

CHAPTER XX,

“UNMERCIFUL DISASTER”

In the morning, after breakfast, it was decided that the men should begin to dig a sloping bed which would allow the Halbrane to slide to the foot of the iceberg. Would that Heaven might grant success to the operation, for who could contemplate without terror having to brave the severity of the austral winter, and to pass six months under such conditions as ours on a vast iceberg, dragged none could tell whither? Once the winter had set in, none of us could have escaped from that most terrible of fates--dying of cold.

At this moment, Dirk Peters, who was observing the horizon from south to east at about one hundred paces off, cried out in a rough voice: “Lying to!”

Lying to? What could the half-breed mean by that, except that the floating mass had suddenly ceased to drift? As for the cause of this stoppage, it was neither the moment to investigate it, nor to ask ourselves what the consequences were likely to be.

“It is true, however,” cried the boatswain. “The iceberg is not stirring, and perhaps has not stirred since it capsized!”

“How?” said I, “it no longer changes its place?”

“No,” replied the mate, “and the proof is that the others, drifting on, are leaving it behind!”

And, in fact, whilst five or six icebergs were descending towards the south, ours was as motionless as though it had been stranded on a shoal.

The simplest explanation was that the new base had encountered ground at the bottom of the sea to which it now adhered, and would continue to adhere, unless the submerged part rose in the water so as to cause a second capsize.

This complicated matters seriously, because the dangers of positive immobility were such that the chances of drifting were preferable. At least, in the latter case there was some hope of coming across a continent or an island, or even (if the currents did not change) of crossing the boundaries of the austral region.

Here we were, then, after three months of this terrible voyage! Was there now any question of trying to save William Guy, his comrades on the lane, and Arthur Pym? Was it not for our own safety that any means at our disposal should be employed? And could it be wondered at were the sailors of the Halbrane to rebel, were they to listen to Hearne’s suggestions, and make their officers, or myself especially, responsible for the disasters of this expedition?

Moreover, what was likely to take place, since, notwithstanding their losses, the followers of the sealing-master were still a majority of the ship's company?

This question I could clearly see was occupying the thoughts of Captain Len Guy and West.

Again, although the recruits from the Falklands formed only a total of fourteen men, as against the twelve of the old crew, was it not to be feared that some of the latter would take Hearne's side? What if Hearne's people, urged by despair, were already thinking of seizing the only boat we now possessed, setting off towards the north, and leaving us on this iceberg? It was, then, of great importance that our boat should be put in safety and closely watched.

A marked change had taken place in Captain Len Guy since the recent occurrences. He seemed to be transformed upon finding himself face to face with the dangers which menaced us. Up to that time he had been solely occupied in searching for his fellow-countrymen; he had handed over the command of the schooner to West, and he could not have given it to anyone more zealous and more capable. But from this date he resumed his position as master of the ship, and used it with the energy required by the circumstances; in a word, he again became sole master on board, after God.

At his command the crew were drawn up around him on a flat spot a little to the left of the Halbrane. In that place the following were

assembled:--on the seniors' side: Martin Holt and Hardy, Rogers, Francis, Gratian, Bury, Stern, the cook (Endicott), and I may add Dirk Peters; on the side of the new-comers, Hearne and the thirteen other Falkland sailors. The latter composed a distinct group; the sealing-master was their spokesman and exercised a baneful influence over them.

Captain Len Guy cast a stern glance upon the men and said in a sharp tone:

“Sailors of the Halbrane, I must first speak to you of our lost companions. Five of us have just perished in this catastrophe.”

“We are waiting to perish in our turn, in these seas, where we have been dragged in spite of--”

“Be silent, Hearne,” cried West, pale with anger, “or if not--”

“Hearne has said what he had to say,” Captain Len Guy continued, coldly. “Now it is said, and I advise him not to interrupt me a second time!”

The sealing-master might possibly have ventured on an answer, for he felt that he was backed by the majority of the crew; but Martin Holt held him back, and he was silent.

Captain Len Guy then took off his hat and pronounced the following words with an emotion that affected us to the bottom of our hearts:--

“We must pray for those who have died in this dangerous voyage, which was undertaken in the name of humanity. May God be pleased to take into consideration the fact that they devoted their lives to their fellow-creatures, and may He not be insensible to our prayers! Kneel down, sailors of the Halbrane!”

They all knelt down on the icy surface, and the murmurs of prayer ascended towards heaven.

We waited for Captain Len Guy to rise before we did so.

“Now,” he resumed, “after those who are dead come those who have survived. To them I say that they must obey me, whatever my orders may be, and even in our present situation I shall not tolerate any hesitation or opposition. The responsibility for the general safety is mine, and I will not yield any of it to anyone. I am master here, as on board--”

“On board--when there is no longer a ship,” muttered the sealing-master.

“You are mistaken, Hearne, the vessel is there, and we will put it back into the sea. Besides, if we had only a boat, I am the captain of it. Let him beware who forgets this!”

That day, Captain Len Guy, having taken the height of the sun by the sextant and fixed the hour by the chronometer (both of these instruments had escaped destruction in the collision), obtained the following position of his ship:--

South latitude: 88° 55’.

West longitude: 39° 12’.

The Halbrane was only at 1° 5’--about 65 miles--from the south pole.

“All hands to work,” was the captain’s order that afternoon, and every one obeyed it with a will. There was not a moment to lose, as the question of time was more important than any other. So far as provisions were concerned, there was enough in the schooner for eighteen months on full rations, so we were not threatened with hunger, nor with thirst either, notwithstanding that owing to the water-casks having been burst in the collision, their contents had escaped through their staves. Luckily, the barrels of gin, whisky, beer, and wine, being placed in the least exposed part of the hold, were nearly all intact. Under this head we had experienced no loss, and the iceberg would supply us with good drinking-water. It is a well-known fact that ice, whether formed from fresh or salt water, contains no salt, owing to the chloride of sodium being eliminated in the change from the liquid to the solid state. The origin of the

ice, therefore, is a matter of no importance. However, those blocks which are easily distinguished by their greenish colour and their perfect transparency are preferable. They are solidified rain, and therefore much more suitable for drinking-water.

