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The Romance of the Nfld. Seal Fishery.

Described Exclusively for the "Graphic" by the Right Hon. Lord Morris, Formerly Premier of the Colony.

It would be difficult to conceive a more interesting study for the naturalist or, indeed, the general reader, than that of the Newfoundland seal fishery. The seal of the North Atlantic. Attention is drawn to the subject by the first Press announcement that the Newfoundland Government contemplates, in the month of February, attempting, by means of aerial observation, through the agency of non-combatant ships, to search for new seal-grounds of the seal herds which come down each year with the ice from the Far North.

The seal is an amphibious and spends as much time on the ice and the land as in the water. Omnivorous, he can pick a meal from the same shell as a tiger, and makes as good a breakfast from the menu of an ordinary hotel as from his favourite dish—a ten-pound salmon. No known animal is more intelligent than the seal in the sense of submitting to be trained out of his element, developing traits of memory, obedience, and suppression of desires and control of natural instincts. This is amply borne out by exhibitions of performing seals.

While the home of the seal is on the coast of Greenland and Baffin's Bay, he leaves for the South early in October, and is generally off the east coast of Newfoundland by Christmas, starting north again in April or May. On the table or the ice, off Newfoundland, the mother seal gives birth to its young, and the herds disport themselves in millions for weeks on the ice and in the water around it. This ice has come down from Greenland and Labrador. Some of it has been made farther south, and consists of sheet ice, formed in the bays and rivers, and slob ice, where the surface of the ocean has frozen. The greater portion of this forms off the coast of Labrador after October, and is carried down with the Arctic current in the months of January, February and March. Once it meets the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, which off the coast of Newfoundland, it melts and disappears. Interspersed with the ice are numerous icebergs of varying fantastic and picturesque forms.

In the last days of February the female seal comes on to the ice, and there its young is born. For fifty years the breeding-ground has generally lain between Belle Isle, in the Straits of that name, and the Grey Islands, off the Newfoundland coast, and about thirty or forty miles from the land. When born the young seals are called "cubs," weighing about four or five pounds. They are white-coated, covered with a fur which in point of texture and beauty surpasses the fur of the South Sea seal. This, however, they shed within a week of their birth. The seal is "pupped," or born, about the first of March, and is usually a "prime" seal by the seventeenth of that month, weighing then about sixty-five pounds. Without having left the ice it has increased in weight, on an average, about four pounds per day. This wonderful result is due largely, if not entirely, to the nutritive character of the mother's milk and of the animalcules in the snow and ice, prodigious quantities of which they devour.

The young seals generally take to the water when three or four weeks old. During this season the male, as well as the female, have been to a large extent on the ice. The seal itself has to fish for a living, and is usually off every morning through a hole in the ice to hunt for his dinner. All kinds of fish are welcome to a place on his bill of fare, but the cod is his favourite item. It is rare to kill a seal without finding inside him the remains of a codfish. The seal may, therefore, be regarded as a real enemy of the codfish, and allowing, say, one codfish per day for two million seals, we have two million codfish consumed every day, or seven hundred and thirty million in a year. Calculating one hundred and twenty fish to the hundredweight, over six million hundredweight are annually consumed, of four times the annual catch of the Newfoundland codfishery.

The instinct of the seal is marvellous. The mother will leave its young on the ice in the morning and remain away the best part of the day in search for food. Returning, it will locate its offspring in the "pachas" amongst thousands of baby seals, notwithstanding that the ice may have "whipped" or drifted with the wind and tide thirty or forty miles.

It is amidst these surroundings that the Newfoundland seal-hunter goes out annually to the "frozen pans," to win and garner riches. At present the seal fishery is carried on by means of steamers specially built for contending with ice. Each ship carries on an average a crew of about two hundred and fifty men. Like every other industry, changes have taken place, and the romance of its early days is now a mere memory. To-day there is not a sailing vessel prosecuting the fishery where seventy years ago four hundred sailing ships, averaging one hundred tons burden, whose united crews numbered four thousand, spread their sails to the breeze, and left for the icefields on the first of March, bringing back as many as six hundred thousand seals, valued at over half a million pounds.

When the ships "strike" the breeding-grounds the crew swarm over the ice, and the seals are killed by a blow on the head with the "gaff," or stick, which the hunter carries. When the water the seals are shot on the ice, the old seals are shot on the ice. When the ice is open and the seal is not jammed he can pick up seals as the crew kill them; but very often the men have to travel ten or fifteen miles from the ship. Then or they kill the seals they pile them up, or "pan" them. Often a ship's crew will "pan" thirty thousand seals in three or four days.

This custom often leads to great risk, and has proved fatal on many occasions. For example, in 1898 over one hundred men became separated from their ship in the night, and while endeavouring to get on board lost their lives in a snow blizzard that overtook them. There was a similar happening in 1912, when over a hundred of a crew failed to reach their ship, and nearly all perished. The same year a ship returning with a load of seals went down with all hands, having met boisterous weather after leaving the icefields.

When the seals, or, as they are termed, the "pelts," consisting of the skin and about three inches of solid white fat adhering thereto—the carcass having been removed—are brought into port, they are placed on the skinning table, and the fat is removed from the skin. The latter is then cured, tanned and manufactured into a beautiful leather extensively used in the making of travelling bags, purses, bicycle saddles, cigar cases, harness and bookbinding. The fat is manufactured into oil and used for lubricating purposes.

