

Society Woman Who Keeps the Monterey Light

by Helen Dare

Some Fads of Mrs. Fish.

Blooded horses, French poodles, Holstein cows, Rare ferns, Old silver, Antique furniture, Fine lace, New books, Old china, Fine paintings, Pretty gowns, Family pride, Little red shoes, Social exclusiveness and a preference for entertaining officers of the Navy, people with Ancestors and artist folk.

LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS are many and various, but Monterey can claim a unique lighthouse keeper. A society woman!

It is a society woman who tends the Monterey Light – a bona fide society woman; not one of those saddest of society's derelicts, "a lady who has seen better days," nor one of its most pathetic adherents, a "would be" desperately, determinedly clinging to the fringe, but an active member in good standings of Society with a big S-- a really, truly society woman born into and accustomed to the rarefied atmosphere of the high life, with the enviable, heaven descended power to edit her visiting list with a blue pencil, as she wishes.

She is Mrs. Emily S. Fish

Many are the things the society woman has done since the day she asserted her right to earn her own living. She has gone on the stage and into millinery and dressmaking, chaperoning and gardening, exploring and dairying, poultry raising and vaudeville, lecturing and house-cleaning, beauty doctoring and trunk packing – and goodness knows what besides; but Mrs. Emily S. Fish, who trims and tends the Monterey light and keeps it shining for the safety of the ships that pass in the night, is the first society woman to go in the lighthouses keeping

She is the first society woman who has combined the 5 o'clock tea and the décolleté gown, dinner giving and reception going, the habits and diversions of the haut monde, with the polishing up of the great brass lamp that gives and the sparkling lenses that send the warning light to the hardy sailorman at his wet plowing.

Although she lives in the distant, lonely lighthouse on Point Pinos, and tends the light by night, she is still of and in society, and this – even were she not so interesting in her own right – would make her notable.

And she is interesting in her own right.

Mrs. Emily S. Fish is the widow of the late Dr. W. M. Fish, who was for many years a surgeon in the United States navy, who was a Regent of the University of California, and who was traveled, cultured and polished – a well-known figure in professional and social life of San Francisco and Oakland.

During his life the beautiful home of Dr. and Mrs. Fish in Oakland was one of the social centers, famous for the good taste and austere exclusiveness of its mistress, for the epicurean perfection of its dinners, and the social irreproachability of its company. Dr. Fish was an officer in the navy. Mrs. Fish is a devout Episcopalian. Both sprang from the stock that could be alluded to with secure, polite satisfaction. And more is not needed to mean the American aristocrat. They had traveled much, and enjoyed the best society of foreign capitals.

So at the functions in the charming Fish home in Oakland the privileged were asked to meet officers and officers' families of the army and navy, dignitaries of the church, foreign lions on their travels – and to appear in the list of "those who attended" at the Fishes was a distinction in itself.

These functions would not perhaps have satisfied the present day fashionable San Franciscan's idea of "jolly," but they were conventionally faultless, and the exclusive to a delightful degree.

When the sadness of widowhood fell upon Mrs. Fish there were, of course, no more functions in the Fish home. Mrs. Fish, in her quiet way, sought occupation that would bring distraction.

She rented her home and tried travel, but traveling is lonely work sometimes.

What with a pension and income from her property, she was comfortably independent. But she loved California, and of California she particularly loved the shifting yellow sand dunes and the blue, blue bay of Monterey. And so, in tribute to the husband who had served his Government, and through the efforts of her son-in-law, Lieutenant-Commander Nicholls of the *Monadnock* – who died in Manilla – she was appointed keeper of the Monterey light, at a comfy little sum per annum.

That was six years ago; and she has tended to the light ever since, living alone – except for a Chinese servant – in the old, fashioned, white-stone lighthouse on the rock toothed point.

A strange, strange choice for a woman of means and culture and position.

But it is a choice that has made of the Monterey light a gem and a curia among light stations.

Although Mrs. Fish has chose a lonely Lighthouse and her abiding place, she has not turned her back on the world or forgot that she is a worldling.

