

A Battle With Polar Bears

By Arthur P. Silver.

A curious story told by a veteran whaler. How the whaling crew went in search of a whale they had killed, only to find the carcass in possession of a dozen ferocious Polar bears! The battle royal that ensued was a most exciting affair.

IN the pursuit of the arduous calling of Arctic whaling the crews of whaling ships are often called upon to face extraordinary hazards. Seldom, however, after killing their whale, are they obliged to wrest their booty from a troop of ravenous Polar bears, angrily disputing possession of their prize. The thrilling story of such an unparalleled encounter was narrated to me under the following circumstances:

It was a lovely evening in June when we swung clear of Port-aux-Basques Harbor, and, catching a light land breeze, steered northwards towards the coast of Labrador. Our craft was a smart Nova Scotia-built schooner of about a hundred and fifty tons, and our crew were picked from a settlement of the oldest Norsemen—the sturdy fishing folk of the iron-bound coasts of Newfoundland. I was peculiarly attracted by the first mate, Harry Jewer, a man still in the prime of life, with hard-bitten, weather-roughened features, yet with a merry twinkle in his eye that bespoke a happy, Hibernian temperament and a capacity for facing with equal cheerfulness the sunshine and the storm of an adventurous career. His face was tanned like leather with being so often set against the blinding glare of sunshine from blindingly glistening fields of drifting ice, and deeply scarred and seamed by repeated scourings of fierce winds armed with stinging ice fragments, which smite like the knotted cords of cruel whips.

Notwithstanding this hard and perilous mode of life his character had been fashioned into a hearty admiration of this awful beauty, grandeur and terror of the great Arctic solitude. Like many others of his class, he was captivated by the fascinating glamor which the Arctic casts like a spell upon those who have once penetrated its mysteries. An opportunity came to listen to the tale of his varied exploits when suddenly one afternoon the wind grew light, and we ran into a heavy smoke-like bank of grey fog which obscured all around us. When at length we emerged there was no breath of wind. The sun beat down on a sea motionless and becalmed.

At this moment, to my great delight, Harry, pulling at his blackened clay pipe, tainting the balmy sea air with pungent odors, seated himself at my side and told me the following tale of a strange adventure that befell him in the Far North:

It was in Lancaster Sound, on board the good ship Aurora, that I found myself in the summer of 1896. We were after "right" whales, and had already taken five on this voyage. While nearly all our casks were full to bursting with oil, we had room to stow away the blubber of yet another carcass. This the crew were anxious to accomplish as speedily as possible, for after a nightless period, the sun was now beginning to dip each day below the horizon for a few hours at a stretch, and cool fitful northwesterers were giving warning of the approach of winter. If only we could secure our booty and turn our course to the south, "with the Newfoundland girls pulling at the tow-ropes," as the saying is in the far north, everyone would be happy. For although the seafarer, wherever you find him, cannot remain content ashore for long, one of the greatest of all the pleasures of his calling is the return home with a pocket full of coin after a successful voyage.

A good Greenland or Arctic "right" whale is worth a lot of money. "Right" whales are those producing whalebone, and a good specimen is worth at least six hundred to seven hundred pounds. There are other large whales which we let alone—the "finners" or orquals, and even the giant "blue whales," as the biggest of them are not worth one-tenth part of the value of the "right" whale. Of late these valuable prizes, as well as the "sperm" whale, are getting scarce, but in those days they were abundant. Each man was sure to come home with a snug little sum to his credit, what with wages and his share of the "bounty," as the men's narrow percentage of interest in the net profits is termed.

"There she blows!" All hearts fairly throbbed for joy as the look-out from the "crow's nest" cheerily shouted the glad news of an enormous "right" whale sighted against the sun in the offing. Blithely the ropes sang out through the tackle-blocks while the men took their places, and as the little flotilla of boats darted away with alacrity from the black sides of the great ship, like so many arrows shot from a bow, a strange gleam came into the men's eyes, and their bronzed faces relaxed in a smile as if they already anticipated their triumph.

