

SOME REMARKS ON GULLS.

BY

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SCRIBNER'S MAG. VOL. XLII. NO. 2.

AUG., 1907.

58.547.

SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE

VOL. XLII

AUGUST, 1907

NO. 2

SOME REMARKS ON GULLS

WITH A FOOT-NOTE ON A FISH

By Henry van Dyke

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. E. SCHOONOVER AND FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY HERBERT K. JOB

I

CITY GULLS



THE current estimate of the sea-gull as an intellectual force is compressed into the word "gullibility"—a verbal monument of contempt. But when we think how many things the gull does that we cannot do—how he has mastered the arts of flying and floating, so that he is equally at home in the air and on the water; how cleverly he adapts himself to his environment, keeping warm among the ice-floes in winter and cool when all the rest of the folks at the summer watering-places are sweltering in the heat; how well he holds his own against the encroachments of that grasping animal, man, who has driven so many other wild creatures against the wall, and over it into extinction; how prudently he accepts and utilizes all the devices of civilization which suit him, (such as steamship lanes across the Atlantic, and dumping-scows in city harbors, and fish-oil factories on the seashore), without becoming in the least civilized himself—in short, when we consider how he succeeds in doing what every wise person is trying to do, living his own proper life amid various and changing circumstances, it seems as if we might well reform the spelling of that supercilious word, and write it "gullability."

But probably the gull would show no more relish for the compliment than he has

hitherto shown distaste for the innuendo; both of them being inedible, and he of a happy disposition, indifferent to purely academic opinions of his rank and station in the universe. Imagine a gull being disquieted because some naturalist solemnly averred that a hawk or a swallow was a better master of the art of flight; or a mocking-bird falling into a mood of fierce resentment or nervous depression because some professor of music declared that the hermit thrush had a more spontaneous and inspired song! The gull goes a-flying in his own way and the mocking-bird sits a-singing his roundelay, original or imitated, just as it comes to him; and neither of them is angry or depressed when a critic makes odious comparisons, because they are both doing the best that they know with "a whole and happy heart." Not so with poets, orators, and other human professors of the high-flying and cantatory arts. They are often perturbed and acerbated, and sometimes diverted from their proper course by the winds of adverse comments.

When Cicero Tomlinson began his career as a public speaker he showed a very pretty vein of humor, which served to open his hearers' minds with honest laughter to receive his plain and forcible arguments. But someone remarked that his speaking lacked dignity and weight; so he loaded himself with the works of Edmund Burke; and now he discusses the smallest subject with a depressing ponderosity. The charm of Alfred Tennyson Starling's early lyrics was unmis-

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takable. But in an evil day a newspaper announced that his poetry smelled of the lamp and was deficient in virility. Alfred took it painfully to heart, and fell into a violent state of Whitmania. Have you seen his patient imitations of the long-lined, tumultuous one?

After all, the surest way to be artificial is to try to be natural according to some other man's recipe.

One reason why the wild children of nature attract our eyes, and give us an inward, subtle satisfaction in watching them, is because they seem so confident that their own way of doing things is, for them at least, the best way. They let themselves go, on the air, in the water, over the hills, among the trees, and do not ask for admiration or correction from people who are differently built. The sea-gulls flying over a busy port of commerce, or floating at ease on the discolored, choppy, churned-up waves of some great river,

Bordered by cities, and hoarse
With a thousand cries,

are unconscious symbols of nature's self-reliance and content with her ancient methods. Not a whit have they changed their manner of flight, their comfortable, rocking-chair seat upon the water, their creaking, eager voice of hunger and excitement, since the days when the port was a haven of solitude, and the river was crossed only by the red man's canoe passing from forest to forest. They are untroubled by the fluctuations of trade, the calms and tempests which afflict the stock market, the hot waves and cold waves of politics. They do not fash themselves about the fashions—except, perhaps, that silly and barbarous one of adorning the headgear of women with the remains of dead gulls. They do not ask whether life is worth living, but launch themselves boldly upon the supposition that it is, and seem to find it interesting, various, and highly enjoyable, even among wharves, steamboats, and factory chimneys.

My first acquaintance with these untamed visitors of the metropolis was

When that I was a littel tine boy,

and lived on the Heights of Brooklyn. A nurse, whose hateful official relation was mitigated by many amiable personal qualities—she was a rosy Irish girl—had the

happy idea of going, now and then, for a "day off" and a breath of fresh air, on one of the ferry-boats that ply the waters of Manhattan. Sometimes she took one of the ordinary ferries that went straight over to New York and back again; but more often she chose a boat that proposed a longer and more adventurous voyage—to Hoboken, or Hunter's Point, or Staten Island. We would make the trip to and fro several times, but Biddy never paid, so far as my memory goes, more than one fare. By what arrangement or influence she made the deck-hands considerately blind to this repetition of the journey, without money and without price, I neither knew nor cared, being altogether engaged with playing about the deck and admiring the wonders of the vasty deep.

The other boats were wonderful, especially the big sailing-ships, which were far more numerous then than they are now. The steam tugs, with their bluff, pushing, hasty manners, were very attractive, and I wondered why all of them had a gilt eagle on top of the wheel-house. A little row-boat, tossing along the edge of the wharves, or pushing out bravely for Governor's Island, seemed to be full of perilous adventure. But most wonderful of all were the sea-gulls, flying and floating all over the East River and the North River and the bay.

