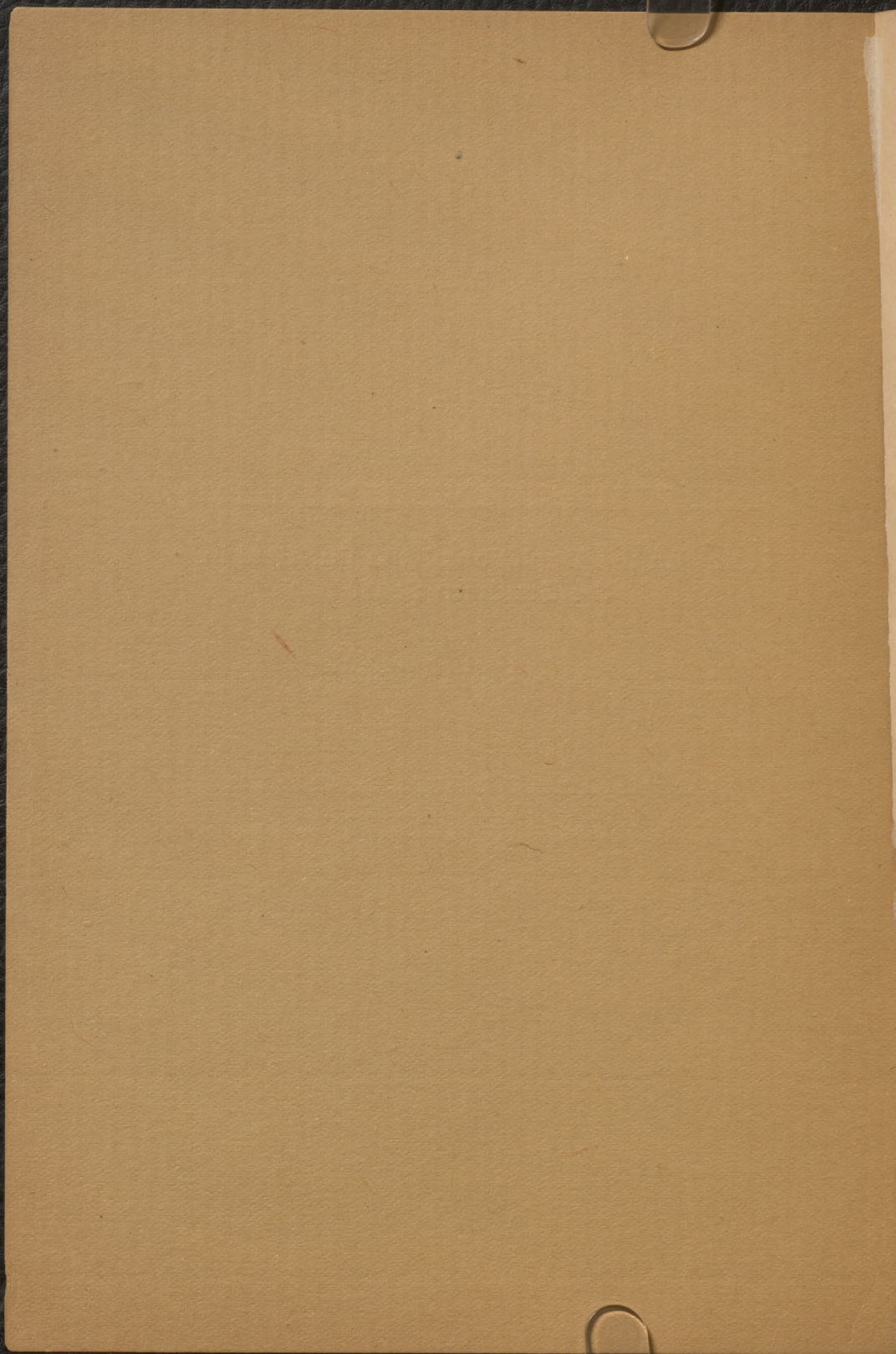


Bundle 51 #28

Notes on the Depletion of the Fur-Seal in
the Southern Seas.

