one hundred and twenty sailing vessels, of from forty to two hundred tons, used to leave the port of St. John's alone for the seal-fishery. Now they are reduced to some half-dozen, but from the more distant "outposts" numbers of small sailing vessels still engage in this special industry.

The young seals are all born on the ice from the 10th to the 25th of February, and as they grow rapidly, and yield a much finer oil than the old ones, the object of the hunters is to reach them in their babyhood, while yet fed by their mother's milk, and while they are powerless to escape. So quickly do they increase in bulk that by the 28th of March they are in perfect condition. By the 1st of April they begin to take to the water, and can no longer be captured in the ordinary way. The great Arctic current, fed by streams from the seas east of Greenland and from Baffin's and Hudson's Bays, bears on its bosom hundreds of square miles of floating ice, which are carried past the shores of Newfoundland to find their destiny in the warm waters of the Gulf Stream. Somewhere amid these floating masses the seals have brought forth their young, which remain on the ice during the first period of their growth for five or six weeks. The great aim of the hunters is to get among the hordes of "white-coats," as the young harp seals are called, during this period. For this purpose they go forth at the appointed time, steering northward till they come in sight of those terrible icy wildernesses which, agitated by the swell of the Atlantic, threaten destruction of all rash invaders. These hardy seal-hunters, however, who are accustomed to battle with the floes, are quite at home among the bergs and crushing ice-masses; and where other mariners would shrink away in terror, they fearlessly dash into the ice wherever an opening presents itself, in search of their prey.

In the ice-fields the surface of the ocean is covered with a glittering expanse of ice dotted with towering bergs of every shape and size, having gleaming turrets, domes, and spires. The surface of the ice-field is rugged and broken, rushing frequently into steep hillocks and ridges. The scene in which "The Ancient Mariner" found himself is fully realized:—

"And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold;
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

"And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen;
Nor shapes of men, nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

"The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around;
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound."

When a storm arises amid these icy solitudes the scene is grand and awful beyond all powers of description.

Considering all the perils, it is surprising how few fatal disasters occur. During the seal hunt of 1872 one hundred men perished, fifty of these having gone down in a single vessel called the *Huntsman*, on the coast of Labrador. In the same year, two steamers, the *Bloodhound* and *Retriever*, were crushed by the ice and sank, but their crews, numbering nearly four hundred men, managed to reach Battle Harbour, in Labrador, over the ice, after enduring great hardships.

Happily these terrible storms are not frequent. For the most part the sea is at rest, and then the ice-fields present a strange beauty of their own, which has a wonderful fascination. When the sun is shining brightly it is too dazzling, and its monotony is wearisome. The moon, the stars, and the flickering Aurora are needed to reveal all its beauty.

We shall now look into the equipment of a sealing steamer, and then in imagination accompany her to the ice-fields, in order to form some idea of the hunt.

In the last week of February the roads leading from the various outposts of St. John's begin to be enlivened by the appearance of the sealers, or, as they are called in the vernacular, "silers," their enterprise being designated "swile huntin'." Each of them carries a bundle of spare clothing over his shoulder, swinging at the extremity of a pole six or seven feet in length, which is called a "gaff," and which serves as a bat or club to strike the seal on the nose, where it is most vulnerable. The same weapon serves as an ice-pole in leaping from "pan" to "pan," and is also used for dragging the skin and fat of the seal over the fields and hummocks of ice to the side of the vessel. To answer these various purposes the "gaff" is armed with an iron hook at one end and bound with iron. Some of the men, in addition, carry a long sealing-gun on their shoulders. These are the "bow" or "after gunners," who are marksmen to shoot old seals or others that cannot be reached by the "gaff." The outfit of the sealers is of the simplest description. Sealskin boots reaching to the knee, having a thick leather sole well nailed, to enable them to walk over the ice, protect the feet; coarse canvas jackets, often showing the industry of a wife or mother in the number of patches which adorn them, are worn over warm woollen shirts and other inner clothing; sealskin caps and tweed or moleskin trousers, with thick woollen mits, complete the costume, which is more picturesque than handsome.

In the forecastle, or other parts of each ship, rough berths are constructed. The sealers have to furnish themselves with a straw mattress and blanketing. The men are packed like herrings in a barrel, and as a rule they never undress during the voyage. In the rare event of putting on a clean shirt, it goes over its predecessor, without removing the latter—a method which saves time and trouble, and is, besides, conducive to warmth. The owner of the vessel supplies the provisions. In sailing vessels half the proceeds of the voyage are divided as wages among the men, but in steamers only a third is thus distributed. The captain gets a certain number of cents per seal.