They made towards a spot where at intervals of from ten to fifteen minutes a white column of spray was seen to shoot high in the air from the extremity of a black rolling mass which glittered in the sun's rays like wet indiarubber. My boat led, and all hands gave me a cheer when I threw the harpoon, which with a heavy thud embedded itself deeply behind the huge central fin of the mighty whale. Those were the "good old days" of whaling, before the craft was made comparatively easy by modern methods; before the days of the fast steamship armed with the fatal "harpoon gun."

After the stroke the whale suddenly headed away from the boats, sent up an enormous jet of water and blood some twenty feet in the air, lashed the water into foam with a terrible flurry of his gigantic tail, and then suddenly dipped beneath the surface of the ocean. To such a vast depth did he plunge in his agony of pain and fright that two boats were compelled to join their lines to ours; and three times he dived, staying under nearly twenty minutes on each occasion, before we could get near enough to lance him in a vital part. Unfortunately, as he sped away he drew on the boats towards a large field of ice known to be in the vicinity before it was actually sighted, because of the extraordinary coldness pervading the atmosphere.

As the custom is with a wounded whale, he made to get under the ice in hot haste. The only chance for success was to finish him before he disappeared beneath the floe. He would have to come up once more to breathe before he could dive beneath the ice-floe, and we got ready to dispatch him. Soon the line began to grow slack, and up, up he came with startling speed. For a few minutes there was an awful flurry on the surface, while our boat became entirely obscured by the flying spume. The creature had been pierced with lances until the water was reddened with blood, yet so padded with fat was he after his summer's gorging on herrings that the lances failed to reach a vital organ. To our great chagrin he dived under the ice, and, as the boats could now no longer follow him beyond the edge of the ice-field, the order was reluctantly given to cut the line, abandon the prize, and return to the ship. Very keen was the disappointment of the men. Here was a fine whale "gone to the deuce!" Gone, too, cut clean away from the grasp of the men, was half a ton of good whalebone. However, there was a feeling pervading the fo'c's'le all that evening that I would not yet give up, but would organize a search party, and each one hoped that he might be one of those chosen to go out to try and retrieve the lost booty.

On the morning following, after thinking the matter over, I decided that the whale must be dead, as the lances had been driven well home, and had drawn so much blood. Thereupon I picked out six of the best men on board to help me hunt for the carcass. Two rifles were stowed in the boat, and enough biscuit to last the seven of us for a couple of days.

All day the men rowed hard, while I swept the sea with my glasses. The vast ice-floe had slowly drifted southward, and it was a long time ere we came up with it, which we did towards nightfall. In the clear water behind its wake we made out an island of black rock fringed with a wide tawny sand beach, and soon we sighted something unusual on a yellow bar that ran far out from the island among the beating waves. Presently, to our great joy, it revealed itself as the stranded body of the dead whale.

The men were delighted at the prospect of recovering the valuable whalebone, for here was prize enough even if it became necessary to abandon the blubber.

That night we camped in a sheltered cove of the island, and needing no rocking, for we were tired out after our long pull. What was our astonishment next morning when we found our prize in possession of a company of Polar bears! There were a round dozen of them—not to speak of a couple of yearling cubs which kept close to their dams—all fighting, snarling and tearing at the flesh of the whale. It was evident that a pitched battle would be necessary to decide whether the carcass belonged to us who had killed the whale or to the bears who were now in full possession. Bigger than grizzlies, at times raising to their full height as dancing bears are trained to do, the monsters before us bore out the reputation of Lancaster Sound for its extremely large breed of bears, noted for their ravenous propensities and extreme daring and ferocity.