Without doubt, our captain would have recognized any blocks of this description, but none were to be found on the glacier, owing to its being that part of the berg which was originally submerged, and came to the top after the fall.

The captain and West decided first to lighten the vessel, by conveying everything on board to land. The masts were to be cleared of rigging, taken out, and placed on the plateau. It was necessary to lighten the vessel as much as possible, even to clear out the ballast, owing to the difficult and dangerous operation of launching. It would be better to put off our departure for some days if this operation could be performed under more favourable circumstances. The loading might be afterwards accomplished without much difficulty.

Besides this, another reason by no means less serious presented itself to us. It would have been an act of unpardonable rashness to leave the provisions in the storeroom of the Halbrane, her situation on the side of the iceberg being very precarious. One shake would suffice to detach the ship, and with her would have disappeared the supplies on which our lives depended.

On this account, we passed the day in removing casks of half-salted meat, dried vegetables, flour, biscuits, tea, coffee, barrels of gin, whisky, wine and beer from the hold and store-room and placing them in safety in the hammocks near the Halbrane.

We also had to insure our landing against any possible accident, and, I must add, against any plot on the part of Hearne and others to seize the boat in order to return to the ice-barrier.

We placed the long boat in a cavity which would be easy to watch, about thirty feet to the left of the schooner, along with its oars, rudder, compass, anchor, masts and sail.

By day there was nothing to fear, and at night, or rather during the hours of sleep, the boatswain and one of the superiors would keep guard near the cavity, and we might rest assured that no evil could befall.

The 19th, 20th, and 21st of January were passed in working extra hard in the unshipping of the cargo and the dismantling of the Halbrane. We slung the lower masts by means of yards forming props. Later on, West would see to replacing the main and mizzen masts; in any case, we could do without them until we had reached the Falklands or some other winter port.

Needless to say, we had set up a camp on the plateau of which I have spoken, not far from the Halbrane. Sufficient shelter against the

inclemency of the weather, not unfrequent at this time of the year, was to be found under tents, constructed of sails placed on spars and fastened down by pegs. The glass remained set fair; the wind was nor'-east, the temperature having risen to 46 degrees (2° 78' C.).

Endicott's kitchen was fitted up at the end of the plain, near a steep projection by which we could climb to the very top of the berg.

It is only fair to state that during these three days of hard work no fault was to be found with Hearne. The sealing-master knew he was being closely watched, and he was well aware that Captain Len Guy would not spare him if he tried to get up insubordination amongst his comrades. It was a pity that his bad instincts had induced him to play such a part, for his strength, skill, and cleverness made him a very valuable man, and he had never proved more useful than under these circumstances.

Was he changed for the better? Did he understand that general good feeling was necessary for the safety of all? I know not, but I had no confidence in him, neither had Hurliguerly!

I need not dwell on the ardour with which the half-breed did the rough work, always first to begin and the last to leave off, doing as much as four men, and scarcely sleeping, only resting during meals, which he took apart from the others. He had hardly spoken to me at all since the schooner had met with this terrible accident.

What indeed could he say to me? Did I not know as well as he that it would be necessary to renounce every hope of pursuing our intended voyage?

Now and again I noticed Martin Holt and the halfbreed near each other while some difficult piece of work was in progress. Our sailing-master did not miss a chance of getting near Dirk Peters, who always tried his best to escape from him, for reasons well known to me. And whenever I thought of the secret of the fate of the so-called Parker, Martin Holt's brother, which had been entrusted to me, that dreadful scene of the Grampus filled me with horror. I was certain that if this secret were made known the half-breed would become an object of terror. He would no longer be looked upon as the rescuer of the sailingmaster; and the latter, learning that his brother--Luckily, Dirk Peters and myself were the only two acquainted with the fact.

While the Halbrane was being unloaded, Captain Len Guy and the mate were considering how the vessel might be launched. They had to allow for a drop of one hundred feet between the cavity in which the ship lay and the sea; this to be effected by means of an inclined bed hollowed in an oblique line along the west side of the iceberg, and to measure two or three hundred perches in length. So, while the first lot of men, commanded by the boatswain, was unloading the schooner, a second batch under West's orders began to cut the trench between the blocks which covered the side of the floating

mountain.

Floating? I know not why I use this expression, for the iceberg no longer floated, but remained as motionless as an island. There was nothing to indicate that it would ever move again. Other icebergs drifted along and passed us, going south-east, whilst ours, to use Dirk Peters' expression, was "lying to." Would its base be sufficiently undermined to allow it to detach itself? Perhaps some heavy mass of ice might strike it and set it free by the shock. No one could predict such an event, and we had only the Halbrane to rely upon for getting us out of these regions.

We were engaged in these various tasks until the 24th of January. The atmosphere was clear, the temperature was even, and the thermometer had indeed gone up to two or three degrees above freezing-point. The number of icebergs coming from the nor'-west was therefore increasing; there were now a hundred of them, and a collision with any of these might have a most disastrous result. Hardy, the caulker, hastened first of all to mend the hull; pegs had to be changed, bits of planking to be replaced, seams to be caulked. We had everything that was necessary for this work, and we might rest assured that it would be performed in the best possible manner. In the midst of the silence of these solitudes, the noise of the hammers striking nails into the side, and the sound of the mallet stuffing tow into the seams, had a startling effect. Sea-gulls, wild duck, albatross, and petrels flew in a circle round the top of the berg with a shrill screaming, and made a terrible uproar.

