

## THE WHITE BEAR

(*Ursos Maritimus*).



HE ghostly monarch of earth's gloomiest region, the white bear, or Nennook, holds a unique position in the animal kingdom. Strictly marine in its habits, it preys upon fishes, birds, etc., eggs and berries in their season, and in confinement will subsist long on bread and other vegetable food. Living amidst extreme cold, where animal and vegetable life is far from plentiful, it has developed powers of scent and skill in pursuit, which are, perhaps, unmatched by any other beast. It can detect the little breathing-holes made by the seals in the ice, even when they and the icy plain are covered with a uniform coating of snow, excelling by far the powers of the specially trained Esquimaux dog. It has been seen to plunge into the water in chase of a salmon, and to return to the surface with the captured fish in its mouth. Its activity, ingenuity, and endurance, are wonderfully brought into play on observing a seal lying asleep on a rock or an ice-raft. Marking the position in which the unsuspecting animal lies, it quietly slips into the water, and, diving below the surface, swims in its direction till forced to ascend to breathe. Resuming its course, it times its submarine journeys so well that when it ascends for the last time to breathe, it is close to the surprised victim. The seal is thus check-mated; if it drops into the water the bear will immediately capture it; if it tries to escape by land, he will also immediately overtake it.

Like other bears, it is a very dangerous foe, and tenacious of life; it sometimes avoids, sometimes attacks, human beings. The pursuit of its prey occasionally leads

to migrations unwelcome alike to the Nennook and the residents of the civilized shores to which the ice-floes will sometimes drift. Sheep and cattle disappear, and the inhospitable owners turn out and avenge themselves on the thief whom hunger has driven unwillingly to bad ways. They hibernate or not, according as they feel in condition or otherwise, or as their living food gets frozen out of their reach. Arctic voyagers are glad to have a supply of fresh meat from the bear, and it is no light play to secure them alive. In Charles Kingsley's historical story of Hereward, one of the most spirited chapters is that on the death of a white bear captured and kept for the amusement of the doughty knight, Gilbert of Ghent, whose abode was somewhere in Scotland, and where the accomplished lad—singer, harp-player, dancer, rider, hunter—soon became the darling of Gilbert's ladies, and the envy of the knights and gentlemen. But the ambitious young Hereward was discontented at having done no great thing worthy of a man, and looked curiously and longingly at the menagerie of wild beasts kept by Gilbert wherewith to try the mettle of candidates for knighthood. "But after looking over the bulls and stags, wolves and bears, Hereward settled it in his mind that there was none worthy of his steel, save one huge white bear, whom no man had dared to face, and whom Hereward, indeed, had never seen, hidden as he was all day within the old oven-shaped Pict's house of stone, which had been turned into his den. There was a mystery about the uncanny brute which charmed Hereward. He was said to be half human, perhaps wholly human; to be the son of the Fairy Bear, near kinsman, if not uncle or

cousin of Siward Digre. He had, like his fairy father, iron claws; he had human intellect, and understood human speech, and the arts of war; at least so all in the place believed, and not so absurdly as at first sight seems.

Terrible was the brown bear: but more terrible 'the white sea-deer,' as the Saxons called him; the hound of Hrymir, the whale's bane, the seal's dread, the rider of the iceberg, the sailer of the floe, who ranged for his prey under the six months' night, lighted by Surtur's fires, even to the gates of Muspelheim. To slay him was a feat worthy of Beswulf's self; and again and again Hereward asked his host to let him try his strength against the monster of the North. Again and again the shrieks of the ladies, and Gilbert's own pity for the stripling youth, brought a refusal. But Hereward settled it in his heart, nevertheless, that, somehow or other, when Christmas time came round, he would extract from Gilbert, drunk or sober, leave to fight that bear; and then either make himself a name, or die like a man.

But as Hereward was coming in one afternoon from hunting, hawk on fist, with Martin Lightfoot trotting behind, crane and heron, duck and hare slung over his shoulder, on reaching the courtyard gates he was aware of screams and shouts within, tumult and terror among man and beast. Hereward tried to force his horse in at the gate. The beast stopped and turned, snorting with fear; and no wonder; for in the midst of the courtyard stood the Fairy Bear; his white mane bristled up till he seemed twice as big as any of the sober brown bears which Hereward yet had seen: his long snake neck and cruel visage wreathed about in search of prey. A dead horse, its back broken by a single blow of the paw, and two or three writhing dogs, showed that the beast had turned (like too many of his human kindred) 'Berserker.' The courtyard was utterly empty; but from the ladies' bower came

shrieks and shouts, not only of women, but of men; and knocking at the bower door, adding her screams to those inside, was the little white figure of an English maiden. They had barricaded themselves inside, leaving the child out; and now dared not open the door, as the bear rolled towards it, looking savagely right and left for a fresh victim.

