

HUNTING THE WALRUS.*



HEAD OF WALRUS.

THE walrus is an amphibious animal inhabiting the arctic regions, and presenting, like other amphibians, a striking illustration of the results of greediness. Not satisfied with living in one element, he tries to live in two, and the consequence is that he can neither live exclusively in the water, like the fishes, nor comfortably on dry land, like the land animals. It is true that the dictionary asserts that an amphibious animal can live in either of two elements. This is a shameless inaccuracy. The amphibian needs both land and water, and could not be happy with either were the other dear element away.

The walrus is a select and aristocratic beast, inasmuch as he is the sole representative of the genus *Trichechus*, and has no plebeian relatives in the shape of subgenera and species to wound his family pride. He is found throughout the whole arctic zone, as far as it has been explored, but he is chiefly hunted in the neighborhood of Nova Zembla and Spitzbergen, where the submarine banks, which he delights to rake for

the mollusks on which he feeds, lie comparatively near the surface of the water. He is not a graceful nor pleasing beast in appearance, since he somewhat resembles an enormous pig, with coarse whiskers, a pair of huge tusks depending from the upper jaw, flippers instead of legs, and no tail whatever. A full-grown walrus weighs from 2500 to 3000 pounds, and his skin, blubber, and tusks constitute his attractions in the eyes of the hunter.

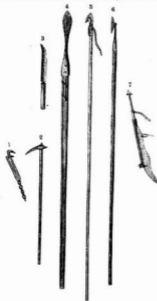
Mr. James Lamont, a British yachtsman, who has enjoyed a great deal of acute and satisfactory misery in hunting the walrus and other arctic animals, holds that the polar bear is the progenitor of the walrus. He supposes that, ages ago, enterprising bears became addicted to shell-fish hunting in shallow water. By constantly raking the mud with their teeth, and thus catching and swallowing shell-fish without wasting time by picking them up with their claws, they gradually developed a pair of upper canine teeth of enormous size. As their manner of life obliged the bears to spend most of their time in swimming, they wisely laid aside their legs and substituted flippers, at the same time abandoning the purely foppish habit of wearing an entirely useless tail. Thus, in Mr. Lamont's opinion, the walrus is merely an improved polar bear, fitted with the necessary apparatus for successfully hunting shell-fish. That the rest of the bears still cling to their ursine peculiarities is, of course, due to their stupid conservatism, and there is really no excuse to be made for them.

This ingenious genesis of the walrus is not, however, to be accepted as a demonstrated fact. Mr. Lamont himself proposes it only in the guise of a plausible hypothesis. Every man has an inalienable right to make all sorts of hypotheses, and those who do not agree with Mr. Lamont have no right to call him hard names, as he is inclined to think they will. Less excusable is the conduct of that eminent naturalist whose name will be forever associated with his discovery of those surprising beasts, the slithytov, the mome-rath, and the jabberwock. He has impliedly asserted that the walrus cherishes a fondness for carpenters, in whose company he is accustomed to walk along the beach, looking for oysters, and discussing the comparative merits of cabbages and kings. It is sufficient to say that not a single well-authenticated case of the kind has ever been reported, and it is in the highest degree improbable that the walrus would engage in an argument concerning a vegetable like the cabbage, of the very existence of which he is in profound ignorance.

Though the walrus occasionally makes

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long voyages on cakes of floating ice, and has even been known to reach by this means the coast of Scotland, such journeys are never voluntarily undertaken. As he can not dive to any great depth, and as he seeks his food on the bottom of the sea, he is compelled to remain where the water is shallow. There is reason to suppose that the walrus is more abundant in higher latitudes than he is in the lower parallels where the hunters now seek him. Nature, in her man-



WEAPONS FOR THE WALRUS.

1. Ice-Anchor.—2. Hook Pick.—3. Walrus Knife.—4. Lance.—5. Walrus Harpoon.—6. White-whale Harpoon.—7. Harpoon Gun.

ufactories at the north pole, is constantly turning out vast quantities of ice and walrus, which are carried by the arctic currents to regions where the vessels of the walrus-hunters can penetrate. It is certain that the walrus is gradually abandoning his most southerly haunts, and retreating northward before the attacks of his enemies. Formerly he frequented the Shetland Islands and the whole extent of the Norway coast, but at present he can not be hunted with much success below the seventieth parallel.

