



Picturesque America; or, the land we live in

a delineation by pen and pencil of the mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, water-falls, shores, cañons, valleys, cities, and other picturesque features of our country ; with illustrations on steel and wood, by eminent American artists

Bryant, William Cullen

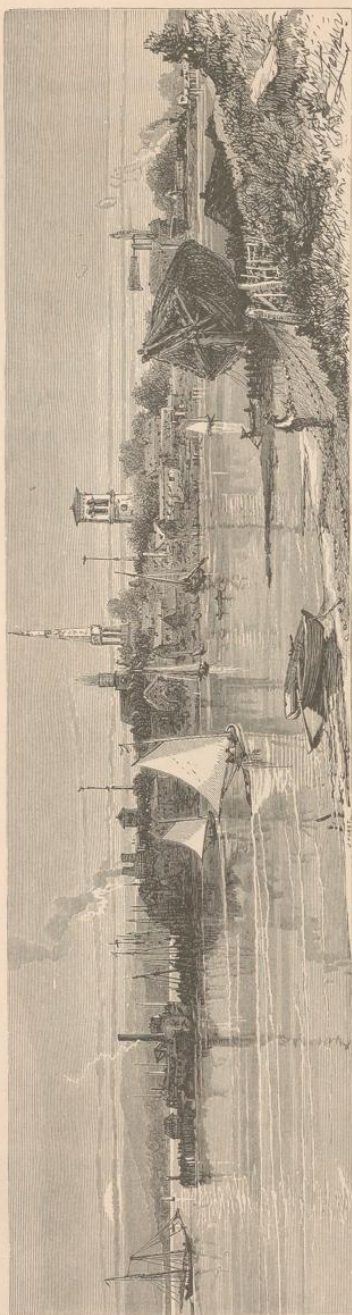
New York, 1872

Scenes In Eastern Long Island.

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SCENES IN EASTERN LONG ISLAND.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRY FENN.



Sag Harbor.

THE eastern end of Long Island is penetrated by a wide bay, extending inland a distance of thirty miles. A large island divides the bay into two distinct parts, the outer division being known as Gardiner's Bay, and the inner, which is subdivided by promontories, as Great Peconic and Little Peconic Bays. This large estuary gives to Long Island the shape of a two-pronged fork. The prongs are of unequal length, that upon the southern side exceeding the northern branch full twenty miles. The southern branch is distinguished as Montauk Point; the northern, until recently, as Oyster-Pond Point, but now is sometimes called Orient Point, deriving this name from the village of Orient, situated within its limits. Although Orient Point is shorter than Montauk Point, yet a succession of islands carries the line of this fork a long distance northeasterly into the sound—all of the islands, it is generally believed, once forming a portion of the northern peninsula. The most noted of them is Plumb Island—this name is popularly spelled *Plum*, and in Thompson's "History of Long Island" we find it indiscriminately given both *Plumb* and *Plum*—upon which is a light-house, well known to mariners. The channel between this island and the Point, known as Plumb Gut, has been rendered famous by the well-known exploit of Mr. Bennett's yacht. It is a common tradition at the Point that, in the last century, the passage to

the island could easily be crossed, at low tide, on foot.

Gardiner's Bay is partly sheltered from the sea by a long, narrow, and low stretch of land, extending, on a line southerly with Plumb Island, across the open space that lies between the two points. Westerly, the bay is separated from the inner division of this inland sea by what is appropriately known as Shelter Island, which extends from opposite Greenport on the north branch to near Sag Harbor on the south branch. This island is high and beautifully wooded, and possesses so many attractions as a summer resort that large hotels are now erecting upon it. It has also been selected by the Methodists as a ground for their annual camp-meetings. A more beautiful place could scarcely be found for the purpose. Unlike all this portion of Long Island, it is crowned by noble hills, from the summits of which superb views can be obtained of the entire width of Long Island, the sound, and long

