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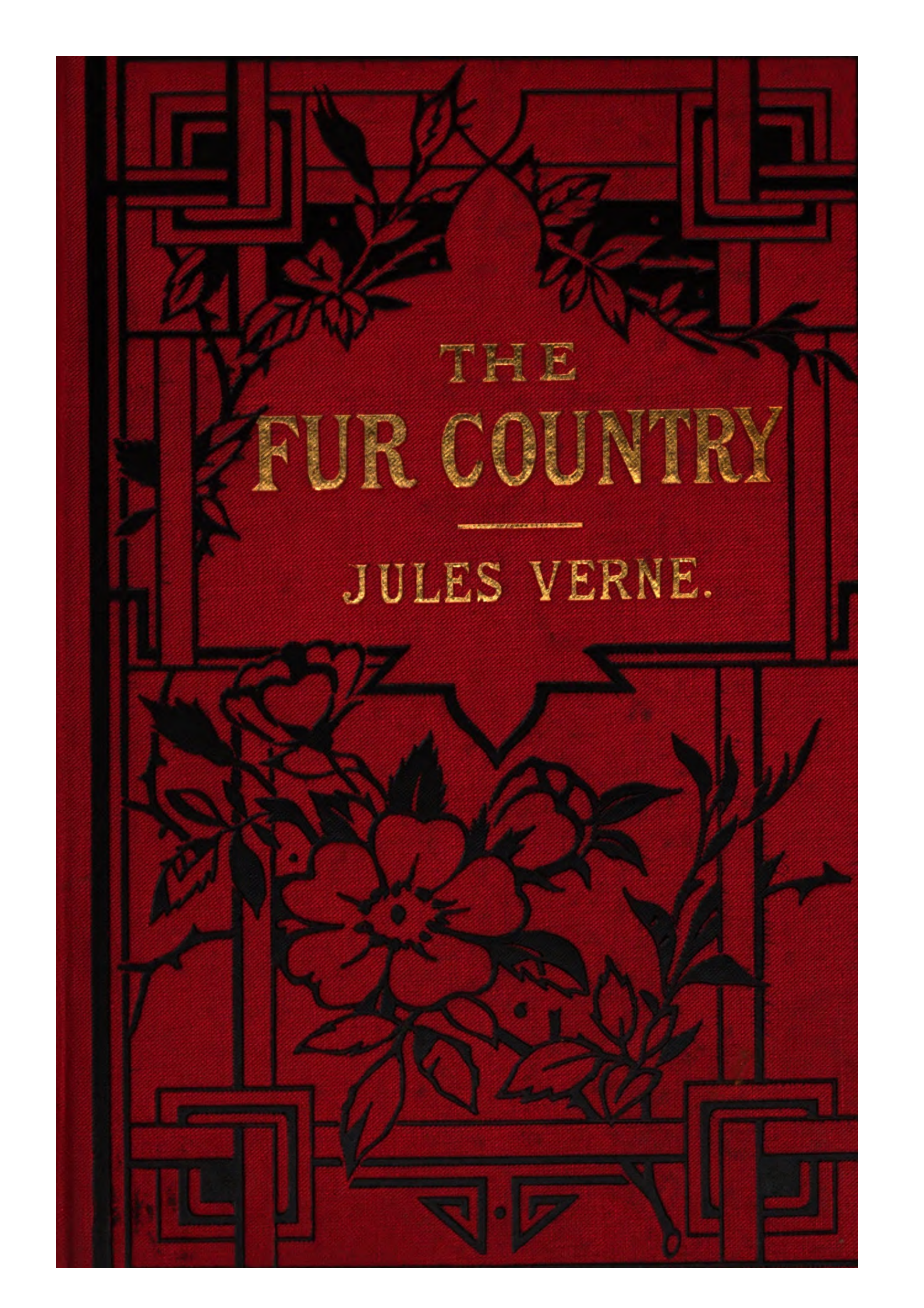
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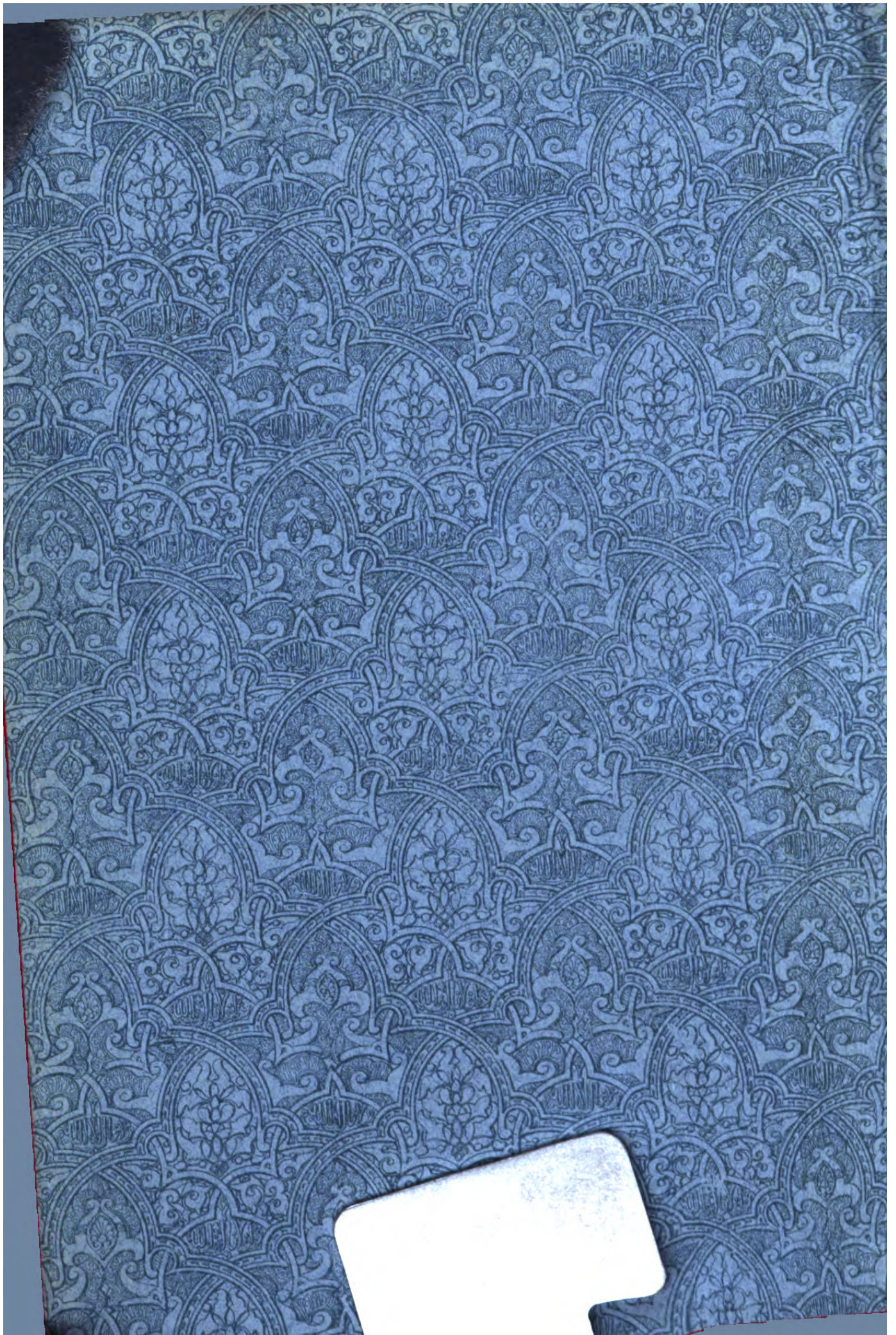


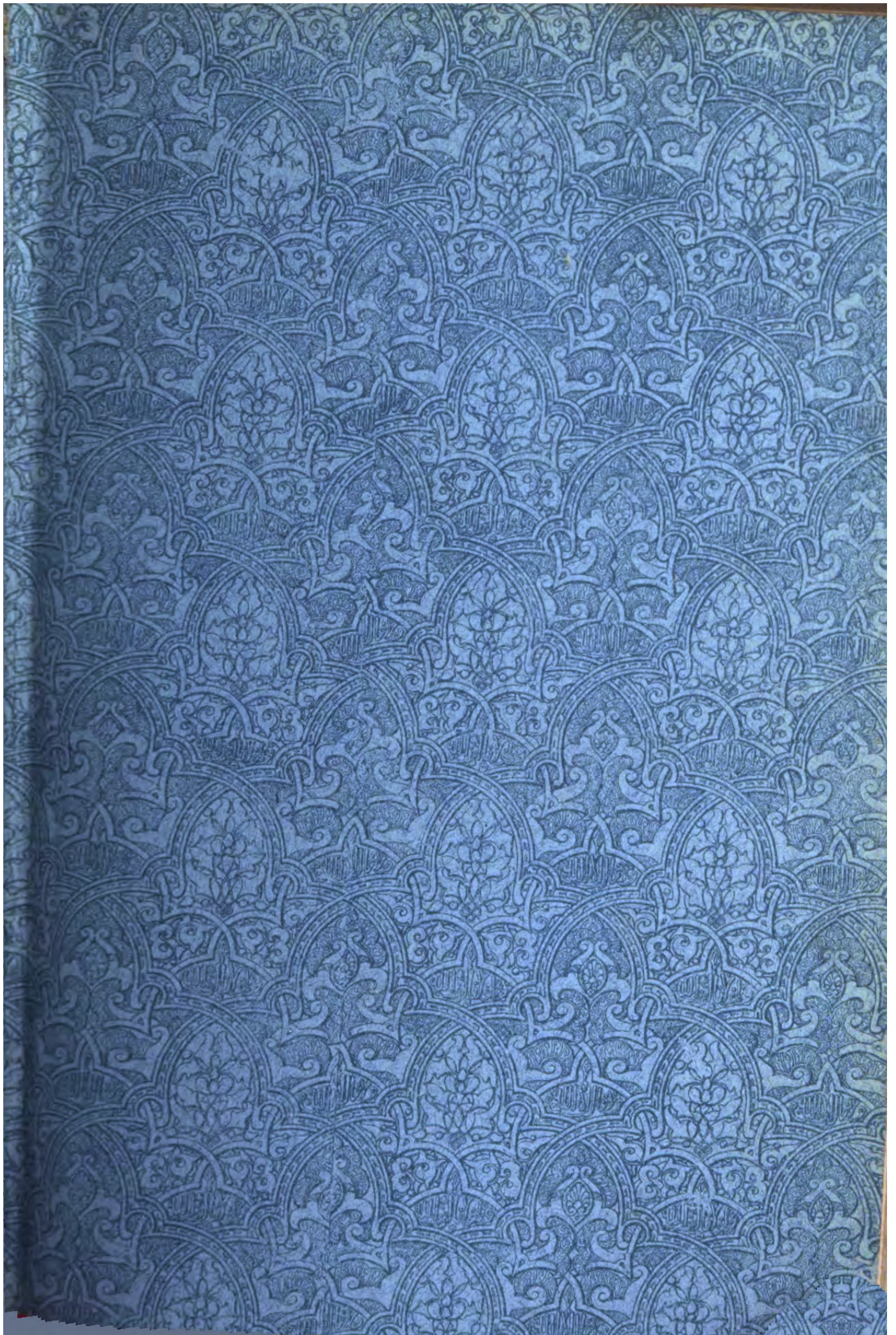
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The book cover is a deep red color with a fine, woven texture. It features a prominent black geometric border composed of interlocking squares and lines, reminiscent of a Greek key or meander pattern. In the center, the title "THE FUR COUNTRY" is printed in a large, bold, gold-colored serif font. Below the title, a thin horizontal gold line separates it from the author's name, "JULES VERNE.", which is also in a gold-colored serif font but smaller. The cover is decorated with black line-art illustrations of roses and leaves, positioned in the upper and lower quadrants. The overall design is classic and elegant, typical of early 20th-century bookbinding.

THE
FUR COUNTRY

JULES VERNE.







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THE FUR COUNTRY.—PART I.

THE FUR COUNTRY

BY

JULES VERNE

AUTHOR OF "THE ENGLISH AT THE NORTH POLE," "THE FIELD OF ICE,"
ETC. ETC.

TRANSLATED BY HENRY FRITH



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THE FUR COUNTRY.

CHAPTER I.

A SOIRÉE AT FORT RELIANCE.

ON the 17th March, 1859, Captain Craventy gave a party at Fort Reliance.

This must not be understood as a grand ball, or a magnificent gala or "rout," or even as a concert. Captain Craventy's reception was much more commonplace, but nevertheless he had done all in his power to make it a success.

Under the direction of Corporal Joliffe, the great lower room had been completely transformed. No doubt the wooden walls of the house were still visible, but four English ensigns, draped at each corner, and some arms borrowed from the fort, served to hide the nakedness of the reception-room. The long blackened beams in the ceiling were relieved by two lamps provided with their reflectors, which were suspended like chandeliers, and served to illumine the somewhat misty atmosphere. The windows were narrow, some of them being mere

loopholes, and the panes were quite encrusted with frost, defying the most curious eyes to penetrate it ; but they were tastefully draped with red cotton bunting in a way that challenged the admiration of all the guests. The floor, which was composed of heavy beams laid side by side, had been swept for the occasion by Corporal Joliffe. No chairs, sofas, or other furniture interfered with the free movement of the guests. Some wooden benches jutting from the walls, large blocks roughly hewn with the axe, two tables with crudely-made legs, composed the whole furniture of the room. But the partition-wall, in which was a narrow doorway leading to the next room, was ornamented in a really picturesque and elegant manner.

Furs, the like of which could not be found in Regent Street, or in the Nevskoi Perspective, were hung around with admirable taste. It appeared as if all the fauna of the Arctic Regions were here represented by their skins. The eye of the visitor passed from wolfs' skins, grizzly bears, polar bears, otters, wolverenes, beavers, musk-rats, ermines, and silver foxes. Above this arrangement was a device artistically picked out with cardboard ; it was the motto of the Hudson's Bay Company :

" PROPELLO CUTEM."

" Really, Joliffe," said Captain Craventy to his subordinate, " you have excelled yourself this evening."

“I think so, sir ; I hope so,” replied the Corporal ; “but, to give everyone their due, I must confess that Mrs. Joliffe deserves great credit, for she has assisted me in everything.”

“She is a clever woman, Corporal.”

“There is not her equal in the world, sir.”

In the centre of the room was an immense stove, half brick half earthenware, from which a great pipe ascended through the roof, and from which volumes of thick smoke poured forth. This stove roared and gleamed under the hands of a stoker, a soldier specially told off for the duty, who piled on the coals most liberally. Sometimes the back-draught would send a volume of smoke into the room, while the flames shot forth from the stove, and the whole place was enveloped in clouds of smoke which dimmed the brightness of the lamps considerably. But this trifling inconvenience did not affect the guests at Fort Reliance. The stove warmed them, and so cold was the weather that they did not think they paid too dearly for the warmth.

Had they listened they would have heard the storm raging outside. The snow fell thickly, and, almost ice already, increased the frost upon the window-panes. The bitter blast made its way through the crannies of the doors and windows, and occasionally asserted itself above other sounds. Then a dead silence followed, and it seemed as if nature were taking breath, when suddenly the hurricane roared with redoubled fury. One could

feel the house shake; the beams creaked and groaned in every direction; a stranger would have thought that the tempest must assuredly destroy the fort altogether, and carry away the planks of which it was composed.

But Captain Craventy's guests did not trouble themselves about the storm, and even had they been outside they would not have been any more alarmed than if they had been Mother Carey's chickens in a gale at sea.

Nevertheless, we must say something about these guests. There were about a hundred people of both sexes present, only two of whom—and they were women—did not belong to the usual circle of society at the fort, which was composed of Captain Craventy; his subaltern, Jasper Hobson; Sergeant Long; Corporal Joliffe; and sixty soldiers or *employés* of the Company. Some of these were married men—for instance, Corporal Joliffe, who had wed a clever bright Canadian; a Scotchman and his Scotch wife named MacNab; John Rae, who had married a native Indian;—but all of them, without distinction of rank, were entertained by Captain Craventy that evening.

It may as well be stated that it was not only the Company's staff that supplied the guests, for all the neighbouring forts within a circuit of a hundred miles had accepted the invitation. Several had come from Fort Providence, or Fort Resolution on the Slave Lake, and even from Fort Chippeway and Fort Liard, still more to the south. Such a rare and unexpected treat as this

was eagerly welcomed by these people, half exiled as they were in these inhospitable regions.

Even a few Indian chiefs had accepted the invitation. These aborigines were in constant communication with the factories, and furnished the greatest number of the furs in which the Company dealt. These Indians were chiefly of the Chippeway tribe, strong, vigorous men, clothed in furs and skins; their faces, painted half black and half red, reminded one something of the representatives of Mephistopheles in European dramas; their heads were adorned with eagles feathers, spread out like a fan, which shook with every movement of their black hair. These chiefs had not brought their wives with them, for the unhappy squaws are looked upon as little better than slaves.

Of such was the company to whom the Captain was doing the honours of the fort. There was no dancing because there was no music, but the refreshment counter made up for all deficiencies. An immense pyramidal pudding made by Mrs. Joliffe's fair hands rose in the centre of the table. It was made of flour, reindeer fat, and musk beef, and was wanting in eggs, milk, and lemon-peel, as recommended by cookery-books, but what it lacked in this respect it made up by its size. Mrs. Joliffe kept helping it liberally to all comers, but nevertheless it still held out. Besides this enormous pudding there were piles of sandwiches, in which ship-biscuit took the place of bread and butter, and the

European ham or beef was superseded by slices of corned beef. However, notwithstanding the hardness of the biscuit and the toughness of the beef, the sandwiches could not resist the sharp teeth of the Indians. There was plenty to drink in the shape of whisky and gin, not to mention an immense bowl of punch which brought the evening to a close, and of which the Indians talked for weeks afterwards.

Mr. and Mrs. Joliffe were complimented on all sides, and it was pleasant to see how actively, and with what good grace, they waited on everyone. Waited is scarcely the word, they anticipated the wishes of every guest; one had scarcely time to ask before his desires were gratified. To the sandwiches succeeded slices of the inexhaustible pudding, and it was followed by glasses of whisky and gin. But the guests were at length satisfied.

“No more, thank you, Mrs. Joliffe.”

“You are really too good, Corporal, but I must ask for breathing-time.”

“I assure you, Mrs. Joliffe, I can eat no more.”

“I am entirely at your mercy now, Corporal.”

“My dear madam, I assure you it is impossible.”

