

**ROBERT  
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BALLANTYNE**

FAST IN THE ICE:  
ADVENTURES IN THE  
POLAR REGIONS

Robert Michael Ballantyne

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in the Polar Regions**

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# R. M. Ballantyne

## Fast in the Ice: Adventures in the Polar Regions

### Chapter One

One day, many years ago, a brig cast off from her moorings, and sailed from a British port for the Polar Seas. That brig never came back.

Many a hearty cheer was given, many a kind wish was uttered, many a handkerchief was waved, and many a tearful eye gazed that day as the vessel left Old England, and steered her course into the unknown regions of the far north.

But no cheer ever greeted her return; no bright eyes ever watched her homeward-bound sails rising on the far-off horizon.

Battered by the storms of the Arctic seas, her sails and cordage stiffened by the frosts, and her hull rasped and shattered by the ice of those regions, she was forced on a shore where the green grass has little chance to grow, where winter reigns nearly all the year round, where man never sends his merchandise, and never drives his plough. There the brig was frozen in; there, for two long years, she lay unable to move, and her starving crew forsook her; there, year after year, she lay, unknown, unvisited by civilised man, and unless the wild Eskimos<sup>1</sup> have torn her to pieces, and made spears of her timbers, or the ice has swept her out to sea and whirled her to destruction, there she lies still—hard and fast in the ice.

The vessel was lost, but her crew were saved, and most of them returned to tell their kinsfolk of the wonders and the dangers of the frozen regions, where God has created some of the most beautiful and some of the most awful objects that were ever looked on by the eye of man.

What was told by the fireside, long ago, is now recounted in this book.

Imagine a tall, strong man, of about five-and-forty, with short, curly black hair, just beginning to turn grey; stern black eyes, that look as if they could pierce into your secret thoughts; a firm mouth, with lines of good-will and kindness lurking about it; a deeply-browed skin, and a short, thick beard and moustache. That is a portrait of the commander of the brig. His name was Harvey. He stood on the deck, close by the wheel, looking wistfully over the stern. As the vessel bent before the breeze, and cut swiftly through the water, a female hand was raised among the gazers on the pier, and a white scarf waved in the breeze. In the forefront of the throng, and lower down, another hand was raised; it was a little one, but very vigorous; it whirled a cap round a small head of curly black hair, and a shrill “hurrah!” came floating out to sea.

The captain kissed his hand and waved his hat in reply; then, wheeling suddenly round, he shouted, in a voice of thunder:

“Mind your helm, there; let her away a point. Take a pull on these foretopsail halyards; look alive, lads!”

“Aye, aye, sir!” replied the men.

There was no occasion whatever for these orders. The captain knew that well enough, but he had his own reasons for giving them. The men knew that, too, and they understood his reasons when they observed the increased sternness of his eyes, and the compression of his lips.

Inclination and duty! What wars go on in the hearts of men—high and low, rich and poor—between these two. What varied fortune follows man, according as the one or the other carries the day.

“Please, sir,” said a gruff, broad-shouldered, and extremely short man, with little or no forehead, a hard, vacant face, and a pair of enormous red whiskers; “please, sir, Sam Baker’s took very bad;

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<sup>1</sup> This word is here spelled as pronounced. It is usually spelled Esquimaux.

I think it would be as well if you could give him a little physic, sir; a tumbler of Epsom, or some-think of that sort.”

“Why, Mr Dicey, there can’t be anything very far wrong with Baker,” said the captain, looking down at his second mate; “he seems to me one of the healthiest men in the ship. What’s the matter with him?”

“Well, I can’t say, sir,” replied Mr Dicey, “but he looks ’orrible bad, all yellow and green about the gills, and fearful red round the eyes. But what frightens me most is that I heard him groanin’ very heavy about a quarter of an hour ago, and then I saw him suddenly fling himself into his ’ammock and begin blubberin’ like a child. Now, sir, I say, when a grow’d-up man gives way like that, there must be some-think far wrong with his inside. And it’s a serious thing, sir, to take a sick man on such a voyage as this.”

“Does he not say what’s wrong with him?” asked the captain.

“No, sir; he don’t. He says it’s nothin’, and he’ll be all right if he’s only let alone. I did hear him once or twice muttering some-think about his wife and child; you know, sir, he’s got a young wife, and she had a baby about two months ’fore we came away, but I can’t think that’s got much to do with it, for *I’ve* got a wife myself, sir, and six children, two of ’em bein’ babies, and that don’t upset *me*, and Baker’s a much stronger man.”