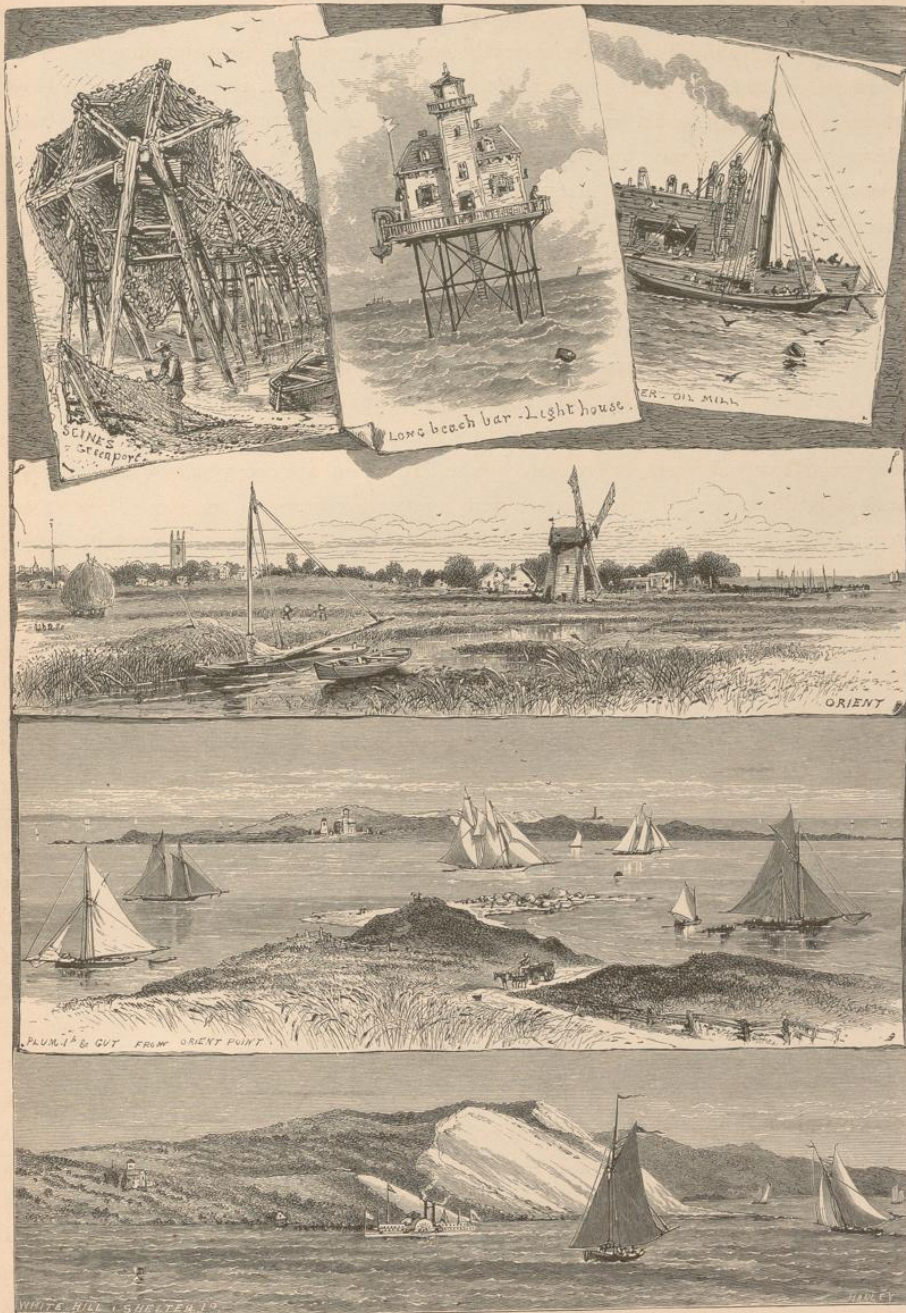


View from White Hill, Shelter Island.

stretches of the open sea. From White Hill, opposite Greenport, Orient Point is visible its entire length, charmingly dotted with villages, while beyond lies the sound, always white with many sails. From Prospect Hill, close at hand, Sag Harbor, and, far off, the open ocean, can be discerned. The Indian name of this island is *Manhansack-aha-qusha-wamock*, which we hope the reader will find no difficulty in pronouncing or remembering. The translation is rendered as "an island sheltered by islands," which is as poetical and pleasing as it is geographically accurate.