The walrus-hunters are chiefly Norwegians, and most of the vessels employed in the business sail from one or the other of

the small Norwegian ports of Tromsø and Hammerfest. These vessels are small and crazy craft which have been worn out in less oily occupations. They are commonly sloop-rigged, and carry a square top-sail which can be laid aback when it is desired to heave the vessel to. They are manned by crews numbering from ten to fifteen men, all of whom have a share in the proceeds of the voyage, as was formerly the custom among our Nantucket whalers. Every walrus sloop carries a crow's-nest lashed to the after-side of the topmast a few feet below the truck. The crow's-nest is simply an empty cask, intended to shelter the man who is on the look-out for walrus. It is approached by a ladder made of wooden rungs lashed at either extremity to the topmast back-stays, and is entered through a trap-door in the bottom. As this ladder does not reach below the head of the lower mast, it sometimes happens that a look-out who has descried a herd of walrus, and is joyfully hastening to the deck, with a mind preoccupied by hopes of blubber, forgets the sudden termination of the ladder, and so steps off into space. As the look-out always has a telescope with him, and as he always contrives, in case of a fall, to strike the deck with the telescope underneath him, the practice of making the descent in one step is much deprecated by captains. Sailors, of course, are cheap, but a good telescope is costly, and its loss is often a serious inconvenience.

Each vessel carries two walrus boats, twenty feet long by four feet beam, and sharp at each end, like an ordinary whale-boat. Five men constitute a boat's crew; of these, four row with a pair of sculls each, the one who acts as stroke standing up in the stern, facing the others, and steering by pushing instead of pulling his sculls. The fifth man is the harpooner, and also the commander of the boat. His station is in the bow, and close beside him are the harpoons, lines, and lances, a telescope, and a hatchet with which to cut loose from a harpooned walrus in case of necessity. If he prefers to shoot the walrus before harpooning him, a rifle also forms part of the magazine of arms. The boats are strongly built, and painted white in order to assimilate them in color to the ice, and to thus enable them to approach the walrus without prematurely attracting his attention. It is claimed that boats rowed with sculls instead of oars find less difficulty in making their way through floating ice, and can, moreover, be turned in any direction with great rapidity.

The weapons used in walrus-hunting bear only a general resemblance to those employed in the whale-fishery. The harpoon heads, which are exceedingly sharp, are shaped like the half of an arrow-head split in two longitudinally, and have thus only one barb.

The harpoon shafts are made of white pine, twelve or thirteen feet long and an inch and a half in thickness. The walrus line, made of two-inch hemp rope, is fastened to the harpoon head, and is twelve or fifteen fathoms long. Six harpoon heads, four shafts, and four or five lines are carried in every boat, and the shaft is fitted into the socket of the harpoon only when the time for using it has arrived.

As white whales are frequently met by boats in pursuit of walruses, a whale line fifty fathoms long, and a harpoon of a heavier weight and better adapted to meet the views of the whale than is the walrus harpoon, are kept in readiness in case a white whale should seem to require them. Harpoon guns, which have proved very successful in the whale-fishery, are seldom used by walrus-hunters. Occasionally, however, a walrus boat carries one mounted on a swivel in the bow. The harpoon gun is like an ordinary fowling-piece, with a clumsy stock, and a bore large enough to receive the shaft of a harpoon. Probably its cost is the real reason why the Norwegians are slow to adopt it.

The lances, of which each boat carries four or five, with white pine shafts nine feet long, are used for killing the walrus after he has been harpooned. The haak pik—the word being evidently the result of a feeble Norwegian effort to spell pick-axe—is a combined boat-hook and ice-breaker, and is, moreover, used as a weapon with which to kill seals. The ice-anchor, besides serving to moor the boat to an iceberg, is employed as a fulcrum by which, with the help of two double blocks and twenty-four fathoms of rope, a boat's crew can haul a dead walrus on to the ice in order to strip off his skin and blubber—an operation which is performed by the aid of long and exceedingly sharp knives.