Hereward leaped from his horse, and, drawing his sword, rushed forward with a shout that made the bear turn round.

He looked once back at the child, then round again at Hereward; and, making up his mind to take the largest morsel first, made straight at him with a growl which there was no mistaking.

He was within two paces; then he rose on his hind legs, a head and shoulders taller than Hereward, and lifted the iron talons high in air. Hereward knew that there was but one spot at which to strike; and he struck true and strong, before the iron paw could fall, right on the muzzle of the monster.

He heard the dull crash of the steel; he felt the sword jammed tight. He shut his eyes for an instant, fearing lest, as in dreams, his blow had come to naught; lest his sword had turned aside, or melted like water in his hand, and the next moment would find him crushed to earth, blinded and stunned. Something tugged at his sword. He opened his eyes, and saw the huge carcass bend, reel, roll slowly over to one side dead, tearing out of his hand the sword, which was firmly fixed into the skull.

Hereward stood awhile staring at the beast like a man astonished at what he himself had done. He had had his first adventure, and he had conquered."

It is somewhat singular that the greatest of British naval heroes should have begun his public career with an adventure with the same animal. Southey relates the following incident which occurred to Nelson when a lad fifteen years of age. At his urgent solicitation he was taken as coxswain on board the

*Carcass*, commissioned for Arctic exploration. "One night, during the midwatch, he stole from the ship with one of his comrades, taking advantage of a rising fog, and set off over the ice in pursuit of a bear. It was not long before they were missed. The fog thickened, and Captain Lutwidge and his officers became exceedingly alarmed for their safety. Between three and four in the morning the weather cleared, and the two adventurers were seen, at a considerable distance from the ship, attacking a huge bear. The signal for them to return was immediately made. Nelson's comrade called upon him to obey it, but in vain; his musket had flashed in the pan; their ammunition was expended; and a

chasm in the ice, which divided him from the bear, probably preserved his life. 'Never mind,' he cried; 'do but let me get a blow at this devil with the butt-end of my musket, and we shall have him.'

Captain Lutwidge, however, seeing his danger, fired a gun, which had the desired effect of frightening the beast; and the lad then returned, somewhat afraid of the consequences of his trespass. The captain reprimanded him sternly for conduct so unworthy of the office which he filled; and desired to know what motive he could have for hunting a bear. 'Sir,' said he, pouting his lip, as he was wont to do when agitated, 'I wished to kill the bear, that I might carry the skin to my father.'



## THE TURTLE FISHERY.

**N** all the turtles the jaws are robust; the beak of the upper jaw is hooked downwards; the edges are sharp, and sometimes saw-like; the lower mandible is received into a groove of the upper; the tongue is very fleshy and moveable in all directions.

It is among the species belonging to the present family that we find the giants of the Chelonian race.

Examples of the leathery turtle have been known to weigh fifteen or sixteen hundred pounds; and other species have been observed weighing eight or nine hundred, with the carapace seven feet in length. In the countries where turtles are common, and attain to very great dimensions, the natives use their carapaces as canoes or boats, for coasting along the shore, as troughs to water cattle, as baths for children, and as roofs for huts. To these circumstances both Pliny and Strabo allude, in their

notice of a nation called "turtle-eaters" (*Chelonophagi*), on the borders of the Red Sea; the custom, therefore, is one of considerable antiquity.

The members of the present family are met with in the warmer latitudes of the ocean, and especially towards the torrid zone. They abound on the shores of many of the West Indian islands, the Antilles, Cuba, Jamaica, Hayti, etc. They are numerous at the Cape Verd and Ascension isles; at the isle of France, the Seychelles islands, and Madagascar; at Vera Cruz in the Gulf of Mexico; at the Sandwich and Galapagos islands, and elsewhere. Stragglers frequently visit the Mediterranean, and occasionally the British shores.

The flesh of some species, but particularly of the green turtle (*Chelonia midas*), is in the greatest request as a luxury for the table, at least in England, and the animal itself is an object of commerce. The arrival of a cargo of "lively turtles" is by no means a thing of trifling importance.