

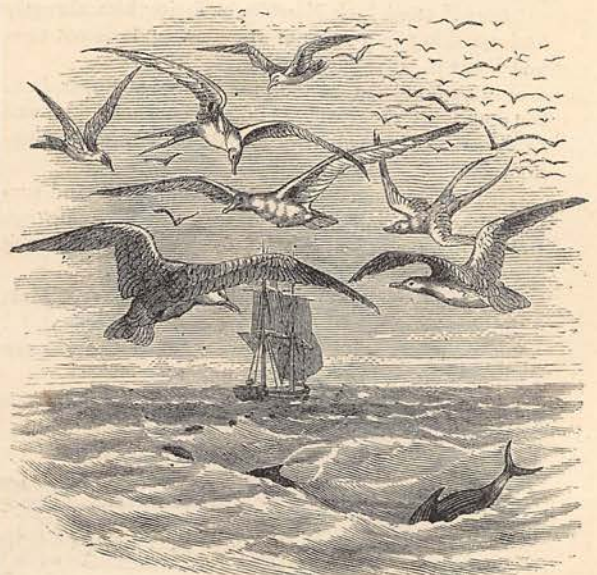
ON BOARD SHIP IN THE TROPICS.



THE PAPER NAUTILUS.

ONCE within the region of the tropics, the monotony of the vast space of sea and air is broken by the appearance of continual objects of interest to the admirer of nature and the naturalist. Now a huge whale rises to the surface to take in a fresh supply of atmospheric air, to replace that which, being vitiated, he expels from his lungs in a thin steamy column, with the forcible expiration which is characteristically termed "blowing" in nautical parlance. "There she blows!" is the whaler's caution as he directs attention to the whereabouts of the great leviathan. Again, it will be a shoal of porpoises, rolling over each other in elephantine playfulness, their sharp snouts and clean-made fins literally cutting the water as they shoot past the vessel at full speed or gambol round her bows. Anon, the elegant little bark of the argonaut, or paper nautilus, so called from the delicate fragility of its sculptured shell and its purity of tint, hoisting its membranous sails to the breeze, and rowing itself along, trireme-fashion, with double-banked oars or tentacles; or perhaps another variety known as the "Portuguese man-o'-war." This is a soft nautilus, without shell, which looks as if constructed of the most transparent Bohemian glass, of a hue between a ruby and an amethyst, and which is almost as unsubstantial. These float by on the foam of the wave, and are to be seen of all dimensions down to the tiniest pink bubble. Now turn from the blue enamelled ocean to the air, and we shall observe the whole horizon teeming with bird life. Conspicuous over all is the kingly albatross, soaring on his magnificent pinions, which cover an expanse of nine feet from wing to wing, the mere extension of their wide surfaces to the air being sufficient to sustain its huge

frame without any perceptible movement. Thus the albatross may be seen soaring over the masthead of the tall ship, often appearing as if suspended in the empyrean, so motionless is he at such times. These, with Cape hens, molly-mawks, frigate birds, Cape pigeons, and a host of other sea-birds, follow the good ship without cessation, rapidly wheeling about, crossing and re-crossing each other, in giddy flight, hour by hour, and day by day, possibly for even months together, so unflagging and unceasing is their attendance. As far as we can see, they never appear to rest on the waves. When met with, they are often hundreds of miles away from the nearest land. Yet dawn succeeds dawn, and there they are still hovering in our wake, eagerly looking out for anything in the shape of food that may be thrown overboard. Such is their keenness of sight that nothing escapes their notice. Of all these winged attendants, none is so beautiful as the Cape pigeon, with its dappled black and white plumage. There is something butterfly-like in the broad painted wings and flapping flight of the pretty bird. A favourite amusement on board ship is snaring the Cape pigeon by floating lengths of strong thread from the taffrail. These are carried out and suspended in the air by the breeze, aided by the motion of the vessel; and the birds flying across strike against them, their wings becoming entangled in the thread—often inextricably. Thus captured, they are hauled fluttering on board. The stately albatross is absolutely "fished for" with a bait. A large piece of raw flesh is affixed to a strong hook, and then made fast to a piece of a spar or thin planking, with the object of making it float on the surface of the waves. This apparatus, attached to a strong line, is



A SHOAL OF PORPOISES.

then cast overboard and allowed to drift in the wake of the vessel. This the albatross soon perceives, and, after sailing round it in ever-narrowing circles, at last makes up his mind to appropriate it. A sudden swoop, and he has secured the bait in his strong beak, and gulping down the tempting morsel, he is firmly hooked. Now comes the tug of war—the exciting work of hauling the powerful bird on board. This is not easily accomplished. Spreading his enormous wings to their full extent, the albatross fills and backs (as we should say in sea-phrase), opposing a tremendous resistance to the efforts of his captors. It is like pulling at the cord of an enormous kite. Two or three vigorous hands, however, soon decrease his distance from the deck, and, despite his furious struggles, he is eventually hoisted over the taffrail, and deposited on the deck. It takes some time even then to secure him, as a blow from his powerful pinions is sufficient to break a limb, if approached incautiously. His movements—so grand and graceful in his proper element, the air—are most ungraceful and awkward on the deck, where he is ludicrously helpless. I doubt whether the enormous spread of his wings would allow of his raising himself in the air at all from a flat surface. His haunts are the inaccessible crags of desolate islands, such as the precipices of Tristan d'Acunha, the Crozettes, the Marion Islands, and other localities in the wide ocean, when on land; and the unequal surface of the waves affords him, no doubt, the necessary elevation when he alights on the billows. The poor bird, once landed, is soon knocked on the head and despatched by his cruel captors. Having been thus foully "done to death," the next proceeding on the part of his assassins is to dispose of his carcass in detail. Almost every part of the albatross is turned to account. His grand eagle-like head becomes the property of some ambitious passenger, who will have it stuffed and attached to a block of polished wood or marble, and converted into a handsome paper-weight. His broad webbed feet will be preserved, reversed, and in this position converted into pediments for the support of elegant ostrich-egg cups or cocoa-nut goblets; and his thigh and wing bones, gracefully curved and cunningly hollowed out by the artisan hand of Nature, will be mounted in rich amber and converted

into pipe-stems. The snowy well-feathered breast of the albatross will make an elegant muff for some favoured lady voyager. Thus the *opima spolia* will



SNARING CAPE PIGEONS.

be pretty generally distributed. The poor bird will, however, be spared the last indignity offered to objects of the chase—he will not be eaten; his flesh would be far too oily for food. Many large sea-birds besides the albatross will take the bait, and are captured in this manner; the novelty of the sport being, I suppose, the chief inducement. Whether man is justified in taking life, with its capacity for enjoyment, away from these happy creatures without some adequate object is another question. This is a wide discussion, and it involves this consideration: How many of our sports, on mature reflection, can be fairly included within this category? We may find strong reasons for their justification, without doubt, on the score of expediency, but unless some adequate motive is adduced, it is after all but the recurrence of the old fable of the frogs. What is sport to us means death to God's creatures. "Live and let live" is a good old motto!

T. J. LUCAS.



"THE STATELY ALBATROSS."