

FROM TIMES PAST

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THE SAND DUNES by Lawrence A. Watson

Time once was when where now fair Prince Edward Island lies "anchored on the wave" seas primeval urged their thousand billows on in never-ceasing warfare against the rocky boundaries of the ancient gulf, and drove their giant forces in thundering onslaught to dash themselves in mighty impotence against the unyielding fortress of impregnable rocks.

One may not say how many thousand years have come and gone since then: it were as great a tax upon one's powers to compute the ages as to picture in imagination that awe-inspiring scene. An angry sky above, rent and torn by lightning shafts; a seething sea beneath, coursed by mountainous billows, surging landwards in ever-increasing strength and impetus. High leaped the maddened billows, crowned with foaming crest; far streamed their banners wrought of angry spume; fearful the impact of these battering-rams of ocean; dread the din and roar vibrating through the caverns of the trembling cliffs, while cannonade of thunders roared, reverberated, died away, but scarce had died before the dread repeated challenge drowned the distance-seeking echoes.

But if the rocky boundaries of the wide-expanded basin obdurately withstood the would-be conquering ocean, they paid their tribute to the waters in the form of fragments and detritus. This the ocean washed and splintered, ground and comminuted into sand-grains. Streams which fed the volume of the ocean, flowing from lands wherein iron abounded, carried a carbonate of that metal in solution, to which the air yielded of its oxygen, converting it into peroxide, and the mud and sand-grains received the ruddy coating which gives to our shores their warm contrasting colour.

Then the mighty ocean heaped this spoil of conquest on the shallows off the southern boundary of the gulf, and this Island lifted up its sandstones red against the deep blue of the mighty river flowing where now the waters of Northumberland Strait revel in sportive mood or turbulent.

Let us go together to the north shore of our Island where the strong pure air of ocean blows in, fragrant, fresh, invigorating! See the long-stretched, interrupted line of sand dunes, as wavy in its contour as the undulating mass of waters rolling inwards at its base! Here the sand hills rear their summits twenty, thirty, even forty feet; there they slope down gently to the openings through which the sea enters the inlets or lagoons, or which give egress to the rivers running north. Had you come hither many years ago you would have seen a different configuration of the hills, for, inconstant as the waters at their feet, or the winds which vex their slopes, they come and go and shift with each routine of seasons. People tell of openings made through the hills in one stormy night, and that once huge vessels rode where now the channels are filled up by the sand blown from off the fast diminishing dunes. More than once a lighthouse, overturned by the shifting of its foundations, has been re-erected far from its former site, and drawings or pictures of the coast line tell the tale of what we see in operation round about us.

While inshore the air is scarcely moved, here, along the dunes, it lifts the sand in clouds about us, swirling round in eddies; heaping it up in ridges, dikes and mounds. But the winds are not the only agencies at work in nature's mound-building, for the waters at our feet wash up sands from out beyond, and drive them in their foaming surf rolling up the slopes. See how they seem to love to toss and worry their sandy sport; how they fling it up in mid-air, and catching it as it falls, rush back to their sporting ground, swirling, churning, scouring it! Is it any wonder, then, that the grains which we have seen were painted with a rusty