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Some Bird Friends

—Pullen

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Some Bird Friends

BY HENRY F. PULLEN

“Birds, Birds, ye are beautiful things”

An intimate introduction to
a few of the common birds
of Western Canada. Con-
taining twenty illustrations
from original photographs.

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To You

Who love the great open spaces,
Who respond to the call of the pine woods,
Who believe in the kinship of all created things,
And who have a particular affection for our feathered friends,
This booklet is dedicated.

Model Lives

"The more I see of some people the more I like birds." That is a parody on something which somebody said somewhere once upon a time. As a matter of fact, birds are much better than men. They are neater, cleaner, more beautiful, more moral, less vindictive, more cheerful, less inclined to gossip or backbite. The only fault of the bird is that he does not use his wonderful powers of flight to dominate the world and bring about a period of bird rule. What a preening of plumage there would be among the man tribe if the birds set the pace! There would be a great destruction of inartistic homes, of ugly suits of clothes, of imitation hats; and a sloughing off of harsh, unholy voices.

Birds live model lives. Were it not for their human enemies, many of them would be almost secure from injury. They have set a pace in transportation which we, with all our ingenuity and boasted superiority, have been unable even to imitate.

Watch the gull flying alongside the ship with scarce a motion of those graceful wings, propelling itself faster than the ten thousand horse-power engine driving the vessel. Here is superiority indeed!

In the creation of the world and the evolution of the human race there was a moment when the fate of man hung in the balance. Had he developed along the line of the winged creatures instead of being content to grovel, what a lightsome race we should have been to-day.

Think of the joy of moving rapidly through space at will. What a small place the world would be, and how educated we should become if we could at will rise from the ground, and, without filling the gas tank, or adjusting the carburetor, wing our way across the sea to another land; or visit the Doukhobors and watch them coax riches from the sun and soil.

Our forefathers missed their opportunity, and because of their sin we must walk or irritate the magneto. We cannot become birds, but we may at least learn to appreciate our feathered friends. It is useless to envy them, but we can treat them as becomes their superior station in life. Cruelty to these highly favored creatures is unthinkable. They are not the Lords of Creation, but they are the perfection of the life to which we can never hope to attain. Let us humble ourselves when we see a finch revelling in thistle-down. He has the advantage of us. Let us remember that we are only men, and that this little creature lives a more perfect life, and is better in every respect than we.

--The Free Lance

OFF TO LOOK FOR LOON'S NESTS AT SOOKE LAKE

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SOME BIRD FRIENDS

Introductory

The common birds of British Columbia are chiefly those which frequent the cities and towns, the villages and the isolated farms. Few birds live away by themselves, but there are exceptions, and one of the notable exceptions is the guillemot. These birds are seen almost everywhere in the isolated inland waters, but seldom in the harbors and bays which are frequented by shipping. The gulls, on the other hand, while they go off to some lonely island during the nesting season, return to the harbor with the approach of autumn, and in the winter become very tame.

Of the land birds, the flickers live in the deep woods, but they are also found on the lawns and in the trees of the garden, making themselves quite at home among men. The crows find their chief food along the beaches, but they have discovered that the presence of man has brought variety of food supplies, and the result has been that many crows have almost deserted the shore and gone to live in the parks and farm fields. Practically all the birds seem to prefer the haunts of men to the wilderness, for food is there in greater abundance.

The great majority of Western birds are insect eaters. Even those that are especially formed by nature to live on seeds enjoy a variety of diet, and seldom refuse a meal of animal food. The propensities of some of the commoner birds to steal fruit from the farmer is sometimes annoying, but only in isolated instances is it found that the birds do more harm than good. There are always individual birds whose tastes are depraved, and these tastes get them into trouble; but on the whole the bird life of the country is beneficial, and for that reason the birds should not only be protected, but their presence should be invited.

There are many residents in the West who are very fond of the birds, and to them it is sufficient to have them without inquiring too closely as to their habits, or the possible injury they may do. For the sake of the birds, however, it is wise to protect them from calumny, and to do this it is necessary to study their habits and to familiarize people with them.

The Western Robin

The best known of all the wild birds in this country is the robin. It lives in the fields and gardens; it adds charm to our lawns, and it dines at the expense of our enemies, the worms and insects. Every one who knows anything of the birds, knows the robin, in fact some children have been known to classify the bird life of the country, as crows, robins, and dickey-birds.

The Western robin is a sub-species of the American robin of the East, differing from it in not having white markings on its tail.

Both in general appearance and habits, the robin resembles the thrush of England, especially the song thrush. The color of its breast, however, differentiates it from its European cousin, and its voice is not as tunesome, nor is its song as continuous. Both are, however, friends of man, preferring to live and nest in the neighborhood of human habitation, rather than in the deep woods or the open fields.

Now and then the robin finds an enemy, usually among the fruit and berry growers; but it prefers the rowan berry to the cherry, and nearly all the wild berries suit its taste in turn.

The robin's nest is plastered with mud, and then lined with hay, or a suitable substitute. The eggs are clear blue, and are usually four in number, although clutches of three and five are not uncommon.

The nest is usually located in the fork of a tree or shrub, anywhere from six to twenty feet from the ground; but now and then odd sites are chosen.

A year or two ago, one pair of birds thought they would like to build their nest in the corner of Mr. Hugo Beaven's porch at Oak Bay. They carried a lot of small sticks, and tried to lodge them on a slight projection, but they all fell to the floor. After some hours of fruitless labor the birds gave it up,

and tried a similar corner in the back porch. There, too, they failed. Apparently they had set their minds on a corner under the shelter of that roof; for, once more they tried the front porch, but with no more success than at first. This time Mr. Beaven came to their rescue. Taking a small box, he nailed it to the wall, in the place where the birds wanted to build; but left the heads of the nails sticking out into the box. The birds at once seized upon the situation. They filled the box with sticks, well above the point where the heads of the nails protruded, and then they commenced their nest, the one that is pic-

ROBIN THAT WON OUT THROUGH SHEER PERSISTENCE

tured in the accompanying illustration.

It was not easy to take the photograph, for the red walls absorbed the light, and the nest was on the shady side of the house. At first the bird moved when the shutter was opened, thus making a blur; but by giving a long exposure, it was found that a perfect image was secured.

Among the Flickers

A combination between a shriek and a squawk, is the cry that usually announces the presence of the flicker.

