THE FARALLON ISLANDS.

By CHARLES NORDEOFF.

The Farallon Islands, known as the Faralones, or, more fully, the Faralones de los Frailes, lie about six miles off the Golden Gate, the famous entrance of San Francisco Bay. Farallon is a Spanish word, meaning a small pointed islet in the sea.

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R BEGIN THE PROMENADE—GATHERING MURE'S BUSHES.

I f you approach the harbor of San Francisco from the west, your first sight of land will be a collection of picturesque rocks known as the Farallones, or, more fully, the Farallones de los Frailes. They are six rugged islets, whose peaks lift their heads in picturesque masses out of the ocean, twenty-three and a half miles from the Golden Gate, the famous entrance of San Francisco Bay. Farallon is a Spanish word, meaning a small pointed islet in the sea.

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fog-whistle which is one of the most curious contrivances of this kind in the world. It is a huge trumpet, six inches in diameter at its smaller end, and blown by the rush of air through a cave or passage connecting with the ocean.

One of the numerous caves worn into the rocks by the surf had a hole at the top, through which the incoming breakers violently expelled the air they carried before them. Such escape-holes are not uncommon on rugged, rocky coasts. There are several on the Mendocino coast, and a number on the shores of the Sandwich Islands. This one, however, has been utilized by the ingenuity of man. The mouth-piece of the trumpet or fog-whistle is fixed against the aperture in the rock, and the breakers, dashes in with venomous spite, or the huge bulging wave which would dash a ship to pieces and drown her crew in a single effort, now blows the fog-whistle and warns the mariner off. The sound thus produced has been heard at a distance of seven or eight miles. It has a peculiar effect, because it has no regular period; depending upon the irregular coming in of the waves, and upon their similarly irregular force, it is blown somewhat as an idle boy would blow his penny trumpet. It ceases entirely for an

The Farallones are seldom visited by travelers or pleasure-seekers. The wind blows fiercely here most of the time; the ocean is rough; and to persons subject to seasickness the short voyage is filled with the misery of that disease. Yet they contain a great deal that is strange and curious. On the highest point of the South Farallon the government has placed a light-house, a brick tower seventeen feet high, surmounted by a lantern and illuminating apparatus. It is a revolving white light, showing a prolonged flash of ten seconds duration once in a minute. The light is about 360 feet above the sea, and with a clear atmosphere is visible from a position ten feet high, twenty-five and a half miles distant; from an elevation of sixty feet it can be seen nearly thirty-one and a half miles away; and it is plainly visible from Sulphur Peak on the main-land, 3471 feet high and sixty-four and a half miles distant. The light-house is in latitude 37° 41' 8" north, and longitude 123° 50' 05" west.

On our foggy Western coast it has been necessary to place the light-houses low, because if they stood too high their light would be hidden in fog-banks and low clouds. The tower on the South Farallon is therefore low; and this, no doubt, is an advantage also to the light-keepers, who are less exposed to the buffetings of the storm than if their labor and care lay at a higher elevation.

As the Farallones lie in the track of vessels coming from the westward to San Francisco, the light is one of the most important, as it is also one of the most powerful on our Western coast; and it is supplemented by a
hour and a quarter at low water, when the moon of the cove or passage is exposed.

The life of the keepers of the Farallon is singularly lonely and monotonous. Their houses are built somewhat under the shelter of the rocks, but they live in what to them is a constant and unfailing store of food; the ocean roars in their ears day and night; the boom of the surf is their constant and only music; the wild scream of the sea-birds, the howl of the sealions, the whistle and shrill chink of the gulls, the dashing against the breakers of the vast breakers, the ear-splitting howl and howl of the wild beasts, the upper tips of the cliffs, and the bark and howl and shriek and roar of the coves and the sea. They live in the winter months in their supply vessels, which for the most part are their only connection with the world, and are sometimes unable to make a landing for weeks at a time. Chance visitors they see only occasionally, and at that distance at which a steamer is safe from the surf, and at which a girl could not even recognize her lover.

The commerce of San Francisco passes before their eyes, but so far away that they can not tell the ships and steamers which sail by them voiceless and without greeting; of the events passing on the planet with which they have so frail a social tie they learn only at long and irregular intervals. The change from sunshine to fog is the chief variety in their lives; the hasty landing of supplies, the great event in their months. They can not even watch the growth of trees and plants; they are bound in such a place, sunny and sheltered under the shelter of rocks probably the ideal of human felicity.

Except the rock of Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic Ocean, I have never seen an inhabited spot so entirely isolated, so entirely separated from the world, whose people appear to me to have a slender hold on mankind. Yet for those who have left their mothers, appear to have no rights which any one is bound to respect. They get out of the way with an abrupt promptness which proves that they live in terror of the stronger members of the community; but they do not give up their places without harsh complaints and penalties groans.

Plastered against the rocks, and with their little and apparently harmless shapes confirmed to the rule and sharp angles, they are a wonderful, but not a graceful or pleasing sight. At a little distance they look like huge moggots, and their slow, ungraciously motions among the rocks do not lessen this resemblance. Swimming in the ocean, at a distance from the land they are inconspicuous objects, as nothing but the head of the aves at the time of the mouth of the river and at the last and imminent moment, with an adroit twist of their bodies, avoid the shock, and, living, re-appear beyond the breaker.

