

THE OIL MENACE.

Mr. W. Bellows writes from Gloucester to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds of Great Britain:—

"I was spending a week-end in summer with a friend, on the Cornish coast, enjoying once again the glorious cliff scenery of the Land's End, and in our wanderings we visited Porthcurnow Cove under the shelter of the Logan Rock. This little bay is marred inland by the presence of buildings erected by the Eastern Telegraph Company, for this is the landing point of one of their cables. Once down on the beach, however, we could quickly forget this near presence of civilisation, as we looked out upon a sea which is a real sea: the open Atlantic stretching uninterruptedly from here to the shores of South America. The sand on which one lingers here is of the purest and loveliest: on all our coast there is surely no more perfect beach. One might be standing on some shore in the Southern Seas and these 'salt sand waves' curling and breaking in the April sun might be those of some tropical Pacific.

I wandered up and down watching the sparkling green surf when I noticed a solitary object which had drifted ashore. I came nearer to discover that it was a bird. A dying bird or a dead bird, lying helplessly in the sunlight. A dead bird, surely! But as I came nearer to it, it moved slightly. I touched its tail feathers and it fluttered on the sand. Thinking it was waiting for the rising water I gently moved it down into the lapping wavelets. In the water this bird—a Guillemot in full plumage—floated helplessly to and fro like a tragic little piece of flotsam. Even the sea meant nothing now to this beautiful but dying bird. I placed it once more upon the sand. Suddenly it struggled to its feet and stood for a moment fluttering with open beak and gently-moving wings and then collapsed. As it lay there within sound and scent of the ocean over which other birds were circling in the fresh April air a deep sense of pity came over me. I called to a man who was on the beach landing a plank from a recent wreck. 'What is the matter with it?' I asked. He gave one glance and said, 'Oil. She is dying of starvation: we have had hundreds come in like that.' Then he showed me the little matted patches of oil in the wing feathers, seemingly so slight—and yet enough to cause this tragedy. Another flutter and we put this once free flying and free diving bird out of its slow and tragic agony. 'Yes—we have had hundreds of them come ashore like that.'

"As I came away from the beach I felt that never again would Porthcurnow Cove be quite the same for me. The remembrance of the dying Guillemot will follow me: just this one bird out of hundreds more and of thousands and tens of thousands dying this cruel and lingering death upon our coast.

"Where does the oil come from?"