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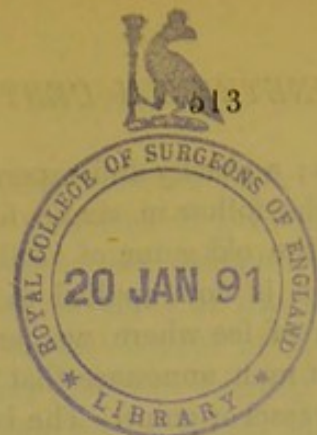
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ON SEALS AND SAVAGES.

IN the old world the charms and beauties of the spring-time have been the theme of poets' songs probably since our simian or other remote ancestor first acquired the power of speech. Should, however, a poet ever arise on the fir-clad island of Newfoundland, he will be compelled, in one respect at any rate, to have the merit of originality, and it will tax his powers to describe the disagreeables of what is there the most forbidding of seasons. Then the thick northern ice comes sweeping down, carried from desolate polar seas by the Arctic current, and sometimes for several hundred miles the island is encased in this chilling armour, which stretches far as the eye can reach, the sea resembling a vast pavement of rough white marble. Here and there an iceberg is jammed amidst the floes, and the deep blue shadows of passing clouds alone afford the eye some little relief in the dreary white monotony. When the southern wind sweeps over this icy desert, it meets with the usual fate attending 'evil communication,' imbibes all the disadvantages of the new association, and reaches Newfoundland laden with the chilling fog which has given such an evil reputation to the climate, and which in parts of the island is distinguished by the expressive sobriquet of 'the barber.' Frequent thaws melt the snow off the warmer portions of rock and field, and these peer out in black and brown misery from amidst the soiled and rotten snow, giving the whole face of the country an indescribable appearance of forlorn wretchedness. Not a flower is to be seen, not a green blade holds out promise of glories to come; a few American 'robins' (*Turdus migratorius*, a kind of thrush—handsome birds with ruddy russet breasts, black heads, and yellow beaks), which arrive about the 10th or 12th of April, alone reassure one that nature is 'not dead but sleepeth.'

As English boys rejoice in the spring amusement of bird-nesting, the youth of Newfoundland look forward to the arrival of the ice for their spring pastime of 'copying.' This diversion consists in jumping from one floating slab of ice to another. These pieces of ice are locally termed 'pans,' and a pan may vary from a piece not more than a few inches in size, to one some thirty feet in diameter. The pans are not always close together, open water or 'sludge' (half-frozen snow) is between them in places, and it is not every pan

that will bear any weight ; a plucky and experienced leader is therefore desirable. The youths follow in single file, jumping from pan to pan in the fashion of the old game of 'follow-my-leader;' hence the term 'copying,' which is now applied to the mere act of progressing from pan to pan of ice where no game is in question, so that one may often hear a man announce that he is going 'to copy out' to such and such a vessel or point. The boys' parents encourage this amusement, for it is thus they learn the chief art necessary to a sealer, and to become a sealer, or 'soiler' as it is usually pronounced, is an object of very general ambition amongst the poorer classes. About a couple of weeks previous to the 1st of March crowds of men begin to arrive in St. John's and other towns in hopes of obtaining a 'berth for the ice' on one of the vessels preparing for the seal fishery. Formerly this 'fishery,' as it is inaccurately called, was prosecuted by fleets of schooners, but of late years steamers have to a great extent taken the place of sailing vessels, and whereas formerly over two hundred schooners have sailed from the harbour of St. John's in search of 'seal meadows,' not more than six or seven steamers now start on the quest. The largest of these steamers belong to Dundee, and reach Newfoundland about the end of February. In St. John's crews of sealers are engaged, and the vessels fitted out for the voyage. No steamer may clear on a sealing voyage before the 10th of March. Should the voyage be a successful one, and the steamer return to port with a full cargo in the course of a couple of weeks, or even less, there is time for her to go on a second sealing cruise, but she must not leave for such a purpose later than the 1st of April.