Eastern Long Island is famous for its fisheries. Its vast bays and adjacent seas abound with blue-fish, mackerel, and a small fish, valuable only for the oil extracted from it, called moss-bunker. This fish has built up in all this region an extensive and profitable industry. Numerous oil-factories recently lined the shores of the main island, and greatly marred the beauty of Shelter Island; but the horrible odor perennially escaping from them at last aroused a popular crusade, which resulted in their being legally declared public nuisances, and their removal ordered. But the industry was too profitable to readily surrender; hence it devised large floating oil-mills, and now, here and there over the surface of Gardiner's Bay, may be seen huge, black, uncouth, and yet picturesque-looking objects, always surrounded by waiting vessels, and ever vomiting into the blue air volumes of black smoke. But they scarcely mar the picture, and the odor of decayed bunkers never reaches the shore. The moss-bunker, menhaden, or bony-fish, is a little creature of something near a pound only in weight—to the great whale what a fly is to an ox. But it is caught in prodigious numbers, as many as one million having been taken at a single haul of a draw-seine from shore, enough to yield fifteen hundred gallons of oil. The fisheries in this section, whether considered as an industry or as a means of sport, give it its peculiar interest. The huge reels for winding the immense nets, seen all along the shores, are striking and picturesque incidents in the landscape.

Greenport, on the northern branch, is the terminus of the Long Island Railroad. It is comparatively a new settlement, dating only from 1827; while East Hampton and Southampton, on the southerly fork, are nearly two centuries older. There were settlers on Oyster Point, however, as far back as 1646, one Mr. Hallock having, in that year, purchased the district from the Indians. But no towns were built up until long after. The settlers on the southern fork, notwithstanding they came from the neighboring shores of New England, passed Orient Point, inviting as it must have been with its rich soil and varied greenery, to the pine-barrens and grassy downs of Montauk. Greenport is a very pretty town—as green, neat, and quiet, as the ideal New-England village. The cottages that line the well-shaded streets are hid among trees, and nowhere is decay or unwholesome poverty apparent. The drive from Greenport to the extreme of Orient Point is very charming. Near the town are many handsome villas and cottages, while flourishing farms and neat farm-houses enliven the road during the