Where did they come from? It was easy to see where they got their living; they were "snappers-up of unconsidered trifles" from every passing vessel whose cabin-boy threw the rubbish overboard. If you could succeed in getting off the peel of an orange in two or three big pieces, or if you could persuade yourself to leave a reasonably large core of an apple, or, best of all, if you had the limp skin of a yellow banana, you cast the forbidden fruit into the water, and saw how quickly one of the gulls would pick it up, and how beautifully the others would fight him for it. Evidently gulls have a wider range of diet than little boys; also they have never been told that it is wrong to fight.

'How greedy they are! What makes some of them white and some of them gray? They must be different kinds; or else the gray ones are the father and mother gulls. But if that is so, it is funny that the white ones are the best fliers and seem able to take things away from the gray ones. How would you like to fly like that? They swoop around and go just where they want to.

Perhaps that is the way the angels fly; only of course the angels are much larger, and very much more particular about what they eat. Isn't it queer that all the gulls have eyes just alike—black and shiny and round, just like little shoe-buttons? How funnily they swim! They sit right down on the water as if it wasn't wet. Don't you wish you could do that? Look how they tuck up their pinky feet under them when they fly, and how they turn their heads from side to side, looking for something good to eat. See, there's a great big flock all together in the water, over yonder, must be a thousand hundred. Now they all fly up at once, like when you tear a newspaper into little scraps and throw a handful out of the window. Where do you suppose they go at night? Perhaps they sleep on the water. That must be fun! Do they have gulls in Ireland, Biddy, and are all their eyes black and shiny?"

"Sure!" says Biddy. "An' they do be a hundred toimes bigger an' foiner than these wans. The feathers o' thim shoines in the sun loike silver and gowld, an' their eyes is loike jools, an' they do be floying faster than the ships can sail. If ye was only seein' some o' thim rale Oirish gulls, ye'd think no more o' these little wans!"

This increases your determination to go to the marvellous green island some day; but it does not in the least diminish your admiration for the gulls of Manhattan. In the summer, when you go to the seaside and watch the

Gray spirits of the sea and of the shore

sailing over the white beach or floating on the blue waves of the unsullied ocean, you wonder whether these country gulls are happier than the city gulls. That they are different you are sure, and also that they must have less variety in their diet, hardly any banana-skins and orange-peel at all. But then they have more fish, and probably more fun in catching them.

These are memories of old times—the ancient days before the Great Invasion of the English Sparrows—the good old days when orioles and robins still built their nests in Brooklyn trees, and Brooklyn streets still resounded to the musical cries of the hucksters: "Radishees! *new* radishees!" or "Ole clo' an' bottles! any *ole* clo' to sell!" or "Shad O! *fre-e-sh* shad!" In that golden age we played football around the old farm-

house on Montague Terrace, coasted down the hill to Fulton Ferry, and made an occasional expedition to Manhattan to observe the strange wigwams and wild goats of the tribe of squatters who inhabited the rocky country south of the newly discovered Central Park. *Eheu jugaces!*

There was a long interval of years after that when the sea-gulls of the harbor did not especially interest me. But now again, of late, I have begun to find delight in them. Conscience, awakened by responsibility, no longer permits those surreptitiously repeated voyages without a repeated fare. But I go through the gate at the end of each voyage, and consider twelve cents a reasonable price for the pleasure of travelling up and down the North River for an hour and watching the city gulls in their winter holiday.

I know a little more about them now. They are almost all herring gulls, although occasionally a stray bird of another species may be seen. The dark-gray ones are the young. They grow lighter and more innocent-looking as they grow older, until they are pure white, except the back and the top of the wings, which are of the softest pearl gray. The head and neck, in winter, are delicately pencilled with dusky lines. The bill is bright yellow and rather long, with the upper part curved and slightly hooked, for a good hold on slippery little fish. The foot has three long toes in front and a foolish little short one behind. The web between the front toes goes down to the tips; but it makes only a small paddle, after all, and when it comes to swimming, the loon and the duck and several other birds can easily distance the gull. It is as a floater that he excels in water sports; he rides the waves more lightly and gracefully than any other creature.

The gull, high floating like a sloop unladen
Lets the loose water waft him as it will;
The duck, round-breasted as a rustic maiden,
Paddles and plunges, busy, busy, still.

But it is when the gull rises into the air, where, indeed, he seems to spend most of his time, that you perceive the perfection of his design as a master of motion. The spread of his wings is more than twice the length of his body, and every feather of those long, silvery-pearly, crescent fans seems instinct with the passion and the skill of flight. He rises and falls without an effort; he swings

and turns from side to side with balancing motions like a skater; he hangs suspended in the air immovable as if he were held there by some secret force of levitation; he dives suddenly head foremost and skims along the water, feet dangling and wings flapping, to snatch a bit of food from the surface with his crooked golden bill. If the morsel is too large for him to swallow, look how quickly three or four other gulls will follow him, trying to take it away. How he turns and twists and dodges, and how cleverly they head him off and hang on his airy trail, like winged hounds, giving tongue with thin and querulous voices, half laughing and half crying and altogether hungry. He cannot say a word, for his mouth is full. He gulps hastily at his booty, trying to get it down before the others catch him. But it is too big for his gullet, and he drops it in the very act and article of happy deglutition. The largest and whitest of his pursuers scoops up the morsel almost before it touches the waves, and flaps away to enjoy his piratical success in some quiet retreat.

