

HELIGOLAND, FROM THE NORTH REEFS.

## HELIGOLAND.

By WALTER ARMSTRONG.

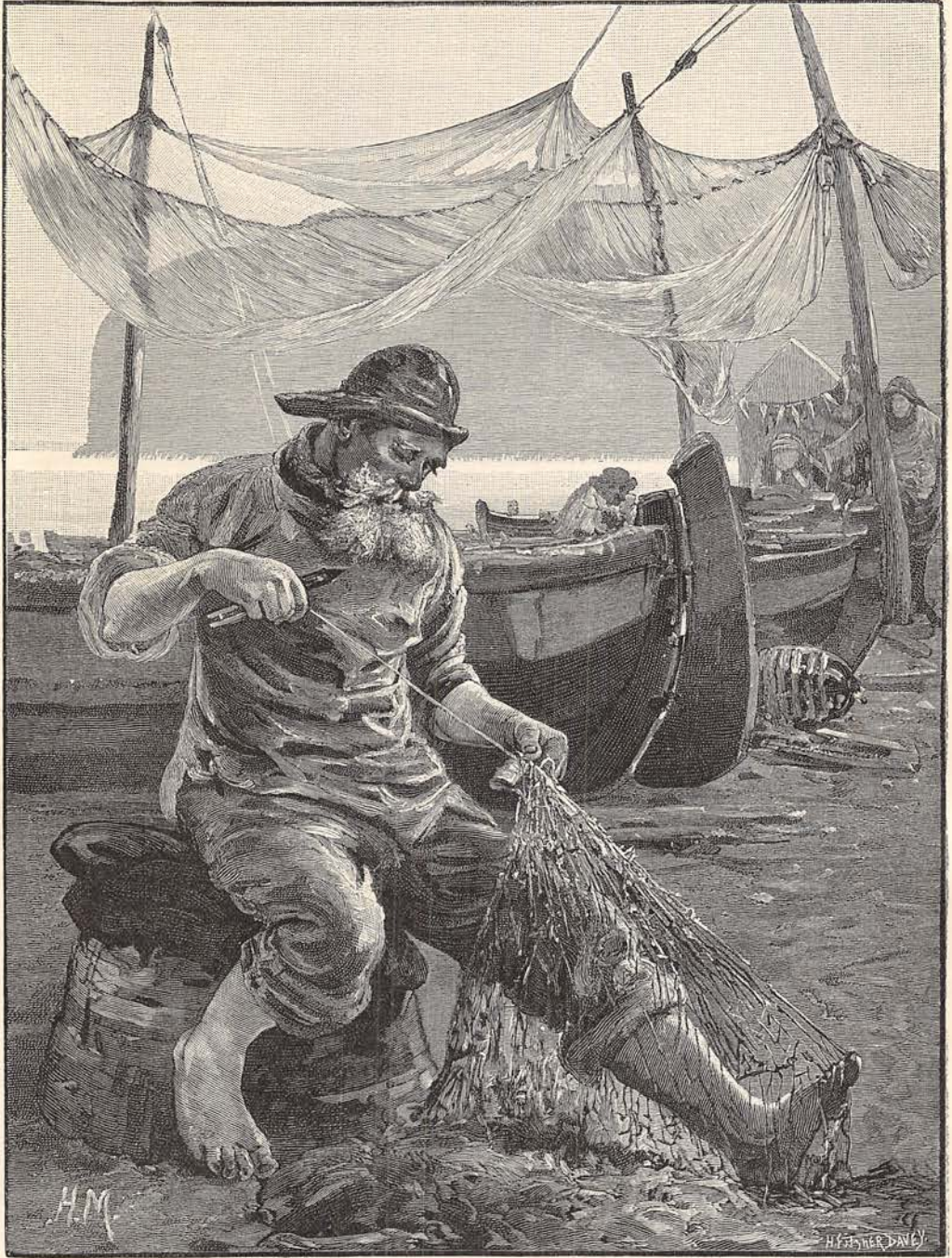
Illustrations Drawn by HAMILTON MACALLUM.

