ROBERT MICHAEL BALLANTYNE

THE GIANT OF THE NORTH: POKINGS ROUND THE POLE

Robert Michael Ballantyne

The Giant of the North: Pokings Round the Pole

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36097101
The Giant of the North: Pokings Round the Pole:

Содержание

R. M. Ballantyne
The Giant of the North: Pokings Round the Pole

Chapter One.
Introduces our Hero and his Kindred

The Giant was an Eskimo of the Arctic regions. At the beginning of his career he was known among his kindred by the name of Skreekinbroot, or the howler, because he howled oftener and more furiously than any infant that had ever been born in Arctic land. His proper name, however, was Chingatok, though his familiars still ventured occasionally to style him Skreekinbroot.

Now it must not be supposed that our giant was one of those ridiculous myths of the nursery, with monstrous heads and savage hearts, who live on human flesh, and finally receive their deserts at the hands of famous giant-killing Jacks. No! Chingatok was a real man of moderate size—not more than seven feet two in his sealskin boots—with a lithe, handsome figure, immense chest and shoulders, a gentle disposition, and a fine, though flattish countenance, which was sometimes grave with thought, at other

times rippling with fun.

We mention the howling characteristic of his babyhood because it was, in early life, the only indication of the grand spirit that dwelt within him—the solitary evidence of the tremendous energy with which he was endowed. At first he was no bigger than an ordinary infant. He was, perhaps, a little fatter, but *not* larger, and there was not an oily man or woman of the tribe to which he belonged who would have noticed anything peculiar about him if he had only kept moderately quiet; but this he would not or could not do. His mouth was his safety-valve. His spirit seemed to have been born big at once. It was far too large for his infant body, and could only find relief from the little plump dwelling in which it was at first enshrined by rushing out at the mouth. The shrieks of pigs were trifles to the yelling of that Eskimo child's impatience. The caterwauling of cats was as nothing to the growls of his disgust. The angry voice of the Polar bear was a mere chirp compared with the furious howling of his disappointment, and the barking of a mad walrus was music to the roaring of his wrath.

Every one, except his mother, wished him dead and buried in the centre of an iceberg or at the bottom of the Polar Sea. His mother—squat, solid, pleasant-faced, and mild—alone put up with his ways with that long-suffering endurance which is characteristic of mothers. Nothing could disturb the serenity of Toolooha. When the young giant, (that was to be), roared, she fondled him; if that was ineffectual, she gave him a walrus

tusk or a seal's flipper to play with; if that did not suffice, she handed him a lump of blubber to suck; if that failed, as was sometimes the case, she gambolled with him on the floor of her snow-hut, and rubbed his oily visage lovingly over her not less oleaginous countenance. Need we enlarge on this point? Have not all mothers acted thus, or similarly, in all times and climes?

> From pole to pole a mother's soul
> Is tender, strong, and true;
> Whether the loved be good or bad—
> White, yellow, black, or blue.

But Toolooha's love was wise as well as strong. If all else failed, she was wont to apply corporal punishment, and whacked her baby with her tail. Be not shocked, reader. We refer to the tail of her coat, which was so long that it trailed on the ground, and had a flap at the end which produced surprising results when properly applied.

But the howling condition of life did not last long.

At the age of five years little Chingatok began to grow unusually fast, and when he reached the age of seven, the tribe took note of him as a more than promising youth. Then the grand spirit, which had hitherto sought to vent itself in yells and murderous assaults on its doting mother, spent its energies in more noble action. All the little boys of his size, although much older than himself, began to look up to him as a champion. None went so boldly into mimic warfare with the walrus and the bear

as Chingatok. No one could make toy sledges out of inferior and scanty materials so well as he. If any little one wanted a succourer in distress, Skreekinbroot was the lad to whom he, or she, turned. If a broken toy had to be mended, Chingatok could do it better than any other boy. And so it went on until he became a man and a giant.

When he was merely a big boy—that is, bigger than the largest man of his tribe—he went out with the other braves to hunt and fish, and signalised himself by the reckless manner in which he would attack the polar bear single-handed; but when he reached his full height and breadth he gave up reckless acts, restrained his tendency to display his great strength, and became unusually modest and thoughtful, even pensive, for an Eskimo.

The superiority of Chingatok's mind, as well as his body, soon became manifest. Even among savages, intellectual power commands respect. When coupled with physical force it elicits reverence. The young giant soon became an oracle and a leading man in his tribe. Those who had wished him dead, and in the centre of an iceberg or at the bottom of the Polar Sea, came to wish that there were only a few more men like him.

Of course he had one or two enemies. Who has not? There were a few who envied him his physical powers. There were some who envied him his moral influence. None envied him his intellectual superiority, for they did not understand it. There was one who not only envied but hated him. This was Eemerk, a mean-spirited, narrow-minded fellow, who could not bear to play

what is styled second fiddle.

Eemerk was big enough—over six feet—but he wanted to be bigger. He was stout enough, but wanted to be stouter. He was influential too, but wanted to reign supreme. This, of course, was not possible while there existed a taller, stouter, and cleverer man than himself. Even if Eemerk had been the equal of Chingatok in all these respects, there would still have remained one difference of character which would have rendered equality impossible.

It was this: our young giant was unselfish and modest. Eemerk was selfish and vain-glorious. When the latter killed a seal he always kept the tit-bits for himself. Chingatok gave them to his mother, or to any one else who had a mind to have them. And so in regard to everything.

Chingatok was not a native of the region in which we introduce him to the reader. He and the tribe, or rather part of the tribe, to which he belonged, had travelled from the far north; so far north that nobody knew the name of the land from which they had come. Even Chingatok himself did not know it. Being unacquainted with geography, he knew no more about his position on the face of this globe than a field-mouse or a sparrow.

But the young giant had heard a strange rumour, while in his far-off country, which had caused his strong intellect to ponder, and his huge heart to beat high. Tribes who dwelt far to the south of his northern home had told him that other tribes, still further south, had declared that the people who dwelt to the south of them had met with a race of men who came to them over

the sea on floating islands; that these islands had something like trees growing out of them, and wings which moved about, which folded and expanded somewhat like the wings of the sea-gull; that these men's faces were whiter than Eskimo faces; that they wore skins of a much more curious kind than sealskins, and that they were amazingly clever with their hands, talked a language that no one could understand, and did many wonderful things that nobody could comprehend.

A longing, wistful expression used to steal over Chingatok's face as he gazed at the southern horizon while listening to these strange rumours, and a very slight smile of incredulity had glimmered on his visage, when it was told him that one of the floating islands of these Kablunets, or white men, had been seen with a burning mountain in the middle of it, which vomited forth smoke and fire, and sometimes uttered a furious hissing or shrieking sound, not unlike his own voice when he was a Skreekinbroot.

The giant said little about these and other subjects, but thought deeply. His mind, as we have said, was far ahead of his time and condition. Let us listen to some of the disjointed thoughts that perplexed this man.

"Who made me?" he asked in a low tone, when floating alone one day in his kayak, or skin canoe, "whence came I? whither go I? What is this great sea on which I float? that land on which I tread? No sledge, no spear, no kayak, no snow-hut makes itself! Who made all that which I behold?"

Chingatok looked around him, but no audible answer came from Nature. He looked up, but the glorious sun only dazzled his eyes.

"There *must* be One," he continued in a lower tone, "who made all things; but who made *Him*? No one? It is impossible! The Maker must have ever been. *Ever been*!" He repeated this once or twice with a look of perplexed gravity.

The northern savage had grasped the grand mystery, and, like all true philosophers savage or civilised who have gone before him, relapsed into silence.

At last he resolved to travel south, until he should arrive at the coasts where these strange sights before described were said to have been seen.

Having made up his mind, Chingatok began his arrangements without delay; persuaded a few families of his tribe to accompany him, and reached the north-western shores of Greenland after a long and trying journey by water and ice.

Here he spent the winter. When spring came, he continued his journey south, and at last began to look out, with sanguine expectation, for the floating islands with wings, and the larger island with the burning mountain on it, about which he had heard.

Of course, on his way south, our giant fell in with some members of the tribes through whom the rumours that puzzled him had been transmitted to the far north; and, as he advanced, these rumours took a more definite, also a more correct, form. In time he came to understand that the floating islands were gigantic

kayaks, or canoes, with masts and sails, instead of trees and wings. The burning mountain, however, remained an unmodified mystery, which he was still inclined to disbelieve. But these more correct views did not in the least abate Chingatok's eager desire to behold, with his own eyes, the strange men from the unknown south.

Eemerk formed one of the party who had volunteered to join Chingatok on this journey. Not that Eemerk was influenced by large-minded views or a thirst for knowledge, but he could not bear the thought that his rival should have all the honour of going forth on a long journey of exploration to the mysterious south, a journey which was sure to be full of adventure, and the successful accomplishment of which would unquestionably raise him very much in the estimation of his tribe.

Eemerk had volunteered to go, not as second in command, but as an independent member of the party—a sort of free-lance. Chingatok did not quite relish having Eemerk for a companion, but, being a good-humoured, easy-going fellow, he made no objection to his going. Eemerk took his wife with him. Chingatok took his mother and little sister; also a young woman named Tekkona, who was his wife's sister. These were the only females of the exploring party. Chingatok had left his wife behind him, because she was not robust at that time; besides, she was very small—as is usually the case with giants' wives—and he was remarkably fond of her, and feared to expose her to severe fatigue and danger.

The completed party of explorers numbered twenty souls, with their respective bodies, some of which latter were large, some small, but all strong and healthy. Four of the men were friends of Eemerk, whom he had induced to join because he knew them to be kindred spirits who would support him.

"I go to the ice-cliff to look upon the sea," said Chingatok one morning, drawing himself up to his full height, and unconsciously brushing some of the lamp-black off the roof of his hut with the hood of his sealskin coat.

At this point it may be well to explain, once for all, that our giant did not speak English, and as it is highly improbable that the reader understands the Eskimo tongue, we will translate as literally as possible—merely remarking that Chingatok's language, like his mind, was of a superior cast.

"Why goes my son to the ice-cliff?" asked Toolooha in a slightly reproachful tone. "Are not the floes nearer? Can he not look on the great salt lake from the hummocks? The sun has been hot a long time now. The ice-cliffs are dangerous. Their edges split off every day. If my son goes often to them, he will one day come tumbling down upon the floes and be crushed flat, and men will carry him to his mother's feet like a mass of shapeless blubber."

It is interesting to note how strong a resemblance there is in sentiment and modes of thought between different members of the human family. This untutored savage, this Polar giant, replied, in the Eskimo tongue, words which may be freely

translated—"Never fear, mother, I know how to take care of myself."

Had he been an Englishman, he could not have expressed himself more naturally. He smiled as he looked down at his stout and genial mother, while she stooped and drew forth a choice morsel of walrus flesh from one of her boots. Eskimo ladies wear enormous sealskin boots the whole length of their legs. The tops of these boots are made extremely wide, for the purpose of stowing away blubber, or babies, or other odd articles that might encumber their hands.

Chingatok seemed the personification of savage dignity as he stood there, leaning on a short walrus spear. Evidently his little mother doted on him. So did Oblooria, a pretty little girl of about sixteen, who was his only sister, and the counterpart of her mother, hairy coat and tail included, only a few sizes smaller.

But Chingatok's dignity was marred somewhat when he went down on his hands and knees, in order to crawl through the low snow-tunnel which was the only mode of egress from the snow-hut.

Emerging at the outer end of the tunnel, he stood up, drew the hood of his sealskin coat over his head, shouldered his spear, and went off with huge and rapid strides over the frozen billows of the Arctic Sea.

Spring was far advanced at the time of which we write, and the sun shone not only with dazzling brilliancy, but with intense power on the fields of ice which still held the ocean in their cold

unyielding embrace. The previous winter had been unusually severe, and the ice showed little or no sign of breaking up, except at a great distance from land, where the heaving of the waves had cracked it up into large fields. These were gradually parting from the main body, and drifting away with surface-currents to southern waters, there to be liquefied and re-united to their parent sea.

The particular part of the Greenland coast to which the giant went in his ramble is marked by tremendous cliffs descending perpendicularly into the water. These, at one part, are divided by a valley tilled with a great glacier, which flows from the mountains of the interior with a steep declivity to the sea, into which it thrusts its tongue, or extreme end. This mighty river of ice completely fills the valley from side to side, being more than two miles in width and many hundred feet thick. It seems as solid and motionless as the rocks that hem it in, nevertheless the markings on the surface resemble the currents and eddies of a stream which has been suddenly frozen in the act of flowing, and if you were to watch it narrowly, day by day, and week by week, you would perceive, by the changed position of objects on its surface, that it does actually advance or flow towards the sea. A further proof of this advance is, that although the tongue is constantly shedding off large icebergs, it is never much decreased in extent, being pushed out continuously by the ice which is behind. In fact, it is this pushing process which causes the end of the tongue to shed its bergs, because, when the point is thrust into

deep water and floats, the motion of the sea cracks the floating mass off from that pail which is still aground, and lets it drift away.

Now it was to these ice-cliffs that the somewhat reckless giant betook himself. Although not well acquainted with that region, or fully alive to the extent of the danger incurred, his knowledge was sufficient to render him cautious in the selection of the position which should form his outlook.