These regulations have recently been passed by the Newfoundland Legislature, as it was feared that the introduction of steamers into the seal fishery might result in the extinction of the seals. The schooners carried crews of from forty to fifty men, while over two and three hundred can be accommodated on each steamer, which has also the advantage of being able to push its way through the ice (the sealing steamers being all wooden vessels) close to patches of seals, and of being to a great extent independent of wind and weather. Hence of late years the destruction of seals has been enormous ; over 500,000 seals have sometimes been killed in a single season, as against 4,900 which was reckoned a fair average fishery in 1795.

As the time for the fishery draws near, numbers of men come tramping into the capital city, while hundreds arrive from the out-ports by rail or in coasting vessels. The chief resort of the sealers is Water Street, the principal thoroughfare of St. John's. It is a long unpaved and dirty street, that boasts shops and stores built of brick or stone, whereas the remainder of the town is built of wood. These run for a couple of miles along the edge of the harbour, into

which numerous wooden wharves push their ungainly forms. At this time of the year the street is generally piled high with black and frozen snow, sleighs and catamarans passing backwards and forwards on a kind of causeway in the centre, and passages being cut along in front of the houses as footways. Along these the sealers throng. They are fine-looking men physically, tall and bony, accustomed to brave all weathers in a most inclement climate, trained in a hard school, ignorant of all the refinements of life; the sort of stuff out of which in former days privateer and buccaneer captains would have been eager to man their ships. Their countenances are, as a general rule, heavy, and, as usually in fishing populations, the intellectual faculties are decidedly in abeyance. The men are mostly dressed in short jackets, strong cloth trousers, and long boots reaching nearly to the knee, caps lined with fur having flaps to cover the ears, warm fingerless gloves called mittens, and the greater number carry a minute bundle slung on a stick over their shoulder.

The bundle contains an infinitesimal quantity of spare clothing and a little medicine for fear of accidents on the voyage—generally some sort of a salve in case of a cut, a little friar's balsam in the event of a sprain, and a bottle of sulphate of zinc lest the sealer should be smitten with ice-blindness. The latter is not uncommon amongst the men; it is a species of ophthalmia and results from the up-glare from the vast expanse of ice which produces inflammation of the eyes. When first the eyes are affected prickings are felt as though dust or small particles of some sort had got into them, the lids wink continually, and water streams from the eyes. Unless checked the inflammation gradually increases, till the sufferer loses all sight for a time, intense pain resulting from exposure to any strong light. Persons who have once experienced snow-blindness are liable to a return of the affliction if they again expose themselves to the dazzling glare of the spring snow. To obviate the risk to their eyes the men frequently wear coloured spectacles when on the ice.

Till one has passed a considerable time amidst ice and snow one hardly realises how saddening and depressing alike to eye and mind is the constant sameness of white, and the fact is forcibly brought home to one how much the pleasure of life is bound up in green things and the ever-varying beauties and interests of the animal and vegetable worlds. When unoccupied by seals the ice floes are monotonous wastes showing no sign of life. It is true life is present even in those frozen hummocks and pans. Professor Stuwitz found infusoria existing in lumps of ice, which, when the mass was broken into small pieces, shone with phosphorescent gleam through their crystal prison, and Dr. Kane describes the luminous appearance resulting from the clashing of icebergs and floes as resembling the

glint of fireflies. But the exhibition of these microscopic forms of life is an exceptional phenomenon; usually the ice seems lifeless and dreary, as must have been the world on the second day of creation.

When sailing ships were in vogue the men often had hard work cutting and sawing a way through the ice for their vessel. When the floes are not heavy or tightly packed a steamer can push and ram her way to open water if the harbour be unencumbered with ice. At daybreak on the 12th of March the steamers get under way, the sealers crowding decks and rigging, and cheering lustily as they depart. Should the ice be thin and clear water in view, the ships butt their way ahead, backing each time a little and then ramming themselves into the ice. Northwards the steamers take their way, each choosing the course considered most likely to lead to the great floes where will be found the seal meadows. At the top of the mast on each steamer is a barrel-like erection called the 'crow's nest.' It is a large cask fastened to the main-royal masthead; on the top is an iron framework on which to rest a telescope. At the bottom of the barrel is a small trapdoor through which entrance is obtained, and in the 'crow's nest' the man on the look-out for seals takes his station and is sheltered from the cutting showers of frozen snow and the icy blasts of the searching wind. As soon as seals are descried the steamer forces her way as far towards them as practicable, and the work of slaughter begins.