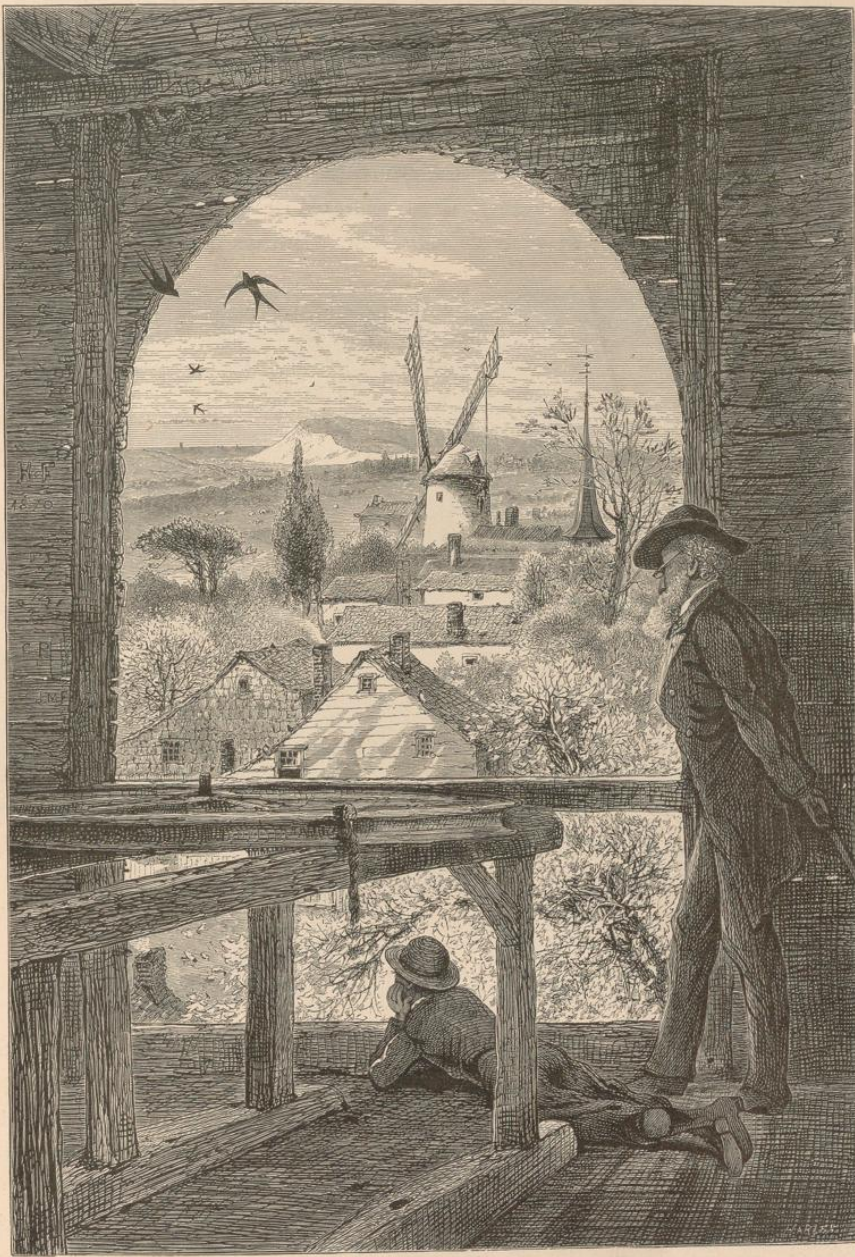


EASTERN LONG ISLAND SCENES.

entire journey. The village of Orient, through which we pass, has a prosperous and pleasing aspect; and all along the drive the scene is varied by frequent glimpses of the sound on one side and the bay on the other. At Orient Point there is a summer hotel, where in July and August great numbers come to enjoy the sea-air and the fishing. There is animation always in the picture presented here. On the sound, steamers and coasting-vessels come and go incessantly; while, in the bay, fleets of fishing-boats ever hover on the horizon, and yachts and smaller pleasure-boats give life and animation to the nearer scene.

Returning to Greenport, the traveller who explores this region will next desire to reach Sag Harbor. A steamer from New York touches at Orient and Greenport, and makes Sag Harbor the terminus of its route; but a pleasanter way to make the journey from Greenport is by sail-boat. The course lies around Shelter Island, and, if winds are fair, the voyage can be accomplished in two hours. Sag Harbor was settled in 1730, nearly one hundred years before Greenport. It is an ancient whaling-place. When Long Island was first settled, whales were common visitors to its shores, and boats were always ready for the pursuit of those welcome strangers. The whales, when caught, were drawn upon the shore, cut in pieces, and sent to primitive boiling-establishments near at hand. When the land of this region was purchased of the Indians, the sachems were allowed, by the terms of purchase, to fish in all the creeks and ponds, hunt in the woods, and to have the "fynnes and tayles" of all whales cast upon the coast. From the pursuit of whales on the coast there naturally arose expeditions of a more ambitious character, and in the early part of the present century we find the people of this town largely interested in the Pacific and Indian Ocean whaling. But eventually Nantucket and New Bedford obtained the monopoly of this business, and, long before whaling began to decline in these towns, it had known its best days for the people of Sag Harbor. The fisheries of the bay are now the principal dependence of its citizens, although a cotton-mill indicates the development of other industries. Sag Harbor is old, quaint, and fish-like; it must remain a matter of taste whether the traveller should prefer its semi-decayed antiquity to the orderly and trimmed newness of Greenport.