She has taken her taste and culture, her love of the thing and pretty things, her exclusiveness and her social graces with her into the old stone home with the lantern atop.

The little reservation of yellow sand which Uncle Sam has pegged down with hi lighthouse she has made in truth to blossom as the rose.

In the circular enclosure, bordered by the dark cypress hedge, there are lawns as spring as English turf and freshly green as Irish, and there are sweetens of old fashionable flower growing and blowing in beds that are masses of color, or singly in their individual beauty – as prettily prim and old-fashioned a garden – with every thing from the sweetly modest lavender to the proud pink hollyhock – as ever gave charm to a cottage in Kent of Surrey.

Mrs. Fish is a woman of many tastes and fads and fancies, and this pretty, old-fashioned garden is but one. Others unfold as one comes up the road to the lighthouse gate, with its old Monterey cannon on the one side and Indian mortar on the other. Blooded horses, that she has bred and reared herself, are kicking up their heels in the paddocks, or grazing outside; a Holstein cow calls to her calf, and another moose her opinion that it is milking time, white leghorn chickens, with their reddest of combs, come scampering greedily, a hundred or more, with the hope of being fed; and a guard of black poodles, unclipped – the pure blooded French aristocrats of poodledom – come lopping down the path like bundles of torn black rags, barking wheezily and inquiringly at visitors.

These are a few of her fads. Mrs. Fish likes quality and breeding in her friends and her pets. In her horses she follows Senator Stanford's plan, and has trotting blood – Mambrina Patchen preferably – warmed with thoroughbred. She breeds the horses for her own use, and has turned out a promising young trotter now in training for a record.

Her French poodles are bench show beauties, and the father of the flock, old Pharaoh, won a first prize at Islington and had the honor of being patted by the royal hand of H. R. M. the Prince of Wales – in spite of which old Pharaoh is quite a democratic dog in his way and as fond of nosing the heels of a stranger as any dog unpatted by royalty.

Although Mrs. Fish live alone in the lighthouse with only her old Chinese servant Que – a treasure of a servant who has been with her since boyhood, and his pigtail is gray now – she is not a recluse.

She entertains here with the same grace and discrimination and elegance that she did in her big Oakland home, When there are war ships in Monterey Bay there are charming little teas and delicious little dinners at the lighthouse, to which are bidden a select few from Del Monte or the coast cottages to meet the officers of the war ships. Occasionally there are little teas or little dinners or little luncheons to old friends from the city or to the artists Monterey draws. Those find the interior of the lighthouse a bijou, with the delicate greenery of rare ferns on the broad window lodges, color sketches of Monterey scenes by the visiting artists on the walls, curios, old furniture and daintiness of the gentlewoman everywhere. Those who stay to dine, dine well and the excellent cooking of Que from rare old china

and beautiful old silver. They find the newest books the latest magazines, the news and gossip of the world at hand just as they did in Oakland where the Fish home was a social center.

Now and then Mrs. Fish leaves the light for a day or so in charge of her faithful old Que and returns to her world. In the smartest of toilets she appears at the receptions and teas and dinners and at-homes of her friends in San Francisco and Oakland, to renew old acquaintances and make new ones – then back to the lighthouse again.

On the visiting days, when the lighthouse is open to the public, the industrious tourist acquires a new sensation by visiting the Monterey light. He is bewildered by being met at the door by the tall, trim-figured, gray haired, sea-tanned keeper, a Gibson picture of fashionable middle-age in modish silk skirt and frou-frou bodice – a grand dame with very much manner, the manner that goes with a lorgnette, the critically polite manner that so skillfully escapes utter in-hospitality and so exquisitely avoids cordiality. He is further bewildered by following up the narrow white-painted stairs, the companion way, and through the trap door to the light, the swish-swish of silk frills and the twinkle of little red shoes; and he isn't quite sure, when he comes down and is bowed out with the grand air, whether the light is of the first or fourth or four-hundredth class, whether it can be seen fifteen or fifty miles at sea, whether it is forty or four hundred thousand candle power, but is quite sure that its keeper is something quite different in the way of lighthouse keepers and not in the least like the bluff old salts of story books and melodrama.