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A BOY TRIES TO WALK TO AMERICA

A ROCK WITHOUT A RAT

AILSA CRAIG CLEARED OF ITS PESTS

How the Birds were Saved on
a Scottish Islet

END OF A GRIM BATTLE

By Our Natural Historian

From Darwin's day to our own travellers in far seas have recorded with disgust the destruction of young terns and other seabirds by grisly land crabs. Of late we have had something quite as horrifying in home waters.

Ailsa Craig, that noble islet which stands as a sea-shouldering sentinel at the mouth of the Clyde, has been for years the scene of horrid carnage, with birds as the victims and rats as the murderers.

The home from time immemorial of multitudes of gannets, guillemots, razor-bills, kittiwakes, puffins, and herring gulls, the islet was invaded some thirty years ago by rats which swam off from a sinking ship. These multiplied, and hordes not only besieged the homes of the families of the men who work the quarries of the Craig, but set up a sustained campaign against the birds.

A Friend in Need

The rodents penetrated the nests in the hillside and there devoured eggs and nestlings. Under these irresistible onslaughts the puffins, which formerly teemed there, so declined in numbers that a year ago very few survived.

Now, if we remove the source of danger before it is too late, Nature can almost invariably repair artificial ravages. Here, just in time, that splendid friend of feathered life, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, came to the rescue.

They spent £160 on the task, and have won a victory worth a hundred times their outlay. They strewn a vast number of baits. Many of these were eaten by the birds and by domestic animals without the least ill result. But to the rats the preparation was fatal.

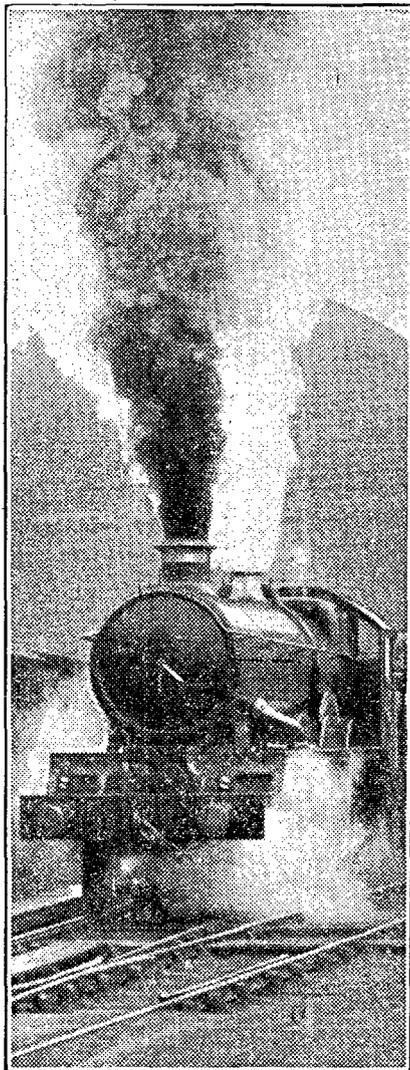
A Restored Sanctuary

At one time it was difficult to walk abroad at night without treading on scurrying rats; today not a rat is to be found on Ailsa Craig.

Following regular runs, the vermin had established paths, as sheep do; now those tracks are overgrown with grass. The homes and property of the islanders are at last secure. But, best of all, the Craig has once again become a sanctuary for the birds of the sea. The great rocky home is re-established as a nursery where Nature may renew her local stream of bird life and re-people the seas with beautiful forms.

It is a fine story, and the Society tells it with pride and hope; pride in the achievement, hope that their triumph will induce new friends to come to their

The Race of the Giants



The Great Western and the London and North-Eastern Railways changed engines for a friendly test on their respective lines, with very interesting results. Here we see on the left the Great Western engine pulling the Scottish express out of King's Cross, and on the right the North-Eastern engine leaving Paddington with the Cornish Riviera express. See page 4



THE BOY WHO RAN AWAY AND WHAT HE IS DOING NOW

How He Tried to Walk to
America and Arrived at Last
ROGER BACON'S OLD PAPERS

Years ago, in the Russian parts of Poland, a boy of nine read the famous old story of The Last of the Mohicans.

He was so sorry for the poor Mohicans. He wanted to save them. He thought he would go to America, and help the Mohicans and become their king. But a king always had a queen. So he told the whole story to his ten-year-old girl friend. She was thrilled, and they ran away together.

Sent Thrice to Siberia

For three days they walked and walked. But the police found them one night asleep in a haystack, wet through, for it was raining. So they were taken home, and they both had pneumonia.

When the boy was older he joined a Polish secret society at school to study Polish history and literature; but it was discovered, and he was sent to Siberia. After a few months he escaped, but was caught and sent back again.

Some years later he escaped once more, returned to Warsaw, and studied at the university. His activities in secret organisations sent him to Siberia for the third time, but he eventually escaped to Tibet. From there he went to England, and is now known as the great bibliographer, Wilfrid Michael Voynich.

He still has adventures, though of a different sort. A few years ago in an old castle he found a bundle of manuscripts. They were very old. When he looked at the drawings he saw that they were of cells and sections of plants that can only be seen with a microscope; yet the manuscripts were undoubtedly earlier than the invention of the microscope.

Roger Bacon's Secret

He bought them and took them to America. Scientists studied them. They were written in some strange code, and the key could not be found. They were evidently the precious manuscripts of Roger Bacon, for no other man at that time had such a reputation for learning.

At last, one day Mr. Voynich took the manuscripts to a chemist. A loose leaf fell into a bowl of some photographic acid. Suddenly a strange diagram appeared on the blank page. It was the longed-for key to the code.

But even then much work was necessary before the treasure could be read. Professor Newbold of Chicago has spent two years in deciphering the first section of the manuscript, which will soon be ready for publication, and then we shall read how many of our modern discoveries were known to that old-world friar.

aid to enable them to carry on their work elsewhere.

But we need some such body to lead a similar crusade against rats in our towns and villages. We have an Act of Parliament which is supposed to compel us to destroy rats and mice. Like many other Acts, this one is a dead letter. Few people know how to set it in operation, and here is the sort of thing which happens.

A lady's house is over-run by rats, though no food is left accessible to them. They climb a pipe from the outside and enter her bathroom, whence they carry the toilet soap down to the ground floor. They bring in bones from without and choke the chimney of her gas stove. They gnaw pipes and create danger from water and gas.

The Act is invoked and experts are called in, who charge her £2 for clearing the house, then tell her, "But, madam, these rats are only colonising; their home and nursery are on the premises of your neighbour, and he refuses to let us enter his grounds to get at the seat of the mischief."

That is typical of what is happening everywhere. One scrupulous person

does his duty; there is no compulsion upon the neighbours. So rats increase in numbers and destructiveness, costing us, it is estimated, a million pounds a week in material damage, as well as bringing foul and deadly disease into our homes.

We have an Act which, if consistently applied, would exterminate every rat in the kingdom. It is not applied, and rats grow greater in multitude every day. It has remained for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to show what really can be done in the matter. E. A. B.

THE AIRMAN INSPECTOR

So many long-distance overhead wires are being used to supply electric power that their supervision is becoming very difficult. These lines often amount to hundreds of miles in length, and are always subject to damage by fierce gales or thunderstorms.

A new light aeroplane has been built in Germany for inspecting these lines from the air. It has been so built that the observer can look directly below him, and in four hours inspect 250 miles of high-tension overhead wires.