“You are right, Mr Dicey, he is a much stronger man than you,” replied the captain, “and I doubt not that his strength will enable him to get over this without the aid of physic.”

“Very well, sir,” said Mr Dicey.

The second mate was a man whose countenance never showed any signs of emotion, no matter what he felt. He seldom laughed, or, if he did, his mouth remained almost motionless, and the sounds that came out were anything but cheerful. He had light grey eyes which always wore an expression of astonishment; but the expression was accidental; it indicated no feeling. He would have said, “Very well, sir,” if the captain had refused to give poor Baker food instead of physic.

“And hark’ee, Mr Dicey,” said the captain, “don’t let him be disturbed till he feels inclined to move.”

“Very well, sir,” replied the second mate, touching his cap as he turned away.

“So,” murmured the captain, as he gazed earnestly at the now distant shore, “I’m not the only one who carries a heavy heart to sea this day and leaves sorrowing hearts behind him.”

## Chapter Two

### At Sea—The First Storm

It is now hundreds of years since the North polar regions began to attract general attention. Men have long felt very inquisitive about that part of the earth, and many good ships, many noble lives have been lost in trying to force a passage through the ice that encumbers the Arctic seas, summer and winter. Britain has done more than other nations in the cause of discovery within the Arctic circle. The last and greatest of her Arctic heroes perished there—the famous Sir John Franklin.

Were I writing a history of those regions I would have much to say of other countries as well as of our own. But such is not my object in this book. I mean simply to follow in the wake of one of Britain's adventurous discoverers, and thus give the reader an idea of the fortunes of those gallant men who risk life and limb for the sake of obtaining knowledge of distant lands.

There have always been restless spirits in this country. There have ever been men who, when boys, were full of mischief, and who could “settle to nothing” when they grew up. Lucky for us, lucky for the world, that such is the case! Many of our “restless spirits,” as we call them, have turned out to be our heroes, our discoverers, our greatest men. No doubt many of them have become our drones, our sharpers, our blacklegs. But that is just saying that some men are good, while others are bad—no blame is due to what is called the restlessness of spirit. Our restless men, if good, find rest in action; in bold energetic toil; if bad, they find rest, alas! in untimely graves.

Captain Harvey was one of our restless spirits. He had a deeply learned friend who said to him one day that he felt sure “*there was a sea of open water round the North Pole!*” Hundreds of ships had tried to reach that pole without success, because they always found a barrier of thick ice raised against them. This friend said that if a ship could only cut or force its way through the ice to a certain latitude north, open water would be found. Captain Harvey was much interested in this. He could not rest until he had proved it. He had plenty of money, so had his friend. They resolved to buy a vessel and send it to the seas lying within the Arctic circle. Other rich friends helped them; a brig was bought, it was named the *Hope*, and, as we have seen in the last chapter, it finally set sail under command of Captain Harvey.

Many days and nights passed, and the *Hope* kept her course steadily toward the coast of North America. Greenland was the first land they hoped to see. Baffin's Bay was the strait through which they hoped to reach the open polar sea.

The *Hope* left England as a whaler, with all the boats, lances, harpoons, lines, and other apparatus used in the whale fishery. It was intended that she should do a little business in that way if Captain Harvey thought it advisable, but the discovery of new lands and seas was their chief end and aim.

At first the weather was fine, the wind fair, and the voyage prosperous. But one night there came a deep calm. Not a breath of air moved over the sea, which was as clear and polished as a looking-glass. The captain walked the deck with the surgeon of the ship, a nephew of his own, named Gregory.

Tom Gregory was a youth of about nineteen, who had not passed through the whole course of a doctor's education, but who was a clever fellow, and better able to cut and carve and physic poor suffering humanity than many an older man who wrote M.D. after his name. He was a fine, handsome, strapping fellow, with a determined manner and a kind heart. He was able to pull an oar with the best man aboard, and could even steer the brig in fine weather, if need be. He was hearty and romantic, and a great favourite with the men. He, too, was a restless spirit. He had grown tired of college life, and had made up his mind to take a year's run into the Polar regions, by way of improving his knowledge of the “outlandish” parts of the world.

“I don’t like the look of the sky to-day, Tom,” said the captain, glancing at the horizon and then at the sails.

