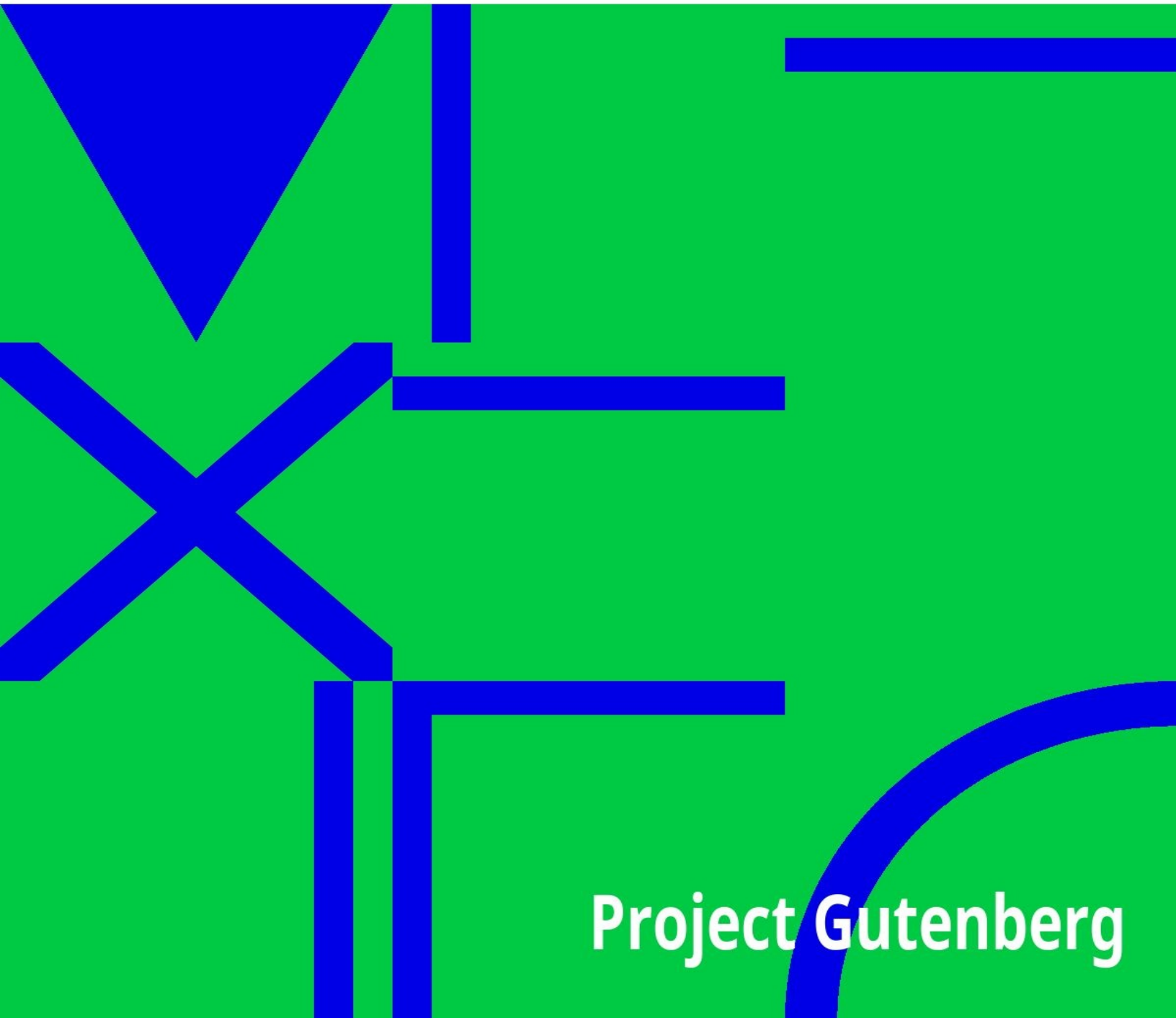
Steve Young

George Manville Fenn



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George Manville Fenn

Chapter One.

The Reason Why.

“What do I think?”

“Yes, out with it. Don’t be afraid.”

“Oh, I’m not afraid; but I don’t want to quarrel with any man, nor to upset the lad.”

“Speak out then. You will not quarrel with me, and I’m not afraid of your upsetting the lad. I like him to know the whole truth; don’t I, Steve?”

“Yes, sir, of course,” cried the boy addressed, a well-built, sturdy lad of sixteen, fair, strong, and good-looking, and with the additional advantage, which made him better-looking still, that he did not know it.

For though Stephen Young, son of a well-known Lincolnshire doctor who lost his life in fighting hard to save those of others, stood in front of a looking-glass every morning to comb his hair, he never stopped long, and for the short space he did stay his face was convulsed and wrinkled, eyes red, and mouth twisted all on one side, consequent upon his being in pain as he jigged and tore with the comb trying to smooth the unsmoothable; for Steve’s hair had a habit of curling closely all over his head; and before he had been combing a minute he used to dash the teethed instrument away, give his crisp locks a rub, and say, “Bother!”

And now he, Captain Marsham, and Dr Handscombe stood on the granite wharf at Nordoe, high up among the Norwegian fiords, talking to Captain Hendal, a sturdy, elderly, ruddy-bronze giant, who acted as a sort of amateur consul and referee for shipping folk who came and went from the little hot-and-cold port, and who was now frowning heavily at the trio whom he faced.

“Want me to speak out, do you, Captain Marsham, eh?”

“Of course. I came and asked you for your help and advice. I know you to be a man of great experience, and I say once more, what do you think?”

“Well, sir, I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

“Why?” said Captain Marsham, smiling; and as his features relaxed, he looked in size, ruddy-bronze complexion, and hard, weather-tanned appearance wonderfully like the Norwegian consul.

“Because you are going to take a boy like that up into the high latitudes, where from minute to minute you never know whether the end mayn’t come.”

“The end come?” said the captain.

“Yes, and you ought to know how: stove in, crushed, sunk, lost in the snow, frozen, starved, sir. It’s one big risk, I tell you. It’s all very well for the walrus-hunters and whale-fishers, who go for their living; but you’re a gentleman, with money to fit out that steamer as you have done it. There’s no need for you to go; and if you’ll take my advice, you’ll give it up.”

Captain Marsham shook his head.

“You’ve been to sea a good deal?” said Hendal.

“Nearly all my life. Almost everywhere,” said the captain, while Steve Young listened intently to all that was said.

“But you don’t know our polar ocean, sir.”

“No; but I’ve had a pretty fair experience among the southern ice, trying to penetrate the pack there,” said Captain Marsham.

“Oh! oh! Ah, then that would help you a bit. Ice is ice, sir, all the world over.”

“Of course.”

“But there, you give it up, sir: that’s my advice. Take a trip a little way if you like, and do your bit of shooting; you can do that without any risks. Then come back. Why, only last year—let me see, it was the beginning of June, like this is—a well-formed, strongly built schooner touched here—the *Ice Blink* they called her—from Hull, Captain Young—”

“Yes,” said Captain Marsham quietly; “and they sailed north, and have not been heard of since.”

“Eh? How did you know?” cried the consul. “Oh, of course, from the papers.”

“Yes, and from other sources too, Captain Hendal. Mr Young is—”

“Was,” muttered the Norwegian.

“*Is*, sir,” said Captain Marsham sternly, “a very old friend of mine, and this lad’s uncle. We are going to try and find out where they are frozen up.”

A complete change came over the Norwegian, who took a step forward and clapped his hands heavily upon Captain Marsham’s shoulders. Then turning smartly, he caught Steve by the hand, shook it heartily, and ended by resting his left arm on the boy’s shoulder as he gazed down at him with his keen blue eyes looking moist.

“God bless you, my lad!” he cried in a deep voice, “and your expedition too. Right, Captain Marsham, and I beg your pardon. I thought you were going on a risky fowling trip, and it made me angry to think of your taking a lad like that up into yon solitudes. But it will not be dark to you when the sun goes down; there’s always a bright light in the hearts of those who go to help others in distress. Now, then, what can I do to help you? For I say God-speed to your trip with all my heart.”

“Thank you, thank you. Well, you can help me in several ways. As an old ice-goer you can give me many hints. Above all, as a brother-sailor you know the value of a good crew. I have some trusty men, but I want four more—young, strong, hearty, Norway lads, who have been well among the walrus, and who can tackle a whale or a bear.”

“Then you mean work?”

“Certainly. I will not believe my friend is lost, though I am going up yonder; so I make this a pleasure and hunting trip.”

“So as to pay expenses?” said the Norwegian.

“Yes. This special steamer and her fittings mean some thousands of pounds, and I think I may as well reduce the cost all I can.”

“Of course; and you have called your steamer the *Hvalross*.”

“Yes; I have used your Norse term for the sea-horse.”

“The name will make our lads eager to go.”

“Then you can get me four to go with us?”

“You shall have the four finest men who have not already started, sir.”

“Come, that sounds better,” said the little, keen-looking man who had not yet spoken. “May I shake hands with you, Captain Hendal?”

“Yes, sir; I like shaking hands with Englishmen,” said the big Norwegian, holding out his great palm, the back of which was strangely suggestive of a polar bear’s paw; and he laughed as he looked down at the little white hand laid in it, and then gave it a grip which changed its colour. “But you’re not a sailor.”

“I? No, a medical man.”

“Name?”

“Handscombe,” said the doctor, smiling.

“Got stuff in you, though,” said the Norwegian grimly, “or you’d have hallooed when I gave your hand that nip. But why are you going? They won’t want a doctor?”

“Oh, I don’t know; I may be useful. I am a bit scientific though, and want to see what we can discover.”

“Good,” said the Norwegian; “deal to learn up there, sir. Ice, currents, the

cold, the storms—and you'll find something beside snow; but you will not find the North Pole."

"No," said Dr Handscombe, smiling; "we don't expect that, do we, Steve?"

The lad smiled.

"Why not, sir? We might, you know."

"Yes, my lad, you might," said the Norwegian seriously. "It is more likely to be found by accident than by those who go on purpose. Well, Captain Marsham, I'll see about your men at once. Shall I find you on board by-and-by?"

"Yes; I'll stay there till you come."

They parted, the Norwegian to stride away for the little town, while Captain Marsham with his two companions made at once for the sturdy-looking vessel with its low grey funnel lying in the land-locked harbour, about fifty yards from the sunny shore.

Chapter Two.

To Norrard.

Steve Young, who was walking first, suddenly stooped down and took up a handful of sand, which was so hot, fine, and dry that it began to trickle between his fingers like that in the kitchen egg-boiler at home, as he trotted softly to the edge of the wharf and looked over, to find exactly what he expected: the boat made fast to one of the cross timbers, with a big swarthy man in a blue jersey asleep in the stern, and a rough-looking, shock-headed boy also asleep in the bows, the hot sunshine having a soporific effect on both.

As Steve reached the edge he looked sharply back and saw that the Norwegian captain had returned, and Captain Marsham and the doctor had turned to see what he wanted. That was Steve's opportunity, and going down on one knee he reached over where the shock-headed boy

lay with the side of his head resting upon the boat's gunwale ten feet below, and one ear turned up as if listening while its owner slept.

Steve Young calculated pretty well in trying to get his hand exactly over that ear, and then let a little sand trickle down. It fell right into the ear, for there was not a breath of wind; but the boy slept on. Steve let a little more go down, and this time there was a tiny stone as well, which struck the open organ and made it twitch, just as a dog's ear does when it is tickled. But the boy slept on, and Steve tried again, letting more sand fall. This time the boy raised his hand and gave his ear a vicious rub. Then the hand dropped, and he slept again. More sand, and a stone or two about half the size of peas, one of which dropped right into the opening of the ear, and resulted in the boy making a rapid dash with his hand past his head, as if striking at something. He subsided once more with a grunt, and more sand fell in company with tiny pebbles. This time the boy made three or four savage blows in the air, but without raising his head or opening his eyes. "Bother the flees!" he muttered, and Steve waited. Then down went the trickling sand. "Bother the flees, I say!" cried the boy, opening his eyes now, and making a few more angry strokes with his hand. Again he closed his eyes, and, practice making perfect, Steve dropped a tiny pebble right into the boy's ear, and drew back out of sight; for this time the lad sprang up and looked sharply round. Then, seeing nothing on the wharf overhead, he turned to the man in the stern, and said sharply:

"That you, Hahmeesh?"

"Eh?" came in a drowsy tone.

"That you flecking stanes in my lug?"

"Na. Flees."

"No. Stanes and sahnd."

"Flees, I tell you. Be quiet."

The boy grunted, looked round, and settled down again to sleep, for he was still drowsy.

Steve listened till all was still, glanced over his right shoulder, saw that Captain Marsham was still talking to the Norwegian, and then quietly peered over the edge of the granite wharf again, to find the boy apparently fast asleep. Then down went a tiny pebble with splendid aim.

“Bother the flees!” roared the boy, springing up and sending his arms about like a windmill. But this time Steve stood fast, laughing; while the boy stopped short, looking up fiercely, and then grinned.

“I see you all the time hiding ahint the stanes!” he cried.

“Come, jump up; here’s the captain.”

The effect of those words was magical, for the man, a big, good-humoured-looking Scot, also sprang up and stepped to his place on the thwart forward, and cried to the boy:

“Naw, Watty, handy there with that hitcher!”

The boy caught up the boat-hook, drew the boat close to where the painter was fastened, and then hauled her along, after casting off, to where a rough wooden ladder was clamped to the side of the wharf.

Both moved smartly, for, short as the time had been that they had served on board the *Hvalross*, Captain Marsham had drilled the men into something like the same habits as those of his old crew when he commanded a sloop in the Royal Navy, before he retired from the service and settled down at Dartmouth. Since then he had amused himself with his yacht, till, hearing of the non-return of his old friend Captain Young, he determined to fit out the *Hvalross* and make an expedition to the north, taking with him his ward, Stephen Young, who had long been importuning him to arrange for his going to sea.

The boat was waiting as Captain Marsham came to the edge of the little granite wharf, and they had just stepped in when a strange sound came floating through the silence of the soft, dreamy summer air, followed directly by a long-drawn, plaintive howl that was almost terrible in its despairing tone.

“What ever is that?” cried the doctor, starting up from his seat and

shading his eyes to gaze at the anchored vessel.

“It’s Skene-dhu!” cried Steve. “What’s he howling at? Because we’re ashore?”

“Pipes,” said the man, who was now pulling steadily at one oar, while the boy tugged at the other.

“Pipes?” cried the captain. “What pipes? They surely don’t play the bagpipes in Norway?”

“No, sir. It’s Andra McByle brought his fra Oban.”

“There, pull, my lads!” said the captain, frowning. “We shall have plenty to depress us going north without winds of this description, eh, Steve?”

“Yes, it’s horrid,” said that young gentleman; and the boy who was rowing looked up at him sharply with a frown on his heavy brows.

And all the while the wild, weird strain grew louder, and the howling more piteous, till the boat reached the vessel’s side, when the drone and squeal of the pipes ceased on the instant, and the dog’s howl was changed to a loud, joyous bark, as his handsome head appeared at the gangway, the eyes flashing in the sunlight, ears cocked, and the thick mass of hair about the neck ruffled up.

“Back, Skeny! Stop there, boy!” shouted Steve; and his words checked the dog just as he was about to leap down.

At that moment a frank-looking, middle-aged man came to the side, and looked down at them. “Any good, sir?” he said; “or are we too late for them?”

“All right, Lowe,” said the captain. “Four of the best men in port promised.”

“Old Hendal promise them, sir?”

“Yes.”

“Then it is all right,” said the new comer on the scene, to wit, Mr James Lowe, the chief officer, an experienced sailor in the Northern Seas, who had applied to Captain Marsham for a post on the vessel while it was fitting out at Birkenhead, joined it at Oban, and proved himself a thoroughly good navigator in bringing them round by the many islands and fast currents of the west coast of Scotland, and then across to Norway and up through the fiords to Nordoe.

A couple of hours later, as the occupants of the *Hvalross* lounged about enjoying the delicious sunshine of the short northern summer, and those fresh to the coast gazed admiringly at the towering cliffs, snow-capped mountains, and thundering waterfalls which plunged headlong into the pure waters of the fiord, which reflected all like a mirror, a heavy boat pushed off from the wharf, and Captain Hendal climbed on deck. He was followed by four sturdy-looking descendants of the Vikings, clear-eyed, fair-haired, massive-headed men, who looked ready and willing to go through any danger, and who one and all declared themselves eager to start, on one condition—that they should not be expected to stoke the engine fire. This was conceded instantly. A few questions were then asked by Captain Hendal as to the stores and *materiel* on board the vessel; and it being found that everything likely to be wanted had been thought of and provided, and that every possible place beside the bunkers was crammed with coal, the Norwegian captain took his leave with the new recruits.

That evening the men were back on board with their kits; quite a crowd of people were about the wharf, consequent upon the new interest for them which the vessel possessed, and an hour later, steam being up, the anchor was raised, and the sturdy-looking grey vessel glided away through the calm waters of the fiord amidst a loud burst of cheers.

Northward ho! for the region of the midnight sun.

Chapter Three.

Preparations.

“I say,” said Steve some hours later, “isn’t it getting late?”

“Yes, very,” said the captain; “go and turn in.”

“But it’s so light, sir! It was light enough coming up here, but— what time is it?”

“Eleven—past.”

“What! Why, I thought it could only be about eight.”

“I suppose so, boy,” said the captain, who was looking ahead for the opening through which the *Hvalross* was to thread her way out from the fiord into the ocean; “but where is your geography?”

“At home.”

“Yes, yes; but I don’t mean your book, my lad. I mean the geography and knowledge in your head. Don’t you remember that the farther we go north at this time of year the lighter it becomes, till, not many miles farther, it will be all daylight?”

“Yes, I remember now,” cried Steve; “but it’s rather puzzling, all that about the midnight sun. Doesn’t the sun really set at all?”

“No,” said Captain Marsham, smiling at the lad’s puzzled expression.

“Then what does it do?” said the lad, gazing hard in the direction of the north-west, where there was still a warm glow.

“Keeps up above the horizon.”

“But that’s what puzzles me,” said Steve.

“Well, I hardly know how to explain it to you, my boy, unless you can grasp it if I ask you to suppose you are standing on the North Pole.”

“Yes, I understand that. Wouldn’t the sun set there?”

“No; but at midsummer day it would be at a certain height above the horizon.”

“Yes; but how would it be at midsummer night?”

“Just at the same height in the sky, going apparently round the heavens.”

“And would it keep on like that, always at the same height night and day?”

“Yes, for one day only. The next day it would be nearly the same height, then a little lower; and so it would go on becoming a little and a little lower, and, as it were, screwing slowly down till it was close to the horizon; then would come the days when it was only half seen, then not seen at all.”

“And after that?”

“Darkness and winter, Steve, till it had gone as far south as it could go and begun to return. Do you understand now?”

“I think so,” said Steve, but rather dubiously. “It’s much too big to get hold of all at once. But just tell me this, and then I’ll go to bed, sir. As we shan’t be right at the North Pole, how long will it be before we see the sun in the middle of the night?”

“That depends, my lad. If this breeze keeps up, we shall hoist sail, save our coal, and pass round the North Cape at midnight, and then we shall have a good three months’ sunshine in which to load our tanks with oil, have plenty of sport, and I hope—best of all—find our friends alive and little the worse for passing through an arctic winter in the snow. Now that’s quite enough for you to think of for one night. Down below.”

Stephen Young left the deck after giving a longing look round at the lovely sky, and feeling as if he had more to think of than he could well manage. Ten minutes later he was lying in his comfortable berth, listening to the gliding motion of the water as it lapped against the vessel’s side. Then he began to wonder why the constant sunshine did not melt all the ice and snow in the arctic circle; and lastly he did not wonder at all, for he was fast asleep, just as the vessel passed through the piled-up masses of rock which guarded the northern entrance to the fiord, and acted as breakwaters to keep the inner straits so lake-like and still. For directly the *Hvalross* had passed the last rocks there was a disagreeable heaving,

and soon after the vessel had little waves splashing against her bows, and within an hour she was careening over to the full breeze, and making her way north at a rate which promised well for Stephen seeing the midnight sun twelve hours sooner than he had been told.

The swilling and scrubbing of the planks roused Steve the next morning, and, hurriedly dressing, he went on deck to find the sun shining brightly, the blue sea sparkling, and a dim line that might have been cloud away to the right. The breeze was just such a one as a sailor would like to continue, and the *Hvalross*, though not fast, being built for strength and resistance to the ice, was making good progress, thanks to the height of her spars and the grand spread of canvas she could bear. The new men were all very busy with bucket and swab, just as if they had been on board a month; and the last traces of the coal dust, which had worried Captain Marsham in his desire for perfect cleanliness, had been sent down the scuppers.

“Morning,” said the first of the new men Steve encountered, giving him a friendly nod. “Nice breeze.”

Steve stared, for he did not expect to find the new men able to converse in English; but in five minutes he found that they were well acquainted with his tongue, and also that they had visited Aberdeen and Hull several times in whalers.

About that time the captain came on deck, had a short conversation with Mr Lowe, the mate, who then went below to rest, just as Steve was noticing the smoke which rose from the galley fire and thinking about breakfast. That came in due time, and when they went on deck again the wind had died out and the vessel hardly had steering way.

There being no immediate need of progress recourse was not had to steam, and a question asked by one of the Nordoe men resulted in Captain Marsham giving orders for the tackle to be brought on deck and overhauled before being re-stowed for immediate use when wanted.

Steve, with a boy’s interest in this fishing tackle on a large scale, eagerly watched the unlashing and laying out of the coils of new, soft, strong, tarred line, the walrus harpoons, lances with their long, thin, smooth,

white pine poles, the white whale harpoon, and the harpoon gun. Every one of these implements was full of suggestive thoughts of exciting adventure; so, too, were the ice anchors and picks; and as all were carefully examined in turn the Norway men talked to each other, making plenty of comments as they ran the new line through their fingers and balanced the lances in their hands, till in imagination Steve saw the great ivory-tusked walrus rising out of the sea and the men in the boats ready to strike.

He was not alone in his intense interest, for the shock-headed boy was staring hard too, with his mouth half open and his forehead wrinkled into furrows, till he saw Captain Marsham approach from the wheel, when he hurried forward to commence altering the coil of a rope which needed no touching and whose neatness he disturbed.

“Well, my men,” said the captain, “what do you say to the tackle?”

“Very good, sir,” said one, who seemed to be the eldest of the party. “Only wants using well.”

“Exactly. But you will manage that.”

“Yes, sir; we’ll try,” said the man, and the others nodded and smiled.

“What about the wind dropping like this? Does it mean change?”

“Yes,” said another of the men, giving a sharp look round; “nor’-east before long, I should say.”

The man proved to be a true weather prophet, for in a couple of hours the wind had swung completely round to dead ahead, and after a little thought the vessel’s course was altered and her head laid for the north-west.

“But will not this take us quite out of our way?” said the doctor, as they sat that day at dinner, with a lively sea playfully patting the shining sides of the vessel as she glided rapidly onward.

“Which is our way?” said the captain, smiling.

“North, to find our friends.”

“Exactly; but it does not matter whether we approach the north by the north-east or north-west. It is all chance as to where they may have wintered; and, as the wind is fair for the way north-west, let’s take it.”

“And if we keep on in this direction, where shall we make?” said the doctor.

“Greenland!” cried Steve; and the captain nodded. “Right,” he said; “and there is a possibility that they may have reached an island there, which I have often thought I should like to see.”

“Yes?”

“Jan Mayen, a place seldom visited. If the wind holds fair we’ll make for that, try to explore it as far as the ice will allow us, and then sail north along the edge of the floe for Spitzbergen, without you can suggest a better plan.”

“I? No!” said the doctor.

“Can you, Lowe?” asked the captain of the mate, who had now joined them after a good morning’s sleep.

“No, sir. It’s all chance work, this sailing to the north. We must search where we can. It’s of no use to say we’ll go here or there; we must go where the ice will let us.”

“Exactly; and take what walrus and seal we can on the way. Have you ever touched at Jan Mayen?”

“No, and never could get near enough to the island for fog and ice.”

“But you’ve heard a good deal about the place?”

“Yes; I’ve heard that it’s a land of high mountains, and that there’s a volcano at one end. Let’s see, there’s a kind of seal there, too, that is very abundant; but the place is rarely touched at, being famous for fogs, currents, and ice—all enemies to navigation.”

“Well, we will see if we cannot have better luck, and try to get there in fine weather,” said Captain Marsham. “What do you say, doctor?”

“That it will be a treat to land there. Besides, we may find our friends.”

The doctor walked forward, and Steve followed, with the idea of landing upon an unexplored coast growing in its fascination; and as the naturalist leaned over the bows to peer down into the clear water, the lad edged up alongside.

“Hullo, Steve! what are you thinking about?” saluted him.

“Volcanoes.”

“Warm subject. Well, what about them?”

“I was wondering why it was that these burning mountains are always found up in very cold regions among the ice and snow.”

“But are they?”

“Oh yes,” said Steve confidently. “There’s Hecla in Iceland, and this one Mr Lowe talked about, and Captain Marsham says he saw a tremendous one amongst the ice toward the South Pole.”

“Indeed!” said the doctor sarcastically. “That makes three. What about the scores of others dotted about the earth in the hottest countries? Your theory will not hold water, my lad. But what’s that man going aloft for? We can’t be anywhere near land.”

This remark was occasioned by one of the men climbing the shrouds of the main-mast, making his way to the top, and then, as they watched him, climbing higher to the main topgallant crosstrees, where he stopped for some little time making an examination before descending.

“Gone up to see if the ropes are safe,” said Steve at last. But this soon proved to be a very lame conclusion, for the other three Norsemen and a sour-looking Scotchman, with a little brown mark at the corner of one lip, were busy getting something up out of the hold.

The something resolved itself into a big tub about five feet in height, and narrow, while it was made higher by an iron framework or ring rising another six inches above the open top, and held projecting like a rail by means of stout bars attached to a hoop.

It is a bad plan on shipboard to ask questions of officers when they are busy, and Steve had been to sea long enough to learn this. On the other hand, it is a good thing, not only at sea, but through life, to investigate as much as possible for yourself, and correct any errors into which you fall as you learn more. “Bought wit is better than taught wit,” the old moralist wrote; and he was quite right, for the things taught us are too often forgotten, while those which we have bought at the cost of a good deal of puzzling and study fix themselves firmly in the mind. So, as soon as the tub was left standing on the deck, and he could conveniently do so, Steve walked up and began to examine it, noting principally that about half-way down there was a broad ledge half round the inside.

“To brew something, I suppose,” said Steve to himself. “They’ll lay the yeast, or whatever it is they use, on that ledge. Some kind of drink, I suppose, to keep the men warm when we get up into the ice.”

He had another good look round after thrusting his head inside the iron rail, upon which a board was placed to slide, and then noted something else which quite upset his theory.

At that moment the shock-headed boy came up from the hold, with a bundle of what seemed to be stout oaken laths under his arm.

“What have you got there, Watty?”

“Wud—pieces o’ wud.”

“What for?”

“I dunno.”

“Oh, you are a clever one!” cried Steve, turning away impatiently, for the sour-looking sailor with the brown mark at the corner of his lip came up from below, where he had been to fetch a bunch of tar-twine.

“Here, Andrew,” said Steve eagerly, “what are they going to make in that tub?”

“Make, Meester Young?” said the man, turning to gaze thoughtfully at the cask. “Observations.”

“Now, no gammon. Tell me!”

The man wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and spread his face into a dry kind of grin, just as if something hurt him, and he was smiling to show people that he did not mind.

“Observations,” he said again.

Steve gave him an angry look.

“Don’t you make stupid observations.”

Andrew McByle of Ballachulish, a well-tanned Scottish whaler, “went off”: that is to say, he did not leave the spot on the deck where he stood talking to Steve Young, but he went off like a clock or some other piece of machinery; for he suddenly gave a jerk, and made a peculiar noise inside somewhere about the throat, accompanied by some singular contortions of the face.

Steve pressed close up to him, for he had seen the contortions before.

“Look here, Andy,” he whispered, “do you want me to kick you?”

“Na, Mr Stevin.”

“Then don’t you laugh at me when I ask you questions. Every one isn’t so precious clever as you are; and look here, Watty Links, if you dare to grin at me I’ll punch your head. Now then, Andy, what is it?”

“Dinna ca’ me Andy, my laddie, and she’ll tell ye. My name’s Andra.”

“Very well then, Andra. What’s the tub for?”

“The craw’s-nest.”

“Bah!” exclaimed Steve; and he walked forward to where the stout red-faced sailor who had pulled him aboard from the wharf was busy applying grease to the fore-mast.

“What’s that cask for, Hamish?”

“Yon, sir? For the crows,” said the man, grinning.

“What! do we shoot crows and salt them down in that tub?”

“Oh no, sir. They shoots themselves up through the bottom.”

Steve stood staring at the man for a moment, and then turned away impatiently.

“How stupid of me,” he said. “I ought to have known. Crow’s-nest, of course.”

He walked near to the foot of the main-mast just as the Norwegian sailor who had been up aloft turned the tub down with its bottom forward, went on one knee and pushed the bottom inward, one end rising up and showing that the other side worked upon hinges.

“She’ll want a little iling,” said the man; then, turning the tub upright again, the bottom fell into its place with a snap, and the man turned and took the ball of tarred twine from McByle, and walked to the side.

“Now, boy,” he said to Watty Links, “bring up that stuff.”

He took hold of the shrouds, swung himself on to the bulwarks, and began to mount the ratlines as calmly as if it were a broad staircase, though the vessel was careening over, and rising and falling on the swell.

“Now, my lad, up with you,” said the captain. “Stop there, and hand him the pieces as he wants them.”

The boy’s face wrinkled up, and he looked down at his bundle of many-lengthed laths, then up at the top-mast, and then at the captain.

“Well, did you hear what I said, sir?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then why don’t you run up?”

“The wind blaws, sir, and I dinna thenk I can haud on.”

“What? Why, you contemptible, lubberly young rascal, what do you mean? You come to sea, and afraid to go aloft!”

“Na, I winna say I’m afraid to gang aloft, sir; but my heid’s a’ of a wark when I get up, and I might fa’ and hurt somebody.”

Captain, mate, the doctor, and Steve burst into a roar of laughter at this; and feeling that he must have said something unusually clever the boy looked smiling round, letting his eyes rest at last upon Steve.

“Here, this won’t do!” cried Mr Lowe. “Now, boy, no nonsense; up with you!”

“Na,” said the boy sturdily, and he shook his shock head. “My mither said I wasna to rin into danger, and I didna come to sea to fa’ overboard, or come doon upon the deck wi’ a roon.”

“Now, boy, come along!” cried the sailor, who was high up above the top.

“Do you hear, sir! Up with you, or you’ll get the rope’s end!” cried the mate angrily.

“Don’t send him,” said the captain in an undertone. “The young cur may fall.”

“I’ll take them!” cried Steve; and stepping forward, he leaped up into the shrouds and held down his hand for the bundle.

The captain gave his head a nod.

“Up with you then, my lad. Shall I send a man to lash you to the rigging?”

“Yes, sir, when I ask,” cried Steve: and taking the bundle of pieces of wood under his arm he began to mount steadily.

“Pass the word for the cook,” cried the mate angrily; and as Steve reached the top he paused to rest a moment, and looked down to see that the cook had come out of the galley and presented himself before his officers.

“Here!” cried the mate, “take this boy, cook, and set him to peel potatoes and scour your pots. He’ll never make a sailor.”

“Na,” whimpered the lad, “I didna come to sea to peel potatoes. My mither said—”

Steve did not hear what Watty’s “mither” had said, for the cook made a rush at him, caught him by the scruff of the neck, and ran him into the galley, closely followed by Skene-dhu, the dog, snapping and barking at their heels in a way which hastened Watty’s pace and stopped all resistance.

Half laughing, half pitying the boy, but with a blending of contempt, Steve resumed his climb, till, looking up, he found the Norwegian sailor just above him.

“So you’ve come, eh, my lad?” he said in perfect English.

“Yes, I’ve come.”

“Don’t you feel scared?”

“No, not yet. I say, what’s your name?”

“Johannes, sir. Well, are you going to help me?”

“Yes, if you show me what to do.”

“Hand me the rails, my lad, one by one, shortest first, while I lash them across from side to side.”

“But what for?”

“What for, my lad? So that we can get into the crow’s-nest when she’s hauled right up and made fast yonder.”

“But why won’t the ratlines do?”

“Because they wouldn’t be handy, my lad. There, you’ll soon see. Get the shortest one ready,” he continued, as he opened his big Norwegian knife by pressing on a spring at the side, and holding it upside down, when the long keen blade which lay in the handle dropped out to its full length, and the removal of the thumb from the spring fixed it in its place.

Then the man climbed a little higher up the shrouds, so that he could reach to where they came to an end on the main topgallant mast, about one-fourth of its length below the truck and halyards, thrust one leg through between the ratlines, so as to twist it round and get a good hold, leaving his hands free; and Steve at once followed his example, and then loosened the shortest lath-like piece of wood. This done, and the piece held ready, he had time to look about him, while the sailor untwisted some of his stout tarred twine and cut it into short lengths ready for use.

Steve’s first look was, naturally enough, down at the deck, which now seemed to be at a terrible depth below him, looking quite a hundred feet, though it was not more than seventy, and the first thought which struck him was: “Suppose I fell!” A thrill ran through him, and in imagination he saw himself lying, broken and bleeding, on the white deck. But the next instant he said to himself: “No; I shouldn’t reach the deck, I should go overboard into the sea. How deep down should I go?” and then he clung there staring below him, till he was roused from the peculiar kind of fascination by the sailor’s voice.

“Now, master,” he said; and Steve gave a kind of gasp as he turned to the speaker. “Shortest piece.”

Steve handed it, and the Norseman tried its length, which proved to be just sufficient to reach across from the starboard shrouds, to which he clung, to those on the port side.

“Just right,” he said, and resting each end of the stout lath-like piece on the ratlines, he proceeded to bind the starboard end fast to the outer shroud.

This was quickly done by a few deft turns of the strong twine, and then the sailor descended a little.

“Next size!” he cried, and another piece was passed up, this being a trifle longer.

It proved to fit exactly, showing how accurately the bundle of pieces had been prepared for the object in view.

“Next!” cried the man, and the piece was handed, placed in position on the opposite ratlines, and secured in turn.

“See what these are for?” said the Norseman, smiling.

“Yes; you are making a ladder, so as to get from side to side,” replied Steve; “but you can’t make it very far down, it would take tremendously long pieces when we get lower.”

“Only want ten or a dozen, my lad. You see what they’re for now, don’t you?”

“N–no.”

“To step on to from the ratlines, and go up into the crow’s-nest.”

“What, that tub?”

“Yes; we haul her up and lash her just above us, close to the truck there, above the top piece of wood.”

“I see now!” cried Steve; and, full of interest in the task, he handed the pieces till the last had been secured, when the Norseman ascended to the highest, took tight hold of the mast, and crossed over on to the port-side shrouds, where he began to make fast the other ends of the pieces of wood.

“How are you getting on up there, Steve?” cried the captain from the deck.

“All right, sir. Done one side.”

“Good! Feel giddy?”

“Oh no, sir.”

“Shall I send the boy to relieve you?”

Steve replied in the negative, and the captain went aft again.

“Ever been up here before, sir?” said the man, as he rapidly went on with his task.

“No, never.”

“Oh!” ejaculated the Norseman, and he looked across at his companion inquiringly, but with his busy fingers working away till the last piece had been securely bound at the port side and a short wooden ladder extended from side to side.

“Now, what’s next?” asked Steve.

“Get up the crow’s-nest. It’ll want two of us for that.”

“Well, I’ll help,” said Steve.

“Ay, sir, and I’d like your help; but it’ll want one of my mates, with his strong arms, to hold her securely while she’s made fast.”

He hailed the deck, and a man came up with a small rope, which Johannes took, climbed up a little higher and passed the end through a little block high up just below the truck, drew upon it, and sent the end of the line down rapidly to the deck.

“Then this crow’s-nest is for a look-out place?” said Steve.

“That’s it, sir. Makes a nice snug cover for a man to stand in when we’re among the walrus or seals, or seeking a way through the ice.”

“And this ladder is for a man to creep up and get in through the bottom?”

“Right again, sir; you don’t want no telling. He creeps up the ladder, in through the bottom, shuts the door down, and there he is, able to look out eight or nine miles any way.”

Steve looked down, and could see that the men on deck were making the great cask fast to the end of the line. Then, turning to the man again:

“You said something about looking out for ice.”

“Ay, sir, I did.”

“How long will it be before we come in sight of any?”

The sailors both looked at him and smiled.

“’Bout as long as it takes to cast your eyes to the nor’ard, sir.”

“What do you mean?”

“Look yonder,” said the first Norseman, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. “You can see ice, can’t you?”

Steve looked in the direction indicated, and shook his head.

“Nonsense, sir!” said the other. “There’s ice—one, two, three good-sized bits floating this way.”

“I can’t see them,” said Steve sadly. “Your eyes are better than mine.”

“Maybe, sir. We’ve been at sea longer than you. Try again.”

The boy looked, holding on by passing his arm round one of the shrouds, while the mast gave from the pressure of the wind, and produced a peculiar effect, as of swinging, now that his attention was not directed to the work going on.

“Feel all right?” said the first Norseman.

“Yes.”

“Not giddy, sir?”

“No, I think not. I’m all right, but I can’t see any ice.”

“Try again. There, straight away where the sea shines in the sunlight.”

“N–no,” said Steve; “I can see the waves breaking and sparkling miles away.”

“No, sir; you couldn’t see the waves breaking and sparkling miles away on a day like this. What you see is ice.”

“What, an iceberg? I thought that would be like an island.”

“No, sir; a bit or two of floe ice going to the south’ard.”

“Yes, I see now; but how big are these pieces?”

“Ten or a dozen feet out of the water, and perhaps a hundred feet long.”

“But what do you mean by floe ice?”

“The ice of the sea frozen.”

“Well, of course!” cried Steve; “so are icebergs.”

“Are they, sir?” said the man, smiling. “Have you ever seen one?”

“No; but I’ve often read of them.”

“Wait till you see one, then, sir, and you won’t say they’re part of the frozen sea; they’re bits of the great ice rivers that run down into the sea, and then break off. Icebergs are fresh water when they’re melted—land ice. Me and my mate have heard them split off with a noise like thunder, and then they float away.”

“Ahoy, there aloft! Up she comes.”

The little wheel in the block overhead began to chirrup and squeak as the men hauled upon the line, and the tub with its iron ring and rail began to ascend rapidly higher and higher, till it reached where the three clung, and was then guided to where it was to be secured, with its bottom resting on the place where the tops of the shrouds passed round the mast.

“Hold on!” was shouted. “Make fast!” and the cask became stationary.

Then the second of the two sailors stood on the newly-made ladder, and held the cask while the first passed a rope round it and secured it to the slight mast; after which there was a little lashing above to steady it, and the crow's-nest hung there high above the deck, ready for use.

"There you are, sir," said Johannes. "As you've been helping you ought to have first try. Up with you."

"Think it's safe?" said Steve, hesitating; and a curious sensation of shrinking came over him.

"Shouldn't ask you to try her if she warn't fast, sir," replied the man bluntly; and without further ado the lad loosened his grasp of the shrouds, and stepped on to the wooden ladder, looking up at the bottom of the cask.

"Now, sir, just one word of warning," said the second Norseman. "That ladder's to step on from the shrouds, not to go down on deck."

"Of course not," replied Steve; "I know that."

"Yes, sir, and so do all of those who come up; but same time, a poor fellow don't think, and when he lowers himself out of the tub, he goes on stepping down without going off on to the shrouds, and I've known men fall and be killed."

"I say, don't talk about falling," said Steve, with a shiver; "it makes one feel creepy."

"Only good advice, sir," said Johannes. "Now, then, up you go."

The lad mounted three of the steps, and his head touched the bottom of the tub.

"It isn't opened!" he cried.

"Never mind, sir; go on, push up."

Steve obeyed, thrust hard with his head, and the bottom gave way, turning upon its hinges till it was vertical, and he passed up inside the

tub, stepped on to the narrow ledge at the side, and the bottom dropped down into its place, forming a firm flooring, with a ring at the edge ready for lifting it up.

The next moment Steve was standing upright, peering round in all directions, finding that he was in a wonderfully commanding position for sweeping the sea, and now, with his eyes already a little educated, making out the ice to the north plainly enough.

There was the seat ready for resting upon; the iron rail all round for a rest for a telescope, and attached to this rail the broad piece of board which could be run round in any direction to act as a screen from the wind when it blew hard and was perhaps cold enough to give frost-bite to the unfortunate watcher up aloft.

A hail from the deck put an end to Steve's sea sweeping, just as he fancied he made out something dark to the south, which might have been a boat or some large fish. So, stooping down in his narrow cell, he raised the bottom, and began to lower himself down, till his feet, which sought for a resting-place, touched the second rail of the ladder they had made, and he thoroughly grasped now how necessary their work had been.

"Steady, sir!" cried Johannes, as he stepped lower. "Keep the door resting upon your head, so that it don't come down with a bang; it might hurt you."

"All right," said the lad, obeying the instructions to the letter, while the two men who stood on the shrouds to starboard and port watched him carefully. "That's it, isn't it?" he continued, as he stepped lower, and the trap-door bottom closed with a gentle tap.

"Make anything out?" cried Captain Marsham from the deck.

"Yes, sir!" cried Steve eagerly. "Three pieces of ice to the north, and there's something dark right away south that looks like a boat bottom upwards."

"Eh? Look again. What do you make it to be, my lad?"

This to one of the Norwegian sailors, who placed a hand over his eyes,

and took a long look to the south.

“Well, what do you make of it?”

“Small whale, I should say, sir. But if it be,” he said, after a short pause, “she’s lying asleep in the sunshine.”

“My glass,” said the captain; and it was quickly fetched from the cabin, adjusted, and he took a long look in the direction pointed out.

“Yes; a small whale or a great grampus basking. Well done, look-out in the crow’s-nest! Better come down now, my lad.”

These words sent the blood coursing to the lad’s cheeks, and he began to descend quickly, thinking now that after all it was a risky position for any one high up there above the deck, and that the sooner he was safely down the better he would like it. Then he took two more steps, and was in the act of taking another when the foot he lowered touched nothing, and he started so violently that the other foot glided from the smooth bar of wood, and he dropped with a jerk to the full extent of his arms, giving his hands such a sharp snatch that he felt them giving way just as he was hanging suspended over seventy feet above the deck. Then they gave way, for, lately as it had been uttered, he had forgotten the Norseman’s carefully given warning.

Chapter Four.

In the Doctor’s Hands.

A cry rose from the deck, and Steve Young in that brief moment felt that all was over, and that he was struck a violent blow in the ribs. Next moment he swung against the starboard shrouds to which he clung, feeling sick and giddy with pain, but awaking to the fact that the big Norwegian sailor had gripped his jacket on the right side and taken up a little fold of flesh as well. The pain was keen for a few moments, but partly ceased as the man thrust his other hand, by which he had held on between the ratlines, and took a good hold of his waistband.

“Now, then, can you get round this side?”

For answer Steve worked himself from the inner to the outer slope of the shrouds just below the cross-bars, and then thrust his legs through and held on, waiting for the fluttering nervous sensation which had attacked him to pass off.

“Ahoy, there!” came from the deck in the captain’s stern tones. “I’ll send up a line; make it fast round his chest, and lower him down.”

These words sent the blood flushing to the boy’s cheeks, for the idea of being lowered down like a bale or cask sounded too degrading.

“No, no!” he cried. “It’s all right, sir; I can come down. Only slipped,” he added.

“Only slipped!” said the Norseman bitterly. “Didn’t I tell you to be careful, sir?”

“Yes; but I forgot.”

“Lucky for you I was watching you.”

“Can you come down?” cried the captain.

“Yes, sir, yes; it’s all right”; and feeling more confident now, the boy began to descend the shrouds steadily enough, gaining confidence at every step till he reached the main-top, where he caught a rope, twisted his legs round, slid down to the deck, and laughingly faced his friends.

“Steve, my lad,” cried the doctor, “what a turn you gave me! I thought you were gone.”

“Yes,” said Captain Marsham in a low tone; “and instead of laughing, my boy, you ought to go down to the cabin and thank God for your narrow escape. It was my fault, though, for encouraging you in your own confidence.”

“I’m very, very sorry, Mr Handscombe,” whispered Steve, as the captain walked away. “I didn’t mean to treat it lightly, only to look as if I were not a

coward."

"Yes, yes, I understand, my lad," was the reply; "but it is a lesson to you. I wouldn't go through those moments again for a thousand pounds. Why, Steve, my lad, I saw, as if in a flash, a funeral at sea, our trip at an end, and poor Captain Marsham going back feeling that he was to blame for your death."

"Oh, I say, Mr Handscombe, don't talk like that!" whispered Steve. "Was it really so bad?"

"Bad, sir! Why, what do you think you are made of—india-rubber? Did you suppose that you would drop on to the deck and bounce up again, to come down then on your feet and strike an attitude like a clown in a pantomime? I haven't patience with you!"

"I'm very sorry, sir, really," said Steve again.

"Not half so sorry as we should have been," said the doctor testily. "But there, I don't know; it would have been a good riddance. Boys are more bother than they are worth, especially consequential and conceited boys, like you are. Hullo! what are you putting your hand there for? Not hurt?"

"I—I don't know," said Steve, pressing both hands to his side. "Yes, I do; it hurts horribly."

"But you didn't fall."

"No; Johannes struck me there, and gripped the flesh. Feels as if he had broken my ribs."

"How do you know, sir? You never had any ribs broken, did you?"

"No," replied Steve; "but it feels as one would suppose ribs would feel if they were broken."

"Bah! You don't know anything about it. That's why I called you conceited. Here, come down into the cabin."

He took Steve by the arm, and the boy winced.

“What! Something wrong there, too?”

“I don’t know,” said Steve in an altered tone. “I don’t know anything, only that I’m so horribly conceited. If I did, I should say my shoulder was wrenched with the jerk.”

“Come along,” said the doctor, changing his tone. “There, my lad, I was a bit hard upon you; but you gave me a terrible fright, and I haven’t got over it yet.”

He led the way toward the cabin; but before they reached the companion hatch the captain came up, looking very stern. Then he, too, altered his manner.

“What is it?” he said anxiously. “Steve is not hurt?”

“Not much, I think. We’re going down to see.”

“I hope not,” said the captain quickly; and his eyes met Steve’s as, without another word, he quietly held out his hand.

It was a very simple action, but it meant a great deal; and as the lad felt the quiet, firm pressure given to his fingers, he grew more and more, as he had expressed himself, sorry for the pain he had so inadvertently caused.

“Now, then,” said the doctor, as soon as he had closed the cabin door, “I ought to be very much obliged to you, Steve, for giving me something to keep my surgical lore from growing rusty.”

“Oh, I say!” cried the boy, “don’t talk like that, sir. There isn’t much the matter, is there?”

“Not much the matter! Why, you talked about broken ribs. Don’t you call that much the matter?”

“Oh, but—”

“Here, let’s see, patient. Don’t; I’ll do that.”

He pressed the boy back on to the locker, and then proceeded to make his examination, while Steve watched his face anxiously, trying to gather from the intent countenance whether he had sustained any serious injury.

“Hum! ha!” ejaculated the doctor, as he went on manipulating the boy’s chest, back, and ribs. “That hurt you?”

“Horribly, sir.”

“And that?”

“Yes, sir; worse.”

“Can’t help it. Well, that?”

“Oh! that’s worse of all, sir.”

“Humph! Now then, take a good, long, deep breath.”

Steve obeyed.

“Now another, deeper and longer. Draw the air well in after an outward breath, to empty the lungs. Hah! that’s better. Well, there are no broken rib ends piercing the lungs.”

“Oh no, I hope not!” cried Steve anxiously. “The ribs are broken, then?”

“Not they. All sound as mine are. There, that will do; get on your jacket.”

Steve began, but the pain the act gave him turned him sick, and seeing this the doctor helped him.

“There must be something the matter, sir,” he said, rather piteously, “or it wouldn’t hurt like this.”

“Hardly fair to call it anything the matter, my lad. Your shoulder has had a nasty wrench from the jerk with which you were brought up.”

“But it hurts so much lower down.”

“And no wonder. In two or three days your side there will be black and

blue.”

“And why—what should make it so, sir?”

“Johannes’ great hand. Why, he must have gripped you there like a steel claw.”

“Yes, he did. I felt it like that. He got hold of a lot of the flesh.”

“Exactly; and a good thing, too. Better than letting you fall sixty to seventy feet.”

“Much,” said Steve dolefully.

“Humph! don’t sound as if you thought so, my boy. There, you’ve not anything serious the matter with you. The bruises will get well of themselves. But don’t look at me in that disappointed way; were you in the hope that I should perform some serious operation?”

“Ugh! No, sir.”

“Oh, I see; you are disappointed because I have given you no medicine. Why, Steve, you are as bad as the poor people who come to a dispensary. They are not happy unless they have a box of pills and a bottle of medicine. I’ll mix you up something.”

“No, no! don’t, sir, please,” cried Steve. “I am very much better now; I am, indeed.”

“Very well, then; lie down there for an hour or two, till the sickness produced by the shock has gone off.”

“Oh no, sir. I needn’t do that, need I?”

“Well, then, come on deck.”

Steve rose from the locker, winced, and subsided again.

“I think I will lie for a little while.”

The doctor nodded and left him in the cabin, where he lay back for about

ten minutes listening to the thumping about on deck, where the men were evidently busy making more preparations for the adventurous cruise. His shoulder ached, and there was a peculiar strained feeling about the muscles of his chest; but this did not trouble him so much as the strained sensation in his mind. For, as he lay back there, he began to think about what they were saying respecting him on deck. The doctor would have told Captain Marsham how he was, Mr Lowe would hear it, and then it would go to the men from the engineer and the four Norwegians downward.

“And they’ll think I’ve no more pluck than a girl,” he thought at last; “just when I want to show that I am ready to take my part in anything. Why, if I’m ready to be upset like this, I shall be left on board when they are going on expeditions fishing, shooting, or hunting, and— Oh! this won’t do.”

And to prove that it would not do he jumped up, walked up and down the cabin twice,—a very short journey, by the way,—found that it did not hurt him more than lying still on the locker, and then went on deck.

Chapter Five.

Revenge by Deputy.

“Better, Steve?” said the captain, giving him a friendly nod; and without waiting for his answer, he went forward to where the engineer, who had nothing to do, was talking to the mate, and then they all went below into the engine-room.

One of the Norway men was at the wheel, the other sailors were in the forecastle, and there was no one to talk to; so Steve went forward, and was nearly abreast of the galley when Watty Links, the shock-headed boy, came out bearing a bucket of potato peelings and refuse, looking sour and sore, but as soon as he caught sight of Steve his face expanded into a broad grin, and, evidently in a high state of delight, he trotted to the side, turned the contents of the bucket overboard, and ran back into the galley, keeping his head averted as if to hide his mirth.

The blood flushed up into Steve’s cheeks, and he turned away, walking aft to watch the grey gulls which seemed to have arrived all at once, and were flying about in quite a crowd, making darts down to the surface to seize some fragment that was floating, amidst querulous screaming and the beating of wings.

It was a curious sight to see the rapidity with which a scrap of biscuit or fat was darted upon, and borne aloft by the hungry birds; but somehow in the grey cloud of feathers wheeling round and rising and falling above the glittering sea, Steve seemed to see the mocking face of Watty, who, smarting from the contempt with which he had been treated, snatched at the opportunity for triumphing over the other’s misfortune; and he could not have selected a way more likely to sting him than by a display of derision.

“Verra beautiful, Meester Young, isn’t it?” said a voice, and Steve turned sharply to find it was the Scottish sailor who had approached unheard.

“What, the sparkling sea, Andra?”

“Nay, the burruds, sir. Look at the pretty things. It minds me o’ being in Loch Fyne, coming down from Crinan in ane o’ Meester Macbrayne’s bonnie boats on the way to Glasgie.”

“Does it? I’ve never been there.”

“Eh, then she ha’e lost a gran’ treat, laddie. There’s plenty o’ watter here, but never a mountain, nor a toon glinting oot o’ the shore. Look yonder, laddie; there’s a bit of a fesh.”

“Porpoise!” cried Steve excitedly; “and another, and another. Why, there’s a regular shoal.”

“Ay, after the herrin’, maybe, laddie. See how they come up and turn over, and dive doon again. Canny kind o’ fesh a porpoise, but they’re much finer than these in the Clyde. I’m thenking, though, that we’ll ha’e to shorten sail a wee. It means wint.”

Captain Marsham was evidently of the same opinion, for coming on deck soon after he gave orders which resulted in a little of the canvas being lowered down, and the *Hvalross* then steadily continued her course without sending the spray scattering in a brilliant shower over the forward part of the deck.

While this was being done Steve passed the galley door again, and bit his lip, for Watty, taking advantage of the cook’s back being turned, thrust out his head as if by accident, gave a sham start as if astonished to see Steve, burst into a silent fit of laughter, which he pretended to smother, and drew his head in again.

“I wonder whether it would hurt my shoulder much if I were to punch his head?” thought Steve.

He walked on, feeling that he ought to treat the annoyance with contempt; but even as he felt this he could not help looking back, when he saw that Watty was watching him, but clapped his hand over his mouth and drew in his head directly.

This was repeated again and again that day, as if the boy found some satisfaction for his disgrace in annoying some one of his own years.

Steve pretended not to heed it; but so sure as he went forward Watty's head was thrust out of the galley, and drawn back again, apparently to conceal the uncontrollable mirth from which the lad pretended to be suffering; while in spite of Steve's efforts all this stung him more and more, till he felt as if he must do something by way of revenge.

It was not easy, and he knew that it was *infra dig* even to show that he was annoyed, let alone attempting to "serve the boy out," as he termed it; but the desire to give Watty some punishment for his annoyance increased.

The opportunity came at last; the extent of Steve's forbearance was at an end. He was going forward to join the four Norwegians, who were busy preparing one of the boats for their first expedition against the walrus, so that when the time came everything might be quite ready, when Watty rushed hurriedly out of the galley, turned sharply upon seeing him, burst into one of his silent fits of laughter, and hurried back through the door.

It all happened in a moment, and Watty's departure was hastened far more than he intended. There was a bound, a kick, and the boy disappeared with a crash, followed by a burst of objurgations, the sound of cuffs and blows, and a whining voice raised pitifully in appeal and explanation. But he had evidently knocked something down in his unceremonious and hasty entrance, and the irate cook was in no temper either to listen to explanations or to believe in what he immediately set down as an excuse.

Steve stood listening to the struggle within, his anger gone, like the electricity in a Leyden jar, at a touch, and he was about to enter the galley and explain, when Watty rushed out, darted forward, and dived down the hatchway into the forecastle, from which place he was ignominiously fetched by the cook like some culprit arrested by a policeman; and the next time he met Steve without the faintest suggestion of a smile upon his countenance.

Chapter Six.

First Perils.

The next day there was something else to think about, for the arctic summer strongly resembled a temperate zone winter. The wind came in heavy gusts from the north-east; there were snow-squalls which shut them in, and on passing away left the deck an inch deep in the soft white fur, while for a time every yard, rope, and sail was covered.

“Doesn’t seem much like June, eh, Steve?” said the doctor.

But in the intervals between the squalls the sun came out warmly, the snow melted aloft, and was rapidly swept from the deck.

Three days passed like this, during which careful, slow progress had to be made, for it was early in the year yet, and June meant a month when the ice was still packed heavily and had not had time to break up and disperse, so that in even this brief time the *Hvalross* had sailed from summer back, as it were, into winter. Then the wind dropped, the sea grew calm, and the vessel lay rolling slowly in the heavy swell, apparently with night coming on, which seemed the more strange, for evening by evening it had grown lighter, and but for the clouds Steve’s great desire would have been gratified, and he would have seen the midnight sun.

On this particular evening, as they lay rolling there, a dense fog had settled down upon the sea, producing the aforesaid darkness; and though this thick gloom was somewhat modified by what seemed to be a dim reflection as of light trying to force its way through, the mist was so dense that the fore part of the vessel was invisible from by the wheel, as the boy stood with the captain and Dr Handscombe waiting for the fog to lift.

A man had been sent up to the crow’s-nest; but the fog was more dense there than below, and he had descended.

“This means ice close by somewhere, eh, Lowe?” said the captain.

“Yes, sir; I’ve been listening for it, but my ear is not keen enough to pierce this fog. Hullo! what’s the matter with the dog?”

For just then the big collie began to whine and sniff about uneasily, making little snaps in the air.

“His nose is sharper than your ears, then,” said the doctor. “He smells something. Can it be the land?”

“No; we must be fifty or sixty miles from the nearest land,” said the captain, and the dog barked sharply.

“What is it, Skeny?” cried Steve, stooping and patting the animal’s shaggy neck; “what is it, old fellow?”

The dog looked up at him sharply, barked again, and ran forward to scramble up on the bowsprit, where he barked loudly, sniffing uneasily in the intervals.

Two of the Norwegian sailors were forward keeping as sharp a look-out as was possible for the mist; and as Steve followed the dog he was sensible of a peculiar feeling of chill, as if an icy breath was blowing over him.

Then the dog barked again a perfect volley, and in an instant Steve felt his heart stand still, for there was a whirring rush, which rose into quite a roar, mingled with the flapping and beating of wings, and the dog grew almost frantic.

“What is it?” whispered Steve in awe-stricken tones.

“Sea-birds,” said one of the men, calmly enough. “A big field of ice is floating by.”

He had hardly spoken before there was a heavy thud against the ship’s bows, another, and then a heavy thrusting blow which made her quiver from stem to stern and careen over, while above where they stood there was the gleam of ice, a huge mass standing five or six feet above the bulwarks, against which it kept scraping and rubbing and careening the vessel over more and more.

The captain shouted an order to the man at the wheel, and he rammed down the rudder, but there was hardly a breath of air, and the ship had no way on. Then running forward, Captain Marsham shouted to the men to seize hitchers, sweeps, anything, to try and thrust off the vessel from the ice-floe, but all in vain. Vessel and ice continued to grind slowly together,

the ship yielding to the mighty pressure of the floe; and as every one had now rushed on deck, it seemed as if the next thing would be to lower the boats and escape before the ice rode right over the *Hvalross* and sank her in the icy depths.

The men toiled and thrust, but their efforts were utterly without effect, for the two heavy floating bodies had an attraction one for the other, and the grinding noise continued, till it sounded to Steve as if the ice would soon work its way through the stout copper and planks; but a few minutes later three pieces of stout spar were lowered down between the vessel's hull and the ice to be rubbed into shreds, while the *Hvalross*, after yielding and careening over foot by foot to the tremendous, pressure, began to right herself till she floated upon an even keel.

If anything the fog was now more dense, making it impossible to take any observations. All they knew was that they were changing their position as they floated steadily along in a heavy current, and that the ice which seemed to hold them fast was gradually revolving, till, from being pointed north-west, the *Hvalross'* bowsprit was south-east.

All this time, while the other sailors seemed excited and startled by the risk, the Norwegians were perfectly calm and cool, Johannes expressing his opinion that they would not hurt now, but that the vessel would hug the great floe till the wind sprang up. But Captain Marsham was not so confident of their not coming to harm grinding against an ice rock whose extent, save that it was some twenty feet above the water, it was impossible to compute; and as soon as he had convinced himself that they would not have to take to the boats, he had given orders which resulted in the rattling of iron doors and a dull roar from the engine-room, while the semi-darkness grew more dense as the grey fog-cloud began to be pervaded by another and a blacker cloud, which poured out of the funnel and then spread itself around in the calm, dense air, till the branches, as it were, of some huge tree, of which the vessel's funnel was the stem, were spread overhead, giving the gleaming ice a peculiarly weird look. For the engineer and his two assistants were hard at work trying to get up steam—a long and tedious task under the circumstances.

Very little was said, very little heard but the roar of the furnace; but every now and then the pieces of spar creaked and groaned with the pressure

upon them, and twice over there was a sharp splitting sound and a splash as a huge piece of the floe fell away, raising such a wave that the *Hvalross* swayed over as she rose and fell.

Captain Marsham paced the deck anxiously, and Steve had the doctor for companion, but they only spoke in whispers of the risk they ran.

“What I fear is,” said the latter, “that with this grinding together a great piece may split off and fall over upon our deck.”

“Not high enough,” said Steve decisively. “If a piece did break away, it could only give us a heavy push, and might do good.”

But, all the same, as he spoke he felt that he would rather that good were not done, and contrived that in their walks about the deck they should be able to peer down into the engine-room, where the men were stoking and raking the fire to make it roar more fiercely, knowing, as they did, that once they could get up steam a very few turns of the screw would back them away from their icy enemy and make all safe.

“The first taste of the perils of the arctic sea, Steve,” said the doctor quietly. “What would it have been if we had been going full speed and struck on this mass of ice!”

“We shouldn’t have been going full speed,” replied Steve confidently, —“not in a fog; and I suppose we should have had some warning, as we did a little while ago.”

“Little while ago!” said the doctor; “it was hours!”

The intense excitement of the time had made it seem so short.

And all the while the roar of the fire kept on, the great tree of smoke spread more and more over the cold mist and darkened the air, till it appeared as if they were going to have real night once more instead of the light into which they had sailed. But still the steam was not available, and after one long grinding crash Captain Marsham gave orders which resulted in bags of biscuit, tins of meat, and casks of water being placed in the two largest boats; after which, as if from a sudden thought, he ordered some blankets to be added.

“I say,” whispered Steve to the doctor, after watching these proceedings for some time, “how long will it take us to row to the nearest port?”

“To Hammerfest, my lad? Don’t ask me.”

There was another grinding, rending noise, as the great ice-floe revolved slowly in one direction and the current bore the vessel against it in another; and as these sounds arose Steve felt a strange oppression at the chest, and it ached where Johannes had seized him, and his wrenched shoulder began to throb. For it was as if the ice was stripping the planking of the ship from the timbers, and the boy listened for the sound of rushing water making its way below. But on going to the side and looking over, he could see the pieces of wood which had been lowered down between the vessel’s hull and the ice being ground up and torn into fibres, while the ice kept splintering away from the edge of the floe, where in the foggy gloom the fragments looked of a dirty-white against the black, solid mass.

Steve tried to be calm and composed, but at such a time it was impossible; and with the natural desire to find some one to whom he could talk and with whom he could find companionship, he looked round to see that the doctor had joined the mate, and that the captain was on the bridge pacing anxiously to and fro and communicating with the engineer from time to time.

He glanced at the sailors, and they all but one were waiting to obey the instructions they received, and were ready with spars and ropes to lower fresh material down! for the ice-floe to grind up against the vessel’s side.

The only man not busy was Andrew McByle, and Steve hurried to him.