It was at the ebb of the tide—dead

low water—when we decided to make our attack. The boat was brought round and headed towards the sand-spit where lay the stranded body of the whale. The feeding bears had apparently scented battle from afar, for two of the biggest took to the water and swam far out towards the boat. These became an easy prey, for they were dispatched while swimming alongside; but there still remained ten, and of these ten, five were indeed formidable monsters. Seeing the fate of their companions, the remainder of those which had entered the water returned to the beach. Five lined up in front of the whale, while the other five, including the two she-bears with their cubs, fell to the rear of the carcass—exactly like a fighting corps held in reserve. The receding tide had left a broad border of shelving sand, so that when our party landed we were still some sixty yards from the front squad of bears.

A trusted shot at one end of the line and myself at the other were armed each with a rifle and had fifty rounds of ball cartridge between us. The other men were equipped with long whalers' lances. I opened the conflict by dropping on my right knee and taking deliberate aim at the largest bear. There was a moment's pause. Then came the sharp report of the rifle followed by an angry roar, and through the smoke, the bear, only slightly wounded, made a rush at us. The spearmen promptly fell back, but the other rifleman knelt down with great coolness and discharged his gun at the furious animal. Again, however, the wound was not fatal. Springing to his feet the man made a lunge at the infuriated bear with his empty gun, but with a swift blow the great brute sent the rifle flying in the air, and with another laid low the unfortunate sailor. The forepaws of the bear were laid on the shoulders of the prostrate man, and the hind feet were being brought to bear with repeated efforts to rip his tough tarpaulin jacket, when, carried away by my excitement, I rushed up and, with the muzzle of my gun held almost at the ear of the savage beast, literally blew his head to fragments. Unmindful of a few hurts and a stream of blood trickling from his face and neck, the fallen man, to our amazement, jumped to his feet and, apparently half-crazed by his recent mauling, performed something very like a war-dance on the dead body of his late assailant.

The bears now appeared to be somewhat cowed by the death of their comrades. The reserve line was weakened by the desertion of the two she-bears with their cubs, and the four monsters in the front rank did not seem much inclined to take the aggressive.

All wild beasts, however, will usually forget their fear of man on three occasions: at mating time, when their young are in danger, and when their food is threatened. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to keep blazing away at the front guard until all were wounded. Finally, I ordered an advance of my little force, whereupon the disconcerted animals suddenly broke and fled, carrying away the rear line in their retreat. The bears were utterly routed.

We were now kept busy for hours in skinning the slain bears and in cutting out the whalebone from the jaws of the prize. Then, well satisfied with our work, we loaded down the boat with our spoils and proceeded on our way to rejoin the ship. But our perils were not yet over. A breeze sprang up which rapidly developed into a gale, accompanied by blinding sleet and snow showers, until our position grew hazardous in the extreme. Great white-capped waves broke over the heavy-laden boat, and we were kept incessantly occupied baling out the water.

Nevertheless we rowed on doggedly for hours, until at length our wrists grew swollen, and it really seemed as if out of the peril of the bears we had rushed into a greater danger still. Fainter and fainter grew our hopes of safety, as the gale rose and the billows rushed past maddened, driven to fury by the scouring blasts.

Suddenly, through a rift in the driving storm-clouds the awful form of a towering iceberg was seen, rearing its glistening columns against the dull greenness of the snow-darkened sky. The weather-side of the iceberg received the full shock of the long, grey-green rollers as they swung up and broke again and again over its shelving icy strand, while the steep lee-side, sinking sheer into the ocean depths, kept the water there as calm as some landlocked harbor. Quickly we seized the proffered opportunity. By herculean efforts the boat was brought up against the full force of opposing wind and tide, and safely steered to the lee-side of the iceberg. Then the ice anchor was got out and she was made fast to the giant berg. The next danger which confronted us was that in the long wait we might perish of cold. There was coffee aboard and fresh water, but how were we to manage for fuel and cooking utensils? I thought for a moment, and then ordered the men to pare off wood shavings from the thwart, flooring and gunwale of the boat until we collected a good-sized parcel of fuel. For a stove we perforated the bottom of a large kettle, hanging a smaller one over the fire. Soon we were able

to pass round a draught of steaming hot coffee, which, wonderfully cheered our spirits. This was repeated towards the break of day. Then the storm gradually subsided, and we knew that the danger was over. Once more we steered our course to the ship, and finally arrived safely with the rich prize of the whalebone which had cost us so much labor and peril.