Let us now see how the seals have come to meet their doom. As the breeding time approaches the female seals congregate in countless numbers in the northern seas, and herd together in great flocks on what is known as the 'whelping ice.' Each seal scratches and bites for herself a hole through the ice, by which she can crawl on to the floe, and return to the water at pleasure, and, singular to say, the creatures contrive to keep these holes open and unfrozen in the coldest weather. About the middle of February the young are born on the ice, each seal producing only one cub each year. When first born the young seals are clothed in a thick white fur, and are called 'white-coats.' Several varieties of seals are found around Newfoundland—the Harp, the Hood, the Bay Seal, and the Square Flipper; a fifth kind described as having a long upper lip resembling that of a tapir is found in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, but it is rare, and little seems known about it. The Bay Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) is not numerous; it goes up the rivers, and is never found on the ice. This is identical with the seal found on the west coast of Ireland and in Scotland, and which as late as 1703 supplied food to the Hebridean islanders. Adamnan tells us that the monastery of Iona kept a flock of these seals in a neighbouring island. A robber once attempted to steal them, but the monks ransomed their seals by giving him sheep in place of them. The 'Square Flipper' is supposed to be a local name for the great Greenland seal, the

Phoca barbata. It attains a large size, some having been killed sixteen feet in length; however, it is not taken sufficiently often in Newfoundland to have the only importance generally recognised, namely that of commercial value. The Harp and the Hood are the two kinds, therefore, of moment to the inhabitants, and of these the Harps are much the most highly prized, as they contain the largest amount of fat or blubber from which the oil is extracted.

The Hood, or more properly the Hooded Seal (*Stenmatopus cristatus*), is so called from the male having a singular hood or bladder over the nose, which it inflates at pleasure. It is much larger and fiercer than the Harp, and usually the Hoods go in pairs, the male assisting his mate in the guardianship of their young. When attacked, should the female be killed, the Hooded Seal becomes a formidable antagonist; his inflated hood renders it difficult to despatch him, and with his sharp teeth he will snap off the handles of gaffs like so many cabbage-stalks. It is said that fights between a Hooded Seal and five or six hunters have lasted over an hour, and the hunters sometimes come off second best in the encounter. Even the Esquimaux now and then fall victims to the prowess of the Hooded Seal, when attacking him in their frail kayacks. Old Hoods are generally killed by being shot, a certain number of the men being armed with guns for the purpose. A seal, if shot in the water when fat and in good condition, will float, but when the blubber has been exhausted, and the seal is lean, the body invariably sinks. The young of the Hoods are not white but greyish in colour and are called 'blue-backs.' The meadows or patches of Hoods and Harps are never seen on the same floes, and the fishermen say that the patches of Hoods are always found to the eastward of the Harp meadows, and the young are born two or three weeks later than those of the latter.

At each seal meadow the sealers affirm that a small seal, called by them a 'Jenny,' takes up its position on a block of ice and acts as a sentinel, warning its companions of the approach of danger. Whether this seal is a distinct species, or an unusually small individual like the 'laughaun,' or little pig so often found in a litter, it is impossible to say, as the sealers have a superstitious aversion to killing a 'Jenny,' so no specimen has ever been procured. In Ireland the 'laughaun' is said to be endowed with superior wisdom, and is the pig that takes the lead amongst its brethren—characteristics that seem to be shared amongst seals by the 'Jenny.'

The Harp Seal (*Phoca greenlandica*) is of a silvery grey colour. The back is spotted, and in its fourth year the spots on the back of the male assume a form somewhat resembling a harp. Till they are three years old the males are hardly distinguishable from the females, and are known as 'bedlamers.'

