

SEALS ON LORD AUCKLAND ISLANDS

From "*Sorrows and Joys of a New Zealand Naturalist*," by H. Guthrie Smith.

THROUGHOUT the trip at every landing we were met by deputations of seals, they accompanied us shorewards, gambolling and playing below the boat or alongside, splashing and diving, leaping out of the water or easily rolling along with only flappers visible. They fraternised with us like laughing South Sea Island girls, glad to receive with open arms a great whale ship of the olden days. They were so willing to be playmates—with hardly an invitation, wishing to join in our fun—our presence there was alone a sufficient overture. The creaking and straining of wood on rowlock, the stirring of the crew, the hoot of the syren was sufficient to call them up and set them capering.

Nor was it in the ocean only or in deep water that they were pleased to sport with us. Whilst walking one happy afternoon along the narrow shore line of Port Ross, a couple of pups about the size of Newfoundland dogs, after moving parallel—they in their element, we in ours—presently ventured a further step. These heavenly twins, heading us, left the shallows where they had been splashing and galumphing, as if in challenge and solicitation.

On that long loch amongst the low tide-worn stones, hard set in yellow sand and seawrack, the little roundabouts awaited me. Like two girls together egging each other on, daring what one alone would eschew, in most attractive fashion they revealed their simple wish to know me better, to be friends. It was now for me, the eldest by far of the three of us to reciprocate, further to press the proffered comradeship. Ah, that all of our emotions are not as rightful as the best of them, that man has almost perforce to persecute and destroy when he might cherish and serve. Who has not watched a mother playing with her babe, yet in our relation to what we serenely term the brute creation we lose the altruistic touch divine. Through human, unhumiliated dull brainlessness we forfeit a pleasure akin to that sweet opening of the heart to kindness, to that eternal forgetfulness of self. In the happy hunting grounds, nay, better name by

far, in the Elysian fields, how shall not author and seal renew their momentary mundane tie—a miracle almost as of discourse betwixt the quick and dead—that link of wild and tame when for the first time in these subantarctic isles the flesh of man and seal have met in ought but pain and fear. Far, far more eagerly do I long to meet that baby seal again than to regret in heaven nine-tenths of my acquaintances. It was love at first sight. Speaking the little language—Swift's language to Stella—and advancing very slowly, I put out my hand till one of them touched it with his nose; nor were the nostrils hastily withdrawn. We were friends—Hoa matenga—friends to the death. I feel sure that within its fat body there must have been some movement corresponding to a canine tail wag, to a shy canine wriggle and laugh.



SEAL PUPS.

[Photo. courtesy H. Guthrie Smith.]