

CHAPTER XXII

BEGINNING OF REVOLT

At this unexpected command, the surprise was great on board the Forward.

"Light the fires!" exclaimed some.

"What with?" asked others.

"When we've only two months' coal in the hold!" said Pen.

"What shall we warm ourselves with in the winter?" asked Clifton.

"We shall be obliged to burn the brig down to her water-line," answered Gripper.

"And stuff the stove with the masts," added Warren. Shandon looked at Wall. The stupefied engineers hesitated to go down to the machine-room.

"Did you hear me?" cried the captain in an irritated tone.

Brunton made for the hatchway, but before going down he stopped.

"Don't go, Brunton!" called out a voice.

"Who spoke?" cried Hatteras.

"I did," said Pen, advancing towards the captain.

"And what did you say?" asked Hatteras.

"I say," answered Pen with an oath--"I say, we've had enough of it, and we won't go any further. You shan't kill us with hunger and work in the winter, and they shan't light the fires!"

"Mr. Shandon," answered Hatteras calmly, "have that man put in irons!"

"But, captain," replied Shandon, "what the man says----"

"If you repeat what the man says," answered Hatteras, "I'll have you shut up in your cabin and guarded! Seize that man! Do you hear?"

Johnson, Bell, and Simpson advanced towards the sailor, who was in a terrible passion.

"The first who touches me----" he said, brandishing a handspike.

Hatteras approached him.

"Pen," said he tranquilly, "if you move, I shall blow out your brains!"

So speaking, he cocked a pistol and aimed it at the sailor. A murmur was heard.

"Not a word, men," said Hatteras, "or that man falls dead!" Johnson and Bell disarmed Pen, who no longer made any resistance, and placed him in the hold.

"Go, Brunton," said Hatteras. The engineer, followed by Plover and Warren, went down to his post. Hatteras returned to the poop.

"That Pen is a wretched fellow!" said the doctor.

"No man has ever been nearer death!" answered the captain, simply.

The steam was soon got up, the anchors were weighed, and the Forward veered away east, cutting the young ice with her steel prow. Between Baring Island and Beecher Point there are a considerable quantity of islands in the midst of ice-fields; the streams crowd together in the little channels which cut up this part of the sea; they had a tendency to agglomerate under the relatively low temperature; hummocks were formed here and there, and these masses, already more compact, denser, and closer together, would soon form an impenetrable mass. The Forward made its way with great difficulty amidst the snowstorms. However, with the mobility that characterises the climate of these regions, the sun appeared from time to time, the temperature went up several degrees, obstacles melted as if by magic, and a fine sheet of water lay where icebergs bristled all the passes. The horizon glowed with those magnificent orange shades which rest the eye, tired with the eternal white of the snow.

On the 26th of July the Forward passed Dundas Island, and veered afterwards more to the north; but there Hatteras found himself opposite an ice-bank eight or nine feet high, formed of little icebergs detached from the coast; he was obliged to turn west. The uninterrupted cracking of the ice, added to the noise of the steamer, was like sighs or groans. At last the brig found a channel, and advanced painfully along it; often an enormous iceberg hindered her course for hours; the fog hindered the pilot's look-out; as long as he can see for a mile in front of him, he can easily avoid obstacles; but in the midst of the fog it was often impossible to see a cable's length, and the swell was very strong. Sometimes the clouds looked smooth and white as though they were reflections of the ice-banks; but there were entire days when the yellow rays of the sun could not pierce the tenacious fog. Birds were still very numerous, and their cries were deafening; seals, lying idle on the floating ice, raised their heads, very little frightened, and moved their long necks as the brig passed. Pieces from the ship's sheathing were often rubbed off in her contact with the ice. At last, after six days of slow navigation, Point Beecher was sighted to the north on the 1st of August. Hatteras passed the last few hours at his masthead; the open sea that Stewart had perceived on May 30th, 1851, about latitude 76 degrees 20 minutes, could not be far off; but as far as the eye could reach, Hatteras saw no indication of it. He came down without saying a word.

"Do you believe in an open sea?" asked Shandon of the lieutenant.

"I am beginning not to," answered Wall.

"Wasn't I right to say the pretended discovery was purely imagination? But they would not believe me, and even you were against me, Wall."

"We shall believe in you for the future, Shandon."

"Yes," said he, "when it's too late," and so saying he went back to his cabin, where he had stopped almost ever since his dispute with the captain. The wind veered round south towards evening; Hatteras ordered the brig to be put under sail and the fires to be put out; the crew had to work very hard for the next few days; they were more than a week getting to Barrow Point. The Forward had only made thirty miles in ten days. There the wind turned north again, and the screw was set to work. Hatteras still hoped to find an open sea beyond the 77th parallel, as Sir Edward Belcher had done. Ought he to treat these accounts as apocryphal? or had the winter come upon him earlier? On the 15th of August Mount Percy raised its peak, covered with eternal snow, through the mist. The next day the sun set for the first time, ending thus the long series of days with twenty-four hours in them. The men had ended by getting accustomed to the continual daylight, but it had never made any difference to the animals; the Greenland dogs went to their rest at their accustomed hour, and Dick slept as regularly every evening as though darkness had covered the sky. Still, during the nights which followed the 15th of August, darkness was never profound; although the sun set, he still gave sufficient light by refraction. On the 19th of August, after a pretty good observation,

they sighted Cape Franklin on the east coast and Cape Lady Franklin on the west coast; the gratitude of the English people had given these names to the two opposite points--probably the last reached by Franklin: the name of the devoted wife, opposite to that of her husband, is a touching emblem of the sympathy which always united them.

The doctor, by following Johnson's advice, accustomed himself to support the low temperature; he almost always stayed on deck braving the cold, the wind, and the snow. He got rather thinner, but his constitution did not suffer. Besides, he expected to be much worse off, and joyfully prepared for the approaching winter.

"Look at those birds," he said to Johnson one day; "they are emigrating south in flocks! They are shrieking out their good-byes!"

"Yes, Mr. Clawbonny, some instinct tells them they must go, and they set out."

"There's more than one amongst us who would like to imitate them, I think."

"They are cowards, Mr. Clawbonny; those animals have no provisions as we have, and are obliged to seek their food where it is to be found. But sailors, with a good ship under their feet, ought to go to the world's end."

"You hope that Hatteras will succeed, then?"

"He certainly will, Mr. Clawbonny."

"I am of the same opinion as you, Johnson, and if he only wanted one faithful companion----"

"He'll have two!"

"Yes, Johnson," answered the doctor, shaking hands with the brave sailor.

Prince Albert Land, which the Forward was then coasting, bears also the name of Grinnell Land, and though Hatteras, from his hatred to the Yankees, would never call it by its American name, it is the one it generally goes by. It owes its double appellation to the following circumstances: At the same time that Penny, an Englishman, gave it the name of Prince Albert, Lieutenant Haven, commander of the Rescue, called it Grinnell Land in honour of the American merchant who had fitted out the expedition from New York at his own expense. Whilst the brig was coasting it, she experienced a series of unheard-of difficulties, navigating sometimes under sail, sometimes by steam. On the 18th of August they sighted Britannia Mountain, scarcely visible through the mist, and the Forward weighed anchor the next day in Northumberland Bay. She was hemmed in on all sides.