And a magnificent sight indeed presented itself when he took his stand among the glittering pinnacles. Far as the eye could reach, the sea lay stretched in the sunshine, calm as a mill-pond, and sparkling with ice-jewels of every shape and size. An Arctic haze, dry and sunny, seemed to float over all like golden gauze. Not only was the sun encircled by a beautiful halo, but also by those lovely lights of the Arctic regions known as parhelia, or mock-suns. Four of these made no mean display in emulation of their great original. On the horizon, refraction caused the ice-floes and bergs to present endless variety of fantastic forms, and in the immediate foreground—at the giant's feet—tremendous precipices of ice went sheer down into the deep water, while, away to the right, where a bay still retained its winter grasp of an ice-field, could be seen, like white bee-hives, the temporary snow-huts of these wandering Eskimos.

Well might the eye, as well as the head, of the so-called savage rise upwards while he pondered the great mystery of the Maker of all! As he stood on the giddy ledge, rapt in contemplation, an

event occurred which was fitted to deepen the solemnity of his thoughts. Not twenty yards from the point on which he stood, a great ice-cliff—the size of an average house—snapped off with a rending crash, and went thundering down into the deep, which seemed to boil and heave with sentient emotion as it received the mass, and swallowed it in a turmoil indescribable.

Chingatok sprang from his post and sought a safer but not less lofty outlook, while the new-born berg, rising from the sea, swayed majestically to and fro in its new-found cradle.

"It is not understandable," muttered the giant as he took up his new position and gazed with feelings of awe upon the grand scene. "I wonder if the pale-faced men in the floating islands think much about these things. Perhaps they dwell in a land which is still more wonderful than this, and hunt the walrus and the seal like us. It is said they come for nothing else but to see our land and find out what is in it. Why should I not go to see their land? My kayak is large, though it has no wings. The land may be far off, but am I not strong? They are pale-faced; perhaps the reason is that they are starved. That must be so, else they would not leave their home. I might bring some of the poor creatures to this happy land of ours, where there is always plenty to eat. They might send messengers for their relations to come and dwell with us. I will speak to mother about that; she is wise!"

Like a dutiful son, the giant turned on his heel, descended the cliffs, and went straight home to consult with his mother.

Chapter Two.
Unexpected Meetings, Alarms, and Confidences

"Mother, I have been thinking," said Chingatok, as he crept into his hut and sat down on a raised bench of moss.

"That is not news, my son; you think much. You are not like other men. They think little and eat much."

The stout little woman looked up through the smoke of her cooking-lamp and smiled, but her big son was too much absorbed in his thoughts to observe her pleasantry, so she continued the cooking of a walrus chop in silence.

"The Kablunets are not to be seen, mother," resumed Chingatok. "I have looked for them every day for a long time, and begin to weary. My thought is now to launch my kayak when we come to open water, load it with meat, take four spears and more lines than a strong hunter needs for a whole season; then paddle away south to discover the land of the Kablunets. They must be poor; they may be starving. I will guide them to our home, and show them this land of plenty."

He paused abruptly, and looked at his mother with solemn anxiety, for he was well aware that he had given her food for profound reflection.

We feel tempted here to repeat our remark about the strong

resemblance between different members of the human family, but refrain.

This untutored woman of the Arctic lands met her son's proposition with the well-known reply of many civilised persons.

"Of what use would it be, my son? No good can come of searching out these poor lands. You cannot benefit the miserable Kablunets. Perhaps they are savage and fierce; and you are sure to meet with dangers by the way. Worse—you may die!"

"Mother," returned Chingatok, "when the white bear stands up with his claws above my head and his mouth a-gape, does my hand tremble or my spear fail?"

"No, my son."

"Then why do you speak to me of danger and death?"

Toolooha was not gifted with argumentative powers. She relapsed into silence and lamp-smoke.

But her son was not to be so easily dissuaded. He adopted a line of reasoning which never failed.

"Mother," he said, sadly, "it may be that you are right, and I am of too fearful a spirit to venture far away from you by myself; I will remain here if you think me a coward."

"Don't say so, Chingatok. You know what I think. Go, if you must go, but who will hunt for your poor old mother when you are gone?"

This was an appeal which the astute little woman knew to be very powerful with her son. She buried her head in the smoke again, and left the question to simmer.

Chingatok was tender-hearted. He said nothing, but, as usual, he thought much, as he gazed in a contemplative manner at his oily parent, and there is no saying to what lengths of self-sacrifice he would have gone if he had not been aroused, and his thoughts scattered to the winds, by a yell so tremendous that it might well have petrified him on the spot. But it did nothing of the kind. It only caused him to drop on his knees, dart through the tunnel like an eel, spring into the open air like an electrified rabbit from its burrow, and stand up with a look of blazing interrogation on his huge countenance.

The cry had been uttered by his bosom friend and former playmate Oolichuk, who came running towards him with frantic gesticulations.

"The Kablunets!" he gasped, "the white-faces have come!—on a floating island!—alive!—smoking!—it is all true!"

"Where?" demanded our giant, whose face blazed up at once.

"There!" cried Oolichuk, pointing seaward towards the ice-hummocks with both hands, and glaring up at his friend.

Without another word Chingatok ran off in the direction pointed out, followed hotly by his friend.

Oolichuk was a large and powerful man, but, his legs were remarkably short. His pace, compared with that of Chingatok, was as that of a sparrow to an ostrich. Nevertheless he kept up, for he was agile and vigorous.

"Have you seen them—have you spoken?" asked the giant, abruptly.

"Yes, all the tribe was there."

"No one killed?"

"No, but terribly frightened; they made me run home to fetch you."

Chingatok increased his speed. So did Oolichuk.

While they run, let us leap a little ahead of them, reader, and see what had caused all the excitement.

The whole party had gone off that morning, with the exception of Chingatok and his mother, to spear seals in a neighbouring bay, where these animals had been discovered in great numbers. Dogs and sledges had been taken, because a successful hunt was expected, and the ice was sufficiently firm.

The bay was very large. At its distant southern extremity there rose a great promontory which jutted far out into the sea. While the men were busy there making preparations to begin the hunt, Oblooria, Chingatok's little sister, amused herself by mounting a hummock of ice about thirty feet high.

When there, she chanced to look towards the promontory. Instantly she opened her eyes and mouth and uttered a squeal that brought her friends running to her side.

Oolichuk was the first to reach her. He had no need to ask questions. Oblooria's gaze directed his, and there, coming round the promontory, he beheld an object which had never before filled his wondering eyes. It was, apparently, a monstrous creature with a dark body and towering wings, and a black thing in its middle, from which were vomited volumes of smoke.

"Kablunets! white men!" he yelled.

"Kablunets!—huk! huk!" echoed the whole tribe, as they scrambled up the ice-hill one after another.

And they were right. A vessel of the pale-faces had penetrated these northern solitudes, and was advancing swiftly before a light breeze under sail and steam.

Despite the preparation their minds had received, and the fact that they were out in search of these very people, this sudden appearance of them filled most of the Eskimos with alarm—some of them with absolute terror, insomuch that the term "pale-face" became most appropriate to themselves.

"What shall we do?" exclaimed Akeetolik, one of the men.

"Fly!" cried Ivitchuk, another of the men, whose natural courage was not high.

"No; let us stay and behold!" said Oolichuk, with a look of contempt at his timid comrade.

"Yes, stay and see," said Eemerk sternly.

"But they will kill us," faltered the young woman, whom we have already mentioned by the name of Tekkona.

"No—no one would kill *you*," said Eemerk gallantly; "they would only carry you off and keep you."

While they conversed with eager, anxious looks, the steam yacht—for such she was—advanced rapidly, threading her way among the ice-fields and floes with graceful rapidity and ease, to the unutterable amazement of the natives. Although her sails were spread to catch the light breeze, her chief motive power at

the time was a screw-propeller.

"Yes, it must be alive," said Oolichuk to Akeetolik, with a look of solemn awe. "The white men do not paddle. They could not lift paddles big enough to move such a great oomiak,"[1], "and the wind is not strong; it could not blow them so fast. See, the oomiak has a tail—and wags it!"

"Oh! *do* let us run away!" whispered the trembling Oblooria, as she took shelter behind Tekkona.

"No, no," said the latter, who was brave as well as pretty, "we need not fear. Our men will take care of us."

"I wish that Chingatok was here!" whimpered poor little Oblooria, nestling closer to Tekkona and grasping her tail, "he fears nothing and nobody."

"Ay," assented Tekkona with a peculiar smile, "and is brave enough to fight everything and everybody."

"Does Oblooria think that no one can fight but the giant?" whispered Oolichuk, who stood nearest to the little maid.

He drew a knife made of bone from his boot, where it usually lay concealed, and flourished it, with a broad grin. The girl laughed, blushed slightly, and, looking down, toyed with the sleeve of Tekkona's fur coat.

Meanwhile the yacht drew near to the floe on which our Eskimos were grouped. The ice was cracked right across, leaving a lane of open water about ten feet wide between its inner edge

[1] The oomiak is the open boat of skin used by Eskimo *women*, and is capable of holding several persons. The kayak, or man's canoe, holds only one.

and the shore ice. The Eskimos stood on the land side of this crack, a hundred yards or so from it. On nearing the floe the strange vessel checked her speed.

"It moves its wings!" exclaimed Eemerk.

"And turns its side to us," said Akeetolik.

"And wags its tail no more," cried Oolichuk.

"Oh! do, *do* let us run away," gasped Oblooria.

"No, no, we will not run," said Tekkona.

At that moment a white cloud burst from the side of the yacht.

"Hi! hee! huk!" shouted the whole tribe in amazement.

A crash followed which not only rattled like thunder among the surrounding cliffs, but went like electric fire to the central marrow of each Eskimo. With a united yell of terror, they leaped three feet into the air—more or less—turned about, and fled. Tekkona, who was active as a young deer, herself took the lead; and Oblooria, whose limbs trembled so that she could hardly run, held on to Oolichuk, who gallantly dragged her along. The terror was increased by a prolonged screech from the steam-whistle. It was a wild scramble in sudden panic. The Eskimos reached their sledges, harnessed their teams, left their spears on the ice, cracked their whips, which caused the dogs to join in the yelling chorus, and made for the land at a furious gallop.

But their fear began to evaporate in a few minutes, and Oolichuk was the first to check his pace.

"Ho! stop," he cried.

Eemerk looked back, saw that they were not pursued, and

pulled up. The others followed suit, and soon the fugitives were seen by those on board the yacht grouped together and gazing intently at them from the top of another ice-hummock.

The effect of the cannon-shot on board the yacht itself was somewhat startling. The gun had been loaded on the other side of the promontory for the purpose of being fired if Eskimos were not visible on the coast beyond, in order to attract them from the interior, if they should chance to be there. When, however, the natives were discovered on the ice, the gun was, of course, unnecessary, and had been forgotten. It therefore burst upon the crew with a shock of surprise, and caused the Captain, who was in the cabin at the moment, to shoot up from the hatchway like a Jack-in-the-box.

"Who did that?" he demanded, looking round sternly.

The crew, who had been gazing intently at the natives, did not know.

"I really cannot tell, sir," said the chief mate, touching his cap.

Two strapping youths—one about sixteen, the other eighteen—leaned over the side and paid no regard to the question; but it was obvious, from the heaving motion of their shoulders, that they were not so much absorbed in contemplation as they pretended to be.

"Come, Leo, Alf, you know something about this."

The Captain was a large powerful man of about forty, with bushy iron-grey curls, a huge beard, and an aquiline nose. The two youths turned to him at once, and Leo, the eldest, said

respectfully, “We did not see it done, uncle, but—but we think —”

“Well, what do you think?”

At that moment a delicate-looking, slender lad, about twelve years of age, with fair curly hair, and flashing blue eyes, stepped out from behind the funnel, which had hitherto concealed him, and said boldly, though blushingly—

“I did it, father.”

“Ha! just like you; why did you do it? eh!”

“I can hardly tell, father,” said the boy, endeavouring to choke a laugh, “but the Eskimos looked so funny, and I—I had a box of matches in my pocket, and—and—I thought a shot would make them look so very much funnier, and—and—I was right!”

“Well, Benjamin, you may go below, and remain there till further orders.”

When Captain Vane called his son “Benjamin,” he was seriously displeased. At other times he called him Benjy.

“Yes, father,” replied the boy, with a very bad grace, and down he went in a state of rebellious despair, for he was wildly anxious to witness all that went on.

His despair was abated, however, when, in the course of a few minutes, the yacht swung round so as to present her stern to the shore, and remained in that position, enabling him to observe proceedings from the cabin windows almost as well as if he had been on deck. He was not aware that his father, knowing his son’s nature, and wishing to temper discipline with mercy, had placed

the vessel in that position for his special benefit!

The difficulty now was, how to attract the natives, and inspire them with confidence in the good intentions of their visitors. In any case this would have been a difficult matter, but the firing of that unlucky gun had increased the difficulty tenfold. When, however, Captain Vane saw the natives cease their mad flight, and turn to gaze at the vessel, his hopes revived, and he set about a series of ingenious efforts to attain his end.

First of all, he sent a boat in charge of his two nephews, Leonard and Alphonse Vandervell, to set up a small table on the ice, on which were temptingly arranged various presents, consisting of knives, beads, looking-glasses, and articles of clothing. Having done this, they retired, like wary anglers, to watch for a bite. But the fish would not rise, though they observed the proceedings with profound attention from the distant hummock. After waiting a couple of hours, the navigators removed the table and left an Eskimo dog in its place, with a string of blue beads tied round its neck. But this bait also failed.

