

"There She Blows!"

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From our distance we could see a red-fish tinge over-spread the white, a column of red and white spray shot up in the air, and for a minute or so the huge bulk flared lifeless, then sank. The line was now rapidly hove in fathom after fathom until the heavy strain came, showing that we were taking the weight of the whale, then a little more time was given to make sure of life being extinct, the line in the meantime being led through a heavy iron block at the foremast head to heave up the whale from the bottom.

The heaving commenced, the tension on the tackle showing the heavy weight involved, and after about twenty minutes' steady hoist, the big slate-coloured body appeared under the bows, only the stout rope entering the body midway along the back suggesting how death came. A rope followed by heavy chains was next passed around the whale at the juncture of the tail with the body; these were then hove in and secured, bringing the whale's tail on a level with the steamer's deck. We gathered headway and the whale swung alongside, lacking but some fifteen feet of being the length of the Orion. The added weight gave our vessel quite a list to starboard, but this was lessened when an air-pipe was inserted in the stomach of the whale and air pumped in to render the body buoyant.

I made another trip in the Orion when big seas were running, the little vessel rolling, pitching and diving in a manner wonderful to behold. When we got to close quarters with the whale, the captain stood in oilskins and sea-boots, was lashed to the gun, and with good reason, for at times when going at full speed the Orion would put everything forward under water, then rising, would spill the water off again as quickly as it came.

Shooting a whale from a slippery deck that is never still for a moment is no easy feat; at least so it seemed to me, and I had a good deal of respect for Captain Nilsen afterward, for a miss is something that rarely happens with him. In heavy weather the whale seems timid, travelling much faster and staying down longer than in fine weather, and the whale hunters generally stay in port when big winds blow, as should they kill a whale the strain on their hoisting tackle is too great. There is undoubtedly risk attached to the work, even if the odds are nearly all in favour of the hunters, for a wounded whale could sink the steamer with ease if he decided to ram it, or he might do much damage with his tail.

It often happens that the whale does not receive his death-blow from the first harpoon, and when the opportunity offers another one is fired into him, and one instance occurred when I was at Sechart of a whale harpooned by the Orion that sank to the bottom after a short struggle, and remained stationary there, the natural inference of the crew being that he had succumbed to the death-dealing missile received. Accordingly, heaving-up operations were commenced after a lapse of some thirty minutes, and judge of the surprise of the men on the steamer when after raising the whale almost to the surface to see him commence fighting furiously. More time had to be paid out, though only sufficient to allow the big animal good clearance of the steamer, and a favourable opportunity presenting itself, another harpoon was discharged into the side of the leviathan, which gave him his quietus. It was found afterward that the first harpoon had broken the whale's back, but had not extinguished life; evidently he was unable to rise of his own accord from the bottom after sounding, but was able to put up a fight for life after the steamer had assisted him. In his first mad rush to the bottom he had rubbed the ocean bed with such force as to drive large stones far into his blubber. The whale hunters stated that this happens frequently, the whale in his agony apparently becoming reckless of any obstacle in his path. At other times it is necessary to lance a whale from one of the steamer's boats after the big fellow has been hove up alongside, and to keep clear of the waving flippers and wallowing tail while watching for a chance to thrust is a matter attended with plenty of risk, but it all comes as a matter of course to the whalers, all in the day's work. Sharks are not attendant at the killing of a whale, or, rather, after the killing, as

they are at the cutting up of a whale alongside at sea by the deep-sea whalers, but on several occasions when the dead whale had been allowed to remain at the bottom for a longer period than usual by the captain of the Orion, it was found, on heaving up, that ground sharks had commenced to make a meal off the carcase.

When the Orion turns over her catch to the station no time is lost by the men ashore in getting the leviathan in position to be drawn up the slip. Several turns of chain cable are passed around the body near the tail, and heavy tackles with steel wire in lieu of rope are led down and hooked to the chain; the hauling part is taken to a powerful steam winch and hove in, the immense body being slowly brought up the slipway until clear of the tide. As soon as the whale is in place men with long-handled knives commence "flensing"—that is, the removal of the blubber. The blubber lays directly under the skin, covering the whole body like a huge blanket, varying in thickness from four to seven inches on the ordinary whale, but attaining much greater thickness on the sperm whale. The men walk from the head toward the tail, cutting long gashes in the blubber as they go, then a steel hook with wire cable attached is hooked in at the end of a strip, the steam winch heaves in on the wire, and the long strips are peeled off one after another, exposing the carcase to view. The whale with blubber removed resembles very much an enormous beef with the skin removed. In fact, I could not help wondering what a big packing-house would do with whale meat, for it has the appearance and flavour of good beef, even to the white inside fat. I had the pleasure of tasting whale steak, and I must say that it is as good, and if a person were not told beforehand what it was he was eating, he would think that he was enjoying a good beefsteak.

After the whale is "flensed," the carcase is removed to the carcase platform and dismembered and stripped of meat, etc. The blubber in the meantime has been cut in small pieces and thrown in a machine which chops it fine, and places it in a series of buckets on an endless chain. The chain carries the buckets to an upper floor, and empties the contents into large metal vats fitted with steam pipes, and here the blubber is tried out for the oil. Nothing is wasted, the boiling process having apparently removed all the oil from the blubber; the refuse is again treated, and more oil of a lower grade extracted. The meat is also treated, and much oil obtained from it by means of acid processes. This oil is termed carcase oil.

A strange thing in connection with the working among whale oil and over the acid tanks where the oil is being extracted from the meat particularly, is the beneficial effect to persons troubled with tuberculosis, a cure being sometimes effected.

When tests show that all oil has been extracted from the blubber and meat, etc., the remains are made into guano by a drying process, which dries the material thoroughly and then shreds it fine, after which it is ready for the market, its value as a fertiliser being very high.

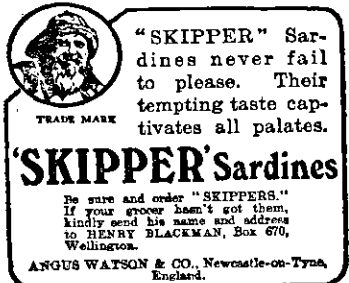
Seventeen whales were taken in one week by the Orion recently, this being a record. The whales invariably are much larger and fatter than those of the Atlantic, due, no doubt, to an unlimited food supply.

Prosecuting Attorney: "Your Honor, the bull pup has gone and chewed up the Court Bible."

Judge: "Well, make the witness kiss the bull pup, then. We can't adjourn court for a week just to hunt up a new Bible."—(San Antonio Express.)

Already Worn.

Custom House stories are always welcome, and here is a new one. The hero of it, a Swiss missionary, was returning to his native Basle from South America, bringing with him some skulls discovered in ancient Patagonian burying-places. At the frontier the authorities insisted on inspecting his trunk. They classified the skulls as "bones of animals," and demanded duty at the rate of a penny a pound. The missionary protested; and it was presently agreed that as the skulls were for scientific purposes, they must be allowed to enter without payment. The only question was how to classify them for the purposes of the Swiss Statistical Bureau. This problem was debated at great length; but ultimately the skulls went through as "personal effects already worn."



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