When I found myself with West and the captain, our conversation naturally turned on our situation and how to get out of it, and upon our chances of pulling through. The mate had good hopes that if no accident occurred the launching would be successfully accomplished. The captain was more reserved on the subject, but at the thought that he would have to renounce all hope of finding the survivors of the fane, his heart was ready to break. When the Halbrane should again be ready for the sea, and when West should inquire what course he was to steer, would Captain Len Guy dare to reply, "To the south"? No! for he would not be followed either by the new hands, or by the greater portion of the older members of the crew. To continue our search in this direction, to go beyond the pole, without being certain of reaching the Indian Ocean instead of the Atlantic, would have been rashness of which no navigator would be guilty. If a continent bound the sea on this side, the schooner would run the danger of being crushed by the mass of ice before it could escape the southern winter.

Under such circumstances, to attempt to persuade Captain Len Guy to pursue the voyage would only be to court a certain refusal. It could not even be proposed, now that necessity obliged us to return northwards, and not to delay a single day in this portion of the Antarctic regions. At any rate, though I resolved not again to speak of the matter to the captain, I lost no opportunity of sounding the boatswain. Often when he had finished his work, Hurliguerly would come and join me; we would chat, and we would compare our

recollections of travel.

One day as we were seated on the summit of the iceberg, gazing fixedly on the deceptive horizon, he exclaimed,--

“Who could ever have imagined, Mr. Jeorling, when the Halbrane left Kerguelen, that six and a half months afterwards she would be stuck on the side of an icemountain?”

“A fact much more to be regretted,” I replied, “because only for that accident we should have attained our object, and we should have begun our return journey.”

“I don’t mean to contradict,” replied the boatswain, “but you say we should have attained our object, Do you mean by that, that we should have found our countrymen?”

“Perhaps.”

“I can scarcely believe such would have been the case, Mr. Jeorling, although this was the principal and perhaps even the only object of our navigation in the polarseas.”

“The only one--yes--at the start,” I insinuated. “But since the half-breed’s revelations about Arthur Pym--”

“Ah! You are always harking back on that subject, like brave Dirk

Peters.”

“Always, Hurliguerly; and only that a deplorable and unforeseen accident made us run aground--”

“I leave you to your delusions, Mr. Jeorling, since you believe you have run aground--”

“Why? Is not this the case?”

“In any case it is a wonderful running aground,” replied the boatswain. “Instead of a good solid bottom, we have run aground in the air.”

“Then I am right, Hurliguerly, in saying it is an unfortunate adventure.”

“Unfortunate, truly, but in my opinion we should take warning by it.”

“What warning?”

“That it is not permitted to us to venture so farin these latitudes, and I believe that the Creator forbids His creatures to climb to the summit of the poles.”

“Notwithstanding that the summit of one pole is only sixty miles

away from us now.”

“Granted, Mr. Jeorling, but these sixty miles are equal to thousands when we have no means of making them! And if the launch of the schooner is not successful, here are we condemned to winter quarters which the polar bears themselves would hardly relish!”

I replied only by a shake of my head, which Hurliguerly could not fail to understand.

“Do you know, Mr. Jeorling, of what I think oftenest?”

“What do you think of, boatswain?”

“Of the Kerguelens, whither we are certainly not travelling.

Truly, in a bad season it was cold enough there! There is not much difference between this archipelago and the islands situated on the edge of the Antarctic Sea! But there one is not far from the Cape, and if we want to warm our shins, no iceberg bars the way. Whereas here it is the devil to weigh anchor, and one never knows if one shall find a clear course.”

“I repeat it, boatswain. If this last accident had not occurred, everything would have been over by this time, one way or another. We should still have had more than six weeks to get out of these southern seas. It is seldom that a ship is so roughly treated as ours has been, and I consider it real bad luck, after our having

profited by such fortunate circumstances--”

“These circumstances are all over, Mr. Jeorling,” exclaimed Hurliguerly, “and I fear indeed--”

“What--you also, boatswain--you whom I believed to be so confident!”

“Confidence, Mr. Jeorling, wears out like the ends of one’s trousers, What would you have me do? When I compare my lot to old Atkins, installed in his cosy inn; when I think of the Green Cormorant, of the big parlours downstairs with the little tables round which friends sip whisky and gin, discussing the news of the day, while the stove makes more noise than the weathercock on the roof--oh, then the comparison is not in our favour, and in my opinion Mr. Atkins enjoys life better than I do.”

“You shall see them all again, boatswain--Atkins, the Green Cormorant, and Kerguelen! For God’s sake do not let yourself grow downhearted! And if you, a sensible and courageous man, despair already--”

“Oh, if I were the only one it would not be half so bad as it is!”

“The whole crew does not despair, surely?”

“Yes--and no,” replied Hurliguerly, “for I know some who are not at all satisfied!”

“Has Hearne begun his mischief again? Is he exciting his companion?”

“Not openly at least, Mr. Jeorling, and since I have kept him under my eye I have neither seen nor heard anything. Besides, he knows what awaits him if he budes. I believe I am not mistaken, the sly dog has changed his tactics. But what does not astonish me in him, astonishes me in Martin Holt.”

“What do you mean, boatswain?”

“That they seem to be on good terms with each other. See how Hearne seeks out Martin Holt, talks to him frequently, and Holt does not treat his overtures unfavourably.”

“Martin Holt is not one of those who would listen to Hearne’s advice, or follow it if he tried to provoke rebellion amongst the crew.”

“No doubt, Mr. Jeorling. However, I don’t fancy seeing them so much together. Hearne is a dangerous and unscrupulous individual, and most likely Martin Holt does not distrust him sufficiently.”

“He is wrong, boatswain.”

“And--wait a moment--do you know what they were talking about the other day when I overheard a few scraps of their conversation?”

“I could not possibly guess until you tell me, Hurliguerly.