Such were some of the replies made to the worthy couple; but as the Corporal and his wife persisted, the guests were obliged to give way, and so they continued to eat and drink. Voices became louder, soldiers and civilians got excited; now they spoke of the chase,

now again of trade. Numerous projects were formed for the coming season; all the animals in the district would not serve now to satisfy these daring hunters. Already bears, foxes, musk-oxen, polecats, etc. etc., had fallen victims to their prowess. Precious furs were already, in imagination, stored in the Company's magazines. This year enormous profits would be realised. And, while the liquor thus freely distributed inflamed the imagination of the Europeans, the Indians, too proud to exhibit admiration, too circumspect to make promises, let their associates ramble on while they themselves imbibed the fire-water in huge doses.

Captain Craventy himself was delighted with the hubbub, and pleased to see these poor people enjoy themselves once again. He was here, there, and everywhere amongst his guests, replying to all questions put to him respecting the fête by saying, "Ask Joliffe, ask Joliffe." So the people went and asked Joliffe, and received most polite answers in reply.

Amongst those attached for service to Fort Reliance we must notice particularly one or two individuals, for it was fated that they should shortly experience some very terrible adventures which no human foresight could have provided against. We must particularly name Lieutenant Hobson, Sergeant Long, Corporal Joliffe and his wife, and the two strange ladies in whose honour the party had been given.

Lieutenant Hobson was about forty years of age,

rather short and thin, and if he was not very muscular he compensated for the want by a strong moral force, which carried him through everything in face of all obstacles. He was a child of the Company. His father, Major Hobson, was a native of Dublin, but for many years previous to his death he and his wife had lived at Fort Assiniboine, where Jasper was born. There, at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, his boyhood and youth were passed. Strictly brought up, young Hobson became a man in self-possession while yet he was scarcely a boy in years. He was not only a hunter, but an intelligent and brave officer. In the engagements which the Company fought in Oregon against their rivals, Jasper distinguished himself greatly, and rapidly rose to the rank of lieutenant. In consequence of his acknowledged merit, he was nominated to command an expedition northwards to explore the Great Bear Lake, and to establish a fort on the farthest limit of the American continent. His departure was fixed to take place at the beginning of April.

If the Lieutenant presented the type of an accomplished officer, Sergeant Long, a man of fifty years of age, with a beard like cocoa-nut fibre, was the embodiment of a soldier. Naturally brave, obedient—never disputing an order, no matter how extraordinary it appeared to him, never arguing when told off for service—he was a machine in uniform, but a perfect machine: one that never wore out. Perhaps Sergeant Long may have been a little

severe with his men, but then he never spared himself. He never tolerated the least infraction of discipline; he punished for the slightest fault, because he never had been punished himself. He commanded because he was obliged to do so, but it gave him no pleasure. In a word he had been born to obey, and his annihilation of self suited his passive nature. This is the sort of stuff of which invincible armies are made. They are but arms worked by one head. This is the only really powerful organisation of force. Two types are known in mythology. Briareus had a hundred arms, the Hydra had a hundred heads, and, of the two, Briareus would have gained the victory if they had engaged each other.

We already know Corporal Joliffe. He was the working-bee of the party, and it was a pleasure to hear him humming. He was more fitted for major-domo than for a soldier, and he himself was aware of it, so he called himself the Corporal of Details, and in these details he would have lost himself hundreds of times but for his wife; so it happened that the Corporal obeyed his wife unconsciously, perhaps, but he nevertheless agreed, with that philosopher Sancho, that a woman's advice is of no great value, but a man must be a fool who does not pay attention to it.

We have already said that the "stranger" element was represented at the party by two ladies, each of whom was about forty years of age. One of them deserved a foremost place amongst celebrated travellers. The rival

of Pfeiffer, of the Tiunés, of the Haumaires, Pauline Barnett had been more than once honourably quoted in the Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society. She had followed the course of the Brahmapootra as far as the mountains of Thibet; she had crossed an unexplored portion of New Holland from Swan River to the Gulf of Carpentaria, and on every occasion displayed the qualities of a great traveller. She was tall, had been a widow for about fifteen years, and her taste for travelling was constantly leading her to explore unknown lands. Her head, encircled with long bands of hair already turning gray, betokened great energy. She was somewhat short-sighted and wore a double eye-glass. Her manner of walking was rather masculine, we must admit, and her whole appearance betokened less of grace than of moral force. She was an Englishwoman, born in Yorkshire, and possessed of some means, which she spent chiefly in travelling. She had now come out to Fort Reliance on a new expedition. Having already crossed the equator, no doubt she now wished to penetrate to the Arctic Circle. Her presence at the fort created quite a sensation. She had come provided with letters from the chairman of the Company to Captain Craventy, requesting him to do all in his power to forward the intentions of this celebrated traveller to reach the Polar Sea. A wonderful enterprise it was to follow in the steps of Hearne, Mackenzie, Rae, and Franklin. What fatigues, trials, and dangers, she would experience in her conflict with

the terrible forces of the Arctic Regions! How would she dare to attempt to penetrate a region where so many other explorers had lost their lives? But Pauline Barnett, member of the Royal Geographical Society, was no ordinary woman.

We may add that this lady was accompanied by an attendant named Madge, who was something more than a servant—a devoted, courageous friend, who lived but for her mistress. Madge was a Scotchwoman of the old type, whom a Caleb might have married without loss of position. She was some years older than her mistress, perhaps five years her senior, and was tall and strongly-built. They were on the most intimate terms. Pauline looked upon Madge as an elder sister, while Madge treated Pauline as a daughter. In fact, they could not possibly exist without each other.

It was really in honour of Pauline Barnett that Captain Craveny had given the party that evening, for that lady was to join Lieutenant Hobson's expedition to the north. It was in honour of Mrs. Barnett that the room resounded with those hearty cheers.

And if upon that memorable evening the stove consumed a hundredweight of coal, it is not to be wondered at, considering that the thermometer outside showed twenty degrees below zero (Fahrenheit), and that Fort Reliance is situated in 61 deg. 47 min. N. latitude, four degrees from the Polar Circle.

CHAPTER II.

THE HUDSON'S BAY FUR COMPANY.

“WHAT do you think of your Lieutenant, Captain Craventy?”

“I think he is an officer who will go as far as he can, Mrs. Barnett.”

“What do you mean by that? Do you mean that he will go beyond the 24th parallel?”

Captain Craventy could not help smiling at Mrs. Pauline Barnett's question. They were talking near the stove, while the guests were moving about between the refreshment-tables.

“Madam,” replied the Captain, “Jasper Hobson will do all that a man can do. The Company have charged him to explore their northern positions and to establish a post as nearly as possible to the American continent—and he will establish it.”

“That is a tremendous responsibility for him,” said the lady.

“No doubt it is; but Jasper has never yet been

frightened by any duty, no matter how severe it may have been."

"I can quite believe it," replied Mrs. Barnett, "and we shall now put him to the proof. But what interest can the Company have in making a fort on the shore of the Arctic Ocean?"

"A great interest, madam," replied the Captain; "I may say a very great interest, indeed. Before long, I expect, Russia will cede her American possessions to the United States. When this arrangement shall have been concluded, the Company will find their traffic with the Pacific very difficult, unless the North-West Passage be practicable. This will be decided by new attempts, for the Admiralty are going to send out an expedition to coast along the American continent, from Behring Straits to Coronation Gulf, on the eastern side of which the new fort will be established. Now, if this enterprise be successful, that point will become an important factory in which all the fur trade of the North will be centred; and while the transport of the skins is now very costly, and takes a considerable time to traverse the Indian territory, then the ships will be able to take them direct to the Pacific Ocean in a few days."

"That will be a very beneficial arrangement," replied Mrs. Barnett, "if the North-West Passage can be utilised; but you hinted just now at some other motive, I thought."

"The other interest," replied the Captain, "is, I may

say, one of vital importance to the Company, whose origin I must beg your permission to explain. You will then be able to understand why this association, formerly so flourishing, is now in danger of extinction."

The Captain then proceeded to give Mrs. Barnett the following sketch of the celebrated Company.

We know that from the earliest times men clothed themselves with the skins of animals ; the trade in furs, therefore, is of very ancient origin. The luxury in dress by degrees became so great that the Sumptuary Laws were at length enacted, which were particularly directed against furs.

In 1553, Russia founded several establishments in the northern steppes, and English companies quickly followed her example. It was through the Samoyeds that the trade in sable, ermine, and beaver was continued ; but during Elizabeth's reign, the use of furs was prohibited to such an extent that this branch of commerce became paralysed.

On the 2nd May, 1670, the Company was accorded the privilege of trading in skins in Hudson's Bay. This society included a number of shareholders of high rank, such as the Duke of York, Lord Albemarle, and Lord Shaftesbury. The capital was then only £8,420. It had several rivals in private companies, particularly in French agents established in Canada, who made very daring, but profitable, expeditions into the interior. These intrepid hunters, known as trappers, compromised the Company

very seriously ; but the conquest of Canada altered the position of affairs. Three years after the capture of Quebec in 1766, the fur trade received a new impetus. The English traders became familiarised with the difficulties of the traffic ; they learned the customs of the country, the habits of the Indians, and their mode of exchange ; but still the Company's profits were *nil*. About 1784, however, some Montreal merchants associated themselves and founded the powerful North-West Company, which soon collected all the offshoots of the trade. In 1798 the business of this company had reached the enormous figure of £120,000 sterling, and the Hudson's Bay Company was once more shaken to its foundation.

We must confess that this North-West Company stuck at nothing where their interests were at stake. They imposed upon their own servants, they speculated on the misery of the Indians, whom they pillaged after they had made them intoxicated, thereby setting at defiance the Acts of Parliament which forbad the sale of alcoholic liquors on Indian territory ; and by these means the agents of the North-West Country realised enormous profits, notwithstanding the competition of American and Russian societies, which founded amongst others the American Fur Company, an association created in 1809, with a capital of 1,000,000 dollars, and which trafficked to the west of the Rocky Mountains.

But of all these societies the Hudson's Bay Company

was the most menaced when, in 1821, it absorbed its former rival, the North-West Company, and the amalgamation was known as the Hudson's Bay Fur Company.

At present this important association has but one rival, namely, the American Fur Company of St. Louis. The former possesses numerous establishments dispersed through a territory which extends over 3,700,000 square miles. The principal factories are situated on James Bay; at the mouth of the River Severn; in the south towards the frontiers of Upper Canada; on the Lakes Athapescow, Winnipeg, Superior, Methye, Buffalo; and near the rivers Colombia, Mackenzie, Saskatchewan, Assiniboine, etc. Fort York, which commands the course of the Nelson flowing into Hudson's Bay, is the headquarters of the country where the principal fur depôt is established.

In 1842, the Company leased all the Russian establishments in North America at a rent of £40,000 per annum, so it is now working on its own account the immense tracts included between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean. It has despatched travellers in all directions. For instance, Hearn, in 1770, towards the Polar Sea, to the discovery of the Copper Mine River; Franklin, between 1819 and 1822 explored 5,550 miles of the American coast; Mackenzie, who, after the discovery of the river which bears his name, reached the shores of the Pacific at 52 deg. 24 min. N. In 1833-34, the Company forwarded to Europe a quantity of skins and furs, the

annexed details of which will give a very good idea of its extensive trade :

Beavers	1,074
Young beavers, etc.	92,288
Musk-rats	694,092
Badgers	1,069
Bears	7,451
Ermines	491
Martens	5,296
Foxes	9,937
Lynxes	14,255
Sables	64,490
Polecats	25,100
Otters	22,303
Racoons	713
Swans	7,918
Wolves	8,484
Wolverenes	1,571

Such a trade as this ought to bring in a large profit to the Company, but unfortunately the amounts had not been maintained, and for the last twenty years the trade had been decreasing.

The cause of this decline was explained by Captain Craventy to Mrs. Barnett, as follows :

“Up to the year 1837,” he said, “one may say that the Company’s business was flourishing. In that year, the number of skins exported amounted to 2,350,000; but since that it has been continually falling off, and the number is now reduced to one half.”

“But to what cause do you attribute this decrease?” asked Mrs. Barnett.

“To the depopulation that the perseverance, and, I may add, the want of foresight, of the hunters has caused in the hunting-grounds. They killed and trapped without mercy. These massacres were made indiscriminately; the young ones and even females with young were not spared; the consequence is an inevitable scarceness in fur-producing animals. The otter has almost completely disappeared, and is only found now in the islands of the North Pacific. The beavers have taken refuge, in small detachments, on the banks of the most distant rivers; and so with other animals which have been obliged to flee before the invasion of trappers. The traps, which were formerly crowded with victims, are now empty; the price of skins is increasing, just when the demand for fur is becoming greater. So hunters are disgusted; and now only the bravest and most indefatigable advance to the confines of the American continent.”

“I now understand,” said Mrs. Barnett, “the importance which the Company attaches to the formation of a factory on the borders of the Arctic Ocean, as the animals have taken refuge so far north.”

“Yes,” replied the Captain, “and besides, the Company is obliged to push forward the centre of its operations in a more northerly direction, for two years

ago an English Act of Parliament considerably reduced its possessions."

"And what was the object of this reduction?" asked the lady.

"A political question of great importance which deeply affected the United States and Great Britain. In fact the mission of the Company was not exactly civilisation; on the contrary, in its own interests the Company is obliged to keep its hunting-ground in as wild a state as possible. Every attempt at cultivation which would drive the animals still farther away was steadily resisted. Its monopoly was consequently opposed to all agricultural progress. Any questions not actually referring to the Company were pitilessly put aside; and this absolute form of Government, in some respects immoral, provoked the measures taken by Parliament; and in 1857 a commission, nominated by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, decided that all land capable of cultivation should be annexed to Canada—such tracts, for instance, as the Red River territory, the districts of the Saskatchewan—and only left the portion of the Company's territory which could not be cultivated.

"The following year the Company lost the west slope of the Rocky Mountains which it derived direct from the Colonial Office, and was thus reduced to the jurisdiction of Hudson's Bay agents; and that is the reason why the Company, before giving up its fur traffic,

has determined to explore the as yet little known northern districts, and to find a north-west passage to the Pacific."

Mrs. Barnett could now understand the ulterior views of this celebrated Company. She was about to make one of a party to establish a new fort on the borders of the Polar Sea. Captain Craventy had put her *au courant* with the circumstances, and perhaps—for he was fond of talking—would have given her further details if an incident had not cut short his explanation.

Just then Corporal Joliffe came to announce that, with Mrs. Joliffe's assistance, he was about to mix a bowl of punch. This news was received with all the honour it deserved, and was loudly cheered. The punch-bowl, or rather basin, was filled with the precious spirit—it held no less than ten pints of rum; some lump-sugar was piled at the bottom by the fair hands of Mrs. Joliffe herself; on the top floated some slices of lemon already somewhat dry with age. Nothing was now requisite but to set it on fire, and the Corporal, with a lighted match in his hand, was awaiting the Captain's orders as if he were about to fire a mine.

"Go ahead, Joliffe," said Captain Craventy.

The light was applied, and the punch was burning in a moment amidst the applause of the guests.

Ten minutes afterwards the brimming glasses were passed from hand to hand in the crowd, and always found takers, like speculators on 'Change.

“Three cheers for Mrs. Barnett! One cheer more for the Captain!”

In the midst of this festivity cries were heard from the outside, and silence at once fell upon the guests.

“Sergeant Long,” said the Captain, “go and see what is the matter.”

And the Sergeant, leaving his glass unfinished, left the room in obedience to the order.

CHAPTER III.

THAWING A PHILOSOPHER.

WHEN Sergeant Long reached the narrow passage leading to the outer door of the fort, the cries became much more audible; they were accompanied now by violent knocking at the postern-gate, which opened into the courtyard, surrounded by a palisade. The Sergeant thrust the door open. The ground was at least a foot deep in snow; he sank almost up to his knees in the white carpet, and, half blinded by the sleet, and chilled to the bone by the terrible cold, he crossed the court diagonally towards the postern-gate.

“Who the devil can be coming here such weather as this?” he muttered, as he removed the heavy bar from the gate. “None but Esquimaux would venture out at such a time.”

“Open the door, open the door!” cried the person without.

“I *am* opening it,” replied the Sergeant, who really appeared to be doing it a dozen times over.

At length the door was pulled back, and then the

Sergeant was almost upset in the snow by a sledge drawn by six dogs, which rushed past him like a flash of lightning. The Sergeant was very nearly crushed by the gate, but he picked himself up without a murmur, shut the door, and returned to the house at his usual rate—that is to say, at about seventy-five paces a minute.

But Captain Craventy, Lieutenant Hobson, and Corporal Joliffe were already at the door, notwithstanding the cold, and were gazing at the sledge, which, covered with snow, had drawn up before the house.

A man, completely wrapped up in furs, immediately descended from the sledge.

“Is this Fort Reliance?” he asked.

“It is,” replied the Captain.

“Is Captain Craventy here?”

“I am he; who are you?”

“A courier of the Company.”

“Are you alone?”

“No, I have a traveller with me.”

“A traveller! What has he come here for?”

“He has come to see the moon.”

At this reply, Captain Craventy began to think the man was a lunatic, which under the circumstances was not an extravagant supposition; but he had no time to go into the matter—the courier was dragging a helpless mass from the sledge. This looked like a bag covered with snow, and he was about to carry it into the house, when the Captain said:

“What have you got in that bag?”

“That is my traveller,” replied the courier.

“Who is he?”

“Mr. Thomas Black, the astronomer.”

“But he is frozen!”

“Well then, he must be thawed, that’s all!”

So Thomas Black was carried into the dwelling-house by the Sergeant, the Corporal, and the courier, and was placed in a room on the first-floor, the temperature of which, thanks to a gleaming stove, was very pleasant. The inanimate philosopher was laid upon a bed. The Captain seized his hand.

It was literally frozen. The robes and mantles were unrolled from the body, and the form of a man about fifty years of age was revealed. He was short and stout, with grayish hair; his beard was untrimmed, his eyes were shut, and his mouth was as tightly closed as if his lips were glued together. He did not breathe, or if he did, the respiration was so slight that it would not have dimmed a mirror.

Joliffe undressed him, and turning him backwards and forwards, said:

“Now, sir, if you please, when do you intend to come to yourself?”

The new-comer, however, showed no signs of returning animation, and the Corporal could only think of one way to restore his normal heat, and that was by giving him a glass of the blazing punch.

But very fortunately for Thomas Black, the Lieutenant was seized with another idea.

“Snow!” he exclaimed. “Sergeant Long, bring me several handfuls of snow.”

There was no want of snow in the court-yard of Fort Reliance.