"Try something emblematic, uncle," suggested Leonard, the elder of the brothers before mentioned.

"And get Benjy to manufacture it," said Alphonse.

As Benjy was possessed of the most fertile imagination on board, he was released from punishment and brought on deck. The result of his effort of genius was the creation of a huge white calico flag, on which were painted roughly the figure of a sailor and an Eskimo sitting on an iceberg, with a kettle of soup

between them. On one side were a pair of hands clasped together; on the other a sprig of heath, the only shrub that could be seen on the shore.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Leo and Alf in the same breath, as they held the flag up to view.

"You'll become a Royal Academician if you cultivate your talents, Benjy," said the Captain, who was proud, as well as fond, of this his only child.

The boy said nothing, but a pleased expression and a twinkle in his eyes proved that he was susceptible to flattery, though not carried off his legs by it.

The banner with the strange device was fixed to a pole which was erected on an ice-hummock between the ship and the shore, and a bag containing presents was hung at the foot of it.

Still these Eskimo fish would not bite, though they "rose" at the flag.

Oolichuk's curiosity had become so intense that he could not resist it. He advanced alone, very warily, and looked at it, but did not dare to touch it. Soon he was joined by Eemerk and the others. Seeing this, Captain Vane sent to meet them an interpreter whom he had procured at one of the Greenland settlements in passing. Just as this man, whose name was Anders, stepped into the boat alongside, it occurred to the Eskimos that their leader should be sent for. Oolichuk undertook to fetch him; he ran back to the sledges, harnessed a small team, and set off like the wind. Thus it came to pass that Chingatok and his mother

were startled by a yell, as before mentioned.

Meanwhile Anders was put on the ice, and advanced alone and unarmed towards the canal, or chasm, which separated the parties. He carried a small white flag and a bag containing presents. Innocent-looking and defenceless though he was, however, the Eskimos approached him with hesitating and slow steps, regarding every motion of the interpreter with suspicion, and frequently stooping to thrust their hands into their boots, in which they all carried knives.

At last, when within hearing, Anders shouted a peaceful message, and there was much hallooing and gesticulation among the natives, but nothing comprehensible came of it. After a time Anders thought he recognised words of a dialect with which he was acquainted, and to his satisfaction found that they understood him.

"Kakeite! kakeite!—come on, come on," he cried, holding up the present.

"Nakrie! nakrie!—no, no, go away—you want to kill us," answered the doubtful natives.

Thereupon Anders protested that nothing was further from his thoughts, that he was a man and a friend, and had a mother like themselves, and that he wanted to please them.

At this Eemerk approached to the edge of the canal, and, drawing a knife from his boot, said, "Go away! I can kill you."

Nothing daunted, Anders said he was not afraid, and taking a good English knife from his bag threw it across the canal.

Eemerk picked it up, and was so pleased that he exclaimed, "Heigh-yaw! heigh-yaw!" joyously, and pulled his nose several times. Anders, understanding this to be a sign of friendship, immediately pulled his own nose, smiled, and threw several trinkets and articles of clothing to the other natives, who had by that time drawn together in a group, and were chattering in great surprise at the things presented. Ivitchuk was perhaps the most excited among them. He chanced to get hold of a round hox, in the lid of which was a mirror. On beholding himself looking at himself, he made such an awful face that he dropt the glass and sprang backward, tripping up poor Oblooria in the act, and tumbling over her.

This was greeted with a shout of laughter, and Anders, now believing that friendly relations had been established, went to the boat for a plank to bridge the chasm. As Leo and Alf assisted him to carry the plank, the natives again became grave and anxious.

"Stop!" shouted Eemerk, "you want to kill us. What great creature is that? Does it come from the moon or the sun? Does it eat fire and smoke?"

"No, it is only a dead thing. It is a wooden house."

"You lie!" cried the polite Eemerk, "it shakes its wings. It vomits fire and smoke. It has a tail, and wags it."

While speaking he slowly retreated, for the plank was being placed in position, and the other natives were showing symptoms of an intention to fly.

Just then a shout was heard landwards. Turning round they

saw a dog-sledge flying over the ice towards them, with Oolichuk flourishing the long-lashed whip, and the huge form of their leader beside him.

In a few seconds they dashed up, and Chingatok sprang upon the ice. Without a moment's hesitation he strode towards the plank and crossed it. Walking up to Anders he pulled his own nose. The interpreter was not slow to return the salutation, as he looked up at the giant with surprise, not unmingled with awe. In addition, he grasped his huge hand, squeezed, and shook it.

Chingatok smiled blandly, and returned the squeeze so as to cause the interpreter to wince. Then, perceiving at once that he had got possession of a key to the affections of the strangers, he offered to shake hands with Leonard and his brother, stooping with regal urbanity to them as he did so. By this time the Captain and first mate, with Benjy and several of the crew, were approaching. Instead of exhibiting fear, Chingatok advanced to meet them, and shook hands all round. He gazed at Captain Vane with a look of admiration which was not at first quite accountable, until he laid his hand gently on the Captain's magnificent beard, and stroked it.

The Captain laughed, and again grasped the hand of the Eskimo. They both squeezed, but neither could make the other wince, for Captain Vane was remarkably powerful, though comparatively short of limb.

"Well, you *are* a good fellow in every way," exclaimed the Captain.

"Heigh, yah!" returned Chingatok, who no doubt meant to be complimentary, though we confess our inability to translate. It was obvious that two sympathetic souls had met.

"Come across," shouted Chingatok, turning abruptly to his companions, who had been gazing at his proceedings in open-mouthed wonder.

The whole tribe at once obeyed the order, and in a few minutes they were in the seventh heaven of delight and good-will, receiving gifts and handshakings, each pulling his own nose frequently by way of expressing satisfaction or friendship, and otherwise exchanging compliments with the no less amiable and gratified crew of the steam yacht *Whitebear*.

Chapter Three.
Shows how the Eskimos were Entertained by the White Men

The *Whitebear* steam yacht, owned and commanded by Captain Jacob Vane, had sailed from England, and was bound for the North Pole.

"I'll find it—I'm bound to find it," was the Captain's usual mode of expressing himself to his intimates on the subject, "if there's a North Pole in the world at all, and my nephews Leo and Alf will help me. Leo's a doctor, *almost*, and Alf's a scientific Jack-of-all-trades, so we can't fail. I'll take my boy Benjy for the benefit of his health, and see if we don't bring home a chip o' the Pole big enough to set up beside Cleopatra's Needle on the Thames embankment."

There was tremendous energy in Captain Vane, and indomitable resolution; but energy and resolution cannot achieve all things. There are other factors in the life of man which help to mould his destiny.

Short and sad and terrible—ay, we might even say tremendous—was the *Whitebear's* wild career.

Up to the time of her meeting with the Eskimos, all had gone well. Fair weather and favouring winds had blown her across the Atlantic. Sunshine and success had received her, as it were, in the

Arctic regions. The sea was unusually free of ice. Upernavik, the last of the Greenland settlements touched at, was reached early in the season, and the native interpreter Anders secured. The dreaded "middle passage," near the head of Baffin's Bay, was made in the remarkably short space of fifty hours, and, passing Cape York into the North Water, they entered Smith's Sound without having received more than a passing bump—an Arctic kiss as it were—from the Polar ice.

In Smith's Sound fortune still favoured them. These resolute intending discoverers of the North Pole passed in succession the various "farthests" of previous explorers, and the stout brothers Vandervell, with their cousin Benjy Vane, gazed eagerly over the bulwarks at the swiftly-passing headlands, while the Captain pointed out the places of interest, and kept up a running commentary on the brave deeds and high aspirations of such well-known men as Frobisher, Davis, Hudson, Ross, Parry, Franklin, Kane, McClure, Rae, McClintock, Hayes, Hall, Nares, Markham, and all the other heroes of Arctic story.

It was an era in the career of those three youths that stood out bright and fresh—never to be forgotten—this first burst of the realities of the Arctic world on minds which had been previously well informed by books. The climax was reached on the day when the Eskimos of the far north were met with.

But from that time a change took place in their experience. Fortune seemed to frown from that memorable day. We say "seemed," because knitted brows do not always or necessarily

indicate what is meant by a frown.

After the first fears of the Eskimos had been allayed, a party of them were invited to go on board the ship. They accepted the invitation and went, headed by Chingatok.

That noble savage required no persuasion. From the first he had shown himself to be utterly devoid of fear. He felt that the grand craving of his nature—a thirst for knowledge—was about to be gratified, and that would have encouraged him to risk anything, even if he had been much less of a hero than he was.

But if fear had no influence over our giant, the same cannot be said of his companions. Oolichuk, indeed, was almost as bold, though he exhibited a considerable amount of caution in his looks and movements; but Eemerk, and one or two of his friends, betrayed their craven spirits in frequent startled looks and changing colour. Ivitchuk was a strange compound of nervousness and courage, while Akeetolik appeared to have lost the power of expressing every feeling but one—that of blank amazement. Indeed, surprise at what they saw on board the steam yacht was the predominant feeling amongst these children of nature. Their eyebrows seemed to have gone up and fixed themselves in the middle of their foreheads, and their eyes and mouths to have opened wide permanently. None of the women accepted the invitation to go aboard except Tekkona, and Oblooria followed her, not because she was courageous, but because she seemed to cling to the stronger nature as a protection from undefined and mysterious dangers.

"Tell them," said Captain Vane to Anders, the Eskimo interpreter, "that these are the machines that drive the ship along when there is no wind."

He pointed down the hatchway, where the complication of rods and cranks glistened in the hold.

"Huk!" exclaimed the Eskimos. They sometimes exclaimed Hi! ho! hoy! and hah! as things were pointed out to them, but did not venture on language more intelligible at first.

"Let 'em hear the steam-whistle," suggested the mate.

Before the Captain could countermand the order, Benjy had touched the handle and let off a short, sharp *skirl*. The effect on the natives was powerful.

They leaped, with a simultaneous yell, at least a foot off the deck, with the exception of Chingatok, though even he was visibly startled, while Oblooria seized Tekkona round the waist, and buried her face in her friend's jacket.

A brief explanation soon restored them to equanimity, and they were about to pass on to some other object of interest, when both the steam-whistle and the escape-valve were suddenly opened to their full extent, and there issued from the engine a hissing yell so prolonged and deafening that even the Captain's angry shout was not heard.

A yard at least was the leap into the air made by the weakest of the Eskimos—except our giant, who seemed, however, to shrink into himself, while he grasped his knife and looked cautiously round, as if to guard himself from any foe that might appear.

Eemerk fairly turned and fled to the stern of the yacht, over which he would certainly have plunged had he not been forcibly restrained by two stout seamen. The others, trembling violently, stood still, because they knew not what to do, and poor Oblooria fell flat on the deck, catching Tekkona by the tail, and pulling her down beside her.

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed the Captain, when the din ceased, "I—I—go down, sir, to—"

"Oh! father, don't be hard on me," pleaded Benjy, with a gleefully horrified look, "I really could *not* resist it. The—the temptation was too strong!"

"The temptation to give you a rope's-ending is almost too strong for *me*, Benjamin," returned the Captain sternly, but there was a twinkle in his eye notwithstanding, as he turned to explain to Chingatok that his son had, by way of jest, allowed part of the mighty Power imprisoned in the machinery to escape.

The Eskimo received the explanation with dignified gravity, and a faint smile played on his lips as he glanced approvingly at Benjy, for he loved a jest, and was keenly alive to a touch of humour.

"What power is imprisoned in the machinery?" asked our Eskimo through the interpreter.

"What power?" repeated the Captain with a puzzled look, "why, it's boiling water—steam." Here he tried to give a clear account of the nature and power and application of steam, but, not being gifted with capacity for lucid explanation, and the mind

of Anders being unaccustomed to such matters, the result was that the brain of Chingatok was filled with ideas that were fitted rather to amaze than to instruct him.

After making the tour of the vessel, the party again passed the engine hatch. Chingatok touched the interpreter quietly, and said in a low, grave tone, "Tell Blackbeard," (thus he styled the Captain), "to let the Power yell again!"

Anders glanced up in the giant's grave countenance with a look of amused surprise. He understood him, and whispered to the Captain, who smiled intelligently, and, turning to his son, said —

"Do it again, Benjy. Give it 'em strong."

Never before did that lad obey his father with such joyous alacrity. In another instant the whistle shrieked, and the escape-valve hissed ten times more furiously than before. Up went the Eskimo—three feet or more—as if in convulsions, and away went Eemerk to the stern, over which he dived, swam to the floe, leaped on his sledge, cracked his whip, and made for home on the wings of terror. Doubtless an evil conscience helped his cowardice.

Meanwhile Chingatok laughed, despite his struggles to be grave. This revealed the trick to some of his quick-witted and humour-loving companions, who at once burst into loud laughter. Even Oblooria dismissed her fears and smiled. In this restored condition they were taken down to the cabin and fed sumptuously.

That night, as Chingatok sat beside his mother, busy with a seal's rib, he gradually revealed to her the wonders he had seen.

"The white men are very wise, mother."

"So you have said four times, my son."