“Indeed!” said Tom, in surprise. “It seems to me the most beautiful afternoon we have had since the voyage began. But I suppose you seamen are learned in signs which we landsmen do not understand.”

“Perhaps we are,” replied the captain; “but it does not require much knowledge of the weather to say that such a dead calm as this, and such unusual heat, is not likely to end in a gentle breeze.”

“You don’t object to a stiff breeze, uncle?” said the youth.

“No, Tom; but I don’t like a storm, because it does us no good, and may do us harm.”

“Storms do you no good, uncle!” cried Tom; “how can you say so? Why, what is it that makes our sailors such trumps? The British tar would not be able to face danger as he does if there were no storms.”

“True, Tom, but the British tar would not require to face danger at all if there were no storms. What says the barometer, Mr Mansell?” said the captain, looking down the skylight into the cabin, where the first mate—a middle-sized man of thirty-five, or thereabouts—was seated at the table writing up the ship’s log-book.

“The glass has gone down an inch, sir, and is still falling,” answered the mate.

“Reef the topsail, Mr Dicey,” cried the captain, on hearing this.

“Why such haste?” inquired Gregory.

“Because such a sudden fall in the barometer is a sure sign of approaching bad weather,” answered the captain.

The first man on the shrouds and out upon the main-topsail yard was Sam Baker, whose active movements and hearty manner showed that he had quite recovered his health without the use of physic. He was quickly followed by some of his shipmates, all of whom were picked men—able in body and ready for anything.

In a few minutes sail was reduced. Soon after that clouds began to rise on the horizon and spread over the sky. Before half an hour had passed the breeze came—came far stronger than had been expected—and the order to take in sail had to be repeated. Baker was first again. He was closely followed by Joe Davis and Jim Croft, both of them sturdy fellows—good specimens of the British seaman. Davy Butts, who came next, was not so good a specimen. He was nearly six feet high, very thin and loosely put together, like a piece of bad furniture. But his bones were big, and he was stronger than he looked. He would not have formed one of such a crew had he not been a good man. The rest of the crew, of whom there were eighteen, not including the officers, were of all shapes, sizes, and complexions.

The sails had scarcely been taken in when the storm burst on the brig in all its fury. The waves rose like mountains and followed after her, as if they were eager to swallow her up. The sky grew dark overhead as the night closed in, the wind shrieked through the rigging, and the rag of canvas that they ventured to hoist seemed about to burst away from the yard. It was an awful night. Such a night as causes even reckless men to feel how helpless they are—how dependent on the arm of God. The gale steadily increased until near midnight, when it blew a perfect hurricane.

“It’s a dirty night,” observed the captain, to the second mate, as the latter came on deck to relieve the watch.

“It is, sir,” replied Mr Dicey, as coolly as if he were about to sit down to a good dinner on shore. Mr Dicey was a remarkably matter-of-fact man. He looked upon a storm as he looked upon a fit of the toothache—a thing that had to be endured, and was not worth making a fuss about.

“It won’t last long,” said the captain.

“No, sir; it won’t,” answered Mr Dicey.

As Mr Dicey did not seem inclined to say more, the captain went below and flung himself on a locker, having given orders that he should be called if any change for the worse took place in the

weather. Soon afterward a tremendous sea rose high over the stern, and part of it fell on the deck with a terrible crash, washing Mr Dicey into the lee-scuppers, and almost sweeping him overboard. On regaining his feet, and his position beside the wheel, the second mate shook himself and considered whether he ought to call the captain. Having meditated some time, he concluded that the weather was no worse, although it had treated him very roughly, so he did not disturb the captain's repose.

Thus the storm raged all that night. It tossed the *Hope* about like a cork; it well-nigh blew the sails off the masts, and almost blew Mr Dicey's head off his shoulders! then it stopped as it had begun—suddenly.

## Chapter Three

### In the Ice—Dangers of Arctic Voyaging

Next morning the *Hope* was becalmed in the midst of a scene more beautiful than the tongue or the pen of man can describe.

When the sun rose that day, it shone upon what appeared to be a field of glass and a city of crystal. Every trace of the recent storm was gone except a long swell, which caused the brig to roll considerably, but which did not break the surface of the sea.

