

Dave of The Dauntless.

By FRANK A. SWEET.

A picturesque group gathered about Skipper Peddle and his son David, as their dog-sled came to a stop half-way down the street. Sealhide caps and boots, with the spotted, hairy side outward, covered the heads and feet of the assemblage, and big woolen comforters shielded their throats, while the remainder of their persons was clad in diverse materials. Each man's keen-edged, short-bladed knife rested in its sheath on his belt, and every one carried his gaff, or short club; thus, in the gathering darkness, they appeared not unlike a mob bent upon mischief.

The stout sealing steamer Dauntless, carrying at her masthead the much coveted pennant denoting the greatest catch of the previous year, lay at the head of the fleet in the harbor, belching great clouds of smoke from her funnel, while her anchor-chain rose dripping, link by link; and red, green, and white lights, like watchful eyes, flashed into view.

As the skipper stepped off the runner of his sled, he was beset with a multitude of questions; for he was a renowned seal killer, and one looked up to by his mates as an authority on all matter relating thereto. All would have joined the ship he commanded, had that been possible; for, with him aboard, it was counted a lucky ship; seldom coming home clean or without a heavy load of pelts and fat.

Brushing them aside, the old seal killer strode rapidly to the shore, followed by his son. He entered the boat waiting him, and was speedily ferried to the ship's side. Cheers from the deck of the Dauntless greeted his approach; and David, his son, who was now about to take his baptism in this bloody work of the far north, was congratulated vociferously upon the fact.

A gun ashore signalled the release of the fleet, for the law's restraining hand detains them until a certain date; and, amid the tooting of horns, the answer of deep-toned whistles, and the hiss of escaping steam, the Dauntless led the fleet from the harbor.

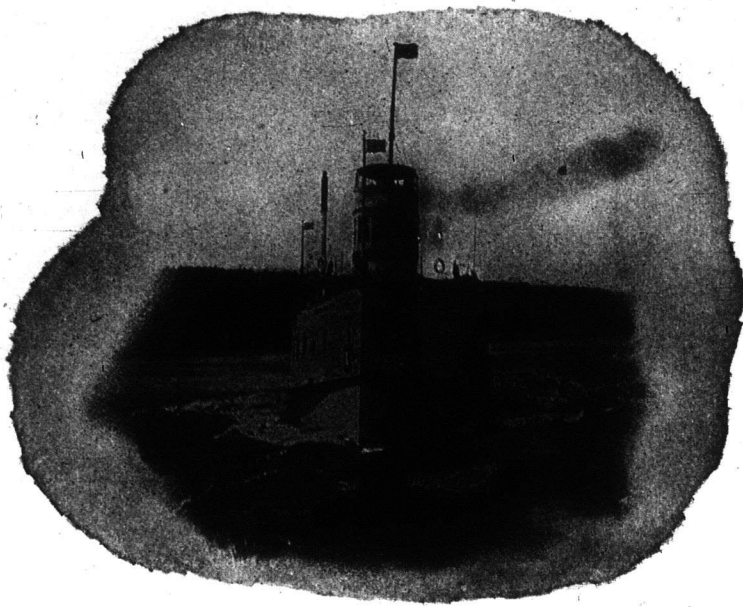
No sooner had she forged well out to sea, than canvas hoods were drawn closely over her lights until every betraying ray was shut from sight. Thus, she sped on in darkness regardless of the rules of the sea. Even the hitherto noisy loys of the crew was stilled at the captain's command, and the silence was broken only by the thud-thud-thud of her rapidly moving engines or the splash of a sea breaking aboard at the bow.

Years of experience had taught her commander that in this race for wealth, which was unknown in amount, and which might, as sometimes happens, be but little, every subterfuge known must be taken advantage of. If possible, he must outwit the other commanders; and, arriving at the whelping-pans, secure a full catch.

A flake of snow, another, and another, falling upon his weather-beaten cheeks; gathering clouds hiding the stars, and the murmur of the rising gale through the rigging pleased him. "Garl!" said he, softly, "Twill be thick." And he lighted his pipe complacently, as he ordered: "Full speed ahead!" and felt the hull tremble with the violence of added impetus.

All night the ship drove through the storm, and when morning broke it was upon a sea of ice, through which she steamed warily—but alone. The seamanship of her commander had triumphed.

High up in the foremast, peering over the rim of the "cro'-nest" barrel there fastened, old Skipper Peddle closely scanned the ice-fields. Suddenly his keen sight detected a dark mass far, far away.



"Swiles! On the port hand!" he shouted to those on deck.

Slowly the ship pushed through the flocs until, brought to a standstill by an immense pan at her bow, she rebounded. Hesitating momentarily, as if gathering breath for the struggle, she plunged forward again, and again struck. With a sound of protest as the ice parted, a great, snake-like crack suddenly appeared, and presently a channel opened. Nearer and nearer, under the able pilotage of Skipper Peddle, the ship moved to where a dark mass of seals squirmed on the ice. Then she stopped. Ice-anchors were thrown out, and the men gathered beside her rail to pour over the side, next moment a human avalanche of mighty hunters of the North.