“Think we shall get off safely, Andra?” he whispered, as a piece of one of the spars gave forth a dismal, groaning sound which vibrated through every nerve.

“No. She was thenking aboot my pipes, laddie. The skipper’s certain to mak’ a fuss gin I tak’ them wi’ me in the boat.”

“Then you think we shall have to take to the boats?” said Steve excitedly.

“Ay, laddie; what else can we do? There’s nae wint, not eneuch to turn a weather-cock upon a kirk, and there’s nae steam. Piff wi’ all your talk aboot the engines to use when there’s nae wint! Where are they the noo?”

“But they’ll soon have the steam up now, Andra.”

“I dinna believe it. She’s fashed wi’ your new-fangled rubbish; all weel eneuch in fine weather, but when she want it the puir feckless mairsheennary isn’t there.”

“But you can hear the fire roaring.”

“Ay, she can hear the great flaming thing burning oop mair coal and mair coal; but it isna fire we want, laddie, but steam.”

“Yes, it is a long time,” sighed Steve. “Do you think we must take to the boats?”

“Ay, laddie; if I were skipper I’d joost hae plenty o’ food and claes pit upon the ice, and camp there wi’ the boats hanging on aboot. We could tak’ to them when the ice was a’ melted doon, an’—”

“Here, hi! lend a hand, my lad!” shouted the mate, and Andrew trotted off, leaving Steve more low-spirited than ever.

For it seemed so terrible, just on the threshold of an exciting voyage, in which he had painted to himself plenty of sport and adventure, ending in the discovery of his uncle and the men who had been his companions. All had gone wrong, and he felt that they would have to accept their failure, and try to get back to the nearest Norwegian port, a terribly dangerous journey in an open boat.

And now, more than ever, he felt the want of some companionship, and, with a feeling of regret, he thought of the one nearest to him in years.

“They’re all men,” he said to himself, “and I’m only a boy. They don’t think about me. Wish I hadn’t kicked poor old Watty.”

As he thought this he walked to the door of the galley and looked in, to

find that the cook was rating the boy of whom he had been thinking.

“What!” he was saying; “want to go and be ready to take to the boats? You stay where you are till you’re wanted. They won’t leave us behind. Such a fuss about getting up a bit of steam; why, I’d have made that water boil an hour ago if I’d had it to do. They don’t know how to manage it!”

“Ow—!”

This was a dismal beginning of a howl from Watty.

“Here, stop that, you miserable Highland calf! You’ve got breeches on, so I suppose you’re a boy! Do you suppose an English lad would make that row? I’ll be bound to say Mr Steve Young’s somewhere aft, with his hands in his pockets as usual, looking on as cool as a cucumber.”

“Na, he’s a cooard!” cried Watty viciously,—“a lang, ugly cooard! Makking a show o’ gooing up aloft, and all the time had to be held on.”

“You’d better not let him hear you say that, my lad, or he’ll thrash you.”

“Yah! not he!” whined the boy. “He’s a cooard, that’s what he is; and he’s on deck waiting to be ane of the fust to go off in the boots, and I’m kep’ doon here.”

“Stop that row!” cried the cook viciously.

“I canna, I canna! Awm thenking aboot my mither!”

“Bo! you great goose! And nice and proud your mither’ must be of such a booby.”

“But I dinna want to be drooned!” sobbed Watty.

“Then what are you drooning yourself for in hot water? It don’t improve you a bit, only shows white streaks on your dirty face. Look here, if you don’t stop that noise, I’ll tell the captain when we take to the boats that you’re not worth saving, and then he’ll leave you behind.”

“Tell him to leave him behind!” whined Watty. “He’s no good.”

“Listeners never hear any good of themselves,” said Steve to himself as he walked aft, and then made for the way down to the engine-room. “But do I always have my hands in my pockets?”

In spite of the cold, darkness, danger, and dread the boy could not help smiling at himself and the force of habit; for at that moment there was a heavy shock caused by a loose mass of ice striking the vessel just on her sharp stem, and startled into the belief that something terrible was about to happen, Steve answered the question he had just asked himself about his hands by snatching them from his pockets to lay hold of the vessel’s side. Then as he looked over and saw the piece of ice—a large fragment that must have been many tons in weight—grinding along by the vessel’s side, he could not help laughing, while directly after a thrill of delight shot through him and the men sent up a cheer. For a communication had passed between the captain and the engine-room as a loud hissing noise was heard; and then, as an order was shouted to the man at the wheel, the *Hvalross* quivered in every timber with a peculiar vibration.

The steam was up at last; the fans of the propeller were spinning round and churning up the icy water, and the *Hvalross* backed away from the dangerous position.

“There, Andra!” cried Steve, as he approached the man who had just hauled up one of the wooden fenders ground down into a mass of ragged fibres, “what do you say to the steam now?”

“Joost naething, laddie. I’d hae done it better wi’ hairf a capfu’ o’ wint.”

“But there was no wind!” cried Steve.

“Nae, there was nae wint. But it’s a blessing we’re awa frae the ice, for it would hae maist broke my hairt to hae left my pipes ahint.”

Chapter Seven.

The Lonely Isle.

With the steam up the captain's task became easier; but it was dangerous work in that dense fog, and some hours of nervous navigation followed amongst the ice-floes, which gathered round them of all sizes, from masses which went spinning away at a touch from the iron prow of the *Hvalross* to huge fields acres in extent, broken away from the icy barrier to the northward, to be carried by the current south into the warm waters, where they would gradually melt away. So heavy were some of the shocks received, in spite of all watchfulness, care, and orders to go astern, that Captain Marsham was at one time for following the example of the drifting floes and going south. But there was the knowledge that somewhere, not far from where they were creeping along, the almost unknown island of Jan Mayen must lie; and it seemed a pity to leave it now, when the first time the sun appeared they would be able to learn their position for certain; so he held on.

"I've lost count," said Steve at last. "Is it to-day or to-morrow? The clock says it's eleven; but is it eleven to-night or eleven to-morrow morning?"

"Eleven to-night, sir, if you like to call it so," said Johannes. "We're up so far north now that the sun never sets for months."

"Never rises, you mean. Where is he?"

"You'll see soon, when the fog lifts."

"But will it break up?"

"Of course, sir. Wait a bit, and it will be all hot sunshine, and always day."

"Go aloft now, my lad," said Captain Marsham; "the fog seems to be thinner higher up. You may be able to get an observation."

Johannes started for the main shrouds, and Steve saw the captain's beard, all covered with moisture from the mist, twitch as if he were laughing.

"At me," thought the lad; and the captain evidently divined his idea, for he said quietly:

"Wait a bit, Steve, till you get a little more confidence. You would be

certain to feel nervous if you went aloft now."

"I wish he'd forget all about that," muttered the lad.

A minute later there was the loud snap of the cask bottom falling into its place, and the captain hailed the Norseman.

"Clearer there?"

"Just a wee bit, sir," came from up in the clouds.

"Make out anything?"

"Can't see the length of the ship, sir; but I can hear breakers quite plain."

"Silence!" cried the captain, and, to use the familiar expression, a pin might have been heard to drop on the deck.

"I can hear nothing," said the captain softly. "Can you, my boy?"

Steve listened for some time.

"No, sir, not a sound."

"We can hear nothing below. Try once more."

Again there was silence for a few moments, and then, sounding muffled and strange from the invisible man in the thick cloud, which made even the main-yard look indistinct, came:

"Breakers, sir, quite plain, away on the starboard bow."

"On ice or rock?"

"So faint, sir, I can't tell yet."

A couple of hours later the low, murmurous roar could be heard from the deck by listening attentively; but it was impossible to say whether it was caused by breakers on a rocky coast, which might be that of Jan Mayen, or by the sea beating on the vast icy barrier lying to the north, near which the officers felt that they must be. So the engine was slowed till the rate

of progress was deemed to be sufficient to keep the vessel from drifting south, and then they waited for the first breathings of the wind which would break up the dense mist that shut them in, chilly, wet, and horribly depressing; and night and day seemed to Steve always the same, just as if they had sailed into a latitude where everything was Welsh flannel in a state of solution.

This lasted for many hours, during which time Johannes ascended to the crow's-nest again and again, and then one of his companions took his turn.

He had hardly reached his lofty perch, when it seemed to Steve on the deck that the noise of the breakers suddenly grew louder, and he was about to say so when there was a shout from aloft.

"Fog's lifting, sir."

And then, as if it were a magical change, the mist overhead grew opalescent, then lighter still, as there was a warm breath of air sweeping over the dingy, murky sea. At that moment the dull, distant murmur of water beating against an obstacle grew louder, as the fog rolled away from the ship off to the north, and five minutes later the crew burst into a loud cheer; for, flashing from the waters and dazzling their eyes, the sun burst through the now iridescent mist, and so quickly that it was hard to realise the truth that astern, and to southward, the sea was sparkling like some wondrous stretch of sapphire blue, while the yards, stays, and ropes of the ship, which were hung with great mist-drops, glittered like diamonds in the glorious light.

The change was indeed wonderful, and, feeling as if he must climb up somewhere and shout, and then that he should like to run to the door of the galley and shake hands with Watty Links, Steve drew in long, deep breaths of soft, warm air. But he neither shouted nor shook hands with the cook's boy, for he stood with Captain Marsham and the doctor, waiting for the explanation of the heavy, increasing roar which came from somewhere behind the vast curtain of mist which lay drifting to the north-west, a couple of hundred yards on the starboard bow, and rising up to the skies, now one glorious span of silver and gold.

They had not long to wait, for the fog was gliding away fast before the soft, summer wind.

All at once the blue water stretching from them to the foot of the mist began to look white, a minute later it could be seen to be in wild commotion, and in another minute to north and south there lay, not more than a mile away, a wave-beaten beach, upon which the blue waves beat and fell back in dazzling silver and diamond spray with a tremendous roar.

But there was plenty yet to see; for, as the mist reached the shore, it seemed to grow more dense, and began to roll in great clouds up some vast slope, and then higher and higher, revealing a long, narrow beach; then a line of chaotic rocks, which had fallen from above; then higher and higher, cliff upon cliff, weather-beaten to a hundred hues; and up above these again, towering mountains; lastly, as if to give the culminating beauty to the scene, the clouds rolled away from one tremendous peak, attended by a score of minor heights, crowned with dazzling ice and snow, vivid and beautiful in the glorious summer sun.

“That’s worth some trouble to come and see!” said Captain Marsham.

“Worth trouble?” cried Steve, whose heart was swelling with delight and the words he wanted to say. “Oh!”

That ejaculation contained all. It was very short, but it meant everything; and it was some time before he woke up to the knowledge of what he was gazing at and what was being done.

It was with quite a start that he turned on being touched upon the shoulder, and found Dr Handscombe at his side.

“Well, Steve boy,” said the doctor, “what do you think of Jan Mayen?”

“Is this Jan Mayen—the island?”

“Yes.”

“Beautiful! lovely! What a place to live in!”

“Delightful!” said the doctor drily. “Not a tree hardly a green thing, eternal ice and snow!”

“Oh, but it’s dazzling, lovely!”

“Yes, when the mist’s off it,” said the doctor.

“And it is not quite off that mountain.”

“Yes, quite off. That smoke you are looking at is from a volcano.”

“And shall we land and explore it?”

“I hope so.”

“When?”

“That depends on the captain. I hope to spend a few good days there.”

“And do you think *they* are here?”

“Impossible to say yet,” said the doctor. “If our friends have taken refuge here, it will be on this southern shore, where they could get most sunshine; but I can see no signal flying, no sign of a wreck. But there, I daresay Captain Marsham will run close in for us to explore.”

By this time the mist had been driven back so far that they saw, opening before them, white and glistening in the sunshine like a band of silver stretching beyond the floe, the ice of the polar ocean. It was miles away to north, to east, and west, and apparently only a few feet above the sea, that, strain their eyes as they would, there was always the floe offering itself as a barrier to stay further progress in that direction.

To their left, and extending toward the north, there was the island; but apparently, too, it did not go very far in the latter direction, but trended round, as if that were the termination of the island. Southward they could not make out its extent.

“Well, Handscombe, what do you say to landing and examining the wreck?”

It was the captain who spoke, and the doctor and Steve both echoed his last word.

“Wreck?”

“Yes; didn’t you see it. There, high up yonder, this side of the sharp point which runs out to the east. I daresay that was the cause of the wreck. Here, take the glass.”

He handed his telescope to the doctor, who made a long inspection, and then passed it to Steve, who took it with hands trembling from eagerness to view what was in all probability the remains of his uncle’s vessel, whose return had been so anxiously awaited all through the past winter, but in the spring given up as being ice-bound somewhere in the north.

Yes, there was the hull of a good-sized ship fast on the rocks, and with decks ripped up by the waves, so that, as the vessel lay over on its port side, Steve could peer with the glass right into the hold between the deck beams. There was the stump of the bowsprit pointing upward toward the stony cliffs, but the masts were completely gone, and an ugly gap in the port side suggested that it would not be long before the timbers quite disappeared.

Steve handed the glass back with a sigh, and his face contracted.

“No, no; don’t look like that,” said the captain gently; “we don’t know that this is the *Ice Blink*.”

“You are saying that to comfort me,” replied the boy sadly. “It must be.”

“Why?”

“You said it was possible that they might have made for Jan Mayen and been frozen up there.”

“I did.”

“Well, there is the vessel,” said Steve piteously.

“How do you know?”

The boy looked at him almost angrily, and pointed to the wreck, as if there was the answer to the question.

“That is not satisfactory proof. I have been looking hard, but the stern is battered away, and there is no name. It may be any one of the hundreds of boats that sailed north during the past ten years, or a derelict brought up by the current and washed ashore.”

But Steve shook his head.

“Ah! you are determined to take the worst view of it, my lad,” said the captain kindly. “Even if it is the wreck of the *Ice Blink*, Steve, my boy, they must have had plenty of stores and timber, and we may find them with a snug cabin built up, and all well and hearty.”

“You think so?” cried Steve eagerly.

“I do not say I think so, my boy. I say it is possible, if—mind *if*—that is the wreck of the *Ice Blink*.”

“Of course,” said the doctor encouragingly, as he used his glass. “They may be up one of those gullies in some sheltered spot inland.”

“No,” said the captain decisively; “I doubt very much whether there are any sheltered spots inland. To me it seems as if the whole of the interior is one icy desert. Look at that gully, Handscombe, there to the right. A regular alpine glacier running nearly down to the shore.”

“Yes; but still there may be sheltered valleys.”

“Of course; but it strikes me that if we find our friends it will be somewhere along the narrow stretch of shore. But we’ll see.”

“What are you going to do, sir—land?” cried Steve eagerly.

“Yes, when we can find a landing-place. No boat could get ashore here. We’ll go gently along to the north, and keep a good look-out both for them and a sheltered cove.”

And, giving the necessary orders, the *Hvalross* began to glide slowly in

toward the wreck, with a man in the chains heaving the lead, and always finding deep water till they were quite close in to where the surf beat heavily with its deafening roar upon the rocks.

A boat was in readiness for landing an exploring party, with guns and spears in case of game being met with, or, as the doctor pleasantly put it, a polar bear should come down prepared to make game of them.

Even when close in there was nothing visible about the wreck which indicated its name or the port to which it belonged, and, the course being altered, they steamed along at a safe distance from the rocks, carefully scanning the shore and the cliffs right up to where the ice and snow lay thickly. But there was no sign of human habitation, no signal, no living creature but the sea-birds, which flew about the face of the cliffs in flocks, looking in places as thick as the flakes in a snow-squall, shrieking, whistling, and circling round to gaze down at the strange visitors to their solitude.

Seen from the vessel, a more lovely spot could not be imagined; its beauty was dazzling; and Steve's spirits rose as he felt that if the captain and crew of the *Ice Blink* had escaped safely from the wreck, they had found a glorious island in which to make their sojourn.

He said something of the kind to Captain Marsham, but there was a saddened look and a shake of the head.

"Heavenly-looking, Steve, my boy," he said, "with the blue sea and sky, the silvered rocks, and the lovely greys, reds, and browns of the cliffs; but don't you see why it is so beautiful? Once this glorious sunshine is blotted out by a cloud, and you have before you a terrible spot—desolate, sterile, storm-swept. Fancy what it must be when the arctic night, with its months of darkness, sets in!"

Steve was silent, and his heart sank for the time, as he saw the truth of the captain's words; but there was hope still waiting to assert itself: he had his glass in his hand, with which he swept the shore as they steamed on mile after mile, till all at once he uttered a shout.

"What is it?" said the captain, for the boy was pointing to where there was a perfect wilderness of rocks stretching down from the cliffs to the sea.

“Some one! Look! There he goes! He is trying to get down to the sea to hail us.”

Steve had seen the moving figure with the naked eye, and his hands trembled so with excitement that he could not adjust his glass.

“A bear—a monster,” said the captain, who was gazing through his.

“A bear in an island?” said the doctor in a tone of doubt; and Steve, whose hopes had been cast down by this announcement, felt his spirits rise again.

“An island? Yes,” said the captain; “but an island hemmed in on two or three sides by the ice. Look, we are close to the pack which touches it on the north. We can get no farther this way, and I daresay that the channel between the island and Greenland is one solid floe. Yes, that’s a fine bear; and look, there is its mate.”

Steve shaded his eyes and gazed shoreward, to see the second bear slowly rise up on its hind legs, looking in the distance wonderfully like some human being, watching the vessel gliding slowly along over the clear water.

“You will land and have a try for the bears?” said the doctor; and at another time Steve would have felt all eagerness to be of the party; but he was disappointed, and his eyes were wandering over the shore, which suddenly ended and gave place to ice.

“Where shall we land?” said the captain quietly. “No boat can get ashore amongst these breakers, and we can go no farther north. It will be deep water right up to the floe, so we will go close to it in case there is a passage between it and the land. But I doubt it; and our friends yonder will save their skins unless we can land south and come up to them along the shore.”

“Then you think they have come over the ice?”

“Of course; just as reindeer do from other regions hundreds of miles away.”

They steamed on, passing the bears, which, after watching them for a time as if feeling their security, went on searching among the rock pools and crevices for food. A quarter of an hour later the engine was slowed; five minutes later it was stopped, and the *Hvalross* lay in the crystal water at the foot of a perpendicular ice cliff ten or fifteen feet high, wonderfully regular at the top, and extending straight to the land on one side, where it met the high rocky cliffs. On their right it stretched away, as far as the telescopes could help them to see, an impassable icy barrier, shutting off all ships from further progress to the north.

“You see,” said the captain, “we cannot land here, and we can go no farther till the ice breaks up or opens out in channels.”

“Don’t you think a boat could land just there, sir, where the sea is calmer?” said Steve, who felt a strange attraction to the shore.

Captain Marsham did not answer, but stood looking in the direction pointed out by Steve, where for a few moments the shore did look quiet; the next minute a heavy swell glided slowly in, rose, curled over, and deluged the shore with white water.

“Do you want me to answer your question, Steve?” he said at last. “That breaker was at least ten feet high. Do you think a boat could live there?”

“No,” said Steve sorrowfully. “But you will try to the south, sir?”

“Of course, my lad,” was the reply; and the engine was reversed, the *Hvalross* backing away from the glittering ice cliff, in which the waves were working gigantic honeycombs of the most delicate sapphire blue, in and out of which the waters raced and made strange sucking and splashing sounds, peculiarly suggestive of savage sea monsters gliding in and out and playing amidst the icy caverns. Then, with her head to the south, she glided swiftly back, retracing the ground already passed over, leaving the bears still busy amongst the rocks, too much engrossed to give them even a passing look; and soon after they were once more abreast of the wreck, and gliding south, but with the engine slowed once more and the man in the chains busy with the lead.

Chapter Eight.

Disappointment.

There was no fear of being overtaken by the darkness of night, for the sun shone brilliantly, as if to make up for the long dreary time that it was hidden from the face of the earth; and its genial warmth had so great an effect upon the spirits of the men that they were all alert and eager for action, watching the shore intently for traces of the crew of the wrecked vessel, and for a break in the tremendous waves where a boat could get to shore in safety. Even the dog partook of the general feeling of exhilaration, rushing frantically about the deck, charging at the sailors open-mouthed, with his frill set up round his neck, and when apparently about to seize them thrusting his muzzle down close to the deck and rolling over and over.

They glided on as near to the line of breakers as it was safe, the steam giving Captain Marsham such complete control over the movements of the vessel that Steve pointed out the fact triumphantly to Andrew McByle.

“Ay,” he said, “she’s ferry goot in her way, the hot watter, but gie me sails. Where wad she pe if ta fire went oot?”

“And where wad she pe if ta wind went doon?” cried Steve, out of patience with the man’s obstinacy.

“Tat’s ferry pad language, Meester Steve Young, sir. Ton’t you try to imitate ta gran’ Gaelic tongue, pecause she can never to it. She’d have to pe porn north o’ Glasgie to speak ta gran’ Gaelic tongue proper.”

“Then you shouldn’t be so obstinate,” said Steve, somewhat abashed.

“Call that dog down, my lad,” cried the captain, “or he’ll be overboard!”

For Skene had leaped up on the bowsprit, made his way from there on to the bulwarks, and was running along the top wherever it was clear of rope or shroud, barking with all his might at the astonished birds which came wheeling round the ship, swooping so low at times that they nearly brushed the dog with their long grey wings, making him snap at them

vainly.

But the intense excitement produced by the change to warmth and sunshine seemed to border on a kind of rollicking madness; and bubbling over with fun Skene turned quite mutinous, barking as if derisively in response to every call, and evading Steve as he chased him, the boy running along the deck and making dashes at the dog, who avoided him by his superior activity, till, getting at last quite close, Steve made a snatch at his quarry's hind leg and grasped it firmly. Almost at the same instant Skene made a bound, dragged his leg away, and came down in a double astride upon the top of the bulwark, tried to recover himself, got upon his legs, again slipped, nearly went overboard, but saved himself by another leap, and came down upon the deck flop. Before he could get up Steve was upon him, holding by the long hair of the animal's neck. Then there was a sharp struggle, in which the boy won, and Skene turned his head round, looked up in his master's face, and uttered a pitiful howl, the cry and the way in which it was uttered seeming so wonderfully human and so thoroughly to express the dog's ideas, "Oh, what a shame, when I was enjoying myself so!" that Steve burst into a fit of laughing.

"C'ssss! Bite him then," came from the door of the galley, and Steve looked sharply round to see Watty's head just outside the door, and the movement made him slacken his hold of the dog.

Wuph!

One deep utterance, half growl, half bark. Skene was free, and Steve on his side, while the dog charged right at Watty, striking the door heavily with his fore paws, as the cook's new assistant snatched his head inside and pulled the door to.

"Serve you right!" muttered Steve, gaining his feet. "Quiet, Skeny! Down!"

For the dog was gazing up at the spot where Watty's head had disappeared, and growling fiercely.

The next moment Watty appeared at the window.

"I'll tell the skipper ye sat the tyke at me!" cried the boy.

“If you don’t behave yourself I will!” retorted Steve; and then patting Skene’s head he walked away, the dog, quite sobered now, following him, muttering in growls, and looking back now and then at the galley, whose door was softly opened, and a hand protruded holding a piece of cold salt meat.

Skene saw it, and hesitated. Then he stopped short, and Watty whistled and wriggled the piece of meat about. That was too much for any animal. Meat is meat after all, and to keep him healthy Skene had been dieted a good deal upon biscuit. He was only a dog, and rushing back, he snatched the piece in his trap-like jaws.

“Poor fellow, then; poor old Skene!” whispered Watty. But he might as well have whispered his soothing words to the winds, for the dog only uttered a low growl and trotted back to his master, who was once more eagerly scanning the coast.

But it was always very much the same: heavy breakers tumbling over to a chain of rocks—foaming, rushing, falling back, and swinging to and fro till fresh help came from the tide, and they gathered themselves for a fresh assault. Beyond the waves a more or less narrow line of shore, and then cliff, and above that mountainous heights glittering with ice and snow, and here and there in some opening a frozen river looking as if it were rushing headlong down to the sea, but hanging there solid, save for a little rill which trickled forth from a cavern of celestial blue at its foot.

They steamed on for hours quite slowly, rounding the southern shore, and then further progress was stayed, for, once more, there before them was the low cliff of ice, extending apparently right up behind the island, and connecting it with the mainland. Ice everywhere now, and another mountain, emitting a faint film of smoke.

“No sign of human being on the shore: all that journey southward for nothing,” said the doctor.

“One can hardly call it for nothing, eh, Steve?” said the captain. “We have satisfied ourselves pretty well that our friends are not here.”

“But they may be inland beyond those cliffs, sir!” cried the boy.

“Maybe, Steve, my lad,” said the captain sadly; “but as far as we can make out there is no chance for a human being to exist there. Any one wrecked in such an inhospitable place would certainly have taken to a sheltered spot under the cliffs, where he would be protected from the coldest winds. Aloft there!”

“Ay, ay, sir!”

“What do you make out over the cliffs there to westward and north?”

“Ice and snow, sir,” came for answer from the crow’s-nest.

“No good land?”

“No, sir. All ice and snow piled up higher and higher. There’s that frozen river goes winding up right into the mountains.”

“No place for a camp?”

“No, sir; not as far as I can see.”

These were the quiet, sober words of Johannes, who was aloft once more, armed with a telescope.

“Any opening where we could land on the ice-floe?” cried Captain Marsham.

“No, sir,” came back after a time; “nothing here. Any boat would be stove in directly.”

“What shall you do now?” said the doctor; and Steve listened eagerly for the reply.

“’Bout ship and coast up again, then follow the edge of the ice away to the north and east. But we’ll keep close in, as we know the water is deep. We may, perhaps, find a landing-place which we have missed coming down.”

Another look round was given, and they began to steam north once more.

Chapter Nine.

The Wreck Ashore.

A coast could never have been more eagerly scanned than was that of this island, for every man of the crew was longing for a run ashore in search of some little adventure to break the monotony of the life on board; and again and again, as a seal was seen to slip off the rocks after staring at them for a while with its peculiar, half human countenance, or a flock of sea-birds was passed, the men looked disappointed that no efforts were made to harpoon the one or shoot the other. But as far as landing was concerned, the heavy waves which foamed among the craggy masses thoroughly precluded that, and at last they neared the wreck once more, looking as grim and desolate as ever. Steve had just turned his glass to examine the snow near the top of the volcano where the smoke was issuing, and was wondering why it did not melt, when Jakobsen, the principal harpooner of the Norwegian party, gave a shout and pointed shoreward and forward.

“Yes, what is it?” cried Captain Marsham.

“Landing-place, sir.”

There it was, surely enough, hidden from them as they came south, but plain to view now at the back of a huge mass of rock which acted as a breakwater; and there, in quite a recess, was a patch of yellow sand, over which the sea glided gently, while behind the rock the water seemed to be deep and still.

Five minutes after the engine was stopped, the boat lowered, and the captain, doctor, Steve, and a strong crew jumped in, leaving Mr Lowe in charge, the dog leaping in last of all. A short row, for the most part balanced on the top of a great roller gliding shoreward to break on the rocks, and then a smart pull to the right, and they were behind the great rock, riding gently on deep crystal-like water. Fifty yards farther the boat was beached on the thick sand, drawn up, and the party set off, climbing over the tumbled-together rocks to reach the more level ground and

make straight for the wreck, which lay some quarter of a mile to the north.

The captain took a sharp look round, and then suggested loading the heavy double guns he, the doctor, and Steve carried, the right bore with the heaviest shot, the rifled barrel with bullet.

One of the men carried a spare rifle, and Johannes and Jakobsen each shouldered a heavy walrus lance, a terrible weapon in the hands of a strong man, with its stout pole about nine feet long and keen leaf-shaped blade, so that they felt themselves more than a match for any polar bear which might show itself in front.

“Gun heavy, Steve?” said the captain.

“Eh? Yes—no! I don’t know,” he replied; “I had not thought about the weight.”

“Which means, I suppose, that you were thinking of having a shot at a bear.”

“Well, yes, sir; I was thinking of something of the kind,” said Steve, colouring.

“You must be careful, then. I will not say do not fire, my lad; but a gun is a dangerous weapon in unskilled hands, as dangerous sometimes for the people round as for the quarry in front.”

“I’ll take care, sir,” said Steve, in a tone full of confidence.

The captain turned and looked at him sharply.

“I’d rather you had said, ‘I’ll try to take care.’”

“Snubbed,” thought Steve. “Why, of course I shall take care. Does he think I shall shoot one of the men?”

He had other things to think of a few minutes later, for there before them, as they toiled on over the rocks and sand, with the breakers thundering away just to their right, lay the wreck, making them all hasten their pace, which gradually increased until it was a run, Steve at last leading, in spite

of the weight of the heavy gun, and reaching the stranded vessel many yards in front of the doctor, who was next.

“I forgot all about the bears,” said the latter, giving a sharp look round with his gun ready.

But there was nothing in sight but a great gull floating gently along over the breaking waves, and looking down eagerly for anything edible cast up by the sea.

Then the rest came up, and they looked round the vessel, lying quite firmly wedged in the rocks, one of them having pierced its bottom, making a gap, through which the sand had made its way till it was half filled.

The bows were examined and then the stern, but everything bearing the vessel’s name and the port from which she sailed had been swept away, save two letters—two E’s on the starboard side, just below the stern cabin window.

“Do you think it is the *Ice Blink*, sir?” said Steve in an awe-stricken whisper; for in spite of the bright sunshine and dazzling blue of sea and sky, there was something so weird and grim about the loose, torn, shattered wreck that the boy felt as if it were impossible to speak aloud.

“No,” said the captain decidedly; and in an instant the sight of the torn timbers seemed less terrible, and the pictures Steve was calling up of his uncle and crew lying somewhere about buried in the sand faded away.

As the captain gave vent to that decisive utterance he climbed on board, and stood up on the stones and sand which filled the angle between the bulwarks and the sloping deck.

“What do you say she is, Johannes?” cried the captain to the sturdy Norseman, who stood leaning on the shaft of his great spear.

“Whaler, sir, and been here for three or four years,” replied the man.

“Yes, I thought it was not a last season’s wreck. E—E,” he said thoughtfully; “where can she be from?”

“Dundee!” cried Steve quickly.

“Good. Of course, a Dundee whaler,” said Captain Marsham. “That brings to an end all idea of the *Ice Blink* coming to grief here. But let’s see; we may find traces of the poor fellows who were wrecked;” and after a look at the remains of the broken masts, the huge cavern-like hollow ripped in the deck, where tons upon tons of sand were lying as it had been tossed in during storms, he led the way aft to the cabin; but there was little to see there. The windows had been battered in by the stones and pieces of rock hurled at them by the waves; but two of the dead-lights, which had been evidently closed during the storm in which the vessel was wrecked, were still held in their places. As for the cabin itself, the contents had been torn and beaten away through a huge gap on one side of the rudder, which reached upward to the deck, and nothing remained of locker or berth that could give any trace of the crew. From here they went forward to the forecastle, the hatch of which gaped widely open; and as they stood below it at the bottom of the sloping deck, Steve felt a strange sensation of shrinking, and as if he would prefer to leave any secrets which the cabin might hide in peace. Captain Marsham felt, too, something of the kind, and he said a few words in a low voice to the doctor.

“Yes,” replied the latter, “perhaps so, poor fellows; but we ought to see.”

That was enough to suggest to Steve the possibility of the remains of the crew being below, just as they had died of cold, perhaps of starvation. The desire to leave the deck increased, but he tried to brace himself together, and listened as the doctor said:

“Shall I go?”

“No,” replied the captain; and taking hold of the hatch he drew himself up to it and peered down; then handing his gun to Steve, he lowered himself down feet first and disappeared, while the rest stood watching the square opening and listening intently.

“Rather dark,” came up from the forecastle, and they heard the sharp scratching sound made by the striking of a match.

“No one here. Plenty of sand drifted right in.”

Another match was struck, and then, after the short period one of the little tapers would take to burn out, the captain's hands appeared and he climbed out.

"Nothing whatever," he said. "No trace of a soul, and everything has been cleared out; not so much as a blanket left."

"That looks as if the crew must have stripped the vessel, and built themselves a place somewhere inland."

"Or on the shore," said the captain. "No; I fancy that this vessel was forsaken long ago. Her crew must have taken to the boats, and let us hope that they all escaped across to Hammerfest, or some other port."

"Will you search any further?" asked Steve. "There is nothing to search for here, my boy," replied the captain; "but we will have a tramp forward, and see if any traces have been left of hut or signal-post, though I feel certain that no one is here."

The doctor looked doubtful, and Steve felt glad, for he thought the captain was taking matters too coolly.

"Well," continued that gentleman, turning to the doctor, "supposing that it was your misfortune to be cast ashore on this desolate place, what would be the first thing you would try to do?"

"Try to get away," replied the doctor, smiling. "Exactly; and if you had no means of getting away, would you not hoist a flag on some prominent place where it would be seen by a passing vessel?"

"Of course."

"Where is the spar, then, hoisted on the cliff?" The doctor shook his head, and Steve gazed up and along the top of the long, level height, which looked like a mighty rampart at the foot of a snowy pyramid.

"Here, what do you say, Johannes? You have had plenty of experience of sea life. Where is the crew of this schooner?"

The man shook his head and smiled. "Who knows, sir?" he said. "I don't

think they ever landed here. It was a deserted ship when it came ashore."

"Why do you say that?" said the doctor sharply. "I see nothing, sir: no timbers or spars dragged up the beach; not a sign of anything having been moored."

At that moment the dog, which had followed them, quietly waiting for the first shot to be fired, when his task of retrieving the game would begin, uttered an uneasy whimper and cocked his ears.

"Quiet, Skeny! What is it?" said Steve, stooping to pat him. "Only getting impatient."

"Yes," said the captain, "and we may as well move on. No, doctor, there is nobody to search for, so let's take a tramp for a few miles, try and pick up a few wild fowl, and get back on board. Eh? you have something to say, Jakobsen?" he continued, as he caught the second Norwegian's eye.

"Only that I think as Johannes does, sir, that you are right. She was a forsaken vessel when she struck there."

"Forward, then," cried the captain, shouldering his gun; and they dropped down on to the drift of sand below her, walked round by the bow, and, keeping a sharp look-out for game, tramped away northward, but bearing for the cliff, where at one point a glacier came right down, and at its foot the snow lay in a long slope; not soft, flocculent snow fresh fallen, but a collection of hard pellets, more resembling a gigantic heap of the remains seen after a very heavy hail-storm. But it was suggestive to Skene of the mountain-side far away beyond the Clyde at home, and with a sharp bark he dashed at it, thrust his nose in the cool, rounded fragments, and then cast himself upon his side to plough his way through them, sniffling and snuffling the while, as if he were trying to find snow-buried sheep after a winter's gale.

"Goot tog, goot tog," muttered Andrew, who carried the spare rifle, and he shifted it from one shoulder to the other. "Ah, laddie," he whispered to Steve, "how it 'minds me o' bonnie Scotland."

They tramped on, noting flock after flock, thousands upon thousands in

fact, of sea-birds, sitting in rows upon the ledges of the cliffs many of them, while others flew seaward, wheeling round and retiring; so plentiful were they—auks, puffins, guillemots, and tern—that the men might easily have been loaded with the spoil. But these birds were not tempting from a food point of view; and though Steve was anxious for a trial, the captain had no mind to stop while the boy ran risks by climbing to the ledges in search of the eggs that no doubt were there in thousands; so they kept on, looking vainly for ducks or geese.

“There,” said the captain at last, “we have nothing to gain by tramping along here. We know that if we keep on we shall come to the ice cliff, and be turned back. It is impossible to get up here and go inward without chipping a way up that glacier, to find more snow, so let’s go back.”

“Without a single bird?” cried the doctor in a disappointed tone.

“Well, another hundred yards or so, then,” said the captain; “but I don’t think we shall get anything. We want the mouth of a river or a lagoon from which the ice has just melted.”

“What’s the matter with the dog?” said Steve suddenly, after they had walked on for another ten minutes; for Skene had suddenly seemed as if he had conceived it to be his duty to turn himself into as near a resemblance to an arctic wolf as he possibly could. His ears were laid back, his eyes lurid, his teeth bared, and the thick ruff above his neck and shoulders set up, bristling and waving as if swept by a strong current of air.

“Look out, gentlemen; he scents game,” whispered Johannes.

“Stop!” said the captain. “It was near here that we saw the bears.”

“No, no, a mile farther,” said the doctor.

At that moment Skene growled savagely, and from behind a pile of grey rocks some fifty yards to their right a large animal suddenly rushed out, turned and stared at them for a moment or two, and then shuffled off at a lumbering trot, going rapidly over the rough ground in the direction of the ice.

“Don’t fire! don’t fire!” cried the captain. “A stern shot would only injure without killing the poor brute. Let him go.”

“My word!” cried the doctor as he lowered his gun; “but he is a fine one.”

Steve, too, had eagerly raised his double gun to fire, and felt quite resentful at being ordered not to draw trigger; and he stood now watching the great, thick-legged creature with its long, silky, cream-coloured fur hanging low down, the animal being as big in body as an ox, but with small, sharp, ferrety-looking head.

“But if the gentleman fires and hits, sir,” said Jakobsen eagerly, “it will stop him and make him angry; then we can kill him with the spears.”

“Look out!” cried the captain; “the other. Hah! Good dog!”

For, unnoticed by them as they watched the retreating bear, Skene had rushed off round the pile of rocks and put up the second bear, a monster certainly bigger than the first, and it rushed into sight before the party from the *Hvalross*, pursued by the dog, which was barking loudly now and snapping at its heels.

After shuffling along a little way without noticing the men, the bear seemed to think that it was extremely undignified and cowardly to run from a fierce little animal something like the dogs it had probably seen in the Esquimaux sledges, and, stopping short, it faced round to look wonderingly at its pursuer.

This was the opportunity the collie sought, and without hesitation it sprang right at the bear’s muzzle, but so quickly that the act was hardly perceptible; the bear raised one paw, gave a tap with it, and poor Skene went flying, rolling over and over, and then lay for a few moments motionless, with the bear walking slowly toward him, but stopping short as it became aware of the presence of the party from the ship.

Chapter Ten.

Ursa Major at Home.

Those were exciting moments, as in the perfect silence which reigned the sharp clicking of the gun-locks sounded loud and strange. Directly after a low whine was uttered by the dog, which lay as if half stunned, what seemed like a light pat from the bear having been a tremendous blow. In answer, as it were, began a chorus of wailing cries, screams, and snapping sounds from the birds which came now wheeling round, a few at a time, till there was a perfect cloud.

The captain, doctor, and Steve held their pieces ready waiting to fire, but the two former hesitated, thinking that they could get a better opportunity; while Steve wondered whether he would be able to hold the heavy double gun steady, for it was visibly describing all kinds of figures with the muzzle, and felt moment by moment more weighty. The two Norsemen stood ready with their great spears levelled; and the bear, there in front, remained watching them, its head lowered and swung up and down, from side to side, with its nose at times almost touching the ground.

“Take care, Steve,” said the captain, without taking his eye from the bear. “Be ready to get behind one of the rocks. You, Johannes, stay by him.”

“Yes,” said the Norseman in a low tone.

“Shall we fire?” said the doctor huskily, as the bear stayed in its place, swinging its head about, making no sign of either attack or retreat.

“Not yet,” replied the captain. “Wait till we can get a shot at the shoulder; a head shot is bad.”

But the bear did not seem disposed to offer the side for the purpose of being shot, and turned first one eye and then the other to them—strange reddish-looking eyes, which looked them over in a furtive way, as the regular swinging motion of the head was kept up.

“Will it charge, Johannes?” said the captain.

“Don’t know. I think it will begin to run. Be ready. It is sure to charge when it is wounded. We’ll take it then on the spears.”

At that moment there was a diversion, and the bear raised its head a little to look beyond them.

Steve glanced sharply round to see what the animal was looking at, and became aware of the fact that Andrew McByle was stealing away on tip-toe. This raised Steve’s ire, for the thought flashed through his brain that if anybody had a right to run it was he, the boy of the party; and he wanted to make off very badly, but, paradoxical as it may sound, he at the same time did not want to run, but to help shoot the bear.

“Here! hi! Stop!” he shouted angrily; “don’t run off with that gun!”

“Ahm only going to tak’ oop a fresh poseetion ahint the stanes,” said Andrew hurriedly.

No more was said, for the bear now shook itself, making the beautiful thick hair stand out, and giving the huge animal the appearance of growing rapidly in size. It uttered a low, fierce growl now, and its eyes flashed in the sunshine.

“You’ll have to fire, Handscombe,” said the captain in a low voice; “it’s going to charge. No, stop!”

For just then the bear swung its head round to the right and glanced toward the ice, as if looking out for a way of retreat.

“It’s going to run,” said Jakobsen.

Hardly had the words left his lips than the bear made a rush right at the centre of their line.

Bang—bang—bang! Three shots were fired almost simultaneously, but they did not have the slightest effect, the bear rushing on, and the next minute the doctor was gathering himself up, and the bear was shuffling along the shore, apparently in pursuit of Andrew McByle, who ran on yelling, and fired twice in the air, as if sending the charges of the gun he carried right ahead, where he wished to be.

“Hurt?” cried the captain anxiously, as he held out his hand to the doctor.

“Only the wind knocked out of me,” was the panting reply. “Come on.”

They re-loaded as they followed the bear at a trot, and to Steve’s great delight, there was a sharp barking, for Skene leaped up as the bear passed him, and, apparently without much the matter, followed the great beast.

“I don’t think we touched him,” cried the captain.

“Yes,” said Johannes simply, as he ran by Steve’s side with his spear at the trail. “Blood.”

He pointed to the ground, but Steve said nothing as, full of excitement now, he kept pace with the others in the pursuit.

“Quick!” cried the captain; “fire anywhere now, or the brute will overtake that man.”

“Serve him right for being such a coward,” muttered the doctor.

The bear was some fifty yards before them, and Andrew McByle another fifty, but with the bear gaining upon him fast, it being astonishing how rapidly the great unwieldy animal could shuffle over the rough ground.

Just then Andrew looked back over his shoulder at his pursuer, uttered a wild yell, threw away the rifle, and with his hands in the air ran on faster.

“I can’t fire for fear of hitting the man,” panted the captain; and then he uttered a cry of satisfaction, for, in his alarm, Andrew had made for broken ground, tripped over a rock, and fell heavily, whilst the bear uttered a fierce roar.

“Halt!” shouted the captain, bending on one knee, as Andrew disappeared, having plumped himself behind a huge block of stone.

Steve followed his leader’s example, and fired directly after, aiming as carefully as possible at the running beast.

“Missed!” muttered Steve.

“I think that touched him!” cried the captain, hurriedly opening the breech of his piece and thrusting in another cartridge.

“Yes, that stopped him,” said the doctor, as the bear swung round and bit viciously at a spot somewhere about the centre of its back.

Then the doctor fired, but his shot had no effect save to draw the animal’s attention to its pursuers, and it came at them at once, showing its teeth now viciously, while the two Norsemen placed themselves on either side of the little party ready for the attack.

The captain took careful aim now, and fired, making the bear jerk its head; but the bullet had made little impression, for the brute came on till Skene made a dash at its nose, when the animal swung round just as the captain was re-loading.

“Fire, both of you—now!” cried the captain excitedly; but only the doctor drew trigger, hitting their quarry somewhere about the hip. Steve did not fire; he could not have told why, but knelt on one knee with his piece ready, and conscious of the fact that one of the big Norsemen was at his right shoulder with the great lance held presented over his head.

Skene kept on harassing the bear and taking off its attention; but a bullet now struck it in so sharp a way that it ignored the dog, and came rushing toward its enemies open-mouthed, blood and foam making its white teeth look horrible, and in spite of another shot came close up, rose on its hind legs, towering above the kneeling men, with its paws separated to strike, when almost together both barrels of Steve’s piece were fired right into the animal’s chest, and as it uttered a savage roar the lances of the two Norsemen were driven into it and rapidly withdrawn.

The effect was instantaneous: the monster threw itself over and lay upon its back, tearing at the air for a few moments, and then subsided slowly on to one side—dead, Skene leaping upon the carcass to give vent to a triumphant burst of barking, while the captain shook hands with the doctor, and then clapped Steve on the shoulder.

“Well done! Bravo!” he cried. “Splendid shots, just at the right moment;

couldn’t have been better.”

“Couldn’t it?” said Steve, speaking feebly, for he felt rather ashamed of the praise, and at the same time a kind of regret for having played so prominent a part in the death of the animal.

He must have shown this in his face, for the captain said:

“It’s quite right, my lad. These bears are dangerous, destructive beasts, and would have given us no mercy. Besides, we must get a cargo to take back.”

A hail brought up the sailors, who were sent back in the boat for the other two Norsemen, while Johannes and Jakobsen, after carefully cleaning the blades of their lances, laid them against a rock, took off their jackets, rolled up their sleeves, and then, taking out their knives, began to skin the great bear.

At this time Andrew came up limping.

“Well, brave man!” said the doctor; “wounded?”

“Ah, she can be brave eneuch when there’s ony occasion, sir,” said Andrew. “But she never war grand at fechting bear, and she thocht she’d get oot o’ the way o’ the shooting.”

“And you did,” said the captain contemptuously. “There, go and fetch that piece you threw away.”

“Nay, it slippit oot o’ my fingers, sir. It was after she’d fired it, though.”

“The least said the soonest mended, McByle,” said the captain coldly. “You had better hold your tongue, and go and find that rifle. I may as well tell you, though, that my opinion of your bravery is not very high.”

“Nay, sir, dinna be hard upon a puir mon. Ye dinna ken a’ aboot me the yet.”

“I know enough. Don’t talk, man; go and find the rifle, and then come and help the skinning here.”

“She will, sir; but, doctor, is her *leg* brukkit?”

“Eh? Bah! no. A bit sprained at the ankle joint. When you fell, I suppose?”

“Ay, sir. Ye see she had to try so hard to save her head, she couldna attend to her legs and feet,” said Andrew, with a cunning look at the doctor, as he limped off in search of the rifle, leaving the rest examining the magnificent animal lying motionless among the stones.

It was an enormous beast, with a coat of long, silky, cream-coloured fur, which hung down from its sides, and hid the claws when its feet were spread out.

“No wonder he could stand the polar winters with a great-coat like that, eh, Steve?” cried the doctor. “Why, my lad, you must have that skin carefully dressed, and use it as an ornament for your drawing-room when you have one.”

“*I*?” cried the boy.

“To be sure; it was your shot that brought him down, eh, Marsham?”

“Certainly,” replied the captain; “he gave the finishing stroke.”

The conversation was getting so personal that Steve walked away to where Skene crouched in a soft, sandy place, his ears cocked up and his eyes intent upon the actions of the two Norsemen, who were working away at the skinning; and as every now and then their tugging at the tough hide gave a slight movement to the left fore leg of the bear, the dog kept jumping up, uttering a fierce growl, ruffling up the hair about his neck, and showing his teeth as if about to attack.

“Down, Skeny! down, boy!” cried Steve, as the dog made one of these demonstrations. “Let’s have a look at you. Where are you hurt?”

He knelt down by the dog, patted him, and then took hold of one of his legs; but Skene threw up his muzzle and made so piteous a cry that the leg was immediately released and laid a short distance farther away by its owner.

“Then you are hurt, old chap. Shall I fetch the doctor?”

The dog yelped.

“What does that mean, Johannes, yes or no?”

“Only his way of saying thank you, sir,” replied the Norseman. “He’s hurt, but not badly; because, as you saw, he could run at the bear. He’s a good deal bruised, and he’ll be a bit sore for days; but animals soon get well again. They lick themselves right when they are hurt.”

“But oughtn’t he to be examined?”

“I did look at him, sir. He’s only hurt in the shoulder and ribs, where the bear struck him. There isn’t a trace of blood. Let him lie, sir; he’ll curl up when we get him on board.”

As the dog appeared to be in no pain and was intent upon the skinning process, he was left alone; and the little party followed the dog’s example, till Johannes suddenly looked up.

“I don’t know, gentlemen,” he said; “it’s hardly likely, but I’d post somebody to keep a look-out. The bear’s mate might come to look after him, and they are savage brutes at times.”

“I’ll get on that stone and keep the look-out myself,” said the captain. “No; here comes McByle with the gun. He shall go up on the rock and keep watch. He doesn’t seem to limp much now.”

This was the case, and a few minutes after Andrew was perched up on a pile of rocks some twenty feet above the ground. He accepted the duty most willingly, for the top of the rock seemed to be a particularly safe place; and as soon as he heard the object of his task he scrambled up so rapidly that the captain laughed.

“We need not fidget about McByle’s hurts,” he said; and then he shouted: “Keep a sharp look to the northward, McByle!”

“Ay, ay, sir, she will,” replied the man; and they saw him gaze intently toward the spot where the other bear had disappeared.

Then all attention was directed to the prize, which by rough measurement was nearly three yards in length, and as ponderous-looking as some huge bull, while another rough measurement showed that it had been a long way on toward five feet in height as it stood.

The boat soon after returned from the ship, with the other two Norwegians, who set to work at once to help, and by their united efforts the great, heavy skin was stripped off and carried by one of the men to the shore.

The head was cut off by means of an axe, so that it might be preserved with its large, grinning, ivory teeth; and then the men busied themselves over the rather disgusting operation of cleaning off all the fat from the body, genuine bear's grease being a valuable commodity. This, too, was borne to the boat for rendering down in the caldron fixed in the fore part of the ship, in connection with a steam-pipe from the engine-boiler. In the course of the proceeding the bear was opened, and the sight that presented itself went a long way toward satisfying Steve that the slaying of a polar bear was not so unnecessary a work after all.

"Much better for the seals of the neighbourhood," said the captain grimly, as Johannes pointed out the fact that their quarry must have killed and eaten a good-sized seal that day, the unfortunate animal having been chopped into big fragments by the bear's tremendous teeth, the food they had seen it searching for being probably taken just as an amusement —*pour passer le temps*.

The huge piles of muscle laid bare upon the neck and shoulders of the animal told of such great strength that the wonder was that the dog had not been killed; but there he crouched so little the worse, that all of a sudden he made a dash by Johannes, stuck his teeth in the still warm flesh, and gave it an angry shake—that is to say, held on and shook his own head and neck, for the ponderous mass of flesh was pretty well immovable.

The piles of fat had all been cleverly removed and sent on board, and as no one evinced any desire to partake of bear-steaks or sirloin, the sailors announced their work as done just as Andrew uttered a shout of warning —"Look out!"

“What is it?” cried the captain, who had been vainly trying to get a shot at a bird or two tempting enough for supper.

“The bear coming.”

“Where away?”

“Three points on the port bow, sir!” cried Andrew, who treated his rocky look-out place as a ship.

The captain took out his little binocular glass and swept the shore, to make out the second bear away in the distance, walking slowly along on the top of the ice-floe which shut them in to the north. It was raising its head on high, and evidently on the look-out for its mate.

“What do you say, Handscombe?” said the captain; “shall we tackle it? There is a good chance if we can approach the animal unobserved.”

“For my part, I say no,” replied the doctor, as the Norwegians, who had been ridding themselves of the traces of their unpleasant task, picked up their spears. “I have had enough bear for one day, and should like some beef. It’s past twelve.”

“Oh, it must be later than that!” cried Steve. “Why, we’ve been hours and hours ashore. I should have thought it was six o’clock.”

“No,” said the doctor, smiling. “My watch keeps good time. I say a quarter to twelve.”

“Then we’ll go on board,” said the captain. “I, too, had no idea it was so late.”

“Early?” suggested Steve.

“Why, Steve!” cried the captain, clapping him on the shoulder, “don’t you know where we are? This is the land of the midnight sun.”

The boy stared at him in astonishment, then due north at the sun, which was shining with a softer and less piercing light than usual, while the captain and his friend the doctor exchanged glances and looked amused

at the boy’s confusion.

He now looked round him, toward the ship and the ice; and then, as if struck by a happy thought, he thrust his hand into his pocket and took out a little compass, which he carefully placed level on a block of stone, watching it till the needle had ceased to vibrate.

“Well?” said the captain, smiling.

“That’s the north,” said Steve, with his forehead wrinkled.

“Of course; we knew that before.”

“And the sun looks as if it were just going to set in the wrong place, sir.”

“Yes, my lad; but it is not going to set. In another quarter of an hour it will be at its lowest point, and then begin to rise higher and travel apparently eastward to the south. You wanted to see the midnight sun. There it is; but I hope you’ll see it to greater perfection when we get farther north.”

“Yes; but won’t it set at all?” cried Steve.

“No; we shall have what will seem like endless day for the rest of the summer.”

“And shan’t want lamps?”

“No, not for a long time to come.”

“But, then, shan’t we want to go to bed and sleep?”

“Oh yes,” said the doctor, laughing; “and I shall be very glad to get my dinner—supper, I mean—and then go. So let’s get back on board.”

But Steve did not move for a minute or two. He stood staring at the sun, beneath which the ice was glittering, while the snow upon the mountains flashed and looked more beautiful than ever. At last he shouldered his gun.

“I’m very stupid, I suppose,” he said at last, as he looked from one to the

other. “I learned all about it at school, and I suppose I knew all this; but now I’m right amongst it everything seems puzzling. I can’t understand how this can be night; but it will all come right by-and-by.”

“Of course,” said the captain, smiling; “but it looks as if the dog understands what puzzles you.”

Steve looked round.

“Why, he’s asleep.”

“Yes; and look about you. Where are the birds? I don’t see one on the wing.”

“There are thousands up yonder on the ledges,” said Steve, pointing to the lines of black-backed and white-breasted puffins and grey gulls.

“Yes, my lad; but they’re all roosting,” said the captain. “All ready, my lads? Now, then, for the boat.”

“Here, Skeny, wake up, old chap!” cried Steve, forcing a laugh. “Sorry to disturb you in the middle of the night, but you’ll be able to see.”

The dog did not stir till his master bent down and touched him, when he started into wakefulness, got up stiffly, shook himself and made his ears rattle, and then yawned in a very human way.

“Come along, then,” cried Steve, starting to follow the rest, and the dog wagged his tail and began to trot to his side, but in a lame, stiff fashion.

Just then, though, he caught sight of the great carcass of the bear. Up went the hair about his throat and neck; he gave a fierce growl, forgot his lameness, and dashed at the bear’s throat, stuck his teeth into it, and tried to give it a shake; then, loosening his hold reluctantly, he followed his master to the boat, which soon after reached the side of the *Hvalross*, where the cook announced the meal to be in perfect readiness, and to it tremendous justice was done.

“Seems nonsense to go to bed now, doesn’t it?” said Steve, as they returned on deck to see the island beginning to grow distant as the

vessel steamed slowly north-north-east, about a mile away from the solid blue-and-silver wall of ice on their left.

“Yes,” said the doctor quietly; “but we must have rest. All this has come upon you so suddenly, because we have been shut up so long in that terrible fog.”

“But we’re leaving Jan Mayen for good, then?”

“Yes; there was nothing to stay for.”

“And if we keep right on like this, where shall we go to next?”

“Come, come,” said the doctor playfully; “you ought to know the chart. I can tell you that.”

“I know I ought to be able to say,” replied Steve, with his brow wrinkled again; “but I’m puzzled, sir. I don’t seem to have grasped it yet. Where are we making for?”

“Well, if the ice would let us get up there, we are going pretty straight for the North Pole; but I expect this great wall will keep us more to the east, and before long, if the weather keeps fine, we shall be sighting the land of peaks and mountains.”

“Spitzbergen?” cried Steve.

“Well done; you have not forgotten everything.”

“No, not quite. And we shall be amongst the walrus, seals, and reindeer, and—”

“To-morrow morning, boy!” cried the doctor. “It’s rather soon after a heavy supper.”

“But isn’t it to-morrow morning to-day—I mean to-night—I mean—?”

“Bed, Steve, bed!” cried the doctor. “Come along, and I’ll set you the example. Your head will be clearer after a good rest, and you won’t be so ready to make bulls.”

“Very well,” said the boy, “I’ll go; but I’m sure I shan’t sleep a wink. It’s impossible, with the sun shining so bright and clear.”

But it was not, for in a quarter of an hour he was soundly off, breathing heavily, and too thoroughly tired out to dream about the encounter with the bear.

Chapter Eleven.

The White Whale Shoal.

“*What* a horrid smell, Hamish! What is it?” cried Steve, going forward.

“Bear’s grease, sir. They’re chust cooking the fat we got yesterday. Like to ha’e some in a pot for your hair?”

“What? Nonsense!”

“Mak’ your whiskers grow, sir,” said the man, grinning. “Look yonder; Watty Links has been for some. Leuk at his head.”

Steve did look, to see that the boy’s red hair was streaky, gummy, and shining, as he had been applying the grease wholesale—that is, with more liberality than care.

For the bear’s fat—some three hundred and fifty pounds’ weight—was in the great caldron surrounded by steam, which hissed beneath it from the engine-boiler as the *Hvalross* glided slowly along about half a mile from the low, regular ice cliff, which stretched away apparently without end, glittering and displaying its lovely delicate tints of pale blue wherever it was shattered or riven at the edge.

“It does seem rum,” said Steve to himself, “for the sun to be always up—let’s see, what do you call it?—above the horizon.”

As he reached the caldron he found Jakobsen, with his sleeves rolled above his brawny elbows, busily at work superintending the rendering down, and he looked up and gave the boy a friendly nod.

“Well, opposition cook!” cried Steve, laughing; “breakfast ready? What is it, bear-soup?”

“No, sir,” said the man seriously, “only the fat.”

“Ah, well, I won’t taste that,” said Steve; and he went on to where his comrades Andersen and Petersen were busy over the great outstretched bear’s skin, which they were cleaning and dressing so that it should be perfectly preserved. Johannes was seated on a stool with a keg between his legs, the little tub being turned up to form a table, on which rested the great grinning head of the slain animal, whose skull he was carefully cleaning from every particle of flesh and fat, throwing the scraps overboard to the great cloud of sea-birds which wheeled and darted and pounced down upon every morsel thrown into the sea.

“Ugh! what a disgusting job!” said Steve.

“Think so, sir? Oh no, it’s clean enough—quite fresh.” And he threw over a handful of bear-flesh, after cutting it in small pieces.

“Why did you do that?” asked Steve.

“To give all the birds a chance.”

“Oh! I say, how hungry they seem!”

“Yes, they do, sir. I often wonder how they live at all in the stormy times.”

Steve watched till the last scrap had been snatched from the crystal clear water, and then looked round as the Norseman flung in some more fragments which he had scraped from the massive skull.

“Seems only fair, sir, eh? The bears get fat on the young birds when they can reach them on the cliffs, and now the birds can get fat on the bear.”

“Why, it’s like making cannibals of them,” said Steve, “eating their own children second-hand.”

“Yes, sir,” said Johannes, pausing to whet his curious knife; “but that’s how things are. One lives upon another. Birds, beasts, and fishes, they’re

all alike. But this will make a noble head when the skin's dressed, and a pair of glass eyes put in, and the whole stuffed out a little. It will make you think about killing it when you get home."

"I don't want to think about killing the poor brute," said Steve shortly. "Here, where's my dog? Skeny!"

There was a sharp bark in answer, but no dog appeared.

"Where is he? Here, Skeny, Skeny!"

The dog answered with another sharp bark, and, directed by the sound, the boy advanced to find the collie curled up on a tarpaulin right forward under the bowsprit.

"Hullo, old chap! why don't you come out?" cried Steve; but the dog only gave his tail a few short raps on the tarpaulin without moving his head, his eyes twinkling up from the furry hair in which his nose was buried.

"Not ill, are you?" continued Steve, bending down to pat his companion, but eliciting a whine, as if the caress had given pain.

"He's only trying to sleep it off, sir," said Johannes, scattering some more food to the gulls, which dashed at it screaming. "I felt him over this morning. He's a good bit bruised, but no bones broken."

"Did he let you—didn't he try to bite?"

"Oh no," said the man with quiet confidence; "a dog won't bite you when he's hurt, if he knows you want to do him good. We're friends, aren't we, Skene?"

The dog rapped the tarpaulin with his tail, and then lay curled up a little closer, perfectly still.

"It's wonderful, sir, how soon animals mend up again without doctoring. A few licks, a little going on short food, and plenty of sleep, and they soon come round. One may do worse than imitate them sometimes."

Steve made no reply, for the simple reason that he had nothing to say;

but he could not help wondering what Mr Handscombe would think, as he got up on the bowsprit just where it passed out over the vessel's prow, held on by the rigging, and had a good look round. But on his left there was nothing but the long, low ice cliff; on his right the glittering sea, flecked with grey sea-birds floating above or calmly sitting on the blue water.

He leaped down, gave Skene a pat, promised him some breakfast, and was going aft toward the galley, but just then Johannes had turned the skin back over the bare skull, pretty well restoring the shape of the head, and he held it up.

"Make a grand ornament, sir, when it's done. Fine ivory teeth, hasn't it?"

"Yes. Lend it to me a moment."

He took hold of the head, and at that moment became conscious of the fact that Watty's greasy shock head was thrust outside of the galley, and that the lad was watching him with a sneering grin upon his countenance. There was not the slightest occasion to take any notice, but these derisive grins made Steve feel hot, and as if he must punch that head as hard as ever he could, for if he did not he told himself that the annoyance would grow worse. He paid no further heed to the boy then, but carried the heavy head to where Skene lay curled up to try the effect upon the dog. That was visible directly in the ruffling up of the thick frill and a low, deep growl; but the next minute Skene gave a short bark, and curled his tail over his nose again, as if quite satisfied that he was only being played with, and Steve bore back the trophy.

"Knows better," said Johannes, smiling in his grave way; "dogs have got more sense than we think for."

"Cooks' boys haven't," said Steve shortly, as he heard a low, jeering chuckle, and saw that Watty had been watching him all the time, and now drew in his head for a few moments, but thrust it out again to indulge in another grin, which made Steve writhe and show his annoyance so plainly that the Norseman said quietly:

"Don't take any notice of his sauce."

“No, I won’t,” said Steve shortly, as the head was withdrawn. But the next moment—the cook being apparently too much engaged to notice the conduct of his help—Watty thrust out his head again, and, seeing the annoyance he gave, uttered another low, derisive chuckle.

Steve, unable to control himself, made an angry gesture, and the boy withdrew his grinning face.

“He’ll do it again directly,” thought Steve; and, acting on the impulse of the moment, he caught up the bear’s head, ran sharply the few steps to the galley door, stood ready close up to the side waiting; and as Watty thrust out his face again grinning, it was into another so fierce and horrible-looking that he stood for a moment petrified, and then uttered a loud yell, darted back, and slammed to the door.

Steve felt better after that, and hurriedly returned the bear’s head prior to seeing about breakfast, for another odour saluted his nostrils, that of frizzling bacon—so suggestive a smell to a hungry lad that he made for the cabin at once, to find the captain, Mr Lowe, and Mr Handscombe just gathered for their morning meal.