“Well, while they were conversing on the bridge of the Halbrane, I heard them talking about Dirk Peters, and Hearne was saying: ‘You must not owe a grudge to the half-breed, Master Holt, because he refused to respond to your advances and accept your thanks! If he be only a sort of brute, he possesses plenty of courage, and has showed it in getting you out of a bad corner at the risk of his life. And besides, do not forget that he formed part of the crew of the Grampus and your brother Ned, if I don’t mistake--’”

“He said that, boatswain; he spoke of the Grampus!” I exclaimed.

“Yes--of the Grampus!

“And of Ned Holt?”

“Precisely, Mr. Jeorling!”

“And what answer did Martin Holt make?”

“He replied: ‘I don’t even know under what circumstances my unfortunate brother perished. Was it during a revolt on board? Brave

man that he was, he would not betray his captain, and perhaps he was massacred.”

“Did Hearne dwell on this, boatswain?”

“Yes, but he added: ‘It is very sad for you, Master Holt! The captain of the Grampus, according to what I have been told, was abandoned, being placed in a small boat with one or two of his men--and who knows if your brother was not along with him?’”

“And what next?”

“Then, Mr. Jeorling, he added: ‘Did it never occur to you to ask Dirk Peters to enlighten you on the subject?’ ‘Yes, once,’ replied Martin Holt, ‘I questioned the halfbreed about it, and never did I see a man so overcome. He replied in so low a voice that I could scarcely understand him, ‘I know not--I know not--’ and he ran away with his face buried in his hands.”

“Was that all you heard of the conversation, boatswain?”

“That was all, Mr. Jeorling, and I thought it so strange that I wished to inform you of it.”

“And what conclusion did you draw from it?”

“Nothing, except that I look upon the sealing-master as a

scoundrel of the deepest dye, perfectly capable of working in secret for some evil purpose with which he would like to associate Martin Holt!”

What did Hearne’s new attitude mean? Why did he strive to gain Martin Holt, one of the best of the crew, as an ally? Why did he recall the scenes of the Grampus? Did Hearne know more of this matter of Dirk Peters and Ned Holt than the others; this secret of which the half-breed and I believed ourselves to be the sole possessors?

The doubt caused me serious uneasiness. However, I took good care not to say anything of it to Dirk Peters. If he had for a moment suspected that Hearne spoke of what happened on board the Grampus, if he had heard that the rascal (as Hurliguerly called him, and not without reason) constantly talked to Martin Holt about his brother, I really do not know what would have happened.

In short, whatever the intentions of Hearne might be, it was dreadful to think that our sailing-master, on whose fidelity Captain Len Guy ought to be able to count, was in conspiracy with him.

The sailing-master must have a strong motive for acting in this way. What it was I could not imagine. Although the crew seemed to have abandoned every thought of mutiny, a strict watch was kept, especially on Hearne.

Besides, the situation must soon change, at least so far as the schooner was concerned. Two days afterwards the work was finished. The caulking operations were completed, and also the slide for lowering the vessel to the base of our floating mountain.

Just now the upper portion of the ice had been slightly softened, so that this last work did not entail much labour for pick-axe or spade. The course ran obliquely round the west side of the berg, so that the incline should not be too great at any point. With cables properly fixed, the launch, it seemed, might be effected without any mishap. I rather feared lest the melting of the ice should make the gliding less smooth at the lower part of the berg.

Needless to say, the cargo, masting, anchors, chains, &c., had not been put on board. The hull was quite heavy enough, and not easily moved, so it was necessary to lighten it as much as possible.

When the schooner was again in its element, the loading could be effected in a few days.

On the afternoon of the 28th, the finishing touches were given. It was necessary to put supports for the sides of the slide in some places where the ice had melted quickly. Then everyone was allowed to rest from 4 o'clock p.m. The captain had double rations served out to all hands, and well they merited this extra supply of spirits; they had indeed worked hard during the week. I repeat that every sign of mutiny had disappeared. The crew thought of nothing

except this great operation of the launching. The Halbrane in the sea would mean departure, it would also mean return! For Dirk Peters and me it would be the definite abandonment of Arthur Pym.

That night the temperature was the highest we had so far experienced. The thermometer registered 53° (11° 67' C. below zero). So, although the sun was nearing the horizon, the ice was melting, and thousands of small streams flowed in every direction. The early birds awoke at four o'clock, and I was one of their number. I had scarcely slept, and I fancy that Dirk Peters did not sleep much, haunted as he was by the sad thought of having to turn back!

The launch was to take place at ten o'clock. Taking every possible difficulty into account, and allowing for the minutest precautions, the captain hoped that it would be completed before the close of the day. Everyone believed that by evening the schooner would be at the foot of the berg.

Of course we had all to lend a hand to this difficult task. To each man a special duty was assigned; some were employed to facilitate the sliding with wooden rollers, if necessary; others to moderate the speed of the hull, in case it became too great, by means of hawsers and cables.

We breakfasted at nine o'clock in the tents. Our sailors were perfectly confident, and could not refrain from drinking "success

to the event"; and although this was a little premature, we added our hurrahs to theirs. Success seemed very nearly assured, as the captain and the mate had worked out the matter so carefully and skilfully. At last we were about to leave our encampment and take up our stations (some of the sailors were there already), when cries of amazement and fear were raised. What a frightful scene, and, short as it may have been, what an impression of terror it left on our minds!

One of the enormous blocks which formed the bank of the mud-bed where the Halbrane lay, having become loose owing to the melting of its base, had slipped and was bounding over the others down the incline.

In another moment, the schooner, being no longer retained in position, was swinging on this declivity.

On board, on deck, in front, there were two sailors, Rogers and Gratian. In vain did the unfortunate men try to jump over the bulwarks, they had not time, and they were dragged away in this dreadful fall.