By FREDERICK REVANS CHAPMAN.

Reprinted from the Canadian Record of Science, October, 1893.



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In a communication which I addressed to Prof. T. J. Parker, F.R.S., on September 24th, 1891, I gave such facts as I then had at command on the subject of the practical extinction of the fur-seal of New Zealand. I am now in a position to add considerably to this, and to supplement it with information respecting the fate of this animal in the Australian seas. If more were needed, I think that it might be obtained by further research, but this would be difficult and would take much time, and as I have no reason

¹ Mr. Chapman's paper, here printed, was written by him in response to enquiries on my part respecting the fur-seal and methods of sealing in the Australasian region. These enquiries were in the first place addressed to Prof. T. J. Parker, F.R.S., of the University of Otago, Dunedin, N. Z. Prof. Parker referred to Mr. Chapman as likely to be well informed on the subject, and obtained from him a memorandum which was printed as an appendix to the Report of the British Behring Sea Commission. At a later date, and too late for inclusion in the report mentioned, Mr. Chapman favored me with the present more detailed paper, embodying the result of much enquiry on his part. This paper, it is

to think that it would support any conclusions differing from those toward which the evidence now collected tends, I think it as well to communicate what I have.

All early writers on New Zealand, Tasmania (Van Diemen's Land) and the southern part of Australia agree in describing the fur-seal as very plentiful in these regions.

Captain Cook (1770), after circumnavigating the North Island of New Zealand, passed down the east coast of the South or Middle Island. When in latitude $46^{\circ} 31'$, off this coast, he remarks: "This day we saw some whales and seals, as we had done several times after having passed the strait" (Cook Strait); "but we saw no seal while we were upon the coast of Eahienomawe" (North Island). On his second voyage (1773) he visited the west coast of what subsequently became the Province of Otago. He refers to the seals here as follows: "A gentleman killed a seal, one of the many which were upon a rock." And next day writes: "We touched at the seal rock and killed three seals." And again, in the same vicinity: "Rowing out to the outermost isles, where we saw many seals, fourteen of which we killed and brought away with us; and might have got many more would the surf have permitted us to land with safety." A few days later he writes: "We could only land in one place, where we killed ten."

The great navigator and others who followed him killed seals only for food. This, too, had been the practice of the Maoris. Mention of seals is constantly found in traditions relating to the southern portion of the South Island (east coast). Mr. T. Sarata, a Maori member of Parliament, tells

believed, will be of general interest, as it relates to a chapter of history and exploration of which few records have seen the light.

It must be remembered, in reading Mr. Chapman's paper, that the pursuit of fur-seals in the Southern Hemisphere has been entirely confined to the killing of these animals on shore, at their breeding-stations. "Pelagic sealing," as now carried on in the North Pacific, has never been practised in the South: where vessels have been employed merely as the means of reaching the otherwise inaccessible resorts of the seals. Thus Mr. Chapman's observations, in so far as they bear on the question of the preservation of the fur-seal of the North Pacific, go to show the extreme importance of protecting the littoral breeding resorts of the animals from all disturbances.—G. M. DAWSON.

me that his ancestors, living about Otago Heads, used annually to make expeditions to Cape Saunders to catch young seals after the breeding season. I also find seals' bones in ancient Maori middens in sufficient numbers to indicate that the animal was once a staple of food here. The natives had neither methods nor motives which could result in the extermination of seals; indeed the parts of the coast where these were and still are most plentiful, were and yet remain uninhabited.