"But you cannot understand it."

"But my son can make me understand," said Toolooha, helping the amiable giant to a second rib.

Chingatok gazed at his little mother with a look of solemnity that evidently perplexed her. She became restless under it, and wiped her forehead uneasily with the flap at the end of her tail. The youth seemed about to speak, but he only sighed and addressed himself to the second rib, over which he continued to gaze while he masticated.

"My thoughts are big, mother," he said, laying down the bare bone.

"That may well be, for so is your head, my son," she replied, gently.

"I know not how to begin, mother."

"Another rib may open your lips, perhaps," suggested the old woman, softly.

"True; give me one," said Chingatok.

The third rib seemed to have the desired effect, for, while busy with it, he began to give his parent a graphic account of the yacht and its crew, and it was really interesting to note how correctly he described all that he understood of what he had seen. But some of the things he had partly failed to comprehend, and about these

he was vague.

"And they have a—a Power, mother, shut up in a hard thing, so that it can't get out unless they let it, and it drives the big canoe through the water. It is very strong—terrible!"

"Is it a devil?" asked Toolooha.

"No, it is not alive. It is dead. It is *that*," he pointed with emphasis to a pot hanging over the lamp out of which a little steam was issuing, and looked at his mother with awful solemnity. She returned the look with something of incredulity.

"Yes, mother, the Power is not a beast. It lives not, yet it drives the white man's canoe, which is as big as a little iceberg, and it whistles; it shrieks; it yells!"

A slightly sorrowful look rested for a moment on Toolooha's benign countenance. It was evident that she suspected her son either of derangement, or having forsaken the paths of truth. But it passed like a summer cloud.

"Tell me more," she said, laying her hand affectionately on the huge arm of Chingatok, who had fallen into a contemplative mood, and, with hands clasped over one knee, sat gazing upwards.

Before he could reply the heart of Toolooha was made to bound by a shriek more terrible than she had ever before heard or imagined.

Chingatok caught her by the wrist, held up a finger as if to impose silence, smiled brightly, and listened.

Again the shriek was repeated with prolonged power.

“Tell me, my son,” gasped Toolooha, “is Oblooria—are the people safe? Why came you to me alone?”

“The little sister and the people are safe. I came alone to prevent your being taken by surprise. Did I not say that it could shriek and yell? This is the white man’s big canoe.”

Dropping the old woman’s hand as he spoke, Chingatok darted into the open air with the agility of a Polar bear, and Toolooha followed with the speed of an Arctic hare.

Chapter Four.
A Catastrophe and a Bold Decision

Two days after her arrival at the temporary residence of the northern Eskimos, the steam yacht *Whitebear*, while close to the shore, was beset by ice, so that she could neither advance nor retreat. Everywhere, as far as the eye could reach, the sea was covered with hummocks and bergs and fields of ice, so closely packed that there was not a piece of open water to be seen, with the exception of one small basin a few yards ahead of the lead or lane of water in which the vessel had been imprisoned.

"No chance of escaping from this, I fear, for a long time," said Alf Vandervell to his brother, as they stood near the wheel, looking at the desolate prospect.

"It seems quite hopeless," said Leo, with, however, a look of confidence that ill accorded with his words.

"I do believe we are frozen in for the winter," said Benjy Vane, coming up at the moment.

"There speaks ignorance," said the Captain, whose head appeared at the cabin hatchway. "If any of you had been in these regions before, you would have learned that nothing is so uncertain as the action of pack ice. At one time you may be hard and fast, so that you couldn't move an inch. A few hours after, the set of the currents may loosen the pack, and open up

lanes of water through which you may easily make your escape. Sometimes it opens up so as to leave almost a clear sea in a few hours."

"But it is pretty tight packed just now, father, and looks wintry-like, doesn't it?" said Benjy in a desponding tone.

"Looks! boy, ay, but things are not what they seem hereaway. You saw four mock-suns round the real one yesterday, didn't you? and the day before you saw icebergs floating in the air, eh?"

"True, father, but these appearances were deceptive, whereas this ice, which looks so tightly packed, is a reality."

"That is so, lad, but it is not set fast for the winter, though it looks like it. Well, doctor," added the Captain, turning towards a tall cadaverous man who came on deck just then with the air and tread of an invalid, "how goes it with you? Better, I hope?"

He asked this with kindly interest as he laid his strong hand on the sick man's shoulder; but the doctor shook his head and smiled sadly.

"It is a great misfortune to an expedition, Captain, when the doctor himself falls sick," he said, sitting down on the skylight with a sigh.

"Come, come, cheer up, doctor," returned the Captain, heartily, "don't be cast down; we'll all turn doctors for the occasion, and nurse you well in spite of yourself."

"I'll keep up all heart, Captain, you may depend on't, as long as two of my bones will stick together, but—well, to change the subject; what are you going to do now?"

"Just all that can be done in the circumstances," replied the Captain. "You see, we cannot advance over ice either with sail or steam, but there's a basin just ahead which seems a little more secure than that in which we lie. I'll try to get into it. There is nothing but a neck of ice between us and it, which I think I could cut by charging in under full steam, and there seems a faint gleam of something far ahead, which encourages me. Tell the steward to fetch my glasses, Benjy."

"Butterface!" shouted the boy.

"Yis, massa."

"Fetch the Captain's glasses, please."

"Yis, massa."

A pair of large binoculars were brought up by a huge negro, whose name was pre-eminently unsuggestive of his appearance.

After a long steady gaze at the horizon, the Captain shut up the glass with an air of determination, and ordered the engineer to get up full steam, and the crew to be ready with the ice-poles.

There was a large berg at the extremity of the lakelet of open water into which Captain Vane wished to break. It was necessary to keep well out of the way of that berg. The Captain trusted chiefly to his screw, but got out the ice-poles in case they should be required.

When all the men were stationed, the order was given to go ahead full steam. The gallant little yacht charged the neck of ice like a living creature, hit it fair, cut right through, and scattered the fragments right and left as she sailed majestically into the

lakelet beyond. The shock was severe, but no harm was done, everything on board having been made as strong as possible, and of the very best material, for a voyage in ice-laden seas.

An unforeseen event followed, however, which ended in a series of most terrible catastrophes. The neck of ice through which they had broken had acted as a check on the pressure of the great body of the floe, and it was no sooner removed than the heavy mass began to close in with slow but irresistible power, compelling the little vessel to steam close up to the iceberg—so close that some of the upper parts actually overhung the deck.

They were slowly forced into this dangerous position. With breathless anxiety the Captain and crew watched the apparently gentle, but really tremendous grinding of the ice against the vessel's side. Even the youngest on board could realise the danger. No one moved, for nothing whatever could be done.

"Everything depends, under God, on the ice easing off before we are crushed," said the Captain.

As he spoke, the timbers of the yacht seemed to groan under the pressure; then there was a succession of loud cracks, and the vessel was thrust bodily up the sloping sides of the berg. While in this position, with the bow high and dry, a mass of ice was forced against the stern-post, and the screw-propeller was snapped off as if it had been made of glass.

Poor Captain Vane's heart sank as if he had received his death-blow, for he knew that the yacht was now, even in the event of escaping, reduced to an ordinary vessel dependent on

its sails. The shock seemed to have shaken the berg itself, for at that moment a crashing sound was heard overhead. The terror-stricken crew looked up, and for one moment a pinnacle like a church spire was seen to flash through the air right above them. It fell with an indescribable roar close alongside, deluging the decks with water. There was a momentary sigh of relief, which, however, was chased away by a succession of falling masses, varying from a pound to a ton in weight, which came down on the deck like cannon-shots, breaking the topmasts, and cutting to pieces much of the rigging. Strange to say, none of the men were seriously injured, though many received bruises more or less severe.

During this brief but thrilling period, the brothers Vandervell and Benjy Vane crouched close together beside the port bulwarks, partially screened from the falling ice by the mizzen shrouds. The Captain stood on the quarter-deck, quite exposed, and apparently unconscious of danger, the picture of despair.

"It can't last long," sighed poor Benjy, looking solemnly up at the vast mass of the bluish-white berg, which hung above them as if ready to fall.

Presently the pressure ceased, then the ice eased off, and in a few minutes the *Whitebear* slid back into the sea, a pitiable wreck! Now had come the time for action.

"Out poles, my lads, and shove her off the berg!" was the sharp order.

Every one strained as if for life at the ice-poles, and slowly

forced the yacht away from the dreaded berg. It mattered not that they were forcing her towards a rocky shore. Any fate would be better than being crushed under a mountain of ice.

But the danger was not yet past. No sooner had they cleared the berg, and escaped from that form of destruction, than the ice began again to close in, and this time the vessel was "nipped" with such severity, that some of her principal timbers gave way. Finally, her back was broken, and the bottom forced in.

"So," exclaimed the Captain, with a look of profound grief, "our voyage in the *Whitebear*, lads, has come to an end. All that we can do now is to get the boats and provisions, and as much of the cargo as we can, safe on the ice. And sharp's the word, for when the floes ease off, the poor little yacht will certainly go to the bottom."

"No, massa," said the negro steward, stepping on deck at that moment, "we can't go to de bottom, cause we's dare a-ready!"

"What d'ye mean, Butterface?"

"Jus' what me say," replied the steward, with a look of calm resignation. "I's bin b'low, an' seed de rocks stickin' troo de bottom. Der's one de size ob a jolly-boat's bow comed right troo my pantry, an' knock all de crockery to smash, an' de best teapot, he's so flat he wouldn't know hisself in a lookin'-glass."

It turned out to be as Butterface said. The pack had actually thrust the little vessel on a shoal, which extended out from the headland off which the catastrophe occurred, and there was therefore no fear of her sinking.

"Well, we've reason to be thankful for that, at all events," said the Captain, with an attempt to look cheerful; "come, lads, let's to work. Whatever our future course is to be, our first business is to get the boats and cargo out of danger."

With tremendous energy—because action brought relief to their overstrained feelings—the crew of the ill-fated yacht set to work to haul the boats upon the grounded ice. The tide was falling, so that a great part of the most valuable part of the cargo was placed in security before the rising tide interrupted the work.

This was fortunate, for, when the water reached a certain point the ice began to move, and the poor little vessel was so twisted about that they dared not venture on board of her.

That night—if we may call it night in a region where the sun never quite went down—the party encamped on the north-western coast of Greenland, in the lee of a huge cliff just beyond which the tongue of a mighty glacier dipped into the sea. For convenience the party divided into two, with a blazing fire for each, round which the castaways circled, conversing in subdued, sad tones while supper was being prepared.

It was a solemn occasion, and a scene of indescribable grandeur, with the almost eternal glacier of Greenland—the great Humboldt glacier—shedding its bergs into the dark blue sea, the waters of which had by that time been partially cleared to the northward. On the left was the weird pack and its thousand grotesque forms, with the wreck in its iron grasp; on the right the perpendicular cliffs, and the bright sky over all, with the smoke

of the campfires rising into it from the foreground.

"Now, my friends," said Captain Vane to the crew when assembled after supper, "I am no longer your commander, for my vessel is a wreck, but as I suppose you still regard me as your leader, I assemble you here for the purpose of considering our position, and deciding on what is best to be done."

Here the Captain said, among other things, it was his opinion that the *Whitebear* was damaged beyond the possibility of repair, that their only chance of escape lay in the boats, and that the distance between the place on which they stood and Upernavik, although great, was not beyond the reach of resolute men.

"Before going further, or expressing a decided opinion," he added, "I would hear what the officers have to say on this subject. Let the first mate speak."

"It's my opinion," said the mate, "that there's only one thing to be done, namely, to start for home as soon and as fast as we can. We have good boats, plenty of provisions, and are all stout and healthy, excepting our doctor, whom we will take good care of, and expect to do no rough work."

"Thanks, mate," said the doctor with a laugh, "I think that, at all events, I shall keep well enough to physic you if you get ill."

"Are you willing to take charge of the party in the event of my deciding to remain here?" asked the Captain of the mate.

"Certainly, sir," he replied, with a look of slight surprise. "You know I am quite able to do so. The second mate, too, is as able as I am. For that matter, most of the men, I think, would find little

difficulty in navigating a boat to Upernavik."

"That is well," returned the Captain, "because I do not intend to return with you."

"Not return!" exclaimed the doctor; "surely you don't mean to winter here."

"No, not here, but further north," replied the Captain, with a smile which most of the party returned, for they thought he was jesting.

Benjy Vane, however, did not think so. A gleeful look of triumph caused his face, as it were, to sparkle, and he said, eagerly—

"We'll winter at the North Pole, father, eh?"

This was greeted with a general laugh.

"But seriously, uncle, what do you mean to do?" asked Leonard Vandervell, who, with his brother, was not unhopeful that the Captain meditated something desperate.

"Benjy is not far off the mark. I intend to winter at the Pole, or as near to it as I can manage to get."

"My dear Captain Vane," said the doctor, with an anxious look, "you cannot really mean what you say. You must be jesting, or mad."

"Well, as to madness," returned the Captain with a peculiar smile, "you ought to know best, for it's a perquisite of your cloth to pronounce people mad or sane, though some of yourselves are as mad as the worst of us; but in regard to jesting, nothing, I assure you, is further from my mind. Listen!"