Yes! I saw it! I saw the schooner topple over, slide down first on its left side, crush one of the men who delayed too long about jumping to one side, then bound from block to block, and finally fling itself into space.

In another moment the Halbrane, staved in, broken up, with gaping planks and shattered ribs, had sunk, causing a tremendous jet of water to spout up at the foot of the iceberg.

Horrified! yes, indeed, we were horrified when the schooner, carried off as though by an avalanche, had disappeared in the abyss! Not a particle of our Halbrane remained, not even a wreck!

A minute ago she was one hundred feet in the air, now she was five hundred in the depths of the sea! Yes, we were so stupefied that we were unable to think of the dangers to come--our amazement was that of people who "cannot believe their eyes."

Prostration succeeded as a natural consequence. There was not a word spoken. We stood motionless, with our feet rooted to the icy soil.

No words could express the horror of our situation!

As for West, when the schooner had disappeared in the abyss, I saw big tears fall from his eyes. The Halbrane that he loved so much was now an unknown quantity! Yes, our stout-hearted mate wept.

Three of our men had perished, and in what frightful fashion! I had seen Rogers and Gratian, two of our most faithful sailors, stretch out their hands in despair as they were knocked about by the rebounding of the schooner, and finally sink with her! The other man from the Falklands, an American, was crushed in its rush; his shapeless form lay in a pool of blood. Three new victims within the

last ten days had to be inscribed on the register of those who died during this fatal voyage! Ah! fortune had favoured us up to the hour when the Halbrane was snatched from her own element, but her hand was now against us. And was not this last the worst blow--must it not prove the stroke of death?

The silence was broken by a tumult of despairing voices, whose despair was justified indeed by this irreparable misfortune!

And I am sure that more than one thought it would have been better to have been on the Halbrane as she rebounded off the side of the iceberg!

Everything would have been over then, as all was over with Rogers and Gratian! This foolish expedition would thus have come to a conclusion worthy of such rashness and imprudence!

At last, the instinct of self-preservation triumphed, and except Hearne, who stood some distance off and affected silence, all the men shouted: "To the boat! to the boat!"

These unfortunate fellows were out of their mind. Terror led them astray. They rushed towards the crag where our one boat (which could not hold them all) had been sheltered during the unloading of the schooner.

Captain Len Guy and Jem West rushed after them. I joined them

immediately, followed by the boatswain. We were armed, and resolved to make use of our arms. We had to prevent these furious men from seizing the boat, which did not belong to a few, but to all!

“Hallo, sailors!” cried the captain.

“Hallo!” repeated West, “stop there, or we fire on the first who goes a step farther!”

Both threatened the men with their pistols. The boatswain pointed his gun at them. I held my rifle, ready to fire.

It was in vain! The frenzied men heard nothing, would not hear anything, and one of them fell, struck by the mate’s bullet, just as he was crossing the last block. He was unable to catch on to the bank with his hands, and slipping on the frozen slope, he disappeared in the abyss.

Was this the beginning of a massacre? Would others let themselves be killed at this place? Would the old hands side with the new-comers?

At that moment I remarked that Hardy, Martin Holt, Francis Bury, and Stern hesitated about coming over to our side, while Hearne, still standing motionless at some distance, gave no encouragement to the rebels.

However, we could not allow them to become masters of the boat, to

bring it down, to embark ten or twelve men, and to abandon us to our certain fate on this iceberg. They had almost reached the boat, heedless of danger and deaf to threats, when a second report was heard, and one of the sailors fell, by a bullet from the boatswain's gun.

One American and one Fuegian less to be numbered amongst the sealing-master's partisans!

Then, in front of the boat, a man appeared. It was Dirk Peters, who had climbed the opposite slope.

The half-breed put one of his enormous hands on the stern and with the other made a sign to the furious men to clear off. Dirk Peters being there, we no longer needed our arms, as he alone would suffice to protect the boat.

And indeed, as five or six of the sailors were advancing, he went up to them, caught hold of the nearest by the belt, lifted him up, and sent him flying ten paces off. The wretched man not being able to catch hold of anything, would have rebounded into the sea had not Hearne seized him.

Owing to the half-breed's intervention the revolt was instantly quelled. Besides, we were coming up to the boat, and with us those of our men whose hesitation had not lasted long.

No matter. The others were still thirteen to our ten. Captain Len Guy made his appearance; anger shone in his eyes, and with him was West, quite unmoved. Words failed the captain for some moments, but his looks said what his tongue could not utter. At length, in a terrible voice, he said,--

“I ought to treat you as evil-doers; however, I will only consider you as madmen! The boat belongs to everybody. It is now our only means of salvation, and you wanted to steal it--to steal it like cowards! Listen attentively to what I say for the last time! This boat, belonging to the Halbrane, is now the Halbrane herself! I am the captain of it, and let him who disobeys me, beware!”

With these last words Captain Len Guy looked at Hearne, for whom this warning was expressly meant. The sealing-master had not appeared in the last scene, not openly at least, but nobody doubted that he had urged his comrades to make off with the boat, and that he had every intention of doing the same again.

“Now to the camp,” said the captain, “and you, Dirk Peters, remain here!”

The half-breed’s only reply was to nod his big head and betake himself to his post.

The crew returned to the camp without the least hesitation. Some lay down in their sleeping-places, others wandered about. Hearne neither

tried to join them nor to go near Martin Holt.

Now that the sailors were reduced to idleness, there was nothing to do except to ponder on our critical situation, and invent some means of getting out of it.

The captain, the mate, and the boatswain formed a council, and I took part in their deliberations. Captain Len Guy began by saying,--

“We have protected our boat, and we shall continue to protect it.”

“Until death,” declared West.

“Who knows,” said I, “whether we shall not soon be forced to embark?”