What a variety of cooking the gulls enjoy from the steamships and sailing-vessels of various nationalities which visit Manhattan! French cooks, Italian, German, Spanish, English, Swedish—cooks of all races minister to their appetites. Whenever a panful of scraps is thrown out from the galley, a flock of gulls may be seen fluttering over their fluent *table d'hôte*. Their shrill, quavering cries of joy and expectancy sound as if the machinery of their emotions were worked by rusty pulleys; their sharp eyes glisten, and their great wings flap and whirl together in a confusion of white and gray. It is said that they do useful service as scavengers of the harbor. No doubt; but to me they commend themselves chiefly as visible embodiments and revelations of the mystery, wonder, and gladness of flight.

What do we know about it, after all? We call this long-winged fellow *Larus argentatus smithsonianus*. We find that his normal temperature is about two degrees higher than ours, and that he breathes faster, and that his bones are lighter, and that his body is full of air-sacs, fitting him to fly. But how does he do it? How does he poise himself on an invisible ledge of air,

Motionless as a cloud . . .
That heareth not the loud winds when they call,
And moveth altogether if it move at all?

How does he sail after a ship, with wings outspread, against the wind, never seeming to move a feather? You understand how a kite mounts upon the breeze: the string holds it from going back, so it must go up. But where is the string that holds the gull?

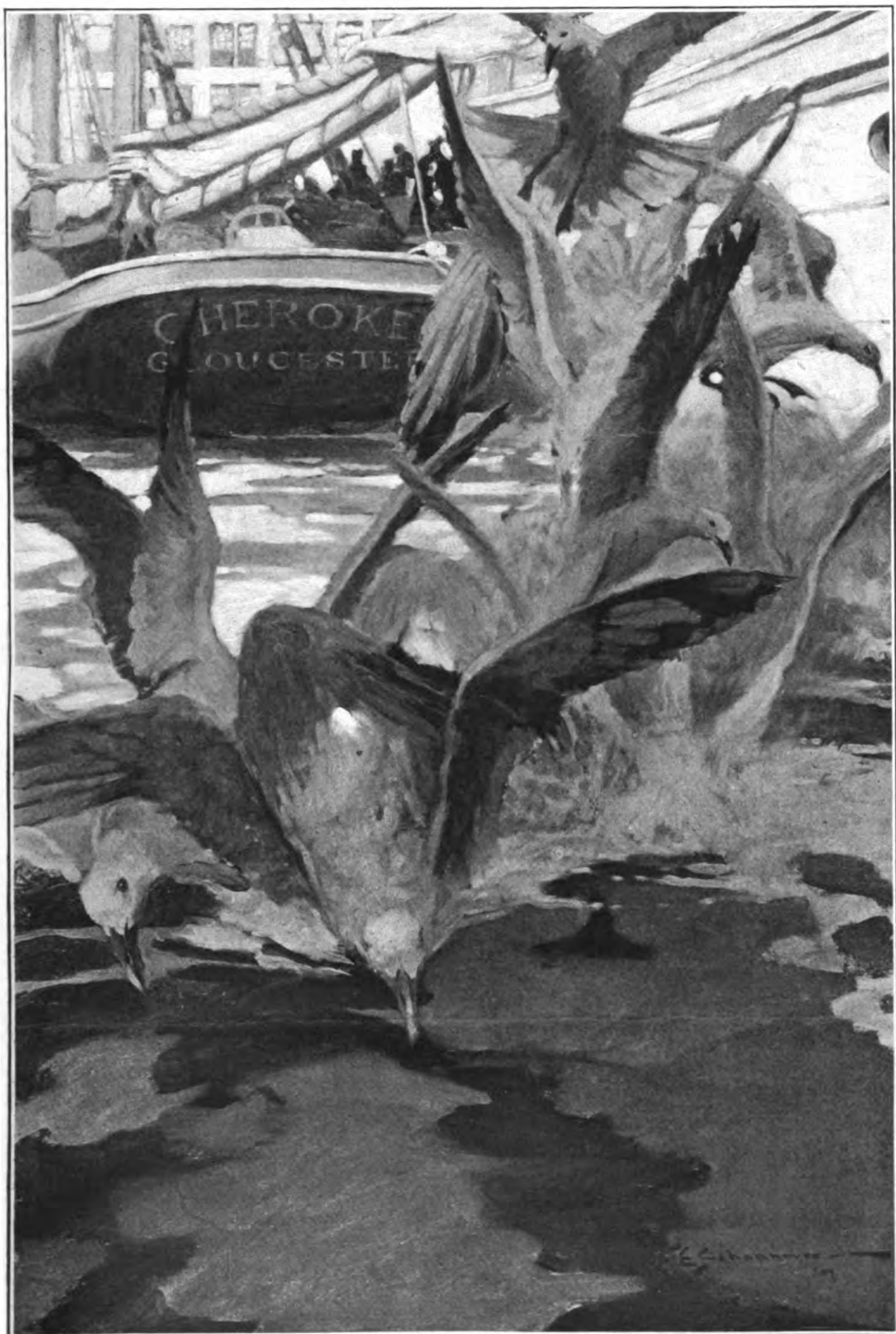
I like these city gulls because they come to us in winter, when the gypsy part of our nature is most in need of comforting reminders that the world is not yet entirely dead or civilized. A man that I know once wrote a poem about them, and sent it to a magazine. It was so evidently an out-of-door poem that the editor put it in the midsummer number, when you might cross the ferry a hundred times without seeing a single gull. They do not begin to come to town until October; and it is well on into November before their social season begins. In March and April they begin to flit again, and by May they are all away northward, to the inland lakes among the mountains, or to the rocky islands of the Maine coast. Let us follow them.