He rose from the box which had formed his seat, and looked earnestly round on his men. As he stood there, erect, tall, square, powerful, with legs firmly planted, and apart, as if to guard against a lurch of his ship, with his bronzed face flushed, and his dark eye flashing, they all understood that their leader's mind was made up, and that what he had resolved upon, he would certainly attempt to carry out.

"Listen," he repeated; "it was my purpose on leaving England, as you all know, to sail north as far as the ice would let me; to winter where we should stick fast, and organise an over-ice, or overland journey to the Pole with all the appliances of recent scientific discovery, and all the advantages of knowledge acquired by former explorers. It has pleased God to destroy my ship, but my life and my hopes are spared. So are my stores and scientific instruments. I intend, therefore, to carry out my original purpose. I believe that former explorers have erred in some points of their procedure. These errors I shall steer clear of. Former travellers have ignored some facts, and despised some appliances. These facts I will recognise; these appliances I will utilise. With a steam yacht, you, my friends, who have shown so much enthusiasm and courage up to this point, would have been of the utmost service to me. As a party in boats, or on foot, you would only hamper my movements. I mean to prosecute this enterprise almost alone. I shall join myself to the Eskimos."

He paused at this point as if in meditation. Benjy, whose eyes and mouth had been gradually opening to their widest, almost

gasped with astonishment as he glanced at his cousins, whose expressive countenances were somewhat similarly affected.

"I have had some long talks," continued the Captain, "with that big Eskimo Chingatok, through our interpreter, and from what he says I believe my chances of success are considerable. I am all the more confirmed in this resolution because of the readiness and ability of my first mate to guide you out of the Arctic regions, and your willingness to trust him. Anders has agreed to go with me as interpreter, and now, all I want is one other man, because—"

"Put me down, father," cried Benjy, in a burst of excitement —"*I'm* your man."

"Hush, lad," said the Captain with a little smile, "of course I shall take you with me and also your two cousins, but I want one other man to complete the party—but he must be a heartily willing man. Who will volunteer?"

There was silence for a few moments. It was broken by the doctor.

"I for one won't volunteer," he said, "for I'm too much shaken by this troublesome illness to think of such an expedition. If I were well it might be otherwise, but perhaps some of the others will offer."

"You can't expect me to do so," said the mate, "for I've got to guide our party home, as agreed on; besides, under any circumstances, I would not join you, for it is simple madness. You'll forgive me, Captain. I mean no disrespect, but I have sailed

many years to these seas, and I know from experience that what you propose is beyond the power of man to accomplish."

"Experience!" repeated the Captain, quickly. "Has your experience extended further north than this point?"

"No, sir, I have not been further north than this—nobody has. It is beyond the utmost limit yet reached, so far as I know."

"Well, then, you cannot speak from *experience* about what I propose," said the Captain, turning away. "Come, lads, I have no wish to constrain you, I merely give one of you the chance."

Still no one came forward. Every man of the crew of the *Whitebear* had had more or less personal acquaintance with arctic travel and danger. They would have followed Captain Vane anywhere in the yacht, but evidently they had no taste for what he was about to undertake.

At last one stepped to the front. It was Butterface, the steward. This intensely black negro was a bulky, powerful man, with a modest spirit and a strange disbelief in his own capacities, though, in truth, these were very considerable. He came forward, stooping slightly, and rubbing his hands in a deprecating manner.

"'Scuse me, massa Capting. P'r'aps it bery presumsheeous in dis yer chile for to speak afore his betters, but as no oder man 'pears to want to volunteer, I's willin' to go in an' win. Ob course I ain't a man—on'y a nigger, but I's a willin' nigger, an' kin do a few small tings—cook de grub, wash up de cups an' sarsers, pull a oar, clean yer boots, fight de Eskimos if you wants me to, an' ginrally to scrimmage around a'most anything. Moreover, I eats

no more dan a babby—'sep wen I's hungry—an' I'll foller you, massa, troo tick and tin—to de Nort Pole, or de Sout Pole, or de East Pole, or de West Pole—or any oder pole wotsomediver—all de same to Butterface, s'long's you'll let 'im stick by you."

The crew could not help giving the negro a cheer as he finished this loyal speech, and the Captain, although he would have preferred one of the other men, gladly accepted his services.

A few days later the boats were ready and provisioned; adieus were said, hats and handkerchiefs waved, and soon after Captain Vane and his son and two nephews, with Anders and Butterface, were left to fight their battles alone, on the margin of an unexplored, mysterious Polar sea.

Chapter Five.
Left to their Fate

There are times, probably, in all conditions of life, when men feel a species of desolate sadness creeping over their spirits, which they find it hard to shake off or subdue. Such a time arrived to our Arctic adventurers the night after they had parted from the crew of the wrecked *Whitebear*. Nearly everything around, and much within, them was calculated to foster that feeling.

They were seated on the rocky point on the extremity of which their yacht had been driven. Behind them were the deep ravines, broad valleys, black beetling cliffs, grand mountains, stupendous glaciers, and dreary desolation of Greenland. To right and left, and in front of them, lay the chaotic ice-pack of the Arctic sea, with lanes and pools of water visible here and there like lines and spots of ink. Icebergs innumerable rose against the sky, which at the time was entirely covered with grey and gloomy clouds. Gusts of wind swept over the frozen waste now and then, as if a squall which had recently passed, were sighing at the thought of leaving anything undestroyed behind it. When we add to this, that the wanderers were thinking of the comrades who had just left them —the last link, as it were, with the civilised world from which they were self-exiled, of the unknown dangers and difficulties

that lay before them, and of the all but forlorn hope they had undertaken, there need be little wonder that for some time they all looked rather grave, and were disposed to silence.

But life is made up of opposites, light and shade, hard and soft, hot and cold, sweet and sour, for the purpose, no doubt, of placing man between two moral battledores so as to drive the weak and erring shuttlecock of his will right and left, and thus keep it in the middle course of rectitude. No sooner had our adventurers sunk to the profoundest depths of gloom, than the battledore of brighter influences began to play upon them. It did not, however, achieve the end at once.

"I'm in the lowest, bluest, dreariest, grumpiest, and most utterly miserable state of mind I ever was in in all my life," said poor little Benjy Vane, thrusting his hands into his pockets, sitting down on a rock, and gazing round on the waste wilderness, which had only just ceased howling, the very personification of despair.

"So's I, massa," said Butterface, looking up from a compound of wet coal and driftwood which he had been vainly trying to coax into a flame for cooking purposes; "I's most 'orribly miserable!"

There was a beaming grin on the negro's visage that gave the lie direct to his words.

"That's always the way with you, Benjy," said the Captain, "either bubblin' over with jollity an' mischief, or down in the deepest blues."

"Blues! father," cried the boy, "don't talk of blues—it's the blacks I'm in, the very blackest of blacks."

"Ha! jus' like me," muttered Butterface, sticking out his thick lips at the unwilling fire, and giving a blow that any grampus might have envied.

The result was that a column of almost solid smoke, which had been for some time rising thicker and thicker from the coals, burst into a bright flame. This was the first of the sweet influences before referred to.

"Mind your wool, Flatnose," cried Benjy, as the negro drew quickly back.

It may be remarked here that the mysterious bond of sympathy which united the spirits of Benjy Vane and the black steward found expression in kindly respect on the part of the man, and in various eccentric courses on the part of the boy—among others, in a habit of patting him on the back, and giving him a choice selection of impromptu names, such as Black-mug, Yellow-eyes, Square-jaws, and the like.

"What have you got in the kettle?" asked Leo Vandervell, who came up with some dry driftwood at the moment.

"Bubble-um-squeak," replied the cook.

"What sort o' squeak is that?" asked Leo, as he bent his tall strong frame over the fire to investigate the contents of the kettle.

"What am it, massa? Why, it am a bit o' salt pork, an' a bit o' dat bear you shooted troo de nose yes'rday, an' a junk o' walrus, an' two puffins, an' some injin corn, a leetil pepper, an' a leetil

salt."

"Good, that sounds well," said Leo. "I'll go fetch you some more driftwood, for it'll take a deal of boiling, that will, to make it eatable."

The driftwood referred to was merely some pieces of the yacht which had been cast ashore by the hurly-burly of ice and water that had occurred during the last tide. No other species of driftwood was to be found on that coast, for the neighbouring region was utterly destitute of trees.

"Where has Alf gone to?" asked the Captain, as Leo was moving away.

"Oh, he's looking for plants and shells, as usual," answered Leo, with a smile. "You know his heart is set upon these things."

"He'll have to set his heart on helping wi' the cargo after supper," said the Captain, drawing a small notebook and pencil from his pocket.

A few more of the sweet and reviving influences of life now began to circle round the wanderers. Among them was the savoury odour that arose from the pot of bubble-um-squeak, also the improved appearance of the sky.

It was night, almost midnight, nevertheless the sun was blazing in the heavens, and as the storm-clouds had rolled away like a dark curtain, his cheering rays were by that time gilding the icebergs, and rendering the land-cliffs ruddily. The travellers had enjoyed perpetual daylight for several weeks already, and at that high latitude they could count on many more to come. By the

time supper was ready, the depressing influences were gone, and the spirits of all had recovered their wonted tone. Indeed it was not to the discredit of the party that they were so much cast down on that occasion, for the parting, perhaps for ever, from the friends with whom they had hitherto voyaged, had much more to do with their sadness than surrounding circumstances or future trials.

"What plan do you intend to follow out, uncle?" asked Alphonse Vandervell, as they sat at supper that night round the kettle.

"That depends on many things, lad," replied the Captain, laying down his spoon, and leaning his back against a convenient rock. "If the ice moves off, I shall adopt one course; if it holds fast I shall try another. Then, if you insist on gathering and carrying along with you such pocket-loads of specimens, plants, rocks, etcetera, as you've brought in this evening, I'll have to build a sort of Noah's ark, or omnibus on sledge-runners, to carry them."

"And suppose I don't insist on carrying these things, what then?"

"Well," replied the Captain, "in that case I would—well, let me see—a little more of the bubble, Benjy."

"Wouldn't you rather some of the squeak?" asked the boy.

"Both, lad, both—some of everything. Well, as I was saying—and you've a right to know what's running in my head, seeing that you have to help me carry out the plans—I'll give you a rough notion of 'em."

The Captain became more serious as he explained his plans. "The Eskimos, you know," he continued, "have gone by what I may call the shore ice, two days' journey in advance of this spot, taking our dogs along with them. It was my intention to have proceeded to the same point in our yacht, and there, if the sea was open, to have taken on board that magnificent Eskimo giant, Chingatok, with his family, and steered away due north. In the event of the pack being impassable, I had intended to have laid the yacht up in some safe harbour; hunted and fished until we had a stock of dried and salted provisions, enough to last us two years, and then to have started northward in sledges, under the guidance of Chingatok, with a few picked men, leaving the rest and the yacht in charge of the mate. The wreck of the *Whitebear* has, however, forced me to modify these plans. I shall now secure as much of our cargo as we have been able to save, and leave it here *en cache*—"

"What sort of cash is that, father?" asked Benjy.

"You are the best linguist among us, Leo, tell him," said the Captain, turning to his nephew.

"'*En cache*' is French for 'in hiding,'" returned Leo, with a laugh.

"Why do you speak French to Englishmen, father?" said Benjy in a pathetic tone, but with a pert look.

"'Cause the expression is a common one on this side the Atlantic, lad, and you ought to know it. Now, don't interrupt me again. Well, having placed the cargo in security," ("*En cache*,"

muttered Benjy with a glance at Butterface.) "I shall rig up the sledges brought from England, load them with what we require, and follow up the Eskimos. You're sure, Anders, that you understood Chingatok's description of the place?"

The interpreter declared that he was quite sure.

"After that," resumed the Captain, "I'll act according to the information the said Eskimos can give me. D'ye know, I have a strong suspicion that our Arctic giant Chingatok is a philosopher, if I may judge from one or two questions he put and observations he made when we first met. He says he has come from a fine country which lies far—very far—to the north of this; so far that I feel quite interested and hopeful about it. I expect to have more talk with him soon on the subject. A little more o' the bubble, lad; really, Butterface, your powers in the way of cookery are wonderful."

"Chingatok seems to me quite a remarkable fellow for an Eskimo," observed Leo, scraping the bottom of the kettle with his spoon, and looking inquiringly into it. "I, too, had some talk with him—through Anders—when we first met, and from what he said I can't help thinking that he has come from the remote north solely on a voyage of discovery into what must be to him the unknown regions of the south. Evidently he has an inquiring mind."

"Much like yourself, Leo, to judge from the way you peer into that kettle," said Benjy; "please don't scrape the bottom out of it. There's not much tin to mend it with, you know, in these regions."

"Brass will do quite as well," retorted Leo, "and there can be no lack of that while you are here."

"Come now, Benjy," said Alf, "that insolent remark should put you on your mettle."

"So it does, but I won't open my lips, because I feel that I should speak ironically if I were to reply," returned the boy, gazing dreamily into the quiet countenance of the steward. "What are *you* thinking of, you lump of charcoal?"

"Me, massa? me tink dere 'pears to be room for more wittles inside ob me; but as all de grub's eated up, p'r'aps it would be as well to be goin' an' tacklin' suffin' else now."

"You're right, Butterface," cried the Captain, rousing himself from a reverie. "What say you, comrades? Shall we turn in an' have a nap? It's past midnight."