Such records as we have of the transactions on the coasts of South Island in the early part of the century tell us that sealing was the first industry; the sealers preceded the whalers, as the whalers preceded the "flax"¹ traders, and these in turn were succeeded by the colonists. Of the sealers and their doings we have little actual record in the colony which has since sprung up, but what we know we learn mainly from the older colony of New South Wales and from the books of travellers. More may doubtless be learned from England and North America, whence came a large number of the sealing vessels. As it is, the information has to be sought from scattered sources. It will be readily understood how slight is the acquaintance of the colonists with seals and their history, when it is considered that in the South Island, which the seals formerly inhabited, the west coast is almost unoccupied along a great part of its extent; while on the east coast, which is fairly populated, the seals became almost extinct prior to the permanent settlement of the country. The west coast is only inhabited as far north as lat. 44°.

As early as 1846, *i. e.*, six years after the foundation of the colony, when Major Heaphy and Mr. Brunner, the explorers sent by the New Zealand Company, passed down the coast by land, they found a few seals, which were regarded with curiosity, on the Steeples at Cape Foulwind. Local tradition referred to the already almost mythical times of the sealers and their doings here. The explorers,

¹ *Phormium tenax.*

referring to the Maoris at the nephrite cutting village, Kararoa, say: "Of these only the old man and woman had ever seen a white man. They remembered the sealers." Even at that date, however, it was worth while to visit the "rookeries" occasionally. Two years before the exploring party went down, 150 sealskins had been obtained at the Steeples. Another point had not been visited for ten years, and it is mentioned that fifteen years earlier a sealing vessel had been lost, and those of her crew who escaped had been murdered by Maoris.

I am unable to give the northward limit of the seals. They were extremely plentiful in Bass Strait, in lat. 38°, and on this island at least as far north as Cape Foulwind, lat. 42°. While not unknown in the North Island, they were evidently rare there. Mention is made in a book of a vessel coming from the Fiji Islands with sealskins, but, if this is not a mistake, I suspect that this locality was given out to mislead competitors, the vessel having really come from some previously unvisited spot in the vicinity of New Zealand, which it was thought undesirable to make known.

Some idea of the number of seals in suitable localities will be gathered from a few facts which may be mentioned.

New South Wales was colonized in 1788, and very soon after, whalers and sealers began to frequent the neighboring seas. In that year Messrs. Enderby's ship, the *Emilia*, rounded Cape Horn, and first carried the sperm whale fishery into the Pacific Ocean. As early as 1793 an American sealer, on his way to his own cruising grounds, called at Sydney and expressed surprise that they had no small craft on the coast, as he had observed a plentiful harvest of seals as he came along.

The insularity of Van Diemen's Land was discovered by Messrs. Bass and Flinders in 1798. In the vicinity of Bass Strait they met the sealing vessel *Nautilus*, which obtained 9,000 seals on that cruise. Seals of several species in enormous numbers were seen. Mr. Flinders likens the scene to a crowded farmyard, and Mr. Bass "had to fight his way

up the cliffs of the island against the seals." The American sealers getting scent of the business, with customary energy, poured into these seas and joined in the scramble. The captains of American vessels being disinclined to respect the local customs regulations, gave a good deal of trouble, and were accused of disturbing the seal fisheries. They probably secured a share of the skins of which no record would appear in Colonial or British customs returns.

In 1802 Captain Campbell, on an island off King's Island, in Bass Strait, killed in ten weeks (from 10th March to 27th May) 600 sea elephants and 4,300 seals. In the same year two French vessels came there seal hunting, but were warned off by Governor King. Van Diemen's Land, now named Tasmania, was settled in 1803, and at a very early date escaped convicts and lawless, runaway sealers began to infest the islands of Bass Strait, ostensibly, and sometimes actually, engaged in sealing. Regular shore gangs were formed which occupied the islands of the strait in sets of ten or twelve. They were tendered by small vessels, which brought provisions and carried away sea-elephant oil and sealskins in abundance. They employed Tasmanian native women to swim out to the rocks, imitate the motion of the seals, and thus take and slaughter them. Before long some of this class, as well as others of better repute, began to find their way to New Zealand. As early as 1792 Messrs. Enderby sent a sealing party to Dusky Sound, by the *Britannia*, and procured 4,500 skins. Jorgen Jorgenson, afterwards known in history for his revolt in Iceland, was upon the coast of New Zealand in 1804. He went down in charge of a small vessel from Port Jackson. "We killed," he says, "several thousand of these harmless animals, and it was quite astonishing with what eagerness the sailors entered into the pursuit, knocking down the animals with their clubs, stripping them of their skins and pegging them out to dry or salting them down in casks, with the greatest zeal and perseverance. At that time these skins were sold in London at a guinea each. We filled our small vessel and returned to Sydney."

