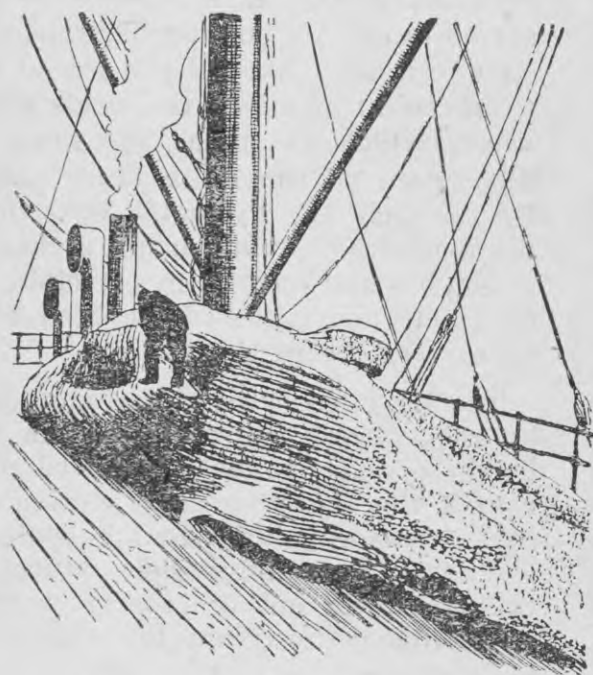


fires stoked in the brick furnaces beneath, and rendered down into oil. To cut up a fair-sized whale required about ten hours' work; it took two days in all for the whole process to be completed down to the casking of the oil. With the sperm whale an additional operation was necessary in extracting the twenty or more barrels of spermaceti—the waxy fluid used for candle making—contained in the mammal's head.

Whereas operations in the South Seas were at first confined to deep-sea, or pelagic whaling, the establishment of shore stations in New Zealand



*"Cutting in" on a whale carcase*

brought new methods and increased competition among the ships' crews. American, French, British and even Portuguese and German ships hunted from bases on the coast, and although some ships teamed up in the course of their operations, among many of the crews there was grim competition, often for the same whale. In the rough code of the whaling grounds there was a strict understanding that a whale went to the first boat which lodged a harpoon in its carcase.

The coming of the harpoon gun revolutionised the industry—and

resulted in the serious depletion of the whale herds. As early as the eighteenth century a harpoon gun had been tried, without success, while another tried successfully in 1821 never found a market. The modern gun was first used in Norwegian waters in 1886, and in its usual form is about four feet long, weighs up to a hundred pounds and is fired from a swivel gun mounted in the bow of the whale chaser. There is a time bomb in the tip of the harpoon, on which four hinged barbs open up inside the whale after being driven home.

In recent times the development of the Antarctic whale fishery has been largely undertaken by Norwegian interests, though British and Japanese ships have also steamed south to join the hunt at intervals. By international agreement, efforts have been made to control the destruction of whales, expert opinion being that with conservation the supply of blue whales and humpbacks in the Antarctic seas could be made to last for a long period. Although electric lighting, gas, the competition of vegetable and mineral oils and other factors have served to displace whale oil from its old peak of importance, the number of uses to which it can be put even in modern times is still legion.

Fifteen years ago there was a whaling station in active operation at Whangamumu, in the Bay of Islands, but this is no longer in use. It remains for the Tory Channel station to carry on the traditions of the old whaling days, that picturesque era in New Zealand's history over which the dim shadows of the past have long closed. Occasionally the whalers of Tory Channel fire a harpoon into the massive back of a blue or even a right whale, and such instances are events in the still exciting routine of the men who man the chasers. But it is the humpbacks that mostly find themselves between the sights of the harpoon gun—and once there it's a bleak outlook for the humpback!