“In that case,” replied the captain, “as all cannot fit into it, it will be necessary to make a selection. Lots shall determine which of us are to go, and I shall not ask to be treated differently from the others.”

“We have not come to that, luckily,” replied the boatswain.

“The iceberg is solid, and there is no fear of its melting before winter.”

“No,” assented West, “that is not to be feared. What it

behoves us to do is, while watching the boat, to keep an eye on the provisions.”

“We are lucky,” added Hurlguerly, “to have put our cargo in safety. Poor, dear Halbrane. She will remain in these seas, like the fane, her elder sister!”

Yes, without doubt, and I thought so for many reasons, the one destroyed by the savages of Tsalal, the other by one of these catastrophes that no human power can prevent.

“You are right,” replied the captain, “and we must prevent our men from plundering. We are sure of enough provisions for one year, without counting what we may get by fishing.”

“And it is so much the more necessary, captain, to keep a close watch, because I have seen some hovering about the spirit casks.”

“I will see to that,” replied West.

“But,” I then asked, “had we not better prepare ourselves for the fact that we may be compelled to winter on this iceberg.”

“May Heaven avert such a terrible probability,” replied the captain.

“After all, if it were necessary, we could get through it, Mr.

Jeorling,” said the boatswain. “We could hollow out sheltering-places in the ice, so as to be able to bear the extreme cold of the pole, and so long as we had sufficient to appease our hunger--”

At this moment the horrid recollection of the Grampus came to my mind--the scenes in which Dirk Peters killed Ned Holt, the brother of our sailing-master. Should we ever be in such extremity?

Would it not, before we proceed to set up winter quarters for seven or eight months, be better to leave the iceberg altogether, if such a thing were possible?

I called the attention of Captain Len Guy and West to this point.

This was a difficult question to answer, and a long silence preceded the reply.

At last the captain said,--

“Yes, that would be the best resolution to come to; and if our boat could hold us all, with the provisions necessary for a voyage that might last three or four weeks, I would not hesitate to put to sea now and return towards the north.”

But I made them observe that we should be obliged to direct our course contrary to wind and current; our schooner herself could

hardly have succeeded in doing this. Whilst to continue towards the south--

“Towards the south?” repeated the captain, who looked at me as though he sought to read my thoughts.

“Why not?” I answered. “If the iceberg had not been stopped in its passage, perhaps it would have drifted to some land in that direction, and might not our boat accomplish what it would have done?”

The captain, shaking his head, answered nothing. West also was silent.

“Eh! our iceberg will end by raising its anchor,” replied Hurliguerly. “It does not hold to the bottom, like the Falklands or the Kerguelens! So the safest course is to wait, as the boat cannot carry twenty-three, the number of our party.”

I dwelt upon the fact that it was not necessary for all twenty-three to embark. It would be sufficient, I said, for five or six of us to reconnoitre further south for twelve or fifteen miles.

“South?” repeated Captain Len Guy.

“Undoubtedly, captain,” I added. “You probably know what the geographers frankly admit, that the antarctic regions are formed by

a capped continent.”

“Geographers know nothing, and can know nothing about it,”
replied West, coldly.

“It is a pity,” said I, “that as we are so near, we should not
attempt to solve this question of a polar continent.”

I thought it better not to insist just at present.

Moreover there would be danger in sending out our only boat on a
voyage of discovery, as the current might carry it too far, or it
might not find us again in the same place. And, indeed, if the
iceberg happened to get loose at the bottom, and to resume its
interrupted drift, what would become of the men in the boat?

The drawback was that the boat was too small to carry us all, with
the necessary provisions. Now, of the seniors, there remained ten
men, counting Dirk Peters; of the new men there were thirteen;
twenty-three in all. The largest number our boat could hold was from
eleven to twelve persons. Then eleven of us, indicated by lot, would
have to remain on this island of ice. And what would become of them?

With regard to this Hurliguerly made a sound observation.

“After all,” he said, “I don’t know that those who would
embark would be better off than those who remained! I am so doubtful

of the result, that I would willingly give up my place to anyone who wanted it.”

Perhaps the boatswain was right. But in my own mind, when I asked that the boat might be utilized, it was only for the purpose of reconnoitring the iceberg.

We finally decided to arrange everything with a view to wintering out, even were our ice-mountain again to drift.

“We may be sure that will be agreed to by our men,” declared Hurliguerly.

“What is necessary must be done,” replied the mate, “and to-day we must set to work.”

That was a sad day on which we began our preparations.

Endicott, the cook, was the only man who submitted without murmuring. As a negro, who cares little about the future, shallow and frivolous like all his race, he resigned himself easily to his fate; and this is, perhaps, true philosophy. Besides, when it came to the question of cooking, it mattered very little to him whether it was here or there, so long as his stoves were set up somewhere.

So he said to his friend the mate, with his broad negro smile,--

“Luckily my kitchen did not go off with the schooner, and you shall see, Hurliguerly, if I do not make up dishes just as good as on board the Halbrane, so long as provisions don’t grow scarce, of course--”

“Well! they will not be wanting for some time to come,” replied the boatswain. “We need not fear hunger, but cold, such cold as would reduce you to an icicle the minute you cease to warm your feet with cold that makes your skin crack and your skull split! Even if we had some hundreds of tons of coal--But, all things being well calculated, there is only just what will do to boil this large kettle.”

“And that is sacred,” cried Endicott; “touching is forbidden! The kitchen before all.”

“And that is the reason why it never strikes you to pity yourself, you old nigger! You can always make sure of keeping your feet warm at your oven!”

“What would you have, boatswain? You are a first-rate cook, or you are not. When you are, you take advantage of it; but I will remember to keep you a little place before my stove.”