For six weeks the young white-coats lie helpless and whimpering

on the ice. The thick layer of blubber that envelops them keeps them warm like a blanket and prevents them from being frozen to death in their icy cradle. During the day the mothers swim far and wide to hunt for fish, returning at intervals to suckle their cubs, and it is a marvellous fact that though they swim for miles around in search of prey, the seals return each to its own hole in the great icy monotony, guided by that exquisite and unerring sixth sense that we term instinct. After six weeks of helpless infancy the young seals begin to take to the water; they lose their white coats, and a spotted skin with a dark fur takes its place. They are now called 'hair seals,' or 'ragged jackets.' Though awkward on land, the seal's movements in the water are graceful, and its motion in swimming most beautiful. The young seals are frolicsome and playful; they roll over and over in the water, luxuriating in its invigorating freshness, and sometimes twist round and round trying to catch their hind flippers, just as kittens frisk and play with their tails. It is not till after several attempts and careful training by the mother that the cub learns to swim successfully, the old seals tenderly watching them all the while, guarding them from the dangers of collision with floating ice, and, it is reported, sometimes clasping them in their flippers and bearing them to places of safety.

But fortunate is the mother seal whose offspring survives till old enough to take to the water. It is while lying helpless on the ice that the greater number of seals fall a prey to the sealers. No sooner is the ship jammed amidst a 'patch' than the work of slaughter begins, and would it were always a work merely of slaughter! but, horrible to say, the men in their careless haste often neglect to kill the unhappy cubs, and actually skin them alive! Such a fact would be almost too shocking for credence were it not attested on undoubted evidence. Tocque, who was an eye-witness, writes:—

It (the seal-fishery) is a constant scene of bloodshed and slaughter. Here you behold a heap of seals which have only received a slight dart from the gaff, writhing and crimsoning the ice with their blood—rolling from side to side in dying agonies. There you see another lot, while the last spark of life is not yet extinguished, being stripped of their skin and fat; their startings and heavings making the unpractised hand shrink with horror to touch them.

Again, Professor Jukes, who was present on a sealing cruise, writes:—

I saw one poor wretch skinned, or scalped, while yet alive, and the body writhing in blood after being stripped of its pelt. The man told me he had seen them swim away in that state, and that if the first blow did not kill them, they would not stop to give them a second.

Again the same authority says:—

As this morning I was left alone to take care of the punt while the men were on the ice, the mass of dying carcasses piled in the boat around me, each writhing, gasping, and spouting blood, nearly made me sick. Seeking relief in action, I

drove the sharp point of the gaff into the brain of every one in which I could see a sign of life. The vision of one poor wretch writhing its snow-white woolly body with its head bathed in blood, through which it was vainly endeavouring to see and breathe, really haunts my dreams.

The men are furnished with poles or gaffs, shod with iron, and having a hook at one end. These serve to assist them in leaping from floe to floe, and are supposed to be also used for killing the seals. However, the 'tender mercies' of the thoughtless are no less cruel than those of the wicked, and when the hope of gain is added there is little chance of a sealer taking into consideration the exquisite agonies inflicted on his victims. The more skins secured the greater the profit, so often the skins are taken without a moment being wasted in ending the life of the unhappy creature, which has perhaps been rendered incapable of motion that would impede the brutal work by a blow on the nose or head. When frightened or hurt the seals sob and cry like children in pain, and large tears roll from their dark and pleading eyes. Professor Jukes thus describes the cries of the seals: 'In passing through a skirt of thin ice a man picked up a young seal with a gaff, and its cries were precisely like those of a child in the extremity of fright, agony, and distress—something between shrieks and convulsive sobbing.'

A gentleman who was present last spring on the sealing ice gave us a similar account of the cruelties that go on, and stated that when stripped of the skin, the animal having been merely stunned by a slight blow to ensure comparative ease for the operator in removing the pelt or 'blanket,' life after a time returns to the torn and bleeding carcass, which writhes in torture till beneficent death sooner or later puts an end to its sufferings.