"Why is it called a flicker?", inquired a very young naturalist. And the answer was, "Because it flicks". In the same way it is a woodpecker, because it pecks wood. A good many people seem to imagine, that this bird lives by pecking wood, but in that they are mistaken. The flicker spends much of its time on the ground, looking for food. While some of its food, it takes from rotting wood, the greater part of it, especially in the summer, is taken from the ground. Ants in particular, are much appreciated by this long-billed connoisseur, and there are lots of ants on the Pacific Coast, therefore all the woodpeckers thrive, and especially the flicker.

The Northwestern flicker, which is the common flicker of the British Columbia coast region, differs from the Northern flicker and high-holder or yellow-hammer of the East, in having a bright red, triangular marking, running back from the bill, below the cheek, instead of a black mark. Also the under parts of the wings and tail are red, instead of yellow, and there is a white patch on the rump, which is particularly noticeable when the bird is flying. All the flickers have the clear black crescent on the breast. The Northern flicker is like the

A SECTION OF WILLOW TREE HAS BEEN REMOVED, SHOWING FLICKER'S NEST

Eastern bird in having yellow beneath the wings and tail, black cheek marks, and a red band around the back of the neck.

Some interesting birds are sometimes found which seem to be crosses between the Northwestern and Northern flickers. Combinations of red and yellow occur, which seems to indicate that the breeds are often crossed. Yellow feathers are seen among the red, or red feathers among the yellow, all of which is scientifically wrong, unless caused by intermarriage between the red-tailed and yellow-tailed kinds.

No one seems to know just why the flicker pecks holes in certain wood. Some people will tell you that it is to secure food, but that is doubtful in many cases. It is not an uncommon thing for a flicker to attack the side of a new house, pecking holes in the siding, and doing considerable damage. I knew one case where a hole was pecked in this way. The owner shot the bird; but the next morning another had taken its place, industriously tapping away at the side of the new house. The chips flew and the holes increased in size and the owner became irate. Once more he went out with the gun, and the offender fell dead. Now he thought all his bird troubles were over, but the following morning a third bird was busy at the same point.

Another case of a bird attacking the side of a house was treated differently. The owner pointed out the hole to me, but "Do not disturb the bird," said he, "I would not interfere with it, if it pecked the house down."

So far as I have been able to gather, that is the only offence against mankind that the flicker ever commits, and the cases are isolated. As a rule he is perfectly harmless except to the insect life of the neighborhood.

Often the flickers become quite tame, and now and then their tameness is the cause of their destruction. One morning early there was a great shrieking outside my window. Sensing disaster to my friends, I jumped out of bed and dashed outside in my night-dress, only to see the old black cat making off with a big flicker in his mouth. Stop him I could not, nor would he drop the bird.

The flicker nests in a hole in a tree; the nest usually being at least eighteen inches below the entrance. The hole is dug out by the parent birds, a chip at a time, and the nest has a few loose chips at the bottom.

When the young birds are strong enough, they scramble up the

A YOUNG FLICKER

entrance tunnel, one at a time, and receive the food that the parents bring, and if the food is not there on time, a great noise ensues. Naturally the strongest birds get the most food, but as there is always plenty during the summer months none of the members of the large family go short.

It has been suggested that the reason the loggers speak of their food as "grub" is because the flickers feed their young on grubs, and naturally the loggers are in close touch with the flickers, both spending most of their time in the woods.

The eggs, eight or ten in number, are pure white, no protective coloration being necessary in the cavernous nest. The nest in the photograph was in a punky willow, about fifteen feet from the ground. In order to secure the illustration it was necessary to destroy the nest. The top of the tree was sawn off and carried to the ground before the section was taken out, enabling the writer to take the photograph.

Our Friend the Crow

The crow is one of the cleverest of all birds. To the ordinary observer he is just a black rascal, that frequents the parks and beaches, leading a useless and brainless life. To the bird-lover, however, he is much more than this. He is the embodiment of cunning and cleverness, and he is quite up to the average in the matter of usefulness. A few of his species have criminal propensities, but that is rather a sign of development than otherwise. Now and then the

A CROW'S NEST

authorities become exceedingly virtuous, and condemn him to death; but he seldom suffers the penalty. As a rule he thrives well, and is looked upon with favor.

It would be foolish to attempt to describe the glossy black plumage of this bird. His voice is more interesting, and less well known, the various calls and inflections, all having a definite meaning. Mr. Thompson Seton has described these calls in his book "Wild Animals I Have Known," and anyone interested should read the story of "Silverspot".

The crows nest in April and May, usually choosing a site suitable for a community. Here and there, however, isolated nests may be found far from any neighbors of their kind. In the neighborhood of Victoria, most of the crows raise their families on Chatham and Discovery Islands. Several nests are often found in one tree, and within the area of an acre several hundred crow homes are located. Here they return year after year, using the old nests as a foundation for the new ones, simply making necessary repairs and lining the inside with new cedar bark and sheep's wool. The reason the wool is used is because sheep are kept on the islands by the Indians, and the birds have found that this is a very suitable lining for the nests.

The four or five eggs are dull green, covered with dark spots so thickly that the eggs have a dark appearance. There are, however, many shades and degrees of markings, so that it is impossible to describe them for every case.

Sometimes the nests are located not far from the ground, in the small yew trees that line the shore, and sometimes they may be in the topmost fork of the highest Douglas fir. I have known crows to nest in low bushes; one in particular that I remember being on Bare Island, in the Gulf of Georgia.

It was on Bare Island that I was once photographing gulls on their nests. I had built a hide and was waiting the return of the bird as usual. In this particular case the gull was rather suspicious, and half an hour passed before it decided that it was safe to return. It perched on a hillock near by and walked in the direction of the nest, and a minute later would have been seated on the eggs. Just at that moment, however, a crow passed by. He at once sensed danger, and gave his danger call: "Caw caw." The gull was warned and flew away, refusing to return again that afternoon. Evidently the crow was cleverer than the gull and the latter knew it, and trusted his sagacity.

Everyone has heard how the crows recognize a gun. When a man is carrying a gun, they keep at a respectful distance, while if the

A PET CROW

weapon is left behind, they become at once more trustful. They also can tell the difference between a gun and a walking-stick.

