

when he revisited the islands in 1890 he found that a great change had occurred. The "bachelors" no longer lay out in areas distinct from the breeding grounds, but in reduced numbers sought the protection afforded by the vicinity of the breeding grounds, so that it was no longer possible to drive the non-breeding seals without disturbance to the breeding rookeries. This great change he attributes to over-driving and over-killing of seals upon the islands and to the operations of pelagic sealers, acting concurrently. The relative importance of these causes of undoubted decline in numbers, on the Pribilof islands at least, have been earnestly discussed in connection with the Bering Sea arbitration.

When driven inland for a short distance by the natives, the seals find themselves upon the killing grounds.

Care must be taken not to urge them above half a mile an hour for overheating of the seal is very detrimental to the fur. The fur is thickest and finest in texture during the third and fourth year of life. Having arrived at the slaughtering grounds, and after the seals have cooled off, the killing begins. A hundred to a hundred and fifty are separated from the herd and on a given signal the natives, armed with oaken bludgeons five to six feet long, rapidly club and kill the unfortunate animals. They are then immediately bled and skinned. The whole work is performed in a remarkably short time. The average time taken to skin a seal is only four minutes, while the best men can do it even in a minute and a half. The skins are taken from the field to the salt house, where salt is profusely spread on the flesh-side, and they are piled up in the "kenches" or bins. After two or three weeks they become pickled and ready for shipment. Most of the skins go to London, England, for dressing and dyeing. The number of seals, male, female and young, annually visiting these islands has, from careful estimates, been found to exceed four millions.

By the middle of September the rookeries are all broken up; by the end of October, or the beginning of November all the fur-seals of mature age have left the islands. During August they shed their coats.

As practically only prime skins are taken at the islands, the great variation in seal-skin sacques is due mostly to the quality of work whereby the fur was treated and prepared for wear. A properly dyed skin,