The breakfast was hardly over when there was a hail from aloft, where Andrew McByle was occupying the crow’s-nest.

“There she spouts!” he cried; and Steve was the first on deck to see the whale, for he knew the meaning of the sailor’s cry.

Running to the main-mast he mounted the shrouds for some twenty feet, and then, with his arm thrust through the ratlines and embracing one of the taut stays of the mast, he stood gazing in astonishment at the sight before him. For he had hurried on deck fully expecting to see one of the great dark Greenland whales diving down after food, coming to the surface again to blow, and then throw its flukes high in the air with a flourish as it dived once more. But, instead of a single whale, the sea appeared to be alive with them, playing about in the water, gambolling on the surface or diving under. Then they were up again, making the sea foam as they flourished their tails, uttered a strange, faint, snorting sound as they blew and whistled, and dived down once more. But it was not playing, for they were in chase of an enormous shoal of small fish, upon

which they were feasting.

There was quite an excitement amongst the men, who, without waiting for orders, saw to the tackle in the boats, Johannes and Petersen hastening to add white whale harpoons to the rest of the implements.

“Well, Steve, my lad,” cried the doctor, “what do you think of the shoal? You ought to have brought your fishing-rod and line.”

“Nonsense!” said the lad shortly; “but I say, Mr Handscombe, you don’t call these whales?”

“What, then, my lad? They’re white whales.”

“Young ones? Then that’s why they are white.”

“No, my lad, old ones. Look; plenty of them have got their two young ones with them.”

“Oh, but surely these are not full-grown whales! Why, the biggest can’t be sixteen feet long.”

“Quite right; about fourteen, I should say. Come down; you’ll want to go in one of the boats. Look; they’ve got in the lines.”

Steve looked down, and saw that the men were carefully stowing two tubs in the fore part of the boats, each tub containing, in carefully laid-down rings, about a hundred and fifty yards of strong line.

“But surely they’re not going to harpoon those baby whales like they do the big ones?”

“Yes, just the same, lad. Come down if you want to have some of the sport.”

The captain stepped into one boat, and Steve followed, the doctor going off in the other with Jakobsen and the crew.

The next minute the word was given to sit fast and be silent, and the boats were rowed rapidly toward the great shoal, which must have

numbered a thousand or fifteen hundred, while the water was one mass of foam.

“Are these good, these white whales?” said Steve to the captain, as the boat cut through the water, and Johannes stood ready with his harpoon, a very different implement from that provided for the walrus, being barbed so as to form a kind of hook, and, once through, could not be withdrawn from the gutta-percha-like side, of which it would take up a loop tough enough to hold the stoutest sea-horse they could strike. The harpoon used for the white whale was lighter, and had a head which somewhat resembled a half-moon, fitted to work at the end of the shaft, and slight, so that one point of the half-moon would stand in a line with the pole, while the other was secured by a band to the shaft. When the harpoon was driven into the whale, the band which held the second point of the head down to the pole was pushed off in passing through the skin and flesh, while at the first tug upon the line attached to the harpoon the loose head would be drawn crosswise, forming instead of a spear a double barb, which was strong enough to hold in the flesh without being drawn out.

The captain was too intent upon the shoal to answer Steve’s question, which he repeated.

“Good, my lad? Yes. The oil is the purest and best to be had, and very valuable; but of course not to be obtained in such quantities as are procured from the larger whales. I hope we shall get three or four, though. They will help to fill up our tanks.”

“I wish he’d think more of finding the *Ice Blink* than of filling the tanks,” thought Steve; but the next moment he, too, was thinking of nothing but the shoal of fish, as the men called them, though they were air-breathing animals instead; for now the chase became exciting. The belugas seemed to take no notice of the boats, but they were going rapidly through the water in chase of their prey, and when a fine one was selected it dived and went away swiftly beneath the water, so that it was difficult to tell where the creature would rise again.

Johannes gave his orders to the men, so that they might row toward the spot where the whale was likely to rise, and so give him a chance to hurl

his harpoon before the animal had time to dive again. But this was not easy. Whether the curious blunt-nosed, white-skinned, active creature, with its back clear of all fish-like fin, was on the alert for the coming harpoon or for the meal it was seeking it is impossible to say, but certainly it showed a remarkable activity in keeping just out of reach. It would rise just exactly where not expected, and the whole business of the chase had to be gone through again and again.

Steve was too much occupied with the efforts of their own harpooner to pay any heed to what was going on aboard the other boat, and divided his time between watching the tall, active Norseman and the spot where it was anticipated that the whale would rise.

At last, after hard pulling, fortune favoured the men's efforts. They had had a long tug, and there being no sign of the quarry they sought Johannes bade the rowers rest, while he stood with one foot resting upon the gunwale expectant.

"It's of no use," said the captain; "it must have gone right on. Look, Steve, how plentiful they are yonder. That's where we ought to have the boat."

He pointed to where pretty well a hundred of the great creatures were flapping in and out of the water; but Steve shook his head.

"Be too dangerous," he said. "Ah, look!"

He started to one side, for at that moment something of a creamy-white suddenly shot out of the water close to the bows of the boat, rose high with a graceful bend, and was curving over to make a plunge down into the depths, when—*whish*! *thud*!—the harpoon was thrown; it stuck a short distance behind the creature's head, and then with one blow the water was sent flying over the occupants of the boat, while the line was running rapidly out of the tub as the white whale disappeared from sight.

Like its relative the leviathan, of fifty or sixty feet in length, which boasts of a mouth big enough to hold a jollyboat and crew, who would doubtless find their quarters exceedingly uncomfortable on account of the forest of whalebone hanging down from the roof, the white whale cannot keep under water long without coming up to breathe; but the one Johannes had so cleverly struck nearly carried out the whole of the line, which

Steve watched darting out ring by ring over the bows, till, in spite of the riskiness of the proceeding, the second Norseman seized the end which lay outside the tub, and gave it a hitch round a block in the bows left for the purpose.

“Be ready for a ride, Steve,” said the captain, “if he does not pull us under before they can cut the rope; in that case be ready for a swim.”

“The first for preference,” thought Steve; but neither event occurred, for the rope suddenly ceased running, and as Johannes armed himself with one of the great lances which lay along the thwarts, his companion rapidly hauled in the slack line and laid it in rings once more.

Practice had made the man wonderfully perfect in this duty, and fathom after fathom was laid in, while the whale remained under so long that the captain shouted to Johannes:

“Has the harpoon come out?”

“I don’t know yet, sir; I’m afraid so,” was the reply. “These fish are so tender; they are often lost in this way.”

And all the time the second man kept on hauling in the line, and the others lay on their oars, for the rope came up straight out of the deep water.

“Yes, sir, he has gone, I fear,” said Johannes.

“No!” cried the other, for the slack line suddenly tightened and was jerked out of his hand; then the water parted about a dozen yards from the boat, the head of the whale appeared, and then the whole of the creature, as it rose higher, curved right over, and descended head first again, its tail giving a peculiar wave in the air before it disappeared, while all had a glimpse of the harpoon shaft, which directly after was seen floating on the surface of the water.

“Gone this time!” cried Steve in disappointed tones.

“Yes, he has gone almost straight down.”

“And we have lost him?”

“I hope not, sir,” said Johannes, leaning over the side, as the boat glided on, and picking up the long shaft of the harpoon.

“And you’ve lost the head of the harpoon, too.”

“Oh no, that’s fast to the line,” replied the man; “the shaft is meant to come out, so that it shall not be broken.”

“I did not understand that,” muttered the boy, as the line that had been recovered now began to run out again as rapidly as before, hissing over the gunwale, and judging from the speed looking as if the last ring would soon be out and the whale dragging at the boat.

The captain was evidently of the same opinion, for he spoke to Johannes, who was standing like a statue with his lance ready.

“Will he snap the line, do you think?”

“No, sir. If he runs all out, we shall have a sharp tug; but the rope will hold.”

“He won’t pull us under water, will he?” cried Steve.

“Oh no, sir; no fear of that. He’ll swim near to the top after this run, and keep on coming up to breathe. He may give us a ride. Here he comes again.”

For the rope ceased running once more, showing how accurately the length of line was calculated for giving the creatures the full extent of their rush and no more.

Once more it was rapidly hauled in, and laid down in rings in the tub; but before half was recovered there was a movement, which was seized upon as a signal how to act, for the whale was not to have more line, the latter being rapidly twisted round the block, after which there was a tremendous jerk, and the boat’s head was dragged down till it seemed as if it must admit the water, but the next minute it was rushing rapidly along sending a line of foam on either side. This lasted for a time, and then

ceased, the whale rising and curving over once more, flourishing its tail in the air, and then apparently diving straight down.

More line was gained and ringed this time, when the tension ceased, and again the whale appeared, curved over, and dived down again. Then once more there was the shock, and the boat was dragged along again. But this was by no means so sturdy a tugging as the last, and before long the rope slackened, the whale came up for breath, and dived slowly.

In a few minutes more there ceased to be any idea of danger, for the captive was nearly exhausted, and the end was coming; for each dive was shorter in depth as well as time. The whale then tried fresh tactics, rising to the surface and rolling over and beating the water heavily with its tail; but all in vain: it could not rid itself of the deeply plunged harpoon, and lay for a few moments perfectly quiet.

All at once it seemed to become aware of the fact that the boat which was approaching it rapidly had something to do with its trouble, and diving suddenly it made a rush for it; but the oars were cleverly managed, and its aim frustrated, while as it passed close by the bows Johannes' great lance struck it full, penetrating deeply before it was snatched out, and the next minute the whale was a dozen yards astern lashing the water with its tail.

An order or two rapidly executed, and the boat was pulled to within safe distance; Johannes made two tremendous lunges with his lance, and the whale turned slowly over and lay quivering for a few minutes; then it was still, and the men gave a cheer.

"Poor whale," thought Steve, who was far from being hardened over such matters; but he tried to think that this capture meant so many gallons of beautifully clear oil, and money for defraying the expenses of their search, and he now stood up to have a good long look at their prize, which was fully fifteen feet long and proportionately heavy.

And now, the excitement of the chase being over, the question arose where was the *Hvalross*, and where was the other boat? These questions were answered by the two vessels, which formed with them a triangle, whose sides were about a mile in length; while, to add to the satisfaction

of the adventure, the other boat was showing a signal, and they could see that it was towing something astern.

Meanwhile Johannes and his fellow-harpooners were busily securing a rope to their prize and drawing in and laying up their line. Next the harpoon was carefully cut out from where it was deeply imbedded in the animal's back; and then the boat's head was turned for the ship, which was steaming slowly towards them as they rowed on towing their carefully secured prize astern.

"I'm glad they've had good luck, too," said Steve; "but, I say, what has become of the shoal?"

"Gone right away, sir," replied Johannes. "We startled them, and they smelt danger. We may catch up to them by-and-by."

"Not to-day," said Captain Marsham quietly. "Pull, my lads;" and he steered so that they might get nearer to their companions' boat and the *Hvalross* be reached by them both at once.

"You are right, sir," said Johannes in his quiet, independent, but respectful manner; "we shall not see the whales again to-day, and we must make haste if we are to reach the ship before it comes."

"Before what comes?" said Steve, wondering at the man's manner.

"Look," he said, pointing to the north-west.

"What at?" replied Steve; "the long line of ice?"

"No," said Captain Marsham. "Look right beyond the ire. Another of those pests—troubles of arctic voyaging, my boy," he continued, correcting himself.

"What, that silvery-looking cloud over the ice? Does that mean wind?"

"I wish it did, Steve, so as to save our coal. No, boy; it means another of those dense mists. I hope only a passing one; but you have had a taste of what an arctic fog can be like. We must make haste; these mists creep on so swiftly. Make a signal, Johannes. The *Hvalross* must come on and

pick us up, or we shall have to cast off our fish."

The next minute a little flag was hoisted in the bows to the end of one of the lance-poles, with the result that there was soon after a cloud of black smoke rolling out of the steamer's funnel and an increase in the white water at her stern; but the boat went no faster, for the white whale was heavy, although the men pulled with a will.

"They ought to see the fog coming on in the other boat," said the captain impatiently. "Of course if we are shut in we shall be able to reach the *Hvalross*. We could do that by listening for their signals, which they would be sure to make; but I hate unnecessary anxiety, Steve, and it is very awkward to be caught by one of these dense mists—everything is so puzzling."

He ceased speaking, and sat watching the other boat making, like themselves, slowly for the same point. And now, seeing the urgency, Johannes and his brother Norsemen seated themselves and put out spare oars to help on the speed. But the whale they were towing seemed to anchor them in one place; and at last, just as the steamer was still quite half a mile away, a peculiar change came over the sea. The sun was still shining brightly, but the other boat grew dim and enlarged-looking, as if it were magnified and set in a bluish opal. There was the long range of ice cliff, but it was curiously blue and undefined.

"I say," cried Steve suddenly, "what's the matter with the *Hvalross*?"

He started from his seat as he spoke, for the steamer was no longer upon the blue water,—there was no blue water,—but apparently twenty feet up in the air, and gradually rising higher till it was double the height, while the funnel, masts, and hull looked soft and swollen out of all proportion.

"An optical illusion, my boy," said the captain quietly. "Sit down. You have heard of refraction. It is a peculiar state of the air. I daresay we look the same to them. Pull, my lads. I'm afraid the mist will be down upon us before we can reach the ship. Look at that."

Steve was already looking at the peculiar way in which their companion boat was dying out of sight, till it was perfectly invisible; and yet it was

clear about where they were, only for a few minutes, though. Then there was a faint, gauzy film close by, into which they rowed, and as they passed completely in, the *Hvalross* was almost hidden; five minutes later it was not to be seen.

The mist was upon them, thickening each moment, and a curiously depressing chill came over the boy. It was as if the cold were attacking his mind as well as his body, and he quite started as the deep voice of Johannes said, the words sounding muffled:

“Keep your helm fast, sir. We mustn’t miss the ship.”

“Mustn’t miss the ship,” thought Steve, with a strange sense of dread creeping over him now like another and darker mist. “If we did miss her, what then?”

Chapter Twelve.

A Strange Peril.

It seemed hard to believe, so rapidly had the change taken place. Only a few minutes before, and they were gliding along with the blue sky above and the air perfectly clear; now everything was shut out, even Johannes in the bows of the boat looking indistinct from where Steve and the captain were seated in the stern.

Captain Marsham made no verbal reply to the warning of the Norseman, but his right arm which held the steering oar grew rigid, and he did not stir from his position.

Steve was no experienced sailor, but he had seen plenty of the last fog, and as he sat there growing anxious the following problem presented itself to him after the fashion of the mathematical studies at school, and based on the difficulty of making a way through what was little better than black darkness. Let A, B, and C represent the points of a triangle. If three parties start together from those points to reach a common centre, and travel at different rates of speed, when will they meet?

“It looks as if the answer is—never,” thought Steve. “Why, the *Hvalross* is steaming faster—we saw her; and she’ll go right on and leave us behind. This fog, too, may last for days.”

“Keep cool, my lad,” said the captain in a low voice; “we shall soon be on board. Listen, and try if you can hear the beat of the propeller.”

Those words sent a hopeful thrill through the boy, just as his spirits were getting very low indeed, and he leaned over the boat’s side listening, but the regular dip, dip of the oars was all he could distinguish. He did not speak; there was no need.

“Steady!” cried the captain suddenly, and his voice sounded as if it were shut in. “Lie on your oars for a few moments. Listen for the beat of the steamer.”

There was dead silence then, and Steve began to realise for the first time in his life the meaning of the word “lost.”

But no sound came to their ears from out of the mist which now surrounded them, and seemed to arch them in as if they were in a dark grey cell just big enough to hold the boat.

“Had we better cast off the fish, sir,” said Johannes at last, “and pull hard?”

“No,” said Captain Marsham; “matters are not so desperate as that. Here, Steve boy, your voice is the youngest and most likely to pierce the mist; give a good ahoy.”

“Ahoy!” yelled the boy, and again, “Ahoy! ahoy!” but the hail sounded as if he were shouting with his head closely shut in a box, and all felt that it was useless to listen for a reply.

“You hail, Johannes, as you would do if alone.”

The Norseman rose up, placed his hands to his mouth, and uttered a bellowing roar. But though this was repeated again and again there was no reply.

“Give way!” cried the captain, and the oars began to dip, the men rowing steadily without a word, trusting themselves entirely to their captain as the one who must know best under the circumstances; while Steve, who felt that he ought to be perfectly calm and cool, knew that moment by moment he was growing more nervous and uncomfortable, haunted as he was by the idea that they might never reach the *Hvalross*, and be left alone in that icy solitude, without weapons or provisions, to try and reach Jan Mayen, and find the refuge they had thought possible for the others.

“There is the wrecked ship,” he said to himself, as thoughts came swiftly; “it would do for a shelter, and we should have to live on sea-birds, unless we could find that after all there are some stores buried in the ship’s hold under the sand.”

“Steady!” cried the captain just then, interrupting the flow of his wild thoughts; and the men rested on their oars again, while shout after shout was sent up, but with no reply.

“We must have come far enough,” muttered Captain Marsham; and he hesitated as he vainly tried to pierce the dense medium which surrounded them. “We’ll lie on our oars and drift a little while,” he said aloud; “the fog will pass over soon. What do you say, Johannes?”

“One never knows, sir,” replied the man gravely; “but it is of no use to go on rowing; we must have passed the ship, for there is a strong current here.”

“Well, we shall see.”

They sat listening till, growing fidgety, Steve turned to lean over the stern and take hold of the rope which held the beluga. The great fish-like creature yielded to the drag and came close up, but its head was hardly discernible, and it looked so weird and strange that the boy loosed his hold with a shudder, expecting that it would float away. But it remained stationary for a few moments, and then, urged by the current, rubbed heavily against the boat’s side, imperceptibly altering its position by dragging round the stern.

After listening patiently for some time, the captain drew a little compass from his pocket and placed it beside him on the thwart, waiting till it was

steady, when he exclaimed in quite a startled tone:

“Which way were we pulling, my men?”

“About due west, sir.”

“But the boat’s head lies south, and we have been going right away from the steamer. Here, pull hard starboard, backwater port!” he cried; and as the oars dipped he bent down and watched the compass till he found the boat’s head pointing north-east, when he shouted, “All together: give way!”

It was a relief to feel that something was being done to extricate them from their awkward predicament, and the men pulled hard for the next ten minutes or so, when, at a word from Captain Marsham, they easied, and a fresh howl was sent forth to penetrate the fog. But this had no better result than the last, and once more the order was given to pull and obeyed with fresh vigour, when Steve suddenly leaped up.

“I heard it then,” he said.

“Hold hard!” cried Captain Marsham, and the oars hung dripping over the side. “Heard what, my lad?”

“The steamer’s whistle, quite plainly.”

There was a dead silence at this as all listened, but not a sound reached them but the drip, drip, drip of the water from the blades of the oars.

“Mistaken, I’m afraid, Steve, my lad,” said the captain. “Any one of you hear the whistle?”

There was no reply.

“Give way, my lads.”

Splash went the oars, and at that moment Steve cried excitedly:

“There it is again, right astern!”

“Nonsense, boy!” said the captain;—“imagination. We should have heard it too. Pull, my lads, pull.”

The men dragged at their oars, and Steve sank down in his place feeling abashed, but perfectly certain all the same that he had heard the whistle. At the end of a few minutes the captain said kindly:

“It’s very easy to be deceived, my lad, and to fancy we hear that which we wish to hear. Johannes, come aft here, and cast off this little fish. We shall have enough to do without towing it.”

“Cast it off, sir?” said the man as soon as he had passed the rowers, and he opened his great knife slowly.

“Yes; it is too heavy to drag. Well, why do you hesitate?”

“I was thinking, sir.”

“Well, think afterwards. Don’t cut the rope; you can untie it.”

“Yes, sir,” said the man slowly; and in a voice which did not reach the others, “but had I not better tell you what I was thinking first?”

“Well, go on,” said the captain shortly.

“We might want the whale—for food.”

Captain Marsham gave quite a start, for there was so much meaning in those few words, suggestive as they were of their being starving in the open boat, and he sat there gazing full in the man’s eyes.

“You think, then, that we may not find the ship?” he said in a whisper.

“The good God only knows,” said the Norseman, taking off his cap. “We are in His hands; but it is our duty to provide for the worst.”

“Yes,” said the captain slowly, “you are quite right, my man; let the fish stay.”

“There!” cried Steve, starting up again. “I’m sure I heard it then!”

“Steve!” cried the captain angrily, as he turned sharply on the boy.

“Yes, I heard it then,” said Johannes slowly, as he held his hands behind his ears and leaned toward the stern.

“You heard it?”

“Yes; there again. Listen, captain.”

“I hear nothing.”

“No, it has stopped now.”

Captain Marsham made an impatient gesture.

“There!” cried Steve excitedly.

“Yes, there!” said Johannes. “You heard it then, sir?”

“No,” said the captain after a few moments’ listening. “You must both be mistaken.”

“No, sir,” said the Norseman gravely, “I am not mistaken; that was a steamer’s whistle.”

“Then it cannot be ours.”

“Perhaps not, sir; but it was a steamer’s whistle, a signal, and it is dead astern. Shall we run back?”

“Yes; we must get on board something as soon as we can. This may be some whaler caught in the fog. Pull, my lads, and I will steer you round.”

Captain Marsham looked down at the dimly seen compass on the thwart beside him, and gradually got the boat’s head south-west.

At the end of half an hour’s pulling the captain suddenly exclaimed:

“Yes, I heard it then! Did you?”

“I have heard it several times since we changed our course,” said

Johannes quietly.

“Indeed! and you, Steve?”

“Yes, sir, I’ve heard it, too.”

“Then why didn’t you speak?”

Steve was silent, and the captain listened again.

“Yes, that is a steamer’s whistle undoubtedly, and perhaps not very distant.”

“She can’t be very far away, sir. If she were, we could not have heard her at all.”

The men were cheery now, and pulled with a steady stroke, making but little way on account of the heavy load they were towing; but the fact of their hearing the vessel, of which there was no doubt now, inspirited them.

“Stop!” said the captain suddenly. “Now, Steve, hail!”

As the boy sent forth as loud an ahoy as his lungs would allow there was a dull, smothered wail off astern, very near at hand, evidently, one moment, and the next sounding distant and far away.

“Hail again!” cried the captain; and this time Johannes gave forth one of his hoarse, deep roars, the sound seeming to return upon them, but there was no reply.

“Hail again, Steve,” and the boy shouted; but still without result.

Then Johannes sent forth another of his sonorous roars, and all laid on their oars and listened, when, so softly as to be almost imperceptible as the men held their breath, there came a low hail, which grew fainter and fainter and then died away.

“That was the *Hvalross*, I’m sure!” cried Steve excitedly, as the boat’s course was altered once more.

“Yes; and she’s hanging about to find us,” said the captain. “Cheer up, my lads. She won’t go far without trying back; she can’t be far away.”

The men tugged at their oars, but there was no answering cheer; even the great Norseman was silent, while, as Steve settled down in his place once more, he felt as if they were to be left to take their chance on the outskirts of the region of ice, for, after signalling till they were weary, the *Hvalross* must be steaming right away.

Chapter Thirteen.

Occupants of the Deep.

Saddened faces met the gaze of the occupants of the stern sheets, as the men steadily tugged away at their oars hour after hour, with the heavy beluga hanging from its rope behind. Then all at once, when the mist was most dense, the silence perfect, and a feeling coming over all that it would be impossible to go on rowing much longer, every one loosed his oar and joined in a loud cheer; for from quite close at hand—so near, in fact, that the mist swayed with the concussion—there was the dull, heavy roar of a cannon.

“The *Hvalross*!” cried Steve.

“Yes, our signal-gun,” replied the captain.

A faint cheer like the distant echo of that from the boat was now heard, the men bent to their oars with renewed vigour, and ten minutes later, guided by shout after shout, the boat suddenly glided under the counter of the vessel.

“Why, we thought we had lost you!” cried the doctor, leaning over from the gangway.

“Then you got back?”

“Yes, hours ago. The ship came right upon us, nearly running us down. But what a fog!”

“Yes,” said Captain Marsham drily, “what a fog! You seem to have been more fortunate than we were. Save your fish?”

“Oh yes; they’ve got it towing alongside. And you, did you cut yours adrift?”

“No; it is alongside, too.”

All were too tired to make an attack upon the whales that day, and after a good meal the watch was set, and those at liberty sought relief from their weariness in sleep, leaving the ship lying to and with the fires going sufficiently to enable the engineer to get up steam at a very short notice and take the ship out of danger if any came near.

Steve awoke after many hours' sleep to find that a light breeze had swept away the mist, and that they were lying about ten miles away from the ice, toward which they had partly drifted, partly steamed, during the heavy mist. It was another example of the difficulties of navigation in the north, another of the risks to which sailors are exposed. But now that the trouble had passed it was almost forgotten, the men being eagerly at work cutting up the two whales and transferring their thick blubber to the caldron, from which a clear, sweet oil was soon after being drawn off and emptied into one of the tanks that henceforth would be reserved for this particular kind of oil.

The trouble of the past day was forgotten, and the men were ready to make light of it all, save the Norwegian sailors, who shook their heads when the others laughed and bantered them about getting lost; they knew the reality of the danger better, and said nothing either to make much or light of it.

The rendering down of the bear's fat and the boiling of the whale blubber into oil rather disgusted Steve; but he contented himself with making a face when the doctor talked about it.

"Must take the rough with the smooth," he said. "The bear-hunt was very exciting and the whale-fishing grand. I think I shall get Johannes to let me try harpooning."

"You mean," said the doctor, "that you must take the smooth with the rough."

"Why? I don't understand you," replied the boy.

"The smooth oil with the rough work of capturing."

"Oh, I see!" cried Steve.

“And you mean to try harpooning?”

“Why not, sir? I tried shooting.”

“Wait till you have some more muscle on your arm, Steve,” said the doctor, laughing; and then, after a look round at the sunlit sea, on which they were gliding easily along with plenty of canvas spread, as there was a favourable wind, he went below.

“Wait till I’ve got more muscle,” muttered Steve. “I’ve got as much as most fellows of my age. Yes, as much as you have, Mr Watty Links; and I’ll show you that I have one of these days,” he added, as he caught sight of the boy watching him with a supercilious smile on his face. “No, I won’t,” thought Steve, as the boy disappeared. “Nice blackguard I should look fighting with a fellow like that. Why, he might lick me,” he added after a few moments’ thought. “I’m not afraid of him, but he’s bigger and stronger than I am, and he might. I should never forgive myself,” he said half aloud. “Yes, I should,” he muttered, smiling at his fresh idea, “when I had had another try and licked him. Bother! I didn’t come to sea to fight. Here, Jakobsen, where’s Johannes?”

The man smiled and pointed upward.

“What do you mean? Oh, I see; in the crow’s-nest.”

“Yes, with the captain’s spy-glass.” Steve had not been aloft since the day when the tub was fixed to the main-mast, and without pausing to think of anything that was said upon that occasion he climbed on to the bulwarks, seized hold of the shrouds, and began to mount slowly and steadily, enjoying the soft breeze blowing by him, and noticing how different the sails looked aloft from what they did from the deck. The main-mast was passed, and he rested in the top for a few minutes to have a look round at the glittering sea, so brilliant now in the clear atmosphere. Then he had a look upward, and began to mount again quietly, and in an easy, effortless way, as if he enjoyed the task. He paused again, holding on by the shrouds as he looked up once more, to see that the Norseman was intent upon something in the distance, resting the large telescope he had taken up on the ring or rail of iron raised above the top of the cask, just at a convenient height for the

purpose, and in perfect ignorance of the presence of visitors. Steve smiled as he climbed higher, and paused once more as he reached the stout cross-bars which they had placed that day when the crow's-nest was built.

"Ahoy there, Johannes!" he cried.

The man gave a violent start, and turned to look over the edge of the cask.

"Mr Young!" he cried, "you there?"

"Look's like it. I've come to see you. Got any room in your nest?"

The Norseman laughed.

"Well, I daresay you could creep in. But did the captain give you leave to come aloft?"

"No; I only just made up my mind to come. Open the door; I'm coming."

"Take care, my lad!" cried the Norseman warningly. "There's no one to catch you if you slip."

"I won't slip this time," said Steve merrily; and climbing from the shrouds on to the wooden ladder, he went up from bar to bar till his head and shoulders passed into the cask, and the next minute the hinged bottom fell to again, and he had just room to stand in company with the sailor.

"I say, rather a tight fit," said Steve, laughing. "Wouldn't do for two people to quarrel packed together in a barrel like this."

"But why have you come up, sir? Did the mate send any message?"

"No, I tell you," cried Steve. "I only saw that you were up here, and thought I should like to come up for a chat."

"Very good of you, sir," said the man quietly. "Got over the scare of the fog?"

“Oh yes, now. It’s of no use to worry about things when they’re over. It was dangerous, though, wasn’t it?”

“Very, sir,” said the Norseman gravely. “Three poor fellows from our town rowed away from their ship with three Swedish men. They were after walrus. One of those fogs came on, and they were never seen again.”

“No? What became of them?”

Johannes shook his head.

“The great sea is wide, sir,” he replied. “The fog confused them, and they must have rowed in the wrong direction, been caught in one of the strong currents, and then tried to reach home as they could not find their ship. There are terrible losses out here in some summers.”

“Was it near here that they were lost?” said Steve, after a few minutes’ silence, during which he pictured the sufferings of the despairing boat’s crew.

“No, sir, more to the east, by Novaya-Zemlya.”

“How horrible!” said Steve with a shudder. “Tell me about something else.”

“Yes, sir; I don’t want to what the English sailors call spin yarns; that seemed to come naturally after our escape.”

“Yes, of course; but tell me this, Johannes. Next time we go off after one of those shoals of white whales—”

“What, sir! you would go again?” said the great amiable-looking fellow, smiling.

“Of course.”

“And run risks?”

“Oh, I hope there would not be any risk; but you wouldn’t have me play the coward always because we were in danger once?”

“No, no, sir, of course not,” said the Norseman, patting the boy on the shoulder. “Well, what if we go after the white whale again? I was trying to make out a school with the glass when you spoke and made me jump. Their oil is so fine and valuable.”

“Yes, I know,” said Steve impatiently; “but if we do go after a school again, I want you to let me try and harpoon one.”

There was not much room to move, but Johannes, as he smiled in his big, solemn way, managed to take hold of the boy’s arm, and gave the biceps a firm grip.

“Shut your hand tight and double up your arm,” he said; and Steve obeyed. “Good; that will do. Now take hold of mine.”

He imitated the boy’s action, and Steve imitated his, taking hold of a huge mass of muscle that stood right out like a partially compressed ball.

Steve coloured a little at the man’s quiet way of showing him the tremendous difference between them in the point of force.

“Well,” said Johannes, smiling, “do you still think that you would like to try?”

“Yes. I know I’m only a boy, and can’t pretend to have a man’s strength; but I should like to try. Don’t laugh at me, please.”

“No, I was only smiling, my lad. Why should I laugh at one who is young because he wishes to try to be brave and manly and shows a desire to learn?”

“Oh, thank you!” cried Steve eagerly; “that is what I do feel, but people are so ready to banter and laugh at me.”

“It is foolish of them,” said Johannes, “unless it is when a boy is what you call conceited and self-satisfied, and thinks that he is a man too soon.”

“I don’t do that, indeed!” cried Steve.

“You need not tell me so,” said Johannes; “I can see that in your eyes,

and I know it, my boy, from your words."

"And you don't think it absurd of me to want to try and use the harpoon?"

"Oh no. It is not so much an act of strength to dart a harpoon into a soft thing like a white whale, but of practice and knack. The shaft of the harpoon is so long and heavy, that if it is directed well and with good aim it curves over and falls with its own weight as well."

"Then you will let me try!" cried Steve eagerly.

"If the captain is willing, of course you shall. I could sooner teach you to strike a whale than one of your sailors—Hamish or Andra."

"Why?" said Steve eagerly.

"Because you are young and pliant, and eager to learn. You would throw it with your head as well as with your arm. They would throw it with the arm, and trust only to their strength."

"Here, give us the telescope!" cried Steve. "I want to find a shoal and begin at once."

"I daresay," said the Norseman, smiling; "but oil-fishing is not so easy as that, or people would soon make fortunes. I have been on the look-out for hours, but there is nothing in sight."

"But there'll be plenty of walrus when we get to Spitzbergen?"

"Perhaps. I have been there when we could load our boat in a very little while, and I have been there when all through the season we have hardly seen a walrus."

"Oh, but if there are none at Spitzbergen, and we don't find the *Ice Blink*, we must go somewhere else."

"If," said the Norseman, smiling. "If? If what?"

"If we can. The ice may stop us."

“What, for a day or two?”

“For a season or two seasons. One can never tell, sir. The ice is king up here, and has its own way.”

“Yes, but kings are conquered sometimes,” said Steve merrily; “perhaps we shall master, find the *Ice Blink*, and go right up to the North Pole, where the open Polar Sea lies.”

“No open Polar Sea lies up there, young gentleman,” said Johannes gravely; and as he spoke he gazed northward with a curious far-off look in his eyes. “I have heard all of that before, but after you pass the southern edge of the floe it is all ice, ice right away. I know there is land here and there, for one year, eastward of Spitzbergen, we came upon a rocky piece of coast; but whether it was an island or a great country running for hundreds of miles, no one yet knows.”

“Well, but how grand to land there and find out,” said Steve eagerly. “I should like that. Would Captain Marsham sail there?” Johannes smiled.

“It does not depend on Captain Marsham,” he replied. “Look,” he said, pointing northward, “there is the edge of the floe. Suppose you knew that there was land two hundred miles northward, how would you sail there?”

“Of course you could not for the ice.”

“That’s right,” said Johannes; “and so it is year by year. By about August the floe has broken up, and part of it is melted, and one can sail a little way farther north, not very far some years, at others for a long distance; but the time always comes when the ice is solid and the ship cannot pass, and then at nights it begins to freeze again, and you have to hurry back for fear of being frozen up.”

“What’s the matter?” cried Steve, for the Norseman suddenly raised his spy-glass and directed it eastward, where the sea looked to be one dazzling sheen of damasked silver.

There was no answer for some moments, and then the man turned to the glass.

“Look yonder,” he said, “about a couple of points away to the south of the ship’s jib-boom.”

Steve seized the glass, and gazed through it, carefully sweeping the sea far and wide.

“Can you make it out?”

“No.”

“Try a little more to the south.”

“Can’t see anything. Yes, I can; a ship’s boat bottom upward miles away. It must be a big boat. Why, it’s a small ship capsized.”

“Watch it,” said Johannes quietly.

“Yes, I’ve got it right now. You can see the copper of the bottom shining in the sun, and—oh, she’s sunk! she’s gone down quickly, head first, and—why, it was a whale!”

“Hah! you were a long time getting to it, sir. Yes, a whale, a right whale, and a big one, too.”

“Well, quick!” cried Steve excitedly. “Why don’t you hail the deck, and tell them? We must have that.”

“How, sir? with a hook and line?”

“Nonsense! Do you think I don’t know? Have out the boats and harpoon it, the same as you did the white whale.”

The Norseman laughed softly.

“No, no,” he said quietly; “you can’t kill right whales like that, sir. You want proper boats with crews, and harpoons with long lines suitable for the work. Why, that fish would run away with all our lines in a minute at the first wounding. We must be satisfied with looking at it. Has it come up again?”

“Oh yes, and I can see it swimming about and playing in the water.”

“Nice little thing to play, sir. That must be seventy feet long.”

“But are you sure that we could not tire it out?”

“Quite, sir. I once went for a voyage, and pretty well know what whale-fishing is. Hail the deck now and tell the captain; there he is. He’s using his glass; I fancy he has made it out.”

At that moment the captain looked upward.

“Who’s aloft there?” he cried.

“I am, sir—Johannes!”

“There’s something out in the sunshine on the starboard bow; try if you can make it out.”

“We have, sir!” cried Steve; “it’s a large whale.”

“Hullo! you there?”

“Yes, sir. Are you going to try for it?”

“Hah! I can’t quite make it out from here. Eh? Try for it? No, my lad. We are not Greenland whale-fishers. Mind how you come down.”

“Yes, I’ll take care,” replied Steve; and the captain made no reference to the last ascent, but walked away.

“You’ll remember your promise, Johannes?” said Steve after a few minutes.

“Oh yes, sir; never fear. Only give me the chance, and you shall harpoon a white whale and catch your fish.”

But that chance did not seem as if it would come, as the *Hvalross* sailed on over a calm sea day after day, the wind serving well, and the coal-bunkers remaining well charged ready for the days when the cold weather was returning—that was, if they had not already achieved their

aim.

Here and there, as they kept along a mile or so from the floe, it began to show signs of breaking up, for at times loose fields of many acres in extent were passed, and at others detached fragments, imperceptibly gliding southward to dissolve slowly from the combined influence of the sunshine and the warmer sea into which they drifted.

“I say, Mr Handscombe,” said Steve one evening, when the sun in the north-west was shining with a softened radiance which turned the distant ice-floe into gold, “isn’t this getting to be a little tame and—and—”

“Monotonous?” said the doctor, finishing the boy’s sentence, for he had begun to hesitate.

“Yes, I meant something of that kind. I thought we were going to have all kinds of adventures, and it’s always blue sea and the ice away there to the left.”

“Oh, I see,” said the doctor; “you want a bear every day, with a bit of whale-fishing, being lost in the mist, and a few wrecks discovered thrown in.”

“No, I don’t,” said the lad pettishly; “but I don’t want to be always sailing along like this, doing nothing. If you go up in the crow’s-nest there’s ice and sun, and if you stop on deck it’s always the same. I want to be doing something. Look at Skeny here, growing quite fat.”

“Shall I ask Captain Marsham to see if we can’t find the sea-serpent for you?”

“There, now you’re laughing at me.”

“Then don’t be so impatient. Why, you stupid fellow, isn’t it wonderful enough to be sailing along here in what looks like constant summer save for the floating ice, and with that glorious sun going round and round in the sky without setting? Is not this constant daylight alone worth the journey?”

“Ye–es,” replied Steve; “only it does seem a bit wasteful.”

“Wasteful?”

“Yes. What’s the good of having the sun shining when you are asleep? It would be ever so much better to have some of it in the winter, or else for us to be so that we did not want any sleep for months in summer, and did not want to be awake for months in the winter, when it’s dark.”

“I say, Marsham!” cried the doctor, laughing, “come and listen. Here’s our philosopher going to set nature right and improve the whole world.”

“Oh, I say, Mr Handscombe, don’t,” whispered Steve, flushing.

“What does he propose doing?” said the captain as he joined them.

“He wants to keep awake all the summer and sleep all the winter; he says it would be better.”

“Well, he has only to take lessons from the bears and practise hibernating. But, like them, he would no doubt be very hungry when he awoke.”

“He’s getting out of patience, too; wants something to do. Can’t you rig him up a line, and let him try for a shark?”

“No sharks up here,” said Steve promptly.

“Plenty,” said the captain, looking at Steve with a peculiar smile, which made the lad wince, for it seemed to say to him, “Don’t be so conceited, my lad; you don’t know everything yet.”

“Greenland shark, I think it is called. The Finland people fish for it. I say, Jakobsen, could we catch sharks anywhere hereabouts?”

“I don’t know about here, sir,” said the Norseman gravely. “There are plenty near the Greenland shores.”

“How do you catch them?”

“Oh, easily, sir, with a long line and winch to reel it up quickly. You let down a big hook with plenty of bait on it, right to the bottom, on some

bank, about two hundred fathoms down."

"Yes," said Steve eagerly. "That's rather deep, though."

"Yes, sir; but that's where the sharks lie."

"Are they very big?"

"Yes, sir, all sizes—eight and ten and twelve or fourteen feet long."

"Well, what then?" said Steve impatiently.

"Oh, then, sir, you wait for a bite."

"Of course, I know that! You wait for a bite in all fishing. But do you fish from a small boat?"

"Oh no, sir. You go, six or seven of you, in a decent-sized smack, and fish till you've loaded her—if you're lucky."

"But what do you do with the sharks? People don't eat them."

"Make isinglass of their skins?" suggested the doctor.

"Oh no, sir," continued Jakobsen. "I've been out two or three times, and very good trade it is, gentlemen. You sail out to the Greenland banks, and if the weather's good you're all right, for the sharks bite very freely, and as the line's very thin you can soon reel it up on a big winch."

"But don't they fight desperately?" said Steve eagerly. "Sharks are so strong."

"No, sir; they're cruel fish, sharks, but a Greenland shark's about the stupidest, most cowardly fish there is. He could break away easily enough, but when he's hooked and feels the line tight up he comes as quietly as possible, just as if he came to the top to ask what we wanted by hooking him like that."

"And do you tell him?" said the doctor, laughing.

The Norseman shook his head.

“No, sir, we don’t play with him. As soon as the bit of chain appears that’s fastened to the bottom of the line on account of the shark’s teeth—because, if it wasn’t for that, he’d bite through the thin line—some of us stand ready with a big hook at the end of a pole like a spar—a good sharp hook with a rope that runs through a block up aloft rigged to the spar; then, as the shark comes to the top—*click*!—the big hook’s into him, the rope’s tightened, he’s hoisted on board, and before he has time to struggle much he’s whipped up on to the deck, where two of us are ready for him.”

“And what do they do?” cried Steve,—“kill the shark?”

“Yes, sir, and pretty quickly; for when the sharks are biting there’s no time to spare. One of us gives him a crack on the head with a handspike, and the other cuts open his side with a big knife and drags out his great liver; then we use the pipe.”

“Yes, go on,” said Steve.

“And blow the dead shark full of wind and throw it overboard.”

“To keep it from sinking?”

“Yes, sir, that’s quite right; for if we didn’t he’d sink, and all the other sharks would begin feeding on him and wouldn’t bite any more at our bait. Then we get the hook ready, and down it goes again, while the sea-birds get a good feast of shark instead of the fish.”

“All that to get only the liver?” said Steve. “Yes, sir; but then the livers are very large, and from some they get quite a barrel of oil, only that’s from the very large sharks.”

“What do you bait with?” said Steve. “Pieces of shark blubber, sir.”

“And isn’t the flesh good for eating?”

“Poor people eat it sometimes, sir, for it’s nice and white; but we sailors never care for it. It’s fine fishing, though, for you get your hold full of the livers, and take them back to port to be boiled down. Barrel of oil’s worth as much as seven pounds, sir.”

“What do they use it for, lamps or machinery?”

The Norseman stared.

“I thought you knew, sir. It’s a very fine, tasteless oil, and supposed to be very good for sick people. They make cod-liver oil of it.”

Captain Marsham burst into a hearty fit of laughter at the puzzlement and chagrin in his friend’s countenance.

“Stop a moment!” cried the doctor angrily. “Do you mean to tell me that this shark oil is used for—I mean, is sold for cod-liver oil?”

“Yes, sir, I believe so,” said the Norwegian.

“Disgusting! Shameful!” cried the doctor. “What a miserable piece of trickery! The people who do it ought to be exposed.”

“Nonsense!” said the captain. “As Jakobsen says, it is very good for sick people. Why, my dear sir, the good effects of cod-liver oil do not depend upon its being extracted from a cod, but upon its being a rich fish oil, strongly impregnated with the peculiar salts, or whatever you call them, found in sea water. I daresay the oil of any fish liver would be as good.”

“And quite as nasty,” suggested Steve. “Right, my lad, quite as nasty, and would do for doctors to trim the wick of the lamp of life when it is burning low.”

“Humph! perhaps you are right,” said the doctor thoughtfully.

“Can’t we have some shark-fishing, Jakobsen?” cried Steve eagerly.

“Why, you don’t want your lamp trimmed, Steve?” said the captain.

“No, sir; but Mr Handscombe might like some of the oil,” replied Steve, with a laughing look at the frowning doctor, who was evidently thinking deeply.

“Eh? No, my lad, I don’t want any. But I’ve been thinking that perhaps this shark oil may be good.”

“Couldn’t catch sharks here, sir, unless we found a bank.”

“Wait a little longer, Steve,” said the captain, “and I daresay we shall find you something better than fishing for sharks.”

Chapter Fourteen.

The Land of Peaks.

“Here, Steve! Hi, my lad, wake up!”

“Eh? Yes! What is it, whales?” cried the boy, hurrying into his clothes.

“Come and look. You wanted something fresh.” It was the captain who roused him up the very next morning, and on reaching the deck he was perfectly astounded at the scene before him. There was no more monotony in the view, for there before him and spreading to right and left was as lovely a land as the human mind could conceive. It was twenty or thirty miles away, and as Steve Young gazed it was at peak after peak rising up toward the skies, all dazzling with ice and snow, and dyed by the distance, of the most lovely tints of amethyst and sapphire blue, while the icy pinnacles were fretted with silver and gold. Upon the slopes of the lower hills there were even patches of a dull green, made beautiful by the brilliant sunshine, while the steeper mountains were of rich orange and brown or of a clear, pure grey.

“Is this Spitzbergen?” asked Steve. “Yes, and well named,” said the captain, who was using his glass; “the land of mountain points—*spitzes* as they call them, or *piz* in North Italy among the mountains there.”

The wind still favoured them, and they rapidly glided on toward what seemed for hours to be fairyland, and so lovely that Steve spent nearly all the time upon deck, scarcely allowing himself enough to obtain the necessary meals. At last he came to the conclusion that he must be tired and surfeited with the view, for somehow it did not appear to be so beautiful as at first. The dazzling peaks of glittering ice shrank lower and lower, till they disappeared behind hills which had hardly been seen before, and now rose apparently higher and higher, with every ledge

deep in snow, and the steep slopes and perpendicular precipices that in some places ran down to the sea looking grim, grey, or black as they were granite or a dark shaley slate. Not a tree was visible, only in places traces of dry-looking heathery stuff and patches of what looked to be moss. In places the water seemed to be foaming down from a great height inland to the sea; but in a short time, as they neared the land, the cascades proved to be ice, and Steve woke to the fact that the place was far more beautiful at a distance, when its rugged asperities were softened and seen through a medium which tinged everything of a delicious blue. That he was not alone in this way of thinking was soon proved by the doctor's remark as he joined him.

"What a land of desolation, Steve!" he said.

"I thought you said it was beautiful?"

"Yes, at a distance, my lad. But close in: look at it—ice, snow, rocks, everywhere. I suppose we are too early in the summer for anything green and bright to be seen."

"Here's Johannes," said Steve, as the big Norwegian came by. "I say, what shall we find here, Johannes? It looks to be a very bleak spot."

"Not for a visit, sir," replied the man. "It is a grand place for game."

"Game? What game?"

"Reindeer, sir. A good fat buck will be a pleasant addition to the salt and preserved meat."

"Of course; and what else?"

"A kind of grouse, sir; abundance of wild ducks. Then, for the use of the ship for cargo, there should be an abundance of seals, and no doubt before long we shall encounter the walrus, if other people have not been before us and scared them away. Lastly, sir, I think it very likely that we shall find your friends in one of the sheltered fiords along the coast."

That was enough. Steve glowed with excitement, and when, later on, the vessel was steered slowly in between a couple of great grim headlands

and quitted the heaving sea for still water, his eyes began to search the shore on both sides for a signal-staff or some signs of occupation.

But at the end of half a mile sails had to be lowered, for a barrier of ice extended right across the fiord, and any further search would require to be performed on foot. But no one repined at that. It was delightful after being cooped up on shipboard so long. A boat was lowered, guns and ammunition placed therein, the four Norwegians took their places with the walrus lances, and, very much to Andrew's disgust, he was not selected to act as gunbearer, Hamish being taken instead.

"We don't want to be left in the lurch again, Steve," said the captain, "if we do happen to meet a bear. What do you say, Johannes? There are bears here, I suppose?"

"For certain, sir. You never know where you may meet them. But this is hardly the place. You see, there are not likely to be any seals here. Where there are seals there are pretty sure to be bears."

"What are we likely to get, then?" asked the doctor.

"Deer, sir. If we go cautiously up the valley yonder, we shall see the deer where the snow has melted off the slope. There will be moss there."

But a long and tedious tramp over exceedingly tangled ground followed their landing, and they trudged along among stones, over snow, and through swampy patches, where there were wild fowl; but these were left in peace in the hope of a more substantial addition to the larder being found.

Snow was all around them, but the sun poured down with so much power that they were all pretty well exhausted when the captain proposed that they should endeavour to make their way back by another valley, separated from the one they were in merely by a lofty hog-back-like range of rocky hill.

"I saw wild fowl going in that direction, and we must direct our attention to them now."

Jakobsen gave his opinion that such a course was quite possible, and

leading the way he struck along a narrow gulley, which evidently connected the two valleys at the end of the range.

The walking was worse than ever there, and Steve was beginning to lag and wish that some one else would carry his heavy gun, when Jakobsen, who had passed out of sight behind a chaotic mass of rocks, suddenly came hurriedly back.

“He has seen deer,” whispered Johannes, who was close beside Steve, and seemed to look upon himself as the boy’s bodyguard.

Jakobsen held up his hand to make the party stop, and the next minute he was close up.

“Reindeer,” he whispered. “Four just round the point yonder feeding on the moss. Come.”

“Stay back, the rest of you,” said the captain in a low voice. “You can come, Steve, my lad, and you, Johannes, be cautious.”

Then the novel kind of deer-stalking commenced, Jakobsen leading and taking advantage of every block of stone, turning round at times to make sure that his companions were keeping out of sight, and at last coming to a stand at where the defile they were threading opened out into a plain.

He was behind a mass of rocks whose hollows were filled up with ice; and when all were together he whispered to them to be ready, and then clambered up till he was high enough to peer over cautiously before descending.

“They are very wild and cautious,” he whispered; “but they have not moved. Go forward now, creeping from rock to rock, and you are sure of one or two.”

“Come, Steve,” whispered the captain. “Don’t fire unless I tell you. Be ready to hand me your gun if I miss.”

He went off to the right of the pile of rocks, and the doctor took the left, all stooping and sheltering themselves till the end of the stones was reached; and upon raising himself a little so as to peer round the last,

there, not fifty yards away, and grazing or tearing up the moss with their feet, were four deer, with their peculiarly shaped, branching antlers, and all apparently in perfect ignorance of danger being so near.

“Can you see Mr Handscombe?” whispered the captain, drawing back to speak.

“No, he is not in sight.”

“I’ll wait, then, so as to give him a chance of getting within shot as well. It will steady my hand, too.”

“What’s that?” whispered Steve, as a sound like one stone being thrown against another reached his ear.

The captain reached forward again, and uttered an exclamation which brought Steve close up just in time to see the four deer bounding away, and to have his ears half deafened by the report of the piece, for the captain fired directly.

“Gone! Lost them!” he cried, as the deer tore on.

“Fire again.”

“With small shot?” said the captain. “No use, my lad. And I should have been so glad to have got a brace of these deer. It would have been such a good change for the men.”

“Hooray!” shouted Steve. “One’s down!” For all at once the foremost of the deer stopped short, then staggered on a few yards, stopped again, and fell.

At that moment a rifle shot rang out from their left, and the last of the flying deer pitched headlong amongst the stones and lay kicking.

“Well done, doctor! and a very long shot, too! Ahoy, Johannes! Jakobsen!” he shouted as he placed a fresh cartridge in his gun. Then, as the men came up, “There you are! We’ll get back to the boat with the fresh provisions. What shall you do, cut them up here?”

“No, sir; tie their legs, and carry them on the lance-poles. We are enough to manage them.”

In a very short time the two deer were being borne, hanging head downwards, over the rough ground till the ice was reached, and finally the boat, the welcome supply of fresh meat being greeted with a cheer as it was hauled up over the side to the deck of the *Hvalross*; and that evening the cook had a busy time, while, as Steve remarked, the smell of that kind of cooking was far better than that which prevailed when the Norsemen were busy rendering down the oil.

Chapter Fifteen.

A Tale of the Winter Cold.

The shore looked more attractive the next morning, probably from the fact that all on board the *Hvalross* had had a most enjoyable supper of fresh meat, and afterwards a long—what Steve called day’s—night’s rest; so that every one was on the alert and eager to carry out the captain’s orders.

So as not to lose time steam was got up at once, and Captain Marsham explained his intentions, which were to go up the west coast until stopped by the ice, and on the way search the different fiords and bays for signs of the lost party. Failing to find them, he said that they would return to their starting-point, and then proceed in the same way southward, and round to the east coast, and ascend that.

“I don’t think it is a question of scouting along the land in the search,” said the captain, “but of being here, for it must be a matter of accident our finding them. We shall of course build up a cairn wherever we touch, with a paper in it telling when we landed and the direction we take, in case they come here after we have gone.”

“And you will go on hunting and fishing as we touch at place after place?”

“Certainly, until we have filled the tanks. That will enable me to prolong my journey, and, if necessary, repeat it next year.”

Steve looked at the captain in horror, but said nothing; and directly after a cairn had been built at the most conspicuous point of the entrance to the fiord, and a letter left in a meat canister inside, the *Hvalross* slowly steamed out, and advanced northward, entering fiord after fiord, and searching vainly. There were always the same forbidding cliffs capped with snow, masses of ice piled up, and the ravines filled with glaciers, and here and there inlets whose entrances were completely frozen up, and not likely to be open for a month. But there was no sign of cairn or signal-post. No human being had left a trace of landing there, and the journey north was continued.

“Why, Johannes,” said the captain on the second evening, after they had spent about a couple of hours in shooting wild fowl to replenish the larder and keep the men in good health with plenty of fresh provisions, “I thought as soon as we reached this wild region we should find deer, bears, and walrus in abundance; and here we have been touching at place after place for two days, and not seen a single animal since we shot the deer.”

“No, sir; it is a matter of accident,” replied the Norseman. “There are plenty; but every year they get farther away, for they are hunted so much that they shun the places where vessels come.”

Their words came plainly to where Steve was busy with a glass; for, after the shooting was over, and the men in one of the boats had collected all the slain to hand over to the cook, who immediately made Watty Links discontented by setting him to pluck the birds, the lad had ascended to the crow’s-nest to have a look round.

It was very wonderful, that outlook to Steve; but it seemed to him awful and depressing. It was so silent and so strange that at times even the continuous daylight caused him to feel a sensation of shrinking, especially when seen through the telescope; for there were moments when he felt as if he were passing into some far-off, weird wonderland, a land of solemn silence, where life could not exist; and at such moments he would take his eye from the glass, and look down at the men on deck and see signs of human creatures being near to carry off the strange sensation.

He had just been passing through one of these fits; for it was evening, and though broad daylight, with the sun shining, there was a peculiarity in the sky to northward, a something he could not well have explained, which made him feel that night was at hand. And as he leaned against the side of the crow's-nest he listened to what was said on deck, and then once more gazed to the northward, following the line of coast, and then giving a start; for a few miles only from where they were gliding onward he saw unmistakably that their journey in that direction was at an end.

He carefully adjusted the glass so as to make sure, and found that it was so: the icy barrier was jammed tight on to the land, and on following it to the westward it extended in one solid wall right away till it was lost in the distance.

Sweeping back to the coast, he searched carefully to see if there were any opening or fiord by which they could pass onward; but there was not a sign, and he was just about to announce his discovery, when he caught sight of something about a mile away, standing out plainly on a low headland, with the black face of a large cliff behind to throw it up so clearly that he wondered why he had not seen it at the first.

Steve Young.

"At last!" he said, with his heart beating violently and a curious choking sensation rising to his throat. For there, looking dim now as he glanced through the glass once more, was a wooden cross, evidently set up as a signal, the first trace of human occupation of that solemn, solitary land; and it was some moments before his emotion would let him hail the deck.

"Ahoy there!" he shouted; then exultantly, but in a tone of voice which did not sound like his own, "Ice right ahead, and a signal showing about a mile away!"

"What!" shouted Captain Marsham. "Stop a minute; I'll come up."

He ran to the shrouds, and began to climb rapidly and as actively as either of the men till he was close beneath the great cask.

"Don't stir, my boy," he said; "I'll find room for both. Now then," he

continued, as the trap beneath their feet was closed, “where’s the signal?”

“Follow the coast-line for about a mile,” cried Steve eagerly, as he handed the glass, “and you will see a great black cliff with hardly a scrap of snow upon it. Then, low down on a piece of level ground—”

“I have it!” cried the captain; “a large post.” His tone of eager satisfaction changed to one that was very solemn and grave: “It is a cross, Steve,” he said.

“Yes, a great wooden cross. Don’t you think they set it up there as a signal?”

“I think some one set it up there as a sign, my boy,” said Captain Marsham gravely.

“And that some one is living there?” cried Steve.

The captain did not answer, but changed the direction of the glass.

“Yes,” he said; “there is the pack, fast for another month, unless we have a storm to break it up. We’ll go on a mile or two, and then turn back. Come along down.”

He began to descend at once, and Steve followed, wondering at his manner, and feeling sad now; for he concluded that, from his experience and knowledge of such matters, the captain felt that they had reached Spitzbergen too late to save their friends alive.

As soon as the deck was reached orders were given to increase the speed a little, Johannes joining the captain on the bridge to keep a careful look-out for danger where there was none, for the water was perfectly clear of rocks and deep right up to the cliffs; so that a quarter of an hour later they were abreast of the cross, a boat was lowered, and Captain Marsham was rowed ashore.

Steve was the first to leap upon the rocks, and then the little party made their way up a slope to the level patch on which stood the rough sign, and, in addition, two more, which had not been perceived till they were

close up; while of greater interest still, close under the perpendicular black cliff, some four or five hundred feet high, was a low, square, wooden hut, built up of old ship's timbers. They made at once for this, leaving the singularly shaped wooden crosses; and once more a feeling of awe crept over Steve, and he whispered to the captain asking him if he thought it was their friends.

"Oh no," was the quick reply. "Didn't you understand? The remains of some Russian party. The crosses told that."

Steve felt relieved, and curiosity had begun to take the place of the shrinking sensation he had felt on seeing that the woodwork was grey and mossy, much of it greatly decayed, and that the rough door had fallen away from its hinges and lay across the opening which it had been used to close. The timbers had been caulked with moss, and no doubt had had snow piled up against them, to keep out the penetrating cold, while the nearly flat roof was covered with stones.

All this was seen almost at a glance as they paused by the door, and then the captain stooped his head and entered the low, cabin-like place, followed by the doctor and Steve.

The place was fairly extensive inside, and fitted up with a long, low, stone bench, upon which lay quantities of dry sea-weed, the whole having evidently been used for the occupants' bed. In the middle of the hut was an arrangement of stones, with a roughly contrived flue, which had formed a kind of stove for heating and cooking, and in it still lay a quantity of ashes and some charred fragments of oak that must have been bits of ships' timber.

That was all visible at first; but in the darkest part of the hut, farthest from the door, the low, bench-like erection was piled with sea-weed apparently, till they drew closer and found that there were several mouldy bear-skins, from which the hair had rotted, and which came away in fragments upon being touched.

It was Steve who gave a tug at one of the skins, and, throwing the pieces down, he was about to drag another one right off, when the captain checked him.

“Let him rest,” he said gravely; and Steve started back as he realised the fact that he was disturbing the resting-place of the dead.

He looked at the captain in horror as if to question him with his eyes, and the answer came.

“Yes, some unfortunate Russian party, evidently left to winter here, and they died off one by one. Let us go and look at the crosses.”

It was with a sensation of relief that they all stood out once more in the soft, bright sunshine, and breathed the clear, cold air, which came fresh from the ice-fields; and soon after they stopped before the crosses, beneath which were the resting-places of five unfortunate men.

“There is the history written plainly enough,” said Captain Marsham in a low voice, as if talking to himself. “These were the party of six left here to collect skins during the winter, to be fetched away the next season. One man died, and his kindly-hearted companions laboriously made that rough, wooden coffin, and dug a few inches into this icy rock for its reception. They covered it with these stones to guard it from wild beasts, and put up this elaborate timber with its three cross-pieces, cut in Russian characters as we see. Then another died, and his four companions treated him nearly the same as the first; there was as much care taken to bury him, and the cross is nearly as grand as the first. The third man died, and the survivors were not able to do so much; the grave is more shallow, the coffin rougher, and there is only one cross-piece. Then we have here the fourth man’s resting-place—very shallow, and only an upright post, with his initials, two letters roughly scored by a feeble hand, by one of the two survivors. Then look at this.”

He took a few steps to where Steve shrinkingly saw a hollow in which, barely covered by small pieces of rock and ice, lay the remains of a man, from which all turned without a word. For it wanted no words to tell how he had pined and died, and been dragged to his last resting-place by his feeble companion, the last of the party, so helpless now that he could not chip out a grave, but was fain to lay his dead companion in a natural rift, and slowly pile over him little pieces of the stone and ice around; then crawl back into the hut to lie there, covered by the skins, waiting for the dawn to come after the long, long wintry night, and bring with it the hopes

of rescue which came too late.

The Norseman who had stood by the graves with his cap in his hands went softly away on tip-toe to the boat, and the captain said sadly: “There is something very awful as well as grand up here in these solitudes. Poor fellows! What a history they have left behind! Steve, lad, it is a painful sight for you.”

“Yes,” said the boy huskily, and his voice shook as he looked up apologetically at the speaker. “I can’t help it—makes me feel quite ill and weak; for when I think of it all, and of those who must have been hoping they would return like some one we know, I feel as if I could sit down and cry.”

“Hah!” ejaculated the doctor; and as the others looked at him he sharply turned away his face.

“Yes, it is very sad,” said the captain briskly; “but we will not take that view of the case, my lad. Let’s only be thankful that you were wrong in your ideas. Our friends would be better provided than these poor fellows were, and I have always a strong feeling that we shall find them alive and well.”

An hour later they had been right up, pretty close to the barrier of ice which stopped further progress to the north; and as there was a pleasant breeze from the north-east, sail was set, the fires damped, and away they went southward toward the fiord where the deer had been shot in the valley.

This was reached late the next evening, and they landed to try for more deer, an adventure attended with so much success that on the following day, when they began to sail southward, they had twelve fine, fat deer lying in the hold in ice, and another in the hands of the cook for present use.

“Seems rather wholesale, doesn’t it?” said Steve to the doctor.

“Yes, my boy; but meat will keep for years in this climate if once frozen; and,” he added with a laugh, “you must make your hay when the sun shines.”

“And freeze it afterwards,” said Steve, smiling.

Chapter Sixteen.

Battle Royal.

Days and days were spent exploring the coast southward, the party landing wherever there was an opportunity offered by a likely spot; but the most southern point of the mountain land was reached without a sign, and several walrus boats were spoken by way of obtaining news, but without result. Then, as the ice was densely packed, preventing any attempt being made to search the eastern shore, a course was laid for the great neighbouring island, the *Hvalross* sailing steadily north-east a short distance from the pack.