The following entries of sealskins are recorded at Sydney. The *Sydney Gazette*, October 14, 1803, notes the arrival of the sealer *Endeavour*, Captain Oliphant, with 2,200 sealskins from New Zealand, six months out. The *Endeavour* brought into Sydney from March 9, 1803, to May 28, 1804, 9,514 sealskins, worth 20 shillings each, and the schooner *Surprise*, from March 11, 1809, to September 15 of the same year, 15,480. During the years 1803 and 1804 upwards of 36,000 sealskins were obtained from the islands of Bass Strait, the slaughter being carried on without regard for sex or season. Some of the above figures probably overlap, as my information does not always state where the seals came from, and it is evident that there are long gaps without information.

The *Scorpion*, 14 guns, left England in 1803 with letters of marque. She captured two French whalers with full cargoes. Whether she got sealskins from them I do not know, but she entered Sydney early in 1804, after a visit to New Zealand, with 4,759 sealskins. Her master, Captain Dagg, leaves his name in Dagg's Sound, on the west coast of Otago. The sealer *Sydney Cove* landed a party at the South Cape (Stewart Island) in 1806. These men were murdered by the natives, save one who married a chief's daughter and got to Sydney in 1820. In 1813 the schooner *Governor Bligh*, Captain Snow, brought to Port Jackson 14,000 sealskins, after a sixteen months' cruise about New Zealand. She also brought back ten men who had been landed there by a vessel which was to return for them, but was never heard of. This occurred again the same year, when the brig *Perseverance* brought away four men similarly left four years before at Solander Island, in Foveaux Strait. Her take is not mentioned. The fact of these crews being left shows that there were parties constantly at work. The figures are perhaps somewhat confused, but they probably altogether understate the results. They sufficiently show at least that there were then rich hunting grounds on the coasts of Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand.

J. S. Pollock, in his work "Travels and Adventures in New Zealand,"¹ says: "Some fifteen years back seals were very prolific [plentiful] on the southerly parts of the country, many shore parties procuring 100,000 skins in a season. So few are now procurable that a single vessel employed solely in this trade would make a losing speculation. The favourite grounds frequented by these animals was the whole of the west coast of the Island of Victoria (Middle or South Island), from Cape Farewell to the South Cape, including the rocks called the Traps, the Snare Islands, Antipodes Islands, Bourty Rocks, Auckland Isles and the Chatham Groups. All these places were infested by the various phocæ, which have since been annually cut up." This writer, though his figures are astonishing, is recognized as one of the safest authorities on subjects relating to the early days of New Zealand. Dumont D'Urville, in 1830, notices the great decline of the seals in recent years.

Sealing was, in the early years of the century and probably up to 1830 or even later, pursued with declining success in Foveaux Strait, on the coast of Stewart Island. Mr. East, in his evidence before a select committee of the House of Commons in 1844, says: "The seals, what few there are, are in the southern part of the island, near the settlements of the Middle Island. Formerly they abounded, but they have been attacked so by the Australian colonists in times past that they have nearly left."

Old narratives, sometimes founded on fact, sometimes mythical, tell strange tales of those wild days. Tommy Chaseland, a noted sealer and afterwards a famous headman of the later whaling days, was the son of an Australian woman and a white man. He navigated his open sealing boat from the Chatham Islands to New Zealand in the stormiest of seas, and lives in the memory of a few of the oldest inhabitants as the hero of numerous bold adventures. Probably the cold seas of the north teem with bold spirits of this kind.