In addition to this array of hunting tools, the walrus boat carries a small mast and sail, a compass, twenty or thirty pounds of bread, a canister of coffee, a small kettle, a bailing ladle, a hammer, a bag of nails, a piece of sheet-lead for mending holes in the boat, and a box of matches. It not infrequently happens that a boat sent on a hunting excursion is unable to regain the sloop, and hence the boats' crews must always be prepared to shift for themselves until they are picked up by some other vessel.

On one occasion a walrus sloop was moored to a stranded iceberg near the Spitzbergen coast, and left in charge of two of the crew, the captain and the rest of his men landing to hunt bears. During their absence the two ship-keepers found the captain's stock of brandy, and soon drank themselves into the condition of the typical boiled owl. Meanwhile a dense fog came on, the tide rose, and the iceberg and the

sloop rapidly drifted away. When the fog lifted, and the hunting party undertook to return to their sloop, they could find no trace of her. They rowed back to the land, and waited for several days. The sloop did not return, and preferring the chance of drowning at sea to the certainty of dying of cold and hunger on land, they boldly started in their open boat to make a voyage of 480 miles to Norway.

There were eight of them, including the captain. Four rowed while the others lay in the bottom of the boat, thus serving as ballast, and giving the oarsmen plenty of room. In eight days they reached the coast of Finmark. When it is remembered that during the most of this time they were surrounded by drift ice, and chilled by the arctic cold, it can be understood that the voyage was far more difficult and hazardous than one of much greater extent over a calm summer sea, like that on which Captain Bligh was set afloat, would have been.

As for the sloop, she drifted about for many days, until she fell in with another vessel, the captain of which, believing her to be abandoned, sent a crew on board her, who found the two worthies asleep by the side of their brandy cask. The brandy was tossed overboard, and the sloop navigated to Hammerfest, where her captain joyfully received her, and subsequently held a brief and satisfactory interview—not wholly unconnected with a serviceable handspike—with the purloiners of his brandy.

As has been said, after the walrus is killed he is dragged on the ice and stripped of his valuables. The skin, with the blubber adhering to it, and the tusks, are brought to the sloop, where the blubber is separated from the skin, and stowed away in tanks without being "tried out." The skins are packed in salt, and the tusks are carefully laid away. It must not be supposed that the flayed carcass of the walrus is left on the ice to shock the sensitive feelings of his relatives and friends. The hunters carefully throw it back into the sea, where it instantly sinks. Were this precaution not taken, every walrus who caught a glimpse of the mutilated carcass would immediately suspect foul play, and would promptly seek a safer locality.

A full-grown walrus yields about 520 pounds of blubber, 300 pounds of skin, and eight pounds of ivory. The blubber is worth forty dollars in gold, the skin fifteen dollars, and the ivory ten dollars, making a total of sixty-five dollars. Of course the price is subject to fluctuations, but the average value of a full-grown walrus does not vary much from the foregoing estimate. The blubber is, of course, converted into oil. The skin is made into sole-leather and harness, and, among the Scandinavians and Russians, into running rigging for small sea-going

craft. The ivory is of a denser and finer quality than elephant ivory, and is manufactured into an infinite variety of small articles. A walrus sloop which makes a successful voyage may bring home a cargo worth \$2000, of which the owners of the vessel receive two-thirds, and the remainder is divided among the crew, the captain receiving three shares, the two harpooners two shares each, and each of the sailors a single share.

The walrus is not an easy beast to kill. The hunters usually try to steal on him in their boats while he is sleeping on an iceberg in what he considers a warm and sunny spot. So lightly does he sleep that it is probably easier to catch six or possibly eight weasels asleep than it is to approach one sleeping walrus without waking him, and it is necessary to be in close proximity to the beast in order to harpoon him. There are also difficulties in the way of shooting a walrus. If he is not killed outright at the first shot, he will infallibly roll into the water, sink to the bottom, and die where he can be of no possible use to any one. Now the walrus is compounded principally of blubber and bone, his head being especially bone-clad. If a bullet is planted about six inches behind the eye and about one-fourth of the apparent depth of the head from the top, it penetrates the brain and produces instant death. It is, of course, no easy matter to hit so small a mark from a moving boat, and hence the rifle is of little use in walrus-hunting, except in the hands of an expert marksman.