Could anything be imagined more brutalising and degrading to those engaged in it than such a fishery? For its results we must again turn to Tocque, himself a native of Newfoundland. He says: 'The seal fishery is not only surrounded by physical calamities, but it is a nursery for moral and spiritual evils. It has a tendency to harden the heart and render it insensible to the finer feelings of human nature.' Again: 'The sealing vessels have been described as "floating hells."'

Professor Jukes writes:—

In this way we had 300 seals on board by dark, and the deck was one great shambles. When piled in a heap together they looked just like a flock of slaughtered lambs; and occasionally from out of the mass one poor wretch still alive would heave up its bloody face and flounder about. I employed myself in knocking these on the head with a handspike to put them out of their misery.

It would be impossible that, living for weeks in scenes like this, men could escape extremely brutalising effects. The decencies of life are impossible, cleanliness is forgotten; when seals are plentiful the men fill even their bunks with the reeking skins, and their

clothes remain unchanged during the whole voyage. Like the Esquimaux they esteem raw meat a delicacy; the sealers frequently string the seal's kidneys in bunches from their belts, and gnaw the gory food as they proceed on their work of slaughter.

The meals on board are thus described:—

As the men came on board they occasionally snatched a hasty moment to drink a bowl of tea, or eat a piece of biscuit and butter; and as the sweat was dripping from their faces, and their hands and bodies were reeking with blood and fat, and they often spread the butter with their thumbs and wiped their faces with the backs of their hands, they took both the liquids and the solids mingled with blood.

If seals are in sight the butchery is not always relaxed even on Sundays, but all lapses from humanity and civilisation seem lightly regarded. Even their Sabbatical delinquencies are sometimes considered by some of the clergy with a lenient eye, judging from an extract from the sermon of a divine of 'acknowledged ability and popularity,' quoted in one of the local papers. The sealing vessels were about to leave for the ice, and previous to their departure the minister introduced the following prayer on behalf of the men:—
'Forbid, O Lord, that any seals should be brought within their reach on the Sabbath Day, lest they should be brought into contact with them on that day. Thou knowest the weakness of our poor fallen nature; and also how poor they are, and how many hungry ones there are at home, and should they take seals, mercifully forgive.'

Thousands of seals are found in patches on the floes, but when one patch is exterminated the men often have to wander far from the ship in search of more prey, and it is then that their early training in copying comes in advantageously. Occasionally the sealers go eighteen or twenty miles away from the vessel over the ice, and in all places it may not be equally strong. Sometimes the pans are scattered; then the experienced copyist will use a slab of ice as a raft, guiding it into the desired position with his gaff, and so ferrying himself across the 'leads' or open water. At other times the 'lolly' or 'sludge' is soft, but will bear just one foot at a time, so the hunters spring rapidly over till they find a more secure pan on which to take breath. When they have gone far and have to drag their 'tows' of skins a considerable distance back to the ship, it may happen that where the ice has been all secure on the journey out, the sealers find a gap too wide to jump lying right in their homeward path. But even if no floating pans are within reach, they are at no loss what to do; the 'tows' (each containing five or six sealskins with the blubber attached) are flung into the water, the blubber causes them to float, and the men use them as stepping-stones across the open water. Accidents of course occur from time to time, and men often go through the 'lolly' or miss their footing and come in for a cold bath, which, considering their filthy condition, may not be

altogether an unmitigated evil; but it is rarely that any of them are drowned, as help is always at hand.

Occasionally the whelping ice approaches so close to the shore that the landsmen come in for their share of the spoil, and then even the women and children eagerly join the scene of carnage. In the spring of 1883, at a place called Bett's Cove, one woman secured five-and-thirty seals in one day, and at Twillingate many women killed heavy loads of seals, the people going twelve miles from land on the ice to reap this harvest. When the ice remains tightly packed for any length of time in the bays, the seals sometimes crawl on to the land, and at Bonavista Bay it has happened that as many as fifteen hundred seals have been killed amongst the bushes on one of the islands.