II

A GULL PARADISE

IN the waters south of Cape Cod, where blue-fish and other gamy surface swimmers are found, the gulls are often useful guides to the fisherman. When he sees a great flock of them fluttering over the water, he suspects that the objects of his pursuit are there, feeding from below on the squid, the shiners, or the skip-jack, on which the gulls are feeding from above. So the fisherman sails as fast as possible in that direction, wishing to drag his trolls through the school of fish while they are still hungry. But in the colder waters around the island of Mount Desert, where the blue-fish have not come and the mackerel have gone away, the sign of the fluttering gulls does not indicate fish to be caught, but fish which have already been caught, and which some other fisherman is preparing for the market as he hurries home. The gulls follow his boat and clean up the waves behind it. They are commentators now, not prophets.

In these blue and frigid deeps the real sport of angling is unknown. There is instead a rather childish, but amusing game of salt-water grab-bag. You let down a heavy lump of lead and two big hooks baited



Drawn by F. E. Schoonover.

What a variety of cooking the gulls enjoy!—Page 132.

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with clams into thirty, forty, or sixty feet of water. Then you wait until something nudges the line, or until you suspect that the hooks are bare. Then you give the line a quick jerk, and pull in, hand over hand, with more or less resistance, and see what you have drawn from the grab-bag. It may be a silly, but nutritious cod, gaping in surprise at this curious termination of his involuntary rise in the world; or a silvery haddock, staring at you with round, reproachful eyes; or a pollock, handsome but worthless; or a shiny, writhing dog-fish, whose villainy is written in every line of his degenerate, chinless face. It may be that spiny gargoyle of the sea, a sculpin; or a soft and stupid hake from the mud-flats. It may be any one of the grotesque products of Neptune's vegetable garden, a sea-cucumber, a sea-carrot, or a sea-cabbage. Or it may be nothing at all. When you have made your grab, and deposited the result, if it be edible, in the barrel which stands in the middle of the boat, you try another grab, and that's the whole story.

It is astonishing how much amusement apparently sane men can get out of such a simple game as this. The interest lies, first, in the united effort to fill the barrel, and second, in the rivalry among the fishermen as to which of them shall take in the largest cod or the greatest number of haddock, these being regarded as prize packages. The sculpin and the sea vegetables may be compared to comic valentines, which expose the recipient to ridicule. The dog-fish are like tax notices and assessments; the man who gets one of them gets less than nothing, for they count against the catcher. It is quite as much a game of chance as politics or poker. You do not know on which side of the boat the good fish are hidden. You cannot tell the difference between the nibble of a cod and the bite of a dog-fish. You have no idea what is coming to you, until you have hauled in almost all of your line and caught sight of your allotment wriggling and whirling in the blue water. Sometimes you get twins.

The barrel is nearly full. Let us stop fishing and drifting. Hoist the jib, and trim in the main-sheet. The boat ceases to rock lazily on the tide. The life of the wind enters into her, and she begins to step over the waves and to cut through them, sending bright showers of spray from her bow, and

leaving a swirling, bubbling, foaming wake astern. Were there ever waters so blue, or woods so green, or rocky shores so boldly and variously cut, or mountains so clear in outline and so jewel-like in shifting colors, as these of Mount Desert? Was there ever an air which held a stronger, sweeter cordial, fragrant with blended odors of the forest and the sea, soothing, exhilarating, and life-renewing?

Here is the place to see it all, and to drain the full cup of delight; not a standpoint, but a sailing-line, just beyond Baker's Island: a voyager's field of vision, shifting, changing, unfolding, as new bays and islands come into view, and new peaks arise, and new valleys open in the line of emerald and amethyst and carnelian and tourmaline hills. You can count all the summits: Newport, and Green, and Pemetic, and Sargent, and Brown, and Dog, and Western. The lesser hills, the Bubbles, Bald Mountain, Flying Mountain, and the rest, detach themselves one after another and stand out from their background of green and gray. How rosy the cliffs of Otter and Seal Harbor glow in the sunlight! How magically the great white flower of foam expands and closes on the sapphire water as the long waves, one by one, pass over the top of the big rock between us and Islesford! This is a bird's-eye view: not a high-flying bird, circling away up in the sky, or perched upon some lofty crag, as Tennyson describes the eagle:

Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world he stands;
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls,
He watches from his mountain-walls;

but a to-and-fro-travelling bird, keeping close to sea and shore. It is a gull's-eye view — just as the flocks of herring gulls see it every day, passing back and forth from their seaward nesting-place to their favorite feeding-ground at Bar Harbor. There they go now, flapping southward with the breeze. We will go with them to their island home, and eat our dinner while they are digesting theirs.

Great and Little Duck Islands lie about ten miles off shore from Seal Harbor. Their name suggests that they were once the haunt of various kinds of sea-fowl. But the ducks have been almost, if not quite, exterminated; and the herring gulls would probably have gone the same way, but for the exertions of



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The gull goes a-flying in his own way.—Page 129.

the Audubon Society, which have resulted in the reservation of the islands as a breeding-ground under governmental protection. It has taken a long time to awaken the American people to the fact that the wild and beautiful creatures of earth and air and sea are a precious part of the common inheritance, and that their needless and heedless destruction, by pot-hunters or plume-hunters or silly shooters who are not happy unless they are destroying something, is a crime against the commonwealth which must be punished or prevented. The people are not yet wide awake, but they are beginning to get their eyes open; and the State of Maine, which was once the Butchers' Happy Hunting Ground, is now a leader in the enactment and enforcement of good game laws.