"I'm not inclined for sleep," said Alf, looking up from some of the botanical specimens he had collected.

"No more am I," said Leo, lifting up his arms and stretching his stalwart frame, which, notwithstanding his youth, had already developed to almost the full proportions of a powerful man.

"I vote that we sit up all night," said Benjy, "the sun does it, and why shouldn't we?"

"Well, I've no objection," rejoined the Captain, "but we must work if we don't sleep—so, come along."

Setting the example, Captain Vane began to shoulder the bags and boxes which lay scattered around with the energy of an enthusiastic railway porter. The other members of the party were

not a whit behind him in diligence and energy. Even Benjy, delicate-looking though he was, did the work of an average man, besides enlivening the proceedings with snatches of song and a flow of small talk of a humorous and slightly insolent nature.

Chapter Six.
Future Plans Discussed and Decided

Away to the northward of the spot where the *Whitebear* had been wrecked there stretched a point of land far out into the Arctic Ocean. It was about thirty miles distant, and loomed hugely bluff and grand against the brilliant sky, as if it were the forefront of the northern world. No civilised eyes had ever beheld that land before. Captain Vane knew that, because it lay in latitude 83 north, which was a little beyond the furthest point yet reached by Arctic navigators. He therefore named it Cape Newhope. Benjy thought that it should have been named Butterface-beak, because the steward had been the first to observe it, but his father thought otherwise.

About three miles to the northward of this point of land the Eskimos were encamped. According to arrangement with the white men they had gone there, as we have said, in charge of the dogs brought by Captain Vane from Upernavik, as these animals, it was thought, stood much in need of exercise.

Here the natives had found and taken possession of a number of deserted Eskimo huts.

These rude buildings were the abodes to which the good people migrated when summer heat became so great as to render their snow-huts sloppily disagreeable.

In one of the huts sat Chingatok, his arms resting on his knees, his huge hands clasped, and his intelligent eyes fixed dreamily on the lamp-flame, over which his culinary mother was bending in busy sincerity. There were many points of character in which this remarkable mother and son resembled each other. Both were earnest—intensely so—and each was enthusiastically eager about small matters as well as great. In short, they both possessed great though uncultivated minds.

The hut they occupied was in some respects as remarkable as themselves. It measured about six feet in height and ten in diameter. The walls were made of flattish stones, moss, and the bones of seals, whales, narwhals, and other Arctic creatures. The stones were laid so that each overlapped the one below it, a very little inwards, and thus the walls approached each other gradually as they rose from the foundation; the top being finally closed by slabs of slate-stone. Similar stones covered the floor—one half of which floor was raised a foot or so above the other, and this raised half served for a seat by day as well as a couch by night. On it were spread a thick layer of dried moss, and several seal, dog, and bear skins. Smaller elevations in the corners near the entrance served for seats. The door was a curtain of sealskin. Above it was a small window, glazed, so to speak, with strips of semi-transparent dried intestines sewed together.

Toolooha's cooking-lamp was made of soapstone, formed like a clam-shell, and about eight inches in diameter; the fuel was seal-oil, and the wick was of moss. It smoked considerably, but

Eskimos are smoke-proof. The pot above it, suspended from the roof, was also made of soapstone. Sealskins hung about the walls drying; oily mittens, socks and boots were suspended about on pegs and racks of rib-bones. Lumps of blubber hung and lay about miscellaneously. Odours, not savoury, were therefore prevalent—but Eskimos are smell-proof.

"Mother," said the giant, raising his eyes from the flame to his parent's smoke-encircled visage, "they are a most wonderful people, these Kablunets. Blackbeard is a great man—a grand man—but I think he is—"

Chingatok paused, shook his head, and touched his forehead with a look of significance worthy of a white man.

"Why think you so, my son?" asked the old woman, sneezing, as a denser cloud than usual went up her nose.

"Because he has come here to search for *nothing*."

"Nothing, my son?"

"Yes—at least that is what he tried to explain to me. Perhaps the interpreter could not explain. He is not a smart man, that interpreter. He resembles a walrus with his brain scooped out. He spoke much, but I could not understand."

"Could not understand?" repeated Toolooha, with an incredulous look, "let not Chingatok say so. Is there *anything* that passes the lips of man which he cannot understand?"

"Truly, mother, I once thought there was not," replied the giant, with a modest look, "but I am mistaken. The Kablunets make me stare and feel foolish."

"But it is not possible to search for *nothing*," urged Toolooha.

"So I said," replied her son, "but Blackbeard only laughed at me."

"Did he?" cried the mother, with a much relieved expression, "then let your mind rest, my son, for Blackbeard must be a fool if he laughed at *you*."

"Blackbeard is no fool," replied Chingatok.

"Has he not come to search for new lands *here*, as you went to search for them *there*?" asked Toolooha, pointing alternately north and south.

"No—if I have understood him. Perhaps the brainless walrus translated his words wrongly."

"Is the thing he searches for something to eat?"

"Something to drink or wear?"

"No, I tell you. It is *nothing*! Yet he gives it a name. He calls it *Nort Pole*!"

Perhaps it is needless to remind the reader that Chingatok and his mother conversed in their native tongue, which we have rendered as literally as possible, and that the last two words were his broken English for "North Pole!"

"Nort Pole!" repeated Toolooha once or twice contemplatively. "Well, he may search for nothing if he will, but that he cannot find."

"Nay, mother," returned the giant with a soft smile, "if he will search for nothing he is sure to find it!"

Chingatok sighed, for his mother did not see the joke.

"Blackbeard," he continued with a grave, puzzled manner, "said that this world on which we stand floats in the air like a bird, and spins round!"

"Then Blackbeard is a liar," said Toolooha quietly, though without a thought of being rude. She merely meant what she said, and said what she meant, being a naturally candid woman.

"That may be so, mother, but I think not."

"How can the world float without wings?" demanded the old woman indignantly. "If it spinned should we not feel the spinning, and grow giddy?"

"And Blackbeard says," continued the giant, regardless of the questions propounded, "that it spins round upon this *Nort Pole*, which he says is not a real thing, but only nothing. I asked Blackbeard—How can a world spin upon nothing?"

"And what said he to that?" demanded Toolooha quickly.

"He only laughed. They all laughed when the brainless walrus put my question. There is one little boy—the son I think of Blackbeard—who laughed more than all the rest. He lay down on the ice to laugh, and rolled about as if he had the bowel-twist."

"That son of Blackbeard must be a fool more than his father," said Toolooha, casting a look of indignation at her innocent kettle.

"Perhaps; but he is not like his father," returned Chingatok meekly. "There are two other chiefs among the Kablunets who seem to me fine men. They are very young and wise. They have learned a little of our tongue from the Brainless One, and

asked me some questions about the rocks, and the moss, and the flowers. They are tall and strong. One of them is very grave and seems to think much, like myself. He also spoke of this Nothing —this Nort Pole. They are all mad, I think, about that thing— that Nothing!"

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the sudden entrance of the giant's little sister with the news that the Kablunets were observed coming round the great cape, dragging a sledge.

"Is not the big oomiak with them?" asked her brother, rising quickly.

"No, we see no oomiak—no wings—no fire," answered Oblooria, "only six men dragging a sledge."

Chingatok went out immediately, and Oblooria was about to follow when her mother recalled her.

"Come here, little one. There is a bit of blubber for you to suck. Tell me, saw you any sign of madness in these white men when they were talking with your brother about this—this—Nort Pole."

"No, mother, no," answered Oblooria thoughtfully, "I saw not madness. They laughed much, it is true—but not more than Oolichuk laughs sometimes. Yes—I think again! There was one who seems mad—the small boy, whom brother thinks to be the son of Blackbeard—Benjay, they call him."

"Hah! I thought so," exclaimed Toolooha, evidently pleased at her penetration on this point. "Go, child, I cannot quit the lamp.

Bring me news of what they say and do."

Oblooria obeyed with alacrity, bolting her strip of half-cooked blubber as she ran; her mother meanwhile gave her undivided attention to the duties of the lamp.

The white men and all the members of the Eskimo band were standing by the sledge engaged in earnest conversation when the little girl came forward. Captain Vane was speaking.

"Yes, Chingatok," he said, looking up at the tall savage, who stood erect in frame but with bent head and his hands clasped before him, like a modest chief, which in truth he was. "Yes, if you will guide me to your home in the northern lands, I will pay you well—for I have much iron and wood and such things as I think you wish for and value, and you shall also have my best thanks and gratitude. The latter may not indeed be worth much, but, nevertheless, you could not purchase it with all the wealth of the Polar regions."

Chingatok looked with penetrating gaze at Anders while he translated, and, considering the nature of the communication, the so-called Brainless One proved himself a better man than the giant gave him credit for.

"Does Blackbeard," asked Chingatok, after a few seconds' thought, "expect to find this Nothing—this Nort Pole, in my country?"

"Well, I cannot exactly say that I do," replied the Captain; "you see, I'm not quite sure, from what you tell me, where your country is. It may not reach to the Pole, but it is enough for me that it lies

in that direction, and that you tell me there is much open water there. Men of my nation have been in these regions before now, and some of them have said that the Polar Sea is open, others that it is covered always with ice so thick that it never melts. Some have said it is a 'sea of ancient ice' so rough that no man can travel over it, and that it is not possible to reach the North Pole. I don't agree with that. I had been led to expect to fall in with this sea of ancient ice before I had got thus far, but it is not to be found. The sea indeed is partly blocked with ordinary ice, but there is nothing to be seen of this vast collection of mighty blocks, some of them thirty feet high—this wild chaos of ice which so effectually stopped some of those who went before me."

This speech put such brains as the Brainless One possessed to a severe test, and, after all, he failed to convey its full meaning to Chingatok, who, however, promptly replied to such portions as he understood.

"What Blackbeard calls the sea of old ice does exist," he said; "I have seen it. No man could travel on it, only the birds can cross it. But ice is not land. It changes place. It is here to-day; it is there to-morrow. Next day it is gone. We cannot tell where it goes to or when it will come back. The *very* old ice comes back again and again. It is slow to become like your Nort Pole—nothing. But it melts at last and more comes in its place—growing old slowly and vanishing slowly. It is full of wonder—like the stars; like the jumping flames; like the sun and moon, which we cannot understand."

Chingatok paused and looked upwards with a solemn expression. His mind had wandered into its favourite channels, and for the moment he forgot the main subject of conversation, while the white men regarded him with some surprise, his comrades with feelings of interest not unmingled with awe.

"But," he continued, "I know where the sea of ancient ice-blocks is just now. I came past it in my kayak, and can guide you to it by the same way."

"That is just what I want, Chingatok," said the Captain with a joyful look, "only aid me in this matter, and I will reward you well. I've already told you that my ship is wrecked, and that the crew, except those you see here, have left me; but I have saved all the cargo and buried it in a place of security with the exception of those things which I need for my expedition. One half of these things are on this sledge,—the other half on a sledge left behind and ready packed near the wreck. Now, I want you to send men to fetch that sledge here."

"That shall be done," said Chingatok. "Thanks, thanks, my good fellow," returned the Captain, "and we must set about it at once, for the summer is advancing, and you know as well as I do that the hot season is but a short one in these regions."

"A moment more shall not be lost," said the giant.

He turned to Oolichuk, who had been leaning on a short spear, and gazing open-mouthed, eyed, and eared, during the foregoing conversation, and said a few words to him and to the other Eskimos in a low tone.

Oolichuk merely nodded his head, said "Yah!" or something similarly significant, shouldered his spear and went off in the direction of the Cape of Newhope, followed by nearly all the men of the party.

"Stay, not quite so fast," cried Captain Vane.

"Stop!" shouted Chingatok.

Oolichuk and his men paused.

"One of us had better go with them," said the Captain, "to show the place where the sledge has been left."

"I will go, uncle, if you'll allow me," said Leo Vandervell.

"Oh! let me go too, father," pleaded Benjy, "I'm not a bit tired; do."

"You may both go. Take a rifle with you, Leo. There's no saying what you may meet on the way."

In half-an-hour the party under Oolichuk had reached the extremity of the cape, and Captain Vane observed that his volatile son mounted to the top of an ice-block to wave a farewell. He looked like a black speck, or a crow, in the far distance. Another moment, and the speck had disappeared among the hummocks of the ice-locked sea.

Chapter Seven.
Difficulties Encountered and Faced

They had not quite doubled the Cape of Newhope, and were about to round the point which concealed the spot that had been named Wreck Bay, when they suddenly found themselves face to face with a Polar bear!

Bruin was evidently out for an evening stroll, for he seemed to have nothing particular to do.

Surprise lit up alike the countenances of the men and the visage of the bear. It was an unexpected meeting on both sides. The distance between them was not more than thirty feet. Leo was the only one of the party who carried a rifle. More than once during the voyage had Leo seen and shot a bear. The sight was not new to him, but never before had he come so suddenly, or so very close, upon this king of the Arctic Seas. He chanced at the time to be walking a few yards in advance of the party in company with Oolichuk and Benjy.

The three stopped, stared, and stood as if petrified.

For one moment, then they uttered a united and half involuntary roar.

Right royally did that bear accept the challenge. It rose, according to custom, on its hind legs, and immediately began that slow, but deadly war-dance with which the race is wont to

preface an attack, while its upper lip curled in apparent derision, exposing its terrible fangs.

