

# WANDERING SEA-FARERS

THE ever-increasing sands of Horowhenua coast had, at some past time, either removed by an unprecedented storm or by slow daily drifts, piled themselves up into a ridge of sandhills. These, beside lending some shelter to the land from the "roaring forties," imprisoned the rainfall from the hills and turned it into a chain of beautiful lakes, the most important of which is Lake Horowhenua. Of the virgin bush that once covered hill and plain a fringe on the Levin side of the lake is all that remains. Our house touched that fringe, so the lake was our playground.

The three children had just started off for a walk to the lake with the maid (doesn't that sound old-fashioned—almost archaic!) when I heard excited cries and looking out saw four white-faced creatures tearing home. They waited not to open the gate but climbed on it and scrambled to the gate-posts.

They were all there and safe so I need not have panicked, but I ran to hear the trouble. All speaking at once they told me that a huge white bird had chased them—no, not flying—running with its wings wide-spread and its beak wide open. It might have caught them only that it stumbled against bushes and tufts of grass.

"Silly ones! It couldn't have been anything but a goose," I assured them. "Come, we'll go down and see." To overcome their reluctance to abandon their safe perches I told them that a gander from the Maori Pa had perhaps been disturbed or blown (we had had a tremendous storm) from his geese and was angry. He had seemed big because they were frightened.

Hardly had I elaborated the comforting theory when it came in sight. It was a huge, white bird—its outspread

An extract from the unpublished papers of HELEN WILSON, author of "My First Eighty Years"

wings were at least eight feet wide; its beak was gaping and it did come straight for us. Surprised and bewildered and even a little scared, it took me some time to realise that it must be an albatross, but not so long to be sure that it was harmless and that though large, it was only a baby and was running to us for help.

It followed us home, and, in spite of the protests of the still doubtful children, I opened the gate. Inside the garden it began running from one red flower to another trying to swallow them. It was hungry we were sure; but why red should suggest food to a sea-bird we never discovered. He always had a penchant for red and would run to a child in a red coat, to the child's consternation.

We gave him raw meat dipped in water, for we thought he must be thirsty. The first pieces we had to drop down his throat, but afterwards he took them from our hands. He ate all the meat we had and then settled down on the grass and with a grunt went to sleep.

THE children were intensely interested and so was their father when he came home. He said that he had heard of dead or damaged albatrosses being found on the beach after a storm. This clearly was a very young bird, and had been blown by an exceptional gale we had had three days ago, from some antarctic nesting ground, across the ocean, then somehow wafted over the sandhill, across the lake and finally anchored by the ring of bush in the Levin side.

He seemed to be quite unhurt, though tired and very hungry. We

tried him—when the meat was gone—with bread and other soft foods, but he would have none of them. We had to buy him beef which he would eat "till further orders." He did not appear to drink though he sat beside the water-race that ran by the tennis court, and perhaps he wet his bill sometimes, and seemed content.

Whenever we bought meat (we had to go to the butcher's in those days as now) we bought a pound or so of gravy-beef for "Humph." One day, coming home from the township, I put my purchases—including Humph's gravy-beef—down on the grass while I took the horse and trap round to the stables. I returned just in time to see Humph flapping across the lawn with the family joint in his beak. He knew his dinner had arrived and objected to waiting for it.

We christened him Humph because that was all he could say. When he wanted something he said "Humph," and when he was satisfied he said the same. His vocabulary consisted of that one word. He was friendly and obviously delighted in company, but was not very entertaining.

As he grew stronger he took to walking up and down the water-race and occasionally dipping his head so that we thought he might be getting small



"I returned just in time . . ."

water life. When in the summer the grass dried up and we irrigated the lawn by damming the race, and the water covered it some six inches deep, a cat we had used to wade in and bring out small eels and cockabullies, lay them on the edge and seem surprised that they disappeared into the water again. But Humph took no interest in the little fish, perhaps because his palate had been spoiled by occasional meals of trout which he adored. One of the disadvantages of having this new member of the family was that he would always sit on the same spot of the lawn and that spot got very unsavoury.

WE read that the albatross was an exceedingly long-lived bird; no one could ascertain correctly, but apparently one known to sailors had been seen to frequent Cape Horn for two hundred years. This took the fancy of the children. The bird was so friendly that they were sure that when he learnt to fly he might leave us but would surely come back again, and for two hundred years he would sail over the sea from his home among the icebergs to the ancestral home of the Wilsons for, of course, we or our descendants should always live there and eight or nine generations of little Wilsons would run out to greet him as he settled on the grass after his long flight.

Humph often stood up and flapped his enormous wings, but he seemed to make no attempt to throw his weight upon them, so we guessed that it would be long before he made his first flight. He contented himself with walking up and down the water-race and sleeping on the grass.

Then Humph disappeared. We were not alarmed, he often went further afield but always kept to the water-races; he would come back. When he did not we scoured the farm, inquired of neighbours. We never saw our ancestral bird again, but some months later we heard that he had wandered as far as Ohau, near which was an Industrial School, and the boys had teased, chased and dragged him about so that he lay down and died. Why we did not advertise I cannot think. Perhaps there was no local paper in 1905.

TEN years later we acquired another sea-faring appendage—Captain Edwin, a seagull who had one broken wing. (continued on next page)

## "THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

(Solution to No. 559)

L	A	M	P	R	E	Y	C	U	F	F	S
I	O	O	R	O	C						
B	A	R	M	E	C	I	D	E	U	A	
I	P	C	A	N	N	U	L				
L	O	S	S	S	K	A	T	E	D	E	
A	G	S	I	L	L	N					
D	E	X	T	E	R	P	O	L	I	T	E
I	I	O	N	T	N	N					
A	F	A	T	H	E	R	E	G	G	S	
M	A	R	D	I	R	N	I				
O	A	A	S	C	E	N	D	I	N	G	
N	G	N	E	E	H						
D	R	E	S	S	L	A	D	D	E	R	S

### Clues Across

- Stops our beef (anag.)—we would naturally become this.
- Robes in a quiet and sedate form.
- "Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander —  
If you're on the loose, I shall —"  
as the song said some time in the thirties.
- "Freedom and — together fall"  
(Pope).
- The middle of walls.

### Clues Down

- Cares to cable (anag.).
- Gives good grounds for its base taunts?
- Unusual or underdone.
- She is hiding in a maple.
- Suitable horse for Nora?

- If hunting, a whip handle, if Eton, a hair-cut.
- Apparent in violent ill-temper.
- In short, Patricia and Ronald offer a protector.
- Restrain; remove 10 across in reverse and you have the same result.
- Make it while the sun shines.
- "Tears, — tears, I know not what they mean"  
(Tennyson).
- A West-Indian flowering tree.
- Pope's triple crowned diadem.
- Sit, honest man (anag.).

- He may be studying to become a Bachelor of 10 across.
- Ponder, parent! (anag.).
- The beginning of litigation.
- "The proper study of mankind is —"  
(Pope).
- As fair (anag.).
- Part of the final total.
- Irritation.

No. 560 (Constructed by R.W.C.)

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