The greater number of seals ever known to have been killed in any one year was six hundred thousand, whilst the average for the last hundred years would be about three hundred thousand. The men, are "found" while at the fishery by the owner of the ship, and are partners in the results of the voyage, receiving one-third as their share, or every third seal. They make on an average about ten pounds each, the time occupied being about three weeks.

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taste as any lamb, or the flesh of any salt water bird. A large male seal of the "square flipper" type in his prime will weigh as much as half a ton. The male "hood" seal is the largest species of seal taken. He derives his name from the fact that when attacked he inflates a skin or hood that covers his head. This hood is so thick that the hunter is scarcely able to penetrate it with the "gaff," or boat-hook.

The seal can recognize the blast or moan of its own offspring from amongst thousands of surrounding seals. They are also, like the deer, capable of scenting you miles away, if you be to windward, and they have been noticed, with the aid of a powerful glass from the observation barrel carried by the steamer on the coast, when the smoke has gone down on them five miles away immediately to rush for and take to the water. They have to depend largely on their scent rather than on their eyes to warn them of impending danger, as their eyes are more adapted for use in the water than on the land.

The position of the "patches" of seals is often located by the hunter from the growl or noise they make, which can sometimes be heard miles away. I have said the seal easily pursues and catches the cod. It is said they swim at the rate of at least fifty miles an hour. They must swim rapidly, as they can only remain under water something like fifteen or twenty minutes. Yet they sometimes, in order to avoid being crushed by the ice when it is piling up on the land, sniffing the ocean outside, go down and swim fifty or sixty miles to the open water. Like other denizens of the deep they have their foes, and are hunted by the swordfish and the shark, and often mount the ice to escape their enemies.

Often an old seal fails to find her offspring, owing to drift ice, or the holes being closed by the ice being jammed on the land. In that case the deserted seal will live as long as the smallest particle of fat adheres to its skin.

Two Celebrated Sieges.

On March 20, 1873, William Brydon, C.B., late Surgeon-Major, Bengal Army and Highland Rifle Militia, died at Westfield. His name was a remarkable one in Indian history as that of the one solitary individual of thirteen thousand soldiers and camp followers of the ill-fated British army in the memorable retreat from Cabul, in January, 1842, who was neither killed or taken prisoner by the Afghans. Dr. Brydon, after many hair-breadth escapes, reached Jalalabad alone, though wounded and exhausted, all the other persons comprising the British force being either killed or taken prisoners. Dr. Brydon went through the rest of the siege of Jalalabad with the garrison, under the command of Sir Robert Sale ("Fighting Bob"). It was his singular fate to undergo another celebrated siege, he being shut up in Lucknow with Sir Henry Lawrence, but he passed unharmed through that long and trying effort to keep the British flag flying, till relieved by Sir Colin Campbell.

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BILL PAYS A CALL.

Bill dropped in with his "Howdy-do!" An' he gave the baby a kiss or two. An' he hugged the girls all 'round till they had cheeks as pink as the buds of May. Then he went to Mother an' shook her hand. An' bowed to her with a sweep most grand. An' her face lit up with a merry smile As she joked with Bill for a little while.

He galloped the youngster on his knee An' told him a tale of the rolling sea, He sprawled full length on the parlor floor. An' made us laugh till our sides were sore; Then the girls came in from the kitchen where They'd been doing the washes, an' Bill said: "There, Now the work's all done, it is time for play. Let us get to our singing right away."

Bill dropped in for a little call. An' he brought in gladness for us all; Old and young, when he passed the door, Seemed happier folks than they were before. An' there wasn't a care we had known that day. But seemed to leave us an' fade away. Till he suddenly said: "Oh me, oh me! It's ten o'clock, how time does fly!" Isn't so much to a tale like this, Unless you are one who is rich an' wise. The friendliness an' the warmth an' all The joys of havin' folks come to call; Oh, we're richer than millionaires by far. An' happier, too, than the great men are. For with all their pomp an' their pride an' fuss, Bill passes 'em by to call on us.

A Painter of Drollery.

Thomas Webster, R.A., was born on March 20, 1860, in Ranelagh Street, Pimlico, but his father, being attached to the household of George III., took the child in his infancy to Windsor, where he remained till the death of the venerable monarch. Young Webster was educated in the choir of the Chapel Royal, St. James's, his father being desirous of making a chorister of him; but like Hoppner, who was in the choir of the Chapel Royal, and Calcott in that of Westminster Abbey, Webster preferred the art of painting to the practice of music. So in 1870 he entered the Royal Academy as a student, and in 1875 obtained the first medal in the School of Painting. Having in that year been fortunate in painting a small picture entitled "Rebels shooting a Prisoner," exhibited at Suffolk Street, it at once brought him into notice, so that the difficulties which many young painters find in early life, and their consequent privations, were alike unfelt by him. For the next ten years he exhibited one or two pictures annually, either at the British Institution or at the

Academy, the year 1874 only excepted. And all this time he was gradually winning his way to public favour; every class saw in his humorous compositions what could not fail to amuse, and, therefore, to please. For his humour, like that of all Dickens' droll fellows, was never coarse; his characters were invariably true to nature; though in her most ludicrous aspects, which both old and young could understand and appreciate. In 1878 he painted a portrait of himself; in the previous year he had been placed on the list of Honorary Retired Academicians. A long lifetime of incessant labour deserved an evening of calm repose, yet such was his fondness for Art that this silver-haired octogenarian worked to the last possible moment in his quiet retreat at Cranbrook, using to the very utmost the talents entrusted to his care.

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