

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NORTHERN ROUTE

The crew seemed to have returned to its habits of discipline and obedience. There was little fatiguing work to do, and they had a good deal of leisure. The temperature kept above freezing point, and it seemed as if the thaw had removed the great obstacles to navigation.

Dick, now sociable and familiar, had made great friends with Dr. Clawbonny. But as in most friendships one friend has to give way to the other, it must be acknowledged it was not the dog. Dick did what he liked with the doctor, who obeyed him as if he were the dog. He was amiable with most of the sailors and officers on board, only by instinct, doubtless, he shunned Shandon's society; he also kept up a grudge against Pen and Foker; he vented his hatred of them by growling at their approach. But they dare not now attack the captain's dog--his "familiar," as Clifton called him. On the whole the crew had plucked up courage again and worked well.

"It seems to me," said James Wall one day to Richard Shandon, "that our men took the captain's speech seriously; they no longer seem to be doubtful of success."

"The more fools they!" answered Shandon. "If they reflected, if they examined the situation, they would see that we are going out of one

imprudence into another."

"But," continued Wall, "the sea is open now, and we are getting back into well-known tracks; aren't you exaggerating a bit, Shandon?"

"No, I am not exaggerating; the dislike I feel to Hatteras is not blinding me. Have you seen the coal-holes lately?"

"No," answered Wall.

"Well, then, go and examine them: you will see how much there's left. He ought to have navigated under sail, and have kept the engine for currents and contrary winds; he ought only to have used his coal where he was obliged; who can tell where we shall be kept, and for how many years? But Hatteras only thinks about getting north. Whether the wind is contrary or not, he goes along at full steam, and if things go on as they are doing now, we shall soon be in a pretty pickle."

"If what you say is true, it is very serious."

"Yes, it is, because of the wintering. What shall we do without coal in a country where even the thermometer freezes?"

"But, if I am not mistaken, the captain counts upon renewing his stock of coal at Beechey Island. It appears there is a large provision there."

"And suppose we can't reach Beechey Island, what will become of us then?"

"You are right, Shandon; Hatteras seems to me very imprudent; but why don't you expostulate with him on the subject?"

"No," said Shandon, with ill-concealed bitterness, "I won't say a word. It is nothing to do with me now. I shall wait to see what turns up; I shall obey orders, and not give my opinion where it isn't wanted."

"Allow me to tell you that you are in the wrong, Shandon; you have as much interest in setting yourself against the captain's imprudence as we have."

"He wouldn't listen to me if I were to speak; do you think he would?"

Wall dared not answer in the affirmative, and he added--

"But perhaps he would listen to the crew."

"The crew!" answered Shandon, shrugging his shoulders; "you don't know the crew. The men know they are nearing the 72nd parallel, and that they will earn a thousand pounds for every degree above that."

"The captain knew what he was doing when he offered them that."

"Of course he did, and for the present he can do what he likes with them."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that while they have nothing to do, and there is an open sea, they will go on right enough; but wait till difficulty and danger come, and you will see how much they'll think about the money!"

"Then you don't think Hatteras will succeed?"

"No, he will not; to succeed in such an enterprise there must be a good understanding between him and his officers, and that does not exist. Hatteras is a madman; all his past career proves it. Well, we shall see; perhaps circumstances will force them to give the command to a less adventurous captain."

"Still," said Wall, shaking his head, "he will always have on his side----"

"Dr. Clawbonny, a man who only cares for science, and Johnson, a sailor who only cares to obey, and perhaps two more men like Bell, the carpenter; four at the most, and we are eighteen on board! No, Wall, Hatteras has not got the confidence of his men, and he knows it, so he bribes them; he profited cleverly by the Franklin affair, but that won't last, I tell you, and if he doesn't reach Beechey Island he's a lost man!"

"Suppose the crew should take it into its head----"

"Don't tell the crew what I think," answered Shandon quickly; "the men will soon see for themselves. Besides, just now we must go north. Who knows if Hatteras won't find that way will bring us back sooner? At the end of McClintock Channel lies Melville Bay, and from thence go the straits that lead to Baffin's Bay. Hatteras must take care! The way to the east is easier than the road to the north!"

Hatteras was not mistaken in his opinion that Shandon would betray him if he could. Besides, Shandon was right in attributing the contentment of the men to the hope of gain. Clifton had counted exactly how much each man would have. Without reckoning the captain and the doctor, who would not expect a share in the bounty-money, there remained sixteen men to divide it amongst. If ever they succeeded in reaching the Pole, each man would have 1,125 pounds--that is to say, a fortune. It would cost the captain 18,000 pounds, but he could afford it. The thoughts of the money inflamed the minds of the crew, and they were now as anxious to go north as before they had been eager to turn south. The Forward during the day of June 16th passed Cape Aworth. Mount Rawlinson raised its white peaks towards the sky; the snow and fog made it appear colossal, as they exaggerated its distance; the temperature still kept some degrees above freezing point; improvised cascades and cataracts showed themselves on the sides of the mountains, and avalanches roared down with the noise of artillery discharges. The glaciers, spread out in long white sheets,

projected an immense reverberation into space. Boreal nature, in its struggle with the frost, presented a splendid spectacle. The brig went very near the coast; on some sheltered rocks rare heaths were to be seen, the pink flowers lifting their heads timidly out of the snows, and some meagre lichens of a reddish colour and the shoots of a dwarf willow.

At last, on the 19th of June, at the famous seventy-third parallel, they doubled Cape Minto, which forms one of the extremities of Ommaney Bay; the brig entered Melville Bay, surnamed by Bolton Money Bay; the merry sailors joked about the name, and made Dr. Clawbonny laugh heartily. Notwithstanding a strong breeze from the northeast, the Forward made considerable progress, and on the 23rd of June she passed the 74th degree of latitude. She was in the midst of Melville Bay, one of the most considerable seas in these regions. This sea was crossed for the first time by Captain Parry in his great expedition of 1819, and it was then that his crew earned the prize of 5,000 pounds promised by Act of Parliament. Clifton remarked that there were two degrees from the 72nd to the 74th; that already placed 125 pounds to his credit. But they told him that a fortune was not worth much there, and that it was of no use being rich if he could not drink his riches, and he had better wait till he could roll under a Liverpool table before he rejoiced and rubbed his hands.