A few years ago the seal ice came close to the town of St. John's, and the inhabitants sallied out to reap the benefit. As they went seawards in the morning some of the hunters saw a man with his gun beside him sitting on a hummock of ice, not far from the mouth of the harbour. At his feet lay a dead seal. They went on in quest of their prey, and walked so far out that it was late in the afternoon before they returned. Happening to pass by the same spot, they saw the man still sitting on the hummock, and the seal lying as before. They went up to him. The man was dead, sitting upright stark and staring, frozen hard as the ice on which he rested.

On the same occasion one poor man killed a single seal, and dragged the carcass over the ice to the store of the merchant where he hoped to sell it. For any damage to the skin of the seal the seller has to submit to a drawback, the amount being deducted from the sum to be paid for the skin. On this occasion the journey had been long, the ice rough and jagged, and the poor man's seal was considerably the worse for its journey. But the merchant was considerate: he did not refuse to buy it, but on calculating the value of the blubber and then of the skin, the latter was found to be so much torn and spoiled that, instead of receiving any pay, it was proved to the bewildered hunter that, according to the merchant's reckoning, he was indebted to that worthy, for injuries to the skin, in a sum amounting to about half a crown!

The chief danger to which sealers are liable is that of the floe on which they find themselves, when at a considerable distance from the ship, being swept out to sea by a wind springing up suddenly. However, as the men are well versed in signs of approaching storms, they do not often subject themselves to such a risk.

Where there are fissures in the floes, large cod-fish are sometimes found on the ice, having sprung out of the water in their efforts to escape from their amphibious foes. Sharks swarm all round the sealing vessels; many of them are very large, fourteen or fifteen feet in length. They are of a dull and heavy temperament, and seem

altogether harmless to human beings. The sealers sometimes take them for the sake of the oil contained in their livers, which is considerable, a shark of ten feet long having a liver averaging six feet in length. It is a curious circumstance that sharks killed on the ice are said invariably to be blind, a thick membrane of often an inch in depth having formed over the creature's eyes. So stupid are these sharks that they may be enticed up on to the ice, within reach of the men's gaffs, by dangling a bait tied to a rope before them, and drawing it gradually nearer until the creature is brought within striking distance.

The seal fishery is a lottery. As many as five or six hundred thousand seals are found in some of the patches, and when vessels get amongst meadows like these, they soon return loaded till the deck is barely above the water, no Plimsoll's line existing in Newfoundland. At other times not a single seal is taken. The largest take ever made by any one ship occurred in the season of 1888, when the 'Neptune' belonging to Messrs. Job, of Dundee, brought in 42,224 pelts. Still the fishery on the whole was not an abundant one, and the seal fishery is on the decline. Steamers have driven sailing vessels from the waters to a great extent, and mineral oils are driving seal oil out of the market. At present the principal profit is derived from the skins, which when salted are exported to England, where they are tanned and form a large item in the 'kid leather' of commerce. Although the take of seals by steamers exceeds that of sailing vessels, the expense is, of course, far greater, and unless the catch be a very heavy one, the losses exceed the profits.

The men are entitled to a third of the value of the seals taken, which is divided equally amongst them; the amount gained by each man belonging to the 'Neptune' on the successful cruise of which we have spoken was sixty-six dollars, or 13*l.* 15*s.* For their berth on the ship they pay 1*l.* currency, receiving their rations in return. The captain receives 4 per cent. on the net proceeds, though some captains arrange to be paid 5*d.* on every skin brought in. The lion's share, of course, falls to the merchant who owns the vessel, and who has run the chief monetary risk in the gamble.

The seal is the main support of the Esquimaux, to whom every atom of the creature is of value. The blood, which they drink smoking hot, is their champagne; its flesh either raw or cooked is meat of which they never tire; even the entrails are eaten by them, and the membrane lining the stomach serves instead of glass for the solitary little window in their 'igloos' or snow huts. The skins form an important part of their clothing, and are the chief material for boots, tents, and kayacks; for the latter, indeed, no skins but those of the seal are used, as no others would stand equally well constant immersion in salt water, the walrus hide being too heavy

for such light craft, though used for the 'oomiak,' or women's boats.