HELIGOLAND was taken from the Danes in 1807, when Napoleon's "Continental system" was in force. It lies about twenty-five miles from Cuxhaven, in a direction north-west-by-west. The colony consists of two islands once united by a bank of sand and gypsum. The larger, or residential island, as I may call it, is about a mile long, by a quarter of a mile wide at its widest part. In superficial shape it is a triangle, with one short side and two long ones. The northern extremity is almost a point, and the total area is less than a quarter of a square mile. It is built—as I feel inclined to put it—of a loosely compacted red rock, and the slightly undulating plateau which forms its summit varies from about one hundred and sixty to more than two hundred feet above the sea-level. On its south-eastern coast—if one may use such a word of such a scrap of land—there lies at the foot of the otherwise unbroken cliff a small ledge of sand on which the lower town is built. This acts as an apology for a port. A mile away stretches the long low bank of white sand which the Germans and the Heligolanders know as the Düne, and the English as the Sandy Island. Here the water shoals very gradually, and affords perhaps the best seabathing in Europe. As for statistics, the population lives on fishing and on the profits made from the summer visitors. These swarm in to the number of from twelve to fifteen thousand every season. The average yield of the fisheries is about £7,000 annually, lobsters, of which about 30,000 are taken each year, counting for a considerable share of the total. The average duration of life in Heligoland is said to be over sixty-three years, and there can be no question of its marvellous salubrity. The permanent population numbers about 2,200, and the revenue touches the respectable sum of £11,715, or considerably more than £5 per head.

The fascination of Heligoland lies in what is done for it by the sea and by its own isolation. No one should go there who cannot be content with the charms of brilliant light, of ever-changing atmospheric effects, of a land free from the countless discomforts of a large and busy population, of a life almost childlike in its simplicity, and of an air which tastes like draughts of life itself.



The best route from London to Heligoland is by way of Hamburg. The explorer may go by a short sea route, such as that *via* Queenborough and Flushing, or he may



A HELIGOLAND BOATMAN (PETER EILERS).

go all the way to the Elbe in the charge of the General Steam Navigation Company. From Hamburg to Cuxhaven is a journey by rail of about fifty miles, and then the steamers take rather less than three hours more before they anchor off the island.

On a clear day the first sight of Heligoland is caught an hour or so after the



steamer leaves Cuxhaven. It stands up on the horizon like a small flat-topped cloud, and the feeling of most of those who have never made the trip before is one of something like dismay at its apparently microscopic dimensions. As the distance lessens the abrupt shape of the island becomes gradually visible, and at last, some time before the steamer rounds to in the sheltered water between Heligoland proper and the Düne, it is seen to be a mere vertical-sided slab of red rock with a "footing" visible only at the point where the isthmus once began which joined it to its satellite. There is no harbour. The passengers leave the steamer in as many of the large buoyant wherries, like whale-boats, characteristic of the place, as their numbers require. Here they catch their first glimpse of the Heligolander, tall, sunburnt, and vigorous, as in bright jacket and picturesque straw hat, he pulls them to the steps of the little pier. On the pier itself an ordeal awaits them. All the visitors already on the island are gathered together to quiz the new comers. This assemblage, through which the travellers have to march as indifferently as they can, is called by the Germans the *Läster-Allee*, or Scandal-lane, and its remarks are now and then audaciously frank. The season only lasts about ten weeks, but every device for which such a little place has room is called in to charm visitors. Nearly all of these have to lodge in the houses of the seafaring population. Everything is scrupulously clean, but no meals are furnished there beyond the morning roll and coffee. For luncheon and dinner recourse must be had to the restaurants. There is, indeed, a hotel, but its accommodation is so limited that it scarcely affects the question. Small as it is however it is notable for the extreme skill with which its architect, an Englishman, solved the problem set before him. This was to plan a building with about thirty bedrooms for visitors every one of which should have a directly southern aspect, and yet to plan it compactly for a nearly square site. The problem was solved by building round a covered court or vestibule, which provided for all the traffic of the house; by making the eastern and western sides converge towards the south; and then by setting back each room successively so that the one behind it could have its window looking to the sun. A building more skilfully adapted to its purpose it would be difficult to find.

