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Our Seal Fishery

A Comprehensive Survey in Facts and Figures

Editor Evening Telegram.

Dear Sir,—I have been reading with interest the letters on the subjects of the Seal fishery which have been appearing lately in the press; and it has struck me that some figures which I have might be of interest. Please understand that I am not an amateur seal fishery expert attempting to rush in between giants such as the Captains, Kean and others who speak from lifetimes of practical experience. I do not pretend to any practical sealing experience. As a lawyer I deal with figures and arguments only, leaving it to the practical sealers to comment on them.

It seems to be clear that the fishery ought in theory to be diminishing. When man first interfered with the Seals there must have been a balance of birth and death out there; for the seals have doubtless been there for thousands or tens of thousands of years, and if birth had predominated there should by then have been innumerable millions of them, whereas it death had predominated they should have been extinct. Now if there was such a balance, surely the killing of some hundreds of thousands every year for a century must have overthrown that balance; (unless we suppose that when man first attacked them their numbers were right up to the available food supply, and that when man had made his broad the herd was able rapidly to breed right up to the food supply again and fill the places of those killed. But seeing that the Seal produces so few young and that the ocean food supply is apparently unlimited, this hypothesis seems very unlikely.)

The difficulty in making a comparison of results in this fishery arises from the lack of a standard. The number of the fleet, the power of the ships, the number of men carried, all vary. Total catches are therefore of little use as a basis of argument. Moreover weather conditions vary so much that a short period is equally useless. I have therefore taken as a basis the average catch per wooden steamer for one trip only, over a period of 50 years, 1875 to 1924 inclusive. This ought to give us a fairly good basis, because the general type of wooden ship has remained the same, (one at least of the steamers figuring in the form of a graph or diagram) and over the long period covered any differences which may have existed in weather and ice conditions, arising out of changes in the date of sailing, or out of the number of men carried, are more or less "averaged out." We are brought down to the simple question: What catch has the average wooden steamer obtained on one trip under average conditions. This affords a fairly uniform basis of comparison. The answer to this is much clearer in the form of a graph or diagram than in figures, but as you can hardly print a diagram the figures will have to serve. The following is the average catch per wooden steamer for one trip for fifty years, and for the sake of comparison is added the average catch per man carried out in those steamers. If this latter is laid out on graph paper the curve will be found to follow fairly closely that of catch per ship.

These annual figures go up and down the scale too rapidly to convey much by themselves. For example, it will be noticed that 1915 is the worst, and 1826 the best, average on record. Therefore let us reduce these annual averages to five-year averages; we get the following result:—

Year	Per Ship	Per Man
1875-79	10858	55.23
1880-84	8551	37.22
1885-89	11293	53.85
1890-94	11812	52.39
1895-99	11620	54.52
1900-1904	15688	36.45
1905-09	10222	32.55
1910-14	10114	60.77
1915-19	5129	47.29
1920-24	11662	

It will be noticed that during the period 1875 to 1904 there was a fairly consistent increase; in fact 1900-1904 seems to have been the golden time for Sealing, with an average of nearly 15700 per wooden ship. Since that there has been a marked decline, broken only by the extraordinary year 1916. The year 1921 came back exactly to the general average per wooden ship for the whole 50 years, i.e. about 11,200 per ship, and since that there has been a better period.

Now these are the facts, derived from statistics given in Chafe's Sealing Record. What is to be deduced from them is a much more difficult question. Let us take this as working hypothesis:—

In the days before the steamers the total catch by sailing vessels, etc., is said to have been often much bigger than that of the present day. I believe it went sometimes as high as 600,000. Now suppose, when that state of affairs had been going in for half a century, the herd was badly depleted. The sailing fleet died out, and the steam fleet, with a catch smaller in total, (though bigger per vessel) took its place. For ten years after 1875 we have catches per ship below the average. From 1885 to 1905 we may suppose the seals were recovering; and the catches per ship increased again until 1900, the peak. After 1904 for 17 years the wooden-ship catches steadily decreased again; the steel ships came, and went, between 1906 and 1916 and did heavy damage to the herd. Apart from 1916, a year standing alone, and so utterly out of line with the trend of the figures that it must have been a case of pure luck or chance, there is nothing to compare with the 1898-1904 peak.

But now, since 1919, the big steamers having been off the scene for several years, the catch recovers again. Have the herd is able to maintain itself? Or is this merely a temporary spurt? Such are the difficult questions which, in the interest of the country ought to be discussed and considered. I hope these calculations may help a little towards that discussion. What have the old sealers to say about the above tentative theory? Perhaps some other enquirer will supply figures for the period before 1875 and let us see if they bear out the theory.