The seal-hunting by the Esquimaux is very different from the wholesale slaughter we have described. When a seal-hole (*i.e.* the opening in the ice where the creatures rise to breathe) is found, which in winter is generally done by a dog specially trained for the purpose, the hunter feels with his spear through the superincumbent snow, till he finds the opening; then he takes up his station and patiently waits, sometimes for two days and nights, till he is rewarded by hearing a seal blow. At the second or third puff the hunter thrusts his spear through the hole, usually penetrating the skull of the unseen animal, which instantly dives, running out several fathoms of the line attached to the spear. Gradually the man drags the struggling seal upwards, and, enlarging the breathing-hole, hauls it out on to the snow. When the seals are basking on the ice in the sunshine, the Esquimaux approach within striking distance, lying flat on the ice and advancing by a sort of wriggling motion, which no doubt the seal mistakes for the movement of one of his own kind. At the same time the hunter chants his 'seal song,' which is described as a 'loud peculiar noise, a mixture of Innuït, singing and bellowing, which seems to work a charm upon the seal.' When the seal is killed, a seal feast takes place, to which all the neighbours are bidden. The first ceremony is to consecrate the animal by sprinkling water on its head. Frequently the feast is simply a gorge on the raw flesh; when the meat is cooked it is boiled in salt water and blood, the broth being eagerly drunk by the guests when the flesh is taken from the pot. The chief or igloo wife then hands portions of the meat to those present, having first politely sucked each morsel to prevent the fluid dripping from it, and at the same time the hostess considerably licks off any hairs or so forth that may have adhered to the meat.

Man is not the only enemy of the seal. They form a large portion of the prey of the polar bear, though unless very hungry he is dainty enough to eat only its blubber. The bears often surprise the seals when asleep on the ice, but they also capture them in the water, sinking their bodies so as only to leave their white heads visible. The seal who peers anxiously around mistakes this for a lump of floating ice, and allows its enemy to come dangerously near; then while the timid seal is scanning the upper world for possible dangers, the crafty bear dives under it and seizes it from below. The seals found in the Arctic regions make an excavation in the snow for their young and leave a hole through the ice by which they obtain access to the water from this lair. The bear is said to jump on the dome of the seal's snow house so as to break it in; it then seizes the baby seal in one of its paws, and holding it by the hind flippers allows the young seal to flounder in the water. When the

mother arrives to visit her young one, the bear keeps drawing the little creature backwards till the old seal is brought within reach, when he pounces upon her with his other paw. So many facts are narrated of the sagacity shown by the polar bear that it is not surprising that the old Norsemen considered that 'the bear had ten men's strength and eleven men's wit.' On the west coast of Ireland the peasants believe that the souls of old maids go into the bodies of seals. It would be well if a similar superstition extended to Newfoundland, as at present the impression there seems general that 'seals are like fish and have no feeling.' Even a sealer would probably have some hesitation about 'scalping' (as they term skinning) alive a spinster aunt or maiden sister.

When the sealing vessels have returned from their cruises, and their unsavoury cargoes have been landed on the south side of the harbour, so as to be out of reach of the olfactory nerves of the townspeople, the sealers again throng the streets of the metropolis. Groups of filthy and foul-smelling men, their clothes clotted with blubber and gore, loiter about the grogshops, or stand staring and spitting *ab libitum*. But their dirt and other drawbacks only seem to increase the heroic attributes of the 'soilers' in the eyes of the population. The town cadgers gaze on them with undisguised admiration, and they may be seen walking with respectable-looking women evidently proud of the escort of their greasy cavaliers. Many of the poorer members of the community may be seen carrying bunches of black and bloody flippers wherewith to prepare a luxurious family repast, and in the gurgling brooklets these ensanguined morsels are spread out to be cleansed before being cooked. There is proverbially no accounting for tastes; the poorer Newfoundlanders esteem seal's flippers a delicacy. The meat, though dark, is certainly tender, but to my uninitiated palate in taste it resembled the very fishiest of wild duck steeped in train oil. The diversity of verdicts pronounced by travellers on seal's flesh probably arises not alone from difference in tastes, but also from difference in the time when the meat was eaten. When the seal is first killed the oily flavour, so unpleasant to most people, is said to be absent. In some of the out-ports seal oil is used to trim the lamps, and a picturesque substitute for lamp or candle is sometimes resorted to in a large scallop-shell holding a piece of blubber with a wick fastened in it.