Some years ago a young crow was captured on one of the gulf islands, and raised by hand. So interesting was it that it soon became the family pet. Taking precedence of the cat and dog in the attentions of the family, it soon became like a spoiled child. It was teased a good deal, and responded by becoming impudent. It soon learned that a gun was dangerous, and it resented any member of the family using it. Let the boy take down the gun and point it in the direction of the crow, and the latter would make a dash for the offender, pecking and striking with its wings until the weapon was put aside.

I have known a good many crows that have been raised in semi-captivity, and I cannot think of any more interesting pets. Dr. Calvert's children once raised two that they took from a nest in the Uplands. They were always allowed their liberty, but were fed and petted to such an extent that they continued tame long after they had reached maturity. They were mischievous sometimes; but on the whole gave little trouble. Whenever they were hungry, which happened at least every hour, they would come down from the oak tree and squawk for food until satisfied. Such favorites were they that they were seldom neglected. After some months they acquired the habit of going away, at first for a few hours, and later staying away for a day or two at a time. They were now learning the scavenging habits of their kind, picking up clams from the beaches, and looking for scraps of any kind. Not having learned to fear everything and to be wary, they naturally fell victims to their trustfulness. One was shot when raiding a neighbor's garden, and the other went away, never to return.

One pair of young birds raised by my own family were the victims of untoward circumstances. Scarcely had they learned to feed themselves, when we went away on a long trip, leaving the birds with a friend who promised to take care of them. On our return, one was dead, and we found that the other had been kept confined in a small cage. We took him home and gave him the freedom of a large aviary, and the luxury of a bath. At once he fluttered into the shallow pan, and played there until thoroughly wet. It took him a long time to dry his feathers, but the next day he did the same thing, and that time his plumage never dried. He died the victim of his love for cleanliness.

The Bird that Sings on Its Nest

The most original of birds, so far as the coast district is concerned, is the vireo. It is the only bird that sings on its nest, and it is the only bird that suspends its nest beneath the bough of a tree or shrub. Then, too, it is one of the few birds that has a slight hook on the end of its bill, resembling in that respect the birds of prey. This hook is not so pronounced as in the shrike, but yet all the vireos have it.

The vireo is not well known except to ornithologists, and yet the bird is fairly common, especially at the south end of Vancouver Island.

WARBLING VIREO ON NEST

It is a little larger than the flycatcher, grey in color, with a suspicion of green. It might well be a cross between the flycatcher and the shrike, although it is nothing like as large or as bloodthirsty as the latter. The hooked bill is probably useful in catching the larger flies and insects, for this bird is an insect-eater like all its near relatives.

The nest is always suspended in the fork of a small bough. There the parent bird sits, hidden by its inconspicuous color, and singing from time to time a delightfully full, clear song, unhappily all too short, but exceedingly pleasing to the ear.

Like most other birds it adapts itself to the oncoming civilization. Some years ago I found a nest in the Oak Bay district adjoining the city of Victoria; and mixed with the grass and lichens were the torn transfer slips of the electric railway, the words "Oak Bay" being clearly decipherable from the outside of the nest.

The picture of the bird on her nest was taken near Swan Lake. The bough was that of the osoberry, and it was swaying in the wind, the bird apparently enjoying the movement. As the bough was beneath tall firs the light was poor and time had to be given to expose the enough to ensure a successful negative. The camera was set up, and half a dozen plates exposed, only one being of any value. That one was taken just as the bough paused before turning at the end of its sway.

The Hummingbird

Every one knows the hummingbird. As soon as spring breaks, it may be heard humming cheerfully around the wild currant trees, from the blossom of which it gathers tiny insects, catching them with its long slender bill, the while it balances itself on its glittering wings. Later it may be seen winging around the honeysuckles and nasturtiums taking a drink here and a tiny white spider there.

The opinion seems to be very general that the hummingbird lives on honey. Many of us have accepted the tradition without question; but careful investigators have shown us that we were wrong, and that the bird lives almost wholly on the minute creatures that inhabit the interior of the flower cups in the region of the nectar vessels. No trace of honey is found in the stomachs, but it would be too dogmatic to say that the bird never takes honey. We know, however, that it will sip from small water vessels hung near the flower, and will return to these again and again. Probably also in a similar way the bird takes water from the cups of the flowers, especially in the early morning when they are laden with dew.

The rufous-backed or red-backed hummingbird is the common variety on the North Pacific Coast. It is a gem of color in life, and even after death the plumage retains much of its beauty.

The nest is the smallest imaginable. It is always placed on the

YOUNG HUMMINGBIRD IN NEST

top of a bough, never wedged in a fork. The exterior is usually covered with lichens which give the nest somewhat the appearance of a knob or natural excrescence, such as is sometimes found on the fir. The two creamy eggs are marvels of daintiness, but when they hatch the young birds soon fill the nest and almost spill over.

One nest I found several years ago, on a low bough of a fir tree not more than two feet from the ground. It was an ideal place for photographing, but the light was poor and the results were not as good as could have been wished. When stubby feathers were beginning to take the place of wool on the young birds, one of them disappeared, where or how, I never knew. The young birds may have fought, and one pushed the other out, but more probably they were frightened and one jumped out.

The hummingbirds fight among themselves a good deal. Very commonly they may be seen chasing each other, especially if one comes near the nest of the other.

Cats are among the worst enemies the hummingbirds have. When the birds are feeding from the flowers near the ground, the cats lie in wait and spring upon them before they are aware of the danger. I have seen several killed in this way. Two I have taken from the cat's mouth after they had been caught, the one to fly away, apparently unhurt, and the other too late to be saved.

Like most of the migratory birds the hummers gather in flocks before leaving for the southland. In the autumn they may sometimes be seen in large numbers disporting themselves amidst a bed of late flowers. At that time they seem to agree much better than earlier in the season.

The Warblers

Of the birds that are really summer birds, and that never remain through the winter, the warblers are among the most numerous and most picturesque. They are nearly all decorated, more or less, with yellow, like most canaries, and in fact, they are often spoken of as wild canaries. Except in color and size they are not related to the

YELLOW WARBLER ON NEST, THREE FEET FROM GROUND

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canaries, for their food and habits are wholly different. While the canaries live almost wholly on seeds, the warblers live altogether on insects and other minute animal forms. Because of this, they stay here only during the summer season when insect life is plentiful. The first touch of autumn sends them flying southward to the lands of perpetual sunshine, where they remain until the following spring.