There is only one place on the shore of Great Duck where you can land comfort-

ably when the wind has any northing in it, and that is a little cove among the rocks, below a fisherman's shanty, on the lower end of the island. Here there are a few cleared acres; some low stone walls dividing abandoned fields; the cellar of a vanished house, and a ruined fireplace and chimney; a little enclosure, overgrown with bushes and weeds, marking a lonely, forgotten burial-ground.

There are few gulls to be seen at this end of the island; it is a tranquil, forsaken place where we can sit beside our fire of driftwood and eat our broiled fish and bread, and smoke an after-dinner pipe of peace. A grassy foot-path leads down the fields, and across a salt-meadow, and along a high seawall of rocks and pebbles cast up by the storms, and so by a rude wood-road through a forest of spruce-trees to the higher part of the island. It rises perhaps a hundred feet



The gulls' nests are hidden away among this gray *débris*, or in crevices among the rocks.

For more above the sea, with a steep shore built of huge sloping edges of flat rock. On the seaward point is the lighthouse, with the three dwelling-houses of the keepers, all precisely alike, immaculately neat and trim, surrounded by a long picket fence, and presenting a front of inimitable human order and discipline to the tumultuous and unruly ocean, which heaves away untamed and unbroken to the shores of Spain and Brittany.

The chief keeper of the light, Captain Stanley, who has been with it since it was first kindled twenty years ago, is also the warren of the sea-gulls. All round us, in the air, on the green slopes of the island, on the broad

waves, his feathered flocks are scattered, and their innumerable laughter and shrill screaming confuse the ear. The spruce-trees on the top of the island and the eastward slopes are almost all dead; their fallen trunks and branches and upturned roots cover the little hillocks and hollows in all directions. The gulls' nests are hidden away among this gray *débris*, or in crevices among the rocks, sheltered as much as possible from the wind and the rain.

They are not very wonderful from an architectural point of view, being nothing more than rough little circles of dried twigs

and grass matted together, with perhaps a bit of seaweed or moss for padding in the case of a parent with luxurious tastes. Three eggs in a nest is the rule, and all that the average mother-gull wants is a place where she can hold them together and keep them warm until they are hatched. The young birds are precocial; they emerge from the shell with a full suit of downy feathers, and are able to walk after a fash-



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The young birds emerge from the shell with a full suit of downy feathers.

ion, and to swim pretty well, almost from the day of their second and completed birth.

The young of altricial birds, like orioles, and bluebirds, and thrushes, being born naked and helpless, have a reason for loving their nest-homes, so carefully and delicately built to shelter their nude infancy. But the young gull cares not for "a local habitation and a name." All that he wants of home is a father and mother, nimble and assiduous in bringing food to him while he flops around, practising his legs and his wings.

It is August now, and the eggs are gone, shells and all. Almost all of the young gulls are accomplished swimmers and fair fliers

the sea when there is a surf running, for if you alarm them they will plunge into the water and be bruised and wounded, perhaps killed, by the breakers throwing them against the rocks.

Wild animals, like polecats and minks, who would be likely to prey upon the young birds, are not allowed to reside on the island; and it is too far to swim from the mainland. But I wonder why large hawks and other birds of prey do not resort to this place as a marine restaurant. Perhaps a young gull is too big, or too tough, or too high-flavored a dish for them. Possibly the old gulls



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How magically the great white flower of foam expands.—Page 134.

by this time, and I suppose the majority of the brood can go with their parents to the nearer harbors and along the island shores to forage for themselves. But there are a few backward or lazy children—perhaps a hundred—still hanging around the places where they chipped the egg, hiding among the roots of the trees or crouching beside the rocks. What quaint, ungainly creatures they are! Big-headed, awkward, dusky, like gnomes or goblins, they hop and scuffle away as you come near them, stumbling over the tangled dead branches and the tussocks of grass, with outspread wings and clumsy motions. Follow one a little while and he will take refuge in a hole under a fallen tree, or between two big stones, squatting there without much apparent fright while you pat his back or gently scratch his head. But you must be careful not to follow the youngsters who are near the edge of

know how to fight for their offspring. I suppose that enough of the adult birds are always on hand for defence, although during a good part of the day the majority of the flock are away at the feeding grounds.

I opened the gate of the light-house enclosure and went in. Three little children who were playing in the garden came shyly up to me, each silently offering a flower. The keeper of the light, who is a most intelligent man and an ardent Audubonite, asked me into his sitting-room and told me a lot about his gulls.

In the spring, the first of them come back in March, sometimes arriving in a snow-storm. They keep to the shore most of the time, but fuss around a little, pulling old nests to pieces or making new ones. About the first of May, they move up to the centre of the island. There are three or four thousand of them, and not quite half as many

ests. By the middle of May the first egg may be expected, and in the second week of June the first gray chick puts out his big head. A week later the brood is all hatched and the parental troubles begin.

"The old birds," says Mr. Stanley, "do not fail to provide food for their young, although as the birds get large the old ones have to go sometimes many miles to do it, but, as a general thing, there is plenty for

swallow it again. Woe betide the young bird that belongs to a neighbor, who tries to fill up at the wrong place! I have seen a young bird killed by one blow from the old bird's bill, his head torn in two. As the young birds grow, the old birds bring them larger fish to swallow. We have a few old birds who know the time we feed the hens, and when that time draws near they are on hand to dine with the hens."