They had had a good evening's shooting the night before, and to the great delight of Andrew, Hamish, and the cook quite a load of fine ducks had been brought on board by the boat; but as Steve was going forward to take a favourite position of his by the bowsprit, he found that another member of the crew was not so highly pleased, for Watty was seated outside the galley door with a goose in his lap and a bucket by his side, busily plucking out the feathers and down, which, partly from the angry energy with which he was working, partly from the breeze, were flying in all directions, and especially all over his blue jersey and into his shock hair, which had been well anointed with the bear's grease he had carefully saved up from the day when the fat was boiled.

When Steve approached Watty seemed to be singing as he plucked, for there was a mumbling, burring noise, and Steve turned to Andrew, who happened to be close at hand seated upon the deck, fastening a line to the edge of a sail.

"Why, Andra," he said, "do you hear that?"

"Oh ay, she hears it," replied the sailor.

"Do you know what it puts me in mind of?"

"Na, she dinna ken, Meester Stevey. A coo waiting for the lassie with the milk-pail, maype."

“No,” said Steve; “it’s just like the drone of your pipes heard in the cuddy with the hatch on.”

“Fwhat? Na, na, she’ll not pe a pit like tat. Ta pipes is music—coot music, Meester Stevey; for there’s na music like ta pagpipes—ta gran’ Hielan’ pagpipes. But she kens she’s chust cracking a choke with me.”

“No, I’m not. Listen; it does sound just like it.”

“Na, na, laddie,” said Andrew after a pause to listen; “she’s mair like ta collie tog when she sees a cat, or maype it’s mair like ta bummel-bees among ta heather upo’ ta hills in bonnie Scotland.”

“Well, it sounds very comic whatever it’s like. Look here’s Skeny coming up to see what’s the matter; look how he’s cocking his ears.”

“Oh ay, she thinks it’s a coo wants driving hame.”

“No, he knows it’s Watty. Look at him.”

“Ay, she can see ta tog. An’ it’s a fine tog, eh, Skene? Come alang, and I’ll gie ye a pinch o’ sneeshin’.”

“No, no, don’t tease the dog!” cried Steve, as Andrew took out an old snuff-mull, opened it, and held it out to the dog.

“Nay, she’ll na tease the tyke. Skene hasna larnt to tak’ ta sneeshing. But it’s ferra coot for ta nose, Skeny.”

And all the while Watty’s peculiar burring sound kept on and increased, the dog looking hard at him with his ears up, and finally giving a short, sharp bark. “Do you hear that, Watty?” said Steve.

“Ay; she heart ta tyke.”

“Skene wants the second verse of the song.”

“Then he’ll ha’e to wait,” said the boy; and he went on again with the monotonous burring sound which had first attracted Steve’s attention.

“What’s the matter with him, Andra?”

“She’s making up a lang story spout ta cook. She’s been retty to fecht, and ta cook said she’d ding her het again’ ta galley if she tidn’t pick ta goose.”

“Ay, but she’ll mak’ my ploot poil pefore she’s tone,” cried Watty fiercely, and scattering a handful of feathers so that some of them and the down flew on to Steve.

“Make your ploot poil?” cried Steve, laughing.

“Ay; and it poils now!” cried Watty, scattering some more feathers purposely, so that they should adhere to his trousers.

“There, I told you he was singing, Andra. His ploot poils, and he was singing like a kettle.”

“My mither sent me to sea to learn to pe a sailor, and ta skipper’s made me ta cook’s poy!” cried Watty vehemently.

“Then you shouldn’t have been such a coward, Watty. There, don’t be in a temper, and I’ll speak to the captain to let you come back to the other duties.”

“Hey, put she’s a puir feckless potie, and dinna ken the when she’s well off. She wishes ta captain wad pit her in ta galley, to get ta fairst wee tasties of all ta gravies and good things ta cook potie mak’s.”

“But he’s tired of it now, Andra. I say, Watty, look here; you’re smothering me with that fluff!”

“Then she should get ower to ta ither side of ta fessel.”

“I’ll knock you to the other side of the vessel if you’re saucy!” cried Steve hotly. “See if I speak to the captain for you now!”

“She dinna want ye to speak. She can speak her ainsel’ when she wants, and she ton’t want; for she’ll stop in ta galley the noo till we get pack to Glasgie and goo pefore ta magistrates aboot it. There!”

This last word was accompanied by a handful of down thrown in the air so that it might be wafted right over Steve.

This was too much for the boy's equanimity, and, hot with passion, he snatched a handful of the down from the pail and rubbed it in Watty's shock head, to Andrew's great delight.

"Weel tone, laddie!" he cried; "tat's ponnie. Gie her anither handfu' of the saft doon."

Now, for some time past Watty, for reasons best known to himself, had been nursing up feelings of the nature that would, in other conditions, have developed into a regular Highland feud. He was jealous of Steve in every way. It annoyed him that a boy younger than he should be dressed better, work less, and live in the cabin, while he had to share the meals of the men when the cook did not make him eat in the galley. In addition, after long brooding over what he called his "wrangs," and in his dislike to the lad who had shown himself to be more plucky, and brought him, as he called it, to shame, he had nursed up the idea that Steve was only a coward at heart, that all his acts were put on for show, and that if he could only find a chance he would risk getting into trouble if it should reach the captain's ears, and give the object of his dislike a good thrashing.

And now the opportunity had come, and there was plenty of excuse. Steve had dared to rub all that down into his sacred, well-greased, red locks; and springing up and looking as if his "ploot really tit poil," he swung round the goose he was plucking, and, using it as if it were an elastic war-club, he brought it with excellent aim bang against Steve's head.

More blood began to boil now, for, with a cry of rage at what, forgetting his own provocation, he looked upon as a daring insult, Steve ran two or three steps—ran away, Watty thought; and exulting in his imaginary triumph, he followed to strike his adversary again with his absurd weapon; but to his utter astonishment, before the blow could fall, Steve, who seemed to be stooping to avoid the attack, sprang up, and, raising both hands, struck downward.

The result was curious. As Steve struck downwards Watty, in delivering his blow, leaned forwards, placing his head just in the proper position to receive the weapon and its contents with which the English lad had armed himself. That weapon was the bucket full of feathers, and Steve's anger went off like a flash, for he had completely extinguished Watty, who staggered back, dropping the bird, blinded, half suffocated by the down, and so confused for a few moments that even when he had thrust off the bucket from his head he stood coughing and sneezing, staggering about in his blind endeavours to escape.

"Weel done, laddie; tat's prave. Gie it ta saucy callant again. She'll sweep up ta feathers when she's tone," cried Andrew in ecstasy.

But now Watty's blood boiled right over, and as soon as his eyes were clear he rushed at Steve with an angry yell, fists doubled, teeth set; and, regardless of the goose hurled in his face, he continued his charge right home and up to his adversary's guard.

The next minute they were fighting hard, blow succeeding blow in the most unscientific way; but the end was not to be then, for Andrew cried in a hoarse whisper:

"Rin, laddie, rin! Here's ta skipper."

Watty heard the terrible words—words awful to him—and he did "rin."

Not far. The galley door was open, and close at hand. Into it he darted like a fox into its hole, and Steve stood alone, covered with feathers, to face the captain and Mr Handscombe, who, hearing the scuffling forward, hurried up to see the cause.

"Highly creditable, upon my word!" cried Captain Marsham, frowning. "Could not you find anything more sensible to do than to get into this disgraceful quarrel with the ship's boy?"

Steve stood breathing hard, flushed with anger and mortification.

"I'd try a sweep next time, Stephen," said the doctor sarcastically; "he would not come off worse upon you than this fellow has done."

“He insulted and struck me,” stammered Steve. “You would not have had me stand still and submit to that, sir?”

“I don’t want to hear anything about it,” said the captain sternly; “it is disgraceful, and I gave you credit for knowing better.”

The captain walked back to the companion hatch and descended to the cabin, leaving Steve, the doctor, Hamish, and Andrew looking at each other.

“Well, sir,” said the doctor, “you’ve done it this time. Have you any idea what an object you look?”

“No,” said Steve, in a tone of voice which told of his mortification.

“Go to your cabin, then, and look in the glass. I should prescribe a little water, too!”

“Hadn’t I better jump overboard for it, then?” cried Steve bitterly.

“Bah! Rubbish! Don’t talk nonsense!” cried the doctor, catching the lad by the arm.

“Why, what’s the matter?” said the mate, coming up hurriedly.

“Oh, nothing much. We’ve had an accident, and spilt some feathers about the deck, and it has made the captain angry about the way in which it was done. Have them cleared up, man. Come along, Steve lad; and don’t look like that,” he whispered, as he half dragged the lad away.

Chapter Seventeen.

Moral Surgery.

“How easy it is to get into trouble!” said Steve; “and what a watch one has to keep over one’s self! There I was, as happy and contented as could be, only a little while ago, and now everything’s miserable. I wouldn’t care if the captain had not spoken to me like that.”

“Go and tell him you’re sorry,” said the doctor.

“I can’t.”

“But you must, my lad. You were in the wrong, weren’t you?”

“I don’t think so. It was all a bit of fun. I never expected that the boy would turn like that.”

“Well, wasn’t it foolish of you to go making a playmate of such a rough, common lad? I’m not snobbish, Steve, but I think people get on better who make friends in their own class; and if your poor father could have seen you fighting a—”

“Oh, don’t, don’t!” cried Steve, “pray! I know I behaved like a blackguard, and it served me right.”

“There, now you’re behaving like a human donkey, my lad, and talking nonsense. Put it aside now. You’re hot and excited. Let me give you a sedative draught.”

“Oh, Mr Handscombe!” cried the lad passionately. “To talk of physic at a time like this!”

“There you go again!” cried the doctor, unconsciously using Watty Links’s expression. “You’ve made your blood boil, and it wants cooling down.”

“Then I’ll drink some water or suck a lump of ice,” said Steve bitterly. “I can’t take physic now.”

“Nonsense, you excitable young donkey!” cried the doctor. “I meant a mental sedative draught. I want you to hear reason, if you will listen to me.”

“I don’t want to listen; I only want to be alone, sir.”

“Yes, to get into a stupid, morbid state, when a little bit of brave surgery—moral surgery—on your part would set all right.”

“There *you* go again, sir!” cried Steve querulously. “One minute you want

to give me pills and a draught, the next you want to begin cutting me to pieces."

The doctor burst out laughing.

"That's right," cried Steve, "laugh at me; I deserve it;" and at that moment he wished that he was a little child again, so that he could go and hide himself away, and relieve his feelings by crying fit to break his heart. But he did not say to himself "cry"; he put it as "blubber like a great girl."

"Be quiet, my lad; and, believe me, I can feel for you and want to help you. I'm a doctor, and I talked metaphorically, as, of course, you know. By moral surgery I meant one brave bit of mastery over self, and cutting the trouble right out. There's no hiding the fact; you, as a gentleman's son, ought not to have been found fighting with the ship's boy, and under such ludicrous circumstances; now, ought you?"

"No, I suppose not," replied Steve; "but—"

"Never mind the 'buts,' my lad. You own that you are in the wrong?"

"Yes."

"Then go and wash your face and brush all that fluff off your jacket. Then pluck up, and like a man go in to the captain; keep cool—you'll be cooler by that time—and tell him exactly how it all was; say you are sorry, and—Don't keep on shaking your head like that, sir; you'll be doing some injury to your spinal column."

"But I can't go and tell him that, after the way in which he looked and spoke to me."

"Yes, you can, sir."

"No."

"There you go, shaking your head again. Tell him you were in the wrong."

"That I'll be a good boy, and won't do so any more."

“Well, is there anything to be ashamed of in that, sir?”

“I couldn’t do it—I wouldn’t do it.”

“Then you’re a coward.”

“No, I’m not,” retorted Steve angrily.

“You are—a miserable moral coward; and I thought you had more pluck in you—more of the honest, manly pluck of an English boy who is brave enough to own to a fault.”

“I’m not a coward,” muttered Steve. “I’d show you if there was any occasion,” and he stood frowning.

“Bah! Any big, strong, stupid fellow, with no brains to boast about, can jump overboard to save any one or do anything of that kind. I want to see you act like a brave fellow who is ready to make a bit of sacrifice of his own feelings, and behave in a manly way. Come, I’m giving you good advice. We shall have bad weather enough to deal with out in the open; we don’t want any moral bad weather in the cabin. Go to the captain, and speak out frankly. Do you know what he will do?”

“Look at me, as he did just now.”

“That’s insulting a brave man and my friend, sir,” said the doctor sternly. “I know Captain Marsham better than you do, then. He will do nothing of the kind. He will listen calmly and dispassionately to all you have to say, and then perhaps point out a few things.”

“To humiliate me!” cried Steve.

“There you go again, blazing out. No, hardly to humiliate you; but, even if he does, who the salts of tartar are you, sir, that you are not to be spoken to and humiliated a bit when you have gone wrong?”

“Oh, I’m nobody,” said Steve bitterly; “I’m a donkey and an ass.”

“Yes,” said the doctor quietly, “but that is rather running wild; a donkey and an ass are the same thing, Stevey, my lad. If the captain says a few

things to cut your comb a little, they will do you good; and I am as certain as that I am sitting here that he will end by saying, ‘There, my boy, then, that’s an end of it. Let it be a lesson to you. Now shake hands.’”

“He wouldn’t say that. He’d send me out of the cabin feeling more miserable than I feel now.”

“I know better than that, my lad. You’re punishing yourself.”

“Then, if a boy strikes me I’m not to strike him again?” cried Steve.

“Humph! Well, I did not say that, my lad, exactly.”

“What was I to do, sir? Was I to let that miserable, disagreeable young rascal, who has been insulting and sneering at me ever since we started from Nordoe, knock me about, and I not retaliate?”

The doctor looked puzzled.

“Go in and shake hands with the captain; he’s in his cabin.”

“No, he isn’t. I heard him go on deck, sir. But you didn’t answer me.”

“I told you that you couldn’t fight with a boy like that. Look at your clothes.”

“Oh yes, I know, sir. I’m all over feathers; but you don’t say anything about what I asked: was I to let him knock me about and crow over me?”

“Well—er,” said the doctor, “you might have kicked him.”

“And that would have been cowardly, and he would have kicked me again. It’s worse to fight with the feet than it is to fight with the hands.”

“Humph! Well, yes, I suppose it is,” muttered the doctor; “but never mind that. Go on deck as soon as you’re decent, and talk to the captain there.”

“I can’t, sir.”

“Then will you go to him when he comes down?”

Steve shook his head, and the doctor began to grow warm.

“Now, don’t be absurd and obstinate, sir,” he cried; “do as I advise you, and let’s get this miserable trouble out of the way. The cabin’s too small, and we all want to help one another too much, for our little commonwealth to be at sixes and sevens. Come, pitch all that shame and cowardice overboard.”

“Do you mean to say, sir, that I did wrong in pitching—I mean in hitting that hot-headed Scotch boy again when he hit me?”

“I did not bring you down here to argue out questions of that kind, sir.”

“But you might answer me, sir. I want to know whether I really was in the wrong.”

“Take it that you were,” said the doctor.

“No, sir, I can’t. I don’t feel convinced. If you had been in my place—”

“I’m not going to answer any such questions, Steve, and you have no right to put them to me. I tell you I am not going to be cross-examined by you, sir, on all kinds of pros and cons. This is a matter that I want settled at once for both of your sakes—there, for all our sakes. Now go.”

Steve shook his head again.

“I don’t feel as if I can.”

“Then you’re a more stubborn fellow than I took you to be; and I can assure you, Steve, I feel that, with a lad whom I have always tried to make my friend. Now, have I not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then do as I say, Steve. Come, like a man.”

“I can’t now.”

“There you go again, repeating this obstinate can’t, can’t, can’t, when all

the time you can."

"But tell me this, sir. Supposing—"

"Look here, boy, am I your doctor, or am I not?"

"No, sir, I haven't been ill," said Steve drily.

"You're ill now. Your nerves are all jarred, your head's in an unwonted state of excitement, and your pulse is going—though I have not felt it—far above its normal rate. You are ill, sir, bodily and mentally, in a regular peevish state of excitement; and as your doctor, speaking perfectly honestly and straightforwardly, I say to you that the medicine you require is mental; that you have only to go to the captain and have a few words based on my advice, and you will be well again directly."

"I'm not ill," said Steve coldly.

"You are, sir; and mental illness is worse than an ordinary bodily ailment. Now, will you go?"

"Will you answer me this one question, sir, first?"

"No. Well, yes, I will, if it's a sensible one; and then I shall expect you to go at once to make yourself tidy and see the captain. Now, then, it's very weak of me, but I'll do it this once. What is it?"

"Suppose, sir—"

"Oh, hang your supposes; let's have facts!"

"Suppose, sir," continued Steve, watching the doctor intently the while, "you were a boy like I am."

"What nonsense! Well, go on, boy."

"And a big rough-headed Scotch lad, after annoying you in all kinds of ways, hit you in a most insulting manner. What would you do?"

"I'd try and knock his head off!" cried the doctor hotly. "I—that is—I mean

—I don’t approve of fighting—I—hang the boy! How stupid of me! I mean I think I should have complained to the captain, and asked him to have the fellow flogged.”

“Captains on board ships like this can’t have the boys flogged,” said Steve drily.

“Punished, then.”

“You said what you would do, sir, at first, and then turned it off. I did the same, and you’ve been blaming me.”

“Well, well; yes, yes, Steve, I did; but let’s leave that question alone, my lad. It’s one that has never yet been thoroughly settled on account of its difficulty. I don’t approve of fighting, but there are times when—that is—you see it’s a very awkward question that we had better leave. I spoke hastily, and I’m afraid that I have done more harm than good. Come, you’ll shake hands with me?”

Steve eagerly held out his.

“That’s right,” said the doctor, gripping the extended palm. “And you’ll take my advice?”

Steve shook his head.

“I can’t yet, sir.”

“Steve, my boy, you send quite a chill through me,” cried the doctor angrily. “I’m as cold as if the weather had suddenly changed and a biting wind were coming off the ice.”

“My head’s quite hot, sir; but it does feel as if it were cold.”

“Of course. Nerves, Steve, nerves; unwonted excitement. Hah! Here’s the captain coming into the cabin. Now’s your time.”

Steve shook his head.

“You must go now. Here, I’ll run and tell him you want to speak to him.”

“No, sir; pray don’t.”

The door opened, and Captain Marsham came in quickly.

“Come on deck, Handscombe,” he said, as he stood at the door putting on a pea-jacket. “You had better have a coat, for there is a remarkable change. The wind has turned nearly due north, and I’m afraid we are going to have a heavy snow-blast. Quick! the change is worth seeing.”

He did not even glance at Steve, but turned away, and the doctor followed, to stop at the door.

“There, go and wash yourself, my lad. It has turned cold, but let’s get this over; we have no time for quarrelling here on board ship.”

He hurried out, and left Steve in the cabin alone with his bitter thoughts.

Chapter Eighteen.

Nature in the North.

“All this trouble about nothing,” muttered Steve, as soon as he was alone; and he mechanically went to the little washing-sink to remove the traces of the fight.

His actions were slow for a few moments, but they soon grew quicker, for he could hear Captain Marsham giving orders in a sharp, peremptory way.

There was an icy wind blowing through the open window and a peculiar whistling sound in the air, and as he hurriedly washed he knew by the rattling noises, faintly as they reached his ears, that the men were getting the furnace going and shovelling on coals.

By the time he was fit to be seen he had heard order after order given, and the men hurrying about, so that when he went on deck he was not surprised to find that they had shortened sail and were reefing those which were left. But the next instant he was startled by the change which

had taken place since he went below.

Away to the north beyond the ice cliffs all had been bright and dazzling; now the sky was overcast, the sun had disappeared, and though a little blue sky was visible to the south it was a dingy kind of blue, fast becoming grey.

The whistling he had heard below had gone on increasing till the wind sang through the cordage, and made the canvas tug and strain at the ropes which held it. Then it died away to a faint whisper, like a sigh of weariness at the exertion.

The ice to the north was only dimly seen after a few minutes, for a thick haze appeared to be gathering in that direction, but high up, and not in any way resembling the fog which had come down upon them twice and appeared to be resting on the sea.

Steve had hardly grasped the state of affairs when Captain Marsham caught sight of him.

“Here, Steve, my lad,” he cried, quite in his old manner, “you had better get on your fur cap and mackintosh if you are going to stay on deck. Sharp! we shall have the storm upon us in a few minutes.”

Those words were quite cheering, and the lad hurried down to make the change suggested, noting, before he went into the cabin, that their course was altered, and the *Hvalross’s* head lay to the south-east.

“He doesn’t want to be near the ice in a storm,” thought Steve; and, strange enough as it appeared to him, he felt comparatively happy, a big, real trouble making the petty affair over which he had felt so despondent begin to fade away.

When he reappeared Captain Marsham was forward seeing to the extra lashing of the boats, which were drawn on board, and a glance showed him that Johannes and Andrew were at the wheel—that is, one was holding the spokes, while the other had been ordered there ready to render aid if it were required.

“Going to be much of a storm, Johannes?” asked Steve.

“Yes, sir, a fierce, heavy snowstorm, with a great wind from the north.”

“Ay, awm thenking she’ll have ferry dirty weather for twa or three days, Meester Steve,” added Andrew. “Well, lad, ye’ve got rid of all ta feathers, hey?”

“Yes,” said Steve shortly, as if he did not want to hear any allusion to the morning’s trouble. “But tell me, Johannes, can’t we get into any sheltered bay till the storm has passed?”

“Not without running a great deal of risk of being caught in the ice, sir. We couldn’t beat back to the west coast with this wind rising; and even if we could, I fear that the ice would be drifting down and stopping us.”

“Ay, she’d never get roond the cape this weather,” grunted Andrew. “Look ahint ye, my lad. She’s hat some ferry douce weather lately; now she’s coing to have some ferry pad weather. But she’s a coot poat, and she can ride oot the gale if she ton’t go to ta pottom.”

“Well, you’re a pretty sort of a Job’s comforter, Andra,” said Steve, trying to be cheerful under depressing circumstances. “But I say, if we do take to the boats, mind and not forget the pipes.”

“Ta pipes, Meester Steve, sir? She needna have anny fear apoot tat. They shan’t pe trooned.”

“What do you say, Johannes?” cried Steve, laughing.

“The captain knows his business, sir,” said the man gravely, “and he has a good crew. He is having the steam got up so that we can get right away from the ice. With plenty of room the *Hvalross* will not hurt.”

Every one was busy now save the doctor and Steve, who, being the non-combatants in the fight about to take place with the coming storm, felt both of them rather in the way; and as birds of a feather are said to flock together, they, after their fashion, flocked; in other words, they naturally joined company to talk about the outlook.

“Glad you and the captain are all right again, Steve,” said the former. “Matters look too serious now for petty troubles, eh?”

“It did not seem to be a petty trouble to me, sir,” replied Steve quietly.

“No, no, of course not; but that’s all over now. I’m afraid we are going to have a bad storm.”

“Think so, sir?”

“Look at the captain. He does; or he would not be taking all these precautions. I suppose we can do nothing?”

“Only get out of the way,” replied Steve. “Every one looks as if he wishes we would go below.”

“Then every one will be disappointed,” said the doctor shortly. “If I’m to be drowned, it shall be from the deck. I’m not going to be battened down under hatches, nor you neither, eh?”

“No, I shall stop on deck,” said Steve stoutly. “How dark it’s getting!”

“Yes, my lad. It looks very beautiful in the bright sunshine, with the ice and snow glittering; but Nature certainly seems to have drawn her line up here in the north, to show us that this part of the world was never meant for ordinary human habitation. If ever the North Pole is reached it will only be a scientific feat, and no valuable result can follow for enterprising man. Whew!” he added with a shiver; “did you feel that?”

For an icy puff of wind struck them suddenly and then passed on, leaving the air as calm as it was before its coming.

“No one could help feeling it,” said Steve, buttoning his mackintosh tightly.

“Part of the advance-guard of the storm, my lad. Yes, we’re going to have it soon. Let’s see, you thought one day that it was horribly hot down below, didn’t you?”

Steve nodded.

“I’m thinking that we shall be glad to go down and visit the engine-room, and not be above turning stokers.”

Another icy blast put an end to the doctor's remarks; and as it passed on toward the south, after making the ship heel over and then race onward, the captain gave sharp orders for reducing the small amount of sail even more, Johannes giving one of his fellow-Norsemen a satisfied nod of the head, which Steve read to mean:

"All right; he knows his business."

And all the while the men were busy below, hurrying on the furnaces and adding to the darkness astern by making the low, wide funnel send out a great black cloud of smoke, which, instead of trailing astern like a plume, gathered together and followed the vessel, shutting off the view northward, save when one of the chilling blasts dispersed it, driving it onward and leaving all clear.

"Getting snug by degrees," said the captain, joining the two idlers for a few moments before hurrying off in a fresh direction. "If it will hold up another quarter of an hour, I think we shall be ready to say to it, 'Do your worst.'"

"Oh, it will last that time."

The captain did not answer, but went to where the men were furling a sail, and he had hardly reached them when a puff of wind seemed to dash down and seize the portion of the great fore-and-aft canvas unsecured, fill it out balloon-fashion, and swing round the heavy yard, which was about to be laid along the top, level with the boom below.

Two men went backwards on the deck.

"Two more hands here!" roared the captain. "Lay on to it, my lads;" and as two of the Norwegians sprang to help, and the two men who had been sent sprawling on the deck regained their feet, Steve shouted, "Come on, Mr Handscombe!" and ran and climbed on to the swinging yard to help bear it down.

Five minutes' hard fight, and the sail was bound down with its yard firmly on to the great boom which lay horizontally level with the bulwarks, and a stout rope was passed round and round and made fast before the next puff came. For these began to succeed each other more rapidly now,

following the advance-guard of the boreal enemy like a band of skirmishers trying to make an easy way for the main army close upon their track.

The sail reduced, all but that which was absolutely necessary, and which, small as was its surface, was sufficient to make the *Hvalross* race along during the time the blasts endured, the captain directed his attention to the hatches' battening down, spreading tarpaulins, and having them nailed over, till at last he turned to where the doctor and Steve stood gazing astern at the grim, black wall, which appeared to be following about a mile away.

"There," he said, "I think we are ready for the fight now. A pretty good lesson this in having everything shipshape, so as to be prepared for emergencies."

"I think it has been wonderful," said the doctor. "How well the men seconded you!"

"Yes; not forgetting the doctor and Steve. That was very brave of you, my lad. A sailor of twenty years' experience could not have done better."

"What, in getting astride of that yard to bear it down? Why, it seemed just the thing to do!"

"Exactly; but it was the doing it speedily, before it did any mischief."

"Perhaps we shall ride on before the storm now, and not be much affected by it," said the doctor tentatively; but the captain shook his head.

"We shall have it directly. Look how the water is beginning to foam away yonder! What I fear is that it may not keep on from the north, but veer about and change. We want more sea room."

"But we have come miles away from the ice already."

"Yes; but I should like to be another fifty. Hark!" The command was not needed, for those he addressed listened awe-stricken to a deep, crashing roar which now came from astern.

“Thunder?” asked Steve.

“Wind, and breaking up of the ice,” said the captain quietly. “If we had stopped in one of the bays of Spitzbergen, we should have had shelter, found the way open after the gale is over, and been able to get round the north of the great island.”

“Here it comes!” cried Steve, as there was another of the fierce rushes of wind, this time so heavy that the air smote him in the face, and he had to turn away, panting, to breathe.

“Yes, we have it now!” cried the captain. “Stand fast there, you two by the wheel!”

“Ay, ay, sir!” came in a deep growl from Johannes, as he and Andrew grasped the spokes side by side.

“And now,” said the captain to his companions in a low voice, “you two had better go below.”

“No!” cried the doctor and Steve at one and the same moment.

“Very well. Get under shelter of the bulwarks, then. The fight has begun.”

He was right, for the storm was upon them with a wild, shrieking, hissing, deafening roar that nearly took Steve off his legs, and sent the doctor staggering forward to clutch at the nearest object that would offer a hold. In an instant the deck was white with a fine, powdery dust that bit and stung and filled the hair, penetrating to the skin. Voices were inaudible, but there was a weird chorus from the ropes and stays, and then a loud report as one of the storm sails burst into ribbons and was torn piecemeal out of the bolt ropes.

Steve turned to see what effect this had upon the captain, and to learn whether it meant danger; but the blinding snow hid him from sight, as well as the men at the wheel; and all he knew was that no one stirred save the doctor, who had crawled to the shelter of the bulwark, and crouched down by his side, to grasp his arm, and place his lips close to his ear and shout:

“What do you think of this?”

Steve made no answer, for the noise, the rush of the snow, the swaying motion of the ship, and the darkness combined to stun his senses. All he could do was to struggle for his breath, gasping, glad to get his hands over his mouth and nostrils as he realised how easily any one might be suffocated in such a storm.

The *Hvalross* was almost on her beam ends for a few minutes; then she righted and tore through the water, which was nearly smooth, the hurricane cutting off the tops of the waves, to mingle with the snow-dust in a spray which froze instantly, and beat against everything it encountered with painful violence, or covered the masts, sails, and ropes with a thick coating of ice.

Then all was darkness and confusion, deafening, bewildering, and strange. The captain made his way to the wheel, and the rest clustered forward, sheltering themselves in front of the galley, for nothing could be done then. The only men who could do anything for their safety were those at the wheel, and the engineer and fireman, who, sheltered in the warmth below, worked on to get up a head of steam ready against it was wanted; but that did not seem probable for some time to come, the vessel racing on under almost bare poles into a continuation of the semi-darkness which surrounded them.

And now Steve thoroughly realised how helpless man, with all his ingenuity, became in the midst of such a storm. Absolutely nothing could be done but trust themselves to the hands of God, and wait patiently for the end.

As soon as the lad could collect his thoughts, he began to wonder what the consequences would be if they overtook some other unfortunate vessel. Again, how far it was to the Siberian coast, toward which they were being driven; and whether Captain Marsham would be able to tell in the midst of that deafening clamour and blinding darkness of the elements how far they might go before being able to turn ship and try to hold his own by the help of the steam in the teeth of the gale. Then, suffering an intensity of cold such as was perfectly new to him, he crouched there, stunned, bewildered, and unable to move.

He was conscious, after a space of what must have been hours, that some change had taken place, for the vessel appeared to be struck again by the storm, but from the other quarter, and just then the wind seemed to pluck and drag at him, as if to tear him from where he crouched, while a short time after the *Hvalross* heeled over again to such an extent that she seemed as if she would never recover herself.

At last Steve became conscious of some one touching him, grasping his arm, and shaking him; but he could hardly move. Then he felt himself dragged over the ice—for it did not seem like the deck—to the way down to the engine-room, and heard a voice shouting, “No, it would be dangerous—cabin!”

How he was helped down he did not know, but he revived a little to the fact that the doctor and captain were by him, and in spite of the din it was possible to hear what was said.

“Is he frost-bitten?”

“No, I think not.”

“Keep him down here, then, and stay yourself.”

“Are you going back on deck?”

“Of course.”

“But one moment. Tell me—I felt a shock. Are we running right for the coast, due south?”

“I wish we were,” said the captain gravely. “No; the storm seemed to swing round, and is blowing almost in a contrary direction. We are running north-east, and unless I can get her head to wind and the steam well up we shall soon be amongst the drifting ice.”

He hurried out of the cabin and closed the door after him, while the doctor hastened to get Steve’s mackintosh from his stiffened body and arms, and helped him to put on a fur-lined coat.

“That’s better,” said the doctor.

Steve nodded.

“How are your feet—numbed?”

“No,” said Steve, rather faintly, “I think they are all right. I was crouched together sitting on them.”

“And your hands?”

“They were in my breast. There’s nothing the matter now. I only felt confused, and as if I could not think or do anything.”

“I felt the same, my lad. It is very awful. I never thought such a storm was possible. Do you think you can venture to go on deck again?”

“Oh yes, I’m ready. I shan’t feel the cold so in this coat.”

“Then come and help me. I want to do something to comfort the men if I can. Let’s make our way to the galley.”

“Yes.”

“I want to get the cook to make a quantity of hot tea. The poor fellows must have something, or they will perish.”

“I’m ready, sir,” cried Steve; “come along.”

“Wait a minute. Which will be the best way?”

“Get to the bulwarks at once, and creep along till we’re opposite the galley. It will be easy enough then.”

“I doubt it, my lad.”

Then the door was opened, for a blinding cloud of powdery snow to rush in; and as they stood together out there once more in the wild shrieking and yelling of the storm, while the ship shivered and creaked and throbbed, they had hard work to close the door after them before making their way on hands and knees through the thick snow to the weather bulwark, and along by this they crept till abreast of the galley without

coming across a soul. They paused here for a few moments, and then Steve placed his lips to the doctor's ear.

"Come on!" he said; and leading the way once more he crossed to the end of the galley in a blind struggle against the wind, which seemed to pounce upon him and try to tear him away. But he crept on, with the doctor close to him, and became aware that he was touching something cold, which moved and then seized him with a hoarse:

"Wha's this?"

"I, Hamish!" shouted the boy. "We want to get into the galley."

"Gang below, laddie. Ta fire's oot, and there's naebody there."

"Come back," said the doctor in Steve's ear; and the boy followed, too much stunned and confused by the wind and driving ice powder to propose any other plan. But as he turned to follow the doctor he became aware that several men were huddled together there in the slight shelter afforded by the cook-house, and this confused him more, for the men were at the wrong end, and not where he knew they had taken refuge before.

And now he recalled the sudden change which had taken place, and grasped the fact that they were head to wind, or nearly so, while a vibration beneath his feet told him that the engine was hard at work.

The next minute—how he did not know—they were by the way down into the engine-room, the doctor's snowy figure being visible in a misty light which struck upward as he descended, Steve following breathless and panting, to find in the glow shed by the fires the cook on one side and Watty Links on the other, while even here the snow-dust was whirling down and melting at once into a rain, which ascended as a thick steam.

"Hadn't you better have kept in the cabin, sir?" said the engineer to Steve; and then he turned to the doctor, "Come down for a warm, sir?"

"No! I wanted to try and get some hot drink to the men on deck—some hot coffee."

“Couldn’t be done, sir,” said the cook.

“Let’s say that when we’ve tried and failed,” cried Steve. “You can get hot water here; I’ll fetch coffee and sugar.”

“Very well, sir, I’ll try; but how are we to get it to them on deck?”

“Bottles, man, bottles!” cried the doctor. “Where there’s a will there’s a way.”

The energy displayed by the new-comers, aided by the warmth, had its effect upon the man; the engineer remembered that he had two clean bottles in a locker, and Steve and the doctor fought their way again over the slippery, snowy deck to the cabin, from which they emerged again well laden, and in another quarter of an hour they were on their way first to the wheel, holding on tightly to prevent their being swept heavily across the poop, and they felt, more than saw, the two men, and by them the captain and mate.

They did not speak their mission, but told it dumbly by pressing a bottle of hot coffee in each man’s hand, waiting while it was consumed, and then returning to get the bottles refilled, their thanks being a warm, hearty pressure and a shouted warning from the captain to take care as they turned to creep back under such shelter as they could get, Steve having hard work once to save himself from being driven forward by the wind, which seemed to come from all quarters at once.

The men huddled forward on deck were now relieved in the same way, this taking two journeys, after which they joined the engineer in partaking of the hot, steaming compound, and prepared to return on deck.

“Hadn’t you better stay below here, sir?” said the man; “there’s nothing to be done on deck.”

“We’ll come down again,” replied the doctor. “Why, Steve,” he cried, “Captain Marsham is on the bridge!”

For at that moment there was a sharp ting upon the gong just overhead, which the engineer responded to by seizing the lever and altering the number of revolutions per minute of the screw. The next moment he

staggered, and would have fallen but for his grasp of the lever, the doctor staggered up against the side, and Steve caught hold of the engineer, while Watty Links was pitched from his seat on to the iron flooring, and evidently uttered a yell, though it was not heard in the terrific noise of the storm; neither did they hear a tremendous crash; but all knew that they had struck something, for there was a fearful shock, and a peculiar thrill ran through the vessel just as if she were being shaken to pieces and her timbers were about to fall apart.

Chapter Nineteen.

In the Grip of Nature.

The doctor seized and pressed Steve's hand in silence as he hurried up on deck to struggle aft to the captain, fully expecting that they were going down. But he was invisible in the driving snow. They made out somehow, though, that he was on the bridge in company with the mate; and, unable to reach and question him, they crept together right aft to the wheel, where Steve found himself at Johannes' feet.

The big Norseman did not wait to be questioned. He knew why the lad had come, and, bending down, he roared in his ear:

"Ice—struck bows!"

That was all, and the man stood immovable once more at his post.

"Come away!" cried the doctor. "We have no business here."

Closely as his lips were pressed to Steve's ear, the words were hardly heard; but the movement he made was suggestive, and though he longed to stay there by the big Norseman, he felt that it was right, and he followed his companion, stopping just under the bridge, and, unable to resist the desire, he began to creep up the steps.

The wind pressure was fearful, and everything he touched was coated with ice; but he persevered till he could touch the captain's leg. In an instant he had stooped down to the boy, to shout, as loudly as he could:

“Go down!”

It seemed hard to the boy, when the touch only meant a desire to show that he was thinking about the man so bravely facing the fierce storm; but he obeyed, and, somehow or other, he hardly knew how, reached the cabin, where the doctor, after several tries, lit the lamp.

As the light shone out Steve stared in wonder at his companion, and then around him at what should have been the snugly furnished cabin. Now all was changed; the white snow had penetrated through door-cracks and the ventilator, covering everything.

But they could breathe and talk here as they rubbed the snow from their faces and hair; though their coats were like so much armour, and were too stiff to bend.

“Awful, Steve, my boy! Awful!” shouted the doctor. “What a fearful storm!”

The noise increased just then, for the door was quickly opened, but as quickly shut, and a white figure stood before them; and for the moment they thought it was the captain; then the icy helmet upon the man’s head was with some difficulty taken off, revealing the face of Mr Lowe, the mate.

“The captain says you are not to run such a risk again, my lad. You can do us no good, and it troubles him when he wants all his energy to save the ship.”

“Then we are in great danger?” cried Steve.

“Yes, my lad, I think so,” was the reply; “but the captain will save us if it is to be done.”

“What was that awful crash?”

“Ice beneath our bows. We have it all round now, and it is impossible to avoid it. All we can do is to keep her head to the wind, and drift. We can make no headway with full steam on, and we dare not if we could.”

“But—”

“Can’t stop,” was the reply; “going forward to the men;” and the mate replaced his ice-laden cap and passed out into the storm.

“The captain was thinking of your safety, Steve, my lad; but we must think for him and the crew. Exposure such as they are going through is murderous. Let’s wait for a bit, and then take them all some more hot drink.”

He led the way out of the whitened cabin, and they struggled back through the driving snow to the engine-room, down into whose warm glow they crept just as there was another blow, which jarred the whole ship. Then the gong sounded.

“Slower,” said the engineer, as he moved the lever. “There, that’s about as little as we can do. Just enough to give her steering power.”

No more was said, and Steve looked round, as he warmed his numbed hands, to see that Watty was lying with his face in his hands, close to the side.

“Asleep?” said Steve, with his lips to the cook’s ear; but the man shook his head.

“Fright!” he replied.

A few minutes later one of the Norwegians and three of the crew came down all covered with ice, and one of the furnace doors was opened to send out a genial glow, lighting up the whole place, which was now dripping wet with thawed snow, and the stream rose up to float out through the hatch.

“Mate sent us down for a warm,” said one of the men. “To stay half an hour, and then relieve some more. We can do nothing on deck.”

“Let’s leave them,” said the doctor in Steve’s ear; and after warning the cook to be ready with the refreshment in half an hour, they made their way back to the cabin.

Those refreshments were not taken to the men on deck, for in turn all were sent down to the engine-room for warmth and food; and at last, to

Steve's great delight, the captain entered the cabin, to reply to the grips of the hand given him, and then drink with avidity the hot coffee ready on the table.

"I don't like leaving the deck," he said cheerfully; "but I must have coal and water for my engine, or I cannot work. No, no, don't question me; I have no news. We are in an awful storm, and are being carried with the drifting ice, Heaven only knows where."

That storm lasted forty-eight hours—hours of as great trial as man could go through, and live. Steve had borne up till, in spite of the danger, his eyes would keep open no longer, and then he had slept a troubled nightmare-like sleep to dream of shipwreck and struggling with the wind and waves. Every now and then he would start awake suffering from cold, and draw the great skin rug in which he had nestled closer round him, and drop off again into what was almost a stupor.

There was one time, or else he dreamed it—he never quite knew which—when he crept all about the deck again, to find it deeply encumbered with snow. Then he was back in the cabin lying on a locker, and he opened his eyes and saw the captain rolled up in a blanket lying asleep on the table. The next minute he was looking about again, to find that the captain had gone, and that the doctor only was there. Once it was Mr Lowe, but he, too, disappeared, and then all was blank, till he started into wakefulness, to find that the deafening rush and roar had ceased, and that a peculiar weird light was forcing its way into the cabin; while at intervals there came a curious grinding, cracking sound, followed every now and then by a loud, rending crash. The ship was rolling slowly upon a heaving sea, and steaming slowly, for the vibration of the screw made the things in the cabin quiver. Then there was more light in the cabin, for the door was opened with a crackling sound, as of moving broken ice, and the captain, glistening and white, entered the cabin.

"Awake, Steve?" he said in a low, weary voice.

"Yes, I'm so ashamed. Then the storm is over?"

"Yes, my lad," said the captain, sinking down on the locker with his great oil-skin coat crackling loudly; "at last, thank God!"

There was a deep, heartfelt ring in Captain Marsham's voice as he uttered those words, and for some moments Steve was silent, conscious now that the doctor was lying on the cabin floor sleeping soundly.

"And we ought to have been on deck to help you, sir," said Steve at last.

"No, my lad, I sent word for you to stay below; man or boy could not help us then. We could only wait."

"But we are safe?"

"For the present, yes."

"And where are we?"

The captain smiled faintly.

"Where are we?" he said. "That's more than I can tell. In the ice, Steve, and for aught I can tell, right up somewhere toward the North Pole."

Chapter Twenty.

No Man's Land.

The cold pierced Steve through and through, as he hurriedly shook himself together; and his first thought now was to help Captain Marsham, who was utterly prostrate from anxiety, want of sleep, and long exposure.

"I shall be all right, my lad," he said kindly, "as soon as I've had some hot tea and a nap. It was a long fight, but the storm is over. The wind swept round, and we've been carried north with the ice, which has been ripped up into endless lanes of clear water. As soon as I can take an observation we shall see where we are."

Their talking roused the doctor, who sprang up to reproach himself after Steve's fashion.

"I am so ashamed, Marsham!" he cried warmly.

"For doing your duty as a non-combatant man?" replied the captain, smiling. "Nonsense! You did me the greatest service you could by keeping out of my way."

In a short time the sailor who acted the part of steward appeared, to show that the routine of the ship, interrupted by that fearful storm, had been resumed, and that the cook had his galley fire going; for a good breakfast was spread upon the table, after which Steve hurried out on deck, leaving the captain to have an hour or two's rest.

He gazed about him wonderingly, his eyes dazzled by the brilliant light; for the sun was shining brightly, and flashing and sparkling from the ice and snow floating in every direction and in motion in the water, which appeared by contrast absolutely black.

The *Hvalross* was under steam, for the ropes and sails were thickly coated with ice and snow; but the aim of the man who was now on the bridge was not to attempt progress so much as to avoid coming in contact with the masses and fields of ice which from time to time

threatened to close in around and crush her like a shell. For there were masses of ice from the size of one of the boats right up to detached fields that were hundreds of yards across; and feeling as if they had escaped a horrible danger, and in perfect ignorance of the fact that their position was as perilous as ever, Steve feasted his eyes on the glorious spread of fantastic beauty before him, and felt as if he had just awakened in a world where everything was silver, even to the vessel in which he sailed.

There were no towering icebergs such as are encountered floating in the Atlantic, for the ice here consisted of the broken-up surface of the frozen sea, the largest pieces not being twenty feet in height, and looking, from their irregularity, as if one field had been forced over another by the rushing waters, which ripped and tore and broke up the ice barrier at whose edge they had so often sailed. But these pieces exhibited every shade of lovely blue, side by side with the glittering as of crystallised silver, for their inequalities were in places covered with soft powdery snow such as three of the men were scraping up and brushing from the deck and tops of the deckhouses where it lay piled.

Forward the sturdy Norsemen were standing armed with hitchers and poles, which they held ready to try and ease off the floating masses of ice, to keep them from driving hard on to the ship’s bows, with the result that generally the *Hvalross* was spared a heavy concussion, and the blocks went scraping along the sides. Every now and then there was a loud crushing up of the smaller pieces between the larger, some being shivered to atoms, while others were forced upward one above another, explaining the noises heard in the cabin; and soon after Steve had another startling experience in the splitting across of a great field of ice, which, consequent upon the undulating motion given by the sea, snapped with a noise like thunder; and this was followed by crashing and splitting of a nature that gave appalling evidence of the power of nature under circumstances like these.

“Well, Mr Steve,” said the mate, as the lad mounted to the bridge beside him. “Mind; it’s very slippery here.”

“I’ve found that out,” said the boy merrily; for he had hurt his shin in climbing the icy steps of the ladder.

“Yes, it is awkward. Well, what do you think of this?”

“Wonderful! Grand!” cried the boy. “Never saw anything so beautiful before.”

“Oh yes, very beautiful,” said the mate grimly; and Steve saw how haggard and weary he looked. “But I could do with a little less beauty and more open water, my lad.”

“Yes; it is awkward to steer amongst all this.”

“Very,” said the mate drily, as there was a sharp concussion against a great floating piece of ice, which the strong prow of the *Hvalross*, cased with iron to meet such contingencies, cut in two as if it had been snow.

“You like it, then?” said the mate.

“Like it! Why, it’s grander than anything I can imagine.”

“Yes; grand enough to crush up the *Hvalross* like an eggshell,” muttered the mate.

“Yes; but you’ll take care it does not!” cried Steve, smiling. “She would go to pieces on rocks, but you and the captain will mind that she does not.”

The mate’s grim, weary face brightened into a smile, and he clapped one of his fur-gloved hands on Steve’s shoulder.

“Bravo, boy!” he said. “It’s a fine thing to be your age, full of hope and confidence. Yes, we’ll do our best not to get crushed; but it’s a very awkward position to be in.”

“Why?” said Steve. “The storm’s over.”

“Yes, the storm’s over; but look where we are drifting north with all this. Suppose we come to the stationary ice, with all these great floes behind us?”

“Well, what then?”

“What then?” said the mate, with a laugh at this questioner’s innocence. “Why, the drifting ice behind us, pressed forward with a power of millions of tons, will force us against the fixed ice, and then we shall either be lifted right out of the water, or go, as I said, like an eggshell.”

“Ah! but that’s only what might happen,” said Steve. “I say, though, Mr Lowe, whereabouts are we? Not up by the North Pole?”

“No,” said the mate, smiling as he gave a look round, shading his eyes with his hand; “I don’t see it sticking up out of the snow. We’re not anywhere near the North Pole, but I can give a pretty shrewd guess as to where we are.”

“Can you?”

“We’ve been driven right through the opened-up ice somewhere a long way east and north of Spitzbergen. I should say about where land was sighted in one of the expeditions up beyond Gillis Land, toward where the Austrians saw a coast which they called Franz Josef.”

“Ah!”

“I don’t say that’s it; but we’re somewhere thereabouts, and—”

He stopped short to use his glass for a few minutes, Steve watching him impatiently.

“Yes,” he said at last, “there’s land yonder.”

“Where? amongst that ice?”

“Yes; look,” said the mate, handing the glass; “right in the nor’-east yonder. There’s land miles away. Quite mountainous. See it?”

“I can see a glittering pyramid of ice; yes, and a big, heavy mass beside it.”

“That’s right; that’s it.”

“But it’s ice and snow, not land.”

“The land’s under it, my lad,” said the mate. “The ice and snow don’t pile up like that without something to stand on. The captain ought to know this; but he’s so done up I wouldn’t wake him. He could do no good if he came on deck.”

“Then shall you make for that land?”

“Yes; there’s nothing else to be done. We must go forward now, as there’s open water. All astern is ice, where we should certainly be nipped. That’s safety for us if we can steam there, for we should be sure to find some cove or fiord, and shelter from the pressure of the ice.”

“But suppose we should get into a fiord, and the ice blocked us in, what then?” said Steve, more anxiously.

“Why, then we should have to wait till it opened again and let us out.”

“But it might be a long time.”

“Perhaps so; but that’s better than getting our ship crushed, eh?”

“Of course,” said Steve; and soon after he went down to talk to the Norsemen forward, the momentary depression at the idea of being shut in having passed away.

There was a low, whimpering muttering as he neared the galley, the door of which was ajar, and he heard the cook say angrily:

“Look here, sir, if you don’t stop that snivelling, I’ll stand you outside to let the tears freeze. I’m not going to have you turning on the rain here. Do you want to put my fire out?”

“Aw canna help it,” said Watty piteously. “Aw was thenking aboot my mither.”

“Thinking about your ‘mither,’ you great calf! Well, other people think about their ‘mithers,’ but they don’t go on blubbering when they’ve got some potatoes to wash. Hullo! Tut, tut, tut! They’ll have to go overboard. Here, take these from close by the stove. Those others are frozen.”

“She never meant me to come oop here in the cauld to be starved to death.”

“What?” cried the cook. “Eh? Oh, it’s you, Mr Steve. How are you, sir? Managed to get you a good breakfast this morning.”

“Yes, thank you. It was grand. What’s the matter with Watty Links?”

“Why, sir, he had a lot of biscuits and fried bacon an hour ago, and a quart of hot coffee to wash it all down, and now he says that his ‘mither’ never meant him to come up here to be starved.”

“I didn’t!” cried Watty angrily. “I never said a word aboot eatin’ and drinkin’. I said ‘starved wi’ the cauld.’”

“Hey, but you’re a poor, weak, sappy kind of a fellow,” cried the cook. “There’s precious little solid meat on you, I’m afraid. Going, Mr Steve, sir?”

“Yes, I must be off.”

“Right, sir. Roast venison for dinner to-day. The deer meat will be prime.”

Steve nodded, and was turning away, when his eyes encountered those of the boy, who had evidently forgotten all about his “mither,” and was grinning at him derisively, and in a way which made Steve’s fingers tingle to tighten up into a fist and teach the lad a lesson. But he went out and shut the door, before going forward to where the four Norwegians were fending off the ice.

“Morning,” he cried; and the great, sturdy fellows greeted him with a pleasant smile on their grave faces.

“Glad to see you out and well, Mr Steve,” said Johannes; and the others uttered something which was evidently meant as acquiescence in their companion’s greeting.

“Oh, I’m all right,” said Steve, “only a bit cold; but I say, have all you chaps had plenty of breakfast?”

“Plenty, sir, plenty!” they cried, as they levelled their poles to meet the charge of a great block which was coming on to them.

The concussion staggered them a little, but the mass of ice was turned aside, and they had a few minutes’ respite.

“What an awful storm!” said Steve.

“Yes, sir, it was. The worst we were ever in,” replied Johannes; “but it’s brought us close up to a grand land for hunting.”

“What, that land over yonder?” cried Steve, pointing.

“Yes, sir. It’s many years since any one reached that land, if it ever was reached, and we’re thinking all of us that the walrus will be there in herds.”

“But did Mr Lowe tell you that was land yonder?”

“No, sir; we saw him pointing with his glass, and Jakobsen there has wondrous eyes; he could see the tops of the mountains when he looked. There’s good coming out of evil, sir; and you’ll see we shall load up with oil when we get there.”

“But do you really think we shall find the sea-horses there. I want to see a walrus.”

“We feel sure of it, sir, because they have been hunted and driven back farther and farther every year of late; and we all felt that they must have retired to somewhere farther north, and by a great stroke of good fortune the ice has opened enough for us to get there.”

“Then the storm was all for the best, Johannes?”

“Yes, sir, I hope so,” said the man, joining another in sending off a great block as he spoke.

“But I say,” said Steve anxiously, “suppose we get frozen up there, and can’t get back.”

“We don’t talk like that, sir, at the beginning of summer out here,” said the Norseman. “If it was September, it would be different. We’ve got nearly three months for the ice to keep on melting and breaking up.”

“Yes, I see, and a better chance for exploring and searching for the *Ice Blink*!”

“Yes, sir, of course,” said the man, with a slight change in his voice; and Steve left them to go and talk to Andrew and Hamish, who were both aft, the latter being at the wheel.

“They don’t think we shall ever find the poor fellows,” thought Steve sadly. “I could see it in their looks when I spoke. But they can’t tell any more than I can; and, for all we know, they may be frozen-in, waiting for the ice to break up. Yes; as it has broken up, so that we may come across them at any time.”

Just then he encountered the doctor in a heavy sheep-skin coat. He had been in the cabin.

“Captain’s sleeping like a top,” said the doctor. “I’ve been to see. Couldn’t you and I relieve Mr Lowe here?”

He looked up as he spoke, for they were just below the bridge, and the mate leaned over and spoke.

“No, thank you, gentlemen,” he said. “I can stand it for a couple of hours longer, and then the captain will wake up and relieve me. You could not con the vessel through this ice, and there’s only one man on board to whom I’d give up my place—the captain.”

“We seem very helpless people here. Let’s go and talk to our two Scotch friends. But look here, my lad, hadn’t you better get on a fur coat?”

“I’m not cold,” replied Steve; and they went on to the man by the wheel, where Andrew greeted them with a grin.

“The pipes are a’ recht, Meester Steve,” he said. “She’ll like to hear them the noo?”

“I don’t believe they’d go.”

“She ton’t pelief they’d go?”

“No. The potatoes were frozen in the cook-house, and I’ll be bound to say they’re spoiled.”

Andrew McByle’s face was a study as he looked from the speaker forward, and then turned hastily to Hamish.

“She’ll mind ta wheel her nainsel,” he said huskily, “while she goes to see aboot her pipes.”

He turned to Steve again, and saw the twinkle in the lad’s eye.

“She’s lairfin’!” he cried. “The pipes are quite safe a’ wrapped oop in her auld plaidie”; and he shook his head and laughed heartily.

“Look!” cried Hamish excitedly, pointing to their right.

“What is it?”

“A seal. Ay, there’s twa bonnie laddies. Look at them watching us, and looking like twa bodies after having a swim.”

Steve did not see the animals at once, for a piece of ice intervened. The next moment, though, they came into sight, where they lay upon the snow, and raised their round heads to gaze at the ship.

“No wonder that some of the old mariners who first saw these large seals fancied that there were mermen and mermaids at sea,” said the doctor, as they watched the peculiar semi-human faces of the creatures gazing at them with their great, soft eyes.

“You might almost fancy, if you saw one of them looking over a rock at you at a little distance, that it was some kind of savage.”

“Yes, but it would have to keep its body out of sight.”

“She has never seen the walrus, then?” said Andrew.

“Only a stuffed specimen.”

“Nay, she tidn’t say a stuff spessaman; she said ta walrus, sir.”

“No, I never saw a live walrus,” said the doctor, smiling.

“Then she’ll just wait a wee till she sees a big bull walrus lift her het oot o’ ta watter and look, and she’ll say tat she’s seen a chiant having a swim.”

The captain came on deck about an hour after with the haggard, drawn look gone out of his face, and he mounted the bridge at once to the mate, who handed him the glass, and Steve saw him take a long look to the north-east before closing the telescope. Directly after Mr Lowe descended and fetched the instruments to take their observations, with the result that soon after the mate went below for a rest, leaving the captain to direct the movements of the vessel.

There was so much open water around them now, and so direct a channel toward the land, while all the rest of the space about them was hemmed in with ice drifting northward, that to go to the north coast was the least perilous course.

“I should like to get an observation from the crow’s-nest,” said the captain, looking upward, “but everything is so coated with ice and slippery that I hardly like to send a man aloft.”

“I’ll go!” cried Steve eagerly.

The captain shook his head.

“Too dangerous, my lad,” he said.

“But you did not tell us where you made out we had been driven,” said the doctor, as Steve stood looking up at the ratlines thick with ice, and the glassy look of shroud and stay, while great icicles hung from the tops and yards.

“I beg your pardon,” said the captain. “I was thinking of the land yonder. I make out that we have been driven right up to 82 degrees north latitude and about 45 east longitude.”

“But what does that mean?” said Steve, laughing.

“Not very far from being as near to the North Pole as any one has reached in this direction,” said the captain, “and that we are close to land that in all probability man has never set foot upon yet.”

“Hooray!” cried Steve excitedly.

“We have come north at an exceptional time. Generally the icy barrier stops all progress. This year that storm has broken it up in masses, and it is quite possible that we may be able to penetrate farther yet.”

“To the North Pole?” cried Steve.

“No,” said the captain, smiling. “My dear boy, you have North Pole on the brain. Would you be ready to go with me if I said that I would try and penetrate the ice as far as I could?”

“Of course,” cried Steve. “But you have no confidence in me, sir.”

“What do you mean?”

“You will not let me go up even to the crow’s-nest to use the glass.”

“Yes, I will, my lad,” replied the captain. “Take the glass and go up. But warily, mind. No excitement. You will be quite cool?”

“Yes,” cried Steve, snatching at the glass and starting for the main-mast shrouds.

“Stop!” cried the captain. “Come here.”

Chapter Twenty One.

Among the Natives.

Steve walked back to the captain looking puzzled, and feeling damped by this sudden change, while his eyes gazed questioningly in his leader’s.

“What did I say to you?” cried Captain Marsham.

“I was to go up to the crow’s-nest and make observations,” replied the boy.

“Coolly, warily, and without excitement, because you were going to make a dangerous ascent, over what is ten times as slippery as glass.”

“Yes,” said Steve; “and I was going.”

“Going!” cried the captain angrily. “Yes, just as if you were about to run up somebody’s carefully sanded steps to the front door.”

“But I should have been as careful as could be as soon as I started, sir.”

“It looked like it. What do you say, doctor?”

“That he seemed to me as if he would have given me a job to mend some of his bones before he was half-way to the main-top.”

“Oh, Mr Handscombe!” cried Steve reproachfully.

“It’s a fact, sir,” said the captain sternly. “I dare not let you go about so serious a task in that jaunty way. There, give me the glass.”

Steve slowly handed the glass, in so despondent a fashion that the captain spoke more quietly.

“I can’t help it, my lad. I regret checking you; but you see the state of the rigging, and that a slip might be fatal. I dare not let you go.”

Steve said nothing, but glanced up at the crow’s-nest, which glistened like silver in the sunshine; and he noted again how the rope ladders were all coated with ice, and he found it hard to imagine that he had been jaunty and careless; he told himself he had only been eager to do what was required, and hence it seemed to be doubly hard.

“I did mean to be very careful, sir,” he said at last.

“I know it, my lad,” replied the captain quietly; “but I was wrong to think of

it, and your quick, eager way showed me the risk, and made me wiser."

"But I don't think it is so dangerous, sir," cried Steve. "Let me try."

"I do think it dangerous," said the captain. "There, you shall hear another opinion. Johannes!"

The Norseman answered the hail, and came quickly aft, after laying down his pole.

"Can you get up to the crow's-nest, and make a few observations?"

The man looked up at the ice-hardened rigging, and his eyebrows contracted a little.

"Yes," he said. "Shall I take a glass?"

"There!" cried Steve quickly.

"You shall go," said the captain. "I will send him instead, Johannes."

The man's quiet, stolid manner passed away in an instant.

"It is dangerous for the boy, sir," he said. "The rigging is all ice."

"Yes, but I'm going to be very careful, Johannes," cried Steve. "Let me see; can't I sling the glass somehow?"

"Don't take that," said the captain. "Go to the cabin and fetch my large binocular in its case. You can sling that over your shoulder."

Steve made a dart for the cabin, but stopped short, turned, gave the doctor a quick look, and then walked slowly to the cabin door, disappeared, and came back quite deliberately, adjusting the strap of the glass over his arm.

"Yes, that will be powerful enough for the purpose," said the captain quietly. "Now listen: what I want to know is in what directions the lanes of open water lead. You will have an excellent view from up there. Try and make out whether there is open water right up to the land."

“Yes, I see,” said Steve quietly; and he was about to take off his gloves.

“Stop! What are you going to do?” cried the captain.

“Take off my gloves. I can hold on so much better.”

“And perhaps leave the skin of your hands on the ropes. You do not feel the cold much now because the air is perfectly still and the sun shining brightly; but the mercury is very low, and it is growing colder. Keep your gloves on, and be slow and careful. Now go.”

Steve started once more, reached the main shrouds, swung himself up on to the bulwark, and instantly had his first lesson in the peril of his task, for all at once a foot glided along the top of the bulwark, and then went off and downward. But he had taken a good grip of the shrouds and saved himself, otherwise he must have gone overboard, and a curious sensation of heat came over him, as he at once began to climb with the ratlines feeling hard and thick like the staves of a ladder, while his hold upon he icy ropes was awkward and strange. And now he began to awaken to the fact that the job was a much harder one than he had imagined it would be, and felt more and more the necessity for the greatest of caution. Glancing down as he heard talking in a low, earnest voice below, he saw that Johannes was speaking to the captain; but it did not occur to him that it was about him till he had reached the main-top, where he paused for a few moments, holding on by the ropes.

“Hadn’t I better kick some of these icicles and this snow down, sir?” he cried.

“Yes; all you can, my lad,” replied the captain.

“Stand from below!” Steve shouted. And then there was the rattle and crackling of the pieces of ice he broke away, till he had made some clearance; and he was then about to start upward, when he became aware of the fact that Johannes was three parts of the way up to the top where he stood.

“Hullo!” he cried, “what do you want?” and as he spoke he saw that the man had a little coil of line over one arm.

“Only coming to keep you company, Mr Steve,” he said, drawing himself up the last few feet and reaching the boy’s side.

“Oh, but it’s too bad!” cried Steve hotly. “It’s treating me as if I were a child. You’ve brought this line up to tie me on.”

“I’ve brought the line up because it may be useful, sir,” said Johannes gravely; “and I’ve come up because the captain thought the way aloft was very dangerous.”

“And so did you, and asked him to let you come?”

Johannes was silent.

“I knew it!” cried Steve. “I do wish you people wouldn’t treat me as if I were a baby.”

“Yes, I did ask him to let me come, sir,” said the Norseman; “for it’s more dangerous than even he thinks. I saw you make that slip when you started, though he did not; and I felt that if you made a slip higher up I might be handy to help you.”

“Yes, but—” began Steve.

“And he gave me leave to come up.”

“Then you’d better go and make the observations, and I’ll go down,” said Steve sulkily.

Johannes looked pained.

“You shall not do that,” he said gravely.

“Why not?”

“Because it would not be like what I, a Norseman, would expect to see in an English gentleman’s son.”