Ice was to be seen all round as far as the eye could reach. Ice in every form and size imaginable. And the wonderful thing about it was that many of the masses resembled the buildings of a city. There were houses, and churches, and monuments, and spires, and ruins. There were also islands and mountains! Some of the pieces were low and flat, no bigger than a boat; others were tall, with jagged tops; some of the fields, as they are called, were a mile and more in extent, and there were a number of bergs, or ice-mountains, higher than the brig's topmasts. These last were almost white, but they had, in many places, a greenish-blue colour that was soft and beautiful. The whole scene shone and sparkled so brilliantly in the morning sun, that one could almost fancy it was one of the regions of fairyland!

When young Gregory came on the quarter-deck, no one was there except Jim Croft, a short, thick-set man, with the legs of a dwarf and the shoulders of a giant. He stood at the helm, and although no steering was required, as there was no wind, he kept his hands on the spokes of the wheel, and glanced occasionally at the compass. The first mate, who had the watch on deck, was up at the masthead, observing the state of the ice.

"How glorious!" exclaimed the youth, as he swept his sparkling eye round the horizon. "Ah, Croft! is not this splendid?"

"So it is, sir," said the seaman, turning the large quid of tobacco that bulged out his left cheek. "It's very beautiful, no doubt, but it's comin' rather thick for my taste."

"How so?" inquired Gregory. "There seems to me plenty of open water to enable us to steer clear of these masses. Besides, as we have no wind, it matters little, I should think, whether we have room to sail or not."

"You've not seed much o' the ice yet, that's plain," said Croft, "else you'd know that the floes are closin' round us, an' we'll soon be fast in the pack, if a breeze don't spring up to help us."

As the reader may not, perhaps, understand the terms used by Arctic voyagers in regard to the ice in its various forms, it may be as well here to explain the meaning of those most commonly used.

When ice is seen floating in small detached pieces and scattered masses, it is called "floe" ice, and men speak of getting among the floes. When these floes close up, so that the whole sea seems to be covered with them, and little water can be seen, it is called "pack" ice. When the pack is squeezed together, so that lumps of it are forced up in the form of rugged mounds, these mounds are called "hummocks." A large mass of flat ice, varying from one mile to many miles in extent, is called a "field," and a mountain of ice is called a "berg."

All the ice here spoken of, except the berg, is sea-ice; formed by the freezing of the ocean in winter. The berg is formed in a very different manner. Of this more shall be said in a future chapter.

"Well, my lad," said Gregory, in reply to Jim Croft's last observation, "I have not seen much of the ice yet, as you truly remark, so I hope that the wind will not come to help us out of it for some time. You don't think it dangerous to get into the pack, do you?"

"Well, not exactly dangerous, sir," replied Croft, "but I must say that it aint safe, 'specially when there's a swell on like this. But that'll go down soon. D'ye know what a nip is, Dr Gregory?"

“I think I do; at least I have read of such a thing. But I should be very glad to hear what you have to say about it. No doubt you have felt one.”

“Felt one!” cried Jim, screwing up his face and drawing his limbs together, as if he were suffering horrible pain, “no, I’ve never felt one. The man what *feels* a nip aint likely to live to tell what his feelin’s was. But I’ve *seed* one.”

“You’ve seen one, have you? That must have been interesting. Where was it?”

“Not very far from the Greenland coast,” said Croft, giving his quid another turn. “This was the way of it. You must know that there was two ships of us in company at the time. Whalers we was. We got into the heart of the pack somehow, and we thought we’d never get out of it again. There was nothin’ but ice all round us as far as the eye could see. The name of our ship was the *Nancy*. Our comrade was the *Bullfinch*. One mornin’ early we heard a loud noise of ice rubbin’ agin the sides o’ the ship, so we all jumped up, an’ on deck as fast as we could, for there’s short time given to save ourselves in them seas sometimes. The whole pack, we found, was in motion, and a wide lead of water opened up before us, for all the world like a smooth river or canal windin’ through the pack. Into this we warped the ship, and hoistin’ sail, steered away cheerily. We passed close to the *Bullfinch*, which was still hard and fast in the pack, and we saw that her crew were sawin’ and cuttin’ away at the ice, tryin’ to get into the lead that we’d got into. So we hailed them, and said we would wait for ’em outside the pack, if we got through. But the words were no sooner spoken, when the wind it died away, and we were becalmed about half a mile from the *Bullfinch*.

“You’d better go down to breakfast, boys,’ says our captain, says he, ‘the breeze won’t be long o’ comin’ again.’