But Sag Harbor has a measure of newness by the side of East Hampton, on the southern branch, and the most easterly town of Long Island. This township was settled in 1649, by thirty families from Lynn and adjacent towns of Massachusetts. The land was purchased of the famous Montauk tribe, remnants of which are still found about Montauk Point. This part of our country does not seem to have the bloody Indian record that distinguishes so many sections. The early settlers, for the most part, lived harmoniously with the original occupants of the soil. Instead of making the red-man their determined enemy, measures seem to have been taken to secure his kindly coöperation; and the remains of the ancient tribe now upon the island, fishing in the same seas



EAST HAMPTON, FROM THE CHURCH BELFRY.

and hunting upon the same ground their fathers did, bear witness to the humanity and forethought of the first settlers of this region.

East Hampton consists simply of one wide street, nearly three hundred feet wide. There are no hotels, no shops, no manufactories. The residences are principally farmers' houses, congregated in a village after the French method, with their farms stretching to the ocean-shore on one side, and to the pine-plains that lie between the town and the bay on the other. Its wide street is lined with old trees, and a narrow roadway wanders through a sea of green grass on either side. Perhaps no town in America re-



Home of John Howard Payne.

tains so nearly the primitive habits, tastes, and ideas of our forefathers as East Hampton. It is rapidly becoming a favorite place of summer resort, visitors at present finding no accommodation save that offered by private families; but its growing popularity renders the erection of hotels almost certain, and then good-by to its old-fashioned simplicity!

Our illustrations include a view of this primitive village from the belfry of its old church, which the people, since Mr. Fenn made his sketch, have inexcusably destroyed—the only instance in the town's history of a disregard for its time-honored memorials. The antiquity of this building gave it interest, but it possessed special antiquarian value to the visitor on account of its identification with one of the most famous

divines in our history. Here the Rev. Lyman Beecher officiated as minister during a period of twelve years, from 1798 to 1810; and during his residence in the town two of his distinguished children, Catharine and Edward, were born. The view from the belfry of the church is pleasing, the distant glimpse of the sea contrasting charmingly with the embowered cottages in the foreground. The old wind-mill gives quaintness to the picture. Two of these queer piles stand at the east of the village. They are very picturesque, reminding one forcibly of the quaint old mills in Holland which artists



Interior of Payne's "Home, Sweet Home."