The two commonest warblers are the Alaska Yellow and the Lutescent. In appearance these birds are much alike, except that the yellow of the Lutescent variety is of a greenish shade, and the other more nearly of the brightest canary hue. Both have soft musical notes, but their song is seldom recognized because of their retiring disposition.

The Alaska Yellow warbler nests near the top of the Spirea or similar bush, from two to fifteen feet from the ground. The eggs are of a creamy color, partly covered with brown spots. The Lutescent variety nests on or near the ground, usually beneath small bushes or litter; and the spots on the eggs are of a redder color than the other.

I have found the parent birds of either variety very tame during the nesting season, but as with other birds, all depends on the individual. On a number of occasions I have tried to photograph them, but owing to difficulties with the light, have seldom succeeded in securing good negatives.

The risk these birds take in the inhabited districts seems very great; for I have known hundreds of nests that have been destroyed, sometimes soon after the eggs were laid, but often when the birds had become partly fledged.

The young of the Lutescent warbler often leave the nest early. This seems necessary as a means of self protection. The location of the nest makes it particularly accessible to snakes and other enemies. The result is that the little ones, long before they are covered with feathers, can run well, and will often make their escape from impending danger. By scattering as they leave the nest, there is always a chance for some of the brood to get away safely. It is a case of the survival of the fittest; the running powers being developed by selection. Those that cannot run are killed.

The Musical Wrens

The wrens are among the finest songsters that the Pacific Coast breeds. To see the tiny creatures with their heads turned upwards and bills open, trilling out a gladsome tune, is enough to make a human envious of the light hearted birds. Even in winter the western winter wren sings on sunny days, and that almost as blithely as in the summer.

There are or two three species of House wren, all of which nest in some hole or shelter; there is a Tule wren; and last but not least important, there is the Western Winter wren. The House wrens are larger than the others and are more common in the settled districts. They have the tiited tails and brown spotted appearance, which at once indicates the family to which they belong. They build large

nest which they line out with feathers, and the creamy eggs are typical of the birds that hide their nests beyond the reach of prying eyes. Often they use the woodpecker's hole or a natural hollow for a site.

ONE OF THE HAUNTS OF THE WESTERN WINTER WREN

The arm of a scarecrow does not look inviting to us, but that was the place chosen by one pair of Parkman's wrens in which to make their summer home. They carried in a lot of hay and lined it throughout. Inside of this they stuffed feathers, large on the outside but downy in the middle, and there they deposited their six pearly eggs. They commenced to sit, but about that time they were disturbed. A nature student went rumaging around and noticed the nest. He called to his aid the lady of the house adjoining and she with a scissors slit the sleeve until the eggs were exposed to view. After a photograph had been taken the sleeve was carefully sewn up, and the ordinary observer would not have known the difference. The wrens were not so ignorant. They found that their home had been disturbed, and they decided that it was not safe to continue to sit on the eggs. They went off to seek a new site, and the eggs were never hatched.

The Western Winter wren builds its nest in an upturned root or mossy nook in the deep woods, usually near a watercourse, and often in the dampest spot possible. Far from the madding crowd it lives, and makes music. During the coldest days of winter it may be seen, usually around a tiny streamlet, hopping about in the bushes, searching always for the minute animal forms on which it lives. The bird

is almost as curious as the squirrel. When any one stops to observe it, little is done to indicate that the intruder is noticed, but the bird hides in the thicket or behind a log, popping out now and then to observe, but always seeming to be searching for food.

Even in the far off solitudes there is sometimes excitement. One day as I was passing along a woodland path, I heard a cry of distress coming from some birds. I ran in the direction of the noise, and soon discovered a snake that had seized a young wren and was trying to swallow it. The parents were uttering the cries as they flew down at the reptile, but with no effect. I made a dash for it, but the crackling of bushes startled the snake and it let go the bird and escaped. Its victim was rescued too late, for it died almost immediately.

Those who do not know the western winter wren should make its acquaintance. It may be found anywhere in the coast region, in the valleys and on the hillsides. Even in the far north its voice is often heard hundreds of miles from the habitations of men.

The Rusty Song Sparrow

The Rusty song sparrow is darker in plumage, and more of an artist than the White Crown. Its song is more continuous and more melodious than that of its cousin. It differs from the Sooty variety only in that its plumage is not quite so dark.

During the winter this bird comes south to the region of the forty-ninth parallel, where it remains, unless the weather becomes unusually cold. It is more secretive and timid than the White Crown, and usually prefers to live at a short distance from human habitations. At times, however, when food becomes scarce, it is seen in our garden, gliding away as we approach, never going far, but hiding often in the smallest bush until danger is past.

In taking the photograph of the bird on the nest seen in the accompanying illustration, I set up the camera on the tripod

THE RUSTY SONG SPARROW'S NEST

while the bird was away after being disturbed. Thinking she would be very wild, I affixed a string to the exposure trigger, and retired a short distance to await her return. It was not long before her soft warning cry was heard, and then before I knew it, she had discovered and inspected me as I hid behind a bush. Apparently she was satisfied, for she returned to her nest and a picture was taken. In order to make sure I set the camera again, and before I had retired my little friend pushed her way through the reeds and was

WHITE CROWN SPARROW

YOUNG WARBLERS

BIRD VISITORS

Bird visitors come to my garden gay,
 Nor wear out their welcome though late
 All drest
 In their best
 They sing and they nest,
 They care not a jot for any behest,
 But they come when they will
 Enjoy life to the fill
 And never a fear of incurring a bill.
 And yet my bird visitors live under law
 From the wren with his song, to the crow
 Dame Nature just calls to them softly
 A miracle surely---away they all go.

BIRD VISITORS

e to my garden gay,
ir welcome though long they may stay.

ey nest,
ot for any behest,
hen they will
fill
of incurring a bill.
visitors live under law,
with his song, to the crow with his "Caw."
st calls to them softly, when lo!
--away they all go.

LUTESCENT WARBLER ON NEST

NEST OF WHITE-CROWN SPARROW

on the nest, sitting patiently there while I took as many photographs as I wanted.

Some birds are much tamer than others. I have known sparrows to allow me to touch them on the nest without being disturbed, while others would leave the moment they heard a footstep. It is all a matter of individuality. Like human beings they differ among themselves, some being much braver than others.