The walrus is fond of society, and herds of thirty, fifty, or even more, are often found sleeping sweetly on an ice-field side by side. One of the number, however, is always detailed as a sentinel, and he discharges his duty with the utmost fidelity. If he sees a suspicious object he instantly awakens his comrades by prodding them with his tusks. The herd then immediately take to the water, and can only be reached by hard rowing.

When a walrus is harpooned, his first impulse is to dive. The harpoon line runs swiftly out, and the walrus, finding that he can not sink the boat by his dead-weight, rises to the surface to breathe, and then starts at a furious rate to rush away from his tormentors. The boat flies through the water, which boils about her bows, and rushes after her in long radiating swells. Occasionally a fierce old bull drags the boat so rapidly that her bows are plunged under the water. Sometimes the walrus darts under a field of ice and tries to drag the boat under after him, or to dash it to pieces against the ice. In such circumstances there is nothing to be done but to cut the line and let him go, while the crew thank Heaven that they are rid of a knavish beast.

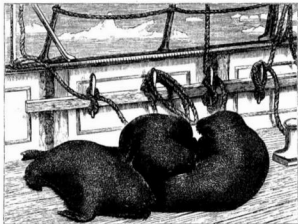
If this necessity does not arrive, the harpooner hauls in the line as soon as the walrus slackens his pace, and when his victim is within reach he stabs him with the fatal lance, until he yields up his special variety of ghost.

Chasing a herd of swimming walruses is hardly less exciting than the chase of the sperm-whale. The harpooner stands erect with harpoon in hand, and shouts to the steersman which direction to take. The men bend to their oars as though they were rowing a race on Saratoga Lake instead of rowing for prosaic blubber. Presently the boat is among the herd. On every side the frightened brutes are blowing, bellowing, and churning the water into foam. The harpooner poises his weapon, but delays to strike until he has selected the fattest one of the herd. Every few moments the walruses dive, as by a common impulse; but they can remain but a short time under the water, and when they come to the surface again the boat is still among them. Now the boat nears a veteran bull, whose vast bulk and long tusks claim the attention of the harpooner. The keen iron sings through the air, and its cruel barb is fast among the tough muscles of the doomed animal. He is not permitted to tow the boat for many minutes. Every oarsman pulls with all the muscular strength, nerve power, and weight at his command, and at the earliest possible minute the captured walrus is lanced, and the harpooner is hurling his harpoon at another. Sometimes three or four walruses are harpooned almost simultaneously, and their struggles make it temporarily doubtful which party is hunting and which is hunted.

The instinct of maternal affection is very strongly developed in the cow walrus, and the hunters take a heartless advantage of the fact. If there is a calf among a herd of hunted walruses, the mother either carries it under her flipper, or, at all events, keeps close to it, and the rest of the herd chivalrously accommodate their pace to hers. The experienced harpooner, therefore, tries to harpoon the calf in preference to even the finest walrus in the herd, knowing that its cries will keep the mother by its side, and will call her companions to her aid. A cow has been known to watch the harpooner, and to deliberately interpose her body so as to receive the harpoon intended for her calf, without making the least outcry or giving any sign of pain. Hunters have, however, at times found their cruel expedient for bringing a flying herd around them rather more successful than they desired it to be. The walruses, indignant at such trifling with the holiest emotions of walrus nature, have charged the boat and torn it into pieces. Even in such circumstances, when the crew are struggling in the water, the

animals seldom attack them, but prefer to improve the opportunity for renewing their flight. It is true that a Norwegian skipper was once seized by a cow walrus and dragged three times down to the bottom; but he explained the occurrence by the flattering theory that the beast mistook him for her calf, and that her action was there-

is defended by an unusually tough hide lined with layers of elastic blubber; while, on the other hand, the walrus inflicts painful and frequently fatal wounds on the bear with his sharp curved tusks. If the walrus happens to have plenty of leisure on his hands, he will sometimes strike his tusks deep into the bear and drag him down to the bottom.



YOUNG WALRUSES ASLERT.

fore dictated by affection instead of revenge.

