

A WHALING ADVENTURE.

(From the Overland Monthly.)

"Good for ninety barrels, sure," exclaimed Captain Hosmer, as he took a leisurely survey of this behemoth. We turned him, took him in tow, and made for the barque, expecting that the mate would pursue another whale; but instead of so doing, he laid his boat for the Jeanette, which was about a mile to leeward. Captain Hosmer could not understand this style of tactics, and expressed some surprise that Mr. Bennett had not followed and got another whale, several of which were not far distant. We had got within a mile of the barque, when to our intense astonishment she squazed away before the wind; which was now blowing a six-knot breeze, spread all canvas and rapidly disappeared from view. What could be the meaning of this astounding conduct? Why had Mr. Bennett left his captain and nine of his crew upon the friendless ocean? Captain Hosmer tried vainly to repress the fears and anguish which at that moment agitated his mind. He endeavoured to account for Mr. Bennett's course in a variety of ways, but that very variety was demoralising. At length it became too evident that the mate had deserted us and gone off with the barque, leaving us to perish on the broad bosom of the deep. Three hours afterward the sun set and night fell, and with it the breeze, leaving a dead calm. "Men," said the captain, "the Jeanette cannot be more than fourteen or fifteen miles away; she was steering east-south-east an hour before sunset, and cannot have altered her course in this calm; let us cut away the whale and pull for the barque, for I think we can catch her by midnight, unless the wind blows up; so cut away the whale and double bank the oars as much as possible, and give way with a will." The monstrous carcass we had been towing was immediately sent adrift, and each one bent to his oar with firm resolve. It was a pull for life. The night was cloudless, but no moon "o'er the dark her silver mantle threw." Bright and lustrous stars were reflected from the passive ocean; our boat rushed through the water, impelled by the strong arms of nine stalwart men, endeavouring to save themselves from agonising death. Her bows were crested with silver foam, and in her wake glowed lurid sparks; while the rapidly-dipping oars, with their long steady sweep, turned up myriads of scintillations, as if a host of fireflies had been disturbed. On, on we pulled, in the direction taken by the Jeanette, until daylight broke upon us, when we stopped, laid upon our oars, and scanned the fast-coming horizon. In vain did we turn our anxious gaze in every direction; there was nothing framed by man in sight. Not a breath of air rippled over the boundless waste of waters; not a bird or a fish broke the awful solitude. Uprose the sun, flaming, angry, mercurial. A small beaker of water was in the boat, but it had been half-emptied during the preceding night of trial and anxiety. Captain Hosmer immediately charged himself with the care of this desperately-coveted beverage, to be doled out in regular rations to each man, no one receiving more than enough to moisten his parching lips and burning tongue. Then commenced that long sequence of unutterable horrors, compared to which all other human ills seem trivial. There were ten men in the boat, and the third day had come with the same lurid sun glaring upon us with relentless fury. At the captain's suggestion each man soaked himself in sea water, which seemed to afford some very slight relief; but our garments soon dried in that furnace-like heat, leaving a crust of salt all over our bodies, so that the experiment had to be constantly repeated. It is needless to describe the increasing anguish and torment suffered by that wretched crew, as day after day came and went, leaving us still upon the glassy deep, which had begun to look more like molten lead than water. We were then so exhausted that all further effort to make way was out of the question. The pangs of hunger had become demoniacal, and men glared at each other with cannibal gaze and intent. Each felt what the others thought. We began to realise that one must die that the rest might live. Strange it was that in the midst of this indescribable agony of mind and body no one thought of committing suicide; no one contemplated self-sacrifice, but with insane despair seemed to prefer being killed and eaten. Psychologists may explain this extraordinary fact; I cannot. The love of life was still the ruling principle, and we clung to it with desperation. "Oh, my God!" exclaimed the captain, "if we had not cut away that whale we might have been content." These were terrible words. They at once imparted a new sense of hunger which could not be appeased without food—food of some kind, no matter what. Among the crew was a Malay; a wonderfully active and vigorous man, with the agility of the tiger-cat and the muscular power of an anaconda. His savage eyes glittered like those of a basilisk as he proposed that we should draw lots to determine who should be immolated. Everyone at first recoiled with unfeigned horror; but in a few minutes the proposition familiarised itself to our minds, and in one hour it was adopted. An express stipulation was made to except the captain, who resisted the motion, but finally consented, as he was the only navigator among us, and the greatest sufferer. Our commander cut small slivers of wood of different lengths from a harpoon-staff, and presenting their ends while concealing their length in his hand, bade each one draw, the one pulling the shortest sliver to die. We were paralysed. Had it really come to this? Perhaps in ten minutes after the victim had been sacrificed a vessel might heave in sight, and rescue us from so horrible a condition. Perhaps a storm might arise and destroy all hands. Perhaps some stray porpoise or other fish might come within the reach of our harpoons or gaffs. We hesitated, and agreed to defer the ordeal until after nightfall, for the double reason of waiting until the last hope had gone, and of securing the sacrifice as cool as possible when no other resource was left. Eight o'clock, p.m., came full soon. The moon was riding in the heavens, and reflected from the vast mirror of the ocean. Slowly and with suffocating trepidation, we approached the captain to draw our lots. His hands and frame shook as