While the Sergeant went to fetch it, Joliffe undressed the astronomer. The body of the unhappy man was covered with frost-bites, and there was no time to lose if they wished to restore circulation to the affected parts. This was what Jasper Hobson hoped to do by a vigorous application of snow. We know that this is the remedy usually employed in very cold countries to re-establish suspended circulation.

When Sergeant Long returned, Joliffe and he sham-pooed the new-comer in a manner he never had before experienced. It was not a gentle rubbing, but a most severe application : more like the rasping of a currycomb than the rubbing of human fingers.

During the operation the loquacious Corporal continued to apostrophise the still senseless traveller :

“Now, sir, come ; what do you mean by getting frozen in this manner ? Why will you be so obstinate ?”

It is very likely that Thomas Black had made up his mind to be obstinate, for quite half an hour elapsed before he gave any signs of returning animation. Indeed, the rubbers had begun to despair, and had just ceased their efforts, when the poor man sighed heavily.

“He is alive ! he is alive !” exclaimed Jasper Hobson.

And now, having warmed the exterior of his body, they thought that the interior should not be neglected, so Corporal Joliffe procured some punch. The traveller felt much revived after this ; the blood returned to his cheek, expression came to his eyes and words to his lips ; so Captain Craventy at last began to hope that Thomas Black was about to tell him how it came to pass that he had reached the fort in such a condition.

The Astronomer, now well wrapped up in blankets, raised himself on his elbow, and in a weak voice said :

“Is this Fort Reliance ?”

“It is,” replied the Captain.

“Captain Craventy ?”

“I am he,” replied the Captain, “and glad to welcome you. But may I ask what brings you to Fort Reliance ?”

“To see the moon,” replied the courier, who was evidently satisfied with his answer, as he made it now for the second time.

Besides, the reply appeared satisfactory to Thomas Black, who made a sign in the affirmative, and then he resumed :

“Is Lieutenant Hobson here ?”

“I am here,” replied the Lieutenant.

“You have not yet started, then ?”

“Not yet,” replied the Lieutenant.

“Well then,” replied Thomas Black, “I have nothing to do but to thank you for your kindness and to go to sleep till to-morrow morning.”

The Captain and his companions then retired, leaving the new-comer to go to sleep. Half an hour afterwards the party broke up, and the guests went home to their respective rooms which were either in the fort or in the houses under its protection.

Next day Thomas Black was better ; his vigorous constitution had resisted a cold. Anyone else would probably have been frozen to death, but Black was not like other people.

Now let us see who this astronomer was, and whence he came, and why he had undertaken to cross the Company's territory at such a season of the year. What did the courier mean when he said that the traveller had come to see the moon? Could he not see the moon anywhere? And was it necessary that he should come to these hyperborean regions?

These were the questions which puzzled Captain Craventy ; but on the following day, after an hour's conversation with his guest, he learnt all.

Thomas Black was an astronomer, attached to the Greenwich Observatory, so ably directed by Professor Airy. More an observer than a theorist, Thomas Black had devoted himself to his profession, and for twenty years had rendered great service to uranographical

science. In private life he was nobody; he only lived for astronomy, and passed his time in the sky, so to speak, not on the earth: a descendant of La Fontaine's savant who went down into a well. He could talk of nothing but of stars and constellations. He ought to have lived in a telescope. As an observer he had no rival in the world; he was indefatigable, and was capable of watching for whole months together for the appearance of a cosmical phenomenon. His speciality was meteors and falling stars, and his discoveries in this branch of meteorology deserved mention. Besides, when minute observations were desirable or precise measurements were expected, Thomas Black was selected, for his clearness of vision was very remarkable. The facility of observation is not given to everybody, and it will not be thought astonishing that the Greenwich astronomer had been chosen for the duty which we shall now proceed to describe.

We are aware that during a total eclipse of the sun, the moon is surrounded by a luminous corona. Now, what is the origin of this crown? Is it a real object or only the effect of the sun's rays? This is a question which scientific research has not been able to solve.

As long ago as 1706, astronomers had scientifically described this luminous crown—Lonville and Halley, during the eclipse of 1715, Maraldi in 1724, Antonio de Alloa in 1778. Bowditch and Terrer, in 1806, observed

this corona minutely, but their conclusions were so contradictory that no definite theory could be promulgated. Apropos of the total eclipse of 1842, savants of all nations—Airy, Arago, Peytal, Laugier, Mauris, Otto Struve, Petit Baily, etc.—endeavoured to find a solution of the phenomenon; but however close the observations were, “the difference,” said Arago, “which we find between observations made of this same eclipse in different places have involved the question in such obscurity that it is not possible to arrive at any definite conclusion as to the cause of the phenomenon.”

Since that time other total eclipses have been studied, but with no new results.

Nevertheless this is a very important question, and ought to be solved at any cost; and now a new occasion presented itself. Another total eclipse of the sun—that is, total in the extreme North of America, Spain, and Africa—was to take place on the 18th July, 1860. It had been arranged amongst astronomers of the various nationalities, that observations were to be made simultaneously at various places. Thomas Black had been chosen to observe the eclipse in North America. He found himself therefore in much the same position as other English astronomers who had gone to Norway and Sweden on the occasion of the eclipse in 1851.

It may readily be imagined that Thomas Black was only too glad to seize the opportunity afforded him to study the luminous corona. He was also commissioned

to find out as far as possible the nature of the ruddy protuberances which appear at divers points on the contour of the terrestrial satellite. If the astronomer succeeded in establishing the question, he would be entitled to the congratulations of the scientific world.

Thomas Black therefore prepared to set out, and obtained letters of recommendation to the principal officers of the Hudson's Bay Company. Now an expedition was about to be sent by the Company to open a new factory in the farthest northern districts, and this was an opportunity not to be lost. So our astronomer set out, crossed the Atlantic, and from New York traversed the Red River settlement, went from fort to fort, by rapid sledge-travelling, under the guidance of a courier belonging to the Company, and notwithstanding the winter and all the dangers of travelling in arctic regions, he arrived at Fort Reliance on the 17th March, as already narrated.

Such was the explanation given by the astronomer to Captain Craventy, who immediately put himself at the disposal of Thomas Black.

"But, Mr. Black," he said, "how is it you have been in such a hurry to arrive since the eclipse will not take place till next year?"

"Well, Captain," replied the astronomer, "the fact is I heard that the Company was about to send out an expedition along the American coast as far as the 70th parallel, and I did not wish to lose the chance of accompanying it."

“Mr. Black,” replied the Captain, “if my Lieutenant had gone I should have felt it my duty to have accompanied you myself to the shore of the Polar Sea.”

And then the Captain again assured the astronomer that he might count upon him for assistance, and once more bade him welcome to Fort Reliance.

CHAPTER IV.

A FACTORY.

THE Slave Lake, one of the largest which one encounters in the region beyond the 61st parallel, is 250 miles long by 50 wide, and is situated at 61 deg. 25 min. N. and 114 deg. W. The whole country surrounding it slopes down to a common centre, a long depression which is occupied by the lake.

The position of the lake, in countries full of game, attracted the attention of the Company at a very early period. A number of rivers flow into it or take their rise from it, such as the Mackenzie, the Foin, and the Athabasca, etc. Several and important forts had been constructed on these rivers—Fort Providence on the north, Fort Resolution on the south. Fort Reliance occupies the extreme north-east of the lake, and is not more than 300 miles from the estuary of the Chesterfield, formed by the waters of Hudson's Bay.

The Slave Lake is covered with small islands, 200 or 300 feet high, composed of granite and gneiss. On the northern shore are thick woods, which shut

out the arid and frozen continent, which has not unnaturally received the name of the Cursed Land. On the other hand the southern shores, which are chiefly calcareous, are extremely flat. There are the limits of the great ruminants, the buffaloes or bisons of the polar district, the flesh of which almost exclusively supplies the food of the Canadian and native hunters.

The trees on the northern shore are grouped into magnificent forests, and one need not be astonished at meeting such fine vegetation in such a remote latitude, for, as a matter of fact, the Slave Lake is scarcely more north than parts of Norway and Sweden, say Stockholm or Christiania. Only we must remember that the isothermal lines or belts of heat, equally distributed, do not follow the terrestrial parallels, and therefore, though in the same latitude, America is incomparably colder than Europe. In April the streets of New York are covered with snow, nevertheless New York is much the same parallel as the Azores; so the nature of a continent, its situation with respect to the ocean, even the conformation of its soil, all influence its climatic conditions.

Fort Reliance, in the summer, was surrounded by masses of verdure, which was most refreshing after the vigorous winter. There was no want of wood in the forest, which consisted almost exclusively of poplars, pines, and birch-trees. On the islands were magnificent willows. Game abounded in the brushwood, and even

in the bad season was plentiful. More to the southward were bisons, elk, and Canadian porcupines, the flesh of which is excellent. The lake abounds with fish; the trout run to an enormous size, the weight often exceeding sixty pounds; pike, a sort of char called blue-fish by the English, and countless legions of tittamegs swarmed in the lake; so there was no question of food for the inhabitants of Fort Reliance. They were already provided by nature, and being likewise clothed with the skins of foxes, bears, martens, and other animals, they were enabled to bear the rigour of the climate.

The fort, properly so called, consisted of a wooden house, with a ground-floor, and a storey above which was used by the commandant and his officers. Around the house were situated the barracks, the Company's storehouses, and the business premises, in which exchanges were effected. A small chapel (which only wanted a clergyman) and a powder magazine completed the surroundings. The whole was enclosed by a paling twenty feet high, in the form of an immense parallelogram, which sustained four little bastions, one at each corner. Thus the fort was protected from a surprise, and the precautions taken were very necessary, at a time when the Indians, instead of being the purveyors of the Company, fought for their own independence; and the precaution was equally desirable against the agents and soldiers of rival associations, who formerly disputed the possession of this rich fur country.

The Hudson's Bay Company included about a thousand men in its employment, and exercised supreme authority, even to the punishment by death. The superintendents of the factories at their pleasure regulated salaries and fixed the value of provisions and skins, and, thanks to this system of absolute power, it was not unusual for them to realise profits of over 300 per cent.

We shall see from the following table, which is extracted from the "Voyage of Captain Robert Lade," on what terms the exchange with Indians was worked, these Indians having since become the best hunters of the Company. The skin of a beaver was then the unit of currency. The Indians paid :

For a gun	10 skins.
Half-a-pound of powder	1 skin.
Four pounds of shot,	1 „
A hatchet	1 „
Six knives	1 „
One pound of glass beads	1 „
A laced coat	6 skins.
A coat not laced	5 „
One laced dress (female)	6 „
One pound of tobacco	1 skin.
A keg of powder	1 „
A comb and looking-glass	2 skins.

But some years afterwards beaver skins became so scarce that the unit of currency was altered. It is now the bison robe which has taken its place. Whenever an Indian comes to a fort, the agents give him as many

pieces of stick as he brings skins, and he exchanges these pieces of wood, on the premises, for manufactured articles. On this system the Company, who fix the value of the object which they buy and sell, cannot fail to realise immense profits.

Such were the customs established at the various factories, and consequently at Fort Reliance. Mrs. Barnett was thus able to study them during her stay, which was prolonged till the 16th April. She and Lieutenant Hobson had long conversations together, planning their route, and both decided not to give way to any obstacle ; but Thomas Black never spoke, except on his own special mission. The question of the luminous corona and the red protuberance of the moon completely absorbed him. They felt that he had staked his life on the solution of the problem, and at length he made Mrs. Barnett as enthusiastic as himself. What a pity it was that they could not cross the Polar Circle, and that the 18th July, 1860, was so distant, particularly so to the impatient astronomer from Greenwich.

The preparations for their departure could not be commenced till the middle of March, and they occupied a month in completion. It was in fact a very heavy responsibility to organise such an undertaking. Everything must be carried — food, clothing, tools, arms, ammunition, and all.

The expedition commanded by Lieutenant Hobson was composed of one officer, two non-commissioned

officers, and ten privates, three of whom were married and brought their wives with them. The following is the list of men selected by Captain Craveny :

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Lieutenant Jasper Hobson. | 10. Private MacNab. |
| 2. Sergeant Long. | 11. „ Sabine. |
| 3. Corporal Joliffe. | 12. „ Hope. |
| 4. Private Peterson. | 13. „ Kellet. |
| 5. „ Belcher. | 14. Mrs. Rae. |
| 6. „ Rae. | 15. „ Joliffe. |
| 7. „ Marbre. | 16. „ MacNab. |
| 8. „ Garry. | 17. „ Barnett. |
| 9. „ Pond. | 18. Madge. |
| | 19. Thomas Black. |

In all, nineteen people, who had to be transported several hundreds of miles across a desert and almost unknown country.

In anticipation of this expedition, the agents of the Company had collected at Fort Reliance all the necessary material. A dozen sledges, with their trains of dogs, had been prepared. These very primitive vehicles consisted of a number of light planks united by transverse beams ; a runner, formed of a piece of wood turned up at the end, was fastened underneath, which enabled the sledge to cut through the snow without sinking into it. Six dogs, harnessed in couples, drew the sledge ; they were very intelligent and very swift steeds, and, under the influence of the driver's whip, could make their fifteen miles an hour.

The wardrobe of the travellers consisted of reindeer skins doubly lined with thick fur. They all wore woollen vests to protect them from the frequent changes of temperature. Every one of the party, whether male or female, wore high boots of sealskin, which the natives excelled in making. These boots are absolutely waterproof, and adapt themselves readily to the feet. To these they could attach pine-wood snow-shoes, three or four feet long, by means of which they could traverse the softest snow and pass over ice like a skater. Fur caps and belts of deerskin completed the accoutrement.

Lieutenant Hobson had provided a sufficient armament—regulation muskets, supplied by the Company, pistols and sabres. They also carried hatchets, saws, adzes, and other tools, and everything necessary to establish a factory; amongst other things, a stove, a smelting-furnace, two air-pumps for ventilation, and a halkett-boat—a sort of india-rubber canoe, which they could inflate when required for use.

For provisions they could count upon the hunters with the detachment. Some of the soldiers were first-rate trappers, and there was no want of reindeer in the polar regions. Whole tribes of Indians or Esquimaux can obtain no other food than this, which is both abundant and palatable. Nevertheless, as delays and difficulties were to be expected, the party had laid in a stock of provisions, such as the flesh of the deer, the bison, and the elk, corned beef, and pemmican—an

Indian preparation, which contains great nourishment in a very small compass. It requires no cooking.

For liquors, Lieutenant Hobson had provided several casks of rum and whisky; but he had made up his mind to economise these as much as possible, for in cold latitudes alcohol is very injurious to health. But the Company had also placed at his disposal a portable medicine-chest, which contained a quantity of limejuice, with lemons and other remedies indispensable to combat scorbutic affections, which are so terrible in those regions. All the men had been most carefully selected; none were too fat nor too thin, and all were acclimatised, and could therefore more easily support the fatigue of such an expedition. Besides this, they were all courageous fellows, and to a man were volunteers; they would be allowed double pay during their absence, should they succeed in establishing the settlement beyond the 70th parallel.

A special sledge had been provided for Mrs. Barnett and her faithful attendant Madge. The former did not wish to be treated differently from the other members of the expedition; but Captain Craveny insisted on her being made more comfortable, and as in this he was only carrying out the wishes of the Company, she yielded.

Thomas Black took the same conveyance which had brought him to Fort Reliance. His astronomical instruments, which were very few—a telescope for his selenographic observations, a sextant to find the latitude, a chronometer to ascertain the longitude, a few maps and

a couple of books—that was all he stowed in his sledge besides his slender baggage, and he relied upon his faithful dogs to leave nothing behind him *en route*.

Of course the subsistence of the steeds had not been forgotten. There were in all seventy dogs—quite a herd to provide for—and the hunters were obliged to look after them. These intelligent and vigorous animals (the dogs) had been bought from the Chippeway Indians, who knew very well how to train them.

The organisation of the troop was most skilfully managed ; Lieutenant Hobson had been most zealous in every particular. Proud of his mission and passionately fond of his work, he neglected nothing which could in any way tend to success. Corporal Joliffe, always ready for anything, exerted himself tremendously without corresponding results, but the presence of his wife made up for everything. Mrs. Barnett had taken a great fancy to the lively *Canadienne*.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Captain Craventy had forgotten nothing which was likely to ensure success. The instructions which he had received from the managers of the Company denoted the importance which they attached to the success of the expedition, and to the establishment of a new factory beyond the 70th parallel. We may, then, rest assured that everything possible had been done, but nature might nevertheless interpose obstacles which could not be overcome by the brave Lieutenant. Who could tell ?

CHAPTER V.

FROM FORT RELIANCE TO FORT ENTERPRISE.

FINE weather came at last. The verdant carpet on the hills appeared here and there where the snow had begun to melt; a few swans, bald-headed eagles, and other migratory birds arrived from the south. The trees began to put forth buds, the pools formed here and there by the melting of the snow attracted red-headed ducks, of which there are so many species in North America. The guillemots, puffins, and eider-ducks went still farther north. Shrews hardly bigger than a nut ventured out of their holes and traced curious figures on the ground with their pointed tails. The fresh air was almost intoxicating, and the sun's rays had a most revivifying effect. Nature was waking from her long sleep after the terrible winter nights, and was smiling as she woke. The effect of the return of spring in the arctic regions is perhaps more impressive than in any other portion of the globe.

Nevertheless the thaw was not universal. The thermometer certainly indicated 41 deg. Fahrenheit, but still the nights were frosty and kept the snow hard,

which was favourable for sledging, a circumstance of which Jasper Hobson meant to take advantage

The lake was still frozen hard. The hunters from the fort during the past month had already made long excursions in search of game. Mrs. Barnett was never tired of admiring the skill with which these men used their snow-shoes, for they skimmed along almost as quickly as a horse can gallop ; and the lady, at Captain Craventy's suggestion, practised walking in snow-shoes, and very soon became an adept.

Several bands of Indians had lately arrived at the fort to exchange their spoils for manufactured articles. The season had not been good ; skins were scarce ; marten furs and polecats fetched a good price ; but beavers, otters, lynxes, ermines, and foxes were rare. The Company were therefore very wise in exploring new territory which had hitherto escaped the rapacity of the hunter.

On the morning of the 16th April, Lieutenant Hobson's party were ready to start. They had already determined their route across the known country extending between the Slave and Great Bear Lakes, the latter of which is situated beyond the Polar Circle. Jasper Hobson wished to reach Fort Confidence, established at the northern extremity of this lake. A station at which he was to re-victual was called Fort Enterprise, 200 miles to the north-west, on the borders of Snare Lake. By travelling fifteen miles a day, Jasper Hobson reckoned

on reaching Fort Enterprise at the beginning of May.