“Oh, I say,” cried Steve, “that’s hitting foul. But it’s too bad, Johannes, and I hate it. I might just as well be pulled up by the halyards.”

“When you have been as long at sea as I have,” said Johannes, with a calm, grave smile lighting up his fine, manly face, “you will not think it a hardship in a dangerous task to have a man at your side whom you can trust, and whom you can feel is ready to help you as long as he has a bit of strength.”

“Come along,” said Steve quickly; “the captain will be wondering why I don’t go up, and thinking I am afraid.”

“Oh no,” said the Norseman, smiling, “he will not think that of you, sir. There, I’m glad to be with you, Mr Steve; for it is bad climbing, and a slip up here would be very, very risky.”

“Yes, it is bad climbing,” said Steve, as he slowly mounted higher and higher, warning his companion, who kept close below him, when he was going to kick down some of the ice which encrusted the ropes.

And so the top-mast was passed, and with the main topgallant mast they came to the ice-covered cross-spells, which had been lashed on, and directly after Steve was beneath the cask raising his hand to push open the hinged bottom; but, to his surprise, it did not yield.

“It’s frozen!” he cried; and he made effort after effort to move the trap, but in vain.

“You’ll have to let me come, sir,” said Johannes quietly. “I’m thinking that the nest is full of snow.”

Steve moved off the spell on which he stood, and held on to the shrouds upon the other side, leaving room for the Norseman to take his place.

“Well?” said Steve, as the man exerted his huge strength without effect.

“More than I can do, sir,” said Johannes quietly. “Let’s try it a little at a time.” And, taking tightly hold, he began to thrust with one shoulder up and up, until the trap began to crack and give way little by little.

Then a little powdery snow began to crumble out, and the Norseman paused to rest.

“You see I am useful,” he said, smiling. “I don’t think you could have moved that.”

“Aloft there! Can’t you get in?” came from below.

“Crow’s-nest full of ice and snow!” cried Steve.

“Knock up the bottom, and let it fall through.”

“Well, that’s what we are doing,” said Steve to himself; and then he watched as the Norseman toiled away till he could get one hand through the opening he had made.

“Mind!” cried Steve. “Put on your glove, or you’ll take the skin off.”

“No,” said Johannes gravely, “not yet awhile. It does not freeze in that way now; that is when the colder weather sets in. The sun is warming the air too much everywhere. Look, there are drips forming.” He worked as he spoke, and now sent the snow and ice showering down from the cask, till at last there was quite a little avalanche, after which he drew himself up inside, let the door close, and scraped and worked away, throwing out consolidated portions, and then sweeping the snow-dust till he could open the trap partially and shuffle it out with his feet. “Warm work, sir,” he said at last, as he looked over the edge and down at Steve.

“Let me come and have a turn, then, for it’s horribly cold here.”

“Come along, then,” said the Norseman; “there’s room now.”

There was an unusual sensation of numbness in Steve’s arms as he climbed back on to the wooden spells, and he knew that he had been motionless quite long enough; and he could not help feeling that if he had remained there another hour clinging to the icy shrouds he would not have been able to live. But the circulation began to return as soon as he exerted himself, and, after a little effort, he squeezed himself up through the bottom of the cask, the trap fell into its place, and he dragged the case of the glass round to the front so as to get at the double telescope.

The scene from the deck had been wonderful, but from the interior of the crow’s-nest the wonder was vastly increased, and Steve could have

stood there for hours, sweeping with the glass in all directions, gazing with delight at the floating ice-islands of every form and size, from the little block that could be thrust aside with a boat-hook to the field or detached floe a mile across; and all in motion, drifting with the current toward the north-east, and rising and falling on the heavy swell left by the storm. There was an incessant cracking roar, too, from all around, as the blocks came in contact and ground together; while from time to time, consequent upon undulation of the surface, a field split right across with a tremendous report.

But there was no time to study the beauty of the surroundings, and Steve had to leave all contemplation of the silver islands floating upon a black sea, to try and trace the open water from where they were right up to the land.

Twice over he was at fault, as he supposed, for he followed with the glass a broad, canal-like line of clear water quite a couple of miles, and then it appeared to be blocked up with ice. He said so to Johannes; but the Norseman shook his head.

“The water goes round behind those blocks, sir,” he said.

“But can you tell that with the naked eye, Johannes?”

“Yes, sir, clearly.”

The result was that a clear way was well traced out for the *Hvalross* right up to the rugged land with its mountains, not more than eight miles away, so that navigation would be perfectly easy at that moment. What it would be with the vast army of ice blocks advancing to invade the shores of the unknown land, it would be impossible to say.

All these facts were communicated bit by bit to the deck, with the consequence that the speed was increased, and the vessel went gliding on in and out amongst the floating fields of ice, while Steve stayed with his companion, who kept pointing out objects worthy of notice.

“Seals yonder,” he said, pointing to one low flat of snow-covered ice; and Steve brought the glass to bear upon the cluster of animals huddled up together.

“Yonder’s a bear, too,” said Johannes after a time.

“What eyes you have!” cried Steve. “I had not even seen that with the glass. Why, he’s on quite a small island of ice, all to himself. How easily we could get to him with a boat!”

“Yes, easily enough, sir; but this is no time for hunting,” said the Norseman. “While we are drifting onward with all this ice the danger is not great; but if we lay to while boats were out fishing we should soon be fast, and it might be months before we got free. There is only one thing to do now: get the ship into a safe haven. Then we can talk about hunting.”

“How long will it take us to get there?”

“Little more than an hour if we do not meet with a check,” said Johannes, as the *Hvalross* glided round the edge of an ice-field into quite a winding river of black water, more open than any they had passed since the storm, and along which the vessel now made good way, while the land ahead began to grow more rugged and wild, looking grand, desolate, and apparently very much broken-up by jutting promontories and deep inlets.

“Yes,” said Johannes, after a long inspection through the glass; “there are plenty of shelter havens there, if we are not shut off from them by the ice.”

All these observations were duly communicated to the captain, who directed the course of the vessel by the instructions he received as to the lay of the water. And as Johannes had said, the places where Steve had imagined the open water to end proved to be quite clear, so that mile after mile was passed, and at last the boy gave his opinion upon the state of the navigation.

“Why, it’s easy enough,” he said; “any one might go right on like this to the North Pole.”

“It’s too easy, sir,” said Johannes, smiling. “How would you get back?”

“Wait till the tide turns and the ice is going the other way.”

“Yes, that would be a capital plan,” replied Johannes drily.

“Cold? Want to come down?” cried the captain from below.

“No, sir; quite warm shut up here,” replied Steve.

“Stay up then, for you’re making the navigation quite easy. All clear ahead?”

“Yes, sir; nothing but a few floating blocks of no consequence; and there are more openings farther on.”

“That’s right. Now look out, both of you, for a good deep inlet. That is what we want next.”

Johannes held the glass at this time, and he said to Steve, as the captain turned away:

“There are two fiords that appear to be just right if we can reach them; but I cannot make out anything for certain yet. Have a try, sir?”

Steve took the glass, rested his arms on the rail, and began to try and make out the inlets by following the course of the open water from just ahead right up to the piled-up mountainous land.

“It looks like a bit of my own country,” said Johannes, “and does not seem to be an island, for there is high ground as far as I can see.”

“More seals,” said Steve; “good big ones, too!”

“Where?”

“Away to the left of that big ice-field, right on its edge. Why, there must be fifty of them. See ’em?”

“Yes,” said Johannes gravely; “more likely a hundred, sir; and, as you say, very fine ones indeed. The captain will not have any difficulty in loading up with oil to take back.”

“Not if we can catch the seals,” said Steve, with his eyes glued to the glass. “There, I think I can make out one of the fiords now. I say, isn’t it rather funny that west coasts should be so much alike?”

“I don’t understand you, sir.”

“Why, all broken-up into fiords, as you call them. Ireland is, and Scotland, and Norway; then Spitzbergen was, and now this place seems to be the same.”

“Yes, sir; I suppose it’s the beating and washing of the sea.”

“But places like Spitzbergen and this can’t be much beaten by the sea, because they are so much frozen-in. Yes, I can see the inlet now, and the other one, too. North of it, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir; those are the two, and there is plenty of open water.”

“Plenty. Shall we tell the captain now?”

“He’s forward talking to the men,” replied Johannes.

“Then we’ll wait. But, I say, about these seals? We shall have to shoot them, I suppose?”

“No, sir, harpoon them; but they are not seals.”

“Nonsense! I saw them myself quite plainly; one of them was dragging itself out of the water.”

“Yes, I saw several do that. It is quite a large herd; but these are walrus—our sea-horses, sir.”

“Oh!” cried Steve, turning the glass in the direction of the herd. “Why, so they are. I can see the big tusks.”

“Yes, sir; there are some very fine ones among them. I thought they must have a haven somewhere up here, if it could be found. The captain has done well, and we shall have a tremendous hunting season.”

“Well?” came from the deck, “see any opening, Steve?”

“Yes, sir, two; and we’re not above a mile away from a great herd of walrus.”

“Seals, my lad—the little Jan Mayen seal.”

“No, sir,” said Johannes quietly; “they are walrus, and we’ve made our way up to their home. I have just seen another herd nearer the land.”

The men below heard this announcement, and gave a cheer, for the news promised work, excitement, and plenty of profit for all on board.

Just then there was a loud barking from Skene, who was up in his favourite place on the bows, just where he could look out well ahead.

“Look at old Skeny,” said Steve. “Any one would think he was the master of the ship. Why, there’s a walrus!”

He was quite right, for there in the black water, staring hard at the excited dog, was a peculiar round head with great soft eyes, a bristling moustache, and a pair of long white tusks sweeping down from its upper jaw in graceful curves. There was nothing visible but the head, and that only for about a minute; for the sight of the vessel gliding swiftly along startled the huge beast, so that it made a plunge and disappeared.

A sharp look-out was kept for others, and several were seen, but always at a distance; and they were forgotten directly in the excitement of the navigation which followed as they neared the land.

All had gone on well so far. The *Hvalross* had had to turn and double to avoid huge masses of the ice-floe; but there had always been plenty of open water, and this had grown wider as they neared a vast pile of rocks forming a promontory, to the north of which lay the fiord which the captain had marked down, becoming more and more satisfied with his choice as they drew nearer, till they were about a mile away; for it offered complete protection from the ice, which would be turned aside by the rocky buttress till such time as a change of wind and the subsidence of the heavy rocking swell should come.

All at once, with marvellous rapidity, there was a change. Beyond a little grinding and scraping they had suffered no harm from the ice, which had been floating with or following them; but now, as if the crowd of blocks and fields in motion possessed a feeling that the vessel was about to escape them and take refuge where it would be safe, there was an

increase of speed in their movements; they were more agitated, rising and falling and crashing together, and appearing as if they were crowding along to crush the vessel before the refuge was reached.

This had not been noticed from the bridge, and in an excited tone Johannes hailed the deck.

“We’re just entering a swift current, sir, which is caused by the great point ahead. The ice is crowding up into it, and goes north with a heavy rush.”

“Yes, I see!” cried Captain Marsham; and he issued a few clear, sharp orders, which were as promptly obeyed.

“Stay aloft there, both of you,” he cried next, “and mark the other water ahead!”

There was a dead silence for a minute on deck, but all around a condensation of the grinding, cracking, and rending of the ice which they had heard more or less all day.

Then, as Steve’s eyes met Johannes’ stern gaze—for the lad was fully awake to the peril—the Norseman sang out:

“Turn her astarn, sir! The ice has closed up ahead.” The captain gave the order without question, the speed was checked, and the *Hvalross* began to glide back, when Johannes’ voice rose again in hoarse command. “Stop! There is no way back.”

“Look again!” roared Captain Marsham. “There must be. Quick!”

“No way out astarn, nor to right or left, sir!” cried Johannes; “the ice is closing in upon us.”

“But forward—is it not opening?”

“No, sir; and we’re in the current, too.”

The captain gave his orders again; but those which reached the crow’s-nest had nothing to do with the navigation of the ship; they were to the men to stow provisions as rapidly as possible in the boats.

“Johannes, what does this mean?” whispered Steve, aghast.

“That the captain means to have the boats ready, if we can use them; if not, to have provisions to heave on to the ice when we take to it.”

“When we take to the ice?” cried Steve.

“Yes, my lad; look!” said the Norseman, pointing to the narrow limits of the water in which the *Hvalross* lay; and as the boy gazed downward with dilating eyes, he could see that on one side there was a wall of ice almost stationary, while on the other the masses were grinding together, the smaller being forced upward above the larger to form a chaotic ridge, which was coming toward them with swift, irresistible power.

“Quick!” said the Norseman sternly. “In another five minutes we shall be crushed in the ice. We must be on deck so as to have our chance of escape with the rest when they take to the floe.”

“Ahoy! there aloft!” roared the captain, as the steam whistle began to utter its deep-toned yell, which sounded strangely amidst the roar and crack of the ice in motion. “Down with you both—quick!”

“Do you hear?” cried Johannes excitedly. “Down, my lad, quick!”

Steve made a movement to stoop and raise the trap on which he stood, and he stopped short and gazed despairingly in the great Norseman’s face.

“Well, why do you stop?” said Johannes. “Draw up the trap, and go down.”

“I cannot stir,” said Steve faintly. “I did not know it before. It’s the cold, I suppose. My legs and feet are quite numbed.”

Chapter Twenty Two.

On the Brink.

“Do you hear, aloft there?” roared the captain. “Down with you!”

“Ay, ay, sir!” cried the Norseman, as he grasped to the full their perilous situation.

“Go down, Johannes,” said Steve faintly; “never mind me.”

The Norseman uttered a low laugh.

“Yes, sir; go down and leave you here! Of course!”

But his hands were busy. He thrust the glass into the case slung from Steve’s shoulder, and taking the line he wore like a baldrick from his own, he hung it on one arm while he made fast the end round the lad’s chest.

“You can use your hands?” he cried.

“Yes, I think so.”

“Then keep yourself clear of the yards and stays as I lower you down. Don’t cling anywhere. I’ll let you down safely.”

“Are you coming?” roared the captain.

“Ay, ay, sir. Below there!” shouted back the Norseman; and with one rapid movement he whipped Steve out of the crow’s-nest, and, grasping the line, began to lower him rapidly, till he caught first here and again there, over and over again, for there was the rigging to pass through; but in a very few seconds the boy was on deck, and the line dropped after him. Then the trap was snatched up, Johannes lowered himself through, stepped down the spells, caught hold of one of the ice-covered stays, and slid down, to catch another lower, and reach the deck in turn. He joined the men in getting together biscuit, tinned meat, and flour bags, ready to cast upon the ice when the terrible nip should come, and either crack the ship’s timbers like an eggshell or force her up on to the surface, to go on drifting north, while the ice by the great pressure consolidated into a dense block.

The captain and doctor had in turn been busy, and brought up guns, rifles, and ammunition; and both now, in spite of the impending peril, had

then devoted themselves to the task of restoring circulation to Steve's lower limbs, and to so good an effect that he soon struggled to his feet.

"Don't—don't mind me," he cried; "I—I will be better now."

"Let him be," said the doctor in a low voice; "it will do him good to exert himself."

"I will stand by the lad, and help him," said a voice behind the doctor; and he turned sharply to find that Johannes was standing there.

"Yes, sir," he said; "and I will try to help as well."

These words were hurriedly spoken in whispers, with the lips close to each listener's ear, for their terrible position filled them with awe, and they spoke with bated breath, listening the while to the hideous crashing and creaking of the ice which moment by moment came nearer, while the huge fragments towered up on their right, and—slowly now—came on to crush the *Hvalross* against the cliff-like floe some fifteen feet in height on their left. For there was that difference in the walls of their prison: they had been gliding along by the side of a vast field whose movement had grown slower, while the smaller fragments on their right had increased in speed, and at times raced along as if in a flooded river of enormous size.

And now no man spoke, but all stood with blanched lips gazing at the ice cliff on their left, as if measuring its height, the crew dividing naturally into three parties—one to the shrouds of each of the three masts, ready to ascend and leap from the ratlines on to the surface of the ice, some of the more daring making up their minds to make for the top, and run out on the great yard of the big square-sail, and drop from that if there should be time.

Only one thought was common to all, and that was to reach the ice. The provisions which had been hastily brought on deck lay where they had been placed amongst the remains of the powdery snow which had not melted in the sun's rays; and even then in those terrible moments—so strangely are little petty things mixed up with the most momentous in our lives—Steve thought to himself that when the two sides of their rapidly narrowing canal did come together, crushing the ship, not a man would stop to pick up anything to help keep himself alive.

“Mr Steve—doctor!” said Johannes suddenly, “there will be a rush for the shrouds when the nip comes, and it will be every man for himself.”

“Yes, of course,” said Mr Handscombe.

“Let them go that way; you both follow me.”

“Where?” said Steve huskily.

“For that boat;” and he nodded toward the one swinging from the davits on the port side.

“What for, man?” said the doctor coldly. “The boat must be crushed, like the ship.”

“Not before I have had time to reach the top of the ice from it. I have been measuring the distance, and I can do it and reach down to lend you both a hand up.”

“Hah! Yes!” exclaimed Steve, forgetting the cold and numbness now in the excitement of seeing a way to escape. “But the captain—tell him.”

“There is no need,” said the Norseman; “he is cleverer than I, and will know what to do. Besides, he will not stir till every man is safe; an English captain never does.”

“But—” began Steve.

“Don’t talk, sir; do as I say,” said the Norseman sternly. “You will be helping the captain to escape if you leave him free to act by saving yourself.”

“I will do as you say,” replied Steve; but even as he spoke he felt as if it would be cowardly to leave Captain Marsham alone in the wreck.

Every man was now on deck, the engineer and his fireman having come up, leaving the steam blowing off with a shriek which minute by minute grew more horrible as it was confined between the two walls of ice, now not fifty yards apart.

The water looked wilder than ever where it was not covered with small fragments of ice, which came rushing up as if driven by the current beneath the towering masses on their right; and as they literally darted up they rushed on to hit against the cliff on their left, some of them striking the sides of the *Hvalross* blows which made her jar, and shook the ice and snow from the rigging, to come rattling down upon the deck.

“It can’t be long now,” thought Steve; and he glanced up at the boat, and then at the captain, who stood perfectly calm upon the bridge; and just then there was a sharp, whimpering bark from by the bowsprit, followed by a perfect roulade, the dog catching sight of a seal.

“Oh, poor old Skeny! We must not leave him,” muttered Steve; and he called the dog loudly.

The collie came with a rush, and crouched at his master’s feet.

“Johannes,” whispered the lad. “My poor dog,—I can’t leave him. He could not get up to the boat.”

The great calm-looking fellow turned and gave Steve a pleasant smile. Then, stooping down, he lifted the dog in his arms, reached up and placed the paws well over the side of the boat, where he hung a good seven feet above the deck. The dog whined, and seemed disposed to struggle to get free; but at a word from his master he made a scrambling effort, received a good thrust from Johannes, and the next instant was in the boat barking at them as he stood on the thwart and looked over the side, as if asking them to come there as well.

“Is it quite hopeless?” whispered the doctor.

“Who can say, sir?” replied the Norseman. “It is very hard now that we are so near a safe harbour. If the ice does join we must be crushed, for it is too high above us to lift us up.”

“And if the ship is crushed,” whispered Steve, “will it sink?”

“The minute the ice loosens its grip, sir, she must go down.”

The walls were not forty yards apart now, and the unfortunate crew could

pretty well pick out the rugged prominences on their right which would just touch and drive them against the smooth, cliff-like mass on their left. More awe-inspiring still, they could see that as soon as the shock came vast pieces of piled-up ice must lose their equilibrium and topple down on the deck, crushing everything they touched; and onward still the terrible line came till it was not twenty yards away.

“The ice cliff is not moving,” said Johannes, “and the crash will be the greater. Be ready, gentlemen; in another minute the blow must come. Great heavens! what is that?”

He looked astern, as a terrible rushing noise was heard; and as all followed his example, struck by the sound, there, about a hundred yards behind them, the water was foaming and rushing toward them in a wave laden with fragments of ice.

It was plain enough: the pressure of the ice behind was driving the water compressed between those narrow walls forward, like some cataract, which looked as if it would sweep the deck before the two cliffs joined.

“Ready!” shouted the captain. “But don’t stir till the crash begins. The vessel will be at its closest to the cliff on this side.”

“But ta watter will sweep us awa’, captain!” yelled Hamish.

“Silence; the wave will pass under us!” roared the captain, his voice being hardly heard. “Wait till I give the word.”

And in those brief moments the space between the walls had grown narrower, till the yards nearly touched on either side, and the loose fragments that fell from the rugged masses on the right kept on splashing the water up on to the deck.

Just then Skene uttered a fierce bark at the coming wall, Johannes gave Steve a sharp look, and laid his hand upon the gunwale of the boat, drawing it down, the men stepped close to the shrouds, and the captain darted a sharp glance from the bridge at the top of the floe, which was to be their asylum.

Then, roaring loudly, the ice-laden wave struck the poop with a

tremendous crash, lifted the vessel, and bore her onward on the breast of the furious cataract, onward and onward along the narrow passage, which seemed to open out before the rushing water. The yards scraped here and scraped there along the cliff-sides; the ice pounded them, and gave forth a peculiar, hollow, echoing roar, but, swiftly almost as an arrow, they were borne along, with the steam whistle shrieking as if the unfortunate boat were in agony.

A minute.

It seemed to all an hour of horror too terrible to be borne, and then the captain, with both hands to his mouth, roared:

“Engineer! below! stop that escape of steam!”

The man darted to the engine-room hatch, and disappeared, just as the walls behind them closed in with a deafening crash as of a thousand thunder peals, the water rushed by them as if shot from some gigantic pipe, and the *Hvalross* was borne forward at a speed such as she had never half achieved before. Then, as the walls behind continued to close, the vessel glided into open water, which grew clearer and clearer right ahead, where it was running like some mighty mill-race a mile wide northward, between the ice and the great promontory, which jutted out from the land.

“Steve!” said the doctor, with his lips to his young companion’s ear; “and they say the days of miracles are past!”

Without another word he went below into the cabin, and Steve felt his hand grasped from above. He looked up to see that it was Johannes leaning down from the boat.

“We are saved, my dear lad,” he said in a voice deep with emotion; and as if he, too, could participate in the general feeling of thankfulness, Skene burst into a joyful fit of barking and leaped right down upon the deck.

The sun shone more brightly than ever, the snow crystals glistened like diamonds, and the cliffs and mountains towering up on their right above the blue fiord were glorious to behold; but everything to Steve Young

looked misty, and he could only see Captain Marsham as through a veil when that gentleman followed the example of Johannes and reached down from the bridge to grasp the boy’s hand.

Chapter Twenty Three.

After Storm—Calm.

There was plenty of floating ice in the open water running rapidly northward; but the task of avoiding this was easy, for the engineer had followed out the captain's instructions, and there was a sufficiency of steam for navigating the vessel.

It was needed, too; for though they had escaped from the terrible trap in which they had been caught, the peril was not far away. A few minutes' observation showed that the great body of ice was closing in upon the land, and that if before long the *Hvalross* was not placed in a safe anchorage she would certainly be crushed, the only difference being that she would be crushed between ice-floe and rock, and not between ice and ice, the doctor saying that they would have jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire.

There was the danger still coming on as they steamed northward between the moving ice and the perpendicular cliffs of the great headland on their right. But the fires were humming and roaring away below, the rattle of stoking implements and shovel was heard on the iron stoke-hole floor; and as the engine worked and panted away, and the propeller shaft made the after part of the vessel thrill, there were divers hissings and snorts which told that there would soon be plenty of steam for the captain's purpose, as he stood on the bridge with his binocular scanning the opening on the right to see if it would give them the security he sought.

"Up aloft again, Johannes!" he cried. "Take a glass and see if you can con a way round and through those rocks."

Steve started, and took a step forward; but the captain shook his head.

"Not this time," he said.

The boy shrank back feeling disappointed, for this observing from the crow's-nest seemed to have become partly his work; but he said nothing,

for he felt that he had not distinguished himself very highly aloft upon two occasions, so he contented himself with watching the grand coast they had reached. He gazed at the towering cliffs a couple of hundred yards upon his right, streaked in every crevice with snow, which crossed these streaks again, lying as it did upon every ledge, and forming a gigantic network on the black rock. Higher up the streaking and netting ceased, for the rocks were not so perpendicular; and here they were coated with dazzling ice.

The sea-birds circled about the vessel by hundreds, while thousands must have been seated in rows upon the ledges, from which, as they came and went, throwing themselves off as if diving into the air, and taking a flight before resettling, they disturbed the newly-fallen, powdery snow, which fell in showers, glittering in the brilliant sunshine like diamond dust, and at times forming tiny rainbows, which came and went as the *Hvalross* glided on.

“We shall not starve here, Steve, in spite of the cold,” said the doctor, who now joined him. “This must be nesting time, and the storm has disturbed the birds and invaded their nests. How grand it all seems now one can look around without feeling one’s heart in one’s mouth, and thinking that the next minute may be our last!”

“Then you felt frightened, too?” said Steve.

“Frightened? Why, my good lad, do you think any one could face peril like that we have gone through without feeling frightened?”

“I should have thought brave men would.”

“I should like to see the man who could pass through what we did unmoved. Perhaps I’m wrong, my boy, but I don’t think he has been born yet. There, don’t let’s talk about it. Come and watch the man heaving the lead.”

They went forward to where Andrew was standing in the forechains busy with the lead, casting it from time to time, for there were rocks all about the entrance of the inlet or fiord they were making for; but the lead always went down and down into deep water, and was rapidly hauled up again, for all that was wanted was to know whether there was sufficient depth

for the vessel to pass along in safety.

“We’re getting a lesson in arctic navigation, Steve,” said the doctor quietly. “People who sit at home at ease, as the song says, little know how difficult it is.”

“Ah! they don’t know, indeed,” said Steve. “Any one would think that all we had to do was to steam right on till we were opposite the fiord, and then turn to the right and go in at once.”

“Which does not sound very nautical, Master Steve, and would result most likely in landing the vessel upon the rocks. Water cold, Andra?” to the man, as he hauled in the lead.

“Ferry, sir, ferry cauld inteet. She feels as if she hadna got any fingers left. But it’s a coot chop to do when she tidna know her way.”

“Keep heaving more quickly!” cried the captain; and he then signalled to the engine-room for more speed, while the Norsemen in the bows went on fending off the pieces of ice through which they were now passing, the surface being quite white with fragments.

The next moment there was a horrible crashing noise from astern, and fresh orders were sent down into the engine-room, the gong sounding quite faintly now.

“Whatever is that?” whispered the doctor. “Are we on a rock?”

“No; the propeller is beating on the pieces of ice. We must go softly, or one of the blades will be broken.”

In fact, the speed was checked so that the propeller was kept barely in motion, just sufficient to give the vessel steering way, and all the time a glance to the left showed that the ice-floe was closing in upon them fast, while they were some distance yet from the opening.

Meantime, Johannes hailed the deck from time to time, enabling the captain to direct the man at the wheel, so as to avoid dangerous rocks, invisible from the bridge, but quite plain from the commanding height aloft.

And thus the position was growing to be one of extreme peril once more, and it became evident to those who, as non-combatants in this fight with the grand forces of Nature, could only look on, that, unless the captain risked the breaking of the propeller, they would be crushed by the ice against the rocks and rendered a hopeless wreck long before they could round the southern point of the fiord. Even if they could reach the inlet, it might prove to be so encumbered with rocks that they could not enter; but it was their only hope now.

Fortunately the current ran swiftly, and as the ice neared more swiftly still, and just when the position was growing most perilous, the surface became clear of floating fragments, such as would injure the screw.

Steve's heart was sinking again, for the great ice wall was getting very close, and he had given many looks at the huge cliff to see whether it would be possible to climb up, when once more the sinking spirits rose with a bound, for, in the nick of time, Johannes shouted, "All clear ahead!" the gong sent forth its notes to order full speed, and the water was churned into a foam as the propeller began to spin round.

"Stand away with that lead!" shouted the captain; and Andrew coiled up the wet line with a sigh of relief.

"He's going to risk the rocks now," whispered Steve.

"Yes; I suppose it's our only chance," replied the doctor; and they both went as far forward as they could get to join the Norsemen who were on the look-out for danger.

They had about a quarter of a mile still to go, but now their speed was greater than that of the closing-in ice, and the men at last burst into a cheer as, in obedience to a motion of the captain's hand, the spokes were spun round, and the *Hvalross* glided along in a sharp curve right in between two towering walls of rocks facing each other at a distance of some sixty yards. Then the engine was slowed down, and they passed more quietly along a rugged channel which went straight in for a short distance, and then bore sharply round to the left.

They were none too soon, for, long before they reached this curve, the ice-floe touched the headland they had passed, and there arose a

crashing roar mingled with thunderous sounds that were deafening. It was as if the huge fields of ice were about to be swept right over the land, and the perpendicular rocks, as they bore the brunt, echoed the terrible volleying noise. The sight was awful in its majesty: one floe ploughed up another, and vast fragments fell over and over, to fall with a crash upon others, or into the waters of the inlet, churning them up as if in some furious tempest, driving billows up against the rocks on either side, and making the *Hvalross* rock and roll as she sped slowly on. And all the while, driven by the almost irresistible force behind, the ice-floes came on and on, filling up the inlet, and roaring with fury as the vessel they seemed to be pursuing kept still beyond their reach.

The lead was out again and rapidly heaved, but the water kept of a great depth, and the channel was clear of scattered rocks, so that the opening where it bore off to the left was reached with ease, and the *Hvalross* bore round in answer to her helm, and began once more to make for the north.

Ten minutes later the whole of the inlet that ran so nearly straight in was jammed right up with mountainous masses of ice, which ran right across the angle where they had turned off to the north, and then the ice came on, mounting over that which was below, grinding, crackling, and pressing it solid, deafening the ears of those who listened for a few minutes, and then dying off into a more and more distant sound. This soon grew fainter, heard as it seemed to be from the other side of the cliffs on their left, while the water in the fiord, which had been tremendously agitated, rushing on past the *Hvalross* and leaving her rolling and the crow's-nest in which Johannes stood describing a long arc in the air, began to subside, the billows ceased to leap up the cliffs, the loose fragments of ice to eddy and rush together, and the vessel floated upon an even keel.

The peril was at an end, for the floes, after completely choking up the entrance to the fiord to the height of at least fifty feet, were now grinding and crushing their way onward outside, and the vessel lay in perfect safety. But, unless there was a way out at the other end of the fiord, they were completely sealed in by ice that, from all appearances, as it towered up from side to side, seemed as if it would take years to melt, while as likely as not it would go on consolidating and increasing in bulk till time should be no more.

No one spoke, though a strange silence gathered round them, the roar of the ice-floes upon the cliffs of this unknown land sounding hushed and strange. Every eye was fixed upon the dazzling white wall which, with its thousands of tons of ice, had been built in a few minutes right across the opening by which they had entered the now fast calming fiord. For that piled-up mass was indescribably grand as it glistened in the sunshine, every crack and depression being of the most lovely blue, from the palest sapphire to the deepest amethyst. It was magnificent, it was grand; and all started at something which was terribly incongruous; for a great flock of the northern gulls suddenly came sweeping down over the ice into the narrow fiord, shrieking, crying, and uttering sounds which were like mocking laughter, to break the solemnity of the scene.

Worse still, his duties having been interfered with in no way, and too busy to take any note of the fresh peril, the cook suddenly appeared from the galley, whose fire had been roaring away for the past two hours, and, walking under the bridge, he looked up to the captain and said loudly:

“Capital haunch of venison, roasted to a turn, sir. If you are at liberty, you can have the dinner in now.”

The grandeur, the solemnity, the thoughts of this fresh miraculous escape, all passed away on the instant. The men made a movement toward the forecastle, looking inquiringly at the mate, for they knew that their meal would be ready too, and Steve turned to the doctor so comically perplexed a face that the latter smiled.

“Hungry, Steve?” he said.

“I—I didn’t know it before, sir,” he replied; “but I suppose I am.”

“Well, *il faut manger*, as the French say. Come along.”

He led the way to the bridge, where the cook was still waiting, for the captain had not spoken.

“Can you come down, Marsham?” said the doctor. “It is many hours since we have broken our fast.”

“Eh?” came back. “Yes. Ahoy, there, Johannes! that will do. Come down,

Handscombe?” said the captain thoughtfully. “Yes, we may as well have something to eat, for we shall have plenty of time.”

He pointed to the huge rampart of ice right across the inlet, and said quietly:

“A man needs to be well educated in the ways of nature in the north to navigate his ship. Our only hope now is—”

“Let’s talk of that when we have studied nature’s daily wants,” said the doctor, smiling. “We are safe, are we not?”

“Oh yes,” said the captain bitterly, “we are quite safe now.”

Chapter Twenty Four.

The Northern Prison.

As the doctor said, *il faut manger*, and, in spite of all they had gone through, their appetites were so sharp-set that they made a most hearty repast, and were ready to declare themselves prepared to encounter anything.

Steve thought that this was rather boastful, and due in a great measure to the fact that they all, himself included, felt that, for the present at any rate, they had no danger to encounter, but he said nothing.

In fact, when they returned on deck the noise of the ice had died away into a distant murmur, and the fiord, with its smooth, blue water, huge, nearly perpendicular walls, and shattered rocks of dark stone made brilliant with ice, looked so beautiful that their position appeared to be more a cause of congratulation than complaint. Certainly they were blocked in; but ice that shut them up so quickly might, by another movement, likely enough set them free; and, besides, most of these northern fiords were like those on the Norwegian or Highland coasts—channels inside islands; and consequently, for aught they knew to the contrary, there was a way out to the north which might not be closed.

But the captain had no intention of making a long exploration on that day. He was content to run on a short distance, to anchor in what looked to be a snug berth behind a jutting mass of the rocky side which sheltered them from the north wind in case it should come tearing down the channel, and faced the sunny south. The fires were then raked out, and that night, after the watch was set, those who were free indulged in a long and much-needed sleep.

Steve rose the next morning bright and cheerful, to find the others the same. The intense cold which accompanied the storm had passed, and there in the sheltered fiord the air felt, by comparison with that which they had gone through, quite salutary. The change must have taken place directly they had gone to rest, for the warm sunshine of the night had thawed the icy rigging to a great extent, so that ropes and stays had resumed their customary aspect, and the snow, which had penetrated the furled sails, was coming away in drips.

It was a wonderful and cheery change, and Steve eagerly waited for the captain's first proceedings in this unknown land—unknown as far as any one there could say.

Watty Links was sunning himself as if in imitation of Skene, who was comfortably basking at the galley door, his head resting upon his paws, and his figure suggesting that he must be on very friendly terms with the cook.

The dog seemed to be fast asleep, but one eye opened a little as Steve approached, and his tail was raised to give three solemn raps on the deck; then, at a word, Skene sprang up, yawned, stretched himself, and followed his master.

Steve gave Watty a word, too; but that gentleman only grunted, and the lad went on to where the men were busy finishing the brushing and scrubbing of the deck.

Here he encountered Mr Lowe, the mate, who had been round the vessel in the dinghy to examine the hull as regarded damages. But she had been too well prepared for her journey into ice-land with a casing of tough wood as a kind of partial outer skin, and this had only been rubbed and

channelled a little by the blocks which had tried to plough her sides, so that he had nothing but good to report to the captain, who had been about for an hour looking bright and eager for the long day's work.

Breaking away from them, Steve joined the Norwegians, who greeted him in their frank, grave way.

"Well, Mr Steve," said Johannes, "I suppose we shall begin hunting directly; there is plenty of game about. You and I must go and get some eggs from the shelves."

"Eggs? there'll be no eggs," said Steve; "they would all be blown away by the storm. Don't you know that these sea-birds lay their eggs on the bare stones generally? Oh, but of course you knew that," he added hurriedly, as it struck him that the Norseman must know ten times as much as he.

"Yes," said Johannes quietly. "I know that, and I have also noticed how wonderfully they stay on those shelves in spite of the great winds that blow. No doubt many were blown off in the storm; but many would stay."

"Why, do the sea-birds stick them down tight?"

"No," said Johannes, smiling. "But you have seen the strange shape of many of the eggs of sea-birds. They are not like those of other fowls."

"No, they're thick at one end and very thin at the other, going off quite straight instead of being rounded."

"That is why they stay on the rocks," said the Norseman: "when the wind strikes them the light, thin end flies round, and they begin to spin so fast that you can hardly see them turn."

"That's curious," said Steve, who looked hard at Johannes, as if ready to think that the man was telling him a travellers' tale. But the Norseman was the last man who could be expected to indulge in fiction, and the boy hastened to ask about their prospects.

"We all feel satisfied that this place abounds with game," said Johannes. "Jakobsen here saw a couple of bears, the seals are plentiful, and we passed yesterday enough of the walrus to feel sure that there must be

plenty more."

"Here, Steve!" cried the captain just then; "breakfast! I am going up the fiord in one of the boats directly after. Do you care to go?"

"Care to go!" cried Steve. "Oh, I say, Captain Marsham, don't leave me behind in any of your trips."

The captain did not seem to hear him, but went to where some of the crew were busy now, unfurling and shaking out the jib preparatory to hoisting it to dry, while other men were busy with the stay-sail.

The lads brightened up at the order given, and the result was that an hour later the largest boat, well manned, and prepared for any emergencies in the way of meeting game, from walrus to wild duck, pushed off from the ship's side, leaving her floating as snugly and as motionless as if in a dock.

The morning was glorious, and as they rowed north the various turnings of the fiord soon shut out all view of the *Hvalross*. After a while the huge towering cliffs, which had risen up nearly sheer from the water's edge, began to retire, becoming less precipitous, and leaving a shore which, from being a mere ribbon, rapidly increased till there was a wide stretch of level land on either side, showing patches of green here and there where the snow had melted away; and soon after a narrow valley opened off to the right, but not going far, its upper end being choked by a glacier of great extent.

The men rowed as if glad of the chance to stretch their muscles, and soon after another valley was passed, and again another, but both on the right, the left side of the fiord being formed by a long, rocky and icy ridge, showing no gap whatever or means of getting through it toward the sea.

The valleys they still kept on passing, away east, gave plenty of promise of deer, so that, even if kept prisoners for some time, there did not appear to be any lack of food; but the other side was the more eagerly scanned by the Norsemen, who had the walrus harpoons, ropes, and lances lying ready to hand, and who longed to wield them again.

The party did not attempt to land, but travelled on for miles, and always

through plenty of water, passing at last a likely-looking chasm on their left, through which ran a narrow, zigzagging, deep-looking canal; and in the hope that this might prove to be a way through to the west coast, it was left for the time being, while they pushed on for a mile or two farther. Here they came upon an unmistakable passage through a rocky defile, whose bottom was clear, dark water, going right on as far as they could see, while, leaving this too so as to finish the exploration of the main fiord first, they rowed on once more. At last, turning a headland, they came suddenly in view of a magnificent sight from the point of view of a lover of nature, but a terribly damping one to a captain whose ship was caught in a trap; for there, about a mile away, and spreading from side to side of the fiord, whose blue waters touched its foot, was another grand glacier, which looked from the distance like a frozen cataract, flowing down from high up in the mountains, to empty its solid waters into the fiord.

“No way out,” said the captain, after a few minutes’ examination of the great glacier with his glass; and he handed it to the doctor, who was fain to confess that the fiord was sealed up there as effectually as at the other end.

“It’s very grand,” he said with a sigh, “magnificent; but rather a dash to your hopes.”

“Back again!” said the captain, after Steve had had his survey as well, and longed to be rowed close up to the blue ice grottoes he could see at the foot of the glacier, beyond which many peaks towered up while the land was scored with valleys.

The oars dipped again in the blue water, and they rowed back to the rugged defile they had left to explore on their return.

Here the prospects were more cheerful as far as the boat was concerned; and they rowed at once into a chasm which seemed to be one vast rift through the mountain, as if torn open by some convulsion of nature.

There was plenty of room for the boat, and the water looked, from its blackness, of great depth; but there was room for the boat only in places, their oars almost touching the perpendicular rocks on either side, these

rising so high that they almost shut out the light. There was a trace of motion, too, in this water, which soon satisfied the captain that it might be possible to pass through to the sea. And so it proved, after about an hour's winding in and out, for the most part in twilight; for all at once the gloom gave place to a burst of sunshine, which struck in like sheaves of rays of light, and a little farther on the chasm opened out, and they were on the western side of the ridge which had divided them from the sea, while on either hand were rocks, and before them the piled-up masses of ice-floe, evidently a part of the army of floating masses which had been forced up all along the shore. This stopped further progress, and they sat with oars balanced gazing before them at a chaos of ice, where the previous day all had been open water.

At first all looked beautiful, but utterly devoid of life. Only, though, for a short time. Before long something was seen to move a short distance away; and upon the boat being paddled round an intervening block of ice, there was a sight which sent a thrill of excitement through the Norsemen, a feeling which the others shared; for there, in ample supply, they saw that which they had come for one thing to seek—a herd of the arctic sea-horses, offering themselves as a ready aim for the Norsemen's harpoons and lances, as well as for the rifles of the captain and doctor.

"Will you try for one to-day, sir?" asked Johannes respectfully.

"It would be waste," replied Captain Marsham. "I do not want to destroy the creatures if we cannot utilise the oil."

"We can, sir," said Johannes quietly. "The ship must come up to the other end of the fiord, and we can hunt here and cut up the walrus, and carry the oil out to be boiled down as easily as we could take it elsewhere."

"Yes, you are right," said the captain. "But how will you reach the animals?"

"You gentlemen will reach them with your guns," said the man quietly.

"Stalk them?" said the captain.

"Yes; creep up very cautiously, for they may be shy. Try and get between them and the sea."

So the boat was rowed close up to the edge of the forced-up ice, and the party landed for their first walrus hunt, Steve shouldering his rifle with the rest.

Chapter Twenty Five.

The Walrus' Foe.

To stalk or crawl up to an animal within shooting distance upon a level prairie, where there is no sign of bush or tree, not so much as a big clump of grass, is a difficult task which it takes a Red Indian to achieve, with his peculiar powers of creeping along the ground almost like a caterpillar, moving, as it were, upon his crooked fingers and his toes; but out upon a rocky shore, among piled-up masses of ice, many of them big enough to hide a couple of hundred men, the stalking appeared to be simplicity itself, and the three bearers of firearms stepped jauntily along toward the walrus herd, screening themselves behind the masses of ice with more than one slip and stumble.

The scene was brilliant in the extreme, with the sun's rays darting from the broken fragments so lately deposited by the ice pressure, which was all that remained of the terrible convulsion of nature in which the expedition so nearly came to utter destruction. Saving the cries of the sea-birds and the ripple of the waves on the shore, there was not a sound to be heard. The water had regained its balance, so to speak, and to right and left, as far as they could see, there was a dark, open space of about a quarter of a mile wide on an average between the rugged ice-piled shore and the pack, with comparatively few fragments, flashing with light as they glided along in the now gentle current.

In their passage in the boat through the gloomy chasm the cold had been intense; but a few minutes' climbing over the ice in the clear sunshine, carrying a heavy rifle and ammunition, resulted in a pause behind a huge mass of piled-up ice, where flat piece after flat piece had been thrust one above the other, and a declaration that it was very hot.

"Hist!" whispered Johannes, who, with Jakobsen, was their companion on

land once more. “A sound may alarm the walrus.”

“But I should have thought they would be tame enough up here,” said Steve. “They can’t have seen men before. Couldn’t we walk up to them boldly?”

The Norseman shook his head.

“They have other enemies beside man, sir, and they are suspicious of anything strange which they see moving. Look,” he continued, pointing downward from the height to which they had climbed.

“What at? More walrus?”

“No, sir; that shining water. We need not have left the boat. It is the continuation of the passage we came through, and you can trace it from those great blocks of ice right away in and out to the sea.”

“All but in that one place not so very far from where we left the boat.”

“Yes; the ice-floe was thrust right over it there. It may have choked it up, but perhaps there is a way under the ice. Great floes like that in motion yesterday would easily be thrust right over such a narrow canal. Look what has been done here.”

“Then, if we can row right through to the sea that will be grand,” said Steve; “because it will make it so easy if we can explore along the coast in the boat.”

“Yes, sir, and so much better for the seal and walrus-hunting. Shall we go on now, gentlemen?”

“Yes,” said Captain Marsham. “Where do you make out the herd to be lying now?”

“About a quarter of a mile from the other side of this pile, sir, straight away toward the sea. Be careful to keep out of sight.”

The stalk was resumed, and slowly and carefully all crept along in single file, keeping to the depressions and rugged passages between the

masses of ice.

It was a most laborious struggle, for the necessity of keeping out of sight forced all to go down in the most difficult places, and at times to lie flat and crawl and drag themselves over the higher portions which they had to cross.

But the excitement kept them well to their work, and in almost perfect silence they progressed till a sheltered nook was reached behind a ridge formed by the tilting of one of the ice-fields which had been forced ashore. Here they paused again to regain breath and steadiness of hand, for the exertion was great to reach this advantageous spot, just beyond which the walrus lay, the sea being close at hand. There was only a rough slope formed by the edge of the floe now lying at an angle of about thirty-five degrees for them to mount, rest their rifles on the edge, take aim each at the one he selected, and fire.

Johannes had directed the captain on the course taken, he seeming to know, as if by instinct, the way to bear and regain the straight line marked out when they had been turned aside by an obstacle; and now, after pointing out to the leader where to take his place, and then by signs only indicating the doctor's, he turned to Steve, placed his lips to the boy's ear, and said:

"Creep up slowly without a sound, slip your gun over, and take aim at one of the walrus that is side on to you. It is of no use to shoot anywhere; it must be straight behind the eye, and about six inches away, just where it looks all thick neck. They're waiting; go on."

Steve glanced to right and left, as Johannes crouched down beside Jakobsen, each man with his lance ready; and then the captain waved his hand, and they started together, crawling up slowly and silently till they were within a yard of the level ridge, where all paused as if animated by the same spirit, thrust the barrels of their pieces toward the top, and began to seek for the next places to plant their feet so as to peer over the edge together.

Steve's heart beat with great throbs, and a curious nervous sensation came over him; but he was in position first, saw that the captain was

ready the next moment, and then turned to the doctor, for it was of course necessary that all should fire together.

Steve was just in time to hear a sharp ejaculation, and see the doctor slip and roll down the ice slope, his rifle rattling after him with plenty of noise; and, knowing that if he were not quick there would be no shot, he raised himself up with rifle ready, thrust it over the ridge at the same time as the captain, and then stopped there staring.

“Fire! fire!” came in a whisper from Jakobsen.

“What at?” replied Steve, and the captain laughed good-humouredly.

“Hurt yourself, Handscombe?” he said.

“Hurt myself! Of course I have. I shall be all bruises,” grumbled the doctor. “Why didn’t you shoot?”

“How can you ask that when you made noise enough to frighten away all the walrus in the arctic circle?”

“Are there none there?” said Johannes, who had crept up to Steve’s side.

“Not a sign of one.”

“Don’t say I scared them all away,” said the doctor.

“Oh no, sir,” replied the Norseman, looking about searchingly. “They must have seen us ten minutes ago; they’re yonder on the ice a quarter of a mile away. We were very careful, too.”

“I am glad I did not frighten them,” cried the doctor, rubbing one of his elbows.

“But it’s so disappointing after all that trouble,” grumbled Steve.

“Wait a bit, sir,” said Johannes, as he watched the herd; “you will have plenty of chances yet. There are sure to be some disappointments in walrus-hunting. We must be more careful next time. There are some, grand bulls there, though,” he added thoughtfully; “look at that one’s

tusks, Mr Steve—that one drawing himself up out of the water."

"Yes, I was looking at it," replied Steve. "What a monster! It looks like an elephant without a trunk, and his tusks turned wrong way on."

For there, swimming about, or climbing on to a great mass of ice a quarter of a mile away, but which looked half that distance in the clear air, was the herd in perfect safety. They were of all sizes, from calves not half grownup to unwieldy cows and the huge massive bulls. Some floated quietly, others were gambolling about, and the rest lay in various attitudes as if basking or sleeping in the warm sunshine; while one great fellow had dragged himself on to the highest point, raised himself on his fore flippers, and, with head erect, was looking about in different directions.

"That's the sentinel," said Johannes quietly. "He'll warn them of danger, and he must have seen us."

"No," said Jakobsen; and he pointed to their right.

Johannes laughed.

"Right," he said. "No wonder you did not get a shot, gentlemen; there was some one stalking them first."

"Some one?" cried the captain. "Who? where?"

Johannes chuckled, and pointed to where the water was being parted by something swimming.

"I see it," cried Steve; "a bear!"

"Yes, sir; he has been trying to get one of the young calves, but they were too sharp for him; and now he has gone down to the water, and is swimming across to the floe to have another try. If you watch him, Mr Steve, you'll see some fun."

"Have a look, Steve," said the captain, drawing the small double glass from its case and passing it to the boy, who carefully laid down his heavy rifle, and focussed the binocular upon the bear, bringing it, as it were, almost to his feet. He could see the long, cruel-looking head, with its

pointed nose just clear of the water, the eyes the same, and the whole body so nearly submerged that there was nothing visible but the long hair, waving like a streaky ripple as the bear swam steadily on.

“It’s not going after the walrus,” said Steve.

“Wait a bit, sir. I think it is,” said Johannes. “That’s the bear’s cunning. If it went straight at them they would all plunge into the water, and swim and dive away. You’ll see the antics directly; those beasts are as cunning as cats.”

In effect, as Steve watched, he saw the bear swim right away to the ice, a couple of hundred yards apparently from the walrus herd, climb out on to the surface, shake itself to get rid of the water two or three times, and then move away from the edge a little and lie down in the sun, while the walrus herd paid no more attention to it than it apparently paid to them, the calves wallowing about and playing on the ice, and the rest of the herd gradually drawing themselves up to bask in the warmth. In fact, though it was interesting to examine the huge beasts through the glass, Steve began to think it time to commence inspecting something else, or try to shoot something useful to the ship’s cook.

“Old Johannes don’t know everything,” he said to himself; but the thought had hardly crossed his mind when the object thereof touched his arm.

“Look,” he said.

“I was looking,” replied Steve, whose glass was fixed upon the walrus herd. “What fat, comical creatures the young ones are! They seem to have no shape at all.”

“No, no; look at the bear. He’s hungry, that fellow, and wants a good feed.”

Steve turned the glass upon the bear, and saw that it had risen to its feet, and was licking itself, with its head turned away from the walrus, and then, lying down, it rolled over two or three times before beginning to lick and paw itself again for a time, but always shuffling backward a little as it attended busily to its toilet.

“See what he means, sir?” whispered Johannes.

“Yes, it’s trying to get nearer to the young walrus.”

“That’s it, sir. Now, you watch.”

Steve’s attention was taken now, and he eagerly scanned the action of the great Polar bear, which appeared to be in quite a playful mood, and had another roll and gambol on the ice before beginning to preen and clean its long, soft, whitish fur again as if it were feathers.

This went on for a long time; but it was so cleverly and artfully managed that it took the others’ attention, and they all lay there on the ice in the warm sunshine, watching the cunning animal as it continued to get nearer and nearer to the herd, while the old bull, with his head erect and his white tusks curving away sat up in the most stupidly stolid fashion.

“Why, the silly great bull will let the bear get close up to him!” cried Steve at last, after looking at one of these evolutions. “He managed quite six yards then. Why doesn’t the creature give the alarm?”

“Not so stupid as you think, sir,” said Johannes. “I’ve watched these animals many times before, and you’ll see that he’ll give the word before long; I mean he’ll do something to start them all off.”

All the same, it did not appear as if the huge walrus realised the danger approaching so steadily, for every now and then, while performing some antic, the bear continued to lessen the distance between it and its prey, while simulating the greatest innocence and assuming to be thinking of anything but making an attack. So playful a creature, enjoying itself thoroughly in the sunshine, could never have approached a walrus herd before. Now it was rolling legs upward, and giving itself a peculiar wriggle, as if to scratch its back; then it was sitting up like a cat, and reaching round to have a lick at the part of its person which had just been rubbed in the ice. A minute later it was on its flank, with all four legs stretched out, and its muzzle in the snow; and all these changes were made with the most extreme deliberation, and as if the animal was intent only upon its own enjoyment, and was as sportive as the unwieldy fat calves rolling about near their mothers a short distance away.

“It’s all over,” said Steve suddenly; for the animal had shuffled a little nearer to the herd, and then lain down with its head from them, and apparently gone to sleep.

The doctor and Captain Marsham, tired of watching the bear, had started off with their pieces, leaving Steve with the two Norsemen, so that the lad’s last remark was addressed to his companions.

“No,” said Jakobsen, smiling; “the sport has hardly begun.”

“Right,” said Johannes. “Why, Mr Steve, you do not think that treacherous great brute would take all that trouble for nothing, do you?”

“I don’t know, I do not understand bears,” replied Steve; “I only say look at him. Why, Johannes, if we had had the boat through, what a capture we might have made—the bear and plenty of walrus!”

“Perhaps, sir,” replied the Norseman drily.

“What do you mean?”

“We might have failed to get within shot.”

“And if we had, lost the walrus all the same,” said Jakobsen.

“Yes,” said Johannes, “you are never sure of one of those great beasts.”

“Well, let’s follow the captain,” said Steve; “I’m getting a little cold.”

“Won’t you stay and see the end of the bear’s game, sir? He has finished his nap, and has begun to have another roll.”

The man was correct, for the bear had rolled itself over, turned, and had another roll over, bringing itself apparently within some twenty yards of a couple of the smallest calves, which were stretched out in clumsy bulk close to the edge of the ice, where it was about ten feet above the glistening water.

“Now for it,” said Jakobsen; “he means mischief at last.”

But never was there a more innocent, playful-looking bear. It turned half away, and began to haul up the snow as if to make its bed there upon the floe, gazing across at the land the while; then with a swing, as if it were on a pivot, it swung round.

“Now!” cried Johannes; but there was no need, Steve’s eyes were fixed intently upon the animal as it made a sudden rush.

So did the bull walrus, and the snow rose in clouds, torn up by the animals making for the sea, which was churned up into foam as first one and then another of the monstrous, shapeless creatures threw itself in with a tremendous splash.

So great was the disturbance of snow and water that there was quite a mist; but Steve was able to see that the two fat calves rolled over into the sea in time enough to avoid the bear’s rush; and almost at the same moment the bull charged it, and caught it with its head in the flank as it stood with outstretched muzzle and grinning teeth reaching over the water, uttering a low, deep roar indicative of its disappointment.

So intent was the bear on the prey which it had missed, that it paid no heed to the approach of the bull, which, after bustling across the surface of the snow, struck the bear right in the side and tumbled it off into the sea with a tremendous splash, following directly after with a turmoil in the water which was more extensive still.

It was impossible to see what happened then, for the calm, smooth water seemed now to have been smitten by a storm, but only to calm again, as Jakobsen pointed along the edge of the floe, where the bear could be seen swimming steadily away.

“He has got off,” said Johannes, “for a wonder.”

“Why?” asked Steve; “the walrus couldn’t fight a savage beast like that.”

“But they do, sir, sometimes, in defence of their young; and then the walrus can be a savage beast, too. Think of what tusks they have! I’ve seen them thirty inches long, but say there are eighteen or twenty inches standing out, firm, hard teeth with which the animal can strike like lightning.”

“Straight down, I suppose?” said Steve.

“Straight down, sir? Any way,—side ways, and even upwards; for big, heavy creatures as they are, they can twist their heads round like a kitten. I daresay a walrus would get the worst of it on the *ice*, if the bear could once get a good hug; but when a bull has got a bear in the water, though he can swim splendidly, he is not at home there like a walrus, and this one must have had better luck than usual to get away.”

“And where is the herd now?” said Steve, looking curiously after the bear.

“Ah, gone far enough by this time, sir. The bear scared them, and they go on swimming away for miles till they forget all about the danger, and then get on the ice again.”

A hail from the captain took them to his side. He was examining the narrow rift which made its way amidst the piled-up ice, the rocks on either side having prevented its being filled up, and, following this, they made their way toward the boat, and wherever it was possible they managed to trace it pretty well, till, as Johannes had surmised, they came upon a place where the channel through the rocks was covered in, but fortunately not choked, being completely arched over for about a hundred yards.

“We must try and find our way to this in the boat to-morrow,” said Captain Marsham; “there must be a way, though we did not find it to-day.”

“It is hidden somewhere by the rocks, sir,” said Johannes: “shall we search?”

“No; they will be getting uneasy on board. I am satisfied with to-day’s work. We have found another road to the sea, one which is not blocked. But,” he added in a low voice to the doctor, “not a way out for the ship.”

They reached the boat a short time after, and plunged from the brilliant sunshine into the chill and gloom of the weird rift, along which they were rowed, listening to a good deal of splashing and echoing in the darkest part.

“Fish?” whispered Steve, for the strangeness of the gloomy chasm had

an effect upon his spirits, and before he asked that question he had been busy with his imagination conjuring up all manner of strange-looking, dangerous creatures as being likely to inhabit the dark depths over which they were riding, so he turned to Johannes and said, “Fish?”

“Seals,” replied the Norseman laconically.

An hour later they were out in the sunshine once again, with the magnificent glacier which filled up the northern end of the fiord looking more lovely than when they saw it first, a fact due; perhaps, to their having been threading a gloomy passage which at times was like a huge cavern.

Then came a long row past the valleys which ran inland, and down one of which the doctor declared that he saw a reindeer; and in due time the fiord contracted, the rocks on either side towered up with their ledges displaying row after row of sea-birds ready to take flight and utter their wild clamour, as in the distance they resembled a snowstorm of which the great flakes were parti-coloured.

At last the *Hvalross* was seen floating on the clear water, looking welcome and bright in the sunshine; and so clear was everything that as they neared her she looked doubled, one vessel keel to keel with another, whose funnel and masts lay low in the depths of the fiord.

“Dinner’s quite ready, gentlemen,” said the cook as they reached the deck; and that night, in spite of the soft glow of the sun, Steve slept as soundly as if it were as dark as any that he had ever known at home.

Chapter Twenty Six.

The Doctor’s Shot.

Captain Marsham had given his orders over-night, and hence the steam was up by breakfast time, and directly after that meal the vessel was gliding northward with her propeller churning up the deep water into a silvery foam, while two ever-extending waves ran toward the sides of the fiord, and broke upon the perpendicular rocks which ran down into deep

water.

Steve felt a little regret at quitting their anchorage, till he recalled that there was an equally beautiful one at the foot of the frozen fall; and he had just come to the conclusion that it was a very wise change, for it suggested imprisonment to be shut in on three sides by the towering rocks and the piled-up ice-floes, when the captain said to Mr Handscombe:

“This will be a wonderful change for the better.”

“But you will not go on loading the vessel with oil now?” said the doctor.

“Why not? We shall have grand opportunities to do that, and make expeditions inland as well, on the chance of finding that our friends may also have been driven up here.”

“But the vessel—we can never extricate her, so why load her?”

“Because the chances here are so many. It looks at the first blush as if the vessel is bound to stay here till she has rotted and the engine rusted away, but we are not going to despair. Who could, in weather like this, eh, Steve?”

“Of course not,” said the boy. “Why, we can set to work and build a ship big enough to carry us back to Norway out of the planks, if the ice behind us does not melt.”

The captain nodded, and then he resumed his task of keeping a sharp look-out forward in search of rocks, but his search was vain, for the water was immensely deep and clear, and they reached the open part of the fiord, and cast anchor a short distance away from the mouth of the black chasm and in full view of the glacier. This promised to give them shelter from the first northern gale which blew, though one of the lateral valleys looked threatening, and as if the wind could rush along it like a blast roaring through a pipe; but as that was below their anchorage, it was not likely to affect them much.

The anchor then went down in deep water, and as if they had only to sail out up the fiord at any time they liked, the captain had two boats lowered,

and giving the mate charge of one, he led the way in the other to the mouth of the chasm, while the men, with their lances and harpoons on board, tugged eagerly at the oars, ready and willing for their first attack upon the oil-yielding animals of the northern seas.

Success attended them on getting to the more open water at the end of the chasm, for, after a little searching, the continuation was found right at the back of a huge mass of rock, and, clearing this obstacle, the men rowed on, to plunge into brief darkness again beneath the long stretch of ice arches. Then came a good, steady pull and a cheer, for the boats were out in clear water in the wide channel which ran up between the ice-bound shore and the floe.

As they rowed out in the open water the men looked disappointed, and Steve, who was in the bows of the first boat with Johannes and Jakobsen, had to listen to the Scotch sailors' banter, spoken to the Norwegians sometimes, but more often at the lad himself.

"Hahmeesh laddie," said Andrew McByle, "if she hadna baith hands at the oar, she'd get out ta sneeshin'. Gie me a pinch. Hah! Ferry goot, laddie, ferry goot," he continued, after helping himself to a pinch of snuff, and being able to use his hands for that. "She'll hae chust ane more wee bit. Hah! Tak' the box back, as she'll pe for finishing it a'."

They rowed on for a little while, with Hamish staring about and Andrew giving an occasional snort of contempt.

"See annything, Hahmeesh?"

"Na, naething."

"Naething it is, laddie. Hech! And I thocht after a' she'd heard tell tat the sea was chust alive wi' the walrus and seal, and bear lived a' along like wee birdies on the rocks."

"Hey, to hear a' they said," grumbled Hamish, "she'd think sae. Ant there's as many walrus coos and bulls here as ye see in ta Firth o' Clyde if ye gang oop ta Glasgie."

"Ye're recht, laddie," said Andrew, "chust as many. Why, it's petter in ta

Clyde, for she can see a porpoise pig, and there's naething here but watter and ice. Wha are we gaen?"

"She canna tell," said Hamish. "She's thinkin' it's to pring the lang tyke oot for a ride."

"If you call my collie a 'lang tyke,' Hamish, I'll set him at you. Here, Skeny. Css!"

The dog started up from where he had been lying in the bows, looked in his master's face, and uttered a low growl.

"Na, she wadna set the tog at a man, Hahmeesh," said Andrew with a sly grin. "Not that there's muckle bite spout the tog. What made ye pring her to sea at a', Meester Steve?"

"To bite impudent people's legs," said Steve gruffly.

"Na, she wadna dae tat," cried Andrew. "Put, Meester Steve, wha' are a' the walrus gane tae?"

"To sleep, perhaps."

Andrew chuckled.

"Look here, laddie, she winna say a wort to anny one, but ye'll chust tell the truth to a man. She tidna see anny walrus yesterday at a'?"

"I'm not going to try and make you believe if you don't care to," said Steve.

"Put she chust wants to know. Come noo, ye tidna see anny, and it was a chust flim-flam and mak'-believe."

"There were plenty here yesterday," said Steve.

"Then where are they gane the?"

"Why didn't you bring your pipes and play? You'd have soon seen where they were."