“So down the men went, and soon after that the steward comes on deck, and, says he to the captain, ‘Breakfast, sir.’ ‘Very good,’ says the captain, and down he went too, leavin’ me at the wheel and the mate in charge of the deck. He’d not been gone three minutes when I noticed that the great field of ice on our right was closin’ in on the field on our left, and the channel we was floatin’ in was closin’ up. The mate noticed it, too, but he wouldn’t call the captain ’cause the ice came so slowly and quietly on that for a few minutes we could hardly believe it was movin’ and everything around us looked so calm and peaceful like that it was difficult to believe our danger was so great. But this was only a momentary feelin’, d’ye see. A minute after that the mate he cries down to the captain:—

“Ice closin’ up, sir!”

“And the captain he runs on deck. By this time there was no mistake about it; the ice was close upon us. It was clear that we were to have a nip. So the captain roars down the hatchway, ‘Tumble up there! tumble up! every man alive! for your lives!’ And sure enough they did tumble up, as I never seed ’em do it before—two or three of ’em was sick; they came up with their clothes in their hands. The ice was now almost touchin’ our sides, and I tell *you*, sir, I never did feel so queerish in all my life before as when I looked over the side at the edge of that great field of ice which rose three foot out o’ the water, and was, I suppose, six foot more below the surface. It came on so slow that we could hardly see the motion. Inch by inch the water narrowed between it and our sides. At last it touched on the left side, and that shoved us quicker on to the field on our right. Every eye was fixed on it—every man held his breath. You might have heard a pin fall on the deck. It touched gently at first, then there was a low grindin’ and crunchin’ sound. The ship trembled as if it had been a livin’ cretur, and the beams began to crack. Now, you must know, sir, that when a nip o’ this sort takes a ship the ice usually eases off, after giving her a good squeeze, or when the pressure is too much for her, the ice slips under her bottom and lifts her right out o’ the water. But our *Nancy* was what we call wall-sided. She was never fit to sail in them seas. The consequence was that the ice crushed her sides in. The moment the captain heard the beams begin to go he knew it was all up with the ship; so he roared to take to the ice for our lives! You may be sure we took his advice. Over the side we went, every man Jack of us, and got on the ice. We did not take time to save an article belongin’ to us; and it was as well we did not, for the ice closed up with a crash, and we heard the beams and timbers rending

like a fire of musketry in the hold. Her bottom must have been cut clean away, for she stood on the ice just as she had floated on the sea. Then the noise stopped, the ice eased off, and the ship began to settle. The lead of water opened up again; in ten minutes after that the *Nancy* went to the bottom and left us standing there on the ice.

“It was the mercy of God that let it happen so near the *Bullfinch*. We might have been out o’ sight o’ that ship at the time, and then every man of us would have bin lost. As it was, we had a hard scramble over a good deal of loose ice, jumpin’ from lump to lump, and some of us fallin’ into the water several times, before we got aboard. Now that was a bad nip, sir, warn’t it?”

“It certainly was,” replied Gregory; “and although I delight in being among the ice, I sincerely hope that our tight little brig may not be tried in the same way. But she is better able to stand it, I should think.”

“That she is, sir,” replied Croft, with much confidence. “I seed her in dock, sir, when they was a-puttin’ of extra timbers on the bow, and I do believe she would stand twice as much bad usage as the *Nancy* got, though she is only half the size.”

Jim Croft’s opinion on this point was well founded, for the *Hope* had indeed been strengthened and prepared for her ice battles with the greatest care, by men of experience and ability. As some readers may be interested in this subject, I shall give a brief account of the additions that were made to her hull.

The vessel was nearly two hundred tons burden. She had originally been built very strongly, and might even have ventured on a voyage to the Polar seas just as she was. But Captain Harvey resolved to take every precaution to insure the success of his voyage, and the safety and comfort of his men. He, therefore, had the whole of the ship’s bottom sheathed with thick hardwood planking, which was carried up above her water-line, as high as the ordinary floe-ice would be likely to reach. The hull inside was strengthened with stout cross-beams, as well as with beams running along the length of the vessel, and in every part that was likely to be subjected to pressure iron stanchions were fastened. But the bow of the vessel was the point where the utmost strength was aimed at. Inside, just behind the cutwater, the whole space was so traversed by cross-beams of oak that it almost became a solid mass, and outside the sharp stem was cased in iron so as to resemble a giant’s chisel. The false keel was taken off, the whole vessel, in short, was rendered as strong, outside and in, as wood and iron and skill could make her. It need scarcely be said that all the other arrangements about her were made with the greatest care and without regard to expense, for although the owners of the brig did not wish to waste their money, they set too high a value on human life to risk it for the sake of saving a few pounds. She was provisioned for a cruise of two years and a half. But this was in case of accidents, for Captain Harvey did not intend to be absent much longer than one year.