“That’s good! that’s good, Endicott! Each one shall have his turn! There is no privilege, even for a boatswain! On the whole, it is better not to have to fear famine! One can fight against the

cold. We shall dig holes in the iceberg, and cuddle ourselves up there. And why should we not have a general dwelling-room? We could make a cave for ourselves with pickaxes! I have heard tell that ice preserves heat. Well, let it preserve ours, and that is all I ask of it!”

The hour had come for us to return to the camp and to seek our sleeping-places.

Dirk Peters alone refused to be relieved of his duty as watchman of the boat, and nobody thought of disputing the post with him.

Captain Len Guy and West did not enter the tents until they had made certain that Hearne and his companions had gone to their usual place of rest. I came back likewise and went to bed.

I could not tell how long I had been sleeping, nor what time it was, when I found myself rolling on the ground after a violent shock.

What could be happening? Was it another capsizing of the iceberg?

We were all up in a second, then outside the tents in the full light of a night in the polar regions.

A second floating mass of enormous size had just struck our iceberg, which had “hoisted the anchor” (as the sailors say) and was drifting towards the south.

An unhoped-for change in the situation had taken place. What were to be the consequences of our being no longer cast away at that place? The current was now carrying us in the direction of the pole! The first feeling of joy inspired by this conviction was, however, succeeded by all the terrors of the unknown and what an unknown!

Dirk Peters only was entirely rejoiced that we had resumed the route which, he believed, would lead us to the discovery of traces of his "poor Pym"--far other ideas occupied the minds of his companions.

Captain Len Guy no longer entertained any hope of rescuing his countrymen, and having reached the condition of despair, he was bound by his duty to take his crew back to the north, so as to clear the antarctic circle while the season rendered it possible to do so. And we were being carried away towards the south!

Naturally enough, we were all deeply impressed by the fearfulness of our position, which may be summed up in a few words. We were no longer cast away, with a possible ship, but the tenants of a floating iceberg, with no hope but that our monster tenement might encounter one of the whaling ships whose business in the deep waters lies between the Orkneys, New Georgia, and the Sandwich Islands. A quantity of things had been thrown into the ice by the collision which had set our iceberg afloat, but these were chiefly articles belonging to the Halbrane. Owing to the precaution that had been taken on the previous day, when the cargo was stowed away in the

clefts, it had been only slightly damaged. What would have become of us, had all our reserves been swallowed up in that grim encounter?

Now, the two icebergs formed but one, which was travelling south at the rate of two miles an hour. At this rate, thirty hours would suffice to bring us to the point of the axis at which the terrestrial meridians unite. Did the current which was carrying us along pass on to the pole itself, or was there any land which might arrest our progress? This was another question, and I discussed it with the boatswain.

“Nobody knows, Mr. Jeorling,” was Hurliguerly’s reply. “If the current goes to the pole, we shall go there; and if it doesn’t, we shan’t. An iceberg isn’t a ship, and as it has neither sails nor helm, it goes as the drift takes it.”

“That’s true, boatswain. And therefore I had the idea that if two or three of us were to embark in the boat--”

“Ah! you still hold to your notion of the boat--”

“Certainly, for, if there is land somewhere, is it not possible that the people of the Jane--”

“Have come upon it, Mr. Jeorling--at four thousand miles from Tsalal Island.”

“Who knows, boatswain?”

“That may be, but allow me to say that your argument will be reasonable when the land comes in sight, if it ever does so. Our captain will see what ought to be done, and he will remember that time presses. We cannot delay in these waters, and, after all, the one thing of real importance to us is to get out of the polar circle before the winter makes it impassable.”

There was good sense in Hurliguerly’s words; I could not deny the fact.

During that day the greater part of the cargo was placed in the interior of a vast cave-like fissure in the side of the iceberg, where, even in case of a second collision, casks and barrels would be in safety. Our men then assisted Endicott to set up his cooking-stove between two blocks, so that it was firmly fixed, and they heaped up a great mass of coals close to it.

No murmurs, no recrimination disturbed these labours. It was evident that silence was deliberately maintained. The crew obeyed the captain and West because they gave no orders but such as were of urgent necessity. But, afterwards, would these men allow the authority of their leaders to be uncontested? How long would the recruits from the Falklands, who were already exasperated by the disasters of our enterprise, resist their desire to seize upon the boat and escape?

I did not think they would make the attempt, however, so long as our iceberg should continue to drift, for the boat could not outstrip its progress; but, if it were to run aground once more, to strike upon the coast of an island or a continent, what would not these unfortunate creatures do to escape the horrors of wintering under such conditions?

In the afternoon, during the hour of rest allowed to the crew, I had a second conversation with Dirk Peters. I had taken my customary seat at the top of the iceberg, and had occupied it for half an hour, being, as may be supposed, deep in thought, when I saw the half-breed coming quickly up the slope. We had exchanged hardly a dozen words since the iceberg had begun to move again. When Dirk Peters came up to me, he did not address me at first, and was so intent on his thoughts that I was not quite sure he saw me. At length, he leaned back against an ice-block, and spoke:

“Mr. Jeorling,” he said, “you remember, in your cabin in the Halbrane, I told you the--the affair of the Grampus?”

I remembered well.

“I told you that Parker’s name was not Parker, that it was Holt, and that he was Ned Holt’s brother?”

“I know, Dirk Peters,” I replied, “but why do you refer to

that sad story again?”

“Why, Mr. Jeorling? Have not--have you never sam anything about it to anybody?”

“Not to anybody,” I protested. “How could you suppose I should be so ill-advised, so imprudent, as to divulge your secret, a secret which ought never to pass our lips--a dead secret?”

“Dead, yes, dead! And yet, understand me, it seems to me that, among the crew, something is known.”

I instantly recalled to mind what the boatswain had told me concerning a certain conversation in which he had overheard Hearne prompting Martin Holt to ask the half-breed what were the circumstances of his brother’s death on board the Grampus. Had a portion of the secret got out, or was this apprehension on the part of Dirk Peters purely imaginary?