Some of the rest of the crew were anxious to be allowed to visit the derelict carcass for another bear hunt, but the captain was known to hold white bears in high respect, and it surprised nobody when he announced his immediate intention of proceeding homewards. And so the ship's course was set towards the Straits of Belle Isle, where, like a jagged tooth gnawing at the Arctic current, the Island of Newfoundland rears its rocky bastions out of the cold, ice-laden seas.

The snow-white skin of one of the biggest of the bears now decorates the little front parlor of my cabin, and furnishes an excuse for a frequent revival of the story of the battle between a boat's crew and a dozen Polar bears.—The Wide World Magazine.

SCIENCE & MECHANICS

The French Government has recommended an appropriation of \$200,000 for the International Congress of Tuberculosis, to be held shortly in Paris.

A dispatch from Christiania states that at Nesdal, north of Bergen, recently, a mass of rock slipped into the Leonvand Lake. A wave of water twenty feet high, which resulted from the fall, swept the neighborhood, carrying away houses, people and cattle.

Edward Donohue, superintendent of plumbing of the City of Peoria, Ill., was recently granted a patent on an improved compression stop and waste cock which is designed to prevent waste of water resulting from the slight wear of the parts of an ordinary faucet. The principle is said to be applicable to street hydrants as well as domestic faucets.

The Congress of Naturalists and Physicians, which recently met in Breslau, strongly condemned the "goose-step" as practiced in the German and some other armies. Dr. Thalwitzer read a paper on the subject, in which he showed that adoption of this ridiculous step accounts for numerous knee and foot complaints among the troops. Sixty per cent. of the sores on the feet of the men are in consequence of persistent adherence to this antiquated step.

The silk production of the world for 1903 is estimated at 39,897,000 pounds avoirdupois, not including the home consumption of China and Japan, the amount of which is difficult to estimate. China still leads in this industry. Its exports of silk amounted to 14,016,000 pounds, as against 10,138,000 pounds exported by Japan. Persia, Turkestan and India together exported 1,969,000 pounds. In Europe Italy is far in the lead in silk production, the amount for 1903 being 7,757,000 pounds. Turkey in Asia and Cyprus together produced 2,990,000 pounds, France 1,043,000 pounds, and other European countries together, 2,651,000 pounds.

In 1873 a great rat-like rodent, named Dinomyx, was discovered in the Peruvian Andes. But a single specimen was found, and this is now preserved in the Berlin Museum. Last spring Doctor Goeldi of Para rediscovered the Dinomyx in the lowlands of Brazil. Its natural habitat is now supposed to be the almost unexplored regions lying among the foot-hills of the Andes, between Brazil, Bolivia and Peru. The animal is described as reminding one of an immense rat, well advanced in development toward a bear. It is about two feet long, with a bushy tail nine inches long, thickest at the base and tapering to a point. It has a waddling gait. Its character is "a combination of leisurely movements and supreme good nature." It seems well provided for digging, but "knows absolutely nothing of haste." Doctor Goeldi keeps a mother and her young one in a cage.

Tale of a Russian Shell.
The offending battery at St. Petersburg which fired case shot at the Winter Palace by accident or design has recalled an anecdote of another Russian battery. It was at the siege of Warsaw, where a Russian Marshal ordered the battery to concentrate its fire on a certain point. Nothing came of this, and the Marshal rode up to the artillerymen in great wrath. "What imbecile is in command here?" he demanded. "I am," said an officer calmly. "Consider yourself under arrest. Your shells are no good." "What can you expect?" retorted the other. "They won't explode. See for yourself." He took up a shell, lighted the match, and held it out to the Marshal, who stood with his hands behind him waiting the result. If the shell had burst both men would have been blown to pieces. But the match went out, and the Marshal remarked simply: "You are quite right."—London Chronicle.