Heligoland was a British possession for eighty-three years, but few English went there. When its cession was announced the other day, the chief person to feel aggrieved should have been Mr. Hamilton Macallum, for whom the island had been a storehouse of subjects for some years. The Heligolanders talk an unwritten language of their own, a sort of Frisian, which some linguists declare to be neither more nor less than Anglo-Saxon. The annual influx of German bathers has compelled them to add German to their *répertoire*. Had the example of Mr. Macallum been more largely followed or anticipated, they might have learnt English instead.

It was in 1826 that a native called Siemens first opened an *établissement de bains*. For a long time the attractions of the place were complicated and its revenue increased, by gambling tables. These do not seem to have done much towards that demoralisation of the people which is supposed to be their certain result. At first the visitors were very few. In 1828 they numbered a century, all told. In 1838 the hundred had become a thousand, and now the total rises in a good year to fifteen times as many. The majority come from Germany and Austria, but bathers from Denmark, Russia, and the Norse Peninsula form a considerable minority. Once a week during the two months and a half of the season proper, a special train runs from Vienna to Cuxhaven, picking up travellers at the larger stations on the way. The absence of English is to be accounted for partly by mere ignorance, partly by an exaggerated idea of the difficulty of getting there. The journey by the Flushing and Hamburg route takes rather less than thirty hours.

Life at Heligoland is like nothing so much as life on board an enormous but motionless ship. Practically everything in the place is brought from the mainland. In an ill-lighted byre seven or eight cows are kept, about the same number as might be stowed away on an Atlantic liner. On the Oberland a flock of about 150 sheep exist on the scanty herbage and on imported food. The ewes provide a certain amount of milk, and one of the quaintest sights of the place is that of a girl acting as dairymaid, while her grandfather, or some other antique male, stands at the animal's head and holds its ears to keep it quiet! Not long ago the surreptitious milking of a sheep by a lady who was not its owner caused a great sensation in the island. The daring thief was brought up before Captain Campbell, the "R.M.," and



in spite of a pathetic and public offer of twenty-five shillings, not as compensation but as a bribe, was sentenced to six weeks of prison!

Like a ship the island has to be provisioned; like a ship it is kept scrupulously clean. There is a tradition that an English smuggler once rode up the "treppe" on horseback and frightened an old woman to death, but no horse has been there in historic times. The main street has a brilliant cleanliness that not even Broeck can rival, for in the North Sea there is no dust. Within the last year or two a lift has been contrived, and is a boon to those to whom the steep climb to the Oberland was too much. Otherwise all locomotion must be done on the feet or in boats. The Heligolander's contentment is like that of the sailor who has no objection to a three years' cruise in a well-

found and well-commanded vessel. How much of his content comes from ignorance, it would be unkind to suggest. A considerable percentage of the men have served in the Queen's navy, but they have not done much at home to diffuse true ideas of the outside world. The Heligolander is a tremendous patriot. Talk to him about foreign parts and he will listen with moderate attention but the moment you pause he will shake his head and declare half-questioningly, half with conviction, "But you never saw an island like our Heligoland? or colours like our green, red, and white?" These same colours pervade the place to



THE FALM.

such an extent that one wonders sometimes that the natives don't paint the red cliffs themselves with streaks of white and green. On second thoughts, however, that is seen to be unnecessary. The fabric of the island bears the colours already—the red wall of rock, its roof of verdure, and the dazzling silver of the sands make up the insular tricolour.