The White-Crowned Sparrow

The house sparrow that scavengers around in our streets, now quarrelling with a neighbor, now chirping with a rather coarse voice such as becomes such a life, is not a native; but there is another sparrow that is common here, that is an altogether different sort of bird. I refer to the White-crowned sparrow.

The White-crown is probably the best known of all the western sparrows, although the Chipping sparrow is almost as common. The three white stripes running from front to back on the top of its head gives it its name. But it has other names. There are a number of different species of this bird, but the differences are so slight that they are hardly worth mentioning. They represent more a difference in habitat than anything else.

This bird has a clear musical voice, but it uses only two or three notes, and its song is short. When heard at midnight, however, it is particularly pleasant to the ear, and weird too, coming out of the silences like the voice of a spirit. There is indeed something almost uncanny about all the native sparrows. They hide so quickly amid the bushes, trained thereto in their endeavor to keep out of the way of the birds of prey that are so numerous everywhere.

The white-crown builds a nest of grass, usually in a bush not far from the ground; but often I have found them right on the ground, and again some have been a foot or two beyond my reach. The eggs, four or five in number, are dull green, and covered with brown spots that give them a brownish appearance.

This bird is largely insectivorous, but it also feeds on the seeds of the dandelion. This is an acquired taste; for I am told that before the advent of the white man there were no dandelions in this country.

Closely related to the finches, the native sparrows are all seed-eaters at times, but insects seem to form their favorite food.

WHITE-CROWN'S NEST IN OLD CAN

A Royal Scavenger

It is the power, the freedom, the purity, and the innocence of the seagull that impresses the observer. There is also a quiet dignity about the bird which seems to stamp him an aristocrat of the oldest of families. With what artistic curves and dignified swoops he follows a ship, and even though he disgraces himself now and then by getting into a family brawl when the cook empties a box of refuse into the sea, it is generally allowed that this is simply a little failing which has to be winked at. After squawking and fluttering among a

GULL, PANTING IN THE HEAT OF THE NOONDAY SUN

heap of relatives in the wake of the ship until all the refuse has been swallowed, or more properly bolted, the big glaucous-winged fellow comes flying after the vessel with the most dignified of expressions, and the powerful sweeps of his pinions soon send him alongside once more.

To look at the gull, no one would suspect him of being a scavenger. His plumage is so spotless. The white of his breast is as the purest snow intensified by the contrast with the lead colored back and wing tips. There is not a suspicion of his being bedraggled or tainted by his occupation. Probably his occupation may not have been really scavenging until the coming of the big ships to the coast. At anyrate he can fish for himself when it becomes necessary, and he can live on shell fish, which he cracks open by the same expedient that the crow uses. Taking a bivalve in his bill he swoops upward to

a height of anywhere from twenty to one hundred feet, lets it fall on the pebbles beneath, and then descends to feed on it, if the shell is broken. If it is not broken he repeats the operation.

There are a number of different varieties of gulls frequenting the Pacific Coast, but only one variety nests along the coast of British Columbia. Many of them go inland to the swamps and small lakes of the interior. The Glaucous-winged gull makes its summer home on the small islands that surround Vancouver Island. One or two of these islands on the West Coast are well known, and in the Gulf of Georgia there are several. The nearest to civilization is Bare Island, a rocky islet not far from Sidney, and less than twenty miles from Victoria. There several thousand adult birds raise their young every year; and there, as at other points, the Indians raid the nests and use the eggs for food. A number of other birds such as guillemots, puffins, cormorants, and oyster catchers also nest there; but in smaller numbers than the gull.

If you visit Bare Island during the nesting season, you will notice many of the big, white-looking birds sitting on the rocks as you approach. Before you get near enough to debark they will rise into the air with shrill screams, and this will be continued until you have landed and obscured yourself from sight. At intervals of the day and night this screaming is repeated, and often when I have been on the island I have thought that some boat must be approaching, but investigation proved this not to be the case. Even at midnight the alarm is sometimes given, and then all the gulls from one end of the island to the other set up a great screeching, which at night sounds more striking than during the day.

Accompanied by a youthful naturalist I spent nearly a week there photographing gulls, guillemots, and other birds. We had a number of opportunities to secure specimens of the eggs of cormorants, puffins, and beautifully marked varieties of the eggs of gull or guillemot; but if I suggested taking any of them, my young naturalist at once expostulated, sometimes with the remark, "Well, you know what I think about it." The result was that we did not take an egg, although we found hundreds, probably thousands.

The nests are made of weeds on the ledges of the rocks or on the bare ground, but the increased dangers of recent years have induced some of them to build their nests beneath the bushes. Two or three eggs are laid, greenish cream-colored, covered more or less thickly with spots of dark, rich brown. They are about the size of a very large hen's egg; immense eggs considering the size of the bird.

The young birds are the most curious little creatures. They are somewhat the same color as the eggs. Their upper parts are mottled, and when they crouch in a niche of the rocks or on the brown sun-burnt grass, they are almost invisible. As soon as they are hatched they will wander off, especially if in any way disturbed, in which case they can run very fast. Sometimes one little bird, having hatched before the others, wanders off leaving the mother sitting upon the other eggs. It is almost impossible to induce the young birds to pose for a photograph. Even if a hut is built near a nest of young the chances are that by the time the photographer is hidden the birds will be marching off across country, travelling perhaps fifty yards be-

YOUNG GULLS

When the nests are built on the ledges of the overhanging cliffs, the young birds often fall on the rocks below and are killed. They will take any risks in order to get away from an enemy. If brought to bay they sometimes vomit up large chunks of fish. This may be part of their defense, for a marauding bird of prey usually prefers fish to young gull.

I have never seen the old birds feeding their young, and have often wondered if they ever do it during the day. I am inclined to think they are fed early in the morning and late in the evening.

When the sun is blazing, the rocks and the sitting birds become intensely hot. Then the mother takes deep breaths, sitting for hours with the mouth wide open, the larynx also widely enough extended to stick the finger in, and the sides of the bird expanding and contracting. Her panting can be clearly heard some yards away. On several occasions I have failed to secure such pictures as I wanted, simply because the bird's mouth being wide open disfigured her so much.

Throughout the winter the Glaucous-winged gull with many other varieties frequent the harbors along the British Columbia shore, feeding chiefly on the refuse thrown overboard from the coasting vessels. Sometimes they are attracted in almost countless numbers to the harbors where the herrings are running. This is especially noticeable at Nanaimo, where there are a great many herring salteries. They perch on the rigging of the ships plying back and forth, and become so tame at times, that they will take food from the hands of those aboard.