On all these southern and eastern coasts, however, a seal

¹ London, 1838, vol. i, p. 316.

is now so rare an apparition as not to be recorded once in ten years. In the sounds of Western Otago, then the most prolific sealing ground, they are still occasionally found, being known to breed on a few very inaccessible rocks in that uninhabited region. Fifteen years ago Captain Fairchild, of the Government steamer *Hinemoa*, himself an old northern sealer, showed me his charts on which were marked several of these "rookeries," but depletion has progressed since, partly through the operations of the Maoris who occasionally pass round the coast in whaleboats from Foveaux Strait, and partly from the fact that the coast is now much more visited and disturbed than formerly.

Though the information which I have got together is of a fragmentary character, it sufficiently shows that sealing was an active pursuit in the southern part of New Zealand, and that numerous sealing vessels obtained full cargoes there, while for nearly half a century the few surviving seals have been pressed nearer and nearer to the point of extermination without being systematically pursued. The islands lying off the coast of New Zealand, however, have proved, relatively at least to their extent, vastly richer in seals than the mainland. Six groups of small islands lie to the south of the latitude of New Zealand.¹ The Snares were discovered by Vancouver late in the eighteenth century. They lie six-and-three miles from Stewart Island. Seals are still found there in small numbers, and were, I have no doubt, once numerous, but the group is so very small that their extermination must have been an easy matter. The Auckland Islands, in lat. 50° S., are about as long as the Isle of Wight, but much cut up by inlets, and with a precipitous southern and western coast, with numerous sea caves capable of sheltering seal "rookeries." They were discovered in 1810 by John Benton, a whaling captain hailing from Sydney, connected with the house of Enderby. They were found to be crowded with seals, and for many years afforded

¹ For further interesting particulars respecting these islands, see a paper by Mr. Chapman entitled "The Outlying Islands South of New Zealand." *Trans. New Zealand Inst.* 1890, p. 491.

a good sealing ground. After a while they seem to have been abandoned for long intervals and revisited with varying success. An attempt was made to colonize them in 1850, which failed after two years. During this period sealing was not pursued. It is impossible to ascertain with any degree of accuracy what number of skins they have supplied, but this much is known that even as lately as 1885, when a party of shipwrecked sailors was found on these desolate islands, they were rescued by a party of white and half-caste sealers, who took them to the sealing grounds. One of them published in the Melbourne *Argus* an interesting series of articles, which showed that numerous "rookeries" were still full, and were systematically visited by these poachers, who were lowered over the high cliffs by their companions by means of ropes. Though I visited this coast a few years later, on a bright, sunny day, with a calm sea, I can imagine no more desolate or dangerous scene, nor a safer refuge from everything but human ingenuity. The fruits of this illicit sealing were gathered by a member of Parliament, and a still higher personage was not free from suspicion. For many years a close time had been proclaimed by the New Zealand Government, which, however, does not possess means adequate to the suppression of this illicit sealing. A short season was opened a few years since, when sealing expeditions were fitted out and all available seals, irrespective of age or sex, were slaughtered, in the hope that the closing of Behring Sea would cause a great rise in prices. As, however, the prices were very low, and the sealers settled disputes with the owner of the vessel by stealing the skins, the result was disappointing. I believe about a thousand skins were obtained at the various islands, chiefly at this group.

Sea-lions, which are said to be quite useless, are very numerous at the Auckland Islands.

Campbell Island, lat. 53° , was discovered by Hazelburg, in a whaling vessel fitted out by the Campbells of Sydney, in 1819. It is a bold, round island of small size, some hundreds of miles from any other land. It has in times past

yielded large quantities of seals. Numerous vessels visited it soon after its discovery, and shore parties lived there for considerable periods. Portions of wrecks and graves of sailors attest these facts. An American poaching vessel which came out to visit it during the close season, ten years ago, met with disappointing results and lost a boat's crew there. Recent cruises have yielded a few seals in this field.

