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George S. Benson

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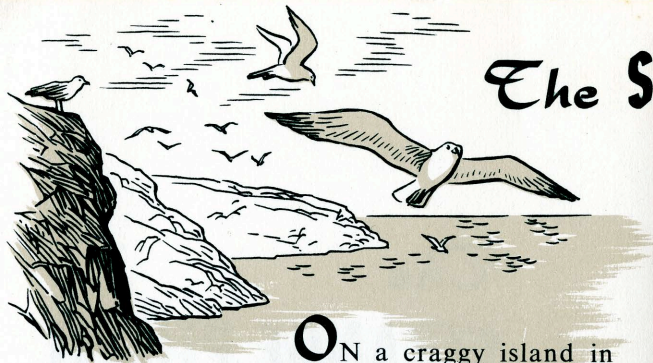
The
STRANGE PLIGHT
of the
HUNGRY GULLS

by **George S. Benson**

A FACTUAL PARABLE

FROM

The NATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM
Harding College



The STRANGE PLIGHT of the HUNGRY GULLS

by George S. Benson

ON a craggy island in Penobscot Bay off the coast of Maine, there once lived a thriving colony of sea gulls. They were of the full-throated Herring gull and Laughing gull families and whenever the whole colony rejoiced over an unusually good catch of fish or insects their screaming could be heard far inland. They were powerful flyers and their individual self-reliance, when it came to fishing and procuring other foods, was a source of great satisfaction and pride to every Penobscot gull. There wasn't a scrawny one in the multitude.

The gulls' mass flights to sea searching for schools of fish were beautiful to behold. They ranged far out over the Atlantic, energetically scouting food, their sleek silver-gray backs and snow-white belly feathers glistening in the sun. And upon returning, tired but proudly holding their fish catch in beaks, their wheelings and turnings and glides were masterpieces of aerodynamic art. For a baby sea gull to be hatched in the Penobscot colony was a stroke of good fortune indeed, for it surely would grow up beautiful and strong, with a zest for life and a proud independence.

Developing Self-Reliance

The Penobscot young hatched out a grayish-brown, able to walk and with the instinct for flying and fishing strong within them. For a few weeks parents fed the down-covered babies. But very soon the fledglings were hopping off rocks, testing their gliding equipment. Flying then came quickly. A great thrill for the youngsters was the first carefully chaperoned trip to sea for fishing. At this time the powerful instincts of the species took over.

The young gulls were natural fishers. At first they tired quickly but in this way they learned that a full and satisfied stomach cost considerable effort—that there weren't any "free" lunches for full-feathered gulls. If the fish weren't running, young and old flew far inland to search out and feed upon hordes of insects such as grasshoppers and even worms. When the time came for the great fall migratory flight to Florida, the young adults were self-sufficient, confident, perhaps even a little haughty.

Food Without Effort

One raw November as the Penobscoters were heading for the Florida Keys a squall set them down on Conch Island, a stone's throw off the waterfront at St. Augustine. They were noisily welcomed by masses of Southern gulls. The next morning the Penobscoters were awake and waiting anxiously at dawn for their Southern hosts to guide them toward the fishing grounds. But the fat Conch Island gulls just sat around lazily.

It was 9:15 A. M. before the Conch Islanders took the air, leading the way. And they did not fly to sea. They flew 100 yards across the waterfront to the shrimp wharf. There, lined up busily cleaning yesterday's catch were nearly 100 shrimp fishing vessels. And in the early morning sunlight the water already had begun to be heavily flecked with tiny dead fish and shrimp scraps. For the Penobscoters, accustomed to working hard for breakfast, this was almost too good to be true; but it was a reality—*food without effort!*

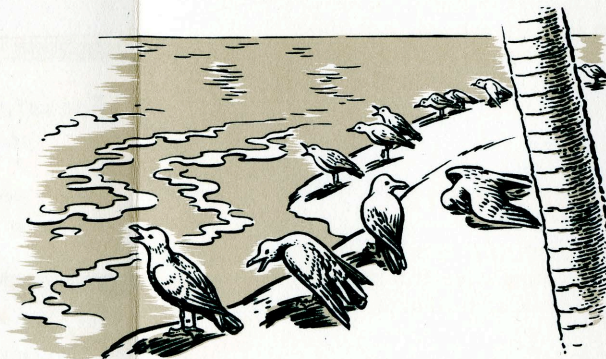
Their Sorry Plight

Thousands of Penobscoters did not fly back North the following April. They were too fat and too well satisfied with life on Conch Island. They

hadn't had to bother with fishing and hunting a single day. Always the shrimp fleet was at the wharf, or would be there shortly, with its anytime-a-day free lunch. The fleet and the gulls stayed on. The gulls got fatter and lazier. But one day last March they flew over for breakfast and found no ships. They flew back to Conch Island and sat waiting, eyes toward the sea. They sat waiting all day, necks pulled in, one foot retracted. They got awfully hungry.

Five days and nights passed and they began screaming. The fleet hadn't returned. They were starving. They sat at the water's edge in long rows, helpless, bewildered, staring out to sea, mouthing their hunger-pangs. St. Augustine people heard them and investigated. They found the shrimp fleet had gone forever. They found the gulls dying because *their ability to fish and hunt was gone*. Ornithologists were astonished. The free shrimp lunches, provided month after month, had destroyed the gulls' natural ability to find food for survival. *They were not sea gulls now; they were mere creatures—helpless wards to be charitably cared for if they were to survive.*

Moral: In the animal kingdom or in human society, there is no *safe* substitute for honest effort in developing self-reliance and pride.



... from
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weekly syndicated column of
Dr. Geo. S. Benson, president
of Harding College. Based
on facts appearing in
March 27 editorial,
Chicago Tribune.

.....The Harding College
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