

**AN ICELAND
FISHERMAN**

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An Iceland fisherman by Pierre Loti & Anna Farwell De Koven

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PIERRE LOTI & ANNA FARWELL DE KOVEN

**AN ICELAND
FISHERMAN**



LAUREL
CROWNED

AN ICELAND
FISHERMAN
By PIERRE LOTI

TALES

AN
ICELAND FISHERMAN

BY
PIERRE LOTI

Translated from the French

BY ANNA FARWELL DE KOVEN

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE difficulties of translation are always great, but never greater than when the task is the reproducing of an emotion which arises from the melody of language rather than from originality of plot or rapid development of incident. But to translate Pierre Loti is no more difficult than to analyze him. He is as yet an unclassified element in literature. The intelligence which admits his limitations in invention and in regularity of expression cannot define or explain away the invincible sorcery which enthalls the emotions. His nature is a rendezvous of contradictions. He is very old and he is very young ; he is as sensitive as a child and as unbelieving as an atheist ; he adores alike the lily of the tropics and the garden-flower of his own home. He has the strength of the developed artist and the irregularity of the amateur. He has experienced and described the extremes of human emotion. But he has two qualities

which remain invariable, — a yearning passion for beauty, and a limpid purity of style. He is as brilliant and realistic an impressionist as any of his countrymen; but he is more than all a sentimentalist, and never describes a scene without the accompanying emotion which unites it to his soul and ours. The poet's passion for beauty is his own; but his expression of it is essentially Gallic, as it is never divested of the personal relation to himself. An abstract rapture over the frozen beauties of a Greek vase could never have arisen from the heart of this fascinating egotist. Like all poets, his nature is as deep as a well and as reflective as the mirror of its surface.

The principle of moral choice does not limit the number of images which he reflects, and we are to be congratulated that the roving, seafaring life he leads gives him manifold opportunities to gratify his curiosity and ours. In "*Le Mariage de Loti*," the first of his books, and in "*Pêcheur d'Islande*," his masterpiece, he strikes the extreme notes of his emotional experience and artistic sympathy. In the former — a description of a summer's sojourn in the Islands of Polynesia — his love for the strange and exotic finds its most remarkable utterance. To be told that there are people who under happy conditions of climate can live in the mere luxurious abandonment to the beauty of Nature in her most magnificent moods, is something; but to be made to see and live with them as this young Alfred de Musset

did, gives us as strange and intense a sensation of remote and almost unimaginable beauty as it is possible to obtain. There are some songs in this book, — love songs and letters from its strange and pitiful barbaric heroine, — which are as full of metaphor as the Song of Solomon, and as fresh from the heart of Nature as the gypsy music of Hungary.

In "Pêcheur d'Islande" he tells the simple love story of an Iceland fisherman, and strikes down to the primal roots of human pathos with the old, old tragedy of love and death. His sympathy for the hardships and dangers of this fisher-folk of his own home, described with the unerring familiarity of old acquaintance, appeals to all pure and tender emotions, and proves the inherent nobility of his nature. All the beautiful qualities of his heart and brain have flowered in this work. It may be doubted if any living writer of the French language combines it with such indescribable melody as does Pierre Loti; and nowhere are its fascinating delicacies, its exquisite reserves of sound, and its sensuous and generous vocables more harmoniously fortunate than when he describes the mysterious splendors of the Iceland skies, and the remote and solemn silences of its treacherous icy seas. The realism of this consummate performance is so consistent and so great that the memory of its word-pictures confounds itself in the mind with that of Jules Breton's heroic peasants, and leaves in the heart the lesson of a

deep and large humanity. As he is artist in his word-visions, he is melodist in his word-tones. When Nature rolls a Breton and a Schubert into one, endows him with an invincible and indescribable personal fascination, sets him free to wander over the face of the earth and the sea, and then gives him a voice, it is worth while to listen to what he has to say. It has been the translator's earnest wish to convey to a yet larger number Pierre Loti's most perfect utterance of the romance of pure humanity in the English translation of "Pêcheur d'Islande."

A. F. de K.