But, to return to our story:

Jim Croft’s fear that they would be set fast was realised sooner than he expected. The floes began to close in, from no cause that could be seen, for the wind was quite still, and in a short time the loose ice pressed against the *Hope* on all sides. It seemed to young Gregory as if the story that the seaman had just related was about to be enacted over again; and, being a stranger to ice, he could not help feeling a little uneasy for some time. But there was in reality little or no danger, for the pressure was light, and the brig had got into a small bay in the edge of an ice-field, which lay in the midst of the smaller masses.

Seeing that there was little prospect of the pack opening up just then, the captain ordered the ice-anchors to be got out and fixed.

The appearance of the sea from the brig’s deck was now extremely wintry, but very bright and cheerful. Not a spot of blue water was to be seen in any direction. The whole ocean appeared as if it had been frozen over.

It was now past noon, and the sun's rays were warm, although the quantity of ice around rendered the air cold. As the men were returning from fixing the anchors, the captain looked over the side, and said:

“It's not likely that we shall move out of this for some hours. What say you, lads, to a game of football?”

The proposal was received with a loud cheer. The ball had been prepared by the sail-maker, in expectation of some such opportunity as this. It was at once tossed over the side; those men who were not already on the field scrambled out of the brig, and the entire crew went leaping and yelling over the ice with the wild delight of schoolboys let loose for an unexpected holiday.

They were in the middle of the game when a loud shout came from the brig, and the captain's voice was heard singing out:

“All hands ahoy! come aboard. Look alive!”

Instantly the men turned, and there was a general race toward the brig, which lay nearly a quarter of a mile distant from them.

In summer, changes in the motions of the ice take place in the most unexpected manner. Currents in the ocean are, no doubt, the chief cause of these; the action of winds has also something to do with them. One of these changes was now taking place. Almost before the men got on board the ice had separated, and long canals of water were seen opening up here and there. Soon after that a light breeze sprang up, the ice-anchors were taken aboard, the sails trimmed, and soon the *Hope* was again making her way slowly but steadily to the north.

## Chapter Four

### Difficulties, Troubles, And Dangers

For some hours the brig proceeded onward with a freshening breeze, winding and turning in order to avoid the lumps of ice. Many of the smaller pieces were not worth turning out of the way of, the mere weight of the vessel being sufficient to push them aside.

Up to this time they had succeeded in steering clear of everything without getting a thump; but they got one at last, which astonished those among the crew who had not been in the ice before. The captain, Gregory, and Dicey were seated in the cabin at the time taking tea. Ned Dawkins, the steward, an active little man, was bringing in a tea-pot with a second supply of tea. In his left hand he carried a tray of biscuit. The captain sat at the head of the table, Dicey at the foot, and the doctor at the side.

Suddenly a tremendous shock was felt! The captain's cup of tea leaped away from him and flooded the centre of the table. The doctor's cup was empty; he seized the table with both hands and remained steady; but Dicey's cup happened to be at his lips at the moment, and was quite full. The effect on him was unfortunate. He was thrown violently on his back, and the tea poured over his face and drenched his hair as he lay sprawling on the floor. The steward saved himself by dropping the bread-tray and grasping the handle of the cabin door. So violent was the shock that the ship's bell was set a-ringing.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," cried the first mate, looking down the skylight. "I forgot to warn you. The ice is getting rather thick around us, and I had to charge a lump of it."

"It's all very well to beg pardon," said the captain, "but that won't mend my crockery!"

"Or dry my head," growled Mr Dicey; "it's as bad as if I'd been dipped overboard, it is."

Before Mr Dicey's grumbling remarks were finished all three of them had reached the deck. The wind had freshened considerably, and the brig was rushing in a somewhat alarming manner among the floes. It required the most careful attention to prevent her striking heavily.

"If it goes on like this, we shall have to reduce sail," observed the captain. "See, there is a neck of ice ahead that will stop us."

This seemed to be probable, for the lane of water along which they were steering was, just ahead of them, stopped by a neck of ice that connected two floe-pieces. The water beyond was pretty free from ice, but this neck or mass seemed so thick that it became a question whether they should venture to charge it or shorten sail.