Leaving that place the detachment was to take the shortest route to the American coast at Cape Bathurst. It had been arranged that in a year Captain Craventy was to send a convoy to re-victual Cape Bathurst, and that the Lieutenant was to send a detachment to meet the convoy to guide it to the place at which the new fort would then, they hoped, be established. In this way the future of the factory was guaranteed against any untoward fate, and the Lieutenant and his companions—voluntary exiles—would still be enabled to keep up communication with their fellow-creatures.

On the morning of the 16th April the sledges, already harnessed, were only awaiting the travellers at the gate. Captain Craventy, having called together the men of the detachment, addressed them in a few kind words. He recommended them before everything to stand by each other in danger. He told them that obedience to orders was indispensable to the success of the enterprise, as well as self-denial and devotion. Three cheers greeted this speech, and then farewells were rapidly exchanged, and each one took his or her allotted place in the sledge.

Jasper Hobson and Sergeant Long took the lead, then Mrs. Barnett and Madge followed, Madge wielding the long Esquimaux whip very cleverly. Thomas Black and one of the soldiers, and Peterson the Canadian, came

third in rank. The other sledges, containing the soldiers and their wives, came after without particular order. Corporal and Mrs. Joliffe brought up the rear. According to Hobson's orders each driver was obliged to keep as much as possible the place allotted to him, and to maintain his relative distance ; so as not to cause any confusion ; as a collision between the sledges at full speed would probably have had a very disastrous result.

Having left Fort Reliance, Jasper Hobson steered directly north-west. The first thing to do was to cross the large river which connected the Slave Lake with Lake Wolmsley. But this watercourse was frozen hard and could not be distinguished from the snow-covered plains, which spread an unbroken carpet over the country, and the sledges drawn by their clever teams sped rapidly over the hard surface.

The weather was very fine, but still very cold. The sun, very little above the horizon, described a lengthened curve ; its rays, brilliantly reflected upon the snow, gave more light than heat. Fortunately there was no wind, and the cold was more bearable in consequence. Nevertheless the breeze, thanks to the pace with which they went through the air, would have been enough to chill the face of anybody not accustomed to travel in those regions.

"All goes well," said Hobson to the Sergeant, who sat beside him as motionless as if at "attention ;" "we are beginning well, the weather is fine, the temperature

not too cold, our sledges run like express trains, and if this fine weather last we shall get on swimmingly. What is your opinion, Sergeant?"

"I quite agree with you, sir," replied the Sergeant, who never on any account differed from his chief.

"You are as determined as I am, Sergeant, to push on as far north as possible," continued Jasper.

"If you command I will obey," replied the Sergeant; "that is quite enough for me."

"I know that, Sergeant," replied Hobson. "I know I have but to tell you to do a thing and it is done at once. I wish all the men understood as you do the importance of our mission and the necessity to devote themselves body and soul to the interest of the Company. Ah, Sergeant, I am sure if I give you an order impossible to execute——"

"There is no such thing," interrupted the Sergeant.

"What I suppose I ordered you to go to the North Pole?"

"Well, sir, I should go."

"And told you to come back again?" added Hobson, smiling.

"Then I should come back," replied Long simply.

During this colloquy Mrs. Barnett and Madge had also been enabled to exchange a few words, while the somewhat steep ascent retarded the pace of the dogs. These two brave women, well wrapped up in otter skins and white bear furs, looked in astonishment upon the

pale outlines of the glaciers which rose on the horizon. The detachment had already passed the hills which rise upon the northern banks of the Slave Lake, the summits of which were crowned with the grim skeletons of trees. As far as the eye could reach the plain stretched out before them unbroken. Some birds occasionally enlivened the solitude, and amongst them they remarked troops of swans which were passing northwards, the whiteness of their plumage vying with the snow, and they could only be distinguished when they rose above the level of the hills into the gray atmosphere, for when they flew near the ground the keenest vision could not distinguish them from it.

“What a wonderful country this is,” said Mrs. Barnett, “and what a difference between these regions and the verdant plains of Australia. You remember, my good Madge, how we suffered from the heat in the Gulf of Carpentaria—you remember that cloudless sky and stifling heat?”

“My dear,” replied Madge, “I haven’t got your memory. I forget my impressions.”

“What!” exclaimed Mrs. Barnett, “have you forgotten the tropical heat of Australia? Have you no recollection of the tortures we endured in the desert, and, short of water, when the sun scorched us to the bone, and when the night even brought us no relief?”

“No, Pauline,” replied Madge, as she wrapped herself in her furs. “I do not recollect anything about it. And

how do you expect me to remember our sufferings from heat and thirst at such a time as this, of all others, when we are surrounded with ice, and when I have but to stretch out my arm to pick up a handful of snow? You talk of heat when we are freezing even beneath our furs. You remember the broiling sun when it cannot even melt the little icicles on our lips. No, my dear, don't tell me about the heat, don't tell me that I ever complained of being too hot, I won't believe it."

Mrs. Barnett could not help smiling.

"I suppose, my good Madge, that you are very cold?"

"I am very cold, but I do not dislike this temperature. On the contrary, the climate appears to me very healthy, and I am certain I shall be quite well in this part of America. It is really a beautiful country!"

"Yes, it is a magnificent country, and we have not yet seen any of the wonders it contains. But wait until we reach the Polar Sea, wait till winter comes with its gigantic icebergs, its storms and tempests, its aurora borealis and magnificent constellations; wait till you have the nights six months long, and then you will understand how infinitely divine are the works of the Creator."

Mrs. Barnett, as she spoke, was evidently carried away by her imagination. In these deserted regions, in that implacable climate, she did not wish to see anything but the most magnificent phenomenon of nature; the traveller's instinct got the better of her reason. In these polar countries she only cared for the moving poetry of the

Sagas, and the songs which the bards sung in the days of Ossian. But Madge, who was more matter of fact, did not hide from herself the dangers or the sufferings to be risked by wintering at a distance of less than thirty degrees from the North Pole.

And indeed the most robust travellers had succumbed to the fatigues and privations, to the moral and physical torture of this terrible climate. It is true that Lieutenant Hobson's mission did not oblige him to press forward to the highest degree of latitude, he was not obliged to reach the pole, or to follow in the traces of Parry, Ross, M'Clure, of Kean or Morton. But as soon as he had crossed the Polar Circle the climate was not very different from that in districts much nearer the Pole. Jasper Hobson did not intend to go higher than the 70th parallel. That was all very well; but we must not forget that Franklin and his unfortunate companions died from the effects of the cold before they had passed the 68th deg. N. latitude.

Mr. and Mrs. Joliffe in their sledge talked of very different things. Perhaps the Corporal had been drinking too often to the success of the expedition before he started, for, strange as it must appear, he was actually disputing with his little wife. Yes, he contradicted her; a thing which never occurred under the most extraordinary circumstances.

"No, Mrs. Joliffe," said the Corporal, "you have nothing to fear. It is not more difficult to drive a sledge

than to drive a pony-carriage, and devil take me if I can't drive a team of dogs."

"I don't say that you cannot drive them," replied his wife. "I only ask you to moderate your pace. You see that we are now in the front of the whole caravan, and I hear Lieutenant Hobson calling out to you to go back to your place in the rear."

"Let him call then, Mrs. Joliffe; let him call;" and the Corporal, using his long whip, still further accelerated his pace.

"Take care, Joliffe," cried his wife. "Do not go so fast, we are going down a hill."

"Down hill, Mrs. Joliffe! do you call that down hill? Why it's up hill."

"I tell you we are descending."

"Well, I maintain we are going up. Look how the dogs are pulling."

In any case, no matter who was right or wrong, the dogs were getting wild; the descent was very steep indeed; the sledge flew along at a tremendous pace, and was already far in advance of the detachment. The Corporal and his wife were bumped about every minute; the jolts, arising from the inequality of the snow, became more and more frequent. The occupants of the sledge, first flung to the right, then to the left, knocked against each other and were terribly bruised. But the Corporal would not listen to his wife's advice, or to the shouts of the Lieutenant. The commander, understanding the danger

of the foolish course they were pursuing, pressed on in pursuit. The rest of the caravan followed as rapidly as they could.

But the Corporal got still more reckless, the pace seemed to intoxicate him ; he cried, and gesticulated, and flourished his long whip like an accomplished charioteer.

“ A remarkable instrument this whip ! ” he exclaimed, “ and how well the Esquimaux know how to use it ! ”

“ But you are not an Esquimaux, ” replied his wife, as she tried, but in vain, to arrest the arm of the imprudent driver.

“ I have heard it stated, ” said the Corporal, “ that the Esquimaux can hit a dog in any part they please ; and that they can even, with the stiff thong, cut a piece from the ear of one of them, if they please. Now I will just try. ”

“ Oh don't, don't, Joliffe ! ” screamed the little woman, frightened almost out of her wits.

“ Don't you be afraid, Mrs. Joliffe ; don't you be afraid. I know what I am about. It seems to me that that dog on the right is doing wrong ; now I am just going to touch him up. ”

But evidently the Corporal was not yet enough of an Esquimaux, nor sufficiently familiar with the long whip—the lash of which was four feet longer than the sledge—for it flung itself out with a hiss, and, turning back very quickly, rolled itself round Master Joliffe's own

neck, and sent his fur cap flying into the air. There is no doubt that, but for the thick cap, he would have cut off one of his own ears instead of the dog's.

At this moment the pack leaped at one side, the sledge was upset, and the occupants flung out into the snow. Very fortunately it was so thick that they escaped unhurt ; but what a come-down it was for the Corporal, how his wife looked at him, and how severely he got reprimanded by Lieutenant Hobson !

The sledge was put right again ; but it was decided that the management of the sledge, equally with that of the household, was in future to be placed in Mrs. Joliffe's hands. The crest-fallen Corporal was obliged to give way, and the journey was immediately resumed.

During the next fifteen days nothing of importance occurred. The weather continued fine ; the cold was not too great ; and on the 1st May the detachment reached Fort Enterprise.

CHAPTER VI.

A WAPITI DUEL.

THE expedition had made 200 miles since its departure from Fort Reliance. The travellers, favoured by the long twilight, travelled night and day at full speed, and were quite overcome with fatigue when they reached the banks of Lake Snare, close to which Fort Enterprise is erected.

This fort had only been established a few years by the Company, and was in fact nothing more than a provision depôt of little importance. It served principally for the resting-place of the detachments which accompanied the convoys bringing the skins from the Great Bear Lake, which is situated nearly 300 miles to the north-west. The garrison consisted of about a dozen soldiers. The fort was only a wooden house enclosed by palisades, but, little comfortable as it was, Lieutenant Hobson and his party were glad to take refuge there and repose for two days from the fatigues of their journey.

The arctic spring was already diffusing its gentle

influence. The snow was melting by degrees, and the nights were no longer frosty. Some delicate mosses and grasses were cropping up here and there, and some small colourless flowers were peeping from between the stones. These manifestations of re-awakening nature after the long winter night were very refreshing to eyes saddened by the monotony of the snow, and were charmed by the appearance of these few specimens of the arctic flora.

Mrs. Barnett and Jasper Hobson took advantage of the halt to visit the shores of the lake. They were both very enthusiastic students of nature, so they went together across the ice-floe and amongst the rushing cascades which already were created by the rays of the sun. The surface of the lake was still solid, not a fissure indicated the approaching break-up. Some icebergs which had fallen down now dotted the surface of the ice in strange and picturesque forms, the beauty of which was increased by the refraction of the light. They looked almost as if a rainbow had fallen down and the fragments had crossed each other on the ice.

“This is a most beautiful sight, Mr. Hobson,” exclaimed Mrs. Barnett. “The prismatic effects are infinitely diversified and changed with our every movement. Does it not seem as if we are looking through an immense kaleidoscope? But perhaps you are already tired of this sight which is so new to me?”

“No,” replied the Lieutenant; “although I was born

on this continent and have lived here all my life, I am never weary of contemplating the beauties it presents. But if your enthusiasm is great now, when the sun is shining, that is to say, when the light has more or less modified the aspect of the country, what will you think when you are able to observe these regions in the midst of winter's grandeur? I confess, madam, that I think the sun, which is so precious in temperate regions, rather spoils my arctic continent for me."

"Really, Mr. Hobson," replied Mrs. Barnett, smiling, "I think that the sun is an excellent travelling companion, and I do not think that we ought to grumble at its warmth even in polar regions."

"I am one of those people," replied Hobson, "who think it better to visit Russia in the winter and the Sahara in the summer; you may then see each country under its most characteristic aspect. No, the sun is an orb for warm latitudes and hot countries. At thirty degrees from the pole it is out of place. The sky of this country is the pure cold sky of winter, sparkling with constellations and aurora borealis. It is the land of the night, not of the day, and you have still to enjoy the enchantments and wonders of the long polar night."

"Mr. Hobson, have you ever visited the temperate zones of Europe and America?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"Yes, and I have admired them, as I think they deserve to be admired, but I have always returned more ardent and enthusiastic to my native land. I am a child

of the frost, and really there is no merit in my braving it. It has no injurious effect upon me, and, like the Esquimaux, I can live for a whole month in a snow hut."

"It is quite pleasant to hear you speak so cheerfully of your dread enemy, the cold. I hope to prove myself worthy of your companionship; even if you brave the polar frost, I trust that we shall endure them together."

"I hope so, indeed, madam, and I trust that all the rest, the soldiers and their wives, will show themselves as resolute as you are. In that case, with Heaven's assistance, we shall do much."

"But you cannot complain as yet," she replied. "We have not had a single accident. The weather has been most favourable, and everything has been propitious."

"No doubt, madam," he replied; "you are quite right; but this very same sun which you admire so much will soon increase our fatigue and put obstacles in our way."

"What do you mean, Mr. Hobson?" said Mrs. Barnett.

"I mean to say that the heat will before long have changed the nature of the country—that the melting ice will no longer present a favourable surface to the sledges. The ground would become rough and rugged, our dogs would be unable to travel fast as hitherto, the rivers and lakes will have begun to melt, and it will be necessary to find fords or to go round them. All

these changes caused by the sun's heat will entail upon us fatigue, delay, and dangers, the least of which will be the breaking of the snow beneath our feet or the fall of avalanches from the icebergs. Yes, that is what we shall have to thank the sun for, every day as he climbs higher up the horizon. Remember this, madam—of the four elements one only is necessary here, namely, the air: that is indispensable. The other three—earth, fire, and water—we can get on very well without. They are even contrary to nature in the polar regions.”

No doubt the Lieutenant was exaggerating. Mrs. Barnett could easily have refuted his arguments, but she liked to hear him express himself so ardently. The Lieutenant was passionately fond of the country, in which fate had cast the lady's life for the present, and his ardour was a guarantee that he would not shrink from any obstacle.

Nevertheless, Jasper Hobson was quite right when he said that the sun had difficulties in store for them. That was evident when, three days later—on the 4th May—they resumed their journey. The thermometer, even at the coldest part of the night, was always above 32 deg. A universal thaw had set in. The snow had begun to melt rapidly, the roughness of the ground caused the sledges to jolt continuously, and as a matter of course the travellers were much shaken. The dogs, in consequence of the bad holding-ground, were obliged

to moderate their pace, and the reins were accordingly once again placed in the unskilful hands of Corporal Joliffe now that there was no danger, for no cries nor any flourishing of the whip could increase the pace of the jaded packs.

Occasionally the travellers lightened the load by getting out and walking. This mode of progression suited the hunters very well, for they were now approaching the best game districts in British America. Mrs. Barnett and her faithful Madge took great interest in the chase, while Thomas Black, on the contrary, declared himself absolutely uninterested in any violent exercise. He had not come to this distant land with the idea of hunting polecats or ermine, but only to observe the moon at the precise moment when her disc should cover the sun; so when the orb of night rose above the horizon, the impatient astronomer could not take his eyes from her. This provoked the Lieutenant, who one day said to him :

“Well, Mr. Black, if by any improbable chance the moon should not come to time on the 18th July, 1860, it will be a bad look-out for you.”

“Mr. Hobson,” replied the astronomer gravely, “if the moon were to be so wanting in etiquette, I should institute proceedings against her.”

The best hunters of the detachment were Marbre and Sabine, who were both past-masters in the art. They were almost unequalled, and the most skilful

Indians could not surpass them in quickness of vision or precision of aim. They were at once trappers and hunters. They were acquainted with all the nets and other artifices for taking sables, otters, wolves, bears, etc. No ruse was unknown to them; they were clever and intelligent; and Captain Craventy had wisely made choice of them for the expedition.

But while on this march, neither of these soldiers had any opportunity to set traps. They could not separate from the detachment more than an hour or two at a time at most, and they were obliged to content themselves with any game that came within shot. Still they were lucky enough to kill one of the great American ruminants, which are rarely met with in such high latitudes.

One day—namely, the 15th May—the two hunters, Lieutenant Hobson and Mrs. Barnett, went some miles towards the east, out of their direct route. Marbre and Sabine had obtained permission to follow up a fresh trail which they had struck, and not only had Hobson given them leave, but he and Mrs. Barnett had made up their minds to accompany them.

The tracks were evidently those of some large deer: there was no mistake on this point. The hunters were positive about it, and were able to name the species to which the animals belonged.

“The presence of these animals in this country seems to surprise you, Mr. Hobson,” said Mrs. Barnett.

“Well, the fact is,” he replied, “that it is somewhat unusual to meet this species beyond the 57th deg. N. latitude. We generally find them to the south of the Slave Lake, where they live upon the young shoots of the willow and poplar, as well as on a species of wild rose of which they are very fond.”

“I suppose, then, that they, as well as the fur animals, have been obliged to relinquish their more southern haunts, in consequence of the close pursuit of the hunters and trappers?”

“That is the only explanation that we can give of their presence here,” replied the Lieutenant. “That is always supposing that my men have not been mistaken in the footprints.”

“No, no, sir,” replied Sabine. “Marbre and I are not mistaken. These are the tracks of deer which we call the red deer, but the natives know them as *wapiti*.”

“That’s a fact,” added Marbre. “Old trappers like us are not easily deceived; besides, you can hear the peculiar whistling they make.”

The party had by this time arrived at the base of a small hill, the slopes of which were almost denuded of snow, and so not difficult to mount. They hastened to the top, while the whistling noise noticed by Marbre became more audible; occasionally cries, which somewhat resembled the braying of an ass, were mingled with the other sound, and proved that the hunters had not been mistaken.

When the Lieutenant and his friends had reached the top of the hill, they gazed across the plain to the eastward. The undulating ground was still white with patches of snow, but the dazzling surface was here and there broken by the young shoots. Some shrubs stretched forth stunted branches, while huge icebergs stood out against the gray sky.