The national costume of Heligoland is very picturesque. The women wear a red petticoat with a border of yellow silk, a bodice and apron of brocaded silk, a gay kerchief folded across the breast and a jaunty little silk cap with a border of old Flemish lace and long brocaded silk ribbons hanging down almost to the foot of the petticoat. Many costumes like this are still worn, especially among the middle-aged and elderly women. The younger ones are unfortunately beginning to prefer bad imitations of Hamburg fashions. The men's national dress is now very rarely to be



seen. It consists of a ribbed velvet coattee with square tabs round the skirt, breeches of the same material, stockings and buckled shoes. The men are very handsome and tall; the women are pleasant-looking, of medium height, and graceful both in shape and movement.

From the pier the visitor just landed may pass up the spotless main street to the little open *place* in front of the Kurhaus. On his way he will notice the balconied *cafés*, the diminutive shops, some slightly below, others as much above the street level, and will admire the gay effect produced by the white walls, the red tiled roofs, and the outside shutters painted the complementary green. A few steps farther up the winding street, or rather lane, we reach the bottom of the Treppe the great staircase which connects the lower with the upper town. The steps are broad and easy, and the height of the cliffs notwithstanding, the climb is not fatiguing. The Treppe superseded by the present one was about a hundred yards to the north. It was cut out of the rock itself, and crumbled away rapidly with use. The present stairs were built by Government nearly fifty years ago, and now for a considerable number of the visitors and for some of the older inhabitants, it has been superseded by the lift already mentioned. This modern addition has been erected close to the Treppe, and before many years are over it will be entirely hidden by the trees which spring from every point hereabouts where roots can find a hold. For the natives, especially the women, the Treppe may be called the centre of the universe, and even the visitor is apt to find no more fascinating employment than loitering about the foot of it, watching the graceful, well-made Heligolanderins mounting and descending with the heavy wooden trays in which supplies for the Oberland are carried.

From the head of the stairs to Government House stretches the Falm, a well-protected road which skirts the edge of the precipice. Here, after the day's work is done, the dwellers in the upper village come to lean upon the balustrade, to watch the sea and the roofs and lanes of the lower town, and to gossip with each other. Immediately beneath is the winding Treppe, with its never-ceasing stream of happy women, handsome men, and careless boys and girls, and its groups of chattering on the green, white and red seats which mark each resting-place. Beyond the little town lies the quiet anchorage with its crowd of boats, and beyond that again the long green-edged whiteness of the Düne, between which and the mainland the sea lies like melted emeralds over the sandy bottom. After dark the Falm is more frequented than ever. The sights and sounds from the Unterland draw from their retreats all those to whom the negotiation of the stairs is not to be too lightly undertaken, but who wish to have their part in the teeming life below.

Well back on the Oberland stands the church. It is a quaint seventeenth century building, with a new tower built by a Heligolander who had made a large fortune as a shipowner in Bremen. Otherwise there has been little change in it since the island became English. Round three sides runs a gallery, its panels fitted with strange illustrations of the Bible. The sitting arrangements are peculiar. The seats of each man, or each family, are private property, and pass like other chattels. They are painted according to their owner's fancy, some white, some red, some blue, some green. But each bears upon it its proprietor's name in black, sometimes also the death-date of the previous owner. On either side of the Communion table there is a private box, like a small omnibus, glazed with blue glass. One is the Governor's, the other the magistrate's. From the roof hang a few of those models of ships we meet with so persistently in northern churches, and by the altar there is a regular museum of ecclesiastical *bric-à-brac*, such as sand-glasses for measuring hours, half hours, and quarters, and other quaint odds and ends. The service as a rule is in German, but once a month the pastor preaches an English sermon. The only other public buildings that need be alluded to are the court-house and the prison. Both are comically small. The magistrate holds his court three times a week, but it is the rarest thing in the world for him to have to decide any serious question or pass any serious sentence.