The food of the men is none of the daintiest, and no one who is at all squeamish about what he "eats, drinks, and avoids" need attempt to go "swile huntin'." The diet consists of biscuit, pork, butter, and tea, sweetened with molasses. On three days of the week dinner consists of pork and "duff," the latter item consisting of flour and water, with a little fatty substance intermixed "to lighten it." When boiled it is almost as hard as a cannon ball. On the other four days of the week all the meals consist of tea, sweetened with molasses, and biscuit. Such is the rough fare on which these hardy fellows go through their trying and laborious work. When, however, they fall in with seals, their diet is improved. They cook the heart, liver, flippers, and other parts, and feast on them *ad libitum*, and generally come ashore in excellent condition, though the odour that attends them does not suggest the "spicy breezes which blow soft from Ceylon's Isle." The use of fresh seal meat is highly conducive to health, and the best preventive of scurvy. Very little sickness occurs among the men while leading this rough life. They are often out for eight or ten weeks without seeing land, and enduring the hardest toils. When seals are taken in large quantities, the hold of the vessel is first filled, and then the men willingly surrender their berths, which are packed full of "white-coats." In fact, every nook and corner is crammed with the precious fat; and the sealers sleep where they can—in barrels on deck, on a layer of seals, or in the coal bunks. It is marvellous to see men, after eight or ten weeks of such life, leap ashore hearty and vigorous. Their outer garments are polished with seal fat, and it is advisable to keep to windward of them till they have procured a change of clothing.

The experiences of a sealing voyage are various, being influenced by the ever-shifting condition of the ice and the direction of the winds. The grand aim of the sealers is to reach that portion of the ice which is the "whelping-grounds" of the seals, while yet the young are in their plump oleaginous babyhood. The position of this icy cradle is utterly uncertain, being dependent on the movements of the ice and the force of the winds and waves. It has to be sought for amid vast ice-fields. At times, in endeavouring to push her way through, the vessel is caught in the heavy ice, and then the ice-saws are called into requisition to cut an opening to the nearest "lead" of clear water, that she may work her way north. But the heavy Arctic ice may close in under the pressure of a nor'-easter, and then no amount of steam-power can drive her through. Howling night closes in; bergs and floes are crashing all around, and momentarily threatening her with destruction; the wind roars through the shrouds, driving on its wings the arrowy sleet and snow, sharp as needles, which only men of iron can stand. Thus, locked in the embrace of the floe, the luckless vessel is drifted helplessly hundreds of miles, till a favourable wind loosens the icy prison walls. It is no uncommon occurrence for a hundred vessels to be thus beset by heavy ice, through which no passage can be forced. Some are "nipped," some crushed to atoms, and the men have to escape for their lives over the ice. Others are carried into the great northern bays, or borne in the heavy "pack" up and down on the ocean for weeks, returning to port "clean"—that is, without a single seal. There are seasons when the boldest and most skilful captains fail. At other times, by a turn of good fortune, a vessel "strikes the seals" a day or two after leaving port, and finds herself in the middle of a "seal patch" sufficient to load the *Great Eastern*. The whole ice for miles around is covered thick with the young "white coats," and in a fortnight from the time of the departure, she returns to port loaded to the gunwale, her very decks being piled with the skins and fat of seals.

When approaching such an El Dorado as this, the excitement on board may be imagined as the welcome whimpering of the young harp seals is heard. Their cry has a remarkable resemblance to the sobbing or whining of an infant in pain, which is redoubled as the destroyers approach. Young hunters, who now apply their gaffs for the first time, are often almost overcome by their baby lamentations. Compassion, however, is soon gulped down. The vessel is "laid to," the men eagerly bound on the ice, and the work of destruction begins. A blow on the nose from the gaff stuns or kills the young seal. Instantly the sculping-knife is at work, the skin with the fat adhering is detached with amazing rapidity from the carcass, which is left on the ice, while the fat and skin alone are carried off. This process is called "sculping"—a corruption, no doubt, of scalping. The skin or pelt is generally about three feet long and two and a half feet wide, and weighs from thirty-five to fifty pounds. Five or six pelts are reckoned a heavy load to drag over rough or broken ice sometimes for one or two miles. If the ice is loose and open the hunter has to leap from pan to pan.

Fancy two or three hundred men on a field of ice carrying on this work. Then what a picture the vessel presents as the pelts are being piled on deck to cool previous to stowage below! One after another the hunters arrive with their loads, and snatch a hasty moment to drink a bowl of tea and eat a piece of biscuit and butter. The poor mother seals, now cubless, are seen popping their heads up in the small lakes of water and holes among the ice, anxiously looking for their young.

So soon as the sailing vessel reaches port with her fat cargo, the skinners go to work and separate skin and fat. The former are at once salted and stored for export to England, to be converted into boots and shoes, harness, portmanteaus, etc. The old method of manufacturing the fat was to throw it into huge wooden vats, in which the pressure of its own weight and the heat of the sun extracted the oil, which was drawn off and barrelled for exportation. This was a tedious process. Latterly steam has been employed to quicken the extraction of the oil. By means of steam-driven machinery, the fat is now rapidly cut up by revolving knives into minute pieces, then ground finer in a sort of gigantic sausage-machine; afterwards steamed in a tank, which rapidly extracts the oil; and finally, before being barrelled, it is exposed for a time in glass-covered tanks to the action of the sun's rays. By this process the work of manufacturing, which formerly occupied two months, is completed in two weeks. Not only so, but by the steam process the disagreeable smell of the oil is removed, the quality improved, and the quantity increased.

The refuse is sold to the farmers, who mix it with bog and earth, which converts it into a highly fertilizing compost. The average value of a tun of seal-oil is about a hundred and forty dollars. The skin of a young harp seal is worth from ninety to one hundred cents. The greater part of the oil is sent to Britain, where it is largely used in lighthouses and mines, and for lubricating machinery. It is also used in the manufacture of the finer kinds of soap.

The harp seal—*par excellence* the