“Ay!” said Andrew seriously. “Chust a wee lilt o’ the pipes might pring the creatures oot o’ their holes. There was a man ance, Apollo they ca’d him, as played on the pipes, an’ a’ the bit beasties cam’ roond to listen; and she’ll pe thenking that a’ that time back the pipes would pe ferry safage like, and a mon like tat not aple to play like we play the noo.”

This was said so innocently and in such good faith that Steve could hardly keep his countenance.

“Chah! She’s ferry sorry she tidna pring the pipes. There was plenty room in ta poat.”

“But there’s no room out here for the noise,” cried Steve, laughing.

“Tid she hear tat?” said Andrew, turning his head to speak to Hamish. “She ca’d the music noise. Ah, laddie, ye’ll ken mair spout the music when ye’re a muckle bit more auld. It’s a ferry crant thing the music, and she’ll pe ferry sorry some tay that she crinned at the pipes.”

“R–r–r–r–ra!” growled Skene, leaping upward so as to place his paws on Steve’s shoulders; and then he barked loudly as he gazed at the ice-floe on their left.

“Keep that dog quiet, Steve,” said the captain; “he’ll scare the walrus.”

Andrew’s head went down with his chin upon his breast, and he gave Steve an exasperating, sly look as the lad tried to quiet the dog.

“Do you hear? Keep him quiet! We ought not to have brought him.”

“She winna skear ta walrus,” whispered Andrew, “for there are nane.”

“The dog sees something yonder,” said Johannes. “Yes, there! He sees a bear close up in that break in the ice.”

“A bear!” cried the captain excitedly. “Well done, dog! We should have passed it.”

The rifles were seized, and their eyes shaded to catch a glimpse of the white-furred animal hiding in one of the crevices of the ice cliff until the

boat had passed. But the glitter of the snow made the task difficult till they were much nearer, and then it was seen to be lying at full length just clear of the water, and with its head well up, apparently enjoying the warm sunshine and seizing a favourable opportunity for a good sleep.

Rifles were held ready for a shot as the men rowed in till they were within a hundred yards, without the bear, which was a monster, taking the slightest notice of the boat, and then the captain said:

“Cease rowing the moment I hold up my hand. Johannes, Jakobsen, have your spears ready; the brute may swim off and attack the boat when it is wounded.”

“We are quite ready, sir,” said the Norwegian in a whisper; and he and his companion gently raised the heads of their spears from where the weapons were lying along the thwarts.

“Good. Now, Steve, we’ll get in another fifty yards if we can, and then rest on our oars. You shall have the first shot. Do you know where to aim?”

“About six inches behind his eye, sir.”

“Nonsense, boy!” cried the captain sharply. “Fire right at the brute’s shoulder, sending the bullet through the shoulder-blade to the heart.”

“Yes, sir,” said Steve; and he turned to Johannes. “You told me to shoot six inches behind the eye,” he whispered.

“At a walrus, sir; not at a bear.”

By this time they were about fifty yards away from the bear, which had not stirred. The captain raised his hand, and the men ceased dipping their oars, the boat gliding forward a short distance, and then coming to a stand.

“Now, Steve! Quick!”

“I—I don’t care to fire,” whispered the lad.

“Bah! What do you mean?”

“The bear’s asleep, and it seems so cowardly.”

“I’m not so particular about a dangerous beast,” said the doctor; and, kneeling in the stem of the boat, he rested his elbows on the gunwale, took a long aim, and fired, the bullet striking the bear’s shoulder with a dull thud.

“Well done! splendid shot!” cried the captain. “Right to the heart. The brute hardly moved.”

But, all the same, as the smoke rose he stood ready to send another shot at the monster if it should prove only to be stunned.

“Here, doctor,” he said, “give him the other barrel, so as to make sure. I don’t want any one to be clawed.”

The doctor, nothing loth, took aim again, and fired his second cartridge, this bullet also taking effect; but the bear did not move.

“Dead enough,” said the captain. “Give way, my lads.”

The men pulled, and the boat was rowed right up to a tiny valley in the ice, which just gave them room to land and group round the monstrous bear, the gentlemen with their guns ready for a shot, the two Norwegians with their spears over their shoulders.

The doctor’s eyes sparkled with delight, for this bear also was a magnificent specimen, with enormously long, fine hair, decidedly whiter than the coat of the brute they had destroyed at Jan Mayen.

“I did not know that you were such a shot, Handscombe,” said the captain.

“Oh, a mere accident,” said the doctor modestly. “Wasn’t it a pity you let your chance go, Steve?”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” said the lad, planting his foot on the bear’s shoulder, and stooping to look for the wound. Then he started, and glanced at Johannes, who, like Jakobsen, stood leaning on his spear.

He read confirmation in the man’s quiet eyes, and he turned round excitedly to his companions.

“Why, the bear’s dead!” he cried.

“Of course it is,” said the captain, laughing. “We should not be standing here if it were not.”

“But I mean dead before Mr Handscombe fired!”

“What!” cried the doctor, flushing red, while the captain went down on one knee to raise a paw.

“Yes,” he cried, “and frozen stiff. It must have been dead for many hours, eh, Johannes?”

“Yes, sir,” said the man, kneeling down to part the fur, “many hours. Yes, here it is! Look! in the chest. The walrus got his tusk well home.”

“Eh? What?” cried the captain, as the Norseman pointed to a great gaping wound; from which the blood had been washed by the sea. The wound was in the upper part of the animal’s chest, in a position where a dagger-like stroke would penetrate to the heart; and the bear had evidently swum for some distance, crawled there, and, after drawing itself up, quietly died.

“But I don’t quite understand,” said the captain.

“It is the walrus we saw tumble the bear off the cliff into the sea yesterday.”

“What!” cried the doctor excitedly. “Then I did not kill it?”

“No,” said the captain, laughing. “You cannot kill a dead thing.”

“But—but—” stammered the doctor.

“You see, doctor, your profession is curing, not killing,” cried the captain, laughing. “Never mind: better luck next time.”

“But it is so absurd. The idea of shooting at a dead beast!”

“I’m glad I didn’t, Mr Handscombe!” cried Steve merrily.

“Now, look here, don’t you begin to joke me, sir,” said the doctor, “because I will not have it.”

He spoke laughingly, but he was evidently greatly chagrined.

“So utterly ridiculous,” he said. “I say, Johannes, you ought not to have let me waste ammunition over a dead beast.”

“I’m very sorry, sir, but I did not know till you fired the first shot, the animal lay so naturally. Then I began to think it was our bear wounded. Of course, sir, I would not have let you fire if I had known.”

“Never mind,” said the captain, laughing. “But I say, Steve, my lad, your scruples saved you from a—from a—”

“There, say it; don’t hesitate,” said the doctor. “Saved him from a very ridiculous action. I don’t mind.”

“Well, we have got a magnificent bear anyhow,” cried the captain. “His skin is finer than that of the other, and he is tremendously fat.”

“There’ll pe plenty more pear’s grease for Watty’s hair,” whispered Hamish; and Andrew uttered a dry laugh, which sounded like the rattling together of pieces of wood.

“I don’t think there can be any tide to rise here and sweep the animal away,” said the captain, “so we’ll leave it till we return.”

He led the way to the boat, leaving the bear untouched, and the next minute they were rowing north, with the whole party keeping a sharp look-out for the walrus, which seemed to have forsaken the coast.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Their First Walrus.

But they were not kept waiting long. A quarter of a mile farther on the coast trended round to the east, and there the open sheet of water became encumbered with masses of ice, upon several of which Jakobsen, whose eyes were wonderfully good and admirably trained, pointed out walrus asleep or on the watch with head thrown back.

That was enough. Andrew uttered no more gibes, but tugged at his oar with the rest, and as silently; for all knew how much depended upon their surprising the wary beasts.

“Have you ever shot walrus, sir?” asked Johannes suddenly.

“Never,” replied the captain; “but I think I shall be able to hit one.”

“Of course, sir. What I meant was, that as soon as you have hit one it will make for the water and sink. So do not be surprised after you have shot if I harpoon the beast to save it from being lost.”

“They do sink, then?”

“Yes, sir; fat as they are they go right down. I have seen many a one lost after being shot.”

“But they are so fat,” said the captain. “An animal laden like that with blubber ought surely to float.”

“You would think so, sir,” replied the Norseman, who had now replaced the spear along the thwarts and taken up a harpoon; “but they do not float.”

“Well, don’t let us lose any if you can prevent it,” said the captain; and Johannes smiled, and then answered Steve’s questions, as he busily made ready for the coming fight by thrusting the lance heads well up into the box which protected them from injury right up toward the bows, and

then examined the harpoon head and shank round which the line was firmly secured.

“How long is the line, Johannes?”

“About fifteen fathoms, sir.”

“Oh, but isn’t that too short? Suppose the walrus comes to the end of the line after being harpooned. It would pull the boat under.”

“No, sir,” said the man, smiling, “because then we should cut the line.”

“But that would be a pity. Why not have it longer?”

“Because it would only be in the way, sir. A walrus seldom takes out fifteen fathoms when it dives after being struck.”

“How’s that?”

“Before it has run out that much it has to come up again to breathe.”

“I see. But suppose it swims away along the surface?”

“Ah! you’ll see then, sir,” said Johannes, smiling, “if I am lucky enough to harpoon one.”

Steve was silent for the time as, in obedience to the captain’s orders, the men rowed gently toward a huge bull which lay on the ice, displaying a magnificent pair of tusks. But suddenly something took the boy’s attention, and he seized the Norseman’s arm.

“Look!” he cried. “How lucky I saw! That harpoon is not fastened to the shaft.”

“No, sir. It ought not to be.”

“But why? Won’t it come off when you throw it?”

“I hope so, sir; we don’t want it broken. Don’t you see that the line is fastened to the head? We want the shaft to come out and float on the water, so that we can pick it up and use it again. It is almost the same as

with the harpoons for the beluga."

"Oh, I see. But wouldn't they be better if they were made thicker?"

"No, sir," said the man, giving the harpoon head a twist and taking it easily from the pointed end of the light pine shaft and replacing it. "That is just right, sir."

Steve gave the Norseman a droll look.

"I say," he whispered, "what an ignorant fellow you must think me!"

"No," said the man, smiling. "You did not understand the things that long experience has taught us are the best; but they are very simple, and you know them now."

"Yes, I know now. But tell me one more thing, and then I will not bother you any more."

"Quick, then," said the Norseman good-humouredly.

"I want to know how near you have to get before you throw."

"We don't throw the harpoon at all if we can help it," replied Johannes, "but get close enough to thrust it into the seal, give it a twist to entangle it in the tough hide, and draw out the shaft."

"Oh, look!" said Steve in a disappointed tone; for, when they were about a hundred yards away, the big bull raised his head, stared at them, and then shuffled off the block on which he lay, gave two or three heavy flops, and slid down softly into the water.

"Never mind, sir," said Johannes calmly; "there is another yonder with finer tusks—that one to the left; and you can steer the boat so that it will be out of sight till we are quite close."

The captain's face, which had looked gloomy, brightened, and he followed out the instructions given; while Skene, after twice over being on the point of barking loudly at the huge beasts scattered about amongst the icefloes, appeared as if he grasped the position and the meaning of

the talking-to he had received, and stood there with his feet upon one of the thwarts well out of the way of the harpooner and his line, and watched the walrus with his ears quivering and playing about, taking evidently as much interest in the proceedings as his master.

This time the boat passed several of the heavy animals, which stared at them stupidly, but did not attempt to stir, so that there would have been no difficulty twice over in striking and making fast; but the huge fellow with the grand tusks was the one they aimed for, the walrus they passed having shorter or broken teeth.

“How is it so many have their teeth damaged?” whispered Steve.

“No dentists up here to attend to them,” said the doctor, who had heard the query.

“Some break them fighting,” said Johannes seriously, for he did not comprehend Mr Handscombe’s allusion; “but very often they snap off the points through digging, them into the ice.”

“What for?”

“To drag themselves up out of the water,” replied Johannes with a look of surprise. “Now, hist!”

Steve was silent, and sat with his rifle across his lap watching the animals, several of those swimming about being young of various sizes, great, fat, shapeless creatures, more like inflated india-rubber sacks cut short than anything else.

And all this time the boat and men kept well behind a large piece of the ice-floe, which screened them effectually from the great bull. But now the time had come when they would have to row round into sight, and the captain sat ready with his piece cocked, the doctor also being prepared to follow if necessary; and, seeing this, Steve softly raised the hammers of his own rifle, and sat prepared.

Johannes noted his action, and gave an approving nod.

The boat glided round the end of the floe, and there, some sixty yards

away, lay the massive bull.

The huge animal had no idea of their approach till now, when they learned the fact that it was evidently the sentinel of the herd, for it drew itself right up with a look of surprise, and the captain raised his piece.

“Not yet, sir!” cried Johannes. “Closer, closer!”

The men pulled, and they saw the bull go through some singular evolutions, as if it were kicking at something beyond and out of sight. It was so, for instantly three more walrus started into sight and plunged into the water, and, the alarm being spread, the occupants of other masses of ice and the edge of the principal floe slid and splashed heavily in, their leader having evidently cried, “Danger! Every one for himself!”

As soon as the grand old sentinel had done his duty, he prepared, with an activity not to have been expected, to take care of himself, all of this having been the work of half a minute; but the boat was now within thirty yards, and gliding nearer, when the captain fired two shots rapidly one after the other.

“Pull!” roared Johannes, and the men dragged at their stout ashen blades; and as the bull, which did not seem even staggered by the heavy bullets, plunged down from the side of the floe, the Norseman reached it and drove the harpoon right into its back, giving a twist with his wrist, and drawing back with the thin pine shaft, as the line ran rapidly out over the bows, following the walrus which had disappeared.

“No, missed!” cried one of the Norsemen from the second boat; and as Steve glanced in that direction he saw that they were pulling hard, apparently after nothing, for not a walrus could be seen.

Then, with Johannes erect in the bows, armed with his great lance, the boat was pulled in the direction in which the line was running out, and for a moment Steve was startled, for all at once a hundred heads almost together appeared above the surface some distance before them, there was a burst of sniffs and snorts as the animals took breath and instantly dived down again, their flippers appearing above the surface, and then they were gone.

The great bull appeared, too, and dived once more before the line was run out; and when the herd, after which the other boat was in full chase, had appeared in the same way two or three times, breathed, and dived again, Jakobsen began to manipulate the line so as to get a pull on the frightened beast, in whose tough hide the harpoon held fast. The consequence was that, while the mate was urging on the men in the other boat, the captain's was being towed and the men lying on their oars.

Just then there was a shout from the other boat, for the last of the flying herd had been overtaken by hard pulling; and, watching his opportunity so as to pick out a finely tusked head, the Norse harpooner there had made a successful thrust, and they, too, were fast in a great bull.

The end for the poor beast first struck was now near; it was growing tired of trying to overtake the flying herd, which appeared and disappeared with wonderful regularity and exactness. It had the boat to drag as well as to force its mighty carcass through the water, and Jakobsen drew upon the line again and again, so as to get within striking distance when the animal ceased to make efforts to dive down.

"Let me come forward and send a bullet through it," said the doctor.

"Better not, sir. It may charge us, and we can stop it better with our lances. If it got its tusks over the side, we should either have a plank ripped out or be overturned."

"Do it your own way," said the captain; and the words had hardly left his lips when Jakobsen stooped and rapidly picked up his lance, for the head of the walrus appeared above the water with its great six-inch bristles standing out above the gleaming tusks. And now it seemed as if it were determined to fly no more, but to wreak its vengeance upon its pursuers. With a loud, snorting noise it made a rush for the boat, its eyes looking wild and red, and the whole aspect of the great visage threatening to a degree.

Steve's heart seemed to give a bound, for he was close to the bows, and only a few feet from the terrible-looking monster. Involuntarily he raised and presented his piece; but Johannes uttered a warning growl that

sounded exactly like that emitted by Skene, who backed away amongst the men, snarling and showing his teeth, as if saying, “I’ve got plenty of fight in me, but it isn’t fair to expect me to tackle an arctic sea-elephant like that.”

Then the huge beast was close up, with head raised, and the gleaming tusks about to strike the boat’s bows, when, *whish*! *crish*! two great lances were driven into its breast. The recoil thrust the boat away from where the water was tossed wildly about, the animal struggling frantically, and recovering itself sufficiently from the two terrible thrusts, which dyed the clear water with crimson, to make another charge at the boat, but only to be met in the same way.

There was another desperate struggle, the poor creature scattering the water with its great flippers, and the next minute, to Steve’s great relief, it was dead and beginning to sink; but Johannes seized the line, and deftly threw a ring round the walrus’s neck, gave it a few twists, and made the monster fast, in case the harpoon should after all give way, as it had with the other boat, which was now returning disconsolate, it being impossible to overtake the swimming and diving herd. Then all at once the animals turned, for something happened which brought them tearing back through the water as rapidly as they had tried to escape; and now, as they came swimming back, it was without any diving, but with serried front, eyes flashing, and tusks gleaming, in a grand charge upon the boats, and with a force sufficient to tear them into matchwood and drown their occupants in the first rush.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

Steve’s New Pet.

The reason for the change of front from flight to a brave attack was this. As the second boat was returning with her disappointed crew, they drove back a member of the herd that had been left behind in the shape of a calf, which, to escape this second boat, swam and dived with such bad choice of direction that, unseen before, it all at once popped its droll-looking head out of the water close to where Steve was sitting looking at

their huge prize. Possibly it was the dead walrus which had attracted the young one and brought it so close.

Skene was the first to see the absurd-looking little creature, and, planting his feet upon the gunwale, he barked himself into a state of terrible excitement, driving the young walrus into hiding beneath the water, but only to come up again from time to time to breathe.

The young walrus could not understand the remarks made about its personal appearance, or else in all probability it would have swum away; for the shapeless creature was dubbed “bladder of lard,” “skin of oil,” “prize pig,” and the like, though Steve stuck to the notion of its being like a short india-rubber sack, blown full of wind, so little did head or flippers project from the blubber-distended body.

“Oh, I say, Johannes, couldn’t you catch it?” cried Steve. “The poor thing believes that is its mother.”

“Yes, sir, and will not go away till we begin to row.”

“Couldn’t you catch it?”

“Oh yes, sir, I could catch it, I daresay,” replied the Norseman, “if the captain wishes.”

“But I do not wish,” said Captain Marsham. “What do you want with a young walrus?”

“To bring up and tame,” replied Steve, with the impression the while that he was saying something rather absurd.

“Have a big one,” cried the doctor, “and let’s form a zoological garden!”

“I don’t see anything to laugh at,” said Steve. “It would be very interesting to watch the habits of the curious animal, and we’ve driven its mother away. What would become of it, Johannes, if it is left?”

“Bear,” said the Norseman laconically.

“There!” cried Steve, looking at the captain.

“Try and catch it,” said the latter quietly; and, giving Steve a smile and a nod, the Norseman took hold of the end of a coil of line, made a noose, and, watching his opportunity, threw it cleverly over the head end of the calf.

“Hurrah! got him first throw!” cried Steve. “No: gone!”

For the rope on being tightened glided over the slippery hide and came away, while the calf dived, turning over like a round cork float, showing its hind flippers, and then it was out of sight.

“There’s nothing to catch hold of, sir,” said Johannes good-humouredly, as he stood there with the noose gathered up in one hand, the coils of line in the other; “but he’ll be up again directly.”

Johannes stood so quick and watchful that, as the calf’s head popped out of the water again, a ring of rope fell round it and was tightened at once, but with no better fortune. Again and again the Norseman tried; but the little creature was too slippery, and gave way, so that it was like trying to lasso a huge egg bobbing about on the surface.

“Give it up,” said the captain at last; but it was just as the ring of line fell once more round the plump, swimming and diving object, and Steve’s feeling of disappointment gave way to delight, for fortune smiled upon the Norseman’s efforts at last, or else the little walrus threw one flipper over the rope and hugged it to its fat side, with the result that the line was tightened with a snatch, and its egg-like body was suddenly compressed into a dumb-bell shape.

“Got him!” cried Steve joyfully, and Skene nearly jumped overboard in his excitement, barking the next minute furiously, while his master stopped his ears; for the calf, as it was dragged toward the boat, first set up a whimper, and then broke out into a series of snorts, barks, and squeals, which gave it a strong resemblance to a pig being coerced into quiescence while undergoing the ornamentation to its nose known as ringing.

At the first dismal squeal, but unnoticed by the occupants of the boat, the walrus herd stopped its retreat, at the second it turned, and at the third it came rushing back as fast as it could tear through the water.

But little heed was paid to this in the excitement of dragging the heavy calf over the side; for it “gave” in every way. There seemed to be nothing to grasp or of which to get a good grip, while to have hauled the animal in by the thin line looked like trying to cut it in two, as a shopkeeper does soap or cheese. But at last Andrew “got a han’,” as he called it, of one hind flipper, Jakobsen of one of the fore flippers, Steve hauled in the line, and Johannes reached over and caught the other fin-like projection. Then there was a haul all together, and the squealing and snorting object rolled over the gunwale and down into the bottom of the rocking boat with what Hamish called “a squelch.”

By that time a warning cry was heard from Mr Lowe’s boat, and the party with the captain gazed in dismay at the fierce-looking herd charging down.

“Quick! oars!” cried the captain, and the men scrambled into their places with a scared look on their faces.

“It’s the youngling’s cries has brought them down,” said Johannes calmly.

“You know these brutes of old,” said the captain. “Will they attack us?”

“They’ll come close up, sir; but I don’t think there’s anything to mind, or I would say throw the calf overboard.”

“Yes, that might be the best thing to do.”

“But I would not yet, sir. We’ll see. These things look very big and fierce, and sometimes they can fight, but it’s mostly bully and noise.”

The rifles were ready, and the two Norsemen seized their lances, ready to repel any savage attack; while for a time the position of the party appeared to be one of extreme peril. But in this case it proved that, strong as was the desire of the animals to help and protect one of their young in trouble, it did not go far enough to make them run much risk. The Norsemen in both boats were ready to add to their take by lancing any aggressive individual; but the herd kept at a safe distance, calming down when the pig-like creature in the boat was quiet, and bursting out into furious snortings and shows of attack whenever the unhappy little creature remembered its trouble and burst forth into a wail.

“There!” cried Johannes at last; “there is no danger. A few splashes of the oar will keep them off. Shall we harpoon another?”

“No,” said the captain; “we will be content with what is done. We have the bear to get as well, so there is plenty of work.”

The second boat threw a line on board, which was made fast, and with this help and the stout arms in their own boat, the dead walrus was towed along the open waterway to where the bear had been found. Then busy hands went to work skinning and flensing with such good will that at last, with both boats most unpleasantly loaded, as the doctor called it, they rowed back to the chasm and reached the ship in safety, well satisfied with their day’s work.

There was no aggressive walrus herd to make its appearance now, for, in spite of an occasional wail from the captive, none of its relatives attempted to enter the passage through to the fiord, and so the tremendous uproar which arose as soon as an attempt was made to get the captive on board the steamer, and which echoed loudly from the sides of the cliffs, was laughed at merrily, the men thoroughly enjoying the task of hoisting the slippery, yielding creature on deck. This was achieved by laying a tarpaulin in the bottom of the boat, rolling the cub over, lashing the corners together, and hoisting and hauling it up to the gangway, where a little more snorting and barking of a pig-like nature resulted in the little animal settling down in the bows penned up by a couple of gratings, and going to sleep in the warm sun, evidently thoroughly appreciating the dry nature of its new bed.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

The Healing of a Feud.

Upon the principle of making hay while the sun shone, the little imprisoned party worked hard amongst the walrus, and with so much success, that there seemed to be no doubt about the cargo defraying the expenses of the expedition, and, if it should prove necessary, paying for a second voyage the next year.

“If we can get out,” said Steve one day, when the subject was being discussed in the cabin.

“We must take that for granted, my lad,” said the captain. “There are many reasons why it is possible for the mass of ice at the bottom of the fiord to give way. The outside must always be weakening, and the pressure on the inner increasing by the constant flow of water into the fiord, which is rising day by day. That passage does not take off half as much as appears to come in somewhere from the rocks, and sooner or later this must break through the ice. If it comes to the worst, we must turn engineers and block the passage by blasting down stones in that narrowest part till we have dammed the way out. We should then turn this fiord into a lake, which would, sooner or later, burst down its southern bank.”

There was a little talk that evening, too, about the sun, whose career above the horizon was coming to an end, the height at noon being far less, and at midnight so close down to the horizon that it ceased to shine down into the glen, the rays being hid by the glacier. This fact brought forth serious thoughts, for it suggested the time when the brief summer would be drawing to a close, and the approach of that long period during which the arc described by the sun grew lower and lower until it ceased to appear at all, and then came the worst of the wintry time—that when, saving the rays of the moon, stars, and aurora, there was no light.

“I don’t want to suggest difficulties,” said the doctor suddenly; “but suppose, when the time for fine weather to be at an end comes, there is no chance of our escape—always supposing that we have seen nothing of the *Ice Blink* people—what then?”

“In plain English,” said the captain, “we must make up our minds to pass the winter here.”

“The winter?” cried Steve.

“Yes, my lad. Why not? We have snug, warm quarters, which we can make warmer, for I saw traces of coal up yonder in the valley close to the glacier. Food is plentiful, and what men have done before men can do again.”

“If there is no help for it, we must submit,” said the doctor.

“Better submit than venture to sea in these two boats,” said the captain; “and in case of the first emergency, I propose that we begin exploring the land now. We have thoroughly examined all the coast that we could reach north and south.”

“And hunt as we go?” said the doctor.

“And hunt as we go, so as to lay in a good store of fresh meat. This will freeze and keep any length of time. I don’t think our prospects are so bad —that is, for seamen.”

“I thought we should have found some trace of our friends,” said the doctor; but the captain shook his head.

“It is all the merest chance,” he said; “we have nothing to guide us. They might have been at Jan Mayen, or up on the north coast of Greenland or the coast of Spitzbergen, or they might be here in the next valley, or north or south where we could not penetrate. On the other hand, they may be in Novaya-Zemlya, or in some region of the far north never yet penetrated by others. Feeling all this has made me think that it will be by accident we shall meet our friends more than by searching; but we shall go on searching all the same.”

“Then you will make a start to-morrow?”

“Yes, as soon as the carpenter has knocked together a few bars, to make a contrivance that I mean to be a hand-barrow for four or eight men when the ground is rough, and a sledge when it is smooth enough for them to pull it, or on snow.”

“Which way shall you go?” said Steve. “Couldn’t we try the valley up by the glacier?”

“That is where I mean to go first,” said the captain, “so as to examine more fully those traces of coal; so let’s go to rest in good time and start early.”

Steve went on deck to see to his dumb companions before retiring for the

night, and found Skene and the young walrus comfortably asleep together forward; for four weeks of imprisonment had sufficed to make the new acquisition so tame and friendly with the dog that Skene quite appreciated his new companion, treating it as a kind of huge india-rubber cushion, over and about which he had a right to stretch himself wherever and whenever he pleased.

But a word roused up the dog, who leaped off the walrus, waking it in the act; and seeing its master it, too, advanced, not like the dog in capers and bounds accompanied by barking, but in a curious shuffling fashion, with plenty of whines and whimpers suggestive of its satisfaction and demand for caresses.

“Good old Skeny!” cried Steve. “Long walk to-morrow, old man, hunting and bear and all sorts.”

The dog uttered a cheery bark at every announcement as if he understood every word, and leaped up at his master, certainly comprehending that there was something on the way.

“Hullo, Blub!” cried Steve, stooping to give the walrus some sounding slaps, which were evidently appreciated. “Rum old chap, ar’n’t you? Why, you always feel as if one ought to sit on you, or roll over you, don’t you?”

For answer the curious-looking object made a barking kind of grunt, and thrust its curious, neckless head over the lad’s shoe, peering up to him, and evidently enjoying the company of one who talked to and favoured it with plenty of slaps and pats, all of which appeared to be thoroughly appreciated, and missed as soon as the lad moved away, the animal shuffling after him in the most absurd way, and to the great delight of the crew, which joined in petting the uncouth beast in the intervals of being free from some busy task.

All this while the stock of oil had rapidly augmented, and one portion of the hold had been set apart for the reception of the great solid tusks, which were carefully extracted from the walrus skulls by Johannes, who never seemed happier than when engaged in some task relating to the capture or storing of the produce of one or other of the arctic animals.

The next morning the party bound for the search and hunt for fresh food

started quite early, the boat landing them very near to the side of the great glacier, with its wonderful bluish tints in the chasms and hollows about its feet. At Steve's request Watty was one of the party, for several times lately he had noticed the longing eyes the lad had directed at them when they were bound on an expedition; and now at last, when he was to have a run on shore and see the shooting of the reindeer, his excitement seemed to bubble over, and he could hardly contain himself as he tramped on by the side of Andrew McByle.

A brief glance was given to the grand glacier, and then the party bore off to the right along the valley, finding, to Steve's great delight, as they reached the warmer and more sheltered position, where the ground was protected from the sea breeze and from the icy currents which blew from the north, quite an abundance of flowers, though there was a perfect absence of trees. They were dwarfed and ordinary-looking plants, saxifrages and other alpine growths, and so insignificant, that in another part of the world they would have been looked upon as paltry weeds, but here they were rushed after by both the lads, Watty being down on his knees directly to pick a handful.

"Leuk at her," said Andrew contemptuously. "She always thocht the callant had a bee in her bonnet. She's gane daft aboot the bit weeds."

But Steve was quite as "daft"; and in the course of their searching for fresh blossoms they came in contact over a tuft which each had espied from a distance, and paused a yard apart, with eyes glistening from eagerness and hand outstretched, the other holding a spare rifle over the left shoulder. Neither spoke for a moment or two, and then Watty broke the silence and looked quite friendly at his young superior; while Steve waited, expecting to hear some unpleasant remark, or to see some annoying gesture, on the lad's part.

"I dinna want them," said Watty at last. "She'll find plenty mair. Hey! but it does the hairt good to see the bonnie bit floores ance mair. Peck them and come alang, Meester Stevey, and we'll be finding bilberries oot yonder on ta brae."

"There's plenty for both, Watty," said Steve; and, in the most friendly way brought together by the tiny blossoms, the lads gathered each a handful,

Steve sticking his in his breast, and Watty taking off his flat, Celtic, worsted bonnet, laying the flowers carefully therein, and then replacing it upon his bear's-greasy, shock head.

"She'll pit them in watter when she gets back," he said. "Hey! but it does her hairt good to rin amang the floores again."

Their party was well on ahead, and they trudged after them together along the valley, with the mountains running steeply up on either side, in places up and away to where the dull green moss and tufty growths gave way to bare patches of stones, and still up and up to where the loose stones were succeeded by rock sheathed and netted with snow. Just above this was the eternal, glittering ice, dazzling in the soft glow of the sun, whose light looked cold and calm, and gave the wondrous landscape a saddened aspect; for, in spite of its beauty and the variety of tint of the mountain-side, Steve felt that there was a something mournful about the valley, though why he could not explain.

It was singular, but every step impressed his more thoughtful companions on ahead that this was no haunt for human beings; and as they tramped on, following the windings of the valley, the impression grew stronger and stronger that theirs were the first, possibly might prove to be the last, human feet that had ever traversed this stony desert.

"She dinna see nae heather," said Watty suddenly, "an' she dinna see nae bluebell; but it's verra bonnie oot here, Meester Steve. Will ta captain be gaen far awa?"

"Oh yes, a long way yet, Watty. We've got to shoot some deer to take back."

"Eh? Shoot the deer an' tak' back! But she'll be hungry sune, and when she's shot a teer she'll mak' a fire and roast her. For she's a fine, gude cook now, and wad like to stay ashore now and build a hoose and shoot and hunt. Wait a wee, and she'll mak' a bonnie fire."

"What of?" said Steve, laughing. "We haven't shot our deer yet; and if we had, there's no wood here."

"Thenk o' tat," said Watty, cocking his bonnet on one side to give his

head a scratch. “Nae wud! She’s nane sae fine a countrie as bonnie Scotland, then. Nae wud!” he continued, looking round. “But she’ll find a forest over yonder?”

“No, there are no trees here.”

“Then she’ll mak’ a fire o’ peat. She’ll find plenty o’ turves doon alangside o’ ta bilberries.”

“Yes, you may find turf, and perhaps coal; but we shall see.”

They had to hurry a little to overtake the party, and this was soon made easier from their halting about a mile farther inland, where the captain was gazing up the stony slope of the mountain to their left.

Steve looked up, expecting to see some particular plant or perhaps bird; but he was soon undeceived by the doctor handing his rifle to Andrew and climbing up a little way to kick off some masses of something and throw them down.

“What has he found, Captain Marsham?” said Steve; “gold?”

“What is far more valuable to us, my lad—coal. Yes,” he added, as he examined the specimen which he had picked up, “and good, soft, bituminous coal, too. Why, Steve, this is going to be a land of plenty for us. A coal vein cropping out of the cliff-side, ready for us to come with picks, sacks, and sledges to carry off as much as we like.”

“She’s pit petter coal than tat into the galley fire,” said Watty, who had followed the example of the others and picked up a piece to examine. “Leuks brown, Meester Stevey. Does she thenk it wud burn?”

“We’ll try as soon as we get a deer to roast, Watty.”

“Hey, leuk at tat!” cried the lad, as a shadow was cast upon the rock wall, and a huge owl floated by on its soft pinions, staring hard at the human visitors to its solitude with its large round eyes, and then proceeded to perch upon a ledge high above their heads, and strip and devour a speckled bird which it had in its claws.

“Hey, look at tat!” cried Watty, whose excitement bubbled over at every fresh thing he saw. “She got ta white speckled grouse fra off the mountain-side. She’s seen ta grouse like tat on Ben Cruachan.”

“Ptarmigan, Handscombe,” said the captain, as the white and browny-grey plumage of the unfortunate bird came floating down from where the eagle-owl was preparing its meal.

“Yes, ptarmigan, sure enough,” said the doctor. “Come along; we must knock over a few of these if we don’t find any deer. Shall I shoot the owl?”

“No, let it rest; we can’t eat it, and we are too busy to care for preserving specimens. Make a note, though, of our having seen these two birds to-day. I want to make out how wide the coal seam is, and whether it would be easy to work. Here, my lad, give some one else that gun, and climb up and tell me how wide that coal is. You can get up there.”

“She got oop and teukit an eagle’s nest ance by Ballachulish,” replied the boy; and readily enough he climbed from stone to stone, with the huge owl ceasing its preparation of its dinner and glaring down at him.

“Their tameness is shocking to me,” quoted the doctor, as he saw Watty climb and the owl watch him come nearer and nearer, till all at once the great white-and-grey-plumed bird dropped the ptarmigan, made a rapid silent stoop unseen by the lad, struck at his head with claws and wings, and sailed away again silently, leaving the bonnet with its flowers falling more quickly than Watty, who lost his hold, and came rolling, scrambling, and tumbling down, till, scratched, bruised, and breathless, he fell quite at his companions’ feet.

“Wha’ did tat?” he shouted furiously, as he sprang up with his eyes flashing; and he gazed from Steve to the doctor and back, as their anxious look changed now to one of mirth on finding that the boy was not much hurt.

“Did what?” cried Steve in suffocated tones.

“Threw a big lump of turf and knockit off her bonnet.”

“Haud your whisht, laddie,” growled Andrew. “Naebody threw a turf, for

there isna turf to throw."

"But ta turf hit her an ta lug, and knockit off her bonnet."

"Haud your whisht, laddie; naebody threw a turf. It was the great grey geuse bird teuk her for a lamb. Hey! here she comes back."

In effect the great owl came sailing up, stooped and picked up the ptarmigan it had dropped, and went off to a ledge of the mountain higher up.

"She's spoiled a' the bonnie floores," muttered Watty, picking up his bonnet, and climbing up again to report that the coal seam was "sae wide," this measure being indicated by touching the face of the rock in two places about a foot apart; and he was about to descend when he caught sight of something away over a ridge, and pointed.

"She can see the ret-teer," he whispered. "Whisht!" Watty crept down cautiously, his actions showing that before now he must have been out in the deer forests at home; for as soon as he reached the bottom of the cliff he ran to Skene, who had been watching the owl and its prey with a curiously puzzled look as if he did not know it as a bird at home, and, dropping on one knee, he threw his left arm over the dog's neck and held his muzzle so that he should not bark.

Chapter Thirty.

Missing.

Every one stared at Watty, he was so completely transformed from the sulky, ill-conditioned lad who assisted the cook. The Scottish blood in his veins was fired by the sight of the deer and recollections of the stalking he had witnessed in his own Highlands, when he had been with one or other of the keepers, and his eyes flashed as he saw the advance made with the rifled guns.

It proved to be no laborious stalk, for the deer did not apprehend danger. The captain brought down one, the doctor another, while Steve, although

he rested his heavy rifle on a stone in taking aim, missed an easy shot. He did better later on, though, for another opportunity occurred enabling him to creep within sixty yards of a buck with large spreading antlers, and he was about to fire at the animal as it stood with head erect looking round listening to a sound in the distance, when there was a hard breathing just at his shoulder.

“Watty, you here?” he said.

“Ay. She cam’ to see her shute. Tak’ a lang straight aim this time, laddie. Dinna miss the beastie for bonnie Scotland’s sake. Quick, or she’ll be gane! Tak’ care; reet i’ the shouther.” *Bang*! “Hey, but ye het her!”

For as the report of Steve’s piece rang out and echoed from the side of the mountain, and again from a ridge across the mossy plain at whose edge they wandered, the stag at which he had fired made a bound and went off at full speed, leaving the lad with his heart beating and full of disappointment.

“No, Watty, a miss; I can’t shoot straight, and it’s of no use trying, I only waste the cartridges.”

“Got him?” came faintly from the distance, and, turning, Steve could see the doctor a couple of hundred yards away.

“No!” cried Steve gloomily; and then softly, “I can’t shoot;” and he watched the disappearing stag.

“Yes, yes, yes!” yelled Watty. “Hi—yi—yi—yi—ah!”

For just as the deer was going at full speed, and a few more bounds would have taken it round a point and out of sight, it dropped suddenly, the impetus at which it had been going sending it right over and over twice; then it lay motionless, and, re-loading as he went, Steve exultantly started after his prize.

“I told her sae; I kenned she’d het her by the way the beastie rinned. Shot recht through the hairt, laddie—recht through the hairt.”

“Mind, it may only be wounded, and these things are dangerous.”

“Nay, she’ll never rin again,” panted Watty, whom long inaction on board had made fat. “It was a bonnie lang shot, and ye ought to be verra proud.”

“But I’m not, Watty; it seems a shame and cowardly to crawl after a beautiful animal and murder it.”

“She isna a peautiful animal,” said Watty scornfully. “She’s fat, put she’s not so big and bonnie as a Hieland stag, and her horns are puir scrats o’ things. Hey, but ye should see the tines on the het of a bonnie ret-teer! She’s only coot to eat; ant she must kill the beasties, or else she’d pine to deat.”

Watty was right, and they could approach the deer without fear of attack. As it happened, it proved to be the finest shot that day, and after it had been gralloched (as the Highlanders term the opening and cleaning of a stag), by the Norsemen, the light sledge was brought into requisition, the men harnessed themselves to it, and the reindeer was dragged to where the game had been left for picking up on their return; but to the surprise of all it was missing.

“It must have been here that we left it,” said the captain, glancing round at the wilderness of rocks reaching from them to the mountain-foot.

“Of course; here are the marks,” said the doctor.

At that minute, with a quiet smile, Johannes touched Steve’s arm and pointed. The boy followed the direction indicated, and saw something moving on the mountain-side.

“Yes, I see it!” cried Steve. “There goes our deer.” For, plainly enough, though over a mile away, possibly two miles, for the air was wonderfully clear, there was a white-coated bear calmly dragging off for its own dinner the deer which had fallen to the doctor’s piece.

“Well, of all the thievish impudence!” he cried. “Come along, and let’s give him a lesson.”

“No, I think not to-day,” said the captain; “we are all tired and hungry. We should not care for the flesh now.”

“But the bear and his skin?”

“We could not take him to-day; we can track him another time. If we shot him now, we should have to leave the carcass, and the skin might be torn. Let’s get back to the other deer.”

The doctor nodded, and, to Steve’s great delight, they pressed on, picked up the next deer, and then all at once Steve handed his gun to Johannes and started off at a trot toward the valley by which they had come.

“Hi! Where’s he going?” cried the doctor, as the men loaded the sledge.

“I don’t know,” said the captain. “Yes, I do: he has run on to light a fire where we found the coal, so as to cook some of the meat.”

“Yes, that’s it,” said the doctor. “I hope he’ll have a good fire. One gets horribly hungry out here.”

They trudged on till they came to where the next deer lay waiting to be picked up. This was the last, and, quite satisfied with their load, they made their way steadily on toward the nearly perpendicular rocks where the coal had been discovered cropping out from the face.

“That’s the place, isn’t it?” said the doctor, pointing and shifting his rifle from one shoulder to the other.

“Yes, sir!” cried Watty Links eagerly. “She can see ta big white ullet flitting aboot and roond and roond because Meester Stevey’s leeting ta fire. She wushes she’d gane. She can leet a fire better tan Meester Stevey, and she could ha’ blow in it wi’ her brath and beat it wi’ her bonnet to mak’ a big blaze coom sune.”

“Did Mr Stephen say to you that he was going to light a fire?”

“Phut!” ejaculated Watty, emitting a sound like an angry turkey-cock, and ruffling up and speaking indignantly. “And tit she thenk she would have let her go and light a fire if she hat kenned aboot it? She’d ha’ gane hersel’, and not let the young chentleman touch the coal stuff. She wadna tell me, and rin away to leet the fire her nainsel’, because she thocht she could do it better. But where’s the smok?”

“Perhaps you are right,” said the captain; “but I don’t see any smoke. He would have been there by now.”

“He has chosen some corner out of the wind,” suggested the doctor, as he watched the great bird circling about the face of the cliff, but from their distance looking less than a pigeon.

“We ought to have a specimen of those owls,” said the captain as they trudged on, rather wearily now, their pieces seeming to have grown wonderfully heavy.

“Marsham, my good friend,” said the doctor, “there is only one specimen in natural history that interests me now, and that is the fleshy tissue known as steak or collops, frizzled over a good clear fire. After I have exhibited, as we doctors say, a dose of that to myself, I shall be quite ready to talk about owls; not before.”

“See him, Johannes?” said the captain, dropping back to take hold of one of the tracking lines, and helping to pull the sledge and ease the men.

“No, sir. He has been troubled to get the fire to burn. Maybe he has no matches. For there was plenty of rough coal lying about, and dry stuff that would soon catch alight. But it will be something to find the fire ready to burn; and we can soon get some bits of meat to roast.”

“I don’t see any signs of that, my lad,” said the captain, after they had gone a little farther. “Of course that was why he ran on. Did he say anything to you about it?”

“Not a word, sir. He made a sudden dart off and was gone.”

“Perhaps he has a fire where we cannot see it,” said the captain; “and it tells well for the coal that it burns with so little smoke. It will be capital for the engines.”

They trudged on, quite satisfied that they had not the other deer to drag as well, for the ground was very rugged, and Captain Marsham suggested to the doctor that if they had had the bear-skin the task would not have been much lighter. Still, every one was cheerful, and tugged heartily at his track rope; but there was no sign of the lad when they

reached the foot of the coal cliff.

Chapter Thirty One.

Lost.

“Ahoy, there! Ahoy!” shouted the doctor again and again, startling the great owl from its eagle-like eerie and making the rocks echo the cry. But there was no response, and the party looked at each other for an explanation of the position.

“He has not been here,” said the captain, “and we must go back and search. How tiresome, when we are so weary!”

“I wish you had not brought him,” grumbled the doctor. “I say, isn’t anybody going to make a fire?”

“Look here, sir!” cried Jakobsen suddenly from where he stood by a big mass of rock.

“Yes! what is it?” cried the captain; and he stepped toward the man, followed by the others, to where Jakobsen pointed down to a ring of stones, within which was a quantity of dry, heathery stuff with a number of weather-worn lumps of coal.

“No mistake about his having been here,” said the doctor, taking out a box of matches, which, to his astonishment, was snatched from his fingers by Watty, who dropped upon his knees, struck and shaded a match, applied it to the light stuff, which blazed up at once, and then began to fan it with his bonnet in one hand, as he kept on adding little bits of coal with the other.

“She’ll soon have a ferry pig fire,” said Watty, “and she’d petter get ta steaks retty to frizzle. She can cook peautifully the noo.”

This was to Jakobsen, who nodded, drew his knife, and began to cut off a haunch from one of the deer, for Johannes was looking about uneasily.

“See anything of him, my man?” said the captain.

“No, sir. He must be gathering coal together to help the fire; but I’ve been down both these rifts, and he is not there.”

“It’s very strange,” said the captain uneasily. “So unlike him to rush off in that way.”

“He was thinking of our comfort, sir,” said Johannes gravely; “and how good it would be for us to find a fire ready.”

“He must be about here somewhere,” said the captain. “Shout, will you?”

Johannes made the rocks echo again and again, but the only effect was the starting of the owl into flight till the cries and their echoes ceased, when it settled once more high up the mountain-side.

There were several narrow, gully-like places within reach, up either of which the boy might have gone, and the question arose as to the reason for his so doing.

“He would not have gone seeking for coal,” said the doctor, “because there is plenty here.”

“I’m thinking, sir,” said the Norseman, “that he had no matches, and has gone to seek for a stone to use with his knife to strike a light. There can be no other reason.”

“Then he will be back directly,” said the captain. “There, leave them to cook; I am uneasy about him. Let’s search those places a little farther off. We’ll take that one, Handscombe; you the other, Johannes.”

They all then started off as the fire burned up, and spread quite a cloud of black smoke overhead; and the Norseman had barely reached the mouth of the ravine which he was to explore before he stopped and gave a triumphant shout as he waved his hand. The others waved their hands in answer, and turned to where he stood, with something in his grasp, peering carefully around.

“His cap!” cried the captain. “What does that mean?”

The Norseman shook his head.

“The ground is hard as iron, sir,” he said; “there is not an impression anywhere. I’ve been looking for foot-marks.”

“Surely he has not been attacked by wild beasts—bears!” cried Mr Handscombe hoarsely.

“I thought of that, sir; but there is no sign.”

They hailed again and again, but there was no reply save that given by the echoes, and the captain grew more uneasy.

“Show me exactly where you found the cap,” he said.

The Norseman trotted about fifty yards on beyond the entrance to the ravine he had been set to search, and picked up a piece of slaty coal.

“Just here, sir,” he said. “I put this where I found the cap.”

“Then he must have gone on in that direction; he would not have come back to go down there.”

“No, sir.”

“But why should he have dropped his cap?” said the doctor.

“He must have been running after something, sir.”

“Or something must have been running after him,” cried the doctor. “He would not have gone any farther than this unless there was some reason.”

“Of course not,” said the captain testily; “but what reason could there be?”

“Well, it seems to me that the best thing is to go back to the fire and wait a few minutes,” said the doctor, after standing thoughtful and silent. “He is far more likely to come to us than we are to go to him. It seems to be a mystery; but mysteries sometimes turn out very simple things. What do

you say?”

“I say that we’ll have a good search down this gully, and see if by any chance he has gone down here. You, Johannes, search along over our morning’s track straight away, and try and be back in half an hour at the fire. We will meet you.”

The Norseman went off without a word, and the captain and doctor, after a glance in the direction of the fire to see that the others were watching them, plunged into the gloomy, rugged gully, which looked as if the mountain had been suddenly split apart, leaving at the bottom just room for two men to pick their way along abreast, while the sides ran up at once toward where the ice and snow never melted save on the surface, to send a little water trickling down to form a tiny stream, which wandered along among the stones beneath their feet. But though they pressed on, seeking hard for some sign of the lad having passed there, nothing was seen; so, when the half-hour was well up, they turned their heads in the other direction, vainly trying to make out where he could have gone, and still scanning every stone and rift overhead for signs.

“I hope Johannes has had better fortune,” said the captain as they neared the entrance.

“I hope so; he would be back at the fire long before now,” replied the doctor; but hardly had he spoken when a loud hail came echoing down the gully. They sent an echoing reply, and hurried their paces.

“One hardly likes to shout here,” said the doctor; “the echoes are so weird and strange, they seem quite to answer you.”

“Better if Steve would answer,” said the captain drily. “You said a time back you wished we had not brought him to-day. I honestly wish now that I had not brought him at all. Well, Johannes?”

There was no need to speak. The heavy, solemn face of the Norseman told that he had seen nothing, and they went back to the fire in silence.

There was a pleasant odour to a hungry man out in the open, that of frizzling meat, as they approached the fire; but the strange disappearance of their young companion took away all appetite, and

Watty, who was smiling with satisfaction at the success of the collops he had been cooking upon skewers of wood, as *chef* of the *al-fresco* kitchen, saw with intense disappointment that the captain and those with him contented themselves with taking a couple of ship's biscuits each, and then turning away to confer as to what ought to be done.

"We cannot go back to the ship without him," said the captain.

"No," cried Johannes.

"Do you think he is playing us some trick?" said the doctor.

"Trick?"

"I mean hiding away, and will turn up directly."

"No, he would not be so wanting in common sense," said the captain sternly. "What pleasure could he find in so inane a prank?"

"None. I ought not to have said such a thing. He would not, of course."

"No," said Johannes decisively. "Is it possible, gentlemen, that he may have gone on, after putting the fire ready, so as to reach the boat?"

"I can see no reason."

"You did not give him any order, sir—one that you have forgotten?"

"No, certainly not," said the captain; and Johannes was silent, waiting for his superior to make some suggestion, the captain being very thoughtful as he stood there with his brow knit. At last he spoke.

"I cannot leave this place with the knowledge that he may have gone away for some reason that we cannot grasp and will perhaps return here by-and-by. It would be horrible for him to come and find that we had gone."

"I should stay," said Johannes shortly. "Thank you, my man," said the captain warmly; "and we shall stay, too. Of course you would not go, Handscombe?"

“Impossible!” said the doctor quickly. “One minute, though,” he continued, looking upward toward the rugged face of the mountain, and higher still to the snow and ice. “Do you think he has climbed up yonder to pass the time till we overtook him?”

“Oh no!” cried the captain; “the time was too short. There, my mind is made up.”

The others looked at him; but he said no more till he had turned back to the fire.

“Look here, my lads,” he said; “make a meal as quickly as you can, and then hurry on to the place where we landed. Of course you will keep a sharp look-out for Mr Steve as you go, in case he may be on the road. If you do not pass him, question the boat-keepers; and if they have not seen him, you, Jakobsen, will come back to us here.” The Norseman nodded.

“I shall depend upon your making all the haste you can back to us,” continued the captain. “We may want you to help explore the place around; but I am in hopes that you will find him waiting by the boat.”

Ten minutes later the men sprang up, harnessed themselves to the sledge and prepared to start, only waiting for the captain to give the word, “Go!”

Just then Watty sidled up to where the captain was standing.

“She’ll chust let her stay?” said the boy insinuatingly.

“Stay? You stay, my lad? What for?”

“She thenks she can help find him.”

“Why, what makes you think that?”

“Aw dinna ken,” said the lad, shaking his head. “She only thenks she can find him. She can climb and rin. Ye’ll chust let her stay?”

“But you don’t want to find him,” cried the doctor. “You two were the worst

of friends."

"Freends? She woodna be freend, only chust acquaint; but she'd like to find him, all the same."

"Stay," said the captain laconically. "You may be of use; but I'm afraid that we can do nothing but wait."

Watty Links stepped back, giving himself a punch in his side, which seemed to indicate that he was intensely gratified.

Then the word was given, the men tightened their track ropes, and went off with the sledge and its heavy load of fresh meat at a pretty good rate, while Captain Marsham and his companions stood gazing round, and considered what direction it would be best to take.

Then a thought struck the captain, and he turned to the boy.

"Look here, my lad," he said quickly, "if you stay here I shall want you to stop by the fire while we go about searching."

"She'll want her to stop by the fire?" said Watty in dismay.

"Yes."

"What, all alane?"

"Yes, while we search, so that some one may be here if Mr Stephen comes back while we are gone."

"But alane by her nainsel'?" faltered Watty.

"Of course. There, be off with you. Run after the men; you can easily overtake them."

"She dinna want to go after the men," said Watty stoutly. "She wants to find Meester Stevey, and ye said I micht stop."

"Then you must do what I want you to do, sir. Are you afraid?"

"Aye, she's a bit skeary aboot stopping here all alane."

“Off with you, then!”

“Nay, she said I micht stop.”

“Then you will have to stay and keep watch by the fire.”

“She wants to go and find Meester Stevey.”

“I have no time to argue with you, sir. Go or stay,” said the captain angrily.

“She’s chust going to stop,” said Watty sullenly.

“The boy has stuff in him,” said the captain to Mr Handscombe; “and he has a kind of attachment to Steve after all their bickerings and fighting. Now, then, we must have another search; which way do you recommend, Johannes?”

“There is no choice, sir,” said the Norseman gravely; “one place is as likely to be right as another. There is a little valley yonder behind the coal. Shall we try that?”

“Yes,” was the laconic answer; and the captain stood thinking for a few moments, and using the little glass he carried to sweep the mountain-side, and then the slopes and plain opening behind them.

“She’ll pe getting ferry hungry,” said Watty, “and she’d petter eat some of the tear.”

The captain shook his head.

“Eat, Johannes,” he said. “You, too, Handscombe.”

The Norseman nodded.

“I cannot eat now, sir,” he said; “but I’ll take enough with us for all. We shall be faint and want food by-and-by.”

“Yes, take some,” said the captain. “Now, my man, you will keep up the fire and have some of the meat they have left ready to cook when we bring back Mr Stephen?”

“Tat’s what she was gaen to do,” said the lad quickly.

“We shall not be away more than an hour, if he comes back first. There is nothing to mind.”

“Put if the beast come what’ll she do?”

“Beasts? They are not likely to come here.”

“Put if she shall come, what then?” queried Watty sharply.

“Then,” said the captain, smiling—“why, then you must climb up the cliff there, and wait till we come back.”

“Yes,” said Watty thoughtfully; “tat’s the pest thing to do.”

Five minutes later he was alone frizzling more of the reindeer haunch freshly cut from the bone with his big sharp knife, for the others had started off at once for the little valley Johannes had pointed out.

“She’ll pe ferry lanely all alane,” said Watty, after watching till the doctor, who was last, had disappeared. “What’ll she do till they come pack?”

He stood watching the fire, and thinking. Then at last:

“There’ll pe plenty left for Meester Stevey when she comes, and she tidn’t get enough pefore, so she’ll pegin to eat over again.”

Chapter Thirty Two.

Steve's Adventure.

And all this time the object of so much solicitude was as eagerly on the watch for help as his friends were ready to supply it.

When the idea struck him that it would be a capital thing to do to run on forward to the foot of the coal cliff and start a fire ready for the time when the sledge was laboriously dragged up, he did not pause to consider whether it would be wise to separate himself from his friends, but darted off at full speed, and in due time reached the spot. He hurriedly built up a number of stones into a circle, and began to collect dry, twiggy stuff to start the blaze, wishing the while that he could see a fir wood with its ample supply of dead, turpentiny branches. But the twigs were strong and promised to burn well, so he proceeded next to collect the weather-worn fragments of coal, which had from time to time crumbled down from above, rent away by the frost. These were scattered here and there, many of them resembling stone; but he soon obtained enough to begin with, and bore them to his rough fireplace, over which he saw in imagination, as he worked, delicious steaks of deer frizzling.

He had pressed the bushy scrub down hard to make it burn without flaring away, glanced at the pieces of coal ready to hand, and now began to search his pocket for the little brass box of matches he carried, when as he knelt down there were footsteps behind him and a heavy breathing.

"That you, Watty?" he said, without looking round. "Bother the box! Here, Watty, got any matches?" *Phoo*!

A deep-toned expiration of the breath was the answer, and the boy turned his head, to find that, not three yards from where he knelt, a huge bear, whose long fur had quite a pale golden tinge in the sunshine, was literally towering over him upon its hind legs with fore paws extended as if to catch him.

Steve's spring over the fireplace was of a kind that, improved by practice, was sufficiently fine to promise his taking rank as the greatest standing

jumper of his time, while his speed in running certainly merited praise as he found that the great beast, which must have stood up some seven feet, had now dropped on all fours and was in full chase.

For choice Steve would have run toward his friends, but he had no option. The bear blocked the way in that direction; on his right there was the rapid rise of the mountain; on the left the ground was broken and boggy; before him the way open toward the mouth of the valley where they had left the boat, and naturally this way he ran, hoping that the bear would soon tire of the pursuit, and believing in his power to run more swiftly.

The way was not good, for it was encumbered with blocks of stone that had fallen from above; but Steve felt that they must be as bad for the bear as for him, and he pressed on, taking off his bonnet to hold it in one hand as he ran.

He glanced over his shoulder, and there was the bear appearing to shuffle along clumsily, but getting over the ground at a great rate of speed, which told the lad that he need do his best; but he consoled himself with the belief that, unless terribly hungry, the bear would not follow him for long; on the other hand, if famished, it would keep on and tire him out, and then—

Steve obstinately refused to let his imagination carry him any farther—the thoughts were too horrible; and, mentally vowing that if he managed to get clear away he would never feel any compunction in helping to shoot a bear again, but would do his best to become the owner of its rich, whitish fur, he tore on as hard as he could go, fully conscious of the fact that the bear, though some yards behind, was determined to tire him out and run him down.

The way now became more open, and as he raced on he just glanced at the opening to the narrow ravine on his right, for there was no temptation to leave the broad, open way for a stone-encumbered defile.

No temptation then; but the next moment there was, for he was not far past enjoying the satisfaction of distancing his pursuer, when his heart sank, and a curdling sensation of horror so convulsed him that he

dropped his cap, and pressed his hands to his throat; for there, fifty yards in front, and coming toward him, was a second bear, into whose jaws he was running hard.

Danger behind, danger before, and between them death without mercy. There was only one way out of the peril, and that was to run back and turn up the narrow defile.

It was a desperate venture, for the first bear was lumbering along and had nearly reached the turning; in fact, would have passed it before the boy could reach the haven of comparative safety if it had not stopped suddenly in surprise at seeing the quarry so suddenly turn round and seem to charge. Instead, then, of running to meet him, the bear suddenly raised itself up, and, with outstretched claws, awaited Steve's approach. It was all over in a moment or two: the boy had to go so close to the waiting bear that the beast struck at him with its right paw, and nearly touched the boy's shoulder; but the next instant he was beyond reach, and running up the defile.

There was no bounding over the ground, though, here, for the place was, as has been shown, encumbered with fallen blocks; and Steve's heart, which the moment before rose with a leap at the way in which he had eluded the bears, sank once more like lead, for he knew enough of the natural history of these beasts and their construction to feel that, though they had left the ice for a prowl among the rocks, they would be thoroughly at home over such ground as he was traversing.

"I've only put it off for a bit," he said to himself; "and they'll run me down."

This thought only roused him.

"They shan't find it an easy task, though," he muttered, and, forced as he was to slacken his speed, he had the satisfaction of seeing, on glancing back along the gloomy passage, that the bears were also compelled to slacken their pace and climb over intervening rocks as he had done. And it was plural, for the second one had joined the first, and they were coming steadily on, their light coats showing with terrible plainness in the gloom among the rocks.

The breathless rush, then, was over; but the progress, though slow, was

terribly hard work, and that which depressed the lad most was to see that the great brutes made no hurry or fuss over their pursuit, but came deliberately on, as if quite sure of the result, and prepared to follow even if it were for days.

“And I thought it so glorious to be always daylight and sunshine,” said Steve. Oh, if it would only come on now the blackest, darkest night ever known, so that he could take advantage of the many hiding-places he could see right and left, and crawl into one of them till the bears had passed!

He looked back just as this idea crossed his mind, and once more a chill of dread came over him. For the defile was a little more open at the top just then, so that he could see the actions of the bears plainly as they came on some sixty yards behind; and he grasped the knowledge now that they were not hunting him by sight, but by scent, and that though, as a rule, they came along with their noses in the air, every now and then they lowered their muzzles and snuffled eagerly about some block of stone, uttering low, pig-like grunts.

“Why, that’s where my hot, moist hands touched,” said Steve in dismay. “Darkness would be of no use if they hunt like that.”

For some minutes now the boy’s legs felt heavy and began to drag, his breath came short, and the feeling of dread rose round him as if it were water in which he was about to drown.

But this sensation did not last. A glance back showed that, if anything, he was farther in advance than before, and, taking heart at this, he pressed on, leaping little gaps, climbing over rocks, and descending at times to where the little stream trickled when the ground was more level.

All this while the fugitive was conscious that he was ascending, the ravine being, as it were, a huge gash riven in the mountain-side. And this knowledge that he was ascending would have depressed his spirits once more had he not set his teeth and tried manfully to keep before him the one idea that he must and would escape.

The depressing sensation was caused by the thought that sooner or later he would come to the end of the stones and rocks and reach the snow;

then, higher up the mountain-side, come upon the ice itself, where the bears would be quite in their element and rapidly run him down.

“But they have not done that yet,” muttered Steve, as a look back reassured him; and he steadily went on walking and climbing.

He knew that his friends must have reached the bottom of the coal cliff, and be wondering why he had run on.

“They’ll be sure to guess it was to light a fire,” he said; but as he said it he wondered whether they would find the place he had chosen for the purpose.

“Sure to,” he thought; “and as the fire is not alight they will begin to hunt for me, and come to my help at last. Of course; they will very soon find my bonnet.” But, even as he thought this, he recalled that it was not inside the mouth of the defile, but beyond; and his spirits sank again, for he thought out exactly what happened: that his friends would come some distance up the ravine in search of him, find no traces, and go back.

Plenty of ideas suggestive of the means of escape flashed through the boy’s brain as he toiled on.

One was the possibility of climbing up some precipitous part of the gully as high as he could get, and seating himself there to wait until the bears were wearied out and left him.

But he gave this idea up for more than one reason.

The bears, he felt, would scent their way right up to the spot where he began to climb, and he might slip and fall headlong into their hungry jaws, to be literally chopped up between them as they would chop up a seal.

Another reason was that the bears might, with all their deliberation of movement, prove to be far better climbers than he; and, in addition, supposing they were not, and he got into a safe spot where they could not reach him, might not they sit down patiently to wait, as wild beasts will for their food, till, chilled by the cold and utterly wearied out, he became an easy prey?

That was one of the ideas on which he pondered as he climbed up higher and higher. The other was as to the possibility of his being able to reach the very top of the ravine, high up amongst the snow and ice, where it became blended with the mountain, and, having thus climbed high enough, begin to descend on the other side of the buttress naturally formed by one side of the gully. Then he would at every step be getting nearer and nearer to his friends, who must, he knew, be in search of him.