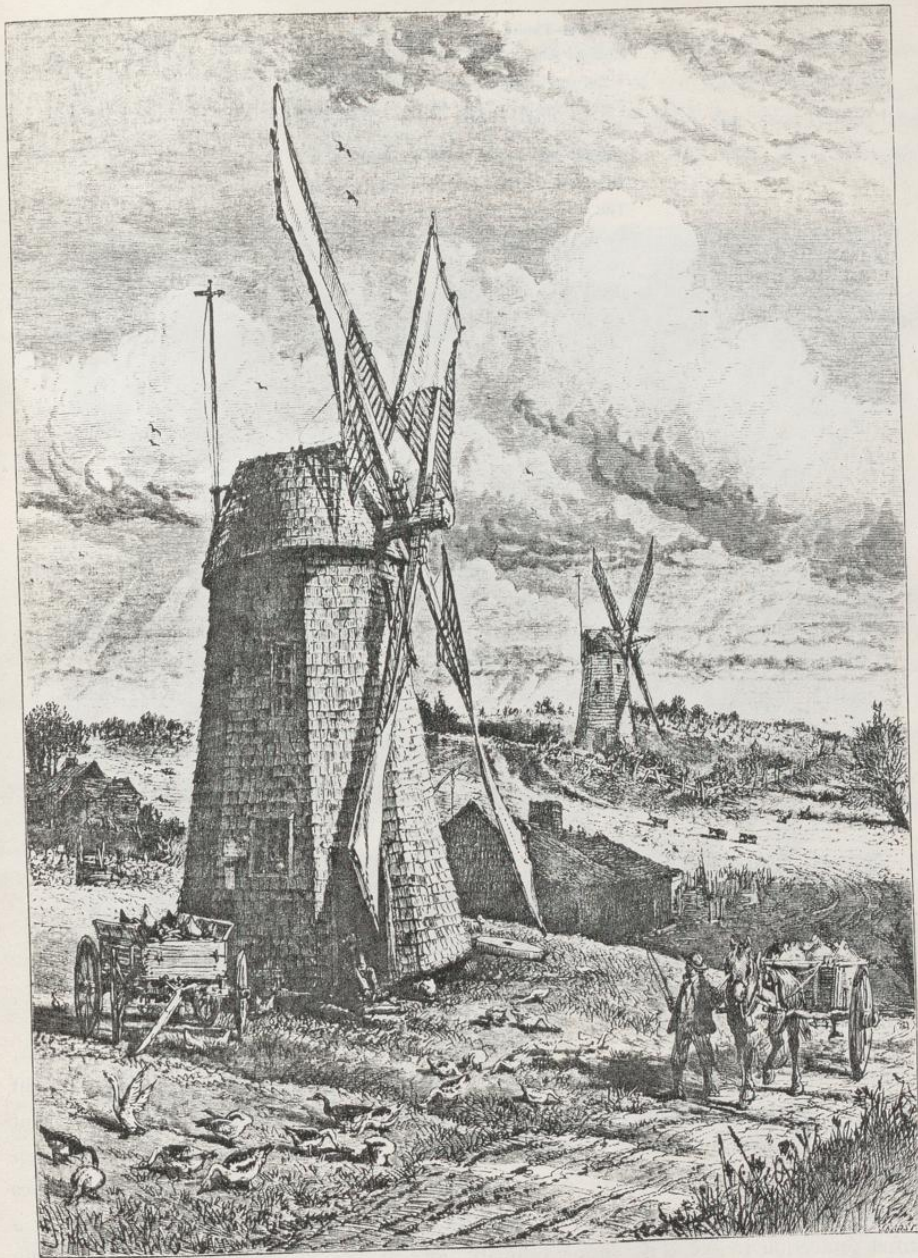
have always delighted to paint. They form a distinctive feature of this part of the island, inasmuch as there are few similar structures existing anywhere in our country.

But East Hampton is not only renowned as the residence of Lyman Beecher, but of one peculiarly associated with our best impulses and feelings. It was here that John Howard Payne, author of "Home, Sweet Home," passed his boyhood. It is commonly asserted that he was born in the very old, shingled cottage pointed out as his residence; but of this there is some doubt. That his father resided here during the tender infancy

of the lad is the better-supported story; but here, at least, the precocious lad spent several years of his early boyhood. His father was principal of Clinton Academy, one of the first institutions of the kind established in Long Island. The old house is held very sacred by the villagers, and the ancient kitchen, with its antique fireplace, stands to-day just as it did when Payne left it for his homeless wanderings over the world. It is truly a homely home; but, no doubt, many a happy hour was passed in the family circle around the bright blaze on the hearth, the simple joys of which were well calculated to inspire one of the best-known and best-loved lyrics in our language. Let no sacrilegious hand touch the old timbers of this precious relic! In a land where memorials of the past are so few, and one, also, where simple, happy homes are so abundant, it is specially fit that we should preserve the roof which sheltered one who has expressed the memories that cling around the hearthstone in words that thrill the hearts of millions.

