PRODUCTION OF WHALE OIL*

THE increasing production of whale oil as well as groundnuts and other oil seeds and nuts has an important bearing upon the copra position. This fact has been explained in an article which appeared in this Journal in February, 1930, and also in a report prepared by the Empire Marketing Board which was published in *The Tropical Agriculturist*, March 1930.

The steady increase in production shown below is further emphasised by the fact that the average annual production of whale oil between 1910-1920 was about 550,000 barrels.

The trade estimate of the quantity of whale oil coming on the market in recent years is as follows:

Year	Barrels
1925	1,044,272
1926	1,166,857
1927	1,220,415
1928	1,356,308
1929	1,861,877

The quantities produced have been greatly increased in recent years on account of the great improvement in the methods employed in the whaling industry. Although no estimate is available of production in 1930, it is expected that heavy catches will continue unless they should result in too drastic depletion of the herds.

Owing to modern methods of treatment, a proportion of the oil can be made up into a non-odorous fat suitable for human consumption, but it is not possible to say what proportion of the whale oil available for world consumption is rendered available for edible purposes.

The following brief history of whaling and its future, was delivered by Professor A. C. Hardy in a recent wireless "talk."

Every whale fishery has followed the same course—first a period of rapid development and profitable enterprise followed by collapse and final failure. By the fifteenth century the Basques had exterminated the Nordkarper whales from the Bay of Biscay—in the sixteenth century the Newfoundland fishery rose and fell. Then the Greenland whale was discovered and from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the middle of last century a series of fisheries one after the other flourished and failed, first round the coast of Spitzbergen and Jan Mayen Land in the days of great competition between the English and the Dutch and then at Greenland and far up the Davis Straits to Baffin Bay. One by one the great British whaling ports gave up. Hull, once famous for its whaling, sent its last ship in 1869—and a few ships still sailed from Dundee till the beginning of the present century.

Just when it seemed that whaling in the north was dead, Svend Foyn, a Norwegian, in 1865 invented the modern harpoon gun. This opened up a new fishery, that of the great rorqual whales which had hitherto been too fast and powerful to be attacked. Then history repeated itself once more and for many years now only a few small stations have been operating in the north. It seemed that whaling was passing altogether from the world—but no.

---

* From *The Malayan Agricultural Journal*, Vol. XVIII, No. 12, December, 1930.

Reports brought back by expeditions from the Antarctic showed that there were whales in the far south. In 1904 that great Norwegain whaling Captain—C. A. Lansen—established the first whaling stations in the south of South Georgia. In the following year floating factories visited the South Shetlands still farther south. So successful were these enterprises that by 1912 there were twenty-one whale catchers working in South Georgia and thirty-two in the South Shetlands. All these islands are part of the British Empire, being Dependencies of the Falkland Islands. The Government, realising the danger to the industry, limited the number of licenses issued to the companies; but during the war when the oil became of great importance the restrictions were relaxed, and in 1915-16 the number of whales taken in a single season reached close on 12,000. If further regulations should become necessary to save the industry from decline, it was realised that it must be based on scientific knowledge. A Committee was set up with the result that the "Discovery" investigations were planned and are now being carried into practice under the leadership of Dr. Stanley Kemp. We knew practically nothing about the biology of these great whales, about their breeding habits, migrations, length of life, the time they take to reach maturity, and of the factors underlying the fluctuations in numbers from year to year. Knowledge of all these points and many others is of the utmost importance. Dr. Kemp and his staff are busy finding the answers to these questions, and much valuable information has already been obtained and is being published in the "Discovery" reports.

In the meatime new developments have taken place in the industry. Hitherto this whaling has been confined to shore stations of floating factories which must be anchored in the shelter of the land. A floating factory ship carries out all the operations just described, within her hull. The whales are flensed and cut up alongside—hence the necessity for calm water. But now in recent years a new type of floating factory has been evolved—it is known as a pelagic whaler, because it can carry out operations in mid-ocean. Huge jaw-like gates open in the bows or stern, revealing a sloping gullet from the sea up to the deck. The whales brought in taken by the catches are swallowed whole. "Surely," as some journalist has aptly said "This is Jonah avenged."

Whaling can thus be carried out without complying with local regulations, The number of whales being taken in the Antarctic is increasing every year; some fortythousand were killed during last season. The regulation of the industry of the future must depend upon international agreement, which is inevitably slow. Let us hope that it will come before it is too late. We need not fear the complete extermination of whales, because the industry is now carried out upon such a scale that it must fail before the whales are actually brought to extinction. But there is a very real danger if care is not taken, of a collapse of the industry, with the loss of this valuable supply of oil if not for ever, for a very long time to come.