This was the idea which gave him hope, and sent a thrill of fresh strength through his weary frame. A short time before he could only think of the certainty of the bears running him down at last in their untiring pursuit, as sooner or later, *if* he were always getting farther from help, they were bound to do. Now he could climb on with a feeling that an end to his sufferings was in sight.

And all this while—how long he could not tell—the bears came steadily on, never faster, never slower, always in the same steady, untiring manner, seeming to be perfectly certain of overtaking their prey after a time; but, as the slope began to grow more steep, so did the progress of pursued and pursuers become slow.

As Steve climbed on, forced by the ruggedness of the path to use his hands more and more frequently, so did the wildness of the defile increase, till, after hours of toil, the patches of snow which he had long reached gave place to a slope of pure white crystals, into which his feet began to sink, making the labour of walking more heavy.

On still, though, plod, plod, till the loose drift was passed as if in a nightmare, and he felt as if his legs were moving mechanically. How long this had been going on he could not tell, for at last the horror of the pursuit had numbed his brain, and he could not think of anything but that he must go on, and that at last he was out of the ravine and away to the right of the ridge, so that at any moment he might begin to descend and get down in another place.

But he could not attempt to descend yet, but must keep on right up into the regions of this eternal snow, where all was silent—a silence which would have filled his mind with awe but for the stunned sensation of utter weariness.

Still there was one flash of hope as he crept on, drawing himself over the ice crags on hands and knees. He had looked back below him at his pursuers, and his heart leaped, for there was only one. At first he could not believe it true, but a second look back confirmed the first impression. One of the bears had given up the pursuit; but the other was as persevering as ever. But it was hopeful, and gave Steve fresh energy; for if one was tired out, it was possible to weary the other.

If he could have begun to descend, he would have done so now; but he dared not attempt it, for not only was the bear too close, but the steepness of the ascent had brought it right beneath him.

And now, for the first time, the great animal seemed to see him, and increased its pace to such an extent that Steve felt all was over. He looked up, and the way was steeper, his only course being over an ice-covered face of rock far out of the perpendicular, but so smooth that the only way up was by taking advantage of the cracks and rifts which seamed it like a net.

“My last chance,” thought Steve, whose mind in this terrible emergency had suddenly grown clearer. He gave one glance below him, to see that the bear was not many yards away, and he could even see the gleam of its little, reddish-looking eyes. Then he buckled to at the climb, and got up foot by foot at a rate which surprised him. But the bear was as alert. When the lad was twenty or thirty feet up the animal had nearly reached the foot, and by the time the pursued had mounted another twenty feet the great brute was close up and raised itself on its hind quarters to mount.

A cry that he could not suppress rose to Steve’s lips, for, to his despair, his last hope died away. He had climbed on desperately, finding the ice-covered rock grow steeper and steeper, till, as he raised one foot to take the next step, there was no crevice or crack to give it hold, and it glided over the ice again and again. He reached to the left, but there was no handhold there. To the right it was the same, and—horror of horrors!—he knew now that he had clambered to a point which it was beyond human power to exceed, and this at a time when the bear was five-and-twenty feet below, and mounting fast.

If he could reach that ledge just above him with his hands, he might draw himself up; but could he? There was only one way, by making a leap, and this with so little foothold. But a low growl decided him, and, pulling himself together, he stooped, and then sprang up with all his might.

Hurrah! He reached the ledge with his crooked hands, and tried hard to drive his toes into the ice as he hung. But only for a few seconds. The sharp edge of the ledge was of ice of the most glassy nature, and Steve closed his eyes, for he had done all that mortal could do; his fingers glided over the angle to which they had for a moment or two clung, and then, as he drew himself up, he was falling like a ball, and as swift right on to the climbing bear.

Chapter Thirty Three.

Watty's Feast.

Watty Links was undoubtedly great in a certain capacity. He resembled a Dutch galliot, especially built to contain the largest quantity of merchandise in the smallest tonnage. Of course Watty was not built to receive merchandise, but he was built to receive food, and the quantity he could consume when he was unfettered was so great that a crew made up of men proportionately as great eaters would have made a captain wince when stores were running out, and shipowners decline to take them again at any wage.

There being a pretty good amount of the deer haunch left when the men departed—for in their hurry and excitement no one had thought it worth while to pack it up—Watty was left, so to speak, with a free hand—that is to say, he had a fire, plenty of meat, a knife, he knew how to cook, and there was no one to say, "Hold hard, young fellow! I'm sure you have had quite enough." So after making such arrangements as should provide an ample amount of roast deer for Steve when he returned, and also for the three personages of the expedition, Watty took a look round.

The sun was getting lower, but the glittering ice peaks and the lights and shades on the mountain were beautiful to behold. But Watty did not see

that beauty. He noticed how profound the silence was, thought it very lonely, and turned back to the fire, which was the most beautiful thing he had seen that day, for the gas and smoke were gone, and the coal was all of a hot glow, there being plenty and no question of its price per ton.

“She wonters where the young chief has gone,” muttered Watty. “Hey, but what a fire to broil a bone!”

A minute later the leg bone of the buck was spitting and sputtering on the glowing coals, and Watty smiled as he felt in his pockets and brought out a tobacco box, which, on being opened, proved to contain two pieces of rag, which he also opened, and displayed about a dessert-spoonful of salt and about half that quantity of black pepper.

“She smells fine alreaty,” said the lad; and he took a pinch of pepper as if it were snuff, and carefully sprinkled it over the grilling bone, following it up with a pinch of salt. Then the box, with its contents, was put away, and Watty dived into his pockets again, to bring out a couple of biscuits.

“Twa biscuit,” he said. “Hey, but she willna waste ta pread when she can have sae muckle gude meat!”

He turned the bone over and waited a few minutes, which he spent in whetting the blade of his knife on a piece of smooth stone, and trying its edge again and again, and ending by giving it a stropping on his boot sole as if he meant to shave.

“Done!” he cried suddenly; and whisking the browned and in some places blackened bone from the fire, he squatted down with his legs doubled under him like a Japanese, and began to skin off pieces of the tempting venison, and ate them deliberately, smiling with satisfaction the while.

“I ken naebody could hae cookit deer meat efer so petter as tat,” he said as he worked away, thoroughly enjoying his picnic meal till the last scrap was cleaned off, and then he cracked the bone with the back of his knife, and managed to get out a good deal of the marrow.

“She’s fine, though she is mickle,” he said; and then he sighed and looked hard at the pieces of the deer set aside for the absent ones—a shabby, raggedly cut lot, though of course of delicious meat.

Watty stretched his eyes away and had a look round.

“They dinna come pack,” he said, “and it’s chust wasting a bonnie bit fire.”

There was a pause.

“She’d petter pit on some mair coal,” muttered Watty; and he picked up a weather-worn lump, but dropped it again.

“It’s chust spoiling a gude fire to put on mair coal,” he said softly, with his face all wrinkles, “and a’ tat meat waiting.”

He had another look round.

“She’s ferry hungry,” he muttered; “and she’ll chust hae ane wee pit. The captain said he couldna eat. She can.”

He made a dart at the biggest piece, laid it on the glowing coal, seasoned it as before, waited till it was done on one side, and then picked it up cleverly on the point of his knife and turned it, seasoned this side also, and replaced his box.

“Peautiful, peautiful!” he murmured. “Hey, put she smells petter than floores!”

He did not leave the meat to cook too long, but soon had it out and laid upon a nicely warmed, flat piece of slaty stone, which served him for a plate as he began to eat with the greatest of gusto.

“Hey, put she is chuicy,” he muttered, as he munched away without paying much heed to a bit or two of cinder adhering to the meat and sounding unpleasant as he crunched them between his strong, white teeth.

“Peautiful!” he murmured again, as he got about half-way through. “She’s thenking it would pe petter to begin cooking mair so as to be retty when they come pack.”

So he placed another piece on the fire, and then went on eating his

second snack so slowly and deliberately, spending a certain amount of time the while in watching and turning the cooking piece that it was beautifully done by the time he had finished; and now came a terrible test of his powers of endurance. He looked at the frizzled slice, then away from it, then back at it; and it tempted him so sorely that he got up and walked away.

“She’s letting the fire oot,” he cried, and ran back to stand looking down at it. “Nay, put she’d spoil a gude cooking fire if she put on anny coal. She’ll cook ta rest.”

No sooner said than done. A fresh piece was put on the glowing cinders, and the newly cooked slice placed upon the bit of shale.

“She’ll chust spoil if she gets caud,” muttered Watty. “The teer-fat goes hart and stickits to the roof of her mouth, an’ it’s a pity to spoil such bonnie meat.”

He gave his shock head a rub, and looked round again, wondering whether there were any bears likely to come and disturb him; but, as far as he could see, he was quite alone in the grand solitude, and he uttered a deep sigh.

“She never said she was to cook anny meat,” he said, “an’ it such a pity to let it spoil. She’ll chust eat this wee pit, an’ they’ll pe pack py the time the nex’ pit is tone.”

Watty took another look, then seasoned and saw to the fresh piece frizzling; and the next minute the smell and sight of the slice upon the stone were too tempting to be resisted longer, and he began upon it and finished it as ravenously as if he had not had a morsel before.

“Hey, put she is fine,” he murmured with a sigh of satisfaction; “she never hat such a gran’ treat pefore, an’ it would pe wicket to let such gude meat spoil by ketting caud. The captain an’ the tocktor poth said they wadna eat a pit, an’ perhaps Meester Stevey’s gone pack to ta ship or the poat pecause she was tired. She hasna the hairt to see such gude meat spoil.”

Poor Watty had grown reckless now, and, casting conscience to the winds, he went on with his banquet. His appetite seemed to increase as

he went on, and, forgetful of bears, captains, doctors, Norsemen, and Steves, seeing, tasting, and enjoying the cooking and eating of these juicy, well-seasoned, delicious pieces of venison, time seemed to be no more for him, and he only awoke to his position as he shook out the contents of his pepper and salt rags on the last piece of meat, a goodly slice, the best of all, which he had avoided eating, always having selected the smaller bits.

“Hat she petter leave tat?” he sighed, as he looked at it longingly and passed his tongue over his lips. “Nay, if she toes, they’ll expeckit mair; put if there’s nane they winna say a word. She’ll hae to eat tat, too.”

The piece was half done, and he turned it, inhaling its delicious odour as he gloated over the brown side, and then took out his biscuits and had them ready.

“Chust to fanish off,” he said, smiling faintly. “She’ll chust pit it atween twa biscuit, an’ mak’ a santwich of it, an’ then—Yah!”

Watty uttered an unearthly yell, for a great shadow fell across the fire at that moment, and he was thrust sidewise, to fall just clear of the fire upon his face.

“The pears—the pears!” he groaned. “What shall she to?” But he did not stir, neither did he see that the piece of hot meat had been literally snatched off the fire, and a crunching sound told him that a pair of strong jaws, with great, white teeth that in imagination he could see gleaming, were grinding up the biscuits that were to form the *finale* of his meal.

“The pear always hugs her pefore she eats her oop,” thought Watty, as he lay there shivering with dread, this being the only movement he could contrive, feeling as he did that if he attempted to escape the great animal would seize him. Then he recollected reading about a traveller pretending to be dead, and lying face downward till a bear in pursuit overtook him, smelled him over, and then went away.

“She lie as tet as a toornail,” thought Watty; and he tried to hold his breath as he waited for the bear to come. But it was evidently too busy with the food, crunching up the biscuits and finishing the meat.

“Oh, if she could only lie still an’ not preathe a pit!” said the lad to himself. “She can’t, an’ it makes a noise. She wishes the pear would come an’ smell her an’ go.”

But the new arrival was too busy, and made Watty, as he lay there on his face, moist with perspiration, wonder how so big a beast could be so long eating so small a quantity of food.

At last the boy felt as if he could endure no more, and that he must make a leap to his feet and run for his life. He knew that the thing to do would be to draw a very deep breath, make a sudden effort, and run, for the suffering from lying there those brief minutes, which seemed to be like hours, was more than he could endure.

He had made up his mind to try, but his heart sank, and he lay a little longer. A second time he tried to screw himself up to the sticking-point, but failed, and lay panting, till all at once, just as he was saying to himself, “She must to it ta third time,” the bear uttered a low “Ah-ah-ah!” and the lad sprang to his feet.

“That’s right, Watty; get me a drink of water.”

“Meester Stevey!” exclaimed the lad. “Oh! oh! oh!” he half sobbed, and, throwing himself again upon the ground, he buried his face in his hands, and lay gently rolling from side to side, trying to stifle the hysterical fit which had attacked him; for it was mingled with relief from what he had looked upon as certain death, anger with himself for making such a blunder, and delight at Steve’s return.

“Why, Watty, what’s the matter?” cried Steve. “I do believe he’s crying. Get up. Did you think I was dead?”

“Yes, we all tought you wass teat, an’ I tought the pear wass come to eat me, ant—ant—ant—she’s ferry clad to see you acain, though she don’t like you.”

“Well, you are a rum chap, Watty! I say, you didn’t mind my snatching away that meat? I couldn’t help it, I was nearly starved.”

“No, she ton’t mind,” replied the lad. “She’d hat a little pit o’ meat pefore.

But she’s all scratted, an’ her het pleets, an’ she’s cot no skin on her knuckles!”

“Oh, never mind that! I got away—escaped. But it was very bad.”

“Put it wass ferry pad! What wass ferry pad?”

“Having a couple of bears after you.”

“An’ she had twa pears after her?”

“Yes, monsters. They hunted me all along a gully right up into the mountain.”

“Hey! An’ tid they catch her?”

“No; one got tired and stopped, but the other came right on to where it was all ice and snow. Up yonder,” said Steve, pointing to the glittering slopes and peaks far above their heads.

“An’ what tid that one to? Tid she ket tired?”

“No,” said Steve. “I made a jump to get up a steep bit of the ice, caught hold, and then fell right on to the bear as it was coming up after me.”

“Hey, tid she, though?”

“Yes; and knocked it off the slope, and we went down together for a little way rolling over and over. Then I found I was alone, for the bear had clawed about and stopped itself; but I was sliding and slipping there down and down, I don’t know how far, but it must have been hundreds of feet over the steep snow, till I rolled over among the stones and cut my head.”

“Hey, and she has cut it! Hadn’t she petter tie it up?”

“Oh, that’s nothing.”

“Put what tid the pear to?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t see any more of it. I suppose it’s up there in the mountain somewhere. I say, Watty, I wish I’d had Skeny with me. I don’t

know, though; perhaps the bears would have killed him. Where are the others?"

"They're gone to leuk for you. She's waiting for them to come pack."

"Have they got Skeny with them? He ought to have scented me out, so that they could have shot the bears."

"Skeny? Na; she tidn't see the tog."

Steve started.

"Why, Watty, I don't remember seeing him when we turned back with the deer; did you?"

"Na, she tidn't see the tog since she rin after a teer. She wass going ferry fast, an' she forgot all spout the tog after. She hopes the tog isna lost."

"No fear! Skeny will find his way back. Oh, how stiff and sore I am! Hark!"

There was a faint whistle from the distance, and Watty leaped up, and, thrusting his fingers into his mouth, blew an answer.

A couple of minutes later, as the boys stood watching in the direction from which the sound had come, they made out three figures on the slope of the mountain. Then these three figures stopped, and began to wave their caps, and directly after they broke into a trot, and were soon up by the fire.

"Steve, lad!" cried Captain Marsham. "Thank God, you are safe!"

"Where have you been, boy?" cried the doctor joyfully, as he wrung the hand the captain had left at liberty. "Why, you have made me a job. Get some water, my lad," he continued to Watty, and laying down his gun he began to take out a pocket-book to get sticking-plaster and scissors.

"I'm very glad, Mr Steve," said Johannes quietly. "We thought you were lost."

While the doctor washed away the marks left by Steve's fall and carefully

applied sticking-plaster the boy told his adventure, Watty listening again attentively, and now watching the speaker, now the mountain-side, in full expectation of seeing the bear make its appearance from one of the gullies; but there was no interruption, and they heard all.

“You must not leave your friends again, my lad,” said the captain. “We must all be ready to help each other; co-operation is power. Well, how do you feel now?”

“So stiff I can hardly move,” replied Steve.

“Then we must camp here for a few hours. Fortunately we have a little of the provisions in our satchels. Where’s the rest of the meat, my lad?”

Watty turned more red than usual. “There isna a pit left, sir. Meester Stevey ate oop a’ there wass left.”

“Bravo, Steve, my boy!” cried the doctor merrily. “Any one who can eat well has not much the matter with him.”

“I felt starved when I came back,” said Steve, colouring. “I couldn’t help it.”

Watty looked horribly guilty; but his was not the nature to make a clean breast of the matter, and he sat furtively watching the little party as the provisions were brought out; and free from care now, they all began to eat.

“Here, Watty,” said Steve, as soon as he received a portion, “we must not forget you.”

“Na, sir, she couldna eat a pit,” cried the lad truthfully, and it was only by great persuasion that his modesty was overcome; but certainly he did not do justice to the biscuits and cheese handed to him, for there were limits even to his capacity.

Just as they had about finished, a distant barking was heard, and Steve tried to stand up, but sank back with a groan.

“Skeny!” he cried. “Oh, I say, I am stiff!”

“The dog! Ah, where has he been all this time?”

“She went off efter the teer, and tidna come pack.”

“Not after deer now, gentlemen,” cried Johannes, snatching up his spear. “Quick! your guns.”

The weapons were seized, and all now caught sight of that which had attracted the Norseman’s attention; for a huge bear was seen coming down from a ravine, followed by the dog, which kept on snapping savagely at the beast’s heels, and then as the bear turned bounded out of its reach.

But the bear did not appear disposed to follow the dog, acting directly after as if it had some object in view, for it turned again, placed its nose close to the ground, and came on toward the little open camp.

“That’s my big bear!” said Steve excitedly. “How do you know?” said the captain, altering the cartridge in one of his barrels for a bullet.

“Because I came down from the mountain that way; and look, he’s smelling my footsteps.”

“Yes, that is right, gentlemen. The brute will be here soon. Shall we meet him here, or get among the rocks?”

“What do you say?” cried the captain. “Here, sir, now that we are not out of breath. If we climb, our hands will tremble.”

“But I’ve no gun,” said Steve.

“And you are not fit to use one, so leave it to us, my boy. Will it come on when it sees us, Johannes?”

“Yes, sir, I think so. These beasts are very fierce, and they have had so little to do with man, that they do not avoid him. We must be very steady and stand firm. I’ll attack first from the right.”

“What, with the spear?” cried Captain Marsham. “No!”

“It would be better, sir,” said the Norseman respectfully. “These animals move rather slowly. It will turn to attack me savagely; and as I try to keep it off with the spear, it will be side on to you, and give you both good shots at the shoulder. Don’t aim at the head until it is down.”

“You are right,” said the captain. “Do as you say, but take care of yourself.”

“I leave that to you, gentlemen,” said the man, smiling. “You will have to shoot the brute while I hold its attention.”

There was no more time for conversation, for the bear was coming steadily on, checked by the dog from time to time, the former action being repeated again and again, and Skene’s activity enabling him to leap away from the savage blows directed at him by the bear.

“Cartridges all right, Handscombe?” cried the captain sharply.

“Yes; both fresh.”

“Mind not to hit the dog.”

The doctor nodded, and Steve stood with his heart beating, wishing that he had the gun far away now upon the sledge, though he was fain to believe that his hands shook, so that he could not have shot straight. He had to join with Watty in occupying the position of spectators, and he was watching the bear come on, still without appearing to realise their presence, when the captain said:

“I don’t think we shall have any difficulty with the brute; but you lads must be ready to take to the rocks if we do. He might charge by us.”

“Just a few yards forward, sir,” said Johannes; “the ground is more level.”

They moved away from where the boys were standing to a spot free from fallen rocks; and Steve’s heart beat more heavily, as he felt how brave it seemed to be to step forward to the attack of so fierce a beast—one which, by a single stroke of the paw, could sweep away those strong men; and as the bear came on, once more he saw himself breathless and exhausted, climbing up and up the snowy slope towering above

where he now stood, with the savage beast close at his heels, merciless and untiring, and so determined that it had gone on tracking him ever since his escape. All this robbed him of any feeling of commiseration for the ferocious creature, and he hoped fervently that it was coming on surely to its fate.

“She’ll come an’ climb oop amang the rocks?” whispered Watty just then.

“No, no; stop here,” said Steve hoarsely.

“She’ll pe safer,” whispered Watty.

“Be quiet and look on,” replied Steve angrily.

“She’ll pe kilt,” groaned the lad; but he was silent afterwards, and as much interested in the scene before him as his companion.

And all the while the snapping, growling, and turning went on while the bear approached nearer and nearer, still without seeing those who waited for it with their deadly weapons poised. It seemed at first that in its heavy way the animal would have come close up; but at last, when it was not more than fifty yards distant, Skene made a sharper charge than ever, as if delighted that his master and friends should see his prowess, charging so close home that he seized the long hair upon the bear’s leg, gave it a shake, and narrowly escaped the claws which were dashed savagely at it.

But Skene was nimble, and now he darted forward to where his friends were, barking loudly, as much as to say, “Here he is; look out!” and then dashed back again.

But the bear had followed the dog with its eyes, and now, forsaking the scent it had been running down, it swung its head from side to side so as to get each eye to bear well in turn upon its enemies, quite ignoring the dog when he dashed back barking furiously.

“Call the dog, and keep him with you, Steve,” said the captain loudly, but without turning; and in obedience to the summons Skene returned to his master, and stayed there, held by the long hair of his neck, trembling with excitement.

There was a low, deep growl now, and the bear stopped, facing them, as if undecided whom first to attack; and then it came on again growling, with its mind still not made up.

These were the most exciting moments, for all felt that the beast might charge in a way which gave no good opportunity for a deadly shot.

It was very close now, and its eyes flashed in the sunshine as it swung its head about with its muzzle close down to the ground, though it was not scenting its way now, but carefully watching its enemies.

Skene uttered an excited yelp just then, and recognising in it the little foe which had so pertinaciously hung on to it for some time past, the bear now uttered a growl, and turned toward where Steve stood with the dog.

“Rin, Meester Stevey, rin!” cried Watty, setting the example; “she’s coming here.”

But the bear soon changed its tactics, for Johannes took a few steps forward and made a thrust at the animal with his lance.

The great brute uttered a furious roar, swung round, struck at the lance shaft, and rose up upon its hind legs to seize the aggressor.

It was a dangerous position for the Norseman, for could the bear get one blow at him with its great hook-armed paw, his chances of being extricated alive were doubtful. But he stood firm, for he had perfect confidence in the captain, and knew that he would seize this opportunity to fire. He was quite right. The captain drew trigger, there was the sharp, loud crack of the rifle, and almost simultaneously the thud of the bullet.

The bear uttered a furious roar, and swung round to meet the enemy who had struck it that terrible blow on its shoulder. This brought it into an inconvenient position for the doctor to get his shot, for the animal was now face on to them; but it gave Johannes his chance, of which he was not long in availing himself, for he rushed in and gave the monster a terrible thrust with the lance.

The next instant the bear had swung round, snapping the shaft in two like a straw, and made for Johannes with a roar, when, just as it was on the

point of overtaking the now unarmed man, crack went the captain's rifle again, but without checking the monster in the least, and Johannes' fate seemed sealed, when, with a sharp hiss, Steve loosed the dog.

"At him, Skeny! css!"

The dog dashed at the bear with a furious burst of barks, and fixed his teeth in the monster's hind leg, so diverting its attention that it stopped to strike at the new enemy.

It was a fatal moment for the bear, but it gave the Norseman an opportunity to escape. For, as the brute stopped to turn on Skene, the doctor now had his chance, and fired, from not ten yards' distance, two shots right in the shoulder, and with an aim that told well of his knowledge of anatomy, for the bear stopped, rose up, and struck at the air with its paws as if imagining its enemy was within reach, and then, as it towered up far higher than a tall man, tottered for a moment or two, and fell over backward—dead.

"Well done, Handscombe!" cried Captain Marsham warmly. "But, Johannes, my good fellow, you were too daring; you ought not to have run so great a risk."

"I am not hurt, sir," said the Norseman, smiling gravely; "and it gave you the chance to fire."

"Yes; but suppose I had not been there to fire?" cried the captain.

"Ah, that would have been different, sir. Then I should not have been there to break my lance in the bear's chest."

Johannes smiled as he approached the bear more closely to extricate his spear.

"Mind!" cried Steve. "Perhaps he is not quite dead."

"There is no fear, sir," replied the man; and, seizing the broken shaft, he dragged the head out of the bear's body, and then took out his knife.

"What are you going to do?" said Steve.

“Skin it, sir,” replied the man, looking surprised that such a question should be asked.

“But suppose its mate comes?”

Johannes paused, and looked dubious.

“Ah!” he said, “then we should have to fight the mate.”

“No more fighting this time,” said the captain. “And Steve is quite right; the other bear may come in search of its companion. We must not attempt to camp here.”

“I should say not,” cried the doctor, “if we are likely to have another bear visitor.”

“Do you think you can walk a few miles, Steve?” asked the doctor.

“Yes, if you will go slowly,” replied the boy. “I’m very stiff now, but I shall get better as we go on.”

And risking the destruction and loss of the skin, they started at once for the boat, to reach it after what to Steve was a long and painful walk.

That night he slept so soundly that ten hours had passed before he made his appearance in the cabin, a good deal scratched and otherwise marked, but little the worse for his adventure.

Chapter Thirty Four.

Signs of the Cold.

The skin of the bear was considered to be of too much value to be left to rot, so that next morning a fresh start was made as before, and in due time the place was reached where the roughly-built fireplace stood up blackened against the grey stones. But the bear lay out of sight beyond a mass of rock.

As they came to where the animal should have been, it did not seem to be there; but directly after Steve pointed, nearly speechless with wonder.

“Look!” he cried. “Come to life again.”

Johannes laughed.

“Hardly,” he said; “don’t you see that it is the bear’s mate.”

So it proved; and upon the party approaching the dead animal, their coming was savagely resented, and the second bear came on at once to the attack so fiercely that the battle began at once, with the result that the Norsemen, who had all accompanied this expedition, had two bears to skin, and the sledge was heavily laden with the valuable portion of their game.

Certain threatening signs were pointed out by Johannes soon after, and they started back, but did not reach the boat till the ground was covered with snow and a peculiar chill was in the air. This snow in summer was unseasonable, but it made the sleigh run easily, and the boat was reached in less time than had been anticipated; but the mountain slopes on either side of the fiord were completely transformed by the snow, an early taste of the winter they might expect to set in before long if they stayed.

As the summer glided on the great rampart of ice was patiently watched for tokens of melting, but these signs were few; and as the sun rose less high day by day, and there were once more hours of darkness, the prospect of their having to bear the winter where they were began to be discussed.

But meanwhile there was a long expedition as often as the men had cleared away the quantities of seal and walrus blubber that were brought in and rendered down. These expeditions were made to embrace business and investigation; and their knowledge of the lay of the land increasing, they persevered in their search wherever it was possible to penetrate the valleys, while the coast to north and south was explored as far as the boats could go.

But there was no sign of the lost crew, and as the time wore on it became

evident that they were not in the region occupied by their friends.

“Let us hope that they may have reached home by now,” said the doctor one evening. “I think we have done everything we can to find them.”

“Everything,” said the captain gravely; “but we cannot fight against fate.”

There began to be certain signs now of the short summer nearing its termination, beside the setting of the sun in the far north-west. The birds were not so plentiful, and whenever a flock approached as many ducks and geese as possible were shot, and placed in ice for use in the winter, when no doubt they would all have gone south.

Thanks to the Norwegians, too, who proved to be very ingenious in watching the seals so as to find suitable places, plenty of fish were caught, making a most agreeable addition to their diet.

At last the captain announced to the men that there was no necessity for more walrus or seal hunts to be carried out, for the cargo was sufficient, and that now they were to occupy their time more with hunting and exploring, so as to make their stores of venison and dried and salted fish so ample that they could set the winter at defiance.

“Then you really think that we shall have to stay here all the winter, sir?” cried Steve.

“I have not a doubt about it now, my boy,” replied the captain. “We came to help at first; now we are badly in want of help ourselves.”

“It doesn’t much matter, does it?” said Steve. “We are all very happy and strong; and if we stop through the winter, we shall be here ready for the breaking up of the ice.”

“Yes, Steve, quite ready,” said the captain, rather sadly; “but I did not mean to be caught like this.”

“We’ve got months yet, haven’t we, before the real winter comes?”

“Not up in this latitude,” said the captain, smiling. “According to my calculations, we are as far north as any expedition has been. Did you

notice anything this morning when you first got up?”

“No, only that it was rather cold for August.”

“Yes, my lad, more than rather, for there was a thin film of ice on the fiord till the sun touched it. Only a very thin film, but a suggestion of how soon winter sets in up here.”

But the next day proved to be so glorious, bright, and sunny that Steve could not realise the fact that the winter would be upon them soon. There were tiny flowers in sunny corners, the sea and sky were of a brilliant blue, and the birds that were sailing round and round, and, chasing each other, made the rocks echo with their joyous cries.

“This place is so sheltered that we ought not to feel the winter so very much,” he said to himself; and he walked up to where the Norsemen were seated rebinding the lashing about their lance heads, examining the grommetting round the harpoons, and planing up a fresh shaft for a lance whose handle had been cracked in an encounter with a huge walrus, which gave one vigorous flap and broke away, the lance handle snapping as if it had been a match, at the same time preparing one for Johannes’ weapon broken by the bear.

“Morning,” he said; and the fair, big, grave-looking fellows returned his salute with a smile.

“Going to be fine weather?” he asked.

“Yes, sir, fine and clear for some days yet. I don’t think we shall have any snow.”

“I should hope not,” said Steve, smiling. “I say, Johannes, didn’t we have a bit of a frost this morning?”

“Yes, sir, a slight one.”

“You don’t think that’s a sign of the winter coming, do you?”

“Yes, sir; and very soon.”

“What nonsense!” cried Steve. “Why, we often have sharp frosts at home in April and May, and they don’t mean that winter is coming. Why do you think it is coming so soon?”

The big Norseman smiled.

“Because, sir, it is not coming; it has already come.”

“Come?”

“Yes,” said Johannes, raising his hand, and pointing to the dazzling peaks of ice and the glistening snow coming quite low down on the slopes, leading gradually to the lake-like shores of the fiord; “there it is, sir.”

“Oh, but ice and snow have been there all the summer.”

“What we call the summer, sir; but it seems to me that the winter is always here. It rises a little when the sun comes back and a part of the snow melts; but if we climb up into the mountains a little way, it freezes every night, and the winter is always there. And now the sun rises a little less high every day, and there is real night which grows longer as the days grow shorter.”

“Yes, I noticed that the days grew shorter,” said Steve, as he looked up at the realm of eternal winter with aching eyes.

“Much, sir; and if we measured we should soon see that the snow up yonder was creeping down toward us week by week.”

Steve was silent for a few minutes, as he tried to familiarise himself with these wonderful facts about nature in the arctic circle.

“I say, Johannes,” he said at last, “what about the ice down at the opening of the fiord—will it give way this year?”

“No, sir,” said the man quietly.

“Then for certain we shall not be able to get out?”

“For certain you will not be able to get out, sir.”

“Then there is no doubt about it whatever; we shall have to spend the winter here, frozen up?”

“Yes, sir. I have had no doubt about it for weeks; neither has the captain, as you have seen by the great store of food he has buried in the ice.”

“Well, it will be a change,” said Steve after a pause. “I suppose it will not be so very cold?”

The Norseman laughed.

“Colder than you think for, sir; but not too cold to bear if you take care. You must not go away into the mountains by yourself.”

“Couldn’t help it if a bear were after me,” said Steve, laughing. “But I shall take care. I say, though, tell me about the darkness: does the sun go right out of sight?”

“Yes, sir, for weeks.”

“And it is quite dark—black darkness?”

“It is about the same as it is in England, sir. There are light nights when the sky is clear, and you can see the moon and stars, and there are dark nights when it is cloudy or a mist hangs low.”

“Seems queer,” said Steve thoughtfully.

“But you had the constant day, sir, when the sun never set.”

“Well, I daresay I shall get used to it,” said Steve; and he went to get his gun and ammunition ready, so as to be prepared for a little exploring expedition which the captain was going to lead along the shore.

And now for the rest of the open time trips were made north and south along the coast, efforts being directed to going farther in each direction before the frost made progress in the boats impossible. Of these trips many were made, each being pushed farther north or south; for the ice

had opened more and more away from the shore, increasing the length and width of the channel in the incomprehensible, unexpected manner in which such changes do take place amongst the ice.

But it was always the same: not a trace of human being having been there before; no post or cairn erected; no sign of the rough hut that sailors who had come so far north would build up as a protection while hunting the walrus and the seal.

“It seems to me,” the captain said, “that we are the first visitors without doubt. Would that we were the second, and could find our friends were the first!”

“If this is the first time the country has been reached,” said Steve, “oughtn’t we to christen it by some name? How would Walrus Land do?”

“As well as any other name,” said the captain; “but, whatever we call it, there is no doubt but that it will be many more years before it is reached again. It is hardly likely that another expedition will meet with such an accident as that which brought us here. Walrus Land be it then, for the huge, unwieldy creatures are plentiful enough. How soon are you going to let your pet go? It grows very fast.”

“Let it go!” cried Steve wonderingly. “Why, I meant to take it back to England.”

“For the Zoological Gardens? You can’t keep it, like a dog, in the back yard.”

“No,” said Steve thoughtfully; “it would want a kennel.”

“Kennel? It would want an elephant house. No, my lad, it will not do; you will have to set our friend at liberty, or let me tell Johannes to turn it into oil.”

That was one day at the end of August, when at midday the sun shone quite hot, and they knew that harvest must be in full progress at home. They had been so great a distance to the south that it was all the men could do to pull back; and, as it was, they did not reach the mouth of the narrow waterway until close upon ten o’clock, and the *Hvalross* till they

were so utterly tired out that, after snatching a hasty meal, all were eager to throw themselves down to sleep.

Safely anchored as they were, shut in from storms, right out where no bears, even if they swam out, could assail them, the keeping of a watch seemed very unnecessary, and Steve never thought it more so than that night, when he found that it was his turn to take the second watch in company with Johannes; for he was regularly fagged. However, his was only the watch to come, so that he was able to get a good sleep before he was called, and then arose with his eyes half closed and a general desire to quarrel with everything and everybody.

“It does seem so stupid!” he grumbled. “What’s the good of it?”

“Being under a first-rate captain, sir, one who never lets discipline grow slack.”

“Oh, bother!” said Steve testily. “It seems such a nuisance when one is so tired and sleepy. It does no good now.”

“Yes, sir, a great deal,” replied the Norseman. “Makes every one feel confident that he is being watched over, and may sleep in peace.”

“Wish I was being watched over and could sleep in peace,” groaned out Steve. “No, I don’t,” he hastened to add; “it would be so precious selfish. But I’m not well, Johannes; I’m chilly. Got a bad cold, I think.”

“Then go and get your sheep-skin coat.”

“Would you? Well, I think I will.”

He went back to the cabin, and returned, putting on the thick coat, with its closely-cut pile of wool, shorn so regularly that it looked like velvet in the light of the glistening stars.

“I don’t like this watching in the dark,” said Steve. “And how strange it is! Only the other day it was quite light at this time. Ugh! how cold I feel!”

“You’ll be better soon,” said Johannes. “You have not had time yet to feel the good of your coat.”

“What good can that do me when I’m not well?” grumbled Steve. “Hullo! you’ve got on yours.”

“Yes, sir; and it’s very welcome. The air is very cold to-night.”

“Freezing?”

“Yes, sir, hard. I daresay we shall find the fiord covered with ice in the morning. Winter is coming, sir, you see.”

“Oh, but this is only a night frost that will go away in the sun quite early.”

“Perhaps so, sir; but you can never be sure about the weather at this time of year. It will make some of the walrus boats turn their heads south, many of them perhaps empty, while here they swarm more than ever.”

“Then they should come up here and catch them.”

“How?” said Johannes.

“Sail and steam, as we did.”

“Yes, sir, that sounds easy; but suppose they cannot? Suppose you made up your mind to sail south to-morrow?”

“Well, we couldn’t go for the ice.”

“Exactly, sir; and the walrus boats couldn’t sail up here for the ice.”

“Ugh! it is cold,” said Steve with a shiver. “I wonder what the glass says. Wish I’d looked.”

“It would not have been a fair test, sir; it is warmer down in the cabin. You are not unwell, only you feel the chill just waking up from sleep.”

“Yes, I feel better now. How the stars shine!”

“You’ll see them brighter by-and-by, sir,” said Johannes. “Have you got anything hard in your pocket?”

“Only my knife. What do you want?”

“Something for you,” replied the Norseman. “Wait a minute, sir.”

He turned and stepped down into the furnace-room, to return directly.

“Take that, sir.”

“What is it? Lump of coal? What for?”

“Throw it right out on the ice, sir. I want you to try it. Quick! there’s something for you to look at now.”

“But surely there’s no ice for it to fall on,” said Steve. “It’s impossible.”

All the same, he took the lump of coal, and, drawing back, threw it as far as he could out over the fiord; and, to his utter astonishment, when it fell he heard it rebound with the regular musical ring of a hard substance upon ice, and strike again and again before it became motionless.

“Why, the ice must be quite half an inch thick!” cried Steve. “No wonder I felt cold.”

“Yes, sir, it’s freezing hard; the winter has begun, though of course it will be warm in the fine days. But look; there’s a sure sign of the cold weather coming.”

He pointed to the northward, where the Great Bear shone with a brightness foreign to that which he would have seen at home.

“What am I to look at?” said Steve; “that soft light? It’s the Milky Way.”

“No, sir, the aurora. There it goes; it is spreading right along.”

“Then it’s the sun going to rise!” cried Steve.

“In the north-west, sir? No, it’s the aurora; you will see it stream up in rays right away to the Pole Star soon. Yes, I thought so;” for, even as he was speaking, sheaves of thin pencils of soft lambent light streamed right away up toward the zenith, then sank, wavered about, and then streamed up once again.

“Finer than I should have expected, sir,” said Johannes, as the glow near the horizon increased till it was now pale white, now of a delicate blush, while the pencils of light flickered up and streamed and waved, and looked in their delicate, dawn-like colouring like the spirits of fire or light flying upward from earth to heaven.

“What is it?” said Steve at last, after gazing at the wondrous phenomenon for a long time.

“Ah, sir, you must ask some one wiser than I am to answer that question. All I can tell you is that cold weather generally comes after the sky has been lit up as if it was the inside of some great shell, and with as many colours, only more light and faint.”

The aurora flashed up brighter and then sank, flickered as if dying out, and then blazed up again, if the term can be applied to the exquisitely soft, lambent glow playing in the north; but its movements were those of leaping flame flashing up from a huge fire, growing exhausted, and then dying down till almost invisible, but only to light up the northern heavens again, from horizon almost to zenith, with its dawn-like beauty, till it grew hard to imagine that there was not something more to follow.

“One would think that some kind of pale, cold sun was about to rise over there,” said Steve at last. “Are you sure that nothing will rise?”

“Nothing but more rays, sir.”

“Cold rays,” muttered Steve, drawing his fingers in under the sleeves of his sheep-skin coat. “I say, Johannes, are you warm?”

“Yes, sir.”

“My fingers are numbed, and it’s getting hold of my toes. I’ll go down and have five minutes’ warm by the cabin fire.”

“No, sir, don’t. Take my advice. Let’s have a trot up and down the deck till your blood circulates. Exercise is the thing out here. Blood always running about through your veins, that’s the thing to keep you warm.”

“But one is so much better after a good warm!”

“For a few minutes, sir; but get yourself warm by a good run, and it will last for hours. Take my word; I know.”

“But you’ve never been frozen up here?”

“Oh yes, sir, twice. Not for long, but quite long enough to know how to act most sensibly as to eating and drinking.”

“Does that make much difference?” said Steve, as they walked sharply along the deck, and then broke into the double, step for step.

“All the difference, sir. Eat and drink well up here in these cold places, and you are able to stand the cold.”

“What do you eat, then?”

“Meat with plenty of fat, sir, and warmth-producing stuff like sugar. The Eskimo people almost live upon fat—blubber and oil.”

“Ugh!” ejaculated Steve; “how horrible! But look here, Johannes, what do you people drink up here to help—plenty of grog?”

“No, sir, not a drop,” said the Norseman sharply. “That does more harm than good. Makes a man feverishly hot for a few minutes, then leaves him colder than he was before.”

“What do you drink, then?” said Steve, staring at the man’s earnestness.

“Tea, sir; plenty of good, hot tea. It rests and refreshes a man directly, and he can do more work on hot tea than upon anything else that has been tried.”

“Well, I don’t mind tea,” said Steve rather jerkily; for it was beginning to be hard work to keep on talking while trotting round and round the deck. But Johannes, though measuring his big strides to make them fit with the boy’s, kept up the trot till Steve was so thoroughly out of breath that at the end of a quarter of an hour he stopped short and then dropped upon a coil of rope.

“Don’t sit down, sir!” cried Johannes. “It’s too cold for that. Out of breath?”

“Yes—quite!” panted Steve. “My word! what a run!”

“Feel cold, sir?”

“Who’s to feel cold,” puffed Steve, “after running miles like that? I’m getting hot.”

“Then now let’s walk, so that you don’t cool down too fast.”

“Why, here’s old Skeny!” cried Steve, patting the dog’s rough head. “I didn’t see him.”

“He has been trotting round just behind us all the time, sir,” said Johannes, bending down in turn to pat the dog, who ruffled up his great thick frill and uttered a low growl.

“Ah!” cried Steve. “Quiet! Don’t you know your friends yet, sir?”

The dog growled again; and this time apparently at his master.

“Ah! would you?” cried Steve; and the dog wagged his tail, making it flap up against the Norseman’s leg; but he growled again.

“It isn’t at us, sir,” said Johannes. “He hears something ashore. What is it, then, old fellow?”

The dog uttered a sharp bark, and ran to the bulwarks, reared up, and tried to look over.

“There’s something coming over the ice. Hark!”

They listened breathlessly, while the dog uttered a low whine.

“Yes, I can hear it now, sir,” whispered Johannes. “Listen!”

Steve was already listening to a strange whistling noise which sounded as if hundreds of boys were a long way off, making the lashes of as many whips whish through the air together; and this sound came nearer and nearer, till it grew close to them—over, beneath, around—and so strange in the darkness, lit up only by the stars which were gleaming on the ice

as well as above, and the lambent rays of the aurora, that Steve felt a curious sensation of dread stealing over him, and he involuntarily crept closer to the Norseman, and whispered:

“It is—something coming from up by the glacier over the ice;” while the sound increased, and sounded so awe-inspiring that the lad could not help a shiver.

Johannes was silent and did not stir.

“Don’t you hear it?” said Steve again. “Shall I get a gun?”

“No; and it is a pity to disturb the captain and doctor. It is not on the ice, sir,” replied Johannes.

“But it is, I tell you.”

“No, sir; I’ve heard it before. It is only echoed from the hard, flat surface. Hah! what a number we might shoot if we wanted them!”

“What do you mean?”

“Wild fowl, sir. They’re not geese, or they would make a clanging noise. They must be ducks.”

“Ducks?” cried Steve, staring upwards and seeing nothing.

“Yes, sir. Another sign of the cold weather. They’re all banded together in one great flight, and are going south to the marshes of North Russia, where they’ll stay till it begins to freeze there, and then go farther south.”

“But are you sure? Oh, they wouldn’t take flight in the dark!”

“Sure, sir? Listen to the whistling of their wings, hundreds and thousands of them flying over as fast as they can go. Yes, they always fly in the night when they’re going from here south, and I believe birds come north in the same way, following after the frost as it is driven north. I’ve noticed it at home near Nordoe. To-day there would be no birds at all in the spring; next day there would be hundreds of them flying about. They must have come in the night.”

Steve had not a word to say, but stood there silent, listening to the whirring of the thousands of wings which echoed from the ice and the sides of the fiord, sounding so close that he felt disposed to stretch out his hand and try to touch that which seemed to be within reach. Then he began to wonder how many thousands there would be, and where they had come from; and then how it was that this plain, homely Norwegian should know so much better than he, and show that he had passed his life picking up knowledge peculiar to his surroundings, so that he was able to teach those around him again and again.

“Isn’t there going to be any end of them?” said the boy at last; for the peculiar whirring had been going on for quite half an hour.

“Oh yes, sir; they’ll all be by soon,” replied Johannes; and almost as he spoke the whirring sound grew fainter, fainter, and then died away.

“Hah!” ejaculated Steve, drawing a long breath. “How strange it sounded!”

He was about to say, “I am glad you were here, for it quite startled me,” when the Norseman spoke:

“I remember hearing one of these night flights, sir when I was quite a lad somewhere about your age. I was out quite alone, and it frightened me so that I ran away. It was one night, and I was going straight home over the mountain when it began. First thing I did was to throw myself flat on my face; but the noise seemed to come close down to me, and I was so scared that I jumped up and began to run. But that did no good, for I started running in the same direction as the wild fowl were flying, and consequently the noise sounded as if following me, and kept on louder and louder till I reached home, dashed myself, out of breath, against the door, and rushed in to where my father and mother were sitting with the window open listening, as I thought, for me. In a moment I’d banged to and barred the door, and then I turned to my father.

“‘Shut the window,’ I said. ‘Quick! they’re coming in.’

“‘What are?’ said my father.

“‘I don’t know. I think it’s a pack of wolves,’ I panted as I sank in a chair.

‘Get the gun.’

“‘Oh yes,’ said my father. ‘Perhaps it is flying wolves with feathers instead of fur coats, and they were after you to eat you.’

“‘Yes, father,’ I said, ‘I thought so.’

“‘Then don’t be such a bull goose again,’ said my father. ‘Here, mother, try and teach this boy to think better, and not go and believe that every sound he hears is all troll and hobgoblin. Feathered wolves that fly, eh, Johannes? That kind of fowl has not been hatched yet, my boy. Now, the next time you hear a flight of fowl going south in the night, you’ll know better, won’t you?’

“I said, ‘Yes, father,’ very sharply, for I was horribly ashamed of having been frightened at the flight of wild fowl; but I didn’t know any better, and it was very dark, like to-night; and it is startling to hear such sounds when you don’t know what they are.”

“Yes, very,” said Steve consciously.

“Why, if the lad Watty had been on deck, I don’t know what kind of creature he would have thought it was. Hark!” he whispered, for Skene uttered another low whine. “Here they are again, sir. This frost has started them in a hurry. Yes; geese this time.”

For from out of the black darkness ahead came a long-drawn, weird, clanging noise, growing louder and louder till it swept over their heads and into the distance, hushed, as it were, by the whir and whistle of the heavy pinions beating the air.

“The captain was right,” said Johannes after they had listened for a time. “There is nothing like laying in a store when you have the chance. We shall have to go far enough now to pick up a few birds for some months to come.”

The wild-geese flight passed over, and the walk up and down the deck was resumed; and now Steve noted that the aurora was growing paler, with the effect of making the stars shine out more brightly. Then all at once the strange glow sank down lower and lower, and then disappeared

as the glow cast upon a cloud of mist disappears when the electric light is turned aside.

“Yes, it comes and goes like that,” said Johannes; “and I have never known yet, sir, any one who could explain it to make it seem clear and reasonable to me. But it is very good.”

“Good! What does it do?”

“Gives us light through the long, black winter, sir, when we’re glad of anything that brightens the sky where there is no sun. Hark! That’s not birds.”

Skene had heard it, and he emitted a deep growl now at the long, low noise faintly heard, apparently from the valley by the glacier.

“What is it?” whispered Steve. “There it is again. Why, it must be wolves. There, that sounds like two or three!”

“And I should say it was the cry of wolves, sir, if there are any. But we have not seen a sign.”

“No, not even a fox.”

“But there are deer,” said Johannes; “and where there are deer you generally find wolves to prey upon them. Yes, the cold weather is bringing them now. It must be wolves.”

Chapter Thirty Five.

Preparing for the Enemy.

“Well, Johannes, what do you say to this?” said the captain, when he appeared on deck the next morning—a natural morning Steve called it, for there had been darkness once more in the night.

“Winter’s coming, sir,” replied the Norseman, as he glanced round him at the dark, clear, metal-like ice which spread from shore to shore, and looked strong enough to bear.

“Yes, but has it come? Surely this will melt before sunset, and we shall have some mild weather ere the cold regularly sets in?”

“If we were two or three hundred miles farther south, sir,” replied the man, “I could answer you; but who can tell what the weather is likely to be up here, where man has had no experience. We can only wait and see.”

They waited; and for a fortnight longer the ice which formed in the night melted in the day. Then came one that was dull and sunless, when the ice did not melt, and they had a fall of snow. That night the ice more than doubled in thickness, and they started ashore next morning for a good long tramp eastward, drawing a light sledge bearing provisions, and ready for the carriage of any game that might be shot.

This was a new experience, for winter garments were now worn, with heavy boots and mittens, fur caps, and eye-protectors. The snow filled up the inequalities of the ground, and the sledge glided easily upon its runners; but its load was soon increased, for the walking was heavy, and as the sun shone out the men were glad to pile their heavy coats upon the light framework and walk without them.

The scene was brilliant, and every here and there they found traces of animals, of whose presence they would otherwise have been ignorant. Skene was the first to notice footprints, snuffling loudly and growling, and setting up his fur about his neck, according to his custom when he smelt an enemy; and upon these tracks being examined, they proved to be

similar to those which would be made by a dog with thick claws and very hairy feet.

“Wolves,” said Johannes directly. “Those which you heard the other night, Mr Steve.”

A sharp look-out was kept for these visitors, but none were seen. Soon after, though, they came upon the fresh-looking footprints of a bear—marks so big that they indicated an animal of large size. But the beast which printed the long marks had gone toward the shore, and though arms were kept ready for instant use, they marched on seeing nothing but the dazzling snow.

After a time the doctor called a halt and gave orders. “Spectacles at once,” he said, “or I shall be having cases of snow-blindness to attend.”

So eye-protectors were mounted, and the party moved on again, the captain choosing a fresh direction, one not previously tried, and, in spite of the heavy walking, as there was no halting to track game, they made plenty of progress, getting miles beyond any point previously reached before they stopped to attack the provisions and rest.

It was intensely cold, but the sun shone brilliantly, and there was not a breath of air; so that the great lowering of the temperature was not unpleasant, especially as the exertion had sent the blood racing through their veins, while the novel aspect of the scene was full of interest for Steve. The peaks glittered in the new-fallen snow, and, look where they would, it was at a world of dazzling whiteness, save where the shadows and valley-like rifts in the mountain-sides appeared to be of a delicate blue.

“We must take advantage of all the light now, Steve,” said the captain, “and make expeditions inland whenever it is possible. We might pick out a few places and make *caches* of provision, so as to get farther out each time. But it is more from a sense of duty than anything else. We must feel that we have done everything possible to find our friends.”

“Yes, sir. Why not make our way right across?”

“Across where?”

“The island to the farther shore, and then work right round the coast, and come up again on our side.”

“For several reasons, my lad,” said Captain Marsham, smiling. “It would be very risky to take the men so far from our headquarters, not knowing how soon we may be attacked by a terrible storm. We do not know that we are upon an island with a farther shore. And it would be impossible to make such a journey as you propose. Are these reasons enough?”

“Plenty, sir. Are we going any farther?”

“No. We have got by the days of endless light, my lad, and I don’t wish for us to be benighted out in these snowy valleys.”

So the captain gave the word to turn back, and they reached the ship just at dusk, after a most uneventful journey, not having encountered a single head of game.

The next morning they found that more snow had fallen, and the deck had to be cleared. There was not the most remote prospect now of doing more that season, so the boats were made snug and covered; and as there was no likelihood of the ship moving in a drift, so set fast was she in the ice, the men were now started to rig up an awning like the roof of a hut and completely cover in the deck. This was worked at with a will, till a double thickness of canvas was spread, and over that tarpaulins.

“Keep some of the cold out, eh, doctor?”

“Yes,” said that gentleman; “and I suppose in a night or two you’ll have snow over it to keep us warmer.”

“It is probable. Wonderful how rapidly we are settling down into winter. A long one, too,” he added in a low voice. “Can you keep us all in good health till the summer comes again?”

“It depends more upon yourselves than upon me,” said Mr Handscombe sharply. “Keep every one so busy that he gets tired and has no time to think.”

“I mean to,” said the captain quietly. “There will be enough to keep them

pretty well employed in getting and sleighing over to here all the coal I hope to have on board—enough, that is, to make up for all that is gone, and so as to give us an ample supply to keep our stoves burning as much as we like."

"Well," said the doctor, "with plenty of work, plenty to eat and drink, and the means of keeping up bonny fires, I do not see why we should not pass through the winter pleasantly enough. The darkness will be depressing when it comes, but the men will have grown pretty well accustomed to it; for it comes on, I suppose, so thoroughly by degrees. Let's see, how long will it be perfectly dark?"

"Not at all, I hope," said Captain Marsham. "Nature counteracts a great deal of the gloom by the brilliancy of stars and moon, and the reflection from the dazzlingly white earth. Then, too, I suppose we shall have the aurora pretty often."

"But for how long does the sun disappear entirely?"

"About eighteen weeks," said the captain. "Once it has reached its farthest point to the south I don't care, for then it will be journeying back to us. Our task seems to be to keep the men in good heart up to the shortest day; after that we can manage."

Days passed with a fair amount of sunshine, and then came a week of storm, the wind giving them a taste or two of what might be expected later; and the snow fell heavily, loading down the great tent-like arrangement over the deck to such an extent that the men were busily employed rigging up the extra spars and spare yards as rafters and ridge-poles, to help bear the strain put upon the ropes; and then all knew that there was to be no autumn, for the brief northern summer gave place at one bound to winter.

After the storm the snow was piled and drifted up round and about the bows to such an extent that in one place there was a complete slope from the top of the bulwark, and the snow lay deep upon the ice, though here and there a few passages were left where the wind had swept the surface pretty clear; and as the day was fairly bright and the way open in the direction of the narrow, jagged rift, it was decided to take advantage

of the opportunity and have a trip through the gorge to the seashore.

Anticipating that the zigzagging, canal-like waterway would be too slightly frozen in so sheltered a spot to bear a party of men, a boat was run down the snow-slope on to the ice, and then skated along on the iron of the keel where the snow was absent, and driven over or through it when it lay deep. The men took to the task readily, the dog entered into the excitement of the business, and Steve followed sedately enough with the captain and doctor, envying Watty his spirits, for the lad had permission to accompany the party, and he was revelling in the excitement of a day's freedom from the slavery of the galley. The men, too, thoroughly enjoyed their task, dragging and pushing with plenty of cheering as they got the boat through some great snow-wreath which barred their way to the chasm-like opening in the side of the fiord.

"Black water—no ice!" cried Steve, who made his way to the front when they were nearly across.

"Na, tat's not watter," said Watty, who had followed him. "She's a' ice."

"Nonsense! Look how clear it is!" cried Steve. "It must be water."

But as he reached the entrance he had to alter his opinion, for the black-looking water proved to be perfectly solid; and Watty dashed on, slid some distance, and ended by jumping upon it.

"Tak' car', laddie!" cried Andrew; "ef she gangs through she'll hae to stay."

But there was no fear, and the boat was left upright in a snow-drift, the provisions packed on the little hand-sleigh brought as well, and the journey commenced through the chasm. At first every one proceeded cautiously, expecting moment by moment to hear a sharp crack; but after a few minutes confidence was felt in the strength of the ice, and all stepped out boldly.

"Hadn't we better have brought the boat, after all, sir?" Steve asked the captain. "There'll be open water as soon as we are through, and we might get a seal or two, if we didn't get a walrus."

"If the water is frozen in this sheltered passage, my lad," replied the

captain, “there is no fear about the water on the other side.”

“What! you think it would be frozen?”

“Certainly. I expect we shall find the open sheet of water along the shore frozen from side to side.”

“Then there’ll be no walrus?”

“Not one.”

“Nor seals?”

“I don’t expect we shall see anything now for months but bears, wolves, and foxes. Beside them, we shall be the only occupants of the place. I have not seen a bird for days.”

It proved as the captain had said, for as soon as they were well through the narrow passage there lay the ice to right and left, and not a patch of open water was to be seen. Winter had set in indeed, and after a long tramp without seeing a single animal the party retraced their steps, and returned to the ship light enough, but in excellent spirits, the inevitable being accepted; and as there was an abundant supply of food in store, the absence of game in boat and sleigh, though it made Mr Lowe smile, was deemed to be of not the slightest consequence.

The next day the coaling began, the men being divided into four parties, one to hew down the coal on the mountain-side, another to collect and pass it down to the sledges, and the other two parties to draw the loaded and empty sledges to and fro. The mineral fuel was abundant, and the men worked so well that very soon the beaten track through the snow was blackened with dust and small fragments of coal; while, after this had been kept on for a week, the men treating the dirty job as quite a frolic, Steve felt that the sooner another fall of snow came down the better for the face of nature. He was not kept long waiting, for the second night after the captain had been satisfied that no more coal could be stored with any convenience down came the storm again, lasting a couple of days, and the last hope of the weather becoming open that season departed.

“No, sir,” said Johannes; “the winter has come, and means to stay.”

“Right on through the long, black darkness when there is no sun,” said Steve with a slight shiver, and he went and looked at the glass.

The doctor saw him go, and joined him. “Down to zero, my lad,” he said. “That would make people at home stare. But it’s only the mercury that’s down to zero; our spirits must be up to a thoroughly genial height.”

Steve nodded, but he could not help a curious sensation of awe creeping over him as once more he thought of the coming six months, during which they would almost have bidden good-bye to the sun.

“I can’t quite think how we shall do without any light, Mr Handscombe,” said Steve quietly.

“Nor I neither, my lad; but *experientia docet*, as the Latin folk used to say.”

“But doctors should not,” said the captain merrily, as he came up. “*Docet* sounds suggestive from the lips of a medical man. Now, Steve, I appoint you commander-in-chief of the fires. See that they are properly kept up from now till the end of next spring.”

“If spring there be,” said the doctor. “I expect that we shall step from winter into summer, as we did from summer to winter; but we shall see.”

“Yes,” said the captain, “we shall see.”

Chapter Thirty Six.

Chill Days.

“Ha-Ha! Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

A regular rollicking burst of good, sound, old-fashioned, honest, English laughter, which rang out clear, bright, and cheery in the frosty air.

“She’ll pe laughin’ at me, Meester Stevey?”

“Yes!” cried the lad, bursting out into another peal, in which Skene joined with a good, sound, rattling bark. “Why, even the dog can’t help it. Look at him!”

“She’ll pe only barkin’ and not laughin’. Togs canna laugh.”

“Well, they can show their teeth!” cried Steve. “Oh, I say, Watty, you do look a guy! Your mother wouldn’t know you.”

“Her ain mither wad ken her anywhere,” said Watty proudly.

“Not like this. Why, you look like an old bear with a sheep-skin on. Why, that coat’s too big for you. What have you got underneath?”

“She isna a pit too pig. She wants a muckle great-coat to keep oot the caud.”

“Why, you’ve got a blanket on under it!”

“Ay. She chust happit a planket roond an’ roond her potty, an’ tied it wi’ a bit o’ line to keep it oop, an’ she’s waarm as waarm a’ but her foots an’ han’s!”

“I should think you are,” said Steve merrily. “You’re as big round as a hop pocket. You can hardly move.”

“Oh ay, she can move when she wants to move. Hae ye got any chilplains?”

“No, have you?”

“Cot any chilplains? Why, her han’s an’ foots are chust a’ ane creat chilplain, an’ when she kets wairm they ding an’ itch till she cauld scratch awa’ a’ her skin.”

“I’ll ask Mr Handscombe to give you something for them.”

“Nay, she winna tak’ it. She canna’ tak’ pheesek.”

“Nonsense! I mean to rub on.”

“Oh, mebby she micht try a wee drap ootside.”

“Well, how do you like having the weather so cold as this?”

“She wants to gang hame. When shall we sail back again?”

“Next summer, I hope. What nonsense! How could we sail when we’re frozen up?”

“Preak a way oot. She wadna mind helping.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about. But I say, I wouldn’t dress up so warmly as that now.”

“Why, she’s tressed oop wairmly!”

“I’ve only got this sheep-skin coat on. If you dress like this now, what will you do when it grows cold?”

“Phwat!” cried Watty excitedly. “Ye dinna mean that she can be more caud than this?”

“Yes, this is nothing. Wait a bit till the sun does not rise at all, and it’s all dark, and then I s’pose it’s going to be tremendously cold.”

“Dinna say it, sir; dinna say it!”

“Why not? It’s true enough!” cried Steve.

“Nay, she’s lauchin’ at her. Cauder! She could na pe mair caud than the noo.”

“Oh, very well; wait and see.”

“Put she’s chust choking her.”

“Chust choking you!” cried Steve, laughing. “I tell you it’s all true.”

“Hey, then, what’s to pecome of her?” groaned Watty. “She couldna pear

a pit mair caud, and she'll have to pe perried out here in the ice and snaw. Ye'll chust tell her ane thing, Meester Stevey. She winna lauch at her?"

"No, I won't laugh, Watty. What is it?"

"They keek oop a lot o' talk and clish ma claver aboot it kettin' dairk. Is she coing to hae ferry short days—shorter than they are the noo?"

"There'll be no days at all soon. It will all be night."

"Phwat! Dairk nicht, and no taylight at a'?"

"Not a bit. The sun will not rise at all for about eighteen weeks."

Watty looked out wildly from among the wool of the great-coat he had on and from beneath the fur of his peaked cap with quite an agonised expression.

"She isna choking her?"

"No, I told you I would not."

"The sun winna coom oop at a'?"

"No, not at all for eighteen weeks. It will be all night."

"Then ta wairld's going to be at an eend?"

"Nonsense! No."

"Then the sun's coing oot?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Then whar she coing to?"

"Down toward the South Pole."

"She canna understan' it," said Watty piteously. "She thocht it was a' talk to frechten her. Then we shall nivver see the sun any more?"

“Of course we shall. There’ll be eighteen weeks without it, and then it will begin to get lighter again more and more, till the sun keeps up in the sky like it did when we came up here just now. You understand?”

“Nay, she dinna understan’ it a pit.”

“But you saw that the sun did not set for a long time?”

“Yes, she saw tat; but she nivver understood it a pit.”

“Well, it is puzzling,” said Steve. “It took me some time to get it into my head, but I do pretty well understand it now. Why, Watty, if we stood at the North Pole at midsummer, we should see the sun go round and round in the sky, and then every day get a little lower and a little lower, till it was only just in sight; and then still lower, till it disappeared altogether.”

“Does she mean went oot o’ sicht a’ thegither?”

“Yes.”

“And wad she hae to stan’ recht o’ the top o’ the pole to see tat?”

“No, at the Pole. You don’t think there’s a wooden pole there, do you?”