“Look, there are the wapiti!” cried Sabine and Marbre, simultaneously, as they pointed to a group of animals about a quarter of a mile away.

“But what are they about?” asked Mrs. Barnett.

“They are fighting, madam,” replied Jasper Hobson. “They always do so when the heat of the sun inflames them. This is another unfortunate result of the presence of the orb of day.”

From the spot on which they stood the party could easily distinguish the movements of the group of wapiti, which were very fine specimens of their species. These animals are known under various names, such as stags with rounded horns, American stags, roebucks, gray elks, and red elks. These graceful animals have slender limbs, their skin is of a somewhat reddish colour, which becomes darker as the season gets warmer. The males can be distinguished from the females by their white horns, which the latter do not possess. The wapiti was once very common in America, and the United States contained a great number, but the clearing of the forests obliged them to take refuge in the more peaceful

districts of Canada. But there they were not allowed to remain in peace ; they were disturbed, and migrated towards Hudson's Bay. In fact, although the wapiti is essentially an animal of the arctic regions, nevertheless, as the Lieutenant had stated, it seldom penetrates beyond 57 deg. N. latitude ; so it may be concluded that these specimens had fled before the Chippeway Indians, who pursue them mercilessly, and had endeavoured to find the security which was denied to them farther south.

Meanwhile the fight went on furiously ; the wapiti had not even perceived the hunters, though it is probable if they had they would not have ceased to struggle. Marbre and Sabine, who knew how blindly they engaged, could have advanced towards them fearlessly and got within range at their leisure, as Lieutenant Hobson actually suggested.

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied Marbre, "but we may spare our powder and ball. The beasts have declared 'war to the knife,' and we shall get there in plenty of time to secure the vanquished."

"Are wapiti valuable animals?" inquired Mrs. Barnett.

"Yes, madam," replied Jasper Hobson ; "their skin, which is less thin than that of the true elk, makes very valuable leather. It is rendered supple by rubbing it with the grease and brains of the animals, and neither damp nor dryness will hurt it—this is the reason why the Indians are so anxious to secure the wapiti."

“But is their flesh not good to eat?”

“Well, not very good. It is tough and not very palatable. The fat congeals the moment it is taken from the fire, and sticks to the teeth. The flesh is, therefore, not so highly valued as that of other deer. Nevertheless, for want of better food in time of scarcity, we eat it, and it keeps us alive as well as anything else.”

Mrs. Barnett and Jasper Hobson continued talking for a few minutes longer, when suddenly the wapiti ceased fighting. Was it possible they had satisfied their anger, or had they perceived the hunters or scented danger? Whatever the reason, all, with the exception of two, fled away to the eastward at full speed. In a few moments they had disappeared, and the swiftest horse could not have overtaken them.

But two magnificent stags still remained on the field of battle. With heads down and locked antlers, with their legs stretched to their utmost tension, they swayed and butted like a pair of wrestlers; neither would let go, and they swung round and round on their fore-legs as if they were riveted together.

“How savage they are!” exclaimed Mrs. Barnett.

“Yes,” replied the Lieutenant; “there are no more revengeful beasts than these wapiti. No doubt they are paying off some old score.”

“But would not this be the time to approach them?” said Mrs. Barnett, “they are quite blinded with rage.”

“We have plenty of time, madam,” replied Sabine ;
“they will not escape us now. If we were close beside
them, with our rifles at our shoulders and our fingers on
the triggers, they would not stir.”

“Indeed !”

“It is quite true,” said Hobson, who had been
attentively examining the combatants while the hunter
was speaking, “and whether we shoot them or whether
they are killed by the wolves, these wapiti will die,
sooner or later, on the spot they stand on at this
moment.”

“I do not understand you,” said Mrs. Barnett.

“Well, madam, if you will come nearer you will
see. You need not be afraid to approach them, for,
as our hunters say, they are quite incapable of flight.”

So Mrs. Barnett, accompanied by the three men,
descended the hill. In a few minutes they had reached
the field of battle. The wapiti had scarcely moved.
They were pushing against each other with their heads
like two great rams, and seemed to be inextricably fixed
one to the other.

In fact, in the heat of the contest, the horns of the
wapiti had been so locked that they could not be disen-
gaged, and still less could they be broken. This is not
at all an uncommon occurrence, nor is it rarely that
antlers are found lying on the ground still locked
together, the former owners having died of hunger and
been eaten by the wild beasts.

A couple of bullets put an end to the struggle, and the hunters immediately set about skinning the deer, leaving their bleeding carcasses to be devoured by the wolves and the bears.

CHAPTER VII.

THE POLAR CIRCLE.

THE expedition continued to advance towards the north-west, but the dogs were greatly fatigued by drawing the sledges over the uneven ground. The brave animals were quiet enough now, although they had given their drivers a good deal of trouble when they started. They could not travel more than eight or nine miles a day, though Hobson hurried on the detachment as much as possible. He was very anxious to reach the Great Bear Lake, on the borders of which Fort Confidence is situated, for there he hoped to receive some important information. He wished to ascertain whether the Indians who frequented the north banks of the lake had been able to cross the neighbouring shores, and whether the Arctic Ocean was open at this time of the year. These were very important questions, and if answered in the affirmative would decide the fate of the new factory.

The country through which the little troop was now passing was most capriciously intersected by a number

of watercourses, the greater portion of which were tributaries of the two important rivers which flow northwards into the frozen ocean. That on the west is the Mackenzie; to the east is the Copper Mine River. Between these two principal arteries, lakes, lagoons, and numerous ponds are formed. Their surface, almost free from ice, would not sustain the sledges, which were therefore obliged to make considerable detours, which added greatly to the length of the journey. Lieutenant Hobson was quite right in saying that winter is the better season to travel in arctic regions, for they are much easier to traverse at that time, as Mrs. Barnett had reason to confess more than once.

This region included in the Cursed Land was absolute desert, as is almost all the northern territory of the American continent. It has been estimated that there is on the average one person for every ten square miles of territory. The inhabitants include, without counting the scattered tribes of natives, a few thousand agents or soldiers attached to the various fur companies. This population is generally massed in the more southerly districts and in the neighbourhood of the factories.

So no trace of human footstep crossed the route of the detachment. The only tracks visible were those of wild animals; occasionally a bear of the white or polar species was sighted, but the rarity of these animals astonished Mrs. Barnett, for she had fancied from the tales she had read of shipwrecked whalers and others, that these

formidable beasts are much more common, and attacked people almost daily. But she concluded that the strength of the detachment kept the bears at a distance.

“Wait until winter sets in, madam,” said the Lieutenant, “wait till the winter makes them hungry, and then perhaps you will see more of them than you care about.”

After a long and fatiguing journey, the little troop at length arrived at the limit of the Polar Circle on the 28th May. We know that this parallel of latitude, 23 deg. 27 min. 57 sec. from the North Pole, forms the mathematical limit of the sun's rays when it describes the arc in the opposite hemisphere. At this point the expedition entered the true arctic regions.

The latitude had been carefully ascertained by Thomas Black and Jasper Hobson, who handled the instruments with equal skill. Mrs. Barnett, who was present at the time, had the satisfaction to hear that she was about to cross the Arctic Circle, and she heard it with a pardonable pride.

“You have already passed the torrid zones in your previous voyages,” said the Lieutenant, “and here you are to-day on the confines of the Arctic Circle. Very few explorers have ventured into such different zones; some have, so to speak, a speciality for warm climates, and Africa and Australia chiefly are the countries they prefer to investigate. Such men as Barth, Burton, Livingstone, Speke, Douglas, and Stuart, for instance.

Others, on the contrary, go into arctic regions which are still imperfectly known : men, I mean, like Mackenzie, Franklin, Penny, Kane, Parry, Rae, etc., whose traces we are now following up. I must congratulate you, Mrs. Barnett, upon being so cosmopolitan a traveller."

"I want to see, or at least try to see, everything, Mr. Hobson," she replied. "I believe the difficulties and perils are about equal in whatever country you encounter them. If in the arctic regions we have not to fear the fevers of hot climates, the unhealthiness of high temperature, and the cruelty of black races, no doubt cold is an equally formidable enemy. We meet wild animals in all latitudes, and the white bears, I expect, will give as good accounts of travellers as the tigers of Thibet or the lions of Africa. So in the polar regions there are similar dangers and obstacles to be met with as in the tropics, and there are in all regions districts which will long defy explorers."

"No doubt, madam," replied Hobson, "but I rather think that the arctic regions will hold out longest ; in tropical climates the natives form the principal barriers, and I am aware how frequently travellers fall victims to African savages, who must sooner or later be reduced by a war of civilisation. But in arctic or antarctic countries, on the contrary, it is not the inhabitants but nature that opposes the insuperable barrier—it is the cruel cold that paralyses human energy."

"Then you think that the torrid zone will have

been quite opened up before the frigid zone is half explored?"

"Yes, madam," replied the Lieutenant; "and I base my opinion upon the following facts. The bravest arctic explorers—such as Parry, Penny, Franklin, etc.—never got beyond 83 deg. N., which is seven degrees from the Pole. On the other hand Australia has been many times crossed by the brave Stuart, and even Africa, with all its terrors, has been traversed by Livingstone from the Loanga Bay to the mouths of the Zambesi. We may therefore safely assume that tropical countries are more easy of access than the polar regions."

"Do you think that anyone will ever reach the Pole?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"No doubt, madam," replied Jasper Hobson, "it will be reached by man, or by woman," he added smiling; "but at the same time I think that the means hitherto employed by navigators will have to be materially modified. People talk of an open sea which some explorers are said to have seen; but this sea, if it exist at all, is very difficult to reach, and no one can tell whether it extends to the Pole or not. I think myself that this open sea will give more trouble than felicity to explorers. For my own part I much prefer solid ground, whether it be rock or ice. Then by means of successive expeditions I would establish depôts of provisions and fuel nearer and nearer to the Pole; and in this way, with plenty of money, plenty of time, and perhaps with a sacrifice of

some human lives, the solution of the great scientific problem would be arrived at. In this way, I believe, I could reach this hitherto inaccessible point of the globe."

"I am quite of your opinion," replied Mrs. Barnett; "and if ever you do attempt it, I shall not be afraid to share your expedition and plant on the North Pole the Union Jack; but at present that is not our object."

"No, not at present," replied Jasper Hobson; "but as soon as the Company's plans are complete, when the new fort has been built at the extreme limit of the American continent, it may become the starting-point of every expedition to the north. Besides, if the fur-yielding animals are too closely hunted they will retire to the Pole, and we shall be obliged to follow them up."

"Unless expensive furs should go out of fashion," replied Mrs. Barnett.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Lieutenant, "there is no fear of that; there will always be some pretty women who will want sable muffs or ermine tippets, and then they must have them of course."

"I suppose so," replied the lady, laughing, "and it is not improbable that the real discoverer of the North Pole will be some trapper who has gone north in chase of a marten or a silver fox."

"That is my opinion too," replied Jasper Hobson; "it is human nature, and the greed of gain will always carry a man much farther and much more quickly than scientific discovery."

“What ! is it you who are giving utterance to such sentiments—you of all people ?”

“What am I but an *employé* of the Hudson’s Bay Company ? And for what other reason but that of gain does it risk its capital and its agents ?”

“Mr. Hobson,” replied Mrs. Barnett, “I think I know you well enough to say that, if need were, you would devote yourself body and soul to science, and if it were necessary in pure geographical interest for you to go to the Pole, I feel assured that you would not hesitate. But,” she added, smiling, “this is a very important question, and its solution is still far distant. For our own part we have only just reached the Polar Circle, and I trust we shall cross it without very great difficulty.”

“I am not certain about it,” replied Hobson, who continued to observe the sky attentively ; “the weather has been very threatening the last few days. Do you see that uniform gray tint in the sky ? All those mists will soon resolve themselves into snow, and should the wind get up we shall have a tremendous storm. We must do all we can to reach the Great Bear Lake.”

“Then,” replied Mrs. Barnett, rising, “let us lose no time ; give the signal for departure at once.”

The Lieutenant needed no urging. Whether alone or accompanied by a few men as energetic as himself, he would have pressed on night and day without stopping, but he could not compel others to do as much as he himself would have done. He was obliged to consider

some individuals of the party if he did not spare himself, so that afternoon, as a matter of prudence, he had given his little party a few hours' rest, and now, towards three o'clock, they resumed their journey.

Jasper Hobson was not mistaken in his prophecy of a change of weather ; in fact it came almost immediately. During the whole day the mists continued to increase, and assumed a yellow and very threatening appearance. The Lieutenant was very restless, but he endeavoured to conceal his anxiety from the others, and while the dogs were with difficulty got ready to start he had a long conversation with Sergeant Long, who was also occupied in watching the symptoms of the coming storm.

Unfortunately the district in which the detachment then was, was very ill suited to sleighing. The ground was very rough, seamed with ravines, and covered with great blocks of granite. Sometimes they were obstructed by half-melted icebergs, which considerably retarded their progress and made it very difficult. The unfortunate dogs could not get on, and the whips of the drivers produced no effect.

So the Lieutenant and his men were frequently obliged to walk to ease the exhausted teams. Sometimes they had to push the sledges along, or even to carry them over the roughest portions of the ground. It will readily be understood what incessant fatigue every one of them underwent without complaint, all except Thomas Black, who was so absorbed with his

one idea that he never left his sledge, and indeed his stoutness precluded him from any severe exercise.

Since the Polar Circle had been crossed, the nature of the soil had altered. It was evident that some convulsion had scattered those enormous blocks, nevertheless there was more vegetation visible. Wherever there were sheltered spots, the sides of the hills were clothed with shrubs and trees. These were invariably of the same species—pines, firs, and willow; and this proved that even in the frigid zone there is a certain vegetable force. Hobson hoped to find these specimens of the arctic flora on the verge of the glacial sea. The trees would give him wood to build his fort and to warm its occupants. Everyone thought the same as they remarked the contrast which this comparatively fertile region presented to the long snow-covered plains extending between the Slave Lake and Fort Enterprise.

As night fell the yellow fog became thicker, the wind got up, large flakes of snow began to fall, and the ground was soon covered with a thick white carpet. In less than an hour it was a foot deep, and, as it did not solidify, it was with the greatest difficulty that the sledges could advance at all, for the curved "bows" stuck in the half-frozen mass and compelled frequent stoppages.

About eight o'clock in the evening the wind rose to a gale, and the snow, violently driven before it, sometimes dashed to the ground, sometimes hurried into the air, formed a sort of whirlwind. The dogs, completely

beaten back, were not able to struggle against the wind. The party was then in a narrow gorge between two high mountains of ice, across which the storm roared with tremendous force. Masses of ice, detached by the hurricane, fell into the pass and rendered progress very dangerous. It was like a small avalanche, and might at any time have engulfed the sledges and its occupants. Under such conditions it was impossible to proceed. Jasper Hobson no longer held out, and after consulting with Sergeant Long he gave the order to halt. But it was necessary to find shelter from the snowdrift which threatened them. That did not trouble men like Hobson and his companions, who, accustomed to arctic expeditions, knew very well what to do. This was not the first time by a good many that they had been caught in a storm many hundred miles from the Company's forts, without having an Esquimaux hut or even an Indian hovel to shelter them.

“To the icebergs !” cried Jasper Hobson.

Everyone understood him—he intended to hollow out snow-houses in those icy masses, or rather mere holes, in which each one could shelter himself from the storm.

Hatchets and knives were quickly in use against the friable masses of ice. Three-quarters of an hour later a number of dens had been scooped out, each large enough to hold two or three persons. The dogs had been unharnessed and left to their own devices.

They trusted to the sagacity of the animals to shelter themselves in the snow.

Before ten o'clock, every one of the party was sheltered in the snow-houses, in parties of two or three, with sympathetic companions. Mrs. Barnett, Madge, and the Lieutenant occupied one den; Thomas Black and Sergeant Long were huddled up in another; and so on. These retreats were perfectly warm, if not quite comfortable, and it is well known that Indians and Esquimaux have no other refuge in the bitterest cold. Jasper Hobson and his friends could now await the termination of the storm in safety, so long as they took care that the entrances to the dens were not filled up by the snow; so they took the precaution to clear it away every half-hour. During the hurricane, the Lieutenant and his soldiers could scarcely set foot out of doors. Very luckily everyone had sufficient provisions, and was able to support this beaver-like existence without suffering from cold or hunger.

For eight-and-forty hours the tempest raged continuously, and even increased. The wind roared through the narrow paths and cut off the tops of the icebergs. Loud cracks, repeated twenty times by the echo, told that the fall of avalanches was increasing. Jasper Hobson began to fear, and not without reason, that the route between the mountains would be blocked up. With these cracking noises mingled other roarings which the Lieutenant could not mistake, and he did not conceal

from the courageous Mrs. Barnett that bears were prowling in the pass ; but fortunately these terrible animals were too much occupied in looking after themselves to trouble their heads about the travellers. Their attention was not attracted either by the dogs or the sledges, which were hidden beneath the snow, and the bears passed on without taking any notice.

The night of the 25th May was still more terrible than its predecessor. The violence of the hurricane was such that the fall of all the icebergs appeared imminent ; in fact the travellers could feel the enormous masses shake, and thought a fearful death awaited them. The awful crackings of the ice and the oscillations of the mass gave warning that breaches had been made in them ; however, no tremendous accident occurred, the enormous masses resisted, and towards morning, by one of those phenomena so frequent in arctic regions, the violence of the tempest suddenly abated under the influence of the intense cold, and with the first streak of daylight an uninterrupted calm had supervened.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GREAT BEAR LAKE.

THERE was one fortunate circumstance at any rate. The sudden but not lasting cold which usually occurs on certain days in May—even in the temperate zone—was sufficient to freeze the thick layer of snow, and it became practicable for sledges, so Lieutenant Hobson resumed his journey as quickly as possible.

The direction of the route, however, was somewhat changed. Instead of going due north the expedition bore towards the west, following, so to speak, the curve of the polar circle. The Lieutenant was very anxious to reach Fort Confidence, at the northern extremity of the Great Bear Lake. These few cold days were therefore most favourable to his plans; he advanced quickly, no obstacles were encountered, and on the 30th May the troop arrived at the fort.