Leo recovered self-possession instantly. The rifle leaped to his shoulder, the centre of the bear's breast was covered, and the trigger pulled.

Only a snap resulted. Leo had forgotten to load! Benjy gasped with anxiety. Oolichuk, who had held himself back with a sparkling smile of expectation at the prospect of seeing the Kablunet use his thunder-weapon, looked surprised and disappointed, but went into action promptly with his spear, accompanied by Akeetolik. Leo's rifle, being a breech-loader, was quickly re-charged, but as the rest of the party stood leaning on their spears with the evident intention of merely watching the combat, the youth resolved to hold his hand, despite Benjy's earnest recommendation to put one ball between the bear's eyes, and the other into his stomach.

It was but a brief though decisive battle. Those Eskimos were well used to such warfare.

Running towards the animal with levelled spears, the two men separated on coming close, so that Bruin was forced to a state of indecision as to which enemy he would assail first. Akeetolik settled the point for him by giving him a prick on the right side, thus, as it were, drawing the enemy's fire on himself. The bear turned towards him with a fierce growl, and in so doing, exposed his left side to attack. Oolichuk was not slow to seize the opportunity. He leaped close up, and drove his spear deep into

the animal's heart—killing it on the spot.

Next day the party returned to the Eskimo camp with the sledge-load of goods, and the bear on the top.

While steaks of the same were being prepared by Toolooha, Captain Vane and his new allies were busy discussing the details of the advance.

"I know that the difficulties will be great," he said, in reply to a remark from the interpreter, "but I mean to face and overcome them."

"Ah!" exclaimed Alf, who was rather fond of poetry:—

> "To dare unknown dangers in a noble cause,
> Despite an adverse Nature and her tiresome Laws."

"Just so, Alf, my boy, stick at nothing; never give in; victory or death, that's my way of expressing the same sentiment. But there's one thing that I must impress once more upon you all—namely, that each man must reduce his kit to the very lowest point of size and weight. No extras allowed."

"What, not even a box of paper collars?" asked Benjy.

"Not one, my boy, but you may take a strait-waistcoat in your box if you choose, for you'll be sure to need it."

"Oh! father," returned the boy, remonstratively, "you are severe. However, I will take one, if you agree to leave your woollen comforter behind. You won't need that, you see, as long as I am with you."

"Of course," said Alf, "you will allow us to carry small libraries with us?"

"Certainly not, my lad, only one book each, and that must be a small one."

"The only book I possess is my Bible," said Leo, "and that won't take up much room, for it's an uncommonly small one."

"If I only had my Robinson Crusoe here," cried Benjy, "I'd take it, for there's enough of adventure in that book to carry a man over half the world."

"Ay," said Alf, "and enough of mind to carry him over the other half. For my part, if we must be content with one book each, I shall take Buzzby's poems."

"Oh! horrible!" cried Benjy, "why, he's no better than a maudlin', dawdlin', drawlin', caterwaulin'—"

"Come, Benjy, don't be insolent; he's second only to Tennyson. Just listen to this *morceau* by Buzzby. It is an Ode to Courage—

"'High! hot! hillarious compound of—'"

"Stop! stop! man, don't begin when we're in the middle of our plans," interrupted Benjy, "let us hear what book Butterface means to take."

"I not take no book, massa, only take my flute. Music is wot's de matter wid me. Dat is de ting what hab charms to soove de savage beast."

"I wouldn't advise you try to soothe a Polar bear with it," said Leo, "unless you have a rifle handy."

"Yes—and especially an unloaded one, which is very effective against Polar bears," put in the Captain, with a sly look. "Ah, Leo, I could hardly have believed it of you—and you the sportsman of our party, too; our chief huntsman. Oh, fie!"

"Come, uncle, don't be too hard on that little mistake," said Leo, with a slight blush, for he was really annoyed by the unsportsmanlike oversight hinted at; "but pray, may I ask," he added, turning sharply on the Captain, "what is inside of these three enormous boxes of yours which take up so much space on the sledges?"

"You may ask, Leo, but you may not expect an answer. That is my secret, and I mean to keep it as a sort of stimulus to your spirits when the hardships of the way begin to tell on you. Ask Chingatok, Anders," continued the Captain, turning to the interpreter, "if he thinks we have enough provisions collected for the journey. I wish to start immediately."

"We have enough," answered Chingatok, who had been sitting a silent, but deeply interested observer—so to speak—of the foregoing conversation.

"Tell him, then, to arrange with his party, and be prepared to set out by noon to-morrow."

That night, by the light of the midnight sun, the Eskimos sat round their kettles of bear-chops, and went into the *pros* and *cons* of the proposed expedition. Some were enthusiastically in

favour of casting in their lot with the white men, others were decidedly against it, and a few were undecided. Among the latter was Akeetolik.

"These ignorant men," said that bold savage, "are foolish and useless. They cannot kill bears. The one named Lo, (thus was Leonard's name reduced to its lowest denomination), is big enough, and looks very fine, but when he sees bear he only stares, makes a little click with his thunder-weapon, and looks stupid."

"Blackbeard explained that," said Oolichuk; "Lo made some mistake."

"That may be so," retorted Akeetolik, "but if you and me had not been there, the *bear* would not make a mistake."

"I will not go with these Kablunets," said Eemerk with a frown, "they are only savages. They are not taught. No doubt they had a wonderful boat, but they have not been able to keep their boat. They cannot kill bears; perhaps they cannot kill seals or walruses, and they ask us to help them to travel—to show them the way! They can do nothing. They must be led like children. My advice is to kill them all, since they are so useless, and take their goods."

This speech was received with marks of decided approval by those of the party who were in the habit of siding with Eemerk, but the rest were silent. In a few moments Chingatok said, in a low, quiet, but impressive tone: "The Kablunets are not foolish or ignorant. They are wise—far beyond the wisdom of the Eskimos. It is Eemerk who is like a walrus without brains. He thinks that

his little mind is outside of everything, and so he has not eyes to perceive that he is ignorant as well as foolish, and that other men are wise."

This was the severest rebuke that the good-natured Chingatok had yet administered to Eemerk, but the latter, foolish though he was, had wisdom enough not to resent it openly. He sat in moody silence, with his eyes fixed on the ground.

Of course Oolichuk was decidedly in favour of joining the white men, and so was Ivitchuk, who soon brought round his hesitating friend Akeetolik, and several of the others. Oblooria, being timid, would gladly have sided with Eemerk, but she hated the man, and, besides, would in any case have cast in her lot with her mother and brother, even if free to do otherwise.

The fair Tekkona, whose courage and faith were naturally strong, had only one idea, and that was to follow cheerfully wherever Chingatok led; but she was very modest, and gave no opinion. She merely remarked: "The Kablunets are handsome men, and seem good."

As for Toolooha, she had enough to do to attend to the serious duties of the lamp, and always left the settlement of less important matters to the men.

"You and yours are free to do what you please," said Chingatok to Eemerk, when the discussion drew to a close. "I go with the white men to-morrow."

"What says Oblooria?" whispered Oolichuk when the rest of the party were listening to Eemerk's reply.

"Oblooria goes with her brother and mother," answered that young lady, toying coquettishly with her sealskin tail.

Oolichuk's good-humoured visage beamed with satisfaction, and his flat nose curled up—as much as it was possible for such a feature to curl—with contempt, as he glanced at Eemerk and said—

"I have heard many tales from Anders—the white man's mouthpiece—since we met. He tells me the white men are very brave and fond of running into danger for nothing but fun. Those who do not like the fun of danger should join Eemerk. Those who are fond of fun and danger should come with our great chief Chingatok—huk! Let us divide."

Without more palaver the band divided, and it was found that only eight sided with Eemerk. All the rest cast in their lot with our giant, after which this Arctic House of Commons adjourned, and its members went to rest.

A few days after that, Captain Vane and his Eskimo allies, having left the camp with Eemerk and his friends far behind them, came suddenly one fine morning on a barrier which threatened effectually to arrest their further progress northward. This was nothing less than that tremendous sea of "ancient ice" which had baffled previous navigators and sledging parties.

"Chaos! absolute chaos!" exclaimed Alf Vandervell, who was first to recover from the shock of surprise, not to say consternation, with which the party beheld the scene on turning a high cape.

"It looks bad," said Captain Vane, gravely, "but things often look worse at a first glance than they really are."

"I hope it may be so in this case," said Leo, in a low tone.

"Good-bye to the North Pole!" said Benjy, with a look of despondency so deep that the rest of the party laughed in spite of themselves.

The truth was that poor Benjy had suffered much during the sledge journey which they had begun, for although he rode, like the rest of them, on one of the Eskimo sledges, the ice over which they had travelled along shore had been sufficiently rugged to necessitate constant getting off and on, as well as much scrambling over hummocks and broken ice. We have already said that Benjy was not very robust, though courageous and full of spirit, so that he was prone to leap from the deepest depths of despair to the highest heights of hope at a moment's notice—or *vice versa*. Not having become inured to ice-travel, he was naturally much cast down when the chaos above-mentioned met his gaze.

"Strange," said the Captain, after a long silent look at the barrier, "strange that we should find it here. The experience of former travellers placed it considerably to the south and west of this."

"But you know," said Leo, "Chingatok told us that the old ice drifts about just as the more recently formed does. Who knows but we may find the end of it not far off, and perhaps may reach open water beyond, where we can make skin canoes, and launch

forth on a voyage of discovery."

"I vote that we climb the cliffs and try to see over the top of this horrid ice-jumble," said Benjy.

"Not a bad suggestion, lad. Let us do so. We will encamp here, Anders. Let all the people have a good feed, and tell Chingatok to follow us. You will come along with him."

A few hours later, and the Captain, Leo, Alf, Benjy, Chingatok, and the interpreter stood on the extreme summit of the promontory which they had named Cape Chaos, and from which they had a splendid bird's-eye view of the whole region.

It was indeed a tremendous and never-to-be-forgotten scene.

As far as the eye could reach, the ocean was covered with ice heaped together in some places in the wildest confusion, and so firmly wedged in appearance that it seemed as if it had lain there in a solid mass from the first day of creation. Elsewhere the ice was more level and less compact. In the midst of this rugged scene, hundreds of giant icebergs rose conspicuously above the rest, towering upwards in every shape and of all sizes, from which the bright sun was flashed back in rich variety of form, from the sharp gleam that trickled down an edge of ice to the refulgent blaze on a glassy face which almost rivalled the sun himself in brilliancy. These icebergs, extending as they did to the horizon, where they mingled with and were lost in the pearl-grey sky, gave an impression of vast illimitable perspective. Although no sign of an open sea was at first observed, there was no lack of water to enliven the scene, for here and there, and everywhere,

were pools and ponds, and even lakes of goodly size, which had been formed on the surface by the melting ice. In these the picturesque masses were faithfully reflected, and over them vast flocks of gulls, eider-ducks, puffins, and other wild-fowl of the north, disported themselves in garrulous felicity.

On the edge of the rocky precipice, from which they had a bird's-eye view of the scene, our discoverers stood silent for some time, absorbed in contemplation, with feelings of mingled awe and wonder. Then exclamations of surprise and admiration broke forth.

"The wonderful works of God!" said the Captain, in a tone of profound reverence.

"Beautiful, beyond belief!" murmured Alf.

"But it seems an effectual check to our advance," said the practical Leo, who, however, was by no means insensible to the extreme beauty of the scene.

"Not effectual, lad; not effectual," returned the Captain, stretching out his hand and turning to the interpreter; "look, Anders, d'ye see nothing on the horizon away to the nor'ard? Isn't that a bit of water-sky over there?"

"Ya," replied the interpreter, gazing intently, "there be watter-sky over there. Ya. But not possobubble for go there. Ice too big an' brokkin up."

"Ask Chingatok what he thinks," returned the Captain.

Chingatok's opinion was that the water-sky indicated the open sea. He knew that sea well—had often paddled over it, and his

own country lay in it.

"But how ever did he cross that ice?" asked the Captain; "what says he to that, Anders?"

"I did not cross it," answered the Eskimo, through Anders. "When I came here with my party the ice was not there; it was far off yonder."

He pointed to the eastward.

"Just so," returned the Captain, with a satisfied nod, "that confirms my opinion. You see, boys, that the coast here trends off to the East'ard in a very decided manner. Now, if that was only the shore of a bay, and the land again ran off to the nor'ard, it would not be possible for such a sea of ice to have come from *that* direction. I therefore conclude that we are standing on the most northern cape of Greenland; that Greenland itself is a huge island, unconnected with the Polar lands; that we are now on the shores of the great Polar basin, in which, somewhere not very far from the Pole itself, lies the home of our friend Chingatok—at least so I judge from what he has said. Moreover, I feel sure that the water-sky we see over there indicates the commencement of that 'open sea' which, I hold, in common with many learned men, lies around the North Pole, and which I am determined to float upon before many days go by."

"We'd better spread our wings then, father, and be off at once," said Benjy; "for it's quite certain that we'll never manage to scramble over that ice-jumble with sledges."

"Nevertheless, I will try, Benjy."

"But how, uncle?" asked Leo.

"Ay, how?" repeated Alf, "*that* is the question."

"Come, come, Alf, let Shakespeare alone," said the pert Benjy, "if you *must* quote, confine yourself to Buzzby."