The winter plumage of the gull is not as white and clear as that worn in the nesting season. Like other birds they put on the best

clothes during the love-making period.

All gulls are protected by law from gunners, and it is very seldom that they are injured, for they are looked upon as of royal blood, and indeed their dignity warrants the presumption.

PIGEON GUILLEMOTS

The Pigeon Guillemot at Home

Few people imagine that there is such a marked dissimilarity in the temperament of the different varieties of sea birds. The gull is very majestic, with no sense of humor or spirit of fun. Whether the bird is soaring in the air or swimming in the water, it is always the same. It is ever on its dignity. The guillemot, on the other hand, is just the opposite. When seen flying close to the surface of the water it moves with spirit, and often seems to be racing. When in its real home, however, during the nesting season, is where it really enjoys itself.

About a thousand guillemots make their summer homes on Bare Island. There they spend several months, during which period they raise their families, and incidently have a most enjoyable time. There are a great many gulls on the island as well as the guillemots, but, while they live very near together, they do not associate in the true sense of the word. The gulls look on at the pranks of the smaller birds, but they never take part.

The guillemots are about the size of pigeons, which they very much resemble in appearance. Their wings are, however, much shorter than pigeons', and their red feet are webbed. Owing to the fact that their wings are so short, they have to move them very fast. Still,

they fly well, and rise from the water with ease. They also dive and swim well, getting their food from the water. In color they are black, with white markings on the wings. They have very short tail feathers, but in place of this they spread their feet behind them when flying, using them as a rudder, in the same way in which most birds do their tails.

During some days on the island my chum and I spent hours watching the birds in their games and securing many photographs. "Tag" seems to be their favorite game. Usually the game is played by two birds, although sometimes three or four take part.

Picture to yourself hundreds of the birds sitting on the rocks along the rugged shore of the little island. Some are almost asleep, others are talking to each other with the peculiar hissing voice of theirs, while yet others are trying to crowd their neighbors off the rocks.

One stands erect and gives its wings a flap, as if to challenge another to a race. At once he is away, and the other after him. The challenger drops into the sea at a distance of from one to two hundred yards from shore. The pursuer may follow, diving after him, and perhaps giving him a nip either in the air or in the water. Then they return to the rocks, and the game is taken up by some others.

GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL AT NEST, BARE ISLAND

The fun continues throughout the morning hours. Sometimes a bird catches a small fish as it dives beneath the water. It then flies with it to the shore, as if challenging some other to take it away.

Almost invariably there is a chase, the pursuer sometimes following the other beneath the water, and at other times waiting for the diver to come to the surface again. Perfect good-humor seems to prevail throughout, the games being apparently tests of skill in flying and diving.

The guillemots lay their eggs in a crevice in the rocks, sometimes a long way from the surface, and at others quite exposed, although the latter seems to be rather an exception to the rule. It is not difficult to catch the parent birds on their nests, but in doing so it is desirable to exercise great care, as they defend themselves fiercely with their bills. Even the little birds a day or two old know how to use their bills with effect.

The young birds are black, woolly, little creatures, with a white speck on the top of their bills. When taken from the nest they crouch low, and when their nests are invaded try to scramble into the innermost recesses among the rocks. The parent birds do not seem to go near them during the day; at least, I have never seen them fed. The lad and I watched them for nearly a week at a stretch without observing any feeding. It is suggested that both these birds and the gulls feed their young by night, but of this I have no ocular evidence. That they commence flying very early in the morning --before three o'clock--is sure, for when camping on the island we heard them flying over our tent before that time every morning.

Often the nests of the gulls and guillemots are in close proximity, the former being in the open, while the latter are beneath the loose rock, perhaps a few feet away. I managed to photograph one of the guillemots on her nest when in a position of this kind. There was a small entrance hole a foot or two from the eggs, but by removing a loose stone I was able to point the camera right into the nest where the mother was sitting. She did not move, although I gave an exposure of over a minute. One such photograph is ample pay for hours or even days of hard work. It is the nature photographer's reward.

While we usually speak of the nest of a guillemot, there is in reality no nest. The eggs are laid on the earth or rock, as the case may be, usually on soft earth. There is no attempt whatever to form a nest. In one or two cases I fancied that the small stones had been gathered to make a suitable bed on which the eggs might rest, much as in the case of the oyster-catcher, but of this I could not be sure, as the pebbles or stones might have been placed there by some other means.

The eggs, two in number, have a creamy-white ground, but are spotted and blotched in a most picturesque manner. They appear as if they had been painted at one or two operations. First there is a spotting of light brown, which looks as if it were made from a thin solution. Over this may be one or two other blotchings of rich browns, varying almost to black. They are about the size of small hens' eggs, like many other seabirds' eggs, very large for the birds that lay them.

When sitting on the rocks the guillemots make one of the prettiest pictures I have seen. They are fairly tame, although it is difficult to

obtain satisfactory photographs without building hides near the rocks which they frequent. This was how the photograph used in the accompanying illustration was taken.

Guillemots nest at a great many points around Vancouver Island usually on high, rocky islets, and in company with gulls, puffins and cormorants. They are a little-known bird, as they do not frequent the harbors during the winter. To those who are interested in ornithology, however, they are a most interesting study.

NEST OF HOUSE WREN IN SLEEVE OF SCARECROW

Game Birds

The only native game birds that are at all common in British Columbia are the grouse. There are two varieties, the larger being the Blue or Mountain Grouse, and the smaller the Willow Grouse. As its name implies the Willow Grouse frequents the swamps and low places but in the winter the Blue Grouse moves well up the mountain sides where it has an endless supply of food in the fir and pine needles.

In the spring both of these birds may be heard as you wander through the woods. The Willow Grouse stands on a log and drums with its wings, perhaps reinforcing the sound with its voice. It is its love song. With care it is easy to watch the operation. At Comox one spring afternoon I was wandering in the woods with Mr. J.B. Bennett, at that time principal of the public school. We heard the whirring drum of the grouse not far distant, and, being desirous of investigating, crept slowly and carefully in the direction from which the sound came. Soon the drumming was repeated and it was louder than before. We were evidently getting near. Twenty paces farther we saw the bird sitting on a fallen log, and as we watched, it raised itself slowly, moved its wings up and down, slowly at first but gradually increasing the speed until they could hardly be seen, and the resultant hum was certainly curious. Time after time we saw it perform this curious antics. Perhaps the call was answered, but if it was we did not hear. At last we approached so near that the bird

noticed us and flew away.

