

A GLIMPSE INTO THE SHUBENACADIE

By ROY DAVIS

HAD the Shubenacadie River been seeking the nearest route to the sea when it debouched from Grand Lake, it would have turned south toward what is now Halifax Harbour. Instead it swung in a wide crescent north to battle with the ever-shifting Fundy tides at the head of Cobequid Bay some twelve miles away from Truro. Thus, instead of being merely another of the almost countless Nova Scotian streams that "wind somewhere safe to sea", it joined the Hindu Hoogly and the Chinese Yangtze as one of the three rivers unequalled for the rise and fall of their tides. The Shubenacadie counts fifty-three feet as the maximum distance between its high-water and low-water marks.

But the Shubenacadie does not proclaim this fact. True, to Nova Scotian custom it shuns publicity and, "variable as the aspen shade," remains an intriguing but difficult personality to anybody who seeks its acquaintance. The Micmac canoeist, the Acadian dyke builder, along with the modern gaspereaux and shad fishermen have found it a useful acquaintance but dangerous opponent. A generation or so ago, it would receive—but only at brief and strictly specified moments—the many square-riggers and barques that used to slide off its banks. It was and still is a safe and picturesque waterway at full tide, but it can be "uncertain, coy, and hard to please" when its "rips" boil across its sandbars and flats at flood or ebb tide. Then its Pitch Brook Rocks may well be thought the haunt of some lesser Lorelei or Siren.

The head-waters of Cobequid Bay, with which the Shubenacadie wages twice daily a battle of advance and retreat, is as moody and changeful as the river. At high water—especially when sun and moon combine to lift the tide—many a square-rigger has floated across it on her maiden voyage. The eight-mile expanse of dark-red water can be quiet as a pond on a sultry June night; but, at flood, and ebb, the Bay, like the River, storms along with its "rips" and criss-cross eddies. At low tide, the brown, glistening flats stretch for miles. From the shore line, even the channel dug by the Shubenacadie is scarcely visible, and the smaller streams are hidden deep in mud-banked gullies. In winter, River and Bay alike give no welcome to man or beast. Both are a chaotic mass of ice floes

and huge ice cakes that crash and crunch in the ebb and flood or crouch on the bare flats as they await the tide.

Few Maritime writers have attempted to picture either Bay or River. True, Charles G. D. Roberts did venture briefly on them in his *The Forge in the Forest*, but even Archibald Mac-Mechan, that pioneer seeker for the romance in Nova Scotian history and scenery, seems not to have realized the picturesque treasures in and about Cobequid Bay. It is to be hoped that before it is too late, some of our younger writers will do for it what has been done so well for Tantramar and "the little village of Grand-Pré."

The story below is only one of many that are still known to those few old-timers who "have come down from a former generation."

PROVIDENTIAL

Old folks round Cliftdean still remember that June morning the Burroughs Boys, Al. and Big Jim, got the loan of Mike Cassidy's shad boat to take two of the Fisher girls clamming across the Bay at Peter's Point. Sadie Fisher was home for a spell from the States visiting her folks, and Mary, she was the youngest of Tad's girls, always went everywhere with Sadie. Mary had black bangs, and they said she'd be even better looking than her sisters when she got filled out. Mollie was working at Squire Forbes' place and couldn't get off. The Reverend Alexander McCulloch said it was providential.

But when the tide ran that night along about supper, the picnickers didn't come in with the flood as they should have. Etta Fisher—she was Tad's woman—got some worried and went down to the crick over beyond the Forbes shipyard, where they pull up the shad boats; but Tad told her likely they'd just missed the tide, and, anyway, Big Jim knew the Bay up and down. When Tad got the cows milked and turned out, the ebb was beginning to run strong and it was most past sundown, so he went along to the Mash where Etta was.

But she'd come over to our place and was sitting with Mother on the front porch watching the moon rise full. Mother said she'd be glad to have some clams, and just then Tad came in our lane. He said they'd likely got started late and couldn't make it. Father and one of our hired men came in from the barn, and they and Tad went back down to the crick. After a while, Mother allowed I'd better bring the lantern so she and Etta could walk down to the Mash, it was such a fine night.

It was awful lonely going down the Mash Road even with the moon so bright that Etta said how I didn't need to have brought the lantern at all. When we got away out by the Bay, you could see lanterns coming from everywhere like big fireflies. The crick had about run out dry by then, except for the trickle that comes down from our Big Intervale Brook. Gee! but the Bay looked sort of cold and lonely with the moonlight on the wet flats, and some sort of a big bird kept kind of squeaking and moaning away offshore.

Ike Semple climbed on top of the old fish shanty and kept waving his lantern and yelling "Ship ahoy"! till Father told him to quit the noise. Ike's always been more or less weak-headed.

And on the next forenoon tide, little Mary Fisher floated right into the crick back of the Fisher place, where you could see her from the kitchen window. They say she looked peaceful. The Reverend Alexander McCulloch said at the funeral—everybody was there from miles around—that Almighty God in his great mercy had brought Mary home to her mother.

But Tad wondered why He couldn't have brought back Sadie too. Folks said he always favored Sadie. And the bodies of Al and Big Jim drifted ashore at Quicksand Point, where Tad picked up the overturned boat as he was looking around the beach. Mike Cassidy said his shad boat wasn't hurt a bit, except the oars were gone, and likely the anchor snapped the painter when it caught in the flood rips. But Mike never went fishing in her again, and they say he let one of the Madden boys up Nine-Mile River way have her for a mere song.