Forts Confidence and Good Hope, on the Mackenzie River, were the most advanced posts which the Hudson's Bay Company possessed at that time. The former, erected at the most northerly extremity of the

Great Bear Lake, was most important, and, across the ice in winter and the water in summer, it was in direct communication with Fort Franklin at the other extremity. Not to mention the daily exchanges which took place with the Indian trappers of the high latitudes, these factories—and particularly Fort Confidence—foraged the banks and waters of the Great Bear Lake. This lake is a regular Mediterranean Sea, extending over many degrees of latitude and longitude. It is very irregular in shape, being very narrowed in the centre by two promontories, while at the north it forms a large triangle. Its general form is somewhat that of an extended skin of one of the large ruminants, without the head.

Fort Confidence had been erected at what we may call a right paw of this skin, about two hundred miles from Coronation Gulf, one of the numerous estuaries which indent the northern coast of America. The fort was there built a little beyond the Arctic Circle, but still nearly three degrees from the 70th parallel, beyond which again the Company considered it absolutely necessary to found a new settlement.

In its entirety Fort Confidence resembled other more southern factories; it consisted of a house for the officers, barracks for the soldiers, storehouses for the skins and furs. All these buildings were surrounded by a palisade. The captain in command of the fort was then absent. He had gone eastward with some Indians and soldiers to find out some better hunting-grounds. The

past season had not been good. High-priced furs had not been forthcoming ; however, on the other hand, otter skins—thanks to the vicinity of the lake—had been very abundant ; but this stock had been sent to the southern factories, so that the store-houses of Fort Confidence were empty at that time.

In the absence of the commanding officer, a sergeant did the honours of the fort to the party. This non-commissioned officer was named Felton, and was the brother-in-law of Sergeant Long. He placed himself entirely at Lieutenant Hobson's disposal, and the Lieutenant, being anxious to give his party a rest, decided to remain two or three days at Fort Confidence. There was plenty of room, and the whole party, including the dogs, were soon comfortably settled. The best room in the principal house was naturally reserved for Mrs. Barnett, who was very much pleased with the polite attention of Sergeant Felton.

Jasper Hobson's first care had been to ask if any parties of Indians were then beating the shores of the Great Bear Lake.

The Sergeant replied in the affirmative, and said that they had received a signal from a party of Hare Indians, who had encamped on the opposite extremity of the lake.

"What distance is that from the fort?" asked Jasper Hobson.

"About thirty miles," replied Felton. "Do you wish to communicate with them?"

“Most decidedly,” said Hobson. “They may be able to give me some most useful information about the territory bordering on the Polar Sea. If the report is favourable, I will build our new fort on that site.”

“Well, sir, there is nothing easier than to go to the Hares’ encampment,” replied Felton.

“Along the shore, do you mean?”

“No, by water. The wind is favourable and the lake is free from ice. We can lend you a boat and a man, and in an hour or two you will reach the Indian encampment.”

“Very well, Sergeant,” said Hobson, “I will do that, and to-morrow morning, if it will suit——”

“Whenever you please, sir, we shall be ready,” replied Felton.

The start was arranged to take place the next morning. When Mrs. Barnett heard of the undertaking she requested Hobson’s permission to accompany him; a favour which we may be quite sure was at once conceded.

But there was something to be done before evening, nevertheless. Mrs. Barnett, Hobson, two or three soldiers, Madge, Mrs. MacNab, and Joliffe, under the guidance of Felton, explored the neighbouring shores of the lake. There was no want of verdure, for the hills, now free from snow, were crowned with a species of Scotch fir, about forty feet high, which supplied the garrison with all the fuel they required during the winter.

Their large trunks, clothed with flexible branches, presented a very characteristic appearance in the landscape, but their uniform height and regularity were somewhat monotonous. Between the groups of trees grew a sort of white weed, which smelt like wild thyme, and Sergeant Felton informed his guests that this herb was called the *incense plant*, because of its fragrance when burning.

About a hundred paces from the fort, the party reached a small natural harbour, surrounded by high granite rocks which quite sheltered it from the waves. In this port was anchored the whole fleet of Fort Confidence, the flotilla consisting of a single fishing-boat, the same which was to be used next day to take Jasper Hobson and Mrs. Barnett across the lake. From the point where they now stood a large extent of water could be seen, the irregular shores, the wooded banks, and the rippling water, upon which some icebergs were still sailing. To the south the lake extended as far as the eye could reach.

The whole view occupied by the clear surface of the Great Bear Lake, its pebbly shores, the slopes clothed with verdure, the tree-crowned hills, all presented the appearance of vegetable and animal life. Numerous varieties of ducks flew over the lake, quacking loudly; they were eider-ducks, whistling swans, harlequins, old women (those chattering birds which never shut their mouths), as well as some hundreds of puffins and guille-

mots, and darted about in every direction. Under cover of the trees were ospreys about two feet high, a species of eagle which build their nests in the forks of the trees. Sabine, the hunter, killed a couple of these birds, which measured six feet across their wings. There were also magnificent specimens of the fishing-eagle, which in the winter descend as far as the Gulf of Mexico, but in the summer visit the highest latitudes of North America.

But the most interesting incident of the walk was the capture of an otter, the skin of which was valued at several hundred roubles.

The skins of these valuable animals were formerly much sought after in China, but if they are not now so valued there they are still in great demand in Russia, where they command a ready sale at very high prices. So Russian merchants explore all the coasts of New Cornwall up to the Arctic Ocean, and in consequence the otter is becoming scarcer every day, and the hunters now are obliged to pursue them up to the shores of the Sea of Kamtchatka, and amongst the islands of the Behring Archipelago.

“But,” added Sergeant Felton, after he had given these details to his guests, “the American otters are not to be despised by any means, and those which inhabit the Great Bear Lake are worth from 250 to 300 francs apiece.”*

There were no doubt some magnificent otters in

* £10 to £12 sterling.

the lake, and one which the Sergeant himself killed was quite as valuable as any of the Kamtchatka species. This animal, which was two feet and a half long, had webbed feet, very short legs, and dark and silky fur on the upper part of its body, the lower part being gray.

"That was a good shot, Sergeant," replied Lieutenant Hobson, who was directing Mrs. Barnett's attention to the splendid fur of the animal.

"Ah sir," replied the Sergeant, "if we got a skin like that every day we should not complain, but we lose a lot of time tracking the animals, which are first-rate swimmers and divers. We scarcely ever hunt them except at night, for during the day they are very shy, and it is by no means an easy matter even for experienced hunters to discover their lairs."

"I suppose this species is also becoming scarcer?" said Mrs. Barnett.

"Yes, madam," replied the Sergeant; "and when these have disappeared the profits of the Company will begin to disappear also. All hunters are anxious for the furs, and the Americans particularly are running us very close. Did you meet any of the American agents on your way up, sir?" he added, turning to Lieutenant Hobson.

"No," replied Jasper; "do they come so high as this?"

"Oh dear yes," said the Sergeant; "and if you hear of their being in the neighbourhood you had better be careful."

“Why,” said Mrs. Barnett; “are they highway robbers?”

“No,” replied the Sergeant, “but they are very formidable rivals, and when game is scarce hunters often come to blows. I daresay that if the attempt of the Company is successful, and you are enabled to establish a fort on the extreme limit of the continent, the Yankees—confound them!—will do the same.”

“Bah!” said the Lieutenant, “there is plenty of room for all. As far as we are concerned we had better make a beginning. We will go ahead as long as we have solid ground under our feet, and may Heaven protect us!”

After an excursion of three hours the party returned to Fort Confidence and did full justice to the excellent dinner prepared for them by the Sergeant. After some conversation they all retired and enjoyed an excellent night’s rest.

Next day (the 31st May) Mrs. Barnett and Hobson were ready to start at 5 A.M. The Lieutenant had determined to devote the whole day to visiting the Indian encampment, and to procure as much information as possible. He suggested to Thomas Black that he should accompany him, but the astronomer preferred to remain where he was; he wanted to make some observations to determine exactly the latitude and longitude of Fort Confidence. Mrs. Barnett and Hobson therefore started together under the guidance of an old servant of the Company named Norman.

Sergeant Felton accompanied them to the shore of the lake, where Norman was in readiness. The little vessel was an undecked cutter but sixteen feet long, and could be easily managed by one man. The weather was fine and the breeze from the north-east was favourable for the transit. Sergeant Felton took leave of them, and apologised for not accompanying them, but he was unable to leave the fort in the absence of his chief; the grapnel was then pulled up and the boat sped rapidly across the lake.

The journey was a mere pleasure-trip. The old sailor, as taciturn as most of his class, sat silently steering. Mrs. Barnett and Hobson, seated opposite each other, admired the continually changing view which opened to their gaze. The boat skirted the northern shore of the lake for about three miles in a straight line; they were thus enabled to perceive the magnificent wooded hills which trended away towards the west. From this side the northern shores of the lake appeared perfectly flat, and the eye could travel a long distance to the horizon. The whole of this shore contrasts greatly with that which makes the acute angle, at the extremity of which rises Fort Confidence surrounded by its belt of pines. The passengers could still see the Company's flag floating from the summit of the keep. Towards the south and west the sun lit up the water with its dazzling rays, but what most particularly attracted the eye were the icebergs, which

appeared like blocks of molten silver, upon which it was impossible to gaze for any length of time, so resplendent were they. These floating mountains, now slowly dissolving, seemed to protest against this bright polar sun, which at present was not very powerful.

Mrs. Barnett and Lieutenant Hobson, as usual, talked about the surroundings — they enriched their memories and laid up a store of pleasant recollections while they proceeded.

They had started at six o'clock, and at nine they were close to their destination. Before ten o'clock Norman ran the boat aground on an old bank close to the Indian encampment.

The travellers immediately stepped ashore. Two or three Indians approached them, the chief amongst them; and this much-beplumed individual addressed them in tolerable English.

These Hare Indians, as well as the Copper and Beaver tribes, belong to the Chippeway race, and consequently differ little in their habits and manners from the rest. They are, besides, in constant communication with the forts, and have become anglicised as much as an Indian can be said so to become. They bring their spoils to exchange for necessaries of life, which for many years past they have not made for themselves. They are, so to speak, in the pay of the Company; they live by it; and it is not surprising

that they have lost all individuality. To find a nation upon which Europeans have not left their trade-mark we must go up to the Greenlanders and Esquimaux, who are all true children of the arctic regions.

Mrs. Barnett and her companion went up to the Indian camp, which was about half a mile from the shore. There they found about thirty men, women, and children, who lived by hunting and fishing. These Indians had only lately returned from the most northern districts, and gave Hobson some information—imperfect it is true—respecting the sea-coast about the 70th parallel. The Lieutenant was glad to learn that no European or American detachment had been seen on the confines of the Arctic Ocean, and that the sea was then open. About Cape Bathurst proper the Indians could tell him nothing. The chief told him that the region between the Great Bear Lake and Cape Bathurst was very difficult to traverse, being very hilly, and intersected by frequent rivers at that time of year. He advised the Lieutenant to descend the Copper Mine River from the north-east end of the lake so as to gain the coast by the shortest route. Having thus reached the Polar Sea, he could easily follow its margin, and could land at any point he chose.

Jasper Hobson thanked the chief, and having given him a few presents, left the encampment; then, after exploring the neighbourhood with Mrs. Barnett, they reached the boat about three o'clock in the afternoon.

CHAPTER IX.

A STORM ON THE LAKE.

THE old sailor was very anxious for the return of his passengers.

During the last hour the weather had changed, and the appearance of the sky was enough to make anyone anxious. The sun had become obscured by a thick mist, and looked like a white disc without heat or brilliancy. The wind had fallen, but the waves were breaking heavily from the south. These symptoms of a rapidly approaching change were developed with the speed usual to such elevated latitudes.

“We must be off, sir,” said old Norman, looking at the fog overhead; “we must start without losing a minute—the weather is very threatening.”

“Well,” replied Hobson, “I must say the weather has decidedly changed for the worse; but we never noticed it, did we, madam?”

“Are you afraid that there will be a storm?” said the lady.

“Yes, madam,” replied the old sailor; “and the

Great Bear Lake is celebrated for its tempests, which rage as strongly as they do on the Atlantic. This sudden fog bodes no good. However, it is possible that the storm may not break for three or four hours, and by that time we shall be at Fort Confidence ; but let us start at once, for the boat might be dashed to pieces amongst the rocks here."

The Lieutenant could not argue the point with such an experienced hand as Norman, so he and Mrs. Barnett immediately went on board.

Just as they were shoving off the old man experienced a sort of presentiment, and muttered :

"It would be better to wait, perhaps."

These words did not escape Lieutenant Hobson, and he looked at the old sailor, who had already taken the tiller. Had he been alone he would not have hesitated, but the presence of Mrs. Barnett warned him to be prudent. She understood his hesitation, however, and said :

"Do not think about me, Mr. Hobson ; please act just as if I were not here. If this brave sailor thinks we ought to go, let us go at once."

"All right," replied Norman, as he let go the rope ;
"we will return by the shortest route."

The boat ran across the lake, but for an hour made but little headway. The sail was scarcely distended by the changing wind, and flapped idly against the mast. The fog became more dense ; the boat already began to

feel the undulation of the water, for the lake was affected by the approaching hurricane before the atmosphere was disturbed. The passengers remained perfectly silent, while the old sailor, with bloodshot eyes, strove to pierce the thick mist. He was ready for any event, and held the sheet so that he might let go if the wind should strike the boat forcibly.

But the conflict had not yet commenced, and all would have gone well had the boat been able to proceed; but after an hour's sail they were only two miles distant from the Indian encampment. But now some fierce gusts came off the land and drove them across the lake, and the shore had become almost invisible in the mist. This was unfortunate, for if the wind came up from the north, the boat and its occupants might be driven right across the lake to an immense distance.

"We do not seem to be making any way," said the Lieutenant to old Norman.

"Scarcely any, sir," replied the sailor. "The wind doesn't hold; and, if it did, I am afraid it is from the wrong quarter; so," he added, extending his hand towards the south, "we may expect to see Fort Franklin before we reach Fort Confidence."

"Well," replied Mrs. Barnett cheerfully, "it will make our excursion more complete, that's all. This Great Bear Lake is certainly a magnificent sheet of water, and well worth crossing from north to south. I suppose, Norman, that we can get back from Fort Franklin?"

“Oh yes, madam, if we get there,” replied the old man; “but these tempests sometimes last a fortnight, and, if our ill-luck carries us to the southern shore, I would not guarantee our return to Fort Confidence under a month.”

“Let us take care, then, what we are about,” replied the Lieutenant, “for such a delay as that would seriously retard our plans; so be as prudent as possible, my friend, and, if it be necessary, let us go back to the north shore as quickly as we can. I think Mrs. Barnett is equal to a walk of twenty or five-and-twenty miles.”

“I wish we could regain the north shore,” replied Norman. “I would return in a minute if it were possible; but you can see for yourself that the wind blows from that direction. All I can do is to steer north-east, and I think I can hold that course if the wind does not get up too much.”

But about half-past four the storm broke; the loud whistling of the wind, which the state of the atmosphere prevented descending, was heard in the upper air—but not for long. The screams of the affrighted birds were audible through the fog, which suddenly dispersed and discovered low masses of cloud, torn in all sorts of shapes, and hurried rapidly towards the south. The fears of the old sailor were realised, the wind came from the north, and it would not be long before it would rise to a hurricane.

"Look out!" said Norman, as he put the boat before the wind.

Down came the squall. It caught the boat, and nearly upset it as it rose on the summit of a wave, and then the storm began with the fury of an ocean tempest. In such comparatively shallow water the waves appeared as if they rebounded from the bottom of the lake to an unusual height.

"Help, help!" cried the old sailor, as he endeavoured to furl the sail.

Jasper Hobson, and even Mrs. Barnett, tried to come to the old sailor's assistance, but unsuccessfully, as they were not acquainted with the management of the boat. Norman could not let go the tiller, and the halyards had caught in the pulley, so the sail could not be taken in. Every moment they thought the boat would capsize, and already the sea had begun to break over the thwarts. The sky got darker and darker; a cold rain, mingled with snow, fell in torrents, and the storm redoubled its fury, and the wind cut the tops of the waves like a knife.

"Cut it, cut it!" cried the old sailor, amidst the roar of the tempest.

Jasper Hobson, his cap taken off by the wind, and half-blinded by the spray, seized Norman's knife, and cut the halyard, which was stretched like a harp-string. But the wet rope no longer ran through the block, and the yard remained immovable. Norman was then of

opinion that they should scud before the wind to the southward, although with such a sea this course would be very dangerous, for the speed of the waves would considerably exceed that of the boat; but still he was obliged to do it, although they would probably land eventually very far on the southern shores of the lake.

Jasper Hobson and his courageous companions were quite aware of the danger in which they stood. They knew the boat could not long resist the buffeting of the waves, and that it must be either capsized or crushed. The lives of all were in the hands of God.

However, neither of them yielded to despair. Clinging to the seats, covered from head to foot with the spray; chilled with the rain and snow and the wind, they tried to penetrate the mist and fog. But they could see no trace of land; a cable's length from the boat clouds and water apparently mingled. The travellers looked at Norman, who, with teeth set and clasping the rudder with both hands, was doing all he could to keep the boat's head to windward.

But the violence of the storm became so great that he could no longer continue on this tack—the boat would quickly have been swamped. Some of the planks had already begun to give way; and when the boat fell into the trough of the sea they thought they should never be able to get up again.

“We must go about and run for it, whatever happens,” said the old sailor.

So, putting down the helm, he set the boat's head to the southward. The sail bellied out before the wind and carried the boat through the water at a tremendous pace ; but the enormous billows followed even more quickly, and threatened to break in over the stern every moment. Already the water was coming in, and had to be baled out without cessation, else the boat must have foundered. The farther they got away from shore the rougher the water became. There was no shelter of trees or hills to break the force of the hurricane. When the fog lifted occasionally, a glimpse might be caught of the enormous icebergs which were tumbling about like buoys upon the water, and, like the boat, were driven rapidly to the south.

It was half-past five o'clock. Neither Norman nor Hobson could estimate the distance they had run, nor had they any idea of the direction in which they were going. They had lost entire control of the boat, and were completely at the mercy of the tempest.

At that time an immense wave was perceived breaking about a hundred feet behind the boat. In front of it the undertow seemed to form a whirlpool, all the tiny surface-waves had been completely swept away by the wind, and in this moving gulf the water looked as black as night. The boat was caught in this abyss, and was swept down lower every moment. The enormous wave swept on, overtopping all the surrounding water. It was gaining upon the boat ! It threatened to crush it !

Norman turned and saw it approaching. Jasper Hobson and Mrs. Barnett also saw it, and with wide-open eyes awaited the shock which they could not escape.

It broke with a tremendous roar over the stern of the boat. There was a fearful shock. A loud cry escaped the Lieutenant and his companion as they were buried under the liquid mountain. They thought there was no hope from that moment. The boat struggled to the surface again, though three-parts full of water, but the old sailor was missing.