Last spring was the first occasion on which I ever saw the Blue Grouse drumming, or, more properly, hooting.

At that time of year it is almost impossible to go to the woods without hearing the odd sound, but to find the bird is quite another thing. We were at Goldstream near the Niagara canyon. Climbing the hill for some distance above Malahat road, we sat on a log and listened to two grouse answering one another. One was on either side of us and not far away. The call coming from the south seemed the louder so I walked in that direction, peering everywhere for a sight of the author. Before long the sound seemed to come from the opposite direction, but I did not at once realize that I had passed the bird by. Returning to my companion I now thought to scan the limbs of the overhanging fir trees. Just as I was about to give up the search I caught sight of the big blue-grey chap sitting on a limb fifty feet from the ground and close to the trunk of the tree.

Taking out my field glasses I watched him as he called again and again in answer to his mate. Almost before the sound of the other bird's voice had died away my bird raised himself slightly, then drawing in his head and expanding his breast feathers he gave the hollow hoot about eight times and settled back to listen for the reply.

This was his way of making music for the world. At anyrate the call was music to his mate, for the answer came again and again and the big fellow had all the time an air of content, of lordliness, of possession --- such dignity as became a bird of his proportions. Here in the big forest he sang his weird song which seemed to have in it somewhat of the moaning of the wind among the trees, somewhat of vastness, but withal there was the spirit of joy and content such as comes only in the springtime of the year.

The California Quail that are so common at the Coast were imported into Vancouver Island in the sixties by Major Gillingham, a retired army officer who was a very keen student and lover of wild life. He kept them at Esquimalt in cages during the first winter, and when released they at once made themselves at home. Others have been introduced since, until today they are more numerous than any other game bird on the Island. In the neighborhood of the cities they are protected from gunners but they fall easy victims to the trapper. There are two varieties, the Valley Quail, and the Mountain Quail, the former being the most commonly found here.

Quail, like grouse, nest on the ground, laying from ten to twenty-five eggs. The young leave the nest as soon as hatched, and crouch and keep still on being given the signal to do so by the parent bird. It is quite common to find a nest full of shells from which the young have emerged, their position in the nest showing quite clearly that they had not been disturbed since the hatching took place.

The Ring-necked Pheasant, common everywhere on Vancouver Island and the lower mainland of British Columbia, was introduced into this country from China. It thrives well, but needs protection, as the size of the bird makes it so attractive to sportsmen. In some districts the pheasants are very tame, especially during the close season. In general habits they resemble very closely the domestic

fowl and will thrive in captivity, if given proper food and care.

A TYPICAL GROUSE'S NEST

Opinions vary as to the usefulness of the game birds and also as to the amount of damage they do to farmers, if any. Some claim that they are very destructive while others say that the pests they destroy much more than make up for any small toll they might take. Examination of the crops of birds, both here and in Great Britain, seems to indicate that they are very useful, and that they seldom eat anything that is of value to the farmer. The native grouse in particular live almost wholly on such things as may be found in a crab swamp or on a hillside of the densest woods.

The Skylark

Several attempts have been made to import English songbirds into this country but without success except in the case of the Skylark. This bird is particularly hardy. It thrives even in small cages, if given the proper food, and sings in the spring as it sits on a grassy turf.

The climate of British Columbia seems particularly suited to this songster. It has become quite accustomed to western life; and it lives and sings for the enjoyment of the select few who go to the fields to hear it.

The Skylark nests on the ground. It divides its time between sitting or running on the green sward and soaring in the air, sometimes almost in the clouds. It is a brown, unpretentious bird, not quite as large as the Meadow Lark, but its voice, coming from the great spaces overhead, fills its world with music.

The Larks on the south end of Vancouver Island do not seem to migrate. They live in the same fields winter and summer. They sing at intervals throughout the year, but it is in the spring that they are at their best. It is quite a common thing to hear three, four, or half a dozen singing at the same time, far above the world, mere specks to the eyes, but to the ears, full-toned, joyous.

These birds were imported by the Natural History Society on two different occasions, and each importation was successful. They are spreading slowly and it is thought have become firmly established.

Birds of the Swamp

There is not much life in the heart of the British Columbia woods. Now and then a squirrel will chirp and scold, and a woodpecker may be heard tapping on a dead tree trunk. Even the deer and the bear and the panther prefer the open glades or river valleys. The tell-tale newly fallen snow discloses little of the wild life, for there is little to disclose. The deep woods are deserted. The open swamps, however, are totally different. Let me tell of a visit to one of these:

It was a partly drained area, close to a village, with the high road passing it, and it was only seven or eight miles from the city of Victoria. Two friends took advantage of our motor car going that way to get a lift on a mountain climbing expedition. They remained in the swamp long enough only to pluck a few botanical specimens, and then hid them away to the hills. We remained for several hours, and only the persistent call of other duties made us drag ourselves away from the enchanting spot.

Why did we like the swamp? Our friends the birds were there, and we enjoyed being near them. They, however, did not like us much, for they did not recognize us as friends.

We found much to interest us among the spirea bushes, in the willow trees, and among the other rank growths of the soft, spongy, low

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land. We came very near to causing a tragedy, but happily we also were able to avert it. Mother love in the bird world was everywhere apparent, and much of cleverness, of ingenuity, and of adaptability to circumstances was evident on every hand.

Take the case of the Rail that made her nest and laid ten beautiful eggs on the ground, well hidden by grass which covered all sign of the home life of the birds. There were plenty of other suitable tufts and fine places for concealment. There were long, rank growths and bushy thickets. This particular pair of birds chose instead a level, open vista with the grass just high enough to cover them, but with the one advantage that the boggy ground gave way at that point, being little more than a weedy covering over a slimy bog. The careful planning of the human mind could not have chosen better.

This swamp was the home of many Coot in days gone by, but of late they have not appreciated the draining of the bog which has been going on, and many have left. A few remained, however, for there were still places where their nests might float on the water amid the thickets, giving the young the advantage of being able to slip into the protecting element when very small, thus avoiding their principal enemies, the snakes and hawks.