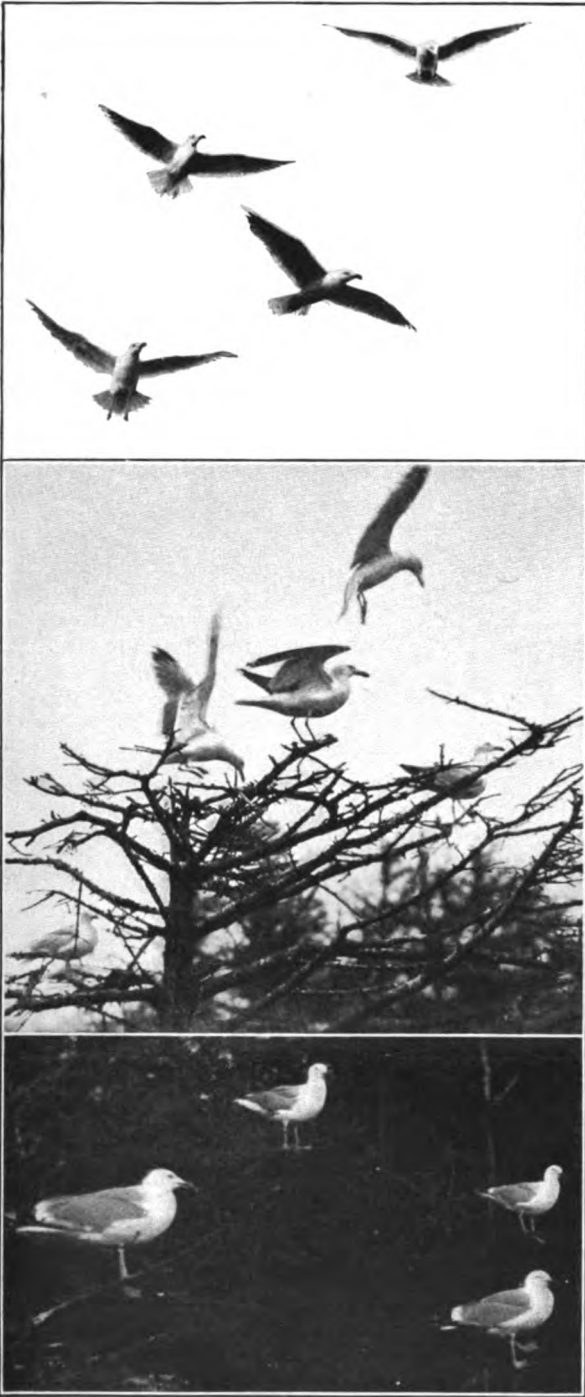


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"Gray spirits of the sea and of the shore."—Page 131.

hem. I have watched them coming back at night, appearing very tired, flying very low, one behind the other. They would alight near where the young should be and call, and the chicks would rush up to the old bird and pick its bill; after the proper time the old bird will stretch out its neck, and up will come a mess of almost everything, from bread to sea-cucumbers, livers, fish (all the small kind). If there is anything left after the feast the old bird will

By the latter part of August, having done their duties, the old birds, the white ones, begin to leave the island. The dingy youngsters are slower to forsake their Eden of innocence, lingering on beside the unsullied waters and beneath the crystalline skies until the frosts of late September warn them that winter is at hand. Then the last of the colony take flight, winging their way southward leisurely and comfortably, putting in at many a port where fish are cleaned



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"It is when a gull rises into the air that you perceive the perfection of his design as a master of motion."—Page 131.

and scraps are thrown overboard, until they arrive at their chosen harbor by some populous and smoke-clouded city, and learn to dodge the steamboats and swim in troubled waters.

So the Gull Paradise is deserted by all but its guardians. The school district of Duck Island—the smallest in the United States—resumes its activities; the school-house is open, the teacher raps on the desk, and the fourteen children of the keepers apply themselves to the knowledge that is dried in books.

III

IN THE GULLS' BATH-TUB

OVER our cottage we saw them flying inland every morning about ten or eleven o'clock; in groups of three or four; in companies of twelve or twenty; sometimes a solitary bird, hurrying a little as if he were belated. Over our cottage we saw them flying seaward every afternoon, one or two at a time, and then, at last, a larger company all together. The trail through the woods, up along the lovely mountain-brook, led us in the same direction as the gulls' path through the air. A couple of miles of walking underneath green boughs brought us to the shore of Jordan Pond, lying in a deep gorge between the mountains of rock with the rounded, forest-clad Bubbles at its head, and the birches, and maples, and poplars, and hemlocks fringing its clean, stony shores. Then we understood what brought the gulls up from the sea every day. They came for a fresh-water bath and a little fun in the woods.

Look at them, gathered like a flotilla, in the centre of the

pond. They are not feeding; they are not attending to any business of importance; they are not even worrying about their young; they are not doing anything at all but "bath-ing" themselves, as my little lad used to say, in this clear, cool, unsalted water, and having the best time in the world. See how they swim lazily this way or that way, as the fancy strikes them. See how they duck their heads, and stretch their long wings in the air, and splash the water over one another; how they preen their feathers and rise on the surface, shaking themselves. Here comes a trio of late starters, flying up from the sea. They hover overhead a moment, crying out to the crowd below, which answers them with a general shout and

a flutter of excitement. Didn't you hear what they said?

"Hello, fellows! How's the water?"

"Bully! Just right—come in quick's you can!" So the new arrivals swoop down, spreading out their tails like fans, and dangling their feet under them, and settling in the centre of the crowd amid general hilarity.