Jasper Hobson uttered a cry of despair. Mrs. Barnett turned towards him.

“Norman !” he cried, pointing to the vacant place.

“Poor man !” murmured Mrs. Barnett.

At the risk of their lives, she and Hobson stood up and looked around in every direction, but they could see nothing. Not a cry could be heard, nor could they perceive any form floating upon the water. The old sailor had met his death in the treacherous water.

Mrs. Barnett and Hobson sank back upon the thwarts. Now that they were left alone, they must provide for their own safety; but neither of them knew how to manage a boat, and even under the circumstances an experienced sailor had scarcely been able to do so. The skiff was now the plaything of the waves, and was hurried along by the sail, for Jasper Hobson could do nothing to check its course.

It was a terrible situation for these unfortunate people

to be thus overtaken by a storm in a frail boat which they did not know how to manage.

“We are lost!” said the Lieutenant.

“No, Mr. Hobson,” replied the courageous Mrs. Barnett; “let us help ourselves, and Heaven will help us.”

Jasper Hobson now understood with what a courageous woman his destiny was linked.

The most important thing to do was to bale out the water which weighed down the boat. Should another wave strike them they would be swamped in a moment, without a chance of recovery. If they could manage to get rid of the water, the boat would rise more easily to the waves; so they set about the work as well as they could. This was no easy task, however, for the spray continually broke into the boat, and the scoop could not be put down for a moment. Mrs. Barnett undertook this part of the work, while the Lieutenant did all he could to keep the boat before the wind.

To add to their danger, the night, or rather what passes for night in those latitudes, for darkness does not last long at that time of year, fell upon them. The clouds mingled with the fog and came lower and lower, so that scarcely a ray of light could penetrate them.

They could not see two boats' length ahead, and had they come near a wandering iceberg the skiff would have been dashed to pieces. This was indeed a very likely

thing to happen, for the masses of ice travelled at such a rate that there was no possibility of avoiding them.

“You have no command over the boat, Mr. Hobson,” said Mrs. Barnett during a short lull in the tempest.

“No, indeed,” replied the Lieutenant, “and I beg you to prepare for the worst.”

“I am ready,” replied the courageous woman simply.

At this moment a loud tearing sound was heard; the sail, split by the wind, was carried away like a puff of smoke. The skiff continued its course for a few moments, it then fell into the trough of the sea, and was buffeted about like a log. The travellers now gave themselves up altogether for lost. They were terribly buffeted about, and were thrown from their seats wounded and bruised. There was not a rag of canvas left which they could spread; so the two unfortunate people in semi-darkness, drenched to the skin, hardly able to hear themselves speak, believed that every moment would be their last, and for nearly an hour they remained in this condition, commending themselves to Providence, who alone could save them.

How long they remained thus neither of them could have said, when suddenly they felt a violent shock.

The boat had run against an iceberg, a rugged slippery mass, to the sides of which it would be impossible to cling. At this sudden shock, which they were powerless to guard against, the boat was shattered and the water rushed over it in torrents.

“We are sinking, we are sinking!” cried Jasper Hobson.

The boat was settling down fast. The water had already reached to the thwarts.

“I am beside you, madam!” cried the Lieutenant. “I will not leave you!”

“No,” replied Mrs. Barnett, “try and save yourself; if not, we shall both perish. Leave me, leave me.”

“Never!” cried Lieutenant Hobson.

Scarcely had he spoken when the boat, struck by another wave, turned over and sank.

The travellers were drawn beneath the waves by the suction of the boat, but in a few seconds they rose to the surface. Hobson swam strongly with one arm, and sustained his companion with the other. But it was evident that the struggle with the waves could not be of long duration, and that he must perish with her he wished to save.

Just then a peculiar sound attracted his attention. It was not the cry of a frightened bird; it was the sound of a human voice. Hobson, with a last effort, raised his head above the waves and gazed rapidly round.

But he could not see anything in the thick fog, yet the cries were still audible, and appeared to be coming nearer. Who would be bold enough to come to his assistance? But whoever they were, they would arrive too late. Embarrassed as he was with his clothes, the Lieutenant felt himself unable to sustain himself and his unhappy burden.

Then, with the instinct of despair, Hobson uttered a loud cry, but soon disappeared beneath the waves.

Yet he had not been mistaken. Three men on the lake had perceived the condition of the boat and had hurried to his assistance. These men, the only ones who had a chance of success under such circumstances, had put out in the only boats which could possibly have resisted such a storm.

They were Esquimaux, and their boats were the kayak, which is a long canoe turned up at each end. It is made of very light wood covered with sealskin, stitched with the sinews of the walrus. The upper part is completely covered with skins, except in the centre, where there is a small space left for the rower. In this the boatman takes his seat, and fastening a waterproof garment to the edge of the boat all round him, he is actually part of his canoe, into which not a drop of water can penetrate.

Thus the kayak, easily managed and very light, floats above the crests of the waves and can never founder. If by accident it should ever be overturned it can be righted in an instant by the blow of the paddle, so it can live where any other boat would unquestionably be destroyed.

The three Esquimaux, guided by the Lieutenant's despairing cry, arrived on the scene just in time. Jasper Hobson and Mrs. Barnett, half-drowned, were yet conscious of being grasped by powerful hands and drawn out

of the water; but in the obscurity they could not see who had rescued them.

One of the Esquimaux seized the Lieutenant and laid him across his kayak, another did the same for Mrs. Barnett, and then the three canoes, skilfully managed with the paddles, which are not less than six feet in length, advanced rapidly across the foaming waves.

Half-an-hour afterwards the two shipwrecked passengers were landed on a sandy beach three miles below Fort Confidence.

The old sailor was still missing.

CHAPTER X.

RETROSPECTIVE.

ABOUT ten o'clock that evening the travellers arrived at the fort. Everyone was delighted to see them, for they believed them to have been lost. But this joy soon gave way to grief when they learnt that poor old Norman had been drowned. This brave fellow had been loved by all, and he was deeply regretted. As for the brave and devoted Esquimaux, after they had received phlegmatically the grateful thanks of the shipwrecked pair, they would not even come up to the fort. It seemed to them that they had done the most natural thing in the world. These were by no means the first lives they had saved, and they immediately re-embarked upon the lake which they scoured night and day for otters and aquatic birds.

The next three days the party devoted to complete rest. The little troop made themselves comfortable, but the Lieutenant had made up his mind to leave on the morning of the 2nd, and, very fortunately, the weather was fine.

Sergeant Felton placed all the resources of the factory

at the disposal of the detachment. Some of the teams were replaced by fresh animals, and at the time fixed for departure the Lieutenant found the sledges drawn up in good order at the postern-gate.

Farewells were exchanged. Everyone thanked Sergeant Felton for his kind hospitality. Mrs. Barnett was by no means the least earnest in her gratitude. A vigorous shake of the hand exchanged between Sergeant Long and his brother-in-law brought the ceremony of leave-taking to a conclusion.

Every pair got into their own sledge as before, except that on this occasion Lieutenant Hobson and Mrs. Barnett travelled together, while Sergeant Long and Madge followed in the other sledge.

According to the advice given him by the Indian chief, Jasper Hobson determined to take the shortest route to the American coast, and go straight between Fort Confidence and the shore. Having consulted his rough map, he made up his mind to descend the valley of the Copper Mine River, which flows into Coronation Gulf.

Between Fort Confidence and the mouth of this river the distance is about a degree and a half; that is to say, between eighty-five and ninety miles. The gulf is bounded on the north by Cape Krusenstern, and from that cape the coast trends rapidly to the west until it reaches Cape Bathurst, which is above the 70th parallel.

Jasper Hobson changed the route which he had

hitherto been following, and went straight away to the east, so as to strike the river in a few hours. He reached it the next day, the 3rd June. The Copper Mine—whose rapid current was now free from ice—rolled through the large valley, which is watered by a number of smaller streams easily fordable. The sledges advanced rapidly, and while they proceeded Jasper Hobson related to his companion the history of the country through which they were passing. A sincere and intimate friendship—in consequence of the circumstances in which they were placed—had sprung up between the Lieutenant and Mrs. Barnett. She was only too glad to be taught, and was delighted to hear of former travellers.

Jasper Hobson, on the other hand, who knew North America by heart, was able to satisfy all her inquiries.

“About ninety years ago,” he said, “all this country was unknown, and it is to the agents of the Hudson’s Bay Company that we are indebted for its discovery. But, as often happens in scientific research, when looking for one thing they found another. Christopher Columbus, while looking for Asia, found America.”

“And what were the Hudson’s Bay Company looking for?” asked Mrs. Barnett. “The North-West Passage?”

“No,” replied the Lieutenant. “A hundred years ago the Company had no interest in finding any new means of communication, for such would have been more valuable to its rivals than itself. It has even been stated that in 1741 a certain Christopher Middleton, who was

sent to explore these regions, was publicly accused of having received £5,000 from the Company to declare that no communication by sea existed or could exist between the two oceans."

"That was not much to the credit of the Company," replied Mrs. Barnett.

"I cannot defend it," replied Jasper Hobson; "indeed, Parliament severely censured it by voting, in 1746, a reward of £20,000 for the discovery of the passage in question. So in that year two brave explorers, William Moore and Francis Smith, succeeded in reaching Repulse Bay in the hope of winning the prize. But they failed, and after an absence of a year and a half they returned to England."

"But did not other explorers follow in their steps?" said Mrs. Barnett.

"No, madam; and for thirty years, notwithstanding the reward offered by Parliament, no attempt was made to explore this portion of the American continent—or rather this part of British America, for that is the name by which it is known—and it was not until 1769 that an agent of the Company followed in the footsteps of Moore and Smith."

"I suppose the Company had then repudiated its narrow-minded prejudices?"

"No, not yet. Samuel Hearne—for that was the name of this agent—only went to reconnoitre the situation of a copper mine which native miners had reported.

On the 6th November, 1769, this agent left Prince of Wales Fort, on the River Churchill, near the western side of Hudson's Bay. He advanced bravely in a north-westerly direction, but the cold was too intense, and, his provisions giving out, he returned to the fort. Fortunately he was not a man to be easily daunted, and on the 23rd February in the following year he made a second attempt, this time taking some Indians with him. He experienced some most terrible hardships on this journey. Game and fish, on which he had counted, often failed him, and it happened that for one week they had nothing to eat but wild fruit, some bits of old leather, and burnt bones. They were then forced to return without having obtained any result. But Hearne was not discouraged; he started a third time on the 7th December, 1770, and after a protracted struggle of nineteen months he discovered the Copper Mine River, on the 13th July, 1772, and followed it to its mouth, where he declared he saw the open sea. This was the first time that the north coast of America had been reached."

"But he had not discovered the North-West Passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans?" said Mrs. Barnett.

"No, madam," replied the Lieutenant; "and what adventurous sailors have sought it since? Phipps in 1773, James Cook and Clarke in 1776 to 1779, Kotzebue in 1815 to 1818, Ross, Parry, Franklin, and many others have devoted themselves to this difficult task in vain.

It was reserved to a discoverer of our own days, the brave M'Clure, who was the only man who really passed from one ocean to the other across the Polar Sea."

"Indeed, that was a geographical victory upon which we English may justly pride ourselves. But did not the Hudson's Bay Company become less selfish and encourage some other explorer after Samuel Hearne?"

"Yes, madam; and it is owing to the Company that Captain Franklin was able to accomplish his voyage from 1819 to 1822 between Hearne's River and Cape Turnagain. This expedition underwent great sufferings. Many times did their provisions completely fail; two Canadians were murdered and eaten by their comrades. But, notwithstanding all his sufferings, Franklin was actually enabled to explore 5,550 miles of the previously unknown coast of North America."

"He was a man of rare energy," added Mrs. Barnett, "which no one can doubt when they remember that, notwithstanding all he had gone through, he started on another expedition to discover the North Pole."

"Yes," replied Jasper Hobson, "and the brave explorer met a cruel death in the very land he had himself discovered. But it has been proved beyond doubt that all his companions did not perish with him. Many of these unfortunate men may still be wandering in these icy solitudes. My blood runs cold when I think of it; and, madam," added the Lieutenant, with visible

emotion, "some day I will search these unknown solitudes where the catastrophe took place, and——"

"And that day," said Mrs. Barnett, as she pressed his hand, "I will accompany you. Yes, this idea has occurred to me as well as to you more than once, and my feelings are deeply moved when I think that our countrymen are awaiting our assistance."

"It will come too late for the greater number of the poor fellows, but some of them will be recovered, you may be sure."

"Heaven grant it, Mr. Hobson!" she replied. "And I may say that the Company's agents, living, as they do, close to the country to be explored, appear to me to be the fittest people to fulfil this duty."

"I am quite of your opinion, madam," replied the Lieutenant, "for these agents are more accustomed to the rigours of the arctic regions. They have often proved their capabilities under similar circumstances. They aided Captain Back, in 1834, in an expedition which resulted in the discovery of King William's Land, where Franklin was lost. Two of our men—the brave Dease and Simpson—whom the Governor of Hudson's Bay, in 1838, specially despatched to explore the borders of the Polar Sea, discovered Victoria Land. I think, therefore, that the final conquest of the arctic continent is reserved for our Company. Little by little our factories are advancing northwards, following the fur-bearing animals; and one day a fort will be erected at the very Pole itself,

on that mathematical point where all the meridians of the globe meet."

On this and on many subsequent occasions Jasper Hobson recounted his own adventures while in the Company's service, his disputes with the rival agents, and his attempts to explore new territories to the north and west. Mrs. Barnett, on her part, entertained him by relating her experiences in the tropics. She told him all she had done and all she hoped to do; so the Lieutenant and his companion sustained an agreeable conversation during the long journey.

All this time they were progressing rapidly northwards. The valley of the Copper Mine got wider as they neared the Arctic Ocean; the hills were lower, a few clumps of trees alone broke the monotony of these wild districts; occasional icebergs, drifting down the river, were still to be perceived, but they got less every day, and a canoe, or even a larger boat, could easily have navigated the stream, which was unimpeded by any bars or rocks. The Copper Mine River is deep and wide, and its clear waters, descending from the snow, run quickly down without forming any dangerous rapids. Its course is very winding at first, but as it descends it becomes less serpentine, and at last it flows along in a direct line for many miles. The banks are wide and flat, of a fine hard sand, clothed with a dry short herbage, very suitable for sledges, as they were perfectly smooth, and presented no obstacles to the dogs.

So the expedition travelled at a great pace, both night and day, if we may use the term; for the sun scarcely disappeared below the horizon, the night lasted only two hours, and the dawn, at this time of the year, almost immediately succeeds the sunset. The weather was fine, the sky was clear, although a little foggy on the horizon, and the party continued their journey under the most favourable conditions.

For two days they proceeded, without any difficulty, alongside the Copper Mine River. The neighbourhood was little frequented by fur-bearing animals, but there were thousands of birds. The absence of the former did not trouble the Lieutenant; for he argued that the hunting-grounds had been abandoned in consequence of the eagerness of the trappers, which was very probable, considering the numerous traces of camp-fires which were noticed. Jasper Hobson saw very clearly that he would have to push on farther north, and that only part of his mission would be accomplished when he reached the mouth of the river. He was therefore anxious to arrive there, and he pressed forward as quickly as possible.

Everybody shared his impatience, and all were anxious to reach the Arctic Ocean as quickly as possible. An indefinable attraction led them forward; the fascination of the unknown dazzled them; perhaps the true hardships awaited them on the much-desired shore, but that was no matter; they were equally anxious to meet

difficulty, and to march straight to their destination. The journey which they were now making was not one which directly interested them; on the shore of the Arctic Ocean their real work would commence. Each one already wished himself there.

At length, on the 5th of June, four days after Lieutenant Hobson quitted Fort Confidence, the river began to widen considerably. The western shore trended rapidly almost due north, while the eastern side was rounded off in a contrary direction as far as the eye could see.

Jasper Hobson immediately halted and pointed silently to the limitless ocean in front of him.

CHAPTER XI.

FOLLOWING THE COAST-LINE.

THE large estuary which the detachment had now reached, after six weeks' travelling, formed a trapezoidal hollow in the American continent. At the western angle was the mouth of the Copper Mine River, and on the east was a long deep bay, which is known as Bathurst Inlet. On this side the shore was very broken, with capes and promontories, and lost its outline in that confusion of straits and sounds and channels which gives to the maps of the polar regions such a curious aspect. On the left side of the river the coast turned to the north, and was terminated by Cape Krusenstern.

This estuary was known as Coronation Gulf, and the islands contained in it constitute the Duke of York Archipelago.

Jasper Hobson, after consulting with Sergeant Long, decided to give his party a day's rest at this place.

Now the exploration was really about to commence. The Company had instructed their agent to keep as far

as possible above the 70th parallel, and on the shores of the Polar Sea ; now, to carry out his orders, the Lieutenant was obliged to seek in the west a point sufficiently elevated on the American continent, for towards the east all the land so divided was really a part of arctic territory—except, perhaps, the district of Boothia, which is cut by the 70th parallel—but its geographical conformation is still very undecided.

Having ascertained the latitude and longitude, and his position on the map, Jasper Hobson perceived that he was still a hundred miles below the 70th deg. ; but beyond Cape Krusenstern, the coast, trending to the north-east, crosses the 70th parallel near the 130th meridian, exactly at the height of Cape Bathurst, which place Captain Craveny had named as a rendezvous. It was therefore necessary to reach that point, and, if the situation were suitable for a factory, to erect a fort there.

“Then, Sergeant Long,” said the Lieutenant, as he showed the map to his assistant, “there we shall be in the condition required by the Company. In that place the sea, opened for a greater part of the year, will admit of vessels from Behring Strait coming up to the fort to bring us provisions and to take away our exchanges.”

“Without mentioning that while they are established there our men will be entitled to double pay,” said Sergeant Long.

“Of course,” replied the Lieutenant ; “and I daresay they will accept it without a murmur.”

“Well, sir, all we have to do now is to go ahead to Cape Bathurst,” said the Sergeant.

But as a day of rest had been arranged they could not start until the next day, the 6th June.

The next portion of the journey would necessarily be very different from the preceding. The regulations as to the order of the sledges need not be maintained; they could all go as they pleased. They made very short journeys, and stopped at every turn of the coast; indeed, they often went on foot. The only rules enforced by Hobson were that nobody was to go more than three miles from the shore, and that the whole party was to assemble twice a day—at noon and in the evening; at night they encamped.