The presiding genius of the place, however, is the Redwing. This bird gives the warning of danger to all others, for its call is most insistent and persistent. No sooner did we appear on the banks of the swamp than a pair of these birds took notice of us and commenced their jarring cries. As we advanced they flew around us and hovered overhead. With signs as plain as words they told us that they were intensely interested in that swamp, and before we left we found that there were eggs, tiny hatchlings, and also youthful flappers that were trying, too young, to explore the fastnesses of the outer world. The eggs, three in number, blue and spotted, were in a nest in a willow tree as high as I could reach. The tiny youngsters were scarce three feet from the ground at the base of a willow bush and surrounded by swamp grass, the nest itself made of grass, cleverly woven to the willow stems. The other nest we did not find but we found one of the venturesome birds.

The young Blackbird was not black but striped with brown, and the woolly tufts of the nestling still clung to it. We spied it clinging to the spirea bushes. After photographing we wanted a closer inspection. To avoid this the little chap flew down amid the bushes and hid on the ground. There we left it, and were packing up the camera when suddenly a great noise of screeching from the little one and of calling and fluttering from the parent birds drew us back to the spot, where we were just in time to rescue our little friend from the jaws of a powerful snake. The reptile had seized the bird by one wing, and was commencing to swallow it. Already the wing had disappeared and in a minute the whole body would have been gone.

I seized the snake by the tail and lifted it from the ground, and the boy tried to extricate the bird from the cruel jaws. Even yet the snake would not let go, so I again placed it on the ground and struck it with my heel. Then the jaws relaxed, and the boy was able to pull the poor little feathered victim away, frightened almost

to death, but otherwise quite unhurt.

"Shall I kill the snake?" I inquired of the boy, as we prepared to go on our way again.

"No, do not hurt it," was the reply. "That is the way they live. Why should we kill it?"

The Oregon Towhee

Anywhere on the Coast in the neighborhood of cities the Towhee or Cheewink may be seen; but it is seldom that a very definite view can be obtained. No sooner does a visitor appear than the bird dives for cover among old brush, dead sticks, or thick bushes. He is a bird of the underbrush where he skulks along with the native sparrows. It seems as if the greatest enemies of the insect eating birds in this country must be the hawks and owls, for so many of the harmless varieties stick close to the brush, probably for protection.

The Towhee is considerably smaller than the robin. It has red sides, dark upper parts, but with white spots on the wings and white tips to the tail feathers. Its voice when in trouble resembles somewhat the "meaw" of a cat and this call gives it the name of Catbird.

The nesting site of the Towhee is on the ground, usually beneath bushes or at the edge of a clump. The eggs are greyish, spotted with brown, and are not easily distinguished from the surrounding foliage.

This bird winters in British Columbia in sheltered spots although it is probable that there is a more or less general southward movement, the birds from Northern B.C. for instance wintering in Southern B.C. and those nesting on Vancouver Island going across the Straits to the State of Washington for the winter.

Insects provide most of the food for the Towhee, but this diet is varied by an admixture of weed seeds. The bird is perfectly harmless and is seldom molested except by the ignorant. If it takes a fancy to a locality it does not seem to mind the presence of human intruders, but it seldom exposes itself unnecessarily. It is often seen in the company of other birds such as the sparrow and the wren, but seldom in the company of its fellows.

The House Sparrow

The introduction of the House Sparrow to this continent is generally looked upon by bird lovers as a great misfortune. The bird is so aggressive and so prolific that nothing can stop its over-running the bird world. Its voice is not pleasant; its habits are not looked upon with favor; and, worst of all, it drives out the other birds which formerly frequented the neighborhoods where it has taken possession. Undoubtedly the sparrow has been found guilty, but that is as far as we can go. It still continues the Biblical injunction to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, and it does so with such good effect that it has to have a regular migration to get rid of the surplus population.

Personally I love the little chap. He may lack all the virtues which make a bird loveable to the ordinary mortal, but his courage and audacity appeal to me very strongly. His adaptability to changing circumstances, and his Bohemian mode of life, stamp him a Philistine of the bird world.

The House Sparrow is typically Anglo-Saxon. He has pushed his way into almost every quarter of the inhabited globe. He holds his own, fights his way, keeps his head erect, and does not seem to care a honk who is around or what enemies he is likely to meet. He is liable to keep this up until he secures world-dominion.

Have you ever noted the fine appearance of the cock-sparrow? His black cravat distinguishes him from his mate. His bill is heavy and strong, admirably suited for seed eating. In England he is fond of taking the wheat from the ear in the fields. Here he finds plenty of food without doing that. The world-conquest on which he has set out is not a musical business, so he has a voice that becomes a fighter. Perhaps in ages to come when the world is subdued and he begins to live a life of ease, his voice will change and he will fill the world with music. At present his chirp is decidedly harsh, but he can be taught to sing.

Even those who profess to detest the English Sparrow must bow down to him as king of the bird world. Hail to the conqueror!

MOUNT BAKER

The Value of Bird Study

Anything which takes the mind away from the sordid grind of business or professional duties is of value. Anything which tends to develop the fine artistic taste, the powers of observation, and the musical sense, all in one, is a hobby much to be desired. That is what bird study does, and more. It takes people out into the fresh air, gives them vigor, and cultivates within them a feeling of kinship with the wild life of the woods and fields. In the quest for birds will be found many other beautiful and enjoyable things. Compared with other branches of natural history bird study is easy. It is within the reach of all, and there is scarcely any time of year when it is out of season.

It is possible that from a perusal of this booklet someone may become interested in bird life. If so, any small effort of mine in preparing material and writing and printing will have been amply repaid. As I write this final page I realize more than ever before how inadequate are my efforts. Dozens of interesting pictures had to be left out because of the cost of making the engravings. A number of intimate bird friends have been neglected because my material was not nearly complete. At some future time I hope to publish another booklet dealing with these; and perhaps some day I may be able to combine them into one volume with the other photographs added.

To the Winter Wren

Thy voice and beauty record hath,
Not in the human written word,
But in the wild unbeaten path,
In Nature's book, O little bird.

Newton F. Pullen

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.. AND CEASELESSLY, IN MANY CLIMES AND MANY LANDS,
THE GREAT PACIFIC ROLLS UPON THE SHIFTING SANDS."