

Admiral Byrd's Adventures Down In Little America

The Penguins and Their Strange Habits and Customs Described by Hans Adamson and Dr. Murphy

The Montreal Standard contains this week an interesting article by Hans C. Adamson on Admiral Byrd's adventures in Little America. We reproduce the article for our Sunday readers:—

Most of us who read of Admiral Byrd's adventures in Little America picture the antarctic as a vast expanse of ice and snow, a place where loneliness prevails, where its awful silence is broken only by howling winds and the terrifying sound of crashing ice packs.

As a matter of fact, if one preferred to live there, he would find many good neighbors, the kind that are more harmless in many ways than those gossip sort we meet every day. If you doubt this, listed to Dr. Robert Cushman Murphy.

"The Adelie penguins, Admiral Byrd's neighbors, have igloos only when they get snow up on their nests during blizzards of the antarctic springtime," began Dr. Murphy, "and the blanket of snow then keeps them warm, just as it does the men in the snow-buried huts at Little America. However, sometimes the problem is to keep cool among the penguins, as I have found on the coast of Peru."

I could not associate penguins with Peru, a tropical country, but Dr. Murphy enlightened me. "The penguins live there all the time," he said, "but here's a different penguin. Few persons realize there are seventeen distinct kinds of penguins in the world. They all belong to the southern hemisphere, but only two of them actually live on the shores of the antarctic continent.

"Four or five more inhabit ice-covered southern islands, such as South Georgia, where I once spent several months while leading an expedition for the American Museum of Natural History," continued Dr. Murphy. "The remaining ten or eleven kinds are mostly birds of the cool south temperate zone, but three of them are tropical. One, the Galapagos penguin, lives almost on the Equator.

Further, their habits and behavior are not at all the same. Some built their nests of stones, some dig burrows in the ground. Two kinds, the king and the emperor, make no nests at all, but hatch their single egg on top of their feet. Some walk and run and coast on their stomachs, others always hop like Kangaroos.

"And penguins temperaments are equally unlike. One kind may be timid, another friendly, a third aggressive and hostile. If an angry ringed

penguin sets out to beat you up and drive you out of his territory, he is no more apt to be bluffed out of a scrap than David was by Goliath. You may push him over a ridge, but dollars to doughnuts he will soon be back with murder in his eye."

"What about the complexion, manners and social status of the penguin?" I asked.

"Well," said Dr. Murphy, "if the king penguin is royal, the emperor is truly imperial. He stands nearly four feet high, weighs half as much as a fine figure of a man, an average man, while in strength he resembles rather a gorilla.

"Five tough seamen from a whaler once surrounded a lone emperor on an ice floe and ganged him. The penguin knocked them about like ninepins, but they finally jumped on him and strapped down his flippers with two of their leather belts. Then they stepped back and took a breath. So did the penguin—and burst the belts!"

"Do penguins breed during the South Polar winter?" I asked.

"Not the other penguins, nor other birds, but the emperor does. During the blackest period of mid-winter, when the temperature remains for days together at 70 degrees below zero, these amazing birds carry out their courtship in the frozen gloom, lay their egg on the flinty sea ice, below the Great Barrier, and told it on their feet with a feather fold of the stomach covering it like a muff.

"When it hatches they carry the chick in the same pouch like receptacle until it grows too big to fit. Emperor and empress are always ready to relieve each other at nurse minding. In fact, all the adults get an insane 'mothering' complex and fight desperately for anybody's egg or chick. Consequently, many of the young are killed by kindness.

"The kind penguins hatch their eggs in the same manner as the emperor, but they select a better season with a lesser degree of iciness for this purpose," said Dr. Murphy. "I lived among them for a long time on an island north of Weddell Sea. They are glorious golden-collared birds, a yard tall with a most lofty and snobbish attitude toward all the rest of creation.

"You have to show them your name in their 'Social Register' before they will warm up to you. Their neighbors, the Johnny Penguins whom the king holds in contempt, are the commoners of the family. The likable but thoroughly disreputable black and white Adelie penguins, whose noisy, thiev-

ing and quarrelsome, colonies are the slum folk of the penguin world.

"Then there are the Marconi penguins with orange plumes on their heads and the jackass penguin—"

"Jackass," I interrupted, "how do they get that name, from their stubbornness?"

"They are as stubborn as anything alive," replied the doctor, "and though they can't kick, they can tear ribbons of flesh from your arm or leg with their pincher-beaks. But the name comes from their bray, which is somewhat similar to the mule's.

Killed by Sea Leopards

"However, penguin music has a wide range. The kind is a champion bugler, accompanying his long-drawn performance with all the pomp and posturing of a uniformed doorman. And the emperor is a veritable bagpiper."

"What endows penguins with such complete lack of fear and even with a friendly interest toward men?" I asked.

"Because on the antarctic continent there have been neither men nor other animals for perhaps millions of years and their sense of timidity or caution has been largely eliminated in the long course of evolution."

"What have they to fear in the sea?"

"The killer whales but most of all the sea leopard," said the doctor.

"The sea leopard is a huge, ferocious seal that lives almost entirely in penguins. They fear it more than anything in the world, and they show it by the way they peer over the ice-foot before plunging into the ocean. They stand and jostle each other like boys around a swimming hole, each one hoping that somebody else will test the safety of the dive. When one finally makes the plunge the others all pour after him."

