

Whale-Hunting as It is Now Done

The Harpoon Gun on a Steamer—What Photographs of the Animals and of Their Capture Reveal

By ROY CHAPMAN ANDREWS, in "The World's Work."

LAST summer, through the kindness of the Pacific Whaling Company of Victoria, B.C., and of Captain I. N. Hibberd, of the Tye Company, Alaska, I had the privilege of spending several months at their stations studying whales for the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

One of the things which I considered of the greatest importance was to study



"SORENSEN SWUNG THE GUN TO ONE SIDE AND FIRED."

and photograph the animals in the water, for even fairly good pictures of living whales have, with one or two exceptions, never been taken. Much of my work was done on board the whaling-ships. The difficulties of such work are many and peculiar. The little whaling-steamers are almost round on the bottom. This enables them to be turned and managed with the greatest ease, but makes sea-sickness a thing to be dreaded by the ordinary man. While the vessel is rolling and pitching in the usually iniquitous waters, focusing the camera and, at the same time, keeping one's feet—to say nothing of food—becomes a feat of considerable difficulty. No matter how strenuously the stomach rebels, nor what the physical discomforts may be, a photographer of whales must be ever on the alert, for



THE HARPOON GUN.

the unexpected always happens. Perhaps a humpback whale, without a sound of warning, will throw himself clear out of the water, or open his great mouth almost at the vessel's side, but always at the place where it seems certain he

will not appear. Nevertheless, whale-hunting with a camera is a royal sport. The whaling-steamer carries a small cannon, mounted at the bow. This shoots a harpoon weighing more than one hundred pounds, and having an explosive head or point, called the "bomb." The still, tense moments of waiting, and the excitement of the instant when the great purplish body rounds up from the water directly in front of the vessel's bow, where you stand with camera focused, ready to press the button at the crash of the harpoon-gun, are enough to make the slowest pulse leap and the thickest blood quicken. Never will I forget the days in Alaska spent on board the steamer Tye, Jr., Captain Charles Gramme, while I photographed finback and humpback whales.

As we left the station in the morning, and steamed down the bay toward Frederick Sound, the sun was just peeping over the snow-capped mountains, and drove long, slanting paths through the fog, which spread itself like a thin veil low over the water ahead. On every side as far as the eye could see were mountain peaks, rich in changing colours of lavender and purple, rising above the green clothing of fir trees. Two hours of steaming among the little wooded islets of the sound brought us within sight of Cape Fanshaw, where the captain told me we might expect to see whales at any time.



The first harpoon often fails to kill the whale, and a second shot is necessary. The bomb of the second harpoon is exploding. The inflated breast of a whale already killed and fast to the boat is seen on the right.

Hardly had the words been spoken when the man in the "barrel" at the mast-head shouted:

"Whale on the port side."

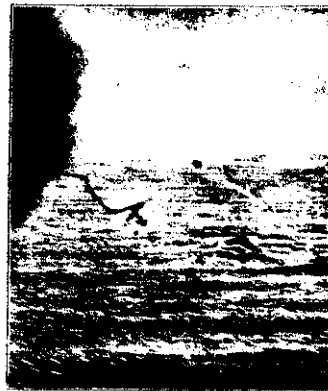
We looked to the left, and could see a faint mist just dissolving in the wind nearly half a mile away. Almost instantly another cloud of vapour shot up into the air, followed by the back and flukes of a huge whale.

"It's a humpback," said the captain, "and a big one, but he's all alone; it won't pay to chase him."

I must confess that I felt considerable disappointment as I saw the steamer keep on ahead and watched the whale, which was spouting at intervals. My fingers itched to focus the camera on that great black body, brought so close by the powerful field glasses. However, I checked my patience as best I could, and, with the glasses at my eyes, swept the water on every side.

We steamed along for some distance and then turned to the right, skirting

a little group of islands called "The Five Fingers." I was straining my eyes through the glasses along the horizon line as we rounded the point, and suddenly saw a column of white vapour shoot up into the air away off on the starboard bow; then another, and another still. The high, narrow spout, which floated off slowly on the wind as though reluctant to dissolve, showed that the whales were finbacks.



THE HARPOON IN THE AIR.

The smoke of the discharge, the harpoon, which travels more rapidly than the naked eye can follow, bits of burning wadding, the rope, and the back of the whale are seen in this photograph.

"Ting ting" went the bell in the engine room as the captain gave the signal for full speed and swung the nose of the little vessel around to the right, heading for the whales, four of them, which were spouting frequently. They were only two miles away, and soon we were so close that the loud, whistling "who-coo" of the spout could be plainly heard, as they blew and went down, leaving a long patch, or "slick," of smooth water where they sank.

I climbed down the steep ladder from the bridge to the deck, made my way forward, and stood beside the harpoon-gun with the camera in hand and plate-



THE EYE AND THE EAR OF A SULPHUR-BOTTOM.

The eye can be seen on the left of the picture, near the mouth, and the ear is the small round opening at the right.

holders ready. The vessel had been stopped on the "slick" left by the largest of the whales, and lay gently rolling from side to side. There was not a sound to be heard but the splashing of the water against the side of the ship, and the retching and groaning of the pump.

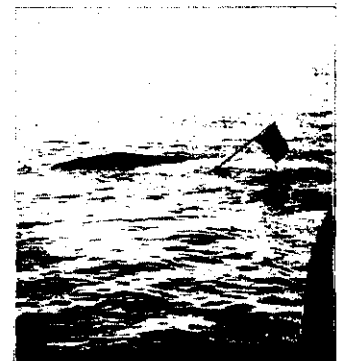
Sorensen, the gunner, stood as rigid as a statue behind the harpoon-gun, swing-



A HUMPBACK DIVING.

ing the muzzle slightly from side to side, ready for instant action. The muscles of every man on board were tense with the strain of waiting; five, ten, fifteen minutes dragged by, each one seeming an hour, and I had begun to think that the whales would never come up, when way off the starboard quarter, rose four shoots of white vapour almost together.

Immediately the quiet on the steamer was broken; "Ting-ting" sounded the bell, answered by the muffled "chug-chug-chug" of the engines, as the boat swung in a long circle. The gunner relaxed, dropped the point of the harpoon on the coil of rope in front, and ran to the galley to gulp down a cup of coffee. I drew two or three long breaths, wiped



MARKED AND LEFT AFLOAT.

A buoy with a flag is attached to the carcass and the whales are set adrift to be picked up at the end of the day's hunt.

the lens of my camera, and walked over to the starboard side. The whales were down again before we reached them, and the vessel stopped on the slick where they disappeared. Again began the tense strain of waiting, but this time not so long. Six minutes went by when the man at the mast-head yelled:

"Look out, they're coming, right ahead." Sure enough, in four emerald green patches, only 20 feet away, the water began to swirl and boil; bracing myself against a rope just behind the harpoon-gun, I focused on the smooth spot of water. Never will I forget the intense excitement of the moment when the great animals burst to the surface right beside us. My finger trembled on the button of the camera, but I waited for the shot. Glancing to one side, I could see Sorensen half stooping, as he swung the heavy gun about and sighted along the barrel at the great purplish body, arching itself for the dive. I began to wonder if he would never shoot,