From East Hampton to the easterly extremity of Montauk Point, the peninsula possesses a peculiar charm. The road follows the sea-shore over a succession of undulating, grass-covered hills. It has been pronounced, by some admirers, the finest sea-drive in America. There is at all times and in all places a fascination in the sea-shore, whether we explore the rocky precipices of Mount Desert, or follow the sandy cliffs of Long Island. But a summer jaunt along the cliffs of Montauk Point has a charm difficult to match. The hills are like the open downs of England, and their rich grasses afford such excellent grazing that great numbers of cattle and sheep are every year driven there for pasturage. The peaceful herds upon the grassy slopes of the hills; the broken, sea-washed cliffs; the beach, with the ever-tumbling surf; the wrecks that strew the shore in pitiful reminder of terrible tragedies passed; the crisp, delicious air from the sea; the long, superb stretch of blue waters—all these make up a picture that is full both of exhilaration and of repose. The heart expands and the blood glows under the sweet, subtle stimulant of the scene, even while delicious calm and contentment fill the chambers of the mind. The interest of the scene continually varies, even while its general features are almost monotonously the same. A boat on the beach, half buried in encroaching sand; a mass of remains of wrecked vessels, such as Mr. Fenn graphically calls "The Graveyard;" a gnarled, wind-beaten tree on the hills; changing groups of cattle, among which occasionally appear drovers or herdsmen on horseback; vessels appearing and disappearing in the horizon of the sea—these make up the changes of the picture, and, simple as they are, give abundant pleasure to the wayfarer.

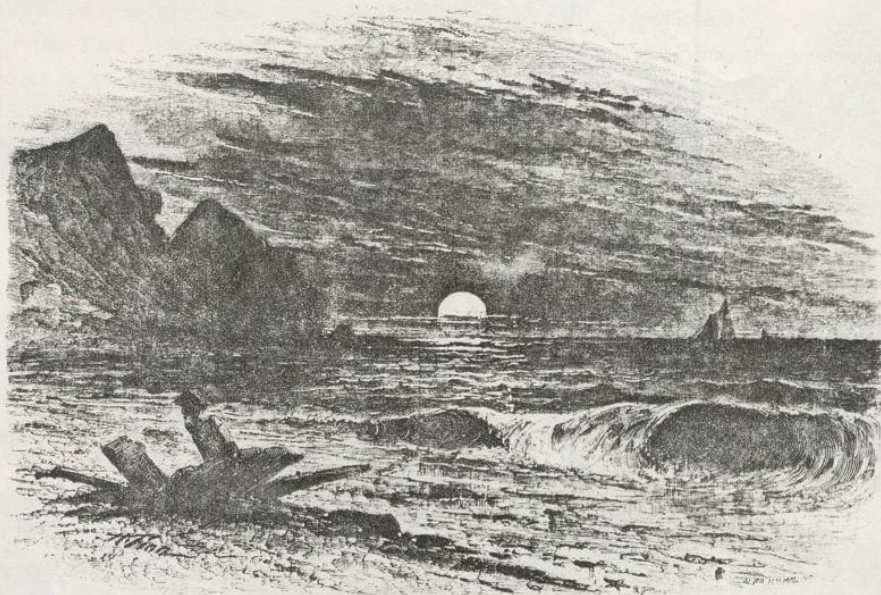
At last, Montauk Point is reached. This is a bold, solitary point of land, composed of sand, bowlders, and pebbles, with far stretches of sea on three of its sides. The storms here are grand, the wide Atlantic rolling in with unbroken force upon the shores. On the extreme point stands a tall, white light-house, erected in 1795, and one of the best-known lights of the coast. Mrs. Sigourney, while on a visit to the Point, in 1837, wrote the following lines:



GRIST WIND-MILLS AT EAST HAMPTON.

