned seat in the stern. Then we paid a visit to the postmistress (a very expensive one it turned out, too), in search of tackle. The tarpon reel is a medium-sized one, fastened to a long, slim pole, that does not seem heavy enough to hold a large fish. The line is a one-sixteenth-inch cord, three hundred yards in length. The whole looks very insufficient till you attach the hook. This is a whopper, for the fish is not supposed to take it into its mouth, but is hooked anywhere about the gills. The whole outfit (and there are dozens, more expensive) cost ten dollars and eighty-five cents—the rod and reel, six dollars; the line, four dollars and fifty cents, and the hooks, thirty-five cents apiece.

Now we were ready for the fray, and, after listening to our fellow-boarder's experiences, we could hardly wait till morning to try our luck. However, after a night's rest in good, clean, sweet beds, a well-cooked breakfast at half-past six, we were soon in our boat and rowing swiftly into the middle of the Pass, where we were to get our first strike at the Silver King in what claims to be his real home.

We anchored in a sort of riffle, and then our man had us put on our hooks a live mullet, which we carried in a bait bucket in our boat. We cast out our lines about forty feet, and then commenced a long period of waiting. We waited—waited—waited. The morning passed, and after dinner we were back at our posts, patiently waiting again. All about us was the vast

deep, the greenish blue waves washing the boat with a musical swish. Every now and again a school of porpoises would roll majestically past us, first with heads up and then with fan-like tails beating the waters into foam. All about us were small boats, filled with the islanders, armed with shot-guns, picking off, with unerring aim, the white sea-gulls that came in from the gulf, or, if fortunate enough to hit it, the queenly pelican, that swooped down into the clear water after the unwary mullet.

When the sun set on this beautiful scene, tired and empty-handed, with not even a strike to cheer us, we were forced to give up the struggle. Salt breezes are certainly conducive to good appetites and sound sleep, and not even Mr. Haskell's tales could keep us long out of our cozy couches that night.

When another day dawned it was with less confidence that we went out in our trusty boat, and, anchoring near the selfsame point, prepared to tempt the shining tarpon with the squirming mullet. It was St. Patrick's Day in the morning. The friendly sun, shining down on the vast expanse of water, threw over it a silver sheen. As we sat, silently watching our lines, a lot of small fish, jumping up out of the water and sparkling in the light, came toward us in droves. Our usually impassive boy raised himself with a shout:

"Tarpon! tarpon!" said he, pointing to the shoals of fish; "they always come before. Look out!" As he spoke my companion's line pulled taut, and, before he could move, a huge, silvery body sprang up in the air. Once again it was seen, and then, as Mr. G— reeled in his line for all he was worth, it fell slack, and we knew he had had a *strike*, but not a catch.

There was a long silence, when again Mr. G—'s line slackened and as the boatman shouted out instructions and he reeled in his line rapidly, the shiny beauty flew up in the air, shaking his head and wriggling his quivering body. A second time, and then a third, he sprang up. Away he flew after each successive jump, swimming like mad, pulling the boat after him in a vain endeavor to free himself. Now he doubles on us, and we have to reel up so fast that we can scarcely take time to breathe. Up, up he flies in the

air—full ten feet—and splashing the water all about us. Ah! he is not ours yet. For again he is off like a flash of light through the limpid waters, our boatman bending to the oars with might and main, and following bravely.

Mile after mile he pulls us on. My companion's hands are bleeding from cuts on the reel, but he is all unconscious of that, so absorbed is he in the maddening chase: Ah! he is growing tired. Slowly we reel up. Can we land him yet? Another rush, and away we go down the Pass like the wind—but the gallant tarpon is conquered, and we pull in quietly toward the distant shore. Now we are nearly there. The gleam of the silver on his broad back shines dazzlingly as we pull the exhausted fish close to the boat. What a beauty he is! A long pull, a strong pull, and we are in shallow water, when my companion springs lightly out of the boat and with a jayhook jerks the monster on shore, and the two hours' struggle is ended.

He is a fine fellow, as he lies there in the sun. The boatmen gather round,

him and weigh and measure him, Even our phlegmatic boy is mildly excited. Mr. G— is very proud, and I fairly dance.

The big beauty is six feet long, and tips the beam at just one hundred and nineteen pounds.

We have won the red ribbon, and have had two hours of the most exciting sport we can imagine. We are tired, hungry and proud. Could there be a happier state of mind for a fisherman?

We remain here a week, every hour of which is replete with pleasure. We bathe in the Gulf of Mexico, finding the water warm even in March. We "still-fish," catching redfish, crowley and sheephead, all of which are fine eating. We pull in crabs and catfish galore. On our tarpon line we land a hundred-pound jackfish and a six-foot shark. The deep sea seems to give up her secrets to us. We sleep, eat and breathe the mild, pure air; and it is a rude awakening, when Captain Gray and his tiny sailboat carries us away from Arcadia, back to the noisy world.



ON THE BANKS OF THE ZUIDER ZEE.

A VISIT TO MARKEN.

BY ELIZABETH ROBINSON.



WHEN I reached my hotel in Amsterdam, I found a letter regretting "unavoidable delay," instead of the friend who had faithfully promised to meet me there; and the hotel, where always, before I had found many Americans, was crowded full of tobacco merchants, who had come from far and near to attend the great tobacco sales.

It was queer enough, sitting in the big, handsome dining-room, with per-