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An American Writer at the Sealfishery.

What George Allan England Wrote About Our Winter Fishery.

Night long since shrouded the coast of a night of shouting gale and blizzards with a steat acid Nothing the loom, when the old Terra Nova woke to a realization that Master-watch Roberts, with a gang of forty sealers, had not come aboard with the others.

Well, here we had the making of a classic tragedy. The ship was commanded by Cap'n Kean, a man of the sea, a man of the sea, a man of the sea. What's the matter with us? Well, we must be a little crazy! Full speed ahead! The ship's engines gripped the vessel's hulls and the ship, like a white steed, dashed through the ice. The flames whipped into the air, sparks skidded along the deck, and the ship, quivering, lunged forward.

For a glimmer wavered through the blizzards, for a blizzard washing on. Toward the glimmer we went. The glimmer moved about it. After an end-time we nosed through an inkly mass of ice. Now fire, and piles of raw redness grew. Yells rang from ship to ice. Harsh crimson glare smeared the pans, the pinnacles, the shadows leaped, fantasies unfolded as with reveals on the Broken. Red and blood soaked figures trooped toward the ship.

How many seals have you got, my boy? shouted the cap'n from his deck. "Look yary now—got 'em all!"

MASTER-WATCH ROBERTS REPORTS.

Word of fear was spoken, none considered. Swiftly the sculptures were loaded with the frenzy of

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death. One less or one more throw means nothing to them, absolutely nothing. Men of iron? Steel!

In all my knockings up and down this tough old world I never have found a race in any way to compare, for fearlessness, endurance, cheerfulness, patience under severe punishment, gluttony for work, and general all around he-banhood, with this superb breed. The heroism of the Iceland fishermen, bepraised by Pierre Loti, isn't it for a moment with that of the Newfoundlanders. Bronzed with gale and ice glare, laughing, hearty, bold as lions, simple as children, lovably unsophisticated, making free with the hungry and waiting north, they stand as a type unique and all but indescribable.

They are a combination of sailors, hunters, coal heavers, blasters, explorers, gymnasts, martyrs, and heroes. Their feats of skill and strength would fill volumes; their daring and adventures would furnish forth material for a score of novels. Amphibious, sure-footed, agile, using their gait like a bird and in most amazing ways, they find nothing too perilous to undertake, nothing too laborious to complete. The skin of their teeth is for them a wide margin of safety. Their lives are one long miracle.

These supernoments of the sea, sprung from the loins of Scotland, Ireland, England, in the long ago, and have developed a race all their own. Summers they wear the iron coats of Labrador, codfishing. Winters how they live, god knows. Dr. Greenhall can partly tell you. Spring, after spring—and March in Newfoundland is some spring!—from the northern bays and outports they troop to battle with ice and blizzard, fire and frost and in return get only a scant handful of dollars, sometimes none at all.

SIGNING ON.

Many of them walk forty, fifty miles over snow-drifted headlands and frozen bays, then come along to St. John's in bare, half-warmed cars, camping out with incredible hardships such as would kill us softer folk. They sign on, take their crop, or outfit—nine dollars worth of anything they like for which twelve dollars are later deducted from their share—go aboard the unutterably dismal, dirty ships; five long weeks in hold or dungeon; labor in fearful cold and buck withering storms. All this time they never undress, but just tumble into their punks, sometimes boots and all. I know, from personal experience, what that means; and I have also learned that the highest ethics, is really after all only a matter of geography. While brown men live easily and idly in fruitful tropics these pure white men of our own race—absolutely splendid Nordic stock—"labor and muck for a try at luck"; then back home they go to their barren tilts and settlements. Coal-blackened, greasy, soaked, blood-crusted, they are content if they have a little oiler to jiggle in their pockets, a few seal flippers on a cord or a barrel of frozen carcasses to carry with them. And, by the way, millions of pounds of excellent meat are every year left on the ice. Here's a tip for some enterprising capitalist.

"When you're got in a trip of fat you earn your money, sir," one sealer confided to me; but this is about as near any complaint as they come. "It's a bit airsome" is all they'll admit about terrific tempests. Their whole lives are hardships. They know nothing else, expect nothing else; possibly would sicken and die with anything else. Vikings of the North, indeed.

The annual swillin'-racket is the Northern Newfoundlanders' one big thrill. It's his huge blow-out, his great slaughter; the full and free laissez-faire of the killing lust that lurks in all of us. Money isn't the motive. It's the kill itself that lures. To miss your spring is a supreme misfortune. These northern-bay men beg and scheme for berths, are grateful for what to us would be a horrid nightmare of misery, talk about the last racket and plan for the next one all year long. The captains are just as eager for it as the men. Cap'n Kean, over seventy, hasn't missed a spring for fifty years. In the midst of ice jams and gales he often shouts, "Who wouldn't sell their farm and go to sea?"

Cap'n Bishop, with whom I returned, stared at me with perfect incomprehension when I asked him, "Well, cap'n, I suppose you're glad to be going home?" The fact is, that question was almost an insult. My stock with Cap'n Bishop fell low after that remark.

A NEWFOUNDLANDER'S HEAVEN.

Even the Newfoundland boys yearn for the kill and for a sight of the wonders and glories of St. John's—their only contact with real streets and shops, their only chance to click up and down real sidewalks in spiked skin boots and see the wonders of a big city. St. John's, I believe, has between thirty and forty thousand people. Every ship carries stowaways, half-died wretches who work for nothing at all but a little gathern'-collection—from the men, for the trip and the rough fare of salt junk, bread, hardtack, fish and brews, beans and tea; the ice made from the melted ice, yellow and brackish in rusty tanks. Such fare, to many, constitutes real luxury. A ship without a stowaway is flunked, or hoodooed, from the very start—one of the many supersti-



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tions that govern sealers. One and all share Cap'n Kean's famous dictum: "G'f me a good ship, a good crew and a good patch of seals, and I won't ask for any better heaven!"