“ ‘Ultima Thule’ of this ancient isle,
 Against whose heart the everlasting surge,
 Long travelling on, and ominous of wrath,
 Forever beats! Thou lift'st an eye of light
 Unto the vexed and storm-tossed mariner,
 Guiding him safely to his home again.
 So teach us, 'mid our sorest ills, to wear
 The crown of mercy, and, with changeless eye,
 Look up to heaven.”

Eastern Long Island is undergoing many physical changes. In reports made to the State Legislature by W. W. Mather, more than thirty years ago, we find a full and in-



Moonlight on Shore.

teresting description of the action of the sea on this peninsula, and also upon Orient Point. “The coast of Long Island,” he says, “on the south side, from Montauk Point to Nepeague Beach, a distance of three miles, is constantly washing away by the action of the heavy surf beyond the base of the cliffs, protected only by narrow shingle beaches of a few yards or rods in width. The pebbles and bowlders of the beaches serve as a partial protection to the cliffs during ordinary tides in calm weather; but even then, by the action of the surf as it tumbles upon the shore, they are continually grinding into sand and finer materials, and swept far away by the tidal currents. During storms and high tides, the surf breaks directly against the base of the cliffs; and as they are formed

only of loose materials, as sand and clay, with a substratum of bowlders, pebbles, gravel, and loam, we can easily appreciate the destructive agency of the heavy waves, rolling in unbroken from the broad Atlantic. The destruction of land from this cause is less than one would be led to suppose, but still it is considerable. The road from Nepeague



The Downs.

Beach to Montauk Point, which originally was some distance from the shore, has disappeared in several places by the falling of the cliffs. There are no data by which to estimate the inroads of the sea on this coast as this part of the island is held in common by an association of individuals who use it for pasturage, and it is inhabited by three herdsmen only, who are frequently changed, and who live several miles distant from each other.

"From Nepeague Beach to two miles west of Southampton, the coast is protected



The Sand-drift.

by a broad and slightly-inclined sand-beach, which breaks the force of the surf as it rolls in from the ocean. From Southampton westward, the coast of the island is protected by long, narrow islands, from one to five or six miles distant from the main island.



The Graveyard.

"The eastern parts of Gardiner's and Plumb Islands, which are composed of loose materials, are washing away in consequence of the very strong tidal currents, and the heavy sea rolling in upon their shores from the open ocean. The action upon these coasts is so rapid as to attract the attention of the inhabitants, and calculations even have been made as to the time that will probably elapse before they will have disappeared. Rocks that have formed a part of Plumb Island may now be observed, at low water, a mile or more from the present shore. Little Gull Island (to the east of Plumb Island), on which a light-house is located, was disappearing so rapidly, a few years since, that it became necessary to protect it from the further inroads of the ocean by encircling it with a strong sea-wall.

"Oyster-Pond Point is wearing away rapidly, by the combined action of the waves during heavy north-east storms, and the strong tidal current which flows with great velocity through Plumb Gut. During a

heavy storm, in 1836, the sea made a clean break over about one-quarter of a mile of the eastern part of the Point, washed away all the lighter materials, and cut a shallow channel, through which the tide now flows.

"Another effect of the sea is the formation of marine alluvion. Northeast storms bring in a heavy sea from the ocean, which, rolling obliquely along the shore, aided by powerful tidal currents, sweep the alluvia along in a westerly direction. Northwest winds do not bring in an ocean-swell, and the waves which they raise fall upon the shore in a line nearly perpendicular to the trend of the coast; so that their effect is to grind the pebbles and sand to gravel by the action of the surf, rather than to transport them coastwise. In this way outlets of small bays are frequently obstructed by bars, shoals, and spits, formed by the tidal currents sweeping past their mouths, and depositing the materials in the eddy formed by the meeting of the currents. Almost every bay and inlet, when not protected from the sea by sandy islands, have their outlets blocked up entirely by the materials deposited, or so nearly as to leave only narrow entrances."



Montauk Point.