In groups of twos and threes the seals lay, close beside the ever-convenient blow-holes, through which the creatures seek food from the depths, or escape threatening danger. Beside each mother lay its little white-coat—so called because of the

yellow-white coat which the young seal wears, and which grows darker soon after birth. The mothers often dive down into the blow-holes, but not one fails to return at feeding time, for its young, though the floc may have drifted far.

There must have been thousands of the little ones and their parents on the floc; for, as far as the eye could reach, the plain was in motion from their ceaseless activity. Their whimpering cries sounded plainly on the frosty air, and the home-guard of older seals hurried clumsily about, scenting the approaching hunters.

David Peddle, the old seal killer's son, was one of the first to plunge into the thick of the herd. Twisting and turning to avoid the vicious snaps of the home-guard, he tightened his belt as he ran. Whipping his knife from its sheath, he seized its wooden handle with his teeth, and shortened his hold upon his gaff. Several young seals were whimpering in fear at his feet, but his blows were well aimed. He had secured several, when behind him rose a loud cry from the men.

"Ware the hood! 'Ware the hood!" they shouted.

Hastily turning, David found himself face to face with an old dog, hooded seal. This was a most formidable antagonist; and one that would try the nerves of the most experienced seal killer. David's own brother had fallen a victim to the furious strength of one of these beasts but the previous season; and the boy noted, with justifiable terror, the sudden inflation of the animal's hood, which, when erected, so completely enshrouded his snout, and the vulnerable forepart of its skull, within the tough skin bag, that neither club nor knife could avail against the dangerous enemy.

David had not dreamed of meeting a seal of this sort; for, while inhabiting the same latitude as the harp seal, its descent from the arctic is generally deferred a month later, than is the coming of the other variety, whose name is derived from the peculiar markings upon its back; he knew, however, that the stress of weather sometimes forces the domestic ice-pans of the two in close contact, so that occasionally, hood and harp are found upon the same pan.

All this flashed through his mind as he stood at bay, and he heartily regretted that he left his rifle aboard the Dauntless; for he realized, all too keenly, that a bullet was the only thing that could save him from a horrible death, were the monster once to close in on him.

The big hood's beady eyes gleamed, its nostrils opened and closed almost incessantly, and its great jaws snapped, as, erect upon its flippers, thus bringing its head nearly to a level with David's own, it lunged nearer and nearer, its flexible spine and great strength of muscle carrying it forward with astonishing rapidity. Now and then it uttered a barking growl.

Raising his bat David rained blow after blow upon the beast's distended hood, with a sound resembling the beating upon a bale of cotton; but his blows had little effect in checking its constant advance, or reducing the roundness of its hood. Whichever way the boy turned the beast presented its head, lunging nearer at each change of position, until he could feel its hot breath on his face. He reached for his knife, only to find that it had fallen from his belt. Tired with battling he felt that he could keep up the struggle but a moment longer and, with a quick glance behind him, he prepared to run.

In the moment of that glance, however, and as though he had been waiting for it, the great seal threw its immense bulk forward, and, with one great effort, bore the hunter to the ice. At the same instant the sharp crack of a rifle sounded in David's ears, and the beast, with a growling bellow of rage and pain, rolled aside. As quickly as he could recover from his astonishment at the sudden withdrawal of what seemed certain death, David sprang to his feet unharmed.

"That was a close call, lad," a familiar voice said. "Pack your pelts, and go aboard," it continued, as David recognized his father, who, rifle in hand had come to his rescue from another portion of the floc, where he had noted the attack.

Stacking his pelts one a-top the other, David passed a line about them, and dragged them to the ship's side, where they were hoisted aboard. Then he returned and skinned his antagonist; but it took the combined strength of his father and himself to transport the three hundred-pound pelt that he stripped from the carcass.

Slowly the Dauntless steamed homeward, gunwales a-wash. Again she held the pennant; again she was the lucky ship. David Peddle, now as mighty a seal killer as was his father, still pursues the hunt, but he has never forgotten that wild cry, nor his battle with the old hooded seal.

THE FARMER FEEDS THEM ALL.

MINNA IRVING.

The politician talks and talks,
The actor plays his part,
The soldier glitters on parade,
The goldsmith piles his art,
The scientist pursues his germs
O'er this terrestrial ball,
The sailor navigates his ship
But the farmer feeds them all.

The preacher pounds the pulpit desk
The broker reads the tape,
The tailor cuts and sews his cloth
To fit the human shape;

The dame of fashion dressed in silk
Goes forth to dine and call
Or drive or dance or promenade,
But the farmer feeds them all.

The workman welds his shining tools,
The merchant shows his wares,
The aeronaut above the clouds
Adizzy journey dares;

But art and science soon would fade,
And commerce dead would fall,
If the farmer ceased to reap and sow,
For the farmer feeds them all.



The First Picnic of the Season.