"Does the sea leopard lie in wait at such places?"

"Yes," he replied. "It picks its victim, which becomes 'wall-eyed' and begins to swim in a circle. The seal takes the inside course and simply loafs along, sure of its prey. When the unfortunate penguin is worn down, the sea leopard makes a rush, seizes the bird in the most widely opened jaws of any animal since the days of the sabre-toothed tiger, rises to the surface, literally shakes the penguin out of its skin and swallows the body without taking the trouble to bite it."

"One penguin doesn't begin to be a meal. I once staked a sleeping sea leopard, 11 feet long, on an ice-pan and killed it instantly by putting a .22 calibre ball through the thin part of its skull. I salvaged its skin and skeleton. Inside its stomach were the remains of four king penguins. The average weight of a king is 36 pounds."

"Isn't it possible for the penguin to escape the sea leopard?" I asked.

"I think they might if they would keep their head and swim in a straight line. I once timed the speed of Johnny penguins as they played along the edge of the ice foot. I found that their normal rate averaged ten meters per second, which is faster than a human sprinter can travel in the 100-yard dash.

Wonderful Swimmers.

"You understand, of course, that penguins swim very little at the surface. They shoot through the water far below, occasionally leaping out to give a gasp for breath and disappear again within the twinkling of an eye.

"A slow-moving creature on land, the penguin gives an astonishing exhibition in water, which is thoroughly enjoys. The bird dives with its lungs full of air, which it exhales while under water. In so doing, bubbles of air rise from each corner of the mouth, giving the appearance of two strings of pearls.

"Its feet seem to be quite useless while swimming except for steering purposes, while its wings act like oars as its head and beak point straight forward."

"Do you think that penguins are intelligent creatures?" I asked.

"Not very intelligent as we understand the word," replied the doctor. "But they are endowed with marvelous inherited instincts which serve their general purpose far better than intelligence would. Like most other birds, they have what might be called

'glorified insect brains,' rather than minds like those of monkeys or dogs.

"All of their actions seem to be governed according to an instinctive pattern. For instance, since they associate danger with the ocean and safety with land and ice, they foolishly run away from the water when they are chased by a man or dog.

"Their curiosity is apparent from the outset as they stand like over-fed human beings, some carrying off an ordinary conversation while others seem to be more imperative in their speech.

"Furthermore, their courting follows a very rigid pattern. Among the species that makes nests, the male usually begins by picking up a pebble and laying it at the feet of his first choice among the ladies. If she takes it up, they immediately use it as the cornerstone of their home. If she proves indifferent, the male gathers up his pebble and goes in search of a more receptive girl. I have even had a male Johnny penguin lay at my own feet the shiny top of a condensed milk can, which I accepted as a very touching proffer of undying friendship."

"What becomes of the millions of penguins that are not eaten up by the sea leopard?" was my last question.

"I hardly know," replied Dr. Murphy, "for one very rarely finds a full-grown penguin on shore. But once when I climbed the coast hills of South Georgia I made a very dramatic discovery. I found a little icy freshwater pond which was the graveyard of penguins.

"Several obviously sick birds had climbed the long, tollsome path up the hills and were standing at the brink of the dark water. In the bottom of the pool, with flippers outstretched, lay hundreds, possibly thousands, of bodies of penguins that had long since climbed the hills to die. It was a Valhalla of penguins, a last resting place for countless unknown soldiers who had run the gauntlet of sea leopards, antarctic blizzards and falling ice. They had finally come home to sleep with their ancestors."

SETS ALWAYS READY TO MAKE ENGLISH FILMS

Shakespeare Country of
Old England Made a
Perfect Background
For "Sorrell and Son."

There is one respect in which English producers of motion pictures have an unquestionable advantage over their Hollywood competitors. That is in the abundance of authentic historical background literally right in their own backyard.

The advantage was particularly useful to British and dominions executives when they made ready to film their recently completed new talking version of "Sorrell and Son," which is soon to be shown here under the auspices of United Artists.

As those who read the popular Warwick Deeping novel will recall, much of the action of "Sorrell and Son" takes place in and around a country inn of England. For these scenes, Herbert Wilcox, producer of the new picture, decided that no studio-built sets could possibly seem quite so atmospheric as a genuine old English inn. His choice fell on the Lygon Arms, one of the finest old inns still remaining in England.

The Lygon Arms is near the Avon, close by Shakespeare's native Stratford in the rolling Cotswold hills, and thus many of the scenes in "Sorrell and Son" were taken in actual spots replete with the glamour of the past.

For instance, the little town of Broadway, where the picture making unit from London established its base, dates back to the fourteenth century, and is still crowded with memories and relics of Tudor days. Along the highways in the neighborhood Shakespeare and his contemporaries undoubtedly travelled on their journeys between London and Stratford.

There is a certain relationship between the story of Shakespeare's life and the story of "Sorrell and Son" in that the Bard, like Stephen Sorrell, had a great love for his son. Shakespeare lost his son in childhood and many commentators have pointed out that his grief over that loss is reflected in his later works.

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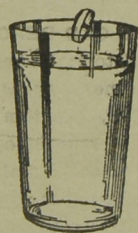
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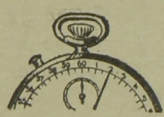
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