Mr. Lamont, in one of his walrus-hunting cruises, captured three young walruses, which were kept in a pen on the deck of his yacht, and were brought up by hand with the aid of an improvised nursing bottle. They were easily tamed, and soon evinced the familiar fearlessness and winning grace of the domestic pig. Like the latter animal, they were incessantly hungry, and continually filled with admiration of their own vocal powers. These interesting little strangers lived to reach the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, where they lived in luxury until one day during the siege, when the happy thought of eating up the menagerie occurred to the hungry Parisians.

Although the walrus seldom attacks men, even when they are swimming among the fragments of a crushed boat, he is by no means cowardly. He will readily fight any animal whom he does not suspect of having a harpoon concealed about him. Not only do the bulls fight savagely among themselves, but a walrus will often engage and defeat the polar bear. The latter finds it comparatively useless to hug an animal who

Then, while the bear is drowning, the walrus takes him apart with great dexterity, and leaves the pieces for the benefit of casual sharks.

Enough has been said to show that walrus-hunting involves a good deal of hard work. It also involves an intolerable amount of unsavory odor. The perfume which ceaselessly ascends from a vessel's hold filled with rancid blubber can not be described, and can be imagined only by a New Yorker living in the immediate vicinity of a bone-boiling establishment. The Norwegians, however, do not seem to mind it. Heroism in the presence of hideous smells is one of the characteristics of the Scandinavians. Perhaps the power of the Northern nose is dulled, just as its exterior color is deepened, by the cold. This is a matter which deserves to be investigated by ethnologists and meteorologists.

The chief dangers connected with walrus-hunting are due not to the walrus, but to the terrible arctic climate. The walrus sloops are often wrecked on the rocks that belt the coast of Spitzbergen, or are walled up in some fiord or cove into which they may have ventured by the sudden packing of the ice. In the former case the crew may take to

their boats, and either steer for Norway or try to fall in with some other vessel of the walrus fleet. When, however, the arctic pack sweeps down and imprisons an incautious sloop, her people are compelled to winter in the frightful cold of Spitzbergen, where the thermometer (Fahrenheit) frequently sinks to -45° , and even lower. For a long time it was supposed that life could not be supported in such extreme and long-continued cold. This, however, was a mistake, as has been abundantly shown by the various scientific expeditions that have wintered in even colder latitudes than that of Spitzbergen. Nevertheless, the wrecked walrus-hunter, with his imperfect means for protecting himself against the cold and for supplying himself with food, seldom manages to live through a Spitzbergen winter. Many years ago a Russian company established a station on the coast of Spitzbergen, and for several seasons men were left at this station during the winter to hunt seals, walrus, bears, and reindeer. One summer the vessel which sailed from Archangel to relieve them was lost at sea. In the following August a party of Norwegians happened to visit the Russian establishment, and on reaching the huts found that all the men were dead. Fourteen had been buried by their comrades in graves the shallowness of which showed how little strength the survivors possessed. Two lay dead just outside the threshold of the largest hut, and the remaining two were

found inside—one lying on the floor and the other on the bed. The latter was the superintendent, who had been able to read and write, and a journal lying beside him told the story of the sufferings of his comrades and himself. The ice, surrounding the coast, had prevented them from getting seals or wild fowl. Their stores had gradually been exhausted, and they had been attacked by scurvy. The last survivor had only had sufficient strength left to roll his dead comrade out of the bed, and to note in his journal his inability to bury him. The graves are now marked by rude crosses fifteen feet high, and the huts are left in the same condition in which they were found by the horror-stricken Norwegians.

It may be asked what sort of men are these who, in their wretched, unseaworthy vessels, pursue an occupation so full of danger and suffering. They are brave, hardy, patient, cheerful, dirty, and drunken. They rarely have the opportunity to exhibit this latter characteristic on shipboard; but when they reach home they make amends by keeping constantly drunk until their money is gone, when they hasten to ship for another voyage. There is certainly no class of sailors who suffer so much and are so miserably paid. It is strange that, in the present scarcity of good seamen in the British mercantile marine, an effort is not made to induce the poor walrus-hunters to man the steamers and clipper ships of British merchants.



A SPITZBERGEN CEMETERY.