As I sat, fascinated with this weird spectacle of the sealions, which seemed to me like an unaltered pining into some hidden and monstrous secret of nature, I could better realize the fantastic and brutal wildness of life in the earlier geological ages, when monsters and giants dwelled about our unripe planet, and brute force of muscles and lungs ruled among the populous hosts of beasts which, fortunately for us, have perished, leaving us only this great wild sea-beast as a faint reminiscence of their existence. I wondered what Dante would have thought—and what new verses his gloomy imagination would have con-
other birds. The gull begins to lay about the middle of May, and usually ten days before the murres. The gull makes a rude nest of brush and seaweed upon the rocks; the murres does not take even this much trouble, but lays its eggs in any convenient place on the bare rocks.

The gull sometimes gets done, but the murres continue to lay for about two months. The egg season lasts, therefore, from the 10th or 20th of May until the last of July. In this period the egg companies, which has for eighteen years worked this field gathered in 1872, 17,052 dozen eggs, and in 1873 15,200 dozen. These brought last year in the market an average of twenty-six cents per dozen. There has been, I was told by the manager, no sensible decrease in the number of the birds or the eggs for twenty years.

From fifteen to twenty men are employed during the egg season in collecting and shipping the eggs. They live on the island during that time in rude shanties near the usual landing place. The work is not amusing, for the birds seek out the most accessible places, and all the men must follow, climbing often where a goat would almost hesitate. But this is not the worst. The gull sits on her nest, and resists the robber who comes for her eggs, and he must take care not to get bitten. The murres remains until her enemy is close upon her; then she rises with a scream which often startles a thousand or two of birds, who whirl up into the air in dense masses, scattering filth and grumo over the eggs. Nor is this all. The gulls, whose season of breeding is soon past, are extravagantly fond of murres eggs; and these rapacious birds follow the egg-gatherers, hover over their heads, and no sooner is a murres's nest uncovered than the bird swoops down, and the gull will snatch the prize from under his nose. So greedy and so active are the gulls that they sometimes even wound the eggs, striking them with their beaks. But if the gull gets an egg, he flies up with it, and, tossing it up, swallow,

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the female on the nest, and also watches to assist the attacks of the gull, which not only destroys the eggs, but also eats the young. The murre feeds on sea-grass and jelly-fish, and I was assured that though some hundreds had been examined at different times, no fish had ever been found in a murre’s stomach.

The bird is small, about the size of a half-grown duck, but its egg is as large as a goose egg. The egg is brown or greenish, and speckled. When quite fresh, it has no strong taste, but when two or three days old, the fishy taste becomes perceptible. They are largely used in San Francisco by the restaurants and bakers, and for omelets, pies, and custards.

During the height of the eggivage season the gulls hover in clouds over the rocks, and when a rookery is started, and the poor birds have their nests by hundreds, the air is presently alive with gulls flying off with the eggs, and the eggs are sometimes literally drenched.

There is thus inevitably a considerable waste of eggs. I asked some of the eggers how many murrees nested on the South Farallon, and they thought at least one hundred thousand. I do not suppose this an extravagant estimate, for, taking the season of 1873, when 17,592 dozen eggs were actually sold in San Francisco, and allowing half a dozen to each murre, this would give nearly 36,000 birds; and adding the proper number for eggs broken, destroyed by gulls, and not gathered, the number of murrees and gulls is probably over one hundred thousand. This on an island less than a mile in its greatest diameter, and partly occupied by the lighthouse and fog-whistle and their keepers, and by other birds and a large number of sea-lions!

When they are done laying, and when the young can fly, the birds leave the island, usually going off together. During the summer and fall they return in clouds at intervals, but stay only a few days at a time, though there are generally a few to be found at all times; and I am told that eggs in small quantities can be found in the fall.

The murre does not fly high, nor is it a very active bird, or apparently of long flight. But the eggs say that when it leaves the island they do not know whether it goes, and they assert that it is not abundant on the neighboring coast. The young begin to fly when they are two weeks old, and the parents usually take them immediately into the water.

The sea-parrot has a crest, and somewhat resembles a cockatoo. Its numbers on the South Farallon are not great. It makes a nest in a hole in the rocks, and bites if it is disturbed.

The island was first used as a sealing station; but this was not remunerative, there being but very few fur seal, and no sea-otters. This animal, which abounds in Alaska, and is found occasionally on the southern coast of California, frequents the masses of kelp which line the shore; but there is no help about the Farallones.

In the early years of California, when provisions were high-priced, the egg-gatherers sometimes got good gains. Once, in 1853, a boat absent but three days brought in one thousand dozen, and sold the whole cargo at a dollar a dozen; and in one season thirty thousand dozen were gathered, and brought an average of but little less than this price.

Of course there was an egg war. The prize was too great not to be struggled for; and the rage of the conflicting claimants grew to such a pitch that guns were used and lives were threatened, and at last the government of the United States had to interfere to keep the peace. But with lower prices the strife ceased; the present company bought out, I believe, all adverse claims, and for the last fifteen or sixteen years peace has reigned in this part of the county of San Francisco—for these lonely islets are a part of the same county with the metropolis of the Pacific.