

St Pete. 1-27-27

My dear Bion:-

Harriet been in the mood for writing to amount to anything since coming to Fla. so excuse a Feller!

We are now sojourning in Aunt's house living out a cold spell - just a reflection from one likely going along up in Michigan

This morning the glass stood at 46 and at this time of writing it registers 62. so we are mending slowly.

There's a mighty sight of profanity rising to the surface because Florida makes so much of her sunshine on paper, nearly half of our time is cloudy.

The Huggetts left their bed and board at this roost for Anna Maria at 8:30 this morning so we are by ourselves this day barring an occasional caller. - Mrs Irwin for one.

Yesterday Mr Huggett + myself took a bus ride - some 40 miles - to Tarpon Springs and north of here where we saw the great industry of sponge getting which is something so foreign to the rest of the world around here that one can't rub it out of one's mind. The business is not a one horse one manumuck as there are as many as 150 vessels in the trade and many thousands of dollars changing hands at frequent intervals.

That and the fiddler crabs are the only two things which have interested me since landing in Fla.

Part of Tarpon Springs is solid Greek + the other, Native + tourist. The sponge enterprise is carried on wholly by the Greeks right from

Greece and learned in the art of fishing up the trunk from the table lands of the Gulf of Mexico - a vast form from 35 to 100 ft beneath the surface. There are not "Le sponge" alone but other sea vegetation too numerous to mention and which can be seen in sundry shops along the wharf and connecting streets. The sponge of commerce is only one of many forms. I was surprised to see the exaggerated forms - even the Commercial sponge growing to the size of a bushel basket & which is only salable when cut into convenient sizes.

The sponge of the Gulf is called "the horse sponge" - I mean the trade sponge - and of a much coarser variety than the Mediterranean sponge and not nearly so valuable. The Gulf sponge is the one mostly seen in our drug stores at home.

The other varieties seen are the glove sponge - resembling the fingers of a glove and connected - and that other variety so plentiful termed "Neptunes Cup". They vary in size from a teacup to the largest flower pot. The nicest one I saw was priced at \$10.00 and to the touch was soft as silk with a most wonderful shape and really deserved a glass globe.

The shops were just crammed with a medley of sea fruit. The Gorgonias were in considerable evidence and of many colors. They look like ~~plants~~ little bushes but are the lowest order of animal life. Their colors are of aniline dyes exaggerated.

Some of the shops have a figure of a diver of sponges sitting in a chair

beside the door and large life size.
Of course he has all his trappings ⁱⁿ and
ready for business. Impresable shoes
rubber suit and diving ^{bell} over the head
with great bulbous eyes of heavy glass
to see through; rubber hose tube to
bring the air down and a line to pull
on to give signals and a net to put the stuff.

The boats go out and stay for months
and are frequently ~~are~~ visited by boats
from the shore bringing supplies and
taking away sponges. The business
is done on the share basis, the owner
of the boat gets a third; the diver a
third and the crew the remaining third.

~~When~~ I am no stranger to the bottom
of the sea having spent many hours exploring
in shallower waters and have seen sponges
growing. In the water they are black
and glossy as though covered with
asphalt-paint. When snatched or
torn from the bottom they are brought to
the air and dry in a few hours. Then
they are rinsed & crushed in sea water
when the black stuff comes out and
leaves the sponge a dirty white. The
bleaching is not done here. They are
strung on strings of about a dozen
& brought together at the ends making
a ring which is convenient to handle.

The quantity in sight is amazing. They have to be trimmed & assorted to size before placed for sale.

We leave for a Maria again the 29th and take up the monotonous round to Hill time.

Ma is in excellent spirits and buzzing but pa can't shake off the rheumatiz located way low down in his back, as yet, which come from sorting apples and cold feet.

The park is running most every day according to weather and one has to believe that there are no checker players left in the North, I counted 52 boards in full operation the last five days. Dominos Galore and a new game to me called "Roche" ~~is~~ a great improvement on the old croquet.

Oranges per 100 - $\frac{\$1.00}{100}$; per doz 20 cents from store; Northern potatoes 10 lbs for 35^{cts}; Grape fruit - rotting on the ground or 15^{cts} per doz.

The place is run riot by real estate agents and lots of people investing just to speculate a bit.

I am very much afraid that Jack Frost has got the start of Bill and got into the Mechan Celler although she is a good one. Apples can stand some but ye potato is sensitive. I write him to let me know how things were coming but have not heard as yet. From all accounts you have had your share. The New England coast is fine. Cheer! Hope you are wintering well. Y^{rs} L. & Jackson