“Ay. Andra says she’s a creat pig pole, an’ ta wairld turns roond and roond upon her.”

“The world turns round and round; but there’s no wooden pole, only one spot they call the Pole.”

“An’ ye can see the sun go roond like tat, Meester Stevey?”

“You could if you could get there. Nobody has ever been so far north. I don’t think anybody has been so far before as this.”

“Then how do they know?”

“Oh, by calculations and books.”

“She dinna pelieve it.”

“Oh, it’s quite true, though.”

“What, tat ta sun coes roond like tat?”

“Yes, I’m not deceiving you. Don’t you believe me?”

“Oh ay, she pelieves pecause she knows she’s a chentleman; and when a chentleman says onything is true she is quite true.”

“Thank you,” said Steve, smiling. “Put if ta sun coes on like tat, an’ she’s squirming oop an’ squirming doon, she’s cot something wrong wi’ her wairks.”

Steve laughed.

“Ay, put it’s naething to lauch aboot, Meester Stevey. Thenk o’ the sun coing quite oot for eighteen weeks. Oh, it’s a waefu’ place. What’ll we do when it’s a’ nicht?”

“Go to sleep like the bears do, and have a good long rest.”

“Go to sleep for eighteen weeks!” cried Watty in horror. “Why, she’d nivver wak’ ony mair!”

“Oh yes, you would; and besides, it will not be quite dark. There’ll be the moon and stars and the aurora.”

“She dinna ken onything apoot the roarer. Will she mak’ it licht?”

“Yes, beautifully.”

“Hey, but caud as it is the noo?”

“Much colder,” cried Steve.

“Then she’ll chust lie doon and dee,” said Watty piteously, “for she canna bear to thenk upo’ it. Cauder than it is the noo, an’ her han’s and foots like they are. Why, she’d be a’ one creat chilplain ivery wha’! What wad her mither say if she knew?”

The lads were out on the trampled snow about a hundred yards from the

Hvalross, which looked, with its snow-covered roofing, like some long, low house, out of which three tall masts had grown. And as they were talking a hail came from the canvas-covered doorway at the top of the gangway.

The resemblance to a low, long house was increased by the iron chimneys rising out through the snow and the big funnel of the boiler, from all of which black smoke was issuing; for, the ample supply of coal being so near, Captain Marsham had the engine furnace kept going for the sake of the heat given by the boilers, as well as from the fire itself. In fact, the engine-room and stoke-hole became favourite places with the men of an evening before bed, or after a long tramp round somewhere through the snow; for, now that they were fairly started in their battle with the arctic winter, the weather had to be very bad, and the wind very keen, for the crew to be kept out of their daily exercise.

The loud hail came from the doorway, and a curious-looking figure like a diver in a fur suit came down the well-made flight of ice steps, and advanced to join the two lads. The resemblance to a diver increased as it drew nearer, for the face was almost completely hidden by the visor-like arrangement of the round, helmet-shaped cap, and in place of a visor's bars there were two large, round green-glass goggles which glistened in a peculiar manner when the object advanced, as if he were not only a diver, but a steam diver who was moved by some internal machinery which caused him to emit little puffs of steam at breathing intervals.

"Morning, Mr Handscombe," cried Steve as he drew near.

"Morning, my lad; but look here, you are doing a very foolish thing. We're below zero, and yet you're standing about here talking as if it were summer."

"We haven't felt the cold, sir."

"The more likely for the cold to be dangerous for you, my lad. A frost-bite comes on without the sufferer knowing about it, the cold making the part quite insensible to pain, and a bad bite may mean utter destruction of the tissue and the loss of even hands and feet."

"Phwat!" cried Watty, forgetting his awe of the doctor in the horror of the

announcement; “wad a man who was frost-bit lose her han’s or her foots?”

“Yes, if it were a bad case of freezing.”

“An’ wad her han’s or foots tummle off?”

“More likely the patient’s medical attendant would have to cut them off.”

“Coot her han’s an foots off? What wi’—chopper?”

“No,” said the doctor, smiling at the lad’s horrified looks; “they would be carefully taken off with a knife and saw. Surgeons are very careful.”

Watty groaned.

“It’s a’ ower wi’ her, Meester Stevey, an’ she’s ferry sorry she’s iver fote and ca’d her, for she’ll nivver see bonnie Scotland more.”

“Why not? What’s the matter with you, my lad?” said the doctor.

“She’s ferry pad, sir. Poth her foots an’ poth her han’s is frost-pitten.”

“What! and you did not tell me? Here, come back to the ship, and let me have a look.”

“Na, na, na; she’ll na gang wi’ ye!” cried Watty.

“But if they are frost-bitten I can perhaps do them good, and save you from a very bad injury. Come along.”

“Na, na; she’ll keep her han’s an’ foots on as lang as she can,” groaned the lad. “She winna let her tooch them.”

“Don’t be absurd!” said the doctor angrily. “Steve, did you know of this?”

“No, sir,” said the boy, fighting hard to conceal his mirth.

“I ought to have been told. Here, come along. Stop!”

“Ay, she’ll stop; she winna gang wi’ ye.”

“Are your feet really bad?”

“Ay, sir; but she shanna tooch them.”

“You have no business to walk,” said the doctor. “I must have you carried, sir.”

“Na, na; she’ll stay here.”

“Bah! don’t be absurd, boy. I know what is best for you. Here, Steve, my lad, go and fetch two of the men to carry him in. I’m glad I heard of this in time.”

“Dinna gang, Meester Stevey; oh, dinna gang!” cried Watty.

“I must; I’m ordered to go,” cried Steve quickly, as he ran back to the ship, and then hunted out Andrew and Hamish from the forecastle to come and bear the lad to the deck.

“She wass ferry well at breakfast,” said Andrew. “She must ha’ been eating something since then,” for Andrew’s ideas of illness were always in connection with eating or drinking too much. “Phwat will she say’s the matter?”

“He told the doctor he was very bad,” replied Steve, “and you’re to carry him.”

“She wass ferry sorry for the puir laddie, and she’ll carry her on her pack.”

But Andrew was not allowed to carry Watty in on his “pack,” but under the doctor’s instructions, and, in spite of the lad’s remonstrances, they passed hands under him, made him throw his arms over their shoulders, and prepared to start.

“She winna go!” cried Watty, struggling faintly.

“Take no notice of him,” said the doctor; “he must be carried in at once. Now off!”

Poor Watty was borne to the snow steps which rose right up to the gangway, carried in, and no sooner were they upon the gloomy deck, where they had to depend now for light upon a couple of swinging lanthorns, than the captain met them.

The place was quite misty with the men's breath, which hung about like steam, in spite of the efforts made to keep the place warm; and things looked quite indistinct, especially about Watty, who had had to resign himself to his fate, and lay where he was placed upon the deck.

"What is it—a fall?" cried the captain; "broken leg?"

"No, frost-bitten," said the doctor laconically. "Take off that fur coat, my lads."

The huge sheep-skin coat was opened and drawn from Watty's shoulders, leaving visible one of the blankets from his bunk doubled and rolled round him tightly, and held by a stout piece of cord that looked wonderfully like a portion of a walrus line.

"Watty laddie," said Hamish, "she meant to keep hersel' wairm," and the men about laughed, all but Johannes and his companions, who were perfectly serious.

"Ay, she tid: ferry wairm as efer wass," added Andrew. "Is it her nose?"

"That will do, my men; let me come," said the doctor, kneeling down and hastily drawing off the big fur glove that Watty wore on his right hand, in spite, too, of a good deal of resistance on the lad's part.

"Dinna lat him coot it off, Meester Stevey, sir," he whispered. "Her mither wadna ken her if she went back to Ardnachree gin she had nae airms and legs."

"Humph! dear me!" said the doctor; "bring that lanthorn closer. Very red and inflamed, but that one's not frost-bitten."

He held the hand close to the lanthorn, which was lowered by Andrew, and then knocked sidewise, for the lad sprang up sitting.

“Then she wadna chop it off?”

“No, no; lie still!” cried the doctor testily.

“You had better hold him, my lads,” said the captain; and Hamish and Andrew held him down again, bringing forth a fierce growl from Skene, who seemed to feel that if there was a struggle on he ought to be in it.

“Down, Skeny!” said Steve sharply; and the dog uttered an uneasy whine.

“Here, let me see the other hand,” cried the doctor.

“Na, that one’s the waur!” cried Watty excitedly. “She’s nae waur than this or my puir foots.”

“No nonsense,” said the doctor; and he firmly but gently held the boy’s other red and swollen hand to the light of the lanthorn.

“Frost-bitten?” said the captain; but the doctor did not answer save by a grunt.

“Ane’s waur than t’ither,” whimpered Watty.

“And now about your feet, my lad,” cried the doctor.

“Oh, they’re nane so bad as my han’s, sir; only dings and tangs o’ nichts.”

“There, get up, you young impostor!” cried the doctor, rising. “Frost-bitten?” he added, turning to the captain. “Nothing but a few chilblains. Here, you Steve,” he continued, button-holing the lad, “did you know there was nothing the matter but chilblains?”

“He told me his hands and feet were frost-bitten,” said Steve.

“Yes, but you knew better, sir,” said the doctor, who had hold of the boy’s arm and was marching him toward the cabin stairs.

“Well, I—” began Steve.

“Of course,” cried the doctor. “I saw the twinkle in your eye, my lad. Look

here, don’t you play tricks with doctors; they get such chances for serving you out.”

“I suppose I ought to have spoken,” said Steve; “but it seemed so comic to see him so sure that he was frost-bitten, and it’s such a long time since we had a laugh that—”

“Let it rest, Handscombe,” said Captain Marsham good-humouredly. “Steve says it is a long time since he had a hearty laugh.”

“What!” cried the doctor. “Why, I heard him roaring with laughter not above an hour ago.”

Steve looked confused.

“Of course,” he said, colouring. “I’d forgotten that.”

“There, we don’t want any apologies, my boy,” said the captain. “Keep up your spirits, and other people’s if you can. I want every one to have a good store of health and strength before the long night comes.”

Chapter Thirty Seven.

A Nocturnal Visitor.

And that long night which was on everybody’s lips, and when silent in everybody’s mind, was coming on surely and gradually, but to all on board the *Hvalross* very fast; for the captain never let the men rest. After every heavy fall of snow—and these came at shorter intervals—the crew were set to work banking it up against the sides of the ship.

“But it will make it so much colder,” Steve protested.

“No, my lad, so much warmer,” said the captain. “Do you know what is our greatest enemy here that we shall have to fight?”

“Yes, the bears. They’ll smell the meat—Johannes said so; and you’re making an extremely easy way up to the deck.”

“Well, yes, if they come. But if they do, we must be ready for them. We can keep them off from our fortress, I daresay. But that was not the enemy I meant.”

“Oh, I see; you mean the cold.”

“Yes, my boy; but in one form. I mean the wind. I daresay we could stand thirty degrees below zero without wind better than we could stand zero with wind. That is the enemy we have to fight against. The still cold will not affect us like the storms.”

And so it passed, day after day. The men were out hunting one morning, when it was the coldest by the thermometer they had yet felt; but no one suffered. The men came back with their beards quite masses of ice, but the exercise in the still air kept them all aglow; while the very next day they had a walk along the lane they had trampled down in the snow as far as the piled-up ice-floe which had shut them up in the peaceful fiord, and coming back they had to face a piercing north wind which carried with it a fine snow-dust which seemed to cut into the skin.

“The coldest day we have had yet,” said the doctor as they stepped on deck; but the captain went at once to the instruments which were placed ready for taking the observations duly entered in a journal, and turned back, shaking his head.

“Twenty degrees warmer than it was yesterday.”

“You amaze me,” said Mr Handscombe. “I never felt it so cold before.”

“He meant twenty degrees not quite so cold, sir,” said Steve, who was rubbing and beating his half-numbed hands. “It isn’t warmer.”

The wind dropped at sundown, if it could be called sundown, when that day they had only had some hours of glow over the icy rampart that shut them in. Then in the darkening sky the stars began to peer out one by one, till, as the sky grew perfectly black, the heavens were one blaze of glittering splendour.

“Why, the stars seem double the size that they are at home,” said Steve, as he stood out on the snow steps for a little while before retiring to rest.

“The sky looks so transparent, too, just as if you were peeping right in amongst them. Look, look!”

He pointed at that which the others saw as soon as he, for a brilliant meteor suddenly flashed into sight, formed an arc in the sky, and disappeared, leaving a thin line of sparks behind it for a moment or two before they died out.

“What was that?” cried Steve.

“A meteor,” said the captain. “One of the little bodies which astronomers say burst into light in passing through our atmosphere. But come; the fireside is the best place on a night like this.”

They retired to the cabin, after carefully tying the points of the canvas down; and, after a walk right forward by the dim light of the lanthorns to see that the men were all comfortable and well, the trio returned to the cabin, where the stove was crackling and roaring, and the hanging lamp, books, papers, and chess-board looked cheery and home-like.

Skene followed them and stood at the door in a deprecating fashion, slowly waving his plume-like tail from side to side, and looking, Steve said, as if he would come in and stay if he were asked.

“Yes, come in,” said the captain.

The dog entered with a bound, and couched instantly at the front of the stove.

“It’s getting intensely cold now,” said the captain, taking up the log-book to make an entry or two.

“I thought so,” said the doctor; “but after my experience of this afternoon I was afraid I might be wrong again. What do you say, Steve?”

“I think it’s as cold as we’ve had it, sir. We can see our breath here before this hot fire.”

“Look here!” exclaimed Captain Marsham, as he sat, pen in hand, examining the inkstand.

“What’s the matter? No ink?”

“Ink? Yes; but look here—frozen, and in this cabin!”

There was the fact; the ink-glass was partly full of splinters and scales of ice, while the bottom was like thick, melted black snow.

“Well, we can’t have it any colder than that, can we?” asked Steve; and then he started, for Skene suddenly sprang to his feet, his hair rose about his throat, and he uttered a low growl.

“What does he hear?” said the captain, after placing the ink to thaw.

“I know,” cried Steve, “though I didn’t hear it. Andra must have got out his pipes, and is playing what he calls a chune.”

“Very likely,” said the captain, turning the ink.

“He doesn’t like it,” continued Steve. “I wonder any one can bear the noise.”

“Tastes differ, my lad,” said the captain. “The men seem to like the sounds on these long, dark nights. I wish we had some one who could play the fiddle, too.”

“Johannes can, and he has one with him,” said Steve eagerly.

“That’s good news, for I want the lads to enjoy themselves, and a little music is the very thing for them. Quiet, dog, quiet! if you mean to stay here.”

For Skene had gone excitedly to the closed door, placed his nose to the crack at the bottom, and growled fiercely.

“It isn’t the pipes,” said Steve, springing up. “He hears something. What is it, Skene?”

“R–rr–rr–ra!” growled the dog in low, menacing tones.

“Now, doctor,” said the captain, setting the example of taking his double

gun from the rack and slinging his cartridge-bag over his shoulder.

The doctor followed the captain's lead, and Steve stepped to the slings on the other side for his.

"Coats on," said the captain; "it's bitter out on the deck. Keep him quiet, Steve!"

Steve patted and whistled to the dog, who gave his tail a slow sweep from side to side, and then stood ready for action, while coats and caps were donned, and cartridges slipped into the breeches of the pieces. The captain laid his hand upon the door and was about to open it, when there was a gentle tap, and the light shone full upon the face of Johannes.

"What's the matter?" asked the captain sharply. "A bear, I think, sir," said the Norseman in a low voice. "The scent of these animals is very fine, and the smell of the cooking has brought him perhaps. But it is very dark, and I'm not sure, sir. I hope it is not a false alarm. You heard it, then?" he said, as it seemed only then to strike him that the party had risen to go out on deck.

"Skeny heard something and growled!" cried Steve. "Then there is one, gentlemen," said the man quietly. "Will you come round and listen?"

A word or two given in an impressive whisper to the dog silenced him, and he followed as if knowing his business exactly—that is, to steal up to the quarry and wait patiently until the fighting began and his pent-up excitement could have full play.

Johannes led, and they all walked slowly along the port side of the deck, which looked dark and impressive with only one lanthorn burning close to the galley door. The canvas sides of the long, tent-like awning bulged in here and there as they passed some shroud or stay, and the roof hung low in places where the snow lay particularly heavy, while the cold that struck to them now in leaving the warm cabin was terrible. Every breath Steve drew felt as if it were charged with tiny needles, which tingled in his nostrils. A thick mist formed about them, and when they paused close to the lanthorn to listen for a minute the vapour of their breath rose and then fell down again in soft specks which the lad did not understand for the moment, and then saw to be tiny flakes of snow. But all was still save a

murmur which came up from the closely shut engine-room hatch, where the men had collected about the glowing fire kept up without stint.

Johannes went on round by the bows, and all followed, Steve shivering with cold and excitement; but they passed along, going aft now, close by the canvas wall, till they reached the cabin door again without a sound being heard.

“False alarm, Johannes?” whispered the captain.

The man smiled, and pointed to the dog, whose ears were twitching, and now standing up, bent forward, now lowered down, while his tail was waving slowly, and his muzzle was in the air with the nostrils distended.

“Skeny says there’s a bear or something about,” said Steve softly.

The dog turned to his master sharply upon hearing his name.

“Where is it, Skeny?” whispered the boy, dropping on one knee with his arm on the dog’s neck.

There was a low growl, and the dog ran back a dozen steps, and stood listening and twitching his ears as he gazed at one part of the canvas wall. They followed, and stood beside him, but all was perfectly quiet, the silence being strangely impressive in that intense misty cold. Then all at once there was a sound like a deep sigh, followed by a snuffling noise, and directly after the canvas wall was pressed in just above the bulwark. It was exactly as if some man of gigantic size was feeling over the canvas for a way in, his nails now scratching against it heavily. But the tough canvas did not tear, for it was thickly coated with ice caused by the condensation of breath, and moisture from without, freezing into a hard, thick mass. But it cracked and snapped and bent in, so that at any moment there was the possibility of its giving way.

“Lanthorn, quick!” said the captain; and as Johannes brought it the captain’s and doctor’s pieces clicked; while, as soon as the light was held well up, they calculated as nearly as they could where the bear’s breast would be and fired together.

A savage roar followed the reports, there was a scrambling rush, and

then a great rustling; and as the men came running up excitedly the dog seemed to consider that he was free, and set up a furious barking as he ran to the tied-up canvas door by the gangway, and stood gazing at his master, waiting to be let out.

“Hit, and scared away,” said the captain, re-loading. “Shall we go out and see?” said the doctor. “No, not till daylight,” replied the captain; “it is too risky to go out in the darkness. We can track it through the snow in the morning. Quiet the dog, Steve, my lad. There, go below, my lads; the cold here is terrible. Good-night.”

Talking eagerly about this interruption the men hurried below, and as soon as the hatch was closed sounds arose which made Skene whine and Steve stop his ears as he hurried into the warm cabin; for Andrew had taken his pipes, and was making them skirl and drone in honour of the victory.

Chapter Thirty Eight.

In the Stern Grip.

Steve slept soundly that night, and woke to find the blanket, pulled up close to his ears, stiff with hoar-frost, and the stinging, prickling sensation in his nostrils more acute than ever. There was no time spent in dressing, and all were soon ready for the breakfast brought in by the cook, who was loud in complaints about the way in which everything froze in the galley, even when the fire was roaring in the stove. But he was pretty cheerful, for he was a busy man with certain daily duties, whereas tasks had to be made for the men, who, on account of the intense cold and the solitary safety of their position, were not now even set to keep any of the regular watches.

As soon as breakfast was despatched by lamplight, a start was made to see if the bear was anywhere near; and as the canvas door was opened with some difficulty, they stepped out into the semi-darkness to make for the other side of the vessel, about a hundred yards from which a hummock could be seen lying through the rising mist; and upon their

approaching it the footsteps of the bear could be plainly traced in company with spots of blood, showing that the animal must have been seriously wounded.

“He staggered and went down here,” said Johannes, pointing to unmistakable marks; and then, as the back of the animal stood up white as the snow around, Johannes began to trot forward.

“Don’t do that!” cried Steve excitedly. “Let them go first with the guns.”

“No fear, sir; he’s frozen stiff.”

So it proved, but a horrifying sight presented itself; for there were footprints about, which the Norseman pointed out as belonging to three more bears, a large and two small ones, which had been devouring the one that had been shot, and now lay, partially eaten, in the snow.

“Ugh! the cannibals!” exclaimed Steve, turning away in disgust.

“Will they come back to the feast?” said the doctor. “They may, sir; but I think not. They have gorged themselves, and will have gone back to the cave they occupy, perhaps to go to sleep for a couple of months. I think they lie up during the very coldest weather, and I should say it was cold enough for that. Besides, this carcass is a mass of ice now.—It is very cold.”

“Yes, and dark enough for anything.” But as the days—they could hardly be called days—glided by the last gleams of a dim twilight died out, till in the clearest times there was nothing but a faint dawn to be seen at twelve o’clock, where they had seen the rim of the sun for the last time, and the cold was intense, beyond anything they could have imagined. When the men were crowded together in the forecastle their breath rose in a thick mist, and Watty murmured bitterly to Steve about it, for he said it was a shame that the deck was not freshly cleaned.

“A’ through snaw-storm last neet,” he said, “the snaw came tumm’ling doon upo’ our bets till she was a’ wet.”

“But there was no snowstorm last night, Watty.”

“Why, she saw it wi’ her ain een.”

“It was only the frozen breath,” said Steve, as he recalled his experience on the deck the night the bear was shot.

“Ah, weel, she dinna ken. Maybe she’s richt; but the cauld is chust awfu’. Tid she ken the McByle burnt her foots last nicht?”

“What, Andra? No.”

“Oh ay, she tid. She was sitting by the fire trying to blaw the ice oot o’ the pipes, for she couldna ket the pipes to skirl. She was sitting leuking on, when she smelt something oot. Chacobsen she says, ‘She’ll hae to mind, Andra, for she’s purning her foots’; and Andra she says tat Chacobsen should keep her chokes to hersel when she’s pusy wi’ the pipes; and chust then Chohannes lays holt upo’ her py the shouthers an’ pu’s her ower, and shows her the toes wass purning, and she tidn’t know.”

“Is this true, Watty?”

“She can chust co and leuk the chief’s foots an’ see. Why, the tins o’ meat all coom oot lumps o’ ice, and the soup freezes in the galley where the fire’s purning. She niver knew it could pe sae caud, or she’d ha’ stoppit at hame.”

Watty was quite right, for the cold struck in everywhere; and if it had not been for the great fire kept going in the engine furnace, the ship would have been unbearable. For the cold produced so utter an insensibility in the extremities that the doctor had to keep a very watchful eye over the men, several of whom were slightly frost-bitten.

But he was well backed up by the four Norwegians, who had learned in their own severe winters something of the power of the frost; and hence it was that, when the darkness set in entirely for their four months’ night, all were still in excellent health.

“Help me, Steve, in every way you can, my lad. Let’s keep the men’s spirits up till the twenty-first of December.”

“You mean till the end of March,” said Steve gloomily.

“No, my lad; as I said, till the twenty-first of December. Only get that day past, and I can say to the men, ‘the sun is on its way back; patience, and we shall once more have the light.’”

“What shall I do to help you?”

“First of all, cast off that despondent way, my lad, and set others an example. You, I, and Mr Handscombe can’t afford to be low-spirited. There: be yourself, cheery and bright. I’m ready to encourage you in starting games or sports. Anything to keep the men in a cheerful state.”

Steve tried, but in spite of moon and star-shine, more brilliant than any present had ever seen before, abundant food, long walks for exercise whenever the weather would permit, and, above all, encouragement to sleep as long as they felt disposed, there was a peculiar depression steadily creeping over the men with which it grew harder and harder to battle.

At first they were merry and cheery enough in the glow of the fire, they sang all the songs they knew, and joined in chorus; the fiddle was heard going, and often enough the tune kept time with the beating of feet, as the men tried the steps of some hornpipes. And on other nights Andrew’s pipes made most dismal sounds, to the great delight of the Scots; but after the mishap to one of his feet, a burn which refused to heal, “ta pipes” found no more favour in the Highlander’s eyes, and he grew low-spirited and irritable to a degree that made him snatch the pipes one day from Watty, who had taken them down “to hae a blaw,” as he called it, and strike him across the head with the big drone.

Johannes was taken into consultation in the cabin, where they were in pretty good spirits, Steve being occupied in helping the doctor and captain in keeping the log, and noting down the observations they made with the instruments and on the weather; but the Norseman shook his head.

“I’m trying all I know, sir,” he said; “but it’s a hard task. I’m only an unlearned man, and do not understand these things well; but it seems to me, sir, that nothing was ever meant to live up here in the coldest time. The birds have gone south, we have not seen the track of deer or wolf for

a month, and it is six weeks now since we have seen the footprint of a bear. It is nature's long, dark, cold night, sir, where nothing is meant to live."

"Humph!" said the captain shortly; "and so you are going to give in too, and turn coward, eh?"

"No, sir," said the Norseman firmly; "and you know that I do not deserve those words. Jakobsen and our two Nordoe brothers have done all they can to keep up the men's spirits, and we shall do this, whether we live or die, to the end."

"Of course you will, Johannes," said Steve warmly, as he was aware of a peculiar sensation in his eyes; and then felt brighter than he had for days, for the captain made a quick movement and snatched off the thick fur glove he was obliged to wear in the heated cabin, even while he wrote, for the ink still froze at a short distance from the fire.

Captain Marsham's movement was to hold out his hand to the Norseman, and have it seized in a grip of iron.

"I beg your pardon, Johannes," he said. "My words were unjust."

"Say no more, sir," said the man, smiling. "You are the captain, and have a right to speak words to bring your men up to their work."

"But they are not needed with you, my lad," said the captain warmly. "But the others, what can we do to stir them out of this depressed state?"

"Work them, sir. We want some great thing to draw them out of thinking about themselves. Walks and ordinary work depress them. We want some great call made upon them for their help."

"Yes; and how can that call be made?"

Johannes shook his head. The suggestion was excellent, but it seemed to be impossible to carry out; for it was madness to attempt toilsome expeditions over the ice when at any hour they were liable to be overtaken by one of the terrible, blinding snowstorms of which they had had several examples since the darkness had set in; so after much

consideration Captain Marsham came to the conclusion that it was hard enough work to preserve existence with the ship as a place of refuge, always within touch, without running risks which might prove fatal to the whole party.

“You are quite right,” said the doctor, who had remained silent. “I do not doubt our power to make long expeditions, but they would always be terribly risky; and unless there was some object in view that warranted the work, I should not venture.”

“You mean that?” said the captain.

“I do. If a man gets frost-bitten anywhere within range, we can bring him back, and soon take proper steps to save the injured limb or part. On the other hand, suppose we are overtaken by a storm and darkness, and forced to shelter somewhere under the lee of the rocks or ice, how many of us would be able to reach the ship after the storm was over? No; I see nothing for us to do but take what exercise we can in the moonlight, and then come back to our quarters, which we must make as snug as we can.”

“And be thankful that we have such quarters,” said the captain. “What do you say, Steve?”

The lad started at this first appeal, but spoke out.

“I should like to try and search again for the crew of the *Ice Blink*, sir,” he said.

“What could we do better than we have done, my boy? We could not reach the parts that we journeyed over in the summer, that is certain, and to do any good we ought to go farther. No, my lad, we must wait.”

Chapter Thirty Nine.

A Brave Fight.

Darkness profound at times, and often with it a silence so strange and weird that Steve found himself speaking in a whisper. He was not alone in this, for he found the crew often answered him in a low voice, as if afraid of being heard. For, in spite of all that could be done to cheer them up, the poor fellows were growing very despondent, and even when the shortest day arrived they did not rouse up as the captain had hoped would be the case.

Time had been gliding on so monotonously of late, with nothing to look for but the changes in the moon, that it took Steve quite by surprise when at breakfast the captain cried cheerily:

“The shortest day, my boy! Well, why don’t you look pleased? What are you thinking about?”

“I was thinking,” said Steve as he started out of a reverie, “that it would be the longest night.”

“Well, take it that way, then: the longest night, and the shortest day. To-morrow the sun will have started on the backward journey, so come, cheer up, and—”

They all sprang to their feet, for a terrific report somewhere on high was followed by a crashing roar as of thunder, and with one consent they hurried on deck and out into the snow.

All was silent by then, but a few moments later there was a rushing and crashing sound, evidently on the steep mountain-side, in the direction of the chasm through which they had been in the habit of making their way to the open sea.

“An avalanche of ice and rocks,” said the captain.

“Yes, sir,” said Johannes, as the rushing sound stopped. “The frost must

have rent open some big rock, and this started the others in falling."

Here was something to do.

"A good beginning, though a few hours too soon, my lads. We've reached the shortest day, and it's time to be active once more. Quick! wrap up; coats on, and mitts. We'll go and see what the ice avalanche has done."

The men returned to their quarters, but it was in a dull, spiritless way, which Steve could not help noticing, but he said nothing then.

"Take guns, sir?" he asked, as they reached the cabin.

"We may as well, my lad, though I don't think there will be anything to shoot."

Steve was ready first, and went out on deck, to see the men coming up from the forecastle, looking big and uncouth in their hooded fur coats and mittens; but no one spoke as they stood there in the gloom waiting for orders. Steve peered about, but could not see the face he sought, and he turned to Hamish, who was close at hand.

"Where's Watty?" he said.

"In her bunk, sir," said the man surlily.

"In his bunk? Why didn't you rouse him up? It will do him good to come. Andra isn't here, either. He ought to try and walk as far as we're going to-day."

"Na, let them be, sir," said the man. "Better let the puir chiels dee in peace."

"For shame!" cried Steve hotly; "what do you mean by talking about dying in peace?"

"Only that she may as weel lee doon and ket it ower, sir. She'll neffer see Scotia acain."

"Hamish, I should be ashamed to say that if I were a big, strong fellow

like you. What are you thinking about?”

“She thinks it wass a shame to pring us all oop here to dee.”

There was a low murmur of acquiescence here among the men, and Steve felt a shiver run through him, as if the men’s dread and despondency were contagious. But he brightened up the next minute, and said lightly:

“This doesn’t sound very brave;” and he pushed by the men and descended to the forecastle, where Andrew lay staring at the dim light swinging from one of the beams.

“Hullo, Andra!” he cried cheerily, though he knew the jubilant sound of his voice was forced; “lying down? How are the pipes?”

“The pipes are froze hard, Meester Stevey, an’ she’ll hae them put wi’ her in the hole in the snow.”

“What, to thaw them?” cried Steve. “Nonsense! you’re not so bad as that. Where’s Watty?”

“Oh!” came from right forward out of the darkness.

“What a groan!” cried Steve boisterously. “Here, come out, you lazy old rascal; we’re just going on a bit of a trip. Where are you? Oh, I say, you do like playing dormouse.”

“Oh, dinna tooch her, sir; she’s froze all through, and she’ll preak.”

“Nonsense! Let’s have a look at you, Watty!” cried Steve jovially, though his heart ached as he spoke and thought of how the doctor had said that unless the men’s spirits were kept up they would droop and die.

As he spoke he half dragged the lad, blankets, and all into the light.

“Why, you’re not half frozen yet.”

“Hey, put she dinna ken. She’s a’ ane muckle chilplain.”

“Then come out, and have a run through the snow.”

“Nay, she’ll never rin acain.”

“Yes, you will. I want you, Watty. Come along.”

“Nay, she dinna like her, an’ she never tid. She’s ferry pad.”

“Did the doctor say so?”

“No,” growled Andrew; “she said it wass nothing the matter with the callant, and she ought to ket oop and rin apoot.”

“Eh?” cried Watty, rising up so quickly that he knocked his head against the bottom of the next bunk. “The doctor said Andra wass petter as I am, Meester Stevey, an’ she should pe apoot her wairk. She’s ferry well inteet.”

“A lee!” cried Andrew fiercely. “The doctor dinna ken how sair she be. She’s ferry pad, and she’s coing to dee.”

“So we all are, some day, Andra. Come, man, get up, and you, too, Watty.”

“Na, na—na, na,” came with quite a duet of groans. “Oh, I say!” cried Steve. “I know I feel quite as bad and low-spirited as you both do. Come, Watty laddie, it’s horribly dull without you. Get up.”

“She dinna want her, sir, she dinna want her.”

“But I do, Watty, ’pon my word. You and I are the only two boys in the ship, and I miss you. Get up, and you and I’ll stick together all day, and have a good run with Skeny.”

“Do she mean she to want her ferry padly?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Then she’ll ket oop,” said the lad with a groan.

“And you, too, Andra. Get up, and come with us; it will do you good.”

“Neffer no more, neffer no more,” groaned the man.

“Nonsense! It’s too bad of you!” cried Steve. “The ship’s as dull as dull now, and you might make it so different.”

Andrew groaned, but he pulled the blanket away from his left ear, and Steve noticed it as he went on.

“One never hears you making a joke about Hamish.”

“Ah, she tid mak’ chokes apoot Hahmeesh.”

“And just when we want the place to be made cheerful with a bit of music, you go and put away the pipes and pretend they’re frozen.”

Andrew groaned again, but it was a much shorter groan.

“When it was light we could hear the pipes going. Ha! what were those tunes you played—Strathclydes?”

“Na, na, Strathspeys, laddie; but if she tuked a holt o’ the pipes the noo it wad pe a coronach she’d blaw.”

“Very well; I’d rather hear that than nothing. That was a good tune, ‘Maggie Lauder.’”

“Oh ay, she wass a ferry coot chune,” sighed Andrew.

“And that jolly jig, ‘Money Rusk.’”

“‘Musk,’” sighed Andrew. “Oh ay, ‘Money Musk’ mak’s ta plood stir in a man maist as much as ‘Tullochgorum.’”

“Or ‘The Gathering of the Clans,’ Andra,” cried Steve.

“Hey, she’s crant!” cried the man excitedly. “She stirs the plood, too.”

“Yes, and it rouses up the men.”

“She feels as if she cauld play it a pit the noo.”

“Could you? Then look here, Andra. We’re going to have a run across the fiord in the moonlight. It’s full moon and as clear as day.”

“She’s retty the noo,” said Watty.

“That’s right, Watty; and I want Andra to come, too. Look here, old fellow. Get the pipes, and you and I and Watty’ll go at the head of the men, and we’ll march across to the side, with you playing ‘The Gathering of the Clans’ in the moonlight, and making the mountains ring. Why, it would be grand.”

“Ay, she’d pe crant,” said Watty; “put she couldna play it. The notes would freeze, ant come rattling doon like hail-stanes.”

“No, they wouldn’t, Watty. My word, how the old pipes would make the mountain-side ring and echo again! Such a sound was never heard before so far north.”

“Hey! and if she had a claymore an’ the plaidie—the plaidie o’ the McByles.”

“Never mind the plaid, Andra. Put on the sheep-skin coat, and come and try.”

The man’s eyes flashed, and, raising himself on his elbow, he thrust one hand behind him, and brought out his beloved pipes from under the blankets.

“Tak’ haud, laddie,” he said. “She was frichten tat the pahg might freeze hairt, put she’s quite saft. She’ll be retty tirectly.”

In ten minutes Andrew was in his big boots and sheep-skin coat and hood, ready to stretch out his hands for the pipes.

“Ahoy, Mr Steve!” came from the deck in Johannes voice. “We’re ready to start.”

“Coming!” cried Steve, who was trembling for fear his efforts had been thrown away and that Andrew would shirk.

But the man pulled himself together, and marched out with quite a military bearing on to the deck, which was empty, and then down the snow steps to where the men were waiting with the captain at their head. And as Steve and his companions stepped out into the bright moonlight reflected from the dazzling snow, the men burst into a cheer, which they repeated when, without a word, Steve took his place with Watty in front, and then signed to Andrew to go first.

The Highlander did not hesitate, but threw back his head, placed the mouthpiece to his lips, blew out the bag, and then stepped off, sending forth the wild notes quivering on the frosty air. He played, and played well, the thrilling strains, which echoed and throbbed from the sides of the rock in a weird and wonderful manner, and sent a curious sensation trembling through the nerves of every man present.

They were utterly silent now, as they kept step to the music, every one bringing his feet down with a heavy tramp, till the regular *beat, beat* was repeated from the snowy rocks in front like the regular tap on some giant drum. Then the echoes grew more and more, till to the excited imagination of Andrew, who, like the rest of the crew, was half hysterical from long-continued depression, it seemed as if other pipes were being played high up among the dazzling snow pinnacles, and clans afar off were gathering indeed to the wild notes of the pibroch.

Right away across the fiord, with hearts glowing and pulses beating high, the men marched on till the entrance to the chasm was reached, and Andrew, looking three inches taller than usual, gave a final blast, which went quivering and echoing through the clear, silent air for miles before it quite died away upon the ears of the men, who drew aside their hoods to listen.

Then, and then only, did they burst forth into a stentorian cheer, which was repeated twice and listened to until it died away.

“Bravo! bravo!” cried the captain. “Well done, Andrew, my man. It was grand! It was worth coming through all these troubles to hear.”

“Ay, the pipes is crant,” said Andrew proudly. “She’s the far pestest musick as effer wass for the mountains.”

“And never better played,” cried the doctor. “I say bravo, too.”

“Well, Watty, how are you?” whispered Steve.

“She feels petter, chust noo.”

“Keep moving, my lads!” cried the captain cheerily; and he stepped forward.

But not many yards; for there before them, piled-up in mighty masses, was the freshly fallen rock which had come crashing down from on high, and completely blocked up the entrance to the passage-like gorge through which they had been wont to row to the sea.

“Will the water force its way through, Johannes?” said the captain.

“No, sir, never. If it had been ice and solid snow, it would of course in time; but this is all granite rock.”

“Well,” said the captain, “it will be work for us to haul a boat right over the mountain and keep on the other side.”

In due time the word was given, and Andrew went to the front again to strike up some of his gayest lilts; and the men marched back to muster on deck afterwards, glowing with health and exercise, and ready to enjoy a hearty meal.

“Steve, my lad,” cried the captain, as soon as they were in the cabin, “God bless you for this! You’ve started the poor fellows on a fresh lease of life. And done me more good, boy, than ever I did to any one yet.”

“Oh, nonsense!” cried Steve, who felt a choking sensation in his throat.

“No nonsense, my lad. Try to keep it up; any way, so that we can kill the demon *ennui*.”

“I’ll try,” said Steve huskily; “but, hard though it was, I didn’t know it would do so much good. But I’ll never laugh at the bagpipes again.”

Chapter Forty.

Black Darkness.

Steve worked hard, and he worked wonders; but he could not do impossibilities, and all in the cabin knew that the black darkness was hovering heavily over the men's spirits. They fought it back for an hour, but it settled down again upon them heavier and heavier all through that awful January, when the cold was so intense that it was dangerous to stir. Then there were terrible storms, during which the fine snow-dust penetrated everything, and every drop of moisture condensed on wall or ceiling froze hard. The doctor managed to keep the men free of frost-bite, but he could not master the depression, and consequently their general health began to fail. It was of no use to tell the crew that the end of the darkness was coming, for when January was out it appeared to be black as ever, and they had February to pass through. Steve's efforts fell flat now, and the men became worse, while even the captain grew heartsick as he looked forward to the months of terrible inaction.

"Nothing but a miracle can save us," he said at last. "I am but human. I have done everything I can. Heaven helps those who help themselves, Steve lad; and Heaven knows we have helped ourselves."

"Then Heaven will help us!" cried Steve fervently; "for, after going through what we have, I will not believe that we shall all have to lie down and die."

How cold it was! They ceased to study their instruments; for, like the men, they seemed, Steve said, to have given up in despair of being able to go down low enough to register the number of degrees.

In spite of all efforts, Andrew had gone back to his bunk, where he lay day after day cuddling his pipes, and growing more and more despondent. Watty also went back, though Steve tried in every way to interest him in sports—running, jumping, and the like. He wanted to "gang hame to his mither," he said; and when strong men grew so despondent, it was useless to blame a boy.

It was during one of the darkest times that Steve found the four Norwegians together upon the deck. It was when the skies were black

with clouds, and a terrible wind howled through the standing rigging, and threatened to tear down the canvas sheltering of the deck; and it was not to be wondered at that the men's spirits were down to their lowest ebb, and that, consequent upon a report from the doctor, Captain Marsham had asked the prayers of all present for their two brethren who lay grievously mentally sick, for it was more from brain than from bodily ailment. It was Sunday, and the proper observance of that day had always been carefully kept up. Steve, heart-sore, and as depressed as any one on board, had gone on the deck to have a run up and down, as it was impossible to go out; and he soon became aware that Skene was trotting at his heels. Directly after he came upon Johannes and his three companions, and halted, wondering why they were there, as they were generally with the firemen below.

"We were only having a talk, sir," said the harpooner.

"About our position—whether we shall get through it?" cried Steve eagerly.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, and what do you think?"

"That we shall, sir. Why not? It is very dark and cold, but we have plenty of food and fuel. We only want work. The cook yonder is always busy getting things ready for us, and he is the healthiest man on board."

"Then you think we can hold out?"

"Please God, yes, sir," said the men in reverent tones. "We must not give up now."

"No, we must not give up now," echoed Steve.

"We have been thinking that, as soon as this storm has blown over, we may have three or four days' fine, clear weather. The moon is getting toward the full, and if the captain would start an expedition, it would not be so dangerous now."

"Which way would you go?"

“Inland, sir. I don’t expect it, but we might find deer or a bear; but whether we did or no, we should have something to do.”

The storm had given place to fine clear moonshine, and there was not a breath of air, but no expedition was started; for, to the despair and misery of all, the captain broke down, worn out by mental care; and after three or four days Steve sat by his cot listening to his hurried breathing, and asking himself what was to become of them all if their brave leader died. The boy had to divide his attention between watching and keeping up the temperature of the cabin; but the glowing stove and constantly burning lamp had a hard fight with the cold, which seemed to pierce through everything; and though curtains of sailcloth had been nailed up outside the cabin door, they did little in those piercing hours of the long arctic night.

The boy had just resumed his seat, after rearranging the fur coat which he had thrown over the captain, when Mr Handscombe entered, the sailcloth curtains crackling loudly as he moved them to pass, for the moisture from the breath froze them stiff, and the thickness was constantly being added to.

“How does he seem?” said the doctor, going closer to the fire to thaw the frozen rime from his beard, which was quite a bush of ice from the chin downward, before taking off his heavy fur coat and hood.

“Just the same, sir,” said Steve despondently.

“Ah!” exclaimed the doctor sharply; “none of that. Don’t you take that tone.”

“I—I can’t help it!” cried Steve piteously, as he now broke down completely. “I—I have tried so hard, Mr Handscombe. I have done everything till now, and it’s of no use. I must lie down now like the rest, and give up, for we shall never see the day again.”

A pair of frozen mittens was thrown down, and Steve’s hand was grasped.

“You have done everything, my lad,” cried the doctor warmly. “I have said nothing, but I have not been blind. I have watched the brave, unselfish

way in which you have tried to help and encourage the others; but you have not done yet. Poor Lowe has taken to his bunk quite helpless, and there is hardly a man ready to stir. We two have to take things in hand, and the lot has fallen on us to try and save the crew of this ship. I am only the doctor, so you must take the captain's place, and go on fighting to the end."

"I can't," groaned Steve. "The end is close at hand now. I must give up."

"A British boy ought never to give up, my lad," cried the doctor warmly; "and you are not going to. They say that doctors say while there is life there is hope. Well, captains ought to feel the same with their crews and ships. If it were the end of November, I should be ready to take a despondent view of our position; but we shall soon be having March and the light. And you talk of giving up? Nonsense! You and I, Steve, must be ready to show that we are made of better stuff. Come, your hand upon it. Pluck works wonders, and you have plenty in you yet, though it is a little bit frozen. Now, then, British boy, you'll fight with me till you die? Come!"

"Yes!" cried Steve, for these words seemed to galvanise him into action.

"Hah! I thought so," cried the doctor. "Never say die, eh?"

"Never say die!" cried Steve half hysterically, for long watching and the strain had terribly lowered his tone.

"Come along, then, captain. Your crew is sick all but the cook."

"And the Norsemen," said Steve.

"They're breaking down, boy. Even stout, staunch old Johannes has caught the fever this morning."

"Fever?"

"Well, the complaint, my lad. He is sickening from the terrible depression. It is more than human nature can stand to see one's fellow-creatures breaking down day by day. There are limits to endurance, and sooner or later every one must break down—except doctors and deputy captains. Now, come on and help me administer medicine. We'll get it, and then

come back here and give poor Marsham the first dose. Come along."

"But the medicine chest is here," said Steve.

"Yes, but this is a different medicine. I have some one mixing it, and I persuaded Johannes to take the fireman's place and keep the furnace going. On with your cap, and come on. Mitts, too, for it's colder than ever."

Steve gave one more look at the captain, who lay there stern and calm now, as if sleeping more peacefully, and then followed Mr Handscombe to the engine-room, from which came up the clatter of an iron shovel and the rattle of coals.

"That's better," said the doctor, "I've roused Johannes up to work. Now let's go and see if the physic is ready."

Steve followed again, the doctor carrying a lanthorn along the dark, crackling deck, whose canvas roof and walls glittered with pendent icicles which made it resemble some wonderful grotto, while in the neighbourhood of the engine-room the deck was slippery with the frozen moisture. There was a warm glow of light by the galley, though, and a faint sound from the humming stove was breaking the stillness of the place, while quite a burst of hot light saluted them as the doctor opened the door.

"Well, cook, my physic ready?"

"Yes, sir, gallons of it, as strong as I can make it. But I do want a little help, sir. Can't you make that boy Watty rouse up? He'd be better here than in his bunk."

"I'll try—I mean we'll try," said the doctor. "That's right. One basin now, not much, for the captain; then we'll come back for the rest. Hah! excellent. Try it, Captain Steve."

The cook stared, and Steve unwillingly tasted the strong soup.

"Go on," cried the doctor. "It takes ten table-spoonfuls to properly try that stuff."

Steve went on, took his ten table-spoonfuls, and felt better.

“Hah! I knew you would,” cried the doctor. “Now look: we must keep up that medicine till further orders, and see if we can’t bring the men round. There are plenty of tins of preserved meat in store?”

“Any amount, sir; and plenty of reindeer meat still.”

“Then we shan’t break down there. Now, then, captain, *en avant*!”

They returned to the cabin, Steve carrying a small basin and the doctor a large one, which he handed down to Johannes on the way, the Norseman receiving it in a sad, awed, depressed way, and promising to eat it at once. But they had very little success in the cabin, and Steve’s spirits, which had been rising, sank again as they returned to the galley, where the cook was ready with a great tin bucket full of the steaming stuff, regular meat essence in its strength.

From here they went down into the forecastle, dim, steamy, and with snowflakes floating here and there. Two or three of the men sat near the stove, but for the most part they were in their bunks, and all greeted the new-comers with a hollow-eyed stare. Their basins were half filled and taken from bunk to bunk; but the men could hardly be roused to eat, and at times the doctor had to angrily insist before they could be induced to try to partake of the steaming preparation.

Watty was the first for whom Steve made in the dark, depressing place, and found him lying dim-eyed, half stupefied, gazing at the light. He thought of how he had roused the lad up before again and again, but the spirit was wanting, on both sides now; and after with great difficulty inducing the lad to partake of a few spoonfuls of the so-called medicine, Watty sank back, and then felt slowly for Steve’s hand.

“I’m thenkin’, Meester Stevey,” he whispered, “that she’ll ket pack to Scotland.”

“Yes, and you too,” said Steve, with as much heart as he could put into his words—little enough, though.

“Nay, she’s coing to dee, and she’s ferry sorry she wasna always coot

frien's."

"Oh, never mind that now, Watty!"

"Put she toes mind, Meester Stevey, and she's ferry sorry. Ye'll pe coing pack to Scotland, sir, and ye'll tak' care an' co and tell my mither a' aboot her and how she deed."

Steve could bear no more. He hurried across to where Andrew was lying, and took him a basin of the doctor's soup. But his success was very little better here. All the men were in the dull, apathetic state pretty well expressed by the Highlander, who, after partaking of a few spoonfuls of the stimulus, said softly:

"Ye'll do her a favour?"

"Yes, Andra, if I can. But stop; do me one first. Get up, and try and help us."

"Nay, she'll never ket oop acain," said the man. "Ye'll chust wait till she's deed, an' then come an' tak' awa' the pipes. They're doon here peside me in her plankets, and she'll tak' care of them an' carry them pack hame wi' her; an' laddie, if she'll try an' learn the pipes, it's the far pestest music as effer wass, an' she'll thenk sometimes apoot puir Andra McByle?"

Steve promised. At another time he could have laughed; but now, in, that dim, gloomy place, surrounded by the faces of the gaunt men whose eyes gleamed faintly in the light of the lanthorn, it all seemed to be more than he could bear; and at last, when everything possible had been done, he followed the doctor back to the cabin, where they sat down in silence.

The doctor was the first to speak.

"It's hard work, Steve boy," he said; "but we've got to do it, and with God's help we will. Poor fellows! they have the muscles, but they have no energy; and I tell you frankly, I'm beginning to be afraid."

"Afraid? What of?" said Steve anxiously.

"That one of them will die; and if we come to that, the effect upon the

others will be terrible."

Steve shuddered.

"Can we do anything else?"

"No more than we are doing, lad," said the doctor wearily, "only wait."

Chapter Forty One.

"Never Say Die."

Three days passed, during which Mr Handscombe and Steve worked hard watching by turns over their sick; and in spite of the boy's desire to evade the task, the doctor forced him to come out for a tramp in the snow by the light of the moon. The Norsemen, who bore the winter better than the rest, had begun to lose hope, and declined to leave the fire, while the cook always pleaded for excuse—want of time.

It would have been very beautiful out there; but the state of the crew, and his own want of energy, made the fiord look like a cold, dark, cruel, icy prison, and Steve was always glad to get back into the shelter of the ship.

Then came a morning when the doctor complained of being unwell, and asked Steve to go alone to attend to the men.

With a feeling of horror that he could not conceal, the boy slowly left the doctor's cabin.

"He'll lie now as the others are lying," said Steve to himself; and the boy's first thought now was that he ought to go to his own cot and give up, for there was nothing more to be done.

"Never say die," he muttered, though; "never say die;" and, setting his teeth, he went on with the duty the doctor had inaugurated, and visited man after man, praying, exhorting, and bullying them into partaking of food instead of lying there, dying, as it were, by inches.

One by one the Norsemen gave up, till only Johannes made the least effort, and that only when Steve stood by. Then came the day when he, too, resigned himself to his fate; and on going, after leaving him lying in the engine-room, to the galley, Steve found that the cook was seated listless and weary, his chin upon his hands, his elbows on his knees, gazing at the dying fire in his stove.

“What!” cried Steve, “you are not going to give up?”

The man looked at him sadly for a few moments without speaking, and then shook his head.

“The cold stuns them, the cold stuns them!” said the boy aloud in his despair and horror as he turned back to the cabin. “Mr Handscombe,” he cried, “what shall I give them? I can do no more.”

There was no reply, and with a thrill of horror running through him Steve fled back to the deck, where the black darkness horrified him still more, for the lamps had gone out for want of attention, the boiler fire was nearly extinct, and even the outer cold seemed preferable to that gloomy icy vault, so full of horror. He literally staggered to the ice-covered canvas door of the awning, and in his fearful loneliness strove to get the frozen fastenings undone, so that he might at least have the stars of heaven for company. And then he felt that he was not alone, for there was a sharp bark, the dog sprang to his side, and the boy dropped upon his knees and flung his arms about his faithful companion’s neck.

“Skeny, old lad!” he cried with a sob, “and I thought I was quite left.”

A sharp bark was the response, and in his delight the dog butted at him, seized his arm in his teeth, and playfully worried it.

The next minute Steve rose to his feet, and, hardly knowing what he was doing, dragged the canvas doorway open, and staggered out of the darkness and down the snow steps into what looked once more a world of silvery light; for the moon was at the full, and it seemed nearly as light as day. In his delight the dog threw himself on his side to force a way through the snow, and then turned over to repeat the performance, and leap and race round his master, who stood shading his eyes from the light, and staring before him at something misty and spectral-looking in

the distance. Finally the dog burst into a joyous peal of barking at the objects which had struck his master, and there came the sharp report of a gun, followed by a rolling volley of echoes.

“Is this dreaming? Am I getting worse?” thought Steve; and at that moment there came a loud “Ahoy!”

“Some one there!—there in that terrible solitude! Then it must be help.”

The excitement and reaction were too much. Steve strove to shout again; but the words failed him, and he only uttered a hoarse cry. But the dog responded bravely and loudly it seemed to the boy at first, then faintly and more faintly, while the moonlight was dim, and then all dark, for he had sunk insensible upon the snow.

When he opened his eyes Skene was standing with his fore paws upon his chest, and nearly a dozen men in heavy furs stood about him, while one white-haired, burly-looking personage, who was supporting him, said:

“Come, my lad, better? Where are your friends? in the ship?”

“Uncle!” was all that Steve could pant out, for he recognised the voice that he had not heard for a couple of years.

Chapter Forty Two.

The Way Out.

Captain Young it was with his crew! For the rescue party which had gone out in search of the *Ice Blink*, and met with the fate of so many who penetrate the solitudes of the north, had been found and rescued by those they sought to save.

Their coming, as they advanced toward the frozen-in *Hvalross* cheering loudly, acted like an electric shock, and before they reached the deck with Steve, men who had been lying in hopeless misery shut up in their bunks came crawling out to meet the help which they knew must have

arrived.

An hour later Steve could hardly believe in the change, for the silence in the ship had given place to an eager buzzing of conversation; the fires were burning and sending forth their warm glow; and though in the cabin the captain still lay insensible, the doctor had been galvanised into life, and was talking eagerly to Captain Young.

“So, Steve,” cried the latter, “you are in command now, eh?”

“Oh, nonsense, uncle! That is only what Mr Handscombe said,” replied the lad.

“Well, you must have been captain and crew, too,” said his uncle, who was making a tremendous meal. “But you’re a poor officer, my lad, to let your men get into such a low, exhausted state.”

“You don’t know, uncle, how every one has tried,” said Steve reproachfully.

“Tried?” said Captain Young. “Why, when we came on board an hour ago your men pretended that they were all dying. Now they are feasting along with my lads as if nothing whatever had been the matter.”

“You don’t know how reduced and helpless we had all grown, sir,” said the doctor, coming to Steve’s help; “and you do not think of the effect upon them of your coming with help when they had all literally lain down to die.”

“I know, I know, my dear sir!” said the bluff, red-faced, grey-headed man. “I’ve gone through it all. Last winter I saw my poor fellows go down one by one, till I was the only man about who tried to fight the darkness and depression; and all the time so utterly weak and despairing that I could at any time have lain down and given up all hope. But we got through the winter, and this year my lads have held up wonderfully, and have battled through with hardly one breakdown.”

“It is astonishing,” said the doctor.

“Perhaps so; but I daresay all of you would have fought through a second

year far better than your first."

Steve shook his head.

"Nonsense, boy! It is principally the mind, and being used to things. You wrote at school, I know, 'Familiarity breeds contempt,' which, written simply, means, 'Bogies don't frighten you when you've seen them more than once.'"

"But our poor fellows were very bad, sir," said Steve.

"Yes, in spirits, my boy. Now they think it's all right, they get up and talk and eat and drink."

"Well, but, uncle," said Steve, "see how different our position is now!"

"Nonsense! It's all fancy, my lad. You're worse off now than you were a couple of hours ago."

"Worse off?" cried Steve.

"Of course. You have a dozen hungry men to provide for."

"But you've come to save us, and brought us hope."

"Where is it then, boy?" cried Captain Young. "You all had as much hope as we had—far more; but you gave up and smothered it. We haven't come to save you; we want you to save us."

"I don't understand you," said Steve.

"Then I'll make myself plain, my lad. You have a sound ship here in this fiord, well provisioned, and with plenty of fuel, besides having a doctor to take care of you. On the other hand, we have a ship sixty miles away, yonder on the east side of this great island or peninsula of a vast arctic continent, for we have not made out much; but our ship lies where it was driven ashore by the ice, crushed beyond repairing, good for nothing but to make us a house to live in."

"Then you have been within sixty miles of us all the time!" cried the

doctor.

“Yes, sixty miles, I should say, south-east, and only found a way across the mountains during these last few days, and quite by accident; for they have always been like a wall to us till now.”

“But you have tried to get across to here before?”

“Once; but our expeditions have generally been in the other directions—south and east.”

“And you have kept on making expeditions in this terrible weather?” said the doctor.

“Terrible? When it is quite calm, and the moon makes it like day,” said Captain Young, smiling. “There, we have had a year’s more experience, and have grown used to it. Whenever the weather was clear we have been out.”

“Then you have not come to save us?” said Steve, who had grown very thoughtful.

“No, my dear boy; you have got to save us,” said Captain Young cheerily. “We would not give up hope, but worked away; and at last we have found the help we wanted, for our ship can never sail again, even if we could get her afloat. You came to rescue us like the brave fellows you were, and here we are ready to be rescued and taken home to dear old England once again.”

Steve’s face was comic in its perplexity.

“We seem a nice party to save your great, strong, hearty men,” he said.

“Bah!” cried Captain Young. “We’ve done you good already, and you’ll all soon come round and be able to help us sleigh all our treasures across the mountains whenever the weather is fine. What a gloriously snug position you are in here; far more sheltered than we.”

Steve exchanged glances with the doctor; and just then, looking very weak, Mr Lowe tottered into the cabin, the coming of the crew of the *Ice*

Blink having roused him too.

“You steamed up this fiord, of course?” said Captain Young.

“Yes,” replied Steve.

“Then there is only one winter’s ice around you, and therefore you ought to be free by the end of July.”

Steve groaned.

“What’s the matter, my lad?”

“You don’t know that the ice-floes jammed up the mouth of the fiord after we were in.”

“Indeed! Well, boy, nature must unjam it when the ice is in motion again. Mouths of inlets are always opening and closing here. Let’s wait and see. I want to see Marsham, though, look different from this.”

He had his wish, and within a week; for all idea of the *Ice Blink’s* going back was put an end to by a succession of terrible gales. When at last the weather settled again the moon was growing old, and a trip right up a valley on the far side of the glacier, where they had never explored at all, led them toward the mountains whose pass was so choked with snow that the party were forced to return to the *Hvalross*, where they were quartered for the next six weeks.

Their coming and the example of the acclimatised men worked wonders, so that by the end of those six weeks there was hardly a sick man left; and when daylight and the hardened snow gave them opportunities journey after journey was made to the *Ice Blink* for the most valuable of the skins the crew had collected, the rest being left in the hope of the *Hvalross* sailing round to that side of the great promontory, so as to get within easy distance, and then load up with all worth taking.

But that was never done, for it was quite the end of August, and a feeling of despair was creeping over both crews, as it seemed that they must prepare for another winter in the ice, when a terrific gale swept down the fiord one night.

It had its results.

All through the spring and summer the water had been rising in the blocked-up fiord, for that which had escaped from the chasm was very small in quantity since the crumbling down of the rocks that night; and consequently the *Hvalross* rode some thirty yards higher than when she was frozen-in amongst the newly formed ice. The weight of this water against the ice dam was tremendous, and there was always hope that it would force its way through; but the piled-up floe held good till the night of the gale, when there was a heavy sea on, and the ship lay tugging at her two anchors, hard set to hold her own so as not to be driven down the fiord and crushed amongst the breakers.

The canvas shelter had long before been lowered, and every one was on deck, waiting once more for the steam to be up sufficiently to enable them to go ahead a little and ease the strain on the anchors. At last there was sufficient pressure, and the familiar ting came from the engine-room gong, the propeller spun round, and the dragging at the anchors ceased. It was just in time, for all at once there was a fearful roar heard loudly above the rushing and shrieking of the wind.

“Full speed ahead!” signalled the captain; and the propeller churned up the water now rushing by them at a terrific rate, while all gazed wildly at the sides, expecting to be swept down the fiord to destruction in the masses of ice. For the great floe dam which closed them in had given way at last, and for a short time their position was one of terrible peril. But the cables proved true, eased as they were by the full power of the propeller, and half an hour after the *Hvalross* was riding nearly forty feet lower than she had been in the morning, with the way out to the ocean free.

In those precarious waters no opportunities can be lost. A place open one day may, by a change of wind, be closed the next by the ice-floes; and in view of this the *Hvalross* glided out of her prison deeply laden with the spoil of another summer in the far north, and with the two crews cheering loudly as they went. Then after various vicissitudes of being caught in the ice, freed, caught, and freed again, she made her way southward till the last lane in the ice-floes was threaded, and her head laid for Nordoe in the brightest of sunshine, and the deck in the long summer day feeling

hot.

There was a warm and friendly, almost affectionate, parting from the Norwegians, Johannes looking quite mournful when he shook farewell hands with Steve; but they were cheered loudly as they stepped on to the little quay, any sadness they felt being chased away by the many friends who pressed round them to welcome them back from the icy seas.

Next morning the head of the stout little steamer was laid for home, and the crew gave vent to the heartiest of cheers, which increased to a roar of delight as Andrew, forgetful of all past suffering, made his appearance, proud and solemn-looking, to march round the deck with his pipes, driving Skene the dog below with crest and tail drooping, and his sharp, white teeth bared to the gums.

Then all settled down to the quiet monotony of the voyage home, for the stormy times were past, and the vessel glided south, heavily laden, but steady, and looking, as Steve said, perfectly satisfied with having well done her work. And so she had, for every man who had sailed was returning safe and sound, and she was bringing back the captain and crew of brave men for whom they had gone in search.

“I feel convinced,” said Captain Marsham one evening, “that we were the first visitors to those icy shores.”

“Yes,” said Captain Young; “I doubt whether any one ever reached so far north before; but I don’t like leaving my ship and so much valuable cargo behind.”

“Let them rest for the next who go there,” said Captain Marsham. “It would have been madness to have run the risk of being caught in the ice again.”

“Yes, we had enough darkness and cold to last some time.”

Steve went out on deck, and found Watty right in the bows bribing Skene to sit up with scraps of meat brought from the galley; but he ceased and looked shyly at the boy as he advanced.

“Well, Watty,” cried Steve, “we shall soon be home again now, all alive

and well.”

“Ay, she’ll sune pe seeing Glasgie, and her puir auld mither ance again.”

“How should you like to go up north once more?”

Watty shook his shock head.

“The pear’s grease is peautiful, Meester Stevey, and she ton’t mind the chilplains after a pit; but it’s a’ tat tairkness mak’s her hairt sair. Hey, but it’s a waefu’ place.”

“Then you wouldn’t care to go again?”

“Na,” said Watty; “put if she ganged there acain to fetch the ither ship she’d gang wi’ her.”

“You would, Watty?”

“Ay, tat she would, and to the ferry wairld’s end.”

The End.

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