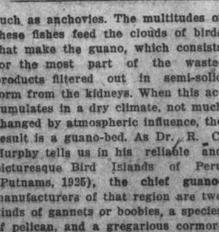
It would be interesting to hear the views of some of the practical men on the question whether the steel steamers, 1906-1916, increased the catch of the wooden ships by helping them to the seals, or decreased the catch by taking seals from them. It will be noticed that the average per wooden ship for 1915-19, is actually less than that of 1910-14, when the steel fleet was in its prime. If the steel steamers hindered the wooden steamers, the situation is better than the above figures indicate but if they actually helped them, then the situation from 1906 to 1915 is worse than the above figures indicate, and the improvement since 1919 is more marked. The whole subject should repay much fuller investigation and analysis than I have been able to give it here. Perhaps others will join the discussion.

Yours truly,
BRIAN DUNFIELD.

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Rotation in Guano Islands

Everyone knows that guano is the most valuable fertilizer in the world. It is said to be thirty-three times as effective as farmyard manure. This is partly because it is so rich in nitrogenous compounds, and partly because they are in a form that makes them very readily absorbed as food by the roots of plants. The best guano comes from the islands off the Peruvian coast that are washed by Humboldt's Current; and it has been calculated that this population requires a daily consumption of a thousand tons of fish. There is no difficulty in regard to the supply of food, but the difficulty



such as anchovies. The multitudes of these fishes feed the clouds of birds that make the guano, which consists for the most part of the waste products filtered out in semi-solid form from the kidneys. When this accumulates in a dry climate, not much changed by atmospheric influence, the result is a guano-bed. As Dr. R. C. Murphy tells us in his reliable and picturesque Bird Islands of Peru (Putnam, 1923), the chief guano-manufacturers of that region are two kinds of gannets or boobies, a species of Antarctic origin that has established itself in dense colonies on the islands of the Humboldt Current. He claims the last as "the most valuable bird in the world." For guano spells bread. In one island the number has been estimated at over five millions, and it has been calculated that this population requires a daily consumption of a thousand tons of fish. There is no difficulty in regard to the supply of food, but the difficulty

in years gone by has been the greedy and unscientific exploitation. If the removal of the guano and the disturbance of the nests is unsystematic and ruthless, the consequence must be a dwindling of the colonies to mere remnants and a stoppage in the supply of guano. It is gratifying to learn that the enforcement of a well-thought-out system of rotation—from island to island—has put an end to the shortsighted folly. Thus, if scientific counsel is obeyed, there will be no end to the production of guano.—The Empire Review.

Household Notes.

Creamed eel is delicious cooked with asparagus tips.
Corn oysters should be seasoned with a little paprika.
A plain custard sauce is nice served with fruit gelatine.
Use fried circles of bread as a foundation for nut canapés.
Garish browned fish hash with cut



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A Bishop on "Too Mild Preaching"

"In little more than a re-creation the Christian pulpit has very largely lost the note of severity," says the Bishop of Lincoln in the Evening News.

"It was about forty years ago that Canon Liddon warned us that we were in danger of treating God as though He were merely 'an active and energetic neighbour in the next street' and it was about the same time that Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, walking with a young friend, said to him, 'Tell me, tell me this. Why is it nobody fears God nowadays?'"

"The men of the old guard, who were great men and even prophets in their day, felt the change which was coming over the popular presentment of religion and it alarmed them. It had not been so with the leaders either of the Evangelical Revival or of the Oxford Movement.

"In either case the accent of severity had not been wanting from their teaching. They lived and taught in awful apprehension of Judgment to come. They spoke to men as those who would one day, and in no long period, have to give an account of the deeds done in the body. For good or for ill, preaching of this kind to-day is uncommon.

"It is worthy of consideration whether the milder message of our own generation is not out of harmony with the actual world in which we live and the facts of human experience. In what we sometimes describe as the lower world of nature, below the level of fully-conscious and deliberate life, consequence reigns supreme.

"Here there is no such thing as forgiveness. It is always a grave matter to infringe a law of nature, for you will pay the penalty to the utmost farthing with unflinching certainty. Nature, in the sense in which we ordinarily use the term, knows nothing of forgiveness.

"The Christian Doctrine of hell is not so much an article of faith as a fact of experience. Whether the misery which is the outcome of an evil will is endless is another question, but it would certainly seem to be the case that if the same moral law prevails in the world beyond the grave as prevails here and now, and it is unthinkable that there can be two moral laws, then as here and now, so there and then, sin unrepented of must bring misery.

"There is much in Holy Scripture which seems to indicate that the punishment of sin is no clumsy super-added penalty, but comes by way of quite inevitable consequence. "It would, perhaps, hardly be urged that teaching which suggests, either expressly or by constant omission of any contrary message, that somehow or another, whatever we do or fail to do, all will ultimately be well, was exactly in accord with the scriptural standard. It is worth while also to consider whether it bears any kind of relation to the facts of human life and experience, whether it does not suggest a world perhaps pleasing to those who are not at pains to think seriously, but not the world in which we live.

"After all, human life for most of us is a somewhat difficult and perplexing business, and though for a while we may pause to hearken to a pleasant voice telling fairy-tales, we must soon pass on our way, for we have serious business in hand."

Mushrooms seem essential to the success of creamed asparagus.

1925
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