"Stand by the fore- and main-topsail braces!" shouted the captain.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Now, Mr Mansell," said he, with a smile, "we have come to our first real difficulty. What do you advise; shall we back the topsails, or try what our little *Hope* is made of, and charge the enemy?"

"Charge!" answered the mate.

"Just so," said the captain, hastening to the bow to direct the steersman. "Port your helm."

"Steady."

The brig was now about fifty yards from the neck of ice, tearing through the water like a race-horse. In another moment she was up to it and struck it fair in the middle. The stout little vessel quivered to her keel under the shock, but she did not recoil. She split the mass into fragments, and, bearing down all before her, sailed like a conqueror into the clear water beyond.

"Well done the *Hope*!" said the captain, as he walked aft, while a cheer burst from the men.

"I think she ought to be called the *Good Hope* ever after this," said Tom Gregory. "If she cuts her way through everything as easily as she has cut through that neck of ice, we shall reach the North Pole itself before winter."

“If we reach the North Pole *at all*,” observed Mr Dicey, “I’ll climb up to the top of it and stand on my head, I will!”

The second mate evidently had no expectation of reaching that mysterious pole, which men have so long and so often tried to find, in vain.

“Heavy ice ahead, sir,” shouted Mr Mansell, who was at the masthead with a telescope.

“Where away?”

“On the weather bow, sir, the pack seems open enough to push through, but the large bergs are numerous.”

The *Hope* was now indeed getting into the heart of those icy regions where ships are in constant danger from the floating masses that come down with the ocean-currents from the far north. In sailing along she was often obliged to run with great violence against lumps so large that they caused her whole frame to tremble, stout though it was. “Shall we smash the lump, or will it stave in our bows?” was a question that frequently ran in the captain’s mind. Sometimes ice closed round her and squeezed the sides so that her beams cracked. At other times, when a large field was holding her fast, the smaller pieces would grind and rasp against her as they went past, until the crew fancied the whole of the outer sheathing of planks had been scraped off. Often she had to press close to ice-bergs of great size, and more than once a lump as large as a good-sized house fell off the ice-fields and plunged into the sea close to her side, causing her to rock violently on the waves that were raised by it.

Indeed the bergs are dangerous neighbours, not only from this cause, but also on account of their turning upside down at times, and even falling to pieces, so that Captain Harvey always kept well out of their way when he could; but this was not always possible. The little brig had a narrow escape one day from the falling of a berg.

It was a short time after that day on which they had the game of football. They passed in safety through the floes and bergs that had been seen that evening, and got into open water beyond, where they made good progress before falling in with ice; but at last they came to a part of Baffin’s Bay where a great deal of ice is always found. Here the pack surrounded them, and compelled them to pass close to a berg which was the largest they had fallen in with up to that time. It was jagged in form, and high rather than broad. Great peaks rose up from it like the mountain tops of some wild highland region. It was several hundred yards off the weather-beam when the brig passed, but it towered so high over the masts that it seemed to be much nearer than it was. There was no apparent motion in this berg, and the waves beat and rolled upon its base just as they do on the shore of an island. In fact it was as like an island as possible, or, rather, like a mountain planted in the sea, only it was white instead of green. There were cracks and rents and caverns in it, just as there are on a rugged mountain side, all of which were of a beautiful blue colour. There were also slopes and crags and precipices, down which the water of the melted ice constantly flowed in wild torrents. Many of these were equal to small rivulets, and some of the waterfalls were beautiful. The berg could not have measured less than a mile round the base, and it was probably two hundred feet high. It is well known that floating ice sinks deep, and that there is about eight or ten times as much of it below as there is above water. The reader may therefore form some idea of what an enormous mass of ice this berg was.

The crew of the *Hope* observed, in passing, that lumps were continually falling from the cliffs into the sea. The berg was evidently in a very rotten and dangerous state, and the captain ran the brig as close to the pack on the other side as possible, in order to keep out of its way. Just as this was done, some great rents occurred, and suddenly a mass of ice larger than the brig fell from the top of a cliff into the sea. No danger flowed from this, but the mass thus thrown off was so large as to destroy the balance of the berg, and, to the horror of the sailors, the huge mountain began to roll over. Fortunately it fell in a direction away from the brig. Had it rolled toward her, no human power could have saved our voyagers. The mighty mass went over with a wild hollow roar, and new peaks and cliffs rose out of the sea, as the old ones disappeared, with great cataracts of uplifted brine pouring furiously down their sides.

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