SOUTHERN FARM NOTES.

TOPICS OF INTEREST TO THE PLANTER, STOCKMAN AND TRUCK GROWER.

Grasses and Forage Plants.

Bulletin 93 of the South Carolina Station is on "Grasses and Forage Plants." H. Benton, the author, says what he has written is based upon experiments and close observation for twelve years. Among the forage crops treated are cowpeas, which Home and Farm has, for many years, done so much to bring into profitable cultivation.

The writer says: The cowpea is unquestionably the best summer growing legume for the South. It is perfectly adapted to our soils and climate.

There are a very large number of named varieties of cowpeas, and new ones are constantly appearing, due to variations in habit of growth, color of leaf, stem, pod and the color and size of the seed; or its physiological characteristics. The most important variety recently developed is the Iron, which is well resisting on our commonly called "pea sick lands." As soon as some variety has attained sufficient local reputation, a name is given to it, and sooner or later the supposed new variety is placed upon the market. In this way one variety may be cultivated in a dozen different localities under as many names, or a dozen different varieties may bear the same name. We have at present thirty-one so-called varieties growing. I have no doubt but that when they are carefully compared and notes completed, that the so-called varieties will be reduced at least twenty-five per cent.

Almost any land will grow cowpeas, but like other economic plants the richer the land the larger the crop, when grown for hay; frequently rich lands fail to produce anything like a fair crop of peas. Many of our sandy and silty soils are so-called "pea sick," on which all varieties except the Iron are attacked by a fungus. Drainage seems to have no effect on the appearance of the disease, as damage from wilt is as great on well drained high soils as on low soils which are not well drained. Comparatively little wilt is known on our Southern soils, which contain an abundance of clay. The past season is the first time I have noticed the wilt appearing in the Piedmont region. Then it did not attack the well established varieties, only some recent crosses which had not become well established. The wilt is at present much less severe on loam and clay soils, and so far as my observation goes, is largely confined to the coast and lower pine belt regions. In many localities the plants wilt so badly that it is unprofitable to attempt to grow any other variety than the Iron. This variety is a compact, vigorous grower of medium size, somewhat trailing in its habits, but less so than the Unknown. The foliage is dark green, possessing a peculiar bluish luster that distinguishes this variety from others. It is of the clay type. It holds its leaves under adverse conditions of drought and disease better than any other varieties. It remains green up to frost, even if plants contain many ripe pods.

The cowpea has various uses in Southern agriculture. It is used extensively as a catch crop on truck or grain lands; is used as a full season crop for the purpose of improving the soil; for hay and for the seed. The seed of some varieties is used to supply the table. The inferior varieties are used extensively for stock food.

The preparation of soil for cowpeas depends upon the season at which they are planted. If planted early in the spring and it is desired that they should occupy the land the entire summer, the soil should be well prepared and fertilized with 200 or 400 pounds of acid phosphates and 100 to 200 pounds kainit per acre. If planted in corn, they may be planted in the sowing furrows late in the season, and cultivated in the operation of cultivating the middles; or they may be sown broadcast before the last cultivation, and worked in. If sown after grain, the most economical method is to sow the peas on the stubble and cross disc them in. I have harvested as good crops of hay after the latter method as when the land was plowed.

The amount of seed to plant depends upon the use to which they are to be put. If for seed, they should be planted in rows about three feet apart and seven to twelve peas planted every eighteen inches; this will take about one-half bushel seed per acre. If planted as a catch crop, or for hay, it is generally better to plant them broadcast at the rate of one to two bushels per acre.

