

CHAPTER II

JUNE 22 TO AUGUST 15, 1895

As spring advanced the disturbance in the ice increased, and new lanes and pools were formed in every direction. At the same time there was a daily increase in the number of aquatic animals and birds around us.

On the night of June 22d I was awakened by the watch, who told me that there were whales in the lane on the starboard side. Every one hurried on deck, and we now saw that some seven or eight female narwhals were gambolling in the channel close upon us. We fired some shots at them, but these did not seem to affect them. Later in the day I went after them in the sealing-boat, but without getting within range. In order to be able to give effectual chase, should they, as we hoped, pay us a visit in the future, we made ready two harpoon-bladders and an oak anchor, which we attached to the end of the harpoon line. Should the whale, when harpooned, prove too strong for us, we would let go the anchor and the bladders, and if the fates were not against us, we might be successful.

We were quite anxious to try the new apparatus, and therefore kept a sharp lookout for the whales. One or two were seen occasionally in the channel, but they disappeared again so quickly that we had no time to pursue them. On the evening of July 2d we had the prospect of a good hunt. The lane swarmed with whales, and we quickly started out with the boat in pursuit. But this time, too, they were so shy that we could not get at them. One of them remained some time in a small channel, which was so narrow that we could throw across it. We attempted to steal on him along the edge, but as soon as we had