

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

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At the Easter Time.

BY E. E. HEWITT.

We're all of us glad at the Easter time,
For the children sing, and the church
bells chime;
The earth has put off her mantle of snow,
And the sky is bright, and the soft winds
blow,
The little leaves play
With the sunbeams gay,
And we all know why—it is Easter day.

We're all of us glad at the Eastertide,
For the daisies whiten the meadows wide,
The yellow buttercups smile in the sun,
And the brooklets laugh as they leap
and run;
The silvery showers
Hang pearls on the flowers,
And the sweet birds sing through the
golden hours.

We're all of us glad at the Easter time,
For deep in our souls the joy-bells
chime;
For the Saviour who loved us and died
for our sin,
Through the gates of glory hath entered
in,
And his heart above
Is throbbing with love,
And his Spirit comes down as the Holy
Dove.

SEAL-FISHING OFF NEWFOUND- LAND.

There is always great excitement connected with the seal-fisheries. The perils and hardships to be encountered, the skill and courage required in battling with the ice-giants, and the possible rich prizes to be won, throw a romantic interest around this adventure. Not the seal-hunters alone, but the whole population, from the richest to the poorest, take a deep interest in the fortunes of the hunt. It is like an army going out to do battle for those who remain at home. In this case the enemies to be encountered are the icebergs, the tempest, and the blinding snowstorm. A steamer will sometimes go out and return in two or three weeks, laden to the gunwale, occasionally bringing home as many as thirty or forty thousand seals, each worth two and a half or three dollars. The successful hunters are welcomed with thundering cheers, like returning conquerors, and are the heroes of the hour. No wonder the young Newfoundlander pants for the day when he will get "a berth for the ice," and a share in the wild joys and excitement of the hunt.

According to law, no sailing vessel can be cleared for the ice before the 1st of March, and no steamer before the 10th of March; a start in advance of ten days being thus accorded to the vessels which depend on wind alone.

As the time for starting approaches, the streets and wharves of St. John's assume an appearance of bustle which contrasts pleasantly with the previous stagnation. The steamers and sailing vessels begin to take in stores and complete their repairs. Rough berths are fitted up for the sealers; bags of biscuits, barrels of pork, and other necessaries are stowed away; water, fuel, and ballast are taken on board; the sheathing of the ships, which has to stand the grinding of the heavy Arctic ice, is carefully inspected. A crowd of eager applicants surrounds the shipping offices, powerful-



A TAME SEAL.

looking men in rough jackets and long boots, splashing tobacco-juice over the white snow in all directions, and shouldering one another in their anxiety to get booked. The great object is to secure a place on board one of the steamers, the chances of success being considered much better than on board

the sailing vessels. The masters of the steamers are thus able to make up their crews with picked men. Each steamer has on board from one hundred and fifty to three hundred men, and it would be difficult to find a more stalwart lot of fellows in the royal navy itself.

LINK OF STEAM

The steamers have an immense advantage over the sailing vessels. They can cleave their way through the heavy ice-packs against the wind; they can double and beat about in search of the "seal-patches;" and when the prey is found they can hold on to the ice-fields, while sailing vessels are liable to be driven off by a change of wind, and if beset with ice are often powerless to escape. It is not to be wondered at that steamers are rapidly superseding sailing vessels in the seal-fishery. They can make two and even three trips to the ice-field during the season, and thus leave behind the antiquated sealer dependent on the winds.

Before the introduction of steamers one hundred and twenty sailing vessels, of from forty to two hundred tons, used to leave the port of St. John's alone for the seal-fishery. Now they are reduced to some half-dozen, but from the more distant "outposts" numbers of small sailing vessels still engage in this special industry.

The young seals are all born on the ice from the 10th to the 25th of February, and as they grow rapidly, and yield a much finer oil than the old ones, the object of the hunters is to reach them in their babyhood, and while they are powerless to escape. So quickly do they increase in bulk that by the 28th of March they are in perfect condition. By the 1st of April they begin to take to the water, and can no longer be captured in the ordinary way. The great Arctic current, fed by streams from the seas east of Greenland and from Baffin's and Hudson's Bays, bears on its bosom hundreds of square miles of floating ice, which are carried past the shores of Newfoundland to find their destiny in the warm waters of the Gulf Stream. The great aim of the hunters is to get among the hordes of "white-coats," as the young harp seals are called, during this period. For this purpose they go forth at the appointed time, steering northward till they come in sight of those terrible icy wildernesses which, agitated by the swell of the Atlantic, threaten destruction of all rash invaders. These hardy seal hunters, however, who are accustomed to

BATTLE WITH THE FLOES.

are quite at home among the bergs and crushing ice-masses; and where other mariners would shrink away in terror, they fearlessly dash into the ice wherever an opening presents itself, in search of their prey.

In the ice-fields the surface of the ocean is covered with a glittering expanse of ice dotted with towering bergs of every shape and size, having gleaming turrets, domes, and spires. The surface of the ice-field is rugged and broken, and frequently in steep hillocks and ridges. The scene in which "The Ancient Mariner" found himself is fully realized:

"And now there came
both mist and
snow,

And it grew wondrous cold,
And ice, mast-high,
came floating by,
As green as emerald.

"And through the
drifts the snowy
cliffs
Did send a dismal
sheen:
Nor shapes of men,
nor beasts were
ken—
The ice was all
between.

"The ice was here, the
ice was there,



SEALERS AT WORK.