The weather was still very fine, and the temperature high. There were occasional snowstorms which came on suddenly, but they were not of long duration and the cold was not increased. All the coast between Cape Krusenstern and Cape Parry, which occupies a space of more than 250 miles, was examined most carefully between the 6th and 20th June. If the geographical survey left nothing to be desired—and in this Hobson was efficiently seconded by Thomas Black, who was able to rectify some errors in previous surveys—the special object of the expedition was none the less attended to, as directed by the Hudson's Bay Company.

Were the districts supplied with game? Could they count with certainty not only on food, but on furs?

Would the resources of the country by themselves be sufficient to provision a factory during the summer at least? These were the questions which Hobson had to solve. The following are the results of his observations :

Game, properly speaking, was not plentiful ; there was no want of birds of the duck species, but the rodents were insufficiently represented by a few polar hares, which were very difficult of approach. On the other hand, there were a good many bears : Marbre and Sabine had found fresh traces of them. Several had been seen and tracked, but they kept a long distance off. In any case, it was pretty certain that during the cold season these animals would come from the higher latitudes in large numbers.

“ Now,” said Corporal Joliffe, whom the question of provisions occupied incessantly, “ when we have the bear in the larder he is by no means to be despised. But there is no doubt he is a very problematical kind of game, and we ought to be cautious, for there is the chance that the hunters may meet the very fate which they destine for the bear.”

This was a very sage remark ; the bears were not to be depended on for reserve of meat. Fortunately, the district was frequented by herds of a much more useful animal, namely, the reindeer, which Corporal Joliffe was delighted to see abounded in that direction. Nature had bountifully provided for them the lichen, of which they are so fond, and which they dig so cleverly from

under the snow, and which constitutes their only food during the winter.

Jasper Hobson was not less pleased than the Corporal, for there was no mistaking the reindeer's footprints, which are like those of the camel. Herds of these animals, sometimes numbering several thousands, are frequently seen. Living, they are easily domesticated and very useful, as they supply excellent milk and can be used to draw sledges. Dead, they are not less serviceable. Their skin, which is very thick, is used for clothing; the hair makes excellent thread, their flesh is good to eat, and altogether they are the most useful animals in these latitudes. Their presence having been ascertained without doubt, encouraged Hobson in his idea of establishing a fort in that district.

He was none the less satisfied respecting the fur-yielding animals, which abounded in the neighbourhood hitherto undisturbed. There were no traces of man having ever penetrated so far, and the animals considered themselves secure. There were many traces of the beautiful blue and silver foxes, which are rapidly getting scarcer, the skin of which is worth its weight in gold. Sabine and MacNab might easily have bagged them; but the Lieutenant very wisely had forbidden all hunting of that kind, for he did not wish to alarm the animals before the winter, when their skins would be much more valuable. Besides, it was useless to overload the sledges. Sabine and MacNab quite understood his reasons, but their

fingers itched more than once when they came within shot of a sable or some valuable fox ; but Jasper Hobson would not tolerate any disobedience.

The skill of the hunters was therefore necessarily exercised upon polar bears, which occasionally showed themselves ; but as they were not very much pressed by hunger they quickly made off, and no serious engagement occurred. However, if the quadrupeds did not suffer, the birds paid for all—white-headed eagles, fishing-hawks (which build their nests in the dead trees and in the summer migrate to arctic regions), wild geese and ducks, eider-ducks, etc., whose number exceeded all calculation.

It can easily be understood that the hunters, who had been forbidden to shoot quadrupeds, revenged themselves on the feathered tribes. Many hundreds of birds were killed during the first fortnight, and were a welcome addition to the corned-beef and biscuit of the expedition.

There was evidently no want of animals in this territory. The Company could easily stock its magazines, and the office would not be empty of traders ; but these two facts would not by themselves secure the success of the factory. A fort could not be established in such a high latitude without a supply of fuel.

Fortunately the coast was wooded. Some of the woods might even be called forests, and in any case there were plenty of willows, poplars, and birch trees, as well as clumps of arbutus. At this time of year the trees

were all in full leaf, and their appearance surprised the travellers, accustomed as they were to the nakedness of the polar landscape. The ground at the foot of the hills was clothed with short grass, which the reindeer devoured greedily. So the Lieutenant could congratulate himself on the site he had chosen for the base of his operations.

It has been stated that animals were numerous, but of human beings there was not a trace. The party encountered neither Esquimaux nor Indians, and at this distance hunters might easily be overtaken by bad weather or by a return of winter, and cut off from all communication. But Hobson did not complain of the absence of human beings. He had not come to find rivals, he sought for an unoccupied country in which fur-bearing animals had sought an asylum, and in this he had all the sympathy of Mrs. Barnett, who was much interested in the success of the enterprise. She could not forget that she was the guest of the Company, and did all she could to forward the Lieutenant's projects.

The disappointment of Jasper Hobson may be imagined when, on the morning of the 20th June, he discovered traces of an encampment which had but lately been abandoned.

It had been formed at the end of a narrow bay, called Darnley Bay, of which Cape Parry forms the most westerly point. There they found, at the base of a little

hill, the pickets which had served to mark out the line of the camp and the heaps of charred embers.

All the party met at this encampment, and all perceived what disappointment Lieutenant Hobson felt.

“What an unfortunate thing,” he said. “I would rather have met a whole family of polar bears.”

“But the men who camped here, whoever they may be, must be already far away,” said Mrs. Barnett; “and very probably they have gone to their usual hunting-grounds farther south.”

“That depends,” replied the Lieutenant. “If these are traces of Esquimaux they have probably gone farther north; if, on the contrary, they are Indians, they are most likely seeking new hunting-grounds as we are, which latter would be a very unfortunate thing for us.”

“But,” said Mrs. Barnett, “cannot we ascertain who these travellers are—whether they are Esquimaux or Indians at all? It appears to me that tribes so different in every respect would scarcely form a camp in the same way.”

There was some reason in this remark, and it was possible that the mystery might be solved by a thorough examination of the ground.

So the party set to work, and examined every trace, every object which had been left behind, and every footprint, most carefully. They could not arrive at any conclusion. Some bones of animals told them nothing, and the Lieutenant, very much annoyed, was about to

give up the search in despair, when he was summoned by Mrs. Joliffe, who had wandered about a hundred paces to the left.

Some of the party immediately joined the young *Canadienne*, who was standing still attentively studying the ground.

“You are looking for some traces,” she said, as the Lieutenant approached; “well, here they are;” and she pointed to a number of footprints plainly visible in the yielding soil.

This would prove something decisive, for the feet of the Indians and the Esquimaux differ as completely as their shoes.

But Jasper Hobson was more particularly struck by the curious arrangement of the footprints. They had evidently been made by the pressure of the human foot, and a foot wearing a boot or shoe; but the curious circumstance was, that the ball of the foot only had touched the ground—there were no marks of the heel; and besides, the footprints were singularly close together and crossing each other, but all in a very small space.

Jasper Hobson remarked upon the peculiarity, and gave it as his opinion that they were not the footprints of a person walking.

“Nor of a person jumping, for there is no impression of the heel,” said Mrs. Barnett.

“No,” replied Mrs. Joliffe, “they were made by a person dancing.”

Mrs. Joliffe was right. On further examination it was evident that the traces were those of a dancer, but not one who danced heavily—rather of a light and graceful performer. But what could possess any individual, however cheerful he might be, to dance in this fashion, some degrees above the Polar Circle?

“He certainly could not have been an Esquimaux,” said the Lieutenant.

“Nor an Indian,” exclaimed Corporal Joliffe.

“No, he was a Frenchman,” said Long decidedly.

And they all agreed that no one but a Frenchman would have thought of dancing in such a place.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MIDNIGHT SUN.

SERGEANT LONG'S observation was a mere guess. No doubt someone had been dancing, but there was no evidence to prove that the dancer was a Frenchman.

Nevertheless Jasper Hobson agreed with his subordinate, and none of the party were inclined to dispute his opinion. They all agreed that some travellers, and amongst them a disciple of Vestris, had lately encamped in that place.

This discovery naturally did not please Lieutenant Hobson, who was afraid that his expedition had been anticipated ; and although the project of the Company had been intended to be kept secret, it had nevertheless been divulged in some of the commercial centres of Canada or the United States.

The march was then resumed, but the Lieutenant was much preoccupied, though he would never think of returning now.

Mrs. Barnett took the opportunity to inquire whether

Frenchmen were frequently met with in such high latitudes.

“Yes,” replied Jasper; “or if they are not exactly Frenchmen born they are almost the same — viz. Canadians who are descended from the former owners of Canada when that territory belonged to France. These Canadians are our most formidable rivals.”

“I was under the impression,” she returned, “that since the absorption of the north-west companies your association had no rivals at all on the American continent.”

“Madam,” replied Hobson, “if no important association exists except ours, which still traffics in skins and furs, there are some private and independent societies, chiefly American, who employ French agents or their descendants.”

“Are these agents highly valued, then?”

“Certainly, madam, and with reason. During the ninety-four years that the French ruled in Canada their agents always proved themselves superior to ours. We must be just to everyone, even to our rivals.”

“More especially to our rivals,” said Mrs. Barnett.

“Yes, ‘particularly to our rivals,’ I should have said. At that time the French trappers were the hardiest of all. They lived for years amongst the Indian tribes, and sometimes married amongst them. The Indians called them ‘wood-runners’ or ‘Canadian travellers,’ and treated them with great friendliness. They were bold

and skilful men, very expert at navigating the rivers, very cheerful and merry, and easily adapted themselves to circumstances—very loyal, very gay, and ready to sing or dance on the slightest provocation.”

“Do you think that these travellers have only come so far as this to hunt?”

“I do not know for what other reason they could have come,” returned Hobson. “They must be seeking new hunting-grounds. But as we cannot stop them we must not delay to proceed ourselves, and thus meet them boldly.”

Lieutenant Hobson had made up his mind to endure what could not be cured, so he hurried on to reach the 70th parallel, in the hope that his unknown rivals would not follow him so far.

During the next few days the party descended about twenty miles to the southward, so as to turn Franklin Bay. The country was still verdant, birds and beasts were as numerous as ever, and most probably they would find the extreme north-west coast equally well supplied.

The sea extended as far as the eye could reach. The most recent maps show no land north of the American coast. The sea is open, and only icebergs have prevented explorers from reaching the Pole.

On the 4th July the detachment turned another bay called Washburn Bay, and reached the extreme point of a small lake hitherto little known; indeed, it

was rather a large pond than a lake. It was only two square miles in extent.

The sledges travelled easily. The appearance of the country was very favourable to the establishment of a factory. A fort at Cape Bathurst, having the lagoon in the rear, and the Behring Strait—which is always free from ice for four or five months in the year—in front, would be in an excellent situation.

On the 5th of July, about 3 P.M., the detachment halted at the extreme point of Cape Bathurst. It was now necessary to ascertain the exact position of the Cape, which the maps placed above the 70th parallel. But the survey had never yet been accurately made, so Hobson decided to wait and take the bearings.

“Why should we not remain here?” asked Corporal Joliffe. “This is a very pleasant situation.”

“It will be still more pleasant if you receive double pay for stopping here, my friend,” replied the Lieutenant.

“Not a doubt of it, sir; and besides, we must obey orders, you know.”

“Then have patience till to-morrow; and if, as I suppose, this Cape Bathurst is really situated beyond the 70th parallel, we will encamp here.”

The situation was favourable. There was plenty of wood close by for the construction of the fort, and for fuel when constructed. The Lieutenant made a reconnaissance to the end of the promontory, and found that the coast-line curved considerably towards the west, and

a series of large icebergs bounded the view. The waters of the small lake were quite sweet, with no taint of saltiness, as might have been anticipated from its proximity to the sea. But in any case there was plenty of palatable water close at hand, for a clear stream ran towards the ocean a few hundred yards to the south-east. The inlet where the stream emptied itself was protected by a sort of "bar" of sand and earth, and formed a natural harbour in which two or three ships could ride safely at anchor. Jasper Hobson, out of politeness, called this little harbour Port Barnett, a compliment which was highly appreciated by the fair traveller.

If they erected the fort behind the cape the chief buildings would be quite sheltered from the north winds. The height of the cape would protect them from the drifts which, like avalanches, sometimes bury houses completely. The space between the foot of the promontory and the shore of the lagoon was sufficient to hold all the buildings necessary. There was even room for a palisade as well, a purely defensive work, but, in the event of the appearance of rival traders, one which would be very useful. So Jasper Hobson, without any present intention of constructing such an establishment, was glad to perceive that there was every facility for so doing.

The weather was very fine and quite warm. Not a cloud was to be seen : but the clear blue of the sky in more temperate zones was not to be expected. During the summer a light mist is usually visible ; but during the

winter, when the icebergs were fixed and the roaring north wind was sweeping pitilessly through the icy mountains, what would Cape Bathurst look like ! But none of the party thought of that, for the weather was superb and the sea sparkled merrily in the sunshine.

A temporary encampment was formed with the sledges on the banks of the lagoon. Towards evening Mrs. Barnett, Jasper Hobson, Thomas Black, and Sergeant Long explored the neighbourhood, which appeared very suitable to their requirements. Hobson was very anxious for daylight, so that he might take the necessary observations and find out whether the place fulfilled the conditions required by the Company.

“ Well, Lieutenant,” said the astronomer, “ this is really a charming spot ; I could not have believed that such a pleasant country lay beyond the Arctic Circle.”

“ Ah, Mr. Black, the most beautiful districts in the world are up here ; I am all impatience to ascertain our position.”

“ Particularly the latitude,” replied the astronomer, who could not get the eclipse out of his head ; “ and I fancy our brave companions are not less anxious than yourself. Double pay beyond the 70th parallel ! ”

“ But do you not take an interest—a purely scientific interest, of course—in this question, Mr. Black ? ” said Mrs. Barnett.

“ Certainly, madam ; certainly I do ; but not an overpowering interest. According to our calculations,

which are exact, the eclipse, which I am commissioned to observe, will only be observed in totality by a person placed beyond the 70th parallel. So I am equally impatient with the Lieutenant to determine the position of Cape Bathurst."

"But I was under the impression that this eclipse will not take place until the 18th July?"

"Yes, madam, the 18th July, 1860."

"And we are now only at the 5th July, 1859, so the phenomenon will not be visible for more than a year."

"Quite so, madam," replied the astronomer; "but if I had not started till next year I might have been too late."

"You are quite right, Mr. Black, to have a year in advance," replied Jasper Hobson, "as now you are certain not to miss the eclipse, for I must confess that our journey hither has been accomplished under the most exceptionably favourable conditions. To tell you the truth, I did not expect to get here till the middle of August, and if the eclipse was expected this month instead of this time next year, you might have been too late; and besides, we do not know even now whether we are beyond the 70th parallel."

"My dear sir, I do not in the least regret the journey I have taken in your company, and I will wait patiently till my eclipse next year. It is well worth waiting for."

A little after noon the next day (the 6th July) Jasper Hobson and Thomas Black prepared to take the exact

bearings of Cape Bathurst. The sun shone clearly enough for them to ascertain the latitude and longitude. Besides, at this time of the year they all but reached its maximum elevation, and this fact would render the work of the observers more easy.

The Lieutenant and his companion had already ascertained the longitude of the place; but it was concerning the latitude that Hobson was anxious, for the meridian of Cape Bathurst was no matter if it were not situated beyond the 70th parallel. Mid-day approached; till the men of the expedition surrounded the observers and impatiently awaited the result of the observations. In fact the question now was whether they had come to the end of their journey or not.

Now perhaps in the latter case no good result would have followed; in fact, according to the maps, which were imperfect, it must be confessed that the coast to the west of Cape Bathurst curved below the 70th parallel, and did not again pass it till it ran into Russian America, where the English had no right to establish themselves; so it was not without reason that Hobson had directed his steps to Cape Bathurst, which is the only one that extends beyond the 70th parallel on the whole coast-line of British America. It now remained to be proved whether the position it occupied on the map was correct. This was the important question that Hobson and Black had now to decide.

The sun at that moment was approaching its culmi-

nating point. The astronomers directed the telescope of their sextant upon it. By means of inclined mirrors on the instrument, the sun is made apparently to go back upon the horizon, and the moment that it appears to touch it with its lower edge is the precise second when it is at the highest point of the diurnal arc, and consequently the exact moment it would pass the meridian ; that is to say, it would be noon at the place where the observers were.

Everyone looked on in a most profound silence.

“Noon !” cried Hobson.

“Noon !” repeated Thomas Black at the same moment.

The telescopes were immediately lowered. The Lieutenant and his companion read off the value of the angles they had obtained, and immediately noted them down.

Some minutes after Lieutenant Hobson rose, and addressing his companions, said :

“My friends, from this day, the 6th July, in the name of the Hudson’s Bay Company, I promise you double pay !”

“Three cheers for the Company !” cried the men.

So Cape Bathurst was actually situated above the 70th parallel.

We annex the exact figures, which may some day be important :

Longitude, 127 deg. 36 min. 12 sec. W. of the

meridian of Greenwich. Latitude, 70 deg. 44 min. 37 sec. N.

The same evening these hardy pioneers, encamped so far from all human habitation, and more than 800 miles from Fort Reliance, perceived with astonishment the glowing sun touch the border of the western horizon without dipping its burning disc beneath it.

The midnight sun was now for the first time shining before their eyes.

CHAPTER XIII.

FORT HOPE.

THE position of the fort was irrevocably fixed. No other place would suit so well as the level ground behind Cape Bathurst on the eastern side of the lagoon, and Jasper Hobson resolved to commence the construction of the principal dwelling-house immediately; in the meantime everyone had to shift for himself, and the sledges were ingeniously utilised so as to form a provisional encampment.

Besides, thanks to the skilfulness of his men, the Lieutenant expected to have the dwelling-house ready in a month. This house was to be made sufficiently large to accommodate the whole of the detachment; afterwards, before the winter set in, if there was time, they would build the barracks for the soldiers and the store-houses for the merchandise; but Jasper Hobson did not expect to get these finished before the end of September. Now after the month of September the nights get very long, and the bad weather would prevent the execution of any work.

Of the ten soldiers who had been chosen by Captain Craventy, two were more particularly hunters ; the other eight used a hatchet with as much skill as a rifle—like sailors, they were good at almost anything. But just now they were more particularly useful as workmen, since the great object in view was to build a fort while there was no enemy against which to defend themselves. Peterson, Belcher, Rae, Garry, Pond, Hope, and Kellet were a body of skilful and zealous carpenters, and were overlooked by MacNab, a Scotchman from Stirling, who was very skilful in the construction of houses and also of ships. There was no want of tools of all sorts ; one of the men, Rae, was a very clever smith, and by means of a small portable forge he was able to make all the nails