The life led by summer visitors to Heligoland is eminently one of routine, one day repeating another, with the exception of a *fête* or two, when a special programme is gone through. The German who comes for his cure rises early, has coffee and rolls in his lodgings, and then sallies out to buy his bathing ticket, which also franks him for the ferry over to Sandy Island. Ticket in hand he makes

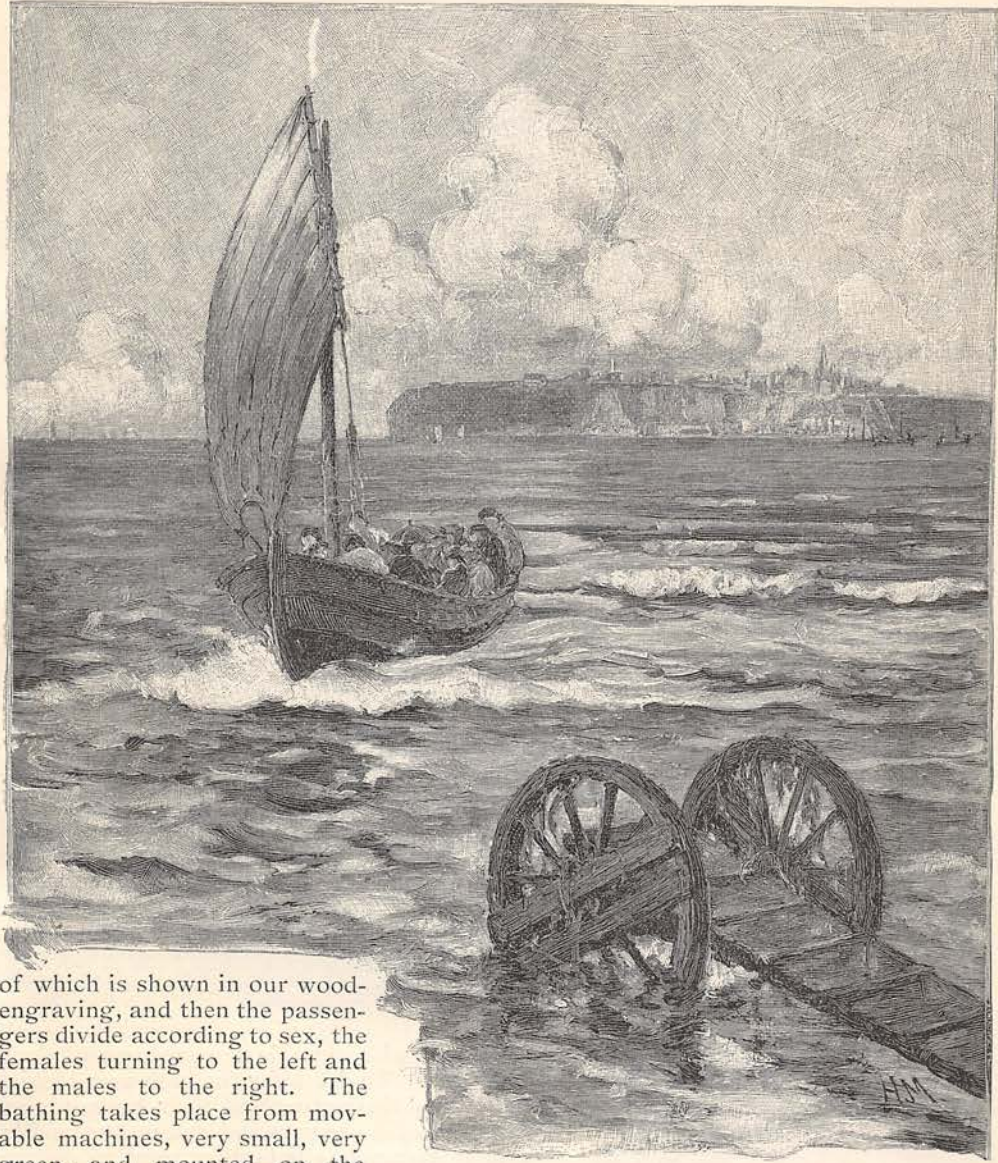




THE "TREPPE," HELIGOLAND.