“Explain yourself,” I said.

“Understand me, Mr. Jeorling, I am a bad hand at explaining. Yes, yesterday--I have thought of nothing else since--Martin Holt took me aside, far from the others, and told me that he wished to speak to me--”

“Of the Grampus?”

“Of the Grampus--yes, and of his brother, Ned Holt. For the first time he uttered that name before me--and yet we have sailed together for nearly three months.”

The half-breed's voice was so changed that I could hardly hear him.

“It seemed to me,” he resumed, “that in Martin Holt's mind--no, I was not mistaken--there was something like a suspicion.”

“But tell me what he said! Tell me exactly what he asked you. What is it?”

I felt sure that the question put by Martin Holt, whatsoever its bearing, had been inspired by Hearne. Nevertheless, as I considered it well that the half-breed should know nothing of the sealing-master's disquieting and inexplicable intervention in this tragic affair, I decided upon concealing it from him.

“He asked me,” replied Dirk Peters, “did I not remember Ned Holt of the Grampus, and whether he had perished in the fight with the mutineers or in the shipwreck; whether he was one of the men who had been abandoned with Captain Barnard; in short, he asked me if I could tell him how his brother died. Ah! how!”

No idea could be conveyed of the horror with which the half-breed

uttered words which revealed a profound loathing of himself.

“And what answer did you make to Martin Holt?”

“None, none!”

“You should have said that Ned Holt perished in the wreck of the brig.”

“I could not--understand me--I could not. The two brothers are so like each other. In Martin Holt I seemed to see Ned Holt. I was afraid, I got away from him.”

The half-breed drew himself up with a sudden movement, and I sat thinking, leaning my head on my hands. These tardy questions of Holt's respecting his brother were put, I had no doubt whatsoever, at the instigation of Hearne, but what was his motive, and was it at the Falklands that he had discovered the secret of Dirk Peters? I had not breathed a word on the subject to anymm. To the second question no answer suggested itself; the first involved a serious issue. Did the sailing-master merely desire to gratify his enmity against Dirk Peters, the only one of the Falkland sailors who had always taken the side of Captain Len Guy, and who had prevented the seizure of the boat by Hearne and his companions? Did he hope, by arousing the wrath and vengeance of Martin Holt, to detach the sailing-master from his allegiance and induce him to become an accomplice in Hearne's own designs? And, in fact, when it was a

question of sailing the boat in these seas, had he not imperative need of Martin Holt, one of the best seamen of the Halbrane? A man who would succeed where Hearne and his companions would fail, if they had only themselves to depend on?

I became lost in this labyrinth of hypotheses, and it must be admitted that its complications added largely to the troubles of an already complicated position.

When I raised my eyes, Dirk Peters had disappeared; he had said what he came to say, and he now knew that I had not betrayed his confidence.

The customary precautions were taken for the night, no individual being allowed to remain outside the camp, with the exception of the half-breed, who was in charge of the boat.

The following day was the 31st of January. I pushed back the canvas of the tent, which I shared with Captain Len Guy and West respectively, as each succeeded the other on release from the alternate "watch," very early, and experienced a severe disappointment.

Mist, everywhere! Nay, more than mist, a thick yellow, mouldy-smelling fog. And more than this again; the temperature had fallen sensibly: this was probably a forewarning of the austral winter. The summit of our ice-mountain was lost in vapour, in a fog

which would not resolve itself into rain, but would continue to muffle up the horizon.

“Bad luck!” said the boatswain, “for now if we were to pass by land we should not perceive it.”

”And our drift?”

“More considerable than yesterday, Mr. Jeorling. The captain has sounded, and he makes the speed no less than between three and four miles.”

“And what do you conclude from this?”

“I conclude that we must be within a narrower sea, since the current is so strong. I should not be surprised if we had land on both sides of us within ten or fifteen miles.”

“This, then, would be a wide strait that cuts the antarctic continent?”

“Yes. Our captain is of that opinion.”

“And, holding that opinion, is he not going to make an attempt to reach one or other of the coasts of this strait?”

“And how?”

“With the boat.”

“Risk the boat in the midst of this fog!” exclaimed the boatswain, as he crossed his arms. “What are you thinking of, Mr. Jeorling? Can we cast anchor to wait for it? And all the chances would be that we should never see it again. Ah! if we only had the Halbrane!”

But there was no longer a Halbrane!

In spite of the difficulty of the ascent through the half-condensed vapour, I climbed up to the top of the iceberg, but when I had gained that eminence I strove in vain to pierce the impenetrable grey mantle in which the waters were wrapped.

I remained there, hustled by the north-east wind, which was beginning to blow freshly and might perhaps rend the fog asunder. But no, fresh vapours accumulated around our floating refuge, driven up by the immense ventilation of the open sea. Under the double action of the atmospheric and antarctic currents, we drifted more and more rapidly, and I perceived a sort of shudder pass throughout the vast bulk of the iceberg.

Then it was that I felt myself under the dominion of a sort of hallucination, one of those hallucinations which must have troubled the mind of Arthur Pym. It seemed to me that I was losing myself in

his extraordinary personality; at last I was beholding all that he had seen! Was not that impenetrable mist the curtain of vapours which he had seen in his delirium? I peered into it, seeking for those luminous rays which had streaked the sky from east to west! I sought in its depths for that limitless cataract, rolling in silence from the height of some immense rampart lost in the vastness of the zenith! I sought for the awful white giant of the South Pole!

At length reason resumed her sway. This visionary madness, intoxicating while it lasted, passed off by degrees, and I descended the slope to our camp.

The whole day passed without a change. The fog never once lifted to give us a glimpse outside of its muffling folds, and if the iceberg, which had travelled forty miles since the previous day, had passed by the extremity of the axis of the earth, we should never know it.