At midnight black as the wintry Pole, snow-swept and terrible, you'll hear the sealers singing Johnny Boker and other chanteys as they toil by torch fares. You'll see them happily laughing and skylarking when we would shrink and shiver and curse the North I, bundled in masses of heavy clothing, coats, furs, often used to see them going about the decks in shirt sleeves, open-throated, bare-headed. How do they stand it? No task out for them is too severe, no peril too deadly to hold them back. No men of any breed work like these strange men; none are so insensible to pain, so swift to recuperate, so magnificent in endurance.

And right here let me say that one of these fine days some fight promoter is going to wake up to the fact that in Newfoundland is lying dormant a world-beating pugilist. Why should a highly organized, Frenchman who can be hurt and knocked out, try for the belt? Your Newfoundlanders may not have science, but he's unhurt. He can stand anything anybody has to give, short of a sledge hammer or a gun, and walk right ahead. And he has the punch. If one of these men ever gets in a single blow—good night! I wish I had the money to buy that man a pure digestion.

Just as they seem not to feel pain, they appear to have no imagination concerning perils. If a thing doesn't happen, why bother? At the beginning I got used to seeing men sit on powder cans and calmly smoke their pipes. Later I saw them fill other cans with loose powder, still smoking. That was a mere commonplace. They



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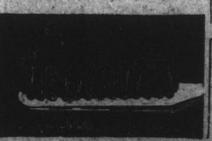
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hands cartridges with magnificent familiarity. One "boy" dropped a bag of them and it went off; but as nobody happened to get shot what did it matter?

Speaking of powder, our lazaret with twelve casks of it lay directly under the red-hot stove in the cabin. The stovepipe went up between the narrow companion stair and the Marconi room, so that a fire would have cut off our exit and also our chance of sending wireless. This pipe was unprotected, about two inches from beams calcined by heat. One day I ventured to point out to Uncle Abalom that we had all the makings of a fine sea tragedy.

"Ain't never burned up nor busted yet," he assured me, scraping charred wood from behind the stovepipe. "Us his de pipe rid-hot too," he proudly added.

No; nobody can beat it. But a sealing steamer is no place for a nervous man.

Aboard the Eagle seal oil was leaking through into the engine room, trickling down a wooden bulkhead. One touch of fire and up the steamer would go. The men calmly told me about a ship catching fire that way; but they didn't mind the leaking oil. Why worry? The fact that so-and-so once floated ashore from a wreck on a coffin with a corpse inside it wasn't considered much of a stunt. Men often purposely fall into the sea, between loose ice, to get a swallow of rum. Cap'n Kean has stuck to the bridge, with his face frozen, while a white seal threw in that fish to keep him from freezing more. Nothing was thought of a mast breaking off, with the scunner's barrel, and the scunner hanging, head down, in the barrel, aloft till rescued. The ships scot in around icebergs with a familiarity quite shocking to a "youngster"—that is, a man like myself. In the little hell hole back of the cabin I used to sit at the way the men would throw matches as a tobacco-sparks close to fuses and percussion caps. A ship going down in the ice is only a trivial incident.

I have seen men working with one hand, while the other was so cruelly lacerated that any American with such an injury would holler for a doctor and go to bed. Men hardly able to stand up will go on ice and haul tow. Men stab through to their feet with gaffs and go on working. They get seal fingers—that is, infections from tainted seal fat—and plug right along. They work even with pneumonia. And they rarely die. I heard of only one man who ever really died in the pack.

"Us led us down on de deck-house an' brung us to port," a sealer told me. He said it as if mentioning a side of beef. The only one man to die out of thousands is a married sealer. The sealers aren't hard-hearted; they simply don't feel. Now and again they show tender streaks.

"Dere was dat time," a master watch said, "a feller got mad at a whitecoat for not beln' big enough, an' ripped us up. Nodder un' brung an' abird, an' sewed us up wid needle an' cord. Whitecoat got well, too, an' us his un' fer a get!"

Among the sealers you have to stand on your own feet and take chances; and if you can't stand, then lie down in your bunk and keep still. No use saying anything. They don't. The most they'll complain of is: "I ain't bodily sick, sir, but I got a soro stummick."

Overworked Women.

Miss Dorothy Dix, in her new book, "My Joy-ride Round the World," says that her sympathy goes out to the Japanese president women. "They lead most laborious lives," she writes, "and have been so degraded by it that they look like stunted Shetland ponies. They are heavy-set, with enormous muscles and incredible strength. I saw a girl of sixteen walking along a road with a telephone pole on her shoulder."

"You may see the women drawing heavy weavers, working up to their knees in the slime of the rice fields, pulling on the oars of a boat, coaling ships, and always on their backs is strapped the inevitable baby, for to their never-ending toil in field and factory they add incessant maternity."

Japanese women have, however, one great advantage as compared with Chinese women. They can walk out with ease and comfort. Their Chinese sisters for the most part cannot walk at all—they can only hobble.

This is because of the hideous practice of foot-binding.

One Too Many

A very absent-minded professor, whose thoughts were usually in the clouds, was left in sole charge of his large family for one evening while his wife was out.

On her return she found him alone. "Was my dear little wife did get the children to bed without any trouble?"

"Yes, all except one red-headed little creature. He struggled and kicked the whole time, and I've had to look him in. He's quietened down now."

"Good gracious," exclaimed his horrified wife, "why, that's the little boy who lives next door!"

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