Macquarrie Island, which lies outside the jurisdiction of New Zealand, in lat. 55°, is now the home of countless great king penguins and of numerous sea-elephants. This was the most remarkable sealing ground in this part of the world. It is 650 miles from the Bluff Harbour and 800 from Tasmania, to which it is politically attached and the Government of which now prohibits the destruction of its native animals and birds. It is not known who discovered it, as the discovery by some Sydney sealing vessel, which occurred about 1811, was evidently kept a secret at first. I suspect that the entry of sealskins from Figi already mentioned was part of the process of keeping the secret. It is said that this small island, not more than twenty-five miles long and less than half that width, yielded to the discoverers no less than 80,000 seals. There is evidence that the pursuit was continued in later years, until dogs brought there by shore parties, destroyed the young seals and exterminated the race. This was facilitated by the fact that there are no considerable cliffs, the herbage everywhere dipping nearly to the sea. I may mention that Professor Scott of the Otago University, who visited the island in 1880, found that the fur seal was then absolutely unknown there; and though shore parties have worked there pretty nearly ever since boiling down sea-elephants, and several kinds of seals are seen, the fur-seal has never reappeared. This appears to support the statement made to me by Captain Fairchild that the fur-seal of these seas returns to breed at its own station and that it is useless to try and shift it to another.

It is to be observed that no land lies south of Macquarrie Island in this region until the ice-bound antarctic land discovered by Ross is reached. A spot marked as Emerald Island on the maps has no existence, nor has Royal Company Island, south of Tasmania. Vessels, however, on the homeward voyage are occasionally driven to Dougherty Island, between New Zealand and Cape Horn, and there it is asserted seals are seen in large numbers. Presumably the seals go south to the ice in summer, as they are not then seen at the various islands. The penguins, however, must go south in winter, as they are seen at the islands in enormous numbers in summer and are absent in winter. The extremely limited extent of the land below the ice line no doubt contributed to the ultimate destruction of the seals of Macquarrie Island.

Antipodes Island, discovered by Pendleton in 1800, a solitary mountainous island surrounded by steep cliffs and only three miles in length and breadth, was also the home of numerous seals. It is known that it was formerly visited by sealers. A man who spent six months there some years since, obtained no seals. Captain Fairchild has never seen seals there, but the recent open season led to its being visited with some result.

Bounty Islands, discovered by Captain Bligh on the outward voyage of the *Bounty* in 1788, form a small group of rocky islands quite without herbage or water and covered with enormous numbers of sea-birds. This group was a famous sealing ground. A sealing party remained here five months in charge of the once famous Maori chief Duaterra, about 1807. Their stay in this desolate spot was unduly prolonged and two Europeans and one Tahitian died of the privations to which they were subjected. They, however, took 8,000 skins. It is evident that numerous other parties of whose doings there is no record visited this place, which even during the late open season seems to have yielded some hundreds of seals, though the total area of rocky surface is not much more than 100 acres. I saw no seals when I visited these rocks a few years since, but the enormous

numbers of penguins swimming in the sea and sitting on the rocks—computed at a low estimate at several millions—attests the presence of a plentiful food supply.

A seventh group is the Chathams, discovered at the end of the last century by Lieut. Broughton. This group, which is situated in the latitude of New Zealand (43°), was inhabited by numerous natives of a primitive Polynesian race called Moriori, thirty of whom survive. About 1835 it was conquered by the Maoris, who now number 300, and to whom are added an equal number of Europeans. It has from the first been a sealing ground. Several shore parties lived here at various periods, and the outlying rocks are still visited by a small number of seals. Of the doings of sealers here I have found it impossible as yet to get records, but it was recognized as a new field. These islands have a good climate and soil, and were, until recently, for many years the headquarters of the now abandoned sperm whale fishery.