Cowpeas make excellent silage, but are somewhat difficult to haul and pass through a silage cutter in the green state, owing to their usual tangled condition. I have seen as bright and free of mould silage produced from cowpeas as from any other plant.

The chief use of cowpeas in the South is for the purpose of soil improvement and for hay. The yield of hay depends upon the fertility of the soil on which it is grown, varying from one-half to three tons cured hay per acre. When grown for hay, it is gen-

erally better to sow a few sorghum or corn seed with the peas so the stalks will support the pea vines, rendering them easier to cut with mowers. There are many methods used in curing pea vine hay. The two most commonly used are: First, setting up poles, nailing cross pieces on the upright poles and throwing the vines around them while green; second, letting the vines wilt thoroughly after being cut, raking into windrows, then throwing into small, loose cocks, and as they dry, throw them into larger cocks. Both methods have their advantages. The former will save the hay in almost any season, but it is rather expensive. The latter is less expensive, but will not save the hay in rainy seasons. The length of time the vines are allowed to remain in the swath, windrows, cocks, etc., and the method of curing, are problems that must be determined by the climatic conditions at the time. The rule is to allow them to remain in the swath as short a time as possible consistent with good curing, in order that the leaves may fall off as little as possible.

Acclimation of Corn.

Other things being equal, it is not wise generally to import corn from a distance, especially a different latitude, because it will not, as a general rule, yield satisfactory returns until it has become thoroughly acclimated, which usually requires from two to three or more years. We have had many striking instances of this fact in our tests of varieties of corn brought from the Northwestern States. None of these varieties have done very well with us, although they are the most prolific ones in the Northwest. This is the reason that it is urged in another part of this series of articles that the history of all seed corn purchased be ascertained from the dealer. Neither is it prudent to buy seed corn that was grown in the extreme South, for it, being accustomed to a longer growing period than we have in North Carolina, will be liable to be caught by frost, and thereby give a diminished yield of immature grain, especially if fall comes early. The small yield of the Northwestern corns, on the other hand, being accustomed to a shorter growing period than we have is forced to maturity at an earlier period than is conducive to the largest yields in our climate.

In our experiments we have gotten the higher yields of shelled corn per acre from the white than from the yellow varieties of corn. This greater yield may be due to the fact that the Southern people, being partial as a general rule, to white corns, have improved them more than they have the yellow varieties. From the standpoint of chemical composition, the yellow corns are no richer in feeding value than the white corns, which fact is contrary to a common belief prevalent in this and other States. The only difference in the two is that there is coloring matter present in the kernels of the yellow corn which is not found in the kernels of white varieties of corn.—By C. B. Williams and B. W. Kilgore, of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture.

How to Handle Ducklings.

Feed after thirty-six hours boiled eggs chopped fine for first two or three feeds. Allow no water until first feed. About third day feed bran and corn-mixed in crumbly state with sweet milk with a little meat meal; to this add a good portion of clean sand, mixing thoroughly. After the first week the above ration can be improved on by adding cut green clover, onion tops, lettuce, or in fact, anything green that would be palatable.

Never allow the old duck to "carry" the duckling, as she would run their legs off or drown them in no time. Put her in a coop for a day or two and she will be ready to go back to the flock.

After the ducks are two or three days old it is a good plan to make a little run in some quiet spot near the house where they can be watched, placing a box in the run arranged so they can hover under it.

Cultivating Sugar Cane.

The sugar cane has no main root, but like all grasses possesses a great number of fine rootlets; these spread to a great distance and to a considerable depth in suitable soil. The results would be of considerable interest and value if planters would make a series of observations on the range of the roots of the sugar cane. In good soil the majority of the rootlets reach a depth of about two feet; a smaller number extending even to four or five feet; in moderately well tilled soil the roots grow downwards until they reach the layer of soil but little disturbed by cultivation, and then spread laterally, so that the depth to which the roots descend in a stiff soil depends on the depth of the tillage.