with an ague. One by one, with lank jaws, cavernous eyes and gaunt frames, we stretched forth our palsy fingers and selected our bits of wood. Not a word was spoken; but the commander, with the index of doom, pointed out the victim. Ten short minutes were given him to prepare for the awful change from life to death; from this world, with its attendant horrors, to the "undiscovered bourne." While engaged in commending himself to the throne of grace, and preparing to go where "the weary are at rest," he was knocked on the head from behind, and quickly despatched with repeated blows—care being taken to shed no drop of blood. That was our first sacrifice to selfishness; but we were not in possession of rational faculty. The capacity to judge clearly and dispassionately had been lost. Our manhood had been taken from us, and we were but beasts of prey—the mere animal man. After two or three days the same horrible ceremony was repeated, and again and again, until four of our number had succumbed. Our fifth drawing was postponed longer than usual, for there seemed to be a reawakened hope of rescue. It came not. Once more the captain held forth the fatal slivers, and the Malay drew the shortest. This was at five o'clock in the afternoon, and the time of sacrifice would not arrive until eight o'clock p.m. My feeble powers of description can give you no adequate idea of how the Malay's eyes glittered; of the foam which covered his lips; of the writhings his frame underwent; of the manner in which he gnashed his teeth, and howled like a wolf. It was frightful. These extreme expressions of unmitigated agony were beginning to operate in his favour, and elicited some tokens of compassion; but they were soon turned to hate and loathing. The after, or stroke oar, was propelled by a lad not over 17 years of age. He had been the most heroic and uncomplaining of the crew. He was a meek, active, intelligent boy, who had won the favour of all, and we had unanimously determined that his life should be saved, if within our power. Seven o'clock arrived. The Malay was at the forward oar. One or two "heavens," short, heavy, thick, were lying under his thwart, and the captain saw him quietly reach down and arm himself with one. Suspecting some villainy, the commander quietly unshipped a lance and placed it by his side, ready for use. Half an hour passed, when the Malay, with the bound of a tiger, leaped over the intervening thwarts and made a desperate blow at the boy's head. As he sprang aft, Captain Hosmer raised his foot and kicked the boy off his thwart, causing the Malay's aim to miss its mark, and at the same instant drove the lance deep into his chest. The would-be murderer fell, and was instantly killed and shared out among the survivors. Hunger had been somewhat appeased, and we killed each other not so much for flesh as to moisten our mouths with the blood, which, although hot at first, soon cooled upon the lips and tongue, especially as a refreshing breeze had sprung up two days before the Malay's death. The sky had become overcast and threatened a storm. Water! water! Anything for water. The indescribable gnawings of hunger are feeble in comparison to the want of water. Oh! that the Majesty above would vouchsafe a rain storm, that we might drink, and not perish of thirst. It was not so ordained. The clouds passed away and left us once more under the glowing firmament. It was more than human nature could bear, and one of our number died under the infliction. His body was made fast to a rope and trolled for two days, in the hope of calling up a shark; but no such good fortune awaited us. Those who still cling to the belief that sharks will instinctively follow a vessel, on board of which some member is soon to die, may rest assured of its fallacy. We would have given worlds to have seen one of those voracious monsters at any time during our horrible sufferings. On the morning of the third day we cut our dead shipmate adrift, and again resigned ourselves to whatever fate might be in store. Only four of the original ten remained alive, viz., the captain, the lad, one messmate, and myself. It had been my fortune to escape so far, and only two of us left to draw lots. Six days had passed since we shared the Malay, and we had been two days without food. There we lay, reeking silently upon the great deep. The moon had come and gone, and was beginning to come again. Thirty-four days had been passed in this awful struggle for life. Not a drop of water had refreshed our systems after the second day; not a fish nor a bird had been seen in all that terrible period. We had ceased to be human, and more resembled beasts of prey. Deep-sunk, bloodless eyes; gaunt, shrivelled, and emaciated frames; lolling, swollen tongues, and trembling limbs; faces covered with thin scraggy beards; nails like claws, and stained with human blood, may give a faint idea of how we looked, except that there was a fiendish, inexpressible glare about the eyes which spoke volumes. Our voices had been reduced to hoarse whistles; the power of utterance was nearly exhausted; men no longer spoke to each other, but conversed reluctantly by sluggish signs. Yet the desire to prolong life rose above all other considerations. It was for that we had killed and eaten our fellow-men; it was for that we had undergone indescribable tortures of mind and body; it was for that we still hoped and struggled against an almost positive fate. As the next day dawned upon the cloudless ocean, although a gentle breeze fanned the waters, Captain Hosmer signalled us to come aft. In a hardly audible whisper he said: "Let us agree to die together like men; let us have no more of this dreadful cannibalism. If we are to perish, it is God's holy will, and we should submit without rebelliousness. All proper measures should be adopted to secure life, if possible; but we have been sinful and selfish beyond ordinary parallel. Should we escape, our lives will become one harrowing grief for the deeds we have done in this boat; and if we do not survive, to what end will have been all the evil we have done?" Freely each person reached out his hand, and grasping that of our noble commander, acquiesced in his views, and solemnly pledged ourselves to their fulfilment. The thirty-fifth day came, and we had resigned ourselves to die, either by the slow and ineffable torture of famine, or by a hasty plunge into the deep. At ten o'clock, a.m., a sail was descried to the westward, standing directly towards us with a fair wind. With all the haste our captain could command, he tore the ragged remnant of his shirt from his shoulders, and made it fast to a lance-staff. This was stepped in the mast-hole, and required the united strength of two men to keep it steady and upright. On came the ship, until within a mile of us; she hoisted her ensign in token of having seen us. We tried to shout, but could not; we tried to dance, and fell down exhausted; we tried to laugh, and wept from fountains long seared; we attempted to clutch each other's hands, and only succeeded in making convulsed motions. Presently the ship rounded to, just to windward, lowered and manned her boat and sent it to our succour. Then the long-sustained tension gave way and we all fell lifeless. When next I awoke to consciousness, I found myself on board the English ship Malabar, bound from Liverpool to Sydney. Every kindness and attention were shown us, and three days afterward we landed in Sydney, the shadowy wrecks of our former selves.—Article: "The Story of a Survivor."