How long the gulls stay at their bath I do not know. Probably some of the busy and conscientious ones just hurry in for a dip and hurry back again. Others, of a more pleasure-loving temperament, make the trip more than once, like a boy I knew, whose proud boast it was that he had gone in swimming seven times in one afternoon. The very idle and self-indulgent ones, I reckon, spend nearly the whole day in their spacious and well-fitted bath-tub.

The mountain lake has been turned into a reservoir for the neighboring village of Seal Harbor. But the gulls do not know that, I am sure; nor would anyone else who judged by outward appearances suspect that such a transformation had taken place. For the dam at the outlet is made of rough stones,

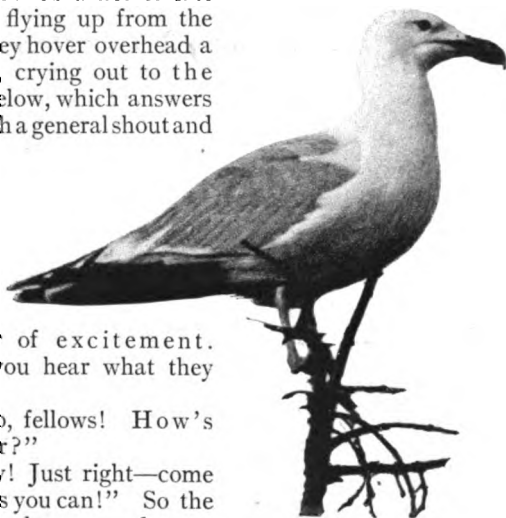
very low, almost unnoticeable; and the water has not been raised enough to kill any of the trees or spoil the shore. Jordan Pond, which was named for a commonplace lumberman who used to cut timber on its banks, and which has, so far as I know, no tradition or legend of any kind connected with it, is still as wild, as lovely, as perfect in its lonely charm as if it were consecrated and set apart to the memory of a score of old romances.

At the lower end, in an open space of slightly rising ground, there is an ancient farmhouse which has been extended and piazzaed and made into a rustic place of entertainment. Here the fashionable summer-folk of the various harbors come to drink afternoon tea and to eat famous dinners of broiled chicken, baked potatoes, and pop-overs. The proprietor has learned from the modern author and advertiser the secret of success; avoid versatility and stick to the line in which the public know you. Having won a reputation on pop-overs and chickens, he continues to turn them out with diligence and fidelity, like short-stories of a standard pattern.

I asked him if there was any fishing in the lake. He said that there was plenty of fishing; but he said it in a tone which made me doubtful

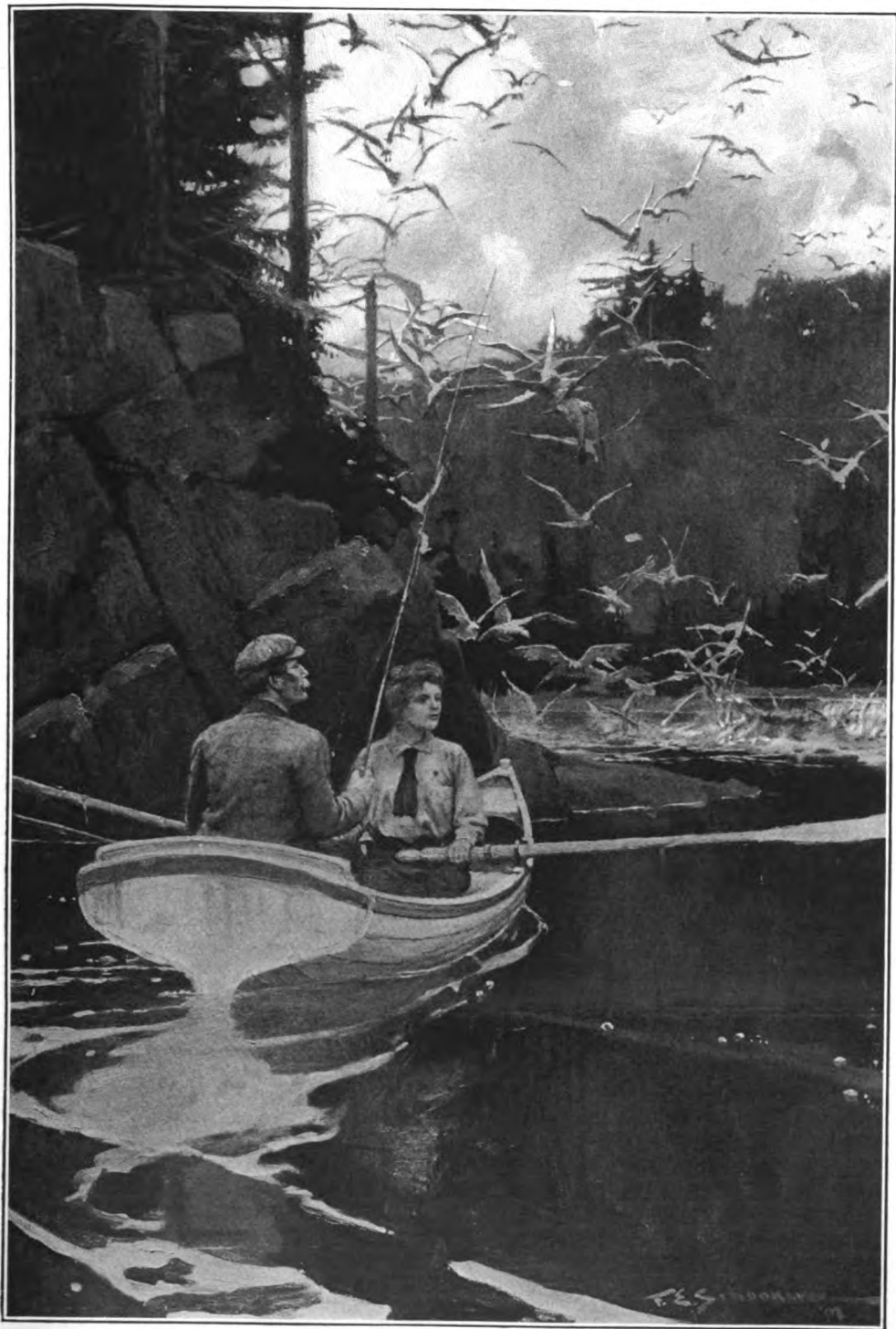
about his meaning. 'What kind of fish were there?' 'Trout by nature, and landlocked salmon by artificial planting.' 'Could we fish for them?' 'Sure; but as for catching anything big enough to keep—well, he did not want to encourage us. It was two or three years since any good fish had been caught in the lake, though there had been plenty of fishing. But in old times men used to come over from Hull's Cove, fishing through the ice, and they caught'—then followed the usual piscatorial legends of antiquity.