his way to the pier and there embarks in a boat like that shown in the engraving below. These boats are allowed to carry eighteen people under sail and twenty-two when rowed. They have each a crew of six men, and so well built and well managed are they that no serious accident has ever been known to happen to them. The mile of sea is soon negotiated. A landing is effected by means of a sort of jetty on wheels, part



THE FERRY TO SANDY ISLAND.

of which is shown in our wood-engraving, and then the passengers divide according to sex, the females turning to the left and the males to the right. The bathing takes place from movable machines, very small, very green, and mounted on the largest of wheels. These are run down into the water and dragged up out of it by women, sturdy girls in a loose white costume which is allowed to take its chance with the waves. The machines have large white hoods instead of doors on the side towards the sea. The separation between the sexes is not conducive to any such display of pretty *costumes de bain* as one sees at a French or Belgian watering place, but brilliant colours are so popular that the crowd at a distance looks like a bank of flowers. One curious feature of bathing at Heligoland has now become much less common than it was. The ladies from the more remote parts of Germany used at one time to have a curious prejudice against





THE CLIFFS, HELIGOLAND.

like plaice, and go off to luncheon at one of the two restaurants, which crown the highest part of the island. The larger of the two is Reimer's, and the favourite lunch—indeed, it may be called part of the cure—is a lobster *mayonnaise* with a

bathing otherwise than in the costume of their mother Eve! To dress for the bath was looked upon both by themselves and their husbands as a confession of some personal deformity; and in spite of government edicts, they used to decline to give grounds for any such suspicion. Even now the practice has not been finally stamped out.

After the sea-bath comes the sand-bath. The bathers lie down in the silver earth and cover themselves to the chin. There they stay for an hour or even two and then wriggle out in shoals,



bottle of Erlanger beer. I have been told that as many as four hundred lobsters will be eaten at Reimer's in a single morning. At one o'clock the steamer arrives with the mail and the day's passengers, and so by that time the Düne is deserted, and the bathers are all back on the little pier to meet their correspondence and to welcome the new comers. Till four there is a period of rest and letter writing, and then the whole community assembles in its best clothes for the musical promenade. The band, of course, is good. It plays in a small pagoda near the beach, and the people sit about drinking tea or coffee to the strains of *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, and the classic *Mikado*. At six o'clock every one goes off to dinner, to reassemble at seven at the theatre or the Kurhaus. Twice a week there is a dance, on all the other nights the theatre is open and sometimes the most famous actors and actresses of Germany, who come for their cure, will help goodnaturedly in the performance. After the theatre or the ball the more reckless spirits will adjourn to a *café* for a nightcap, but few people in Heligoland fail to go to bed on the same day as they get up.

The orthodox season begins on the 10th of June. From that date till the end of August there are steamers daily, and every detail of the official programme is in full working order. The only breaks in the pleasant monotony are those contrived by individuals of a sporting turn, who organize shooting expeditions round the coast, by explorers, who conscientiously make their way into every cave in the cliffs, and by the great function of illuminating the cliffs, which takes place once in every season, in August. For a fortnight previously the whole population of the island has occupied every minute it could spare from looking after the "Badegäste" in covering the cliffs with little mounds of coloured fire and other devices for making as much light as possible. About eight o'clock all the visitors and two-thirds of the inhabitants get afloat in the narrow roads. Every boat is pressed into the service and starts on the circuit of the rock in prescribed order. The police boat goes first, then come the musicians, and after them the Governor in his barge with his stalwart crew of coastguardsmen. The rest follow in an interminable line of wherries. As the procession sets out the beacons blaze up, the fireworks and coloured fires are lighted in succession as the Governor's barge approaches, and the long line of red cliff, with the dark mouths of its countless caves, becomes the background of such an illumination as can be enjoyed in the same way nowhere else in the world. The tour of the island occupies an hour or so, and then as the South Point comes again in view, "God save the Queen" blazes out above the coastguard station, the band plays the English anthem, and with a volley of hurrahs the Heligolanders' great annual function comes to an end.