When unmolested on the ice, or basking in the sunshine on a smooth wave-worn rock, the seal seems the personification of contented happiness. He rolls and stretches himself, luxuriating in the genial warmth, wriggling and twisting almost like a snake, opening his hind flippers as if they were fans, and now and then lazily scratching his face and neck with a fore flipper, as does a dog with his hind legs. At such a moment probably the only drawback to the seal's enjoyment is the presence of numerous parasites with

which his fur is infested. These insects resemble the ticks found in sheep, and the skins of the old seals are full of them. When lying asleep on his side, the flippers laid back like fins, and his coat showing a silvery hue as it dries in the sunshine, the seal has a strong likeness to a large salmon; at other times he looks like a huge otter or water-rat, and indeed young seals are termed by the whalers 'floe-rats.' Occasionally for weeks the seals are kept prisoners on the ice, unable to get to the water. This occurs when the ice becomes jammed and the floes piled one over the other, so that the seal-holes are closed by them. When this happens the backs of the unfortunate animals are often scorched and blistered by the sun, and the creatures grow very thin, as all the while they must exist without food.

An old sealing captain, who recently died, used to relate how once for more than six weeks his ship had been fast stuck in the ice, and all the time was surrounded by thousands of seals, who, from the cause already stated, were unable to get to the water. The ship had a full cargo, and there was not an inch of space for any more skins, so for once the men ceased their work of slaughter and used to wander amongst the seals, playing with or teasing them. Sometimes they would jump on the backs of the old seals, letting the animals flounder about in vain attempts to rid themselves of their riders.

The seal is easily tamed, and is of a very affectionate disposition, attaching himself to his master with doglike fidelity. We kept one for several months, and, though timid and shy at first, he was easily reassured by kindness, and soon became quite tame. A gentleman connected with St. John's most kindly gave me the seal, which unfortunately, contrary to his instructions, had been wounded in the capture by a thrust on the head from a gaff. However, it was not long before Neptune's wound was healed, and he became a most interesting pet. It was some time before we could induce him to eat; tempting morsels of fish were dangled before him or thrown into his tank, but he would have none of them. At last we fortunately thought of placing some live fish in the water, which proved too much for his philosophy and were speedily caught and devoured. After that we had no further difficulty in inducing him to eat fish, dead or alive, and when fish were scarce, he did not disdain boiled lobster. He answered to his name, and would sprawl and wriggle up two or three steps and into the house to obtain a proffered herring or piece of cod, and uttered shrill cries of pleasure on catching sight of his master.

Now-a-days trading interests are supposed to override all other considerations, and to the Moloch of Commerce the health, morality, and happiness of millions of human beings are too often ruthlessly sacrificed; therefore efforts to mitigate the cruelties inflicted year after year on numbers of helpless and harmless animals will to many

people appear quixotic and useless. Morris, in his most interesting *Lectures on Art*, pithily points out the 'law of nature which forbids men to see evils which they are not ready to redress.' May it not be that it is a 'law of nature' which, like a cataract over men's eyes rendering them for a time dim, can ultimately be removed, and is it too much to hope that those who possess superior enlightenment and education will sooner or later awake to the crying sin of cruelty which, if the will were present, would easily be redressed? Surely, setting aside the sufferings of what we are pleased to call 'lower animals,' the wholesale brutalisation of large numbers of ordinary unthinking human beings is no light matter, and some blame has justly attached to a community where the labouring classes were allowed to retrograde from the humanising benefits supposed to be reaped from civilisation. But better days are dawning in Newfoundland. A Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has been established in the colony; the leading men there are awakening to the evils of which we have spoken, and it is to be hoped that their efforts to put down cruelties and unnecessary barbarities may be crowned with success.

EDITH BLAKE.