When the Europeans commenced to hunt seals on the coast of New Zealand they also found whales in immense numbers. The coasts swarmed with black or inshore whales, and the deeper waters, even near the land, abounded in sperm whales. The great sea now known as the Tasman Sea, between Australia and New Zealand, was called the Middle Ground, and was throughout its extent a whaling ground. It was found worth while to equip whaling vessels both from Sydney and from England. In addition to these were many from America and France and some from other countries. The very first whaling fleet which sailed from Sydney brought in a large catch, and reported the amazing fact that they had sighted 15,000 whales. Mr. Wm. Chapman, who visited New Zealand with the Governor of Norfolk Island, in 1793, describes the number of whales off the north of New Zealand, where he saw several whale-ships successfully cruising. The crew easily killed a whale, apparently for pastime. The whale fisheries were continued with activity until after 1840, but from that date a great decline in results is noticed.

As points of analogy occur between whaling and sealing in the Southern Hemisphere, it will not be out of place to add a few words on the whaling industry, the last ship connected with which withdrew from the waters a year or two since. Some statistics have been preserved as to the whaling operations north of Banks Peninsula for a few years. They are imperfect, as they relate to the transactions of one firm only, but they give some idea of the magnitude and the course of the trade. Each whale yields five or six tons of oil.

Year.	Whales caught.	Oil in tons.	Year.	Whales caught.	Oil in tons.
1829.....	(?)	120	1837.....	75	360
1830.....	do.	143	1838.....	156	725
1831.....	do.	152	1839.....	134	642
1832.....	do.	115	1840.....	90	429
1833.....	do.	284	1841.....	57	285
1834.....	do.	424	1842.....	35	163
1835.....	69	502	1843.....	30	151
1836.....	70	410			

The foregoing was entirely the work of shore stations on a few hundred miles of coast. The figures do not take into account the catch of ships, even in the same localities. Thus, in 1834, one vessel, the *Columbia*, took 200 tons in the harbour of Otakson (Otago). In 1835 four or five vessels fished in this harbour. During 1841, 1842 and 1843 nineteen vessels, principally French, entered the harbour. But all this was exceeded by the operations in Cook Strait and in parts of the North Island. The Bay of Islands became, like Honolulu in later times, the rendezvous of a great fleet of whaling vessels. The fragmentary statistics which have come to hand amply show this; yet the vessels only entered the harbours at certain seasons, and many of them wholly avoided harbours, as, once there, they had no law to prevent the desertion of seamen.

The French made some sort of protest against the destructiveness of shore stations, but there was no recognized sovereignty save a shadowy dependence on New South Wales, and there was no law of any kind prior to 1840. It

is to the operation of shore parties, destroying and disturbing the cow whales in the breeding grounds, that I attribute the extinction of the whales. The sperm whale, which lives more constantly in the deep sea, lasted longer and lingers still. At this once famous whaling station one whale—possibly two—has been killed in the last twenty years. The boats have rotted on the beach; it is not worth the while of the Maori owners to look after them. With the town of Dunedin in the bay, numbering 45,000 inhabitants, and a trade of some millions annually, the survival of the whales could not be expected.

I cannot but attribute the depletion of the seals to the same cause. They are very timid, and as is the case with all timid creatures disturbance on the breeding grounds is fatal to the maintenance of the race. Disturbance in this case has taken the form of reckless slaughter. There could be no hope of preserving the seals on the east coast, which is now settled and is rapidly becoming well peopled. On the wild west coast they could only be preserved by stringent laws judiciously administered. There are reasons which lead me to conclude that once or twice in recent years, when left undisturbed for a time, they have increased in certain places. The comparatively large number obtained in 1891 caused some surprise to experts, and this fact may be taken as some evidence of increase. Such an increase can, however, only lead to partial restoration of the seal fisheries on the uninhabited west coast and on the islands which are probably useless for other purposes, if great care is used to make the protection effective.

Dunedin, N. Z., March 22, 1893.

1870

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