"Nay, Benjy, be not so severe. It was but a slip. Besides, our leader has not forbidden our carrying a whole library in our heads, so long as we take only one book in our pockets. But, uncle, you have not yet told us how you intend to cross that amazing barrier which Benjy has appropriately styled an ice-jumble."

"How, boy?" returned the Captain, who had been gazing eagerly in all directions while they talked, "it is impossible for me to say how. All that I can speak of with certainty as to our future movements is, that the road by which we have come to the top of this cliff will lead us to the bottom again, where Toolooha is preparing for us an excellent supper of bear-steaks and tea. One step at a time, lads, is my motto; when that is taken we shall see clearly how and where to take the next."

A sound sleep was the step which the whole party took after that which led to the bear-steaks. Then Captain Vane arose, ordered the dogs to be harnessed to the sledges, and, laying his course due north, steered straight out upon the sea of ancient ice.

Chapter Eight.
Difficulties and Dangers increase, and the Captain expounds his Views

The first part of the journey over the rugged ice was not so difficult as had been anticipated, because they found a number of openings—narrow lanes, as it were—winding between the masses, most of which were wide enough to permit of the passage of the sledges; and when they chanced to come on a gap that was too narrow, they easily widened it with their hatchets and ice-chisels.

There was, however, some danger connected with this process, for some of the mighty blocks of ice amongst which they moved were piled in such positions that it only required a few choppings at their base to bring them down in ruins on their heads. One instance of this kind sufficed to warn them effectually.

Captain Vane's dog-sledge was leading the way at the time. Leo drove it, for by that time the Eskimos had taught him how to use the short-handled whip with the lash full fifteen feet long, and Leo was an apt pupil in every athletic and manly exercise. Beside him sat the Captain, Alf, Benjy, and Butterface—the black visage of the latter absolutely shining with delight at the novelty of the situation. Behind came the sledge of Chingatok,

which, besides being laden with bear-rugs, sealskins, junks of meat, and a host of indescribable Eskimo implements, carried himself and the precious persons of Toolooha and Tekkona. Next came the sledge of the laughter-loving Oolichuk, with the timid Oblooria and another woman. Then followed the sledges of Ivitchuk and Akeetolik, laden with the rest of the Eskimo women and goods, and last of all came Captain Vane's two English-made sledges, heavily-laden with the goods and provisions of the explorers. These latter sledges, although made in England, had been constructed on the principle of the native sledge, namely, with the parts fastened by means of walrus-sinew lashings instead of nails, which last would have snapped like glass in the winter frosts of the Polar regions, besides being incapable of standing the twistings and shocks of ice-travel.

All the dogs being fresh, and the floor of the lanes not too rough, the strangely-assorted party trotted merrily along, causing the echoes among the great ice-blocks, spires, and obelisks, to ring to the music of their chatting, and the cracks of their powerful whips. Suddenly, a shout at the front, and an abrupt pull up, brought the whole column to a halt. The Captain's dogs had broken into a gallop. On turning suddenly round a spur of a glacier about as big as Saint Paul's Cathedral, they went swish into a shallow pond which had been formed on the ice. It was not deep, but there was sufficient water in it to send a deluge of spray over the travellers.

A burst of laughter greeted the incident as they sprang off the

sledge, and waded to the dry ice a few yards ahead.

"No damage done," exclaimed the Captain, as he assisted the dogs to haul the sledge out of the water.

"No damage!" repeated Benjy, with a rueful look, "why, I'm soaked from top to toe!"

"Yes, you've got the worst of it," said Leo, with a laugh; "that comes of being forward, Benjy. You would insist on sitting in front."

"Well, it is some comfort," retorted Benjy, squeezing the water from his garments, "that *Alf* is as wet as myself, for that gives us an opportunity of sympathising with each other. Eh, *Alf*? Does Buzzby offer no consolatory remarks for such an occasion as this?"

"O yes," replied Alf; "in his beautiful poem on Melancholy, sixth canto, Buzzby says:—

"'When trouble, like a curtain spread,
Obscures the clouded brain,
And worries on the weary head
Descend like soaking rain—
Lift up th'umbrella of the heart,
Stride manfully along;
Defy depression's dreary dart,
And shout in gleeful song.'"

"Come, Alf, clap on to this tow-rope, an' stop your nonsense," said Captain Vane, who was not in a poetical frame of mind just

then.

"Dat is mos' boosiful potry!" exclaimed Butterface, with an immense display of eyes and teeth, as he lent a willing hand to haul out the sledge. "Mos' boosiful. But he's rader a strong rem'dy, massa, don' you tink? Not bery easy to git up a gleefoo' shout when one's down in de mout' bery bad, eh!"

Alf's reply was checked by the necessity for remounting the sledge and resuming the journey. Those in rear avoided the pond by going round it.

"The weather's warm, anyhow, and that's a comfort," remarked Benjy, as he settled down in his wet garments. "We can't freeze in summer, you know, and—"

He stopped abruptly, for it became apparent just then that the opening close ahead of them was too narrow for the sledge to pass. It was narrowed by a buttress, or projection, of the cathedral-berg, which jutted up close to a vast obelisk of ice about forty feet high, if not higher.

"Nothing for it, boys, but to cut through," said the Captain, jumping out, and seizing an axe, as the sledge was jammed between the masses. The dogs lay down to rest and pant while the men were at work.

"It's cut an' come again in dem regins," muttered the negro steward, also seizing an axe, and attacking the base of the obelisk.

A sudden cry of alarm from the whole party caused him to desist and look up. He echoed the cry and sprang back swiftly, for the huge mass of ice having been just on the balance, one slash at

its base had destroyed the equilibrium, and it was leaning slowly over with a deep grinding sound. A moment later the motion was swift, and it fell with a terrible crash, bursting into a thousand fragments, scattering lumps and glittering morsels far and wide, and causing the whole ice-field to tremble. The concussion overturned several other masses, which had been in the same nicely-balanced condition, some near at hand, others out of sight, though within earshot, and, for a moment, the travellers felt as if the surrounding pack were disrupting everywhere and falling into utter ruin, but in a few seconds the sounds ceased, and again all was quiet.

Fortunately, the obelisk which had been overturned fell towards the north—away from the party; but although it thus narrowly missed crushing them all in one icy tomb, it blocked up their path so completely that the remainder of that day had to be spent in cutting a passage through it.

Need we say that, after this, they were careful how they used their axes and ice-chisels?

Soon after the occurrence of this incident, the labyrinths among the ice became more broken, tortuous, and bewildering. At last they ceased altogether, and the travellers were compelled to take an almost straight course right over everything, for blocks, masses, and drifts on a gigantic scale were heaved up in such dire confusion, that nothing having the faintest resemblance to a track or passage could be found.

"It's hard work, this," remarked the Captain to Leo one

evening, seating himself on a mass of ice which he had just chopped from an obstruction, and wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"Hard, indeed," said Leo, sitting down beside him, "I fear it begins to tell upon poor Benjy. You should really order him to rest more than he does, uncle."

A grim smile of satisfaction played for a minute on the Captain's rugged face, as he glanced at his son, who, a short distance ahead, was hacking at the ice with a pick-axe, in company with Alf and Butterface and the Eskimo men.

"It'll do him good, lad," replied the Captain. "Hard work is just what my Benjy needs. He's not very stout, to be sure, but there is nothing wrong with his constitution, and he's got plenty of spirit."

This was indeed true. Benjy had too much spirit for his somewhat slender frame, but his father, being a herculean man, did not quite perceive that what was good for himself might be too much for his son. Captain Vane was, however, the reverse of a harsh man. He pondered what Leo had said, and soon afterwards went up to his son.

"Benjy, my lad."

"Yes, father," said the boy, dropping the head of his pick-axe on the ice, resting his hands on the haft, and looking up with a flushed countenance.

"You should rest a bit now and then, Benjy. You'll knock yourself up if you don't."

"Rest a bit, father! Why, I've just had a rest, and I'm not tired —that is, not very. Ain't it fun, father? And the ice cuts up so easily, and flies about so splendidly—see here."

With flashing eyes our little hero raised his pick and drove it into the ice at which he had been working, with all his force, so that a great rent was made, and a mass the size of a dressing-table sprang from the side of a berg, and, falling down, burst into a shower of sparkling gems. But this was not all. To Benjy's intense delight, a mass of many tons in weight was loosened by the fall of the smaller lump, and rolled down with a thunderous roar, causing Butterface, who was too near it, to jump out of the way with an amount of agility that threw the whole party into fits of laughter.

"What d'ye think o' that, father?"

"I think it's somewhat dangerous," answered the Captain, recovering his gravity and re-shouldering his axe. "However, as long as you enjoy the work, it can't hurt you, so go ahead, my boy; it'll be a long time before you cut away too much o' the Polar ice!"

Reaching a slightly open space beyond this point, the dogs were harnessed, and the party advanced for a mile or so, when they came to another obstruction worse than that which they had previously passed.

"There's a deal of ice-rubbish in these regions," remarked Benjy, eyeing the wildly heaped masses with a grave face, and heaving a deep sigh.

"Yes, Massa Benjy, bery too much altogidder," said

Butterface, echoing the sigh.

"Come, we won't cut through this," cried Captain Vane in a cheery voice; "we'll try to go over it. There is a considerable drift of old snow that seems to offer a sort of track. What says Chingatok?"

The easy-going Eskimo said that it would be as well to go over it as through it, perhaps better!

So, over it they went, but they soon began to wish they had tried any other plan, for the snow-track quickly came to an end, and then the difficulty of passing even the empty sledges from one ice mass to another was very great, while the process of carrying forward the goods on the shoulders of the men was exceedingly laborious. The poor dogs, too, were constantly falling between masses, and dragging each other down, so that they gave more trouble at last than they were worth.

In all these trying circumstances, the Eskimo women were almost as useful as the men. Indeed they would have been quite as useful if they had been as strong, and they bore the fatigues and trials of the journey with the placid good humour, and apparent, if not real, humility of their race.

At last, one afternoon, our discoverers came suddenly to the edge of this great barrier of ancient ice, and beheld, from an elevated plateau to which they had climbed, a scene which was calculated to rouse in their breasts feelings at once of admiration and despair, for there, stretching away below them for several miles, lay a sea of comparatively level ice, and beyond it a

chain of stupendous glaciers, which presented an apparently impassable barrier—a huge continuous wall of ice that seemed to rise into the very sky.

This chain bore all the evidences of being very old ice—compared to which that of the so-called "ancient sea" was absolutely juvenile. On the ice-plain, which was apparently illimitable to the right and left, were hundreds of pools of water in which the icebergs, the golden clouds, the sun, and the blue sky were reflected, and on the surface of which myriads of Arctic wild-fowl were sporting about, making the air vocal with their plaintive cries, and ruffling the glassy surfaces of the lakes with their dipping wings. The heads of seals were also observed here and there.

"These will stop us at last," said Alf, pointing to the bergs with a profound sigh.

"No, they won't," remarked the Captain quietly. "*Nothing* will stop us!"

"That's true, anyhow, uncle," returned Alf; "for if it be, as Chingatok thinks, that we are in search of nothing, of course when we find nothing, nothing will stop us!"

"Why, Alf," said Leo, "I wonder that you, who are usually in an enthusiastic and poetical frame of mind, should be depressed by distant difficulties, instead of admiring such a splendid sight of birds and beasts enjoying themselves in what I may style an Arctic heaven. You should take example by Benjy."

That youth did indeed afford a bright example of rapt

enthusiasm just then, for, standing a little apart by himself, he gazed at the scene with flushed face, open mouth, and glittering eyes, in speechless delight.

"Ask Chingatok if he ever saw this range before," said the Captain to Anders, on recovering from his first feeling of surprise.

No, Chingatok had never seen it, except, indeed, the tops of the bergs—at sea, in the far distance—but he had often heard of it from some of his countrymen, who, like himself, were fond of exploring. But that sea of ice was not there, he said, when he had passed on his journey southward. It had drifted there, since that time, from the great sea.

"Ah! the great sea that he speaks of is just what we must find and cross over," muttered the Captain to himself.

"But how are we to cross over it, uncle?" asked Leo.

The Captain replied with one of his quiet glances. His followers had long become accustomed to this silent method of declining to reply, and forbore to press the subject.

"Come now, boys, get ready to descend to the plain. We'll have to do it with caution."

There was, indeed, ground for caution. We have said that they had climbed to an elevated plateau on one of the small bergs which formed the outside margin of the rugged ice. The side of this berg was a steep slope of hard snow, so steep that they thought it unwise to attempt the descent by what in Switzerland is termed glissading.

"We'll have to zig-zag down, I think," continued the Captain, settling himself on his sledge; but the Captain's dogs thought otherwise. Under a sudden impulse of reckless free-will, the whole team, giving vent to a howl of mingled glee and fear, dashed down the slope at full gallop. Of course they were overtaken in a few seconds by the sledge, which not only ran into them, but sent them sprawling on their backs right and left. Then it met a slight obstruction, and itself upset, sending Captain Vane and his companions, with its other contents, into the midst of the struggling dogs. With momentarily increasing speed this avalanche of mixed dead and living matter went sliding, hurtling, swinging, shouting, struggling, and yelling to the bottom. Fortunately, there was no obstruction there, else had destruction been inevitable. The slope merged gradually into the level plain, over which the avalanche swept for a considerable distance before the momentum of their flight was expended.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.