But the Gypsy girl and I were not to be disheartened by historical comparisons. We insisted on putting our living luck to the proof, and finding out for ourselves what kind of fish were left in Jordan Pond. We had a couple of four-ounce rods, one of which I fitted up with a troll, while she took



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A typical gull.



Drawn by F. E. Schoonover.

The gulls' bath-tub.—Page 139.

the oars in a round-bottomed, snub-nosed white boat, and rowed me slowly around the shore. The water was very clear; at a depth of twenty feet we could see every stone and stick on the bottom—and no fish! We tried a little farther out, where the water was deeper. My guide was a merry rower and the voyage was delightful, but we caught nothing.

Let us set up the other rod, while we are trolling, and try a few casts with the fly as we move along. I will put the trolling-rod behind me, leaning over the back-board; if a fish should strike, he would hook himself and I could pick up the rod and land him. Now we will straighten out a leader and choose some flies—a silver doctor and a queen of the water—how would those do? Or perhaps a royal coachman would be—Chrrr-p! goes the reel. I turn hastily around, just in time to see the trolling-rod vanish over the stern of the boat. Stop, stop! Back water—hard as you can! Too late! There goes my best-beloved little rod, with a reel and fifty yards of line, settling down in the deep water, almost out of sight, and slowly following the flight of that invisible fish, who has hooked himself and my property at the same time.

This is a piece of bad luck. Shall we let the day end with this? “Never,” says the Gypsy. “Adventures ought to be continued till they end with good luck. We will put a long line on the other rod, and try that beautiful little phantom minnow, the silver silk one that came from Scotland. There must be some good fish in the pond, since they are big enough to run away with your tackle.”

Round and round the shore she rows, past the points of broken rocks, underneath the rugged bluffs, skirting all the shelving bays. Faintly falls the evening breeze, and behind the western ridge of Jordan Mountain suddenly the sun drops down. Look, the gulls have all gone home. Creeping up the rosy side of Pemetic, see old Jordan’s silhouette sketched in shadow by the sun. Hark, was that a coaching horn, sounding up from Wildwood Road? There’s the whistle of the boat coming round the point at Seal. How it sinks into the silence, fading gradually away. Twilight settles slowly down, all around the wooded shore, and across the opal lake—

Chr-r-r-r! sings the reel. The line tightens. The little rod, firmly gripped in my hand, bends into a bow of beauty, and a

hundred feet behind us a splendid silver salmon leaps into the air. “What is it?” cries the Gypsy, “a fish?” It is a fish, indeed, a noble ouananiche, and well hooked. Now if the gulls were here, who grab little fish suddenly and never give them a chance; and if the mealy-mouthed sentimentalists were here, who like their fish slowly strangled to death in nets, they should see a fairer method of angling.

The weight of the fish is twenty times that of the rod against which he matches himself. The tiny hook is caught painlessly in the gristle of his jaw. The line is long and light. He has the whole lake to play in, and he uses almost all of it, running, leaping, sounding the deep water, turning suddenly to get a slack line. The Gypsy, tremendously excited, manages the boat with perfect skill, rowing this way and that way, advancing or backing water to meet the tactics of the fish, and doing the most important part of the work.

After half an hour the ouananiche begins to grow tired and can be reeled in near to the boat. We can see him distinctly as he gleams in the dark water. It is time to think of landing him. Then we remember, with a flash of despair, that we have no landing-net! To lift him from the water by the line would break it in an instant. There is not a foot of the rocky shore smooth enough to beach him on. Our caps are far too small to use as a net for such a fish. What to do? We must row around with him gently and quietly for another ten minutes until he is quite weary and tame. Now let me draw him softly in toward the boat, slip my fingers under his gills to get a firm hold, and lift him quickly over the gunwale before he can gasp or kick. A tap on the head with the empty rod-case—there he is—the prettiest landlocked salmon that I ever saw, plump, round, perfectly shaped and colored, and just six and a half pounds in weight, the record fish of Jordan Pond!

Do you think that the Gypsy and I wept over our lost rod, or were ashamed of our flannel shirts and tweeds, as we sat down to our broiled chickens and pop-overs that evening, on the piazza of the tea-house, among the white frocks and Tuxedo jackets of the diners-out? No, for there was our prize lying in state on the floor beside our table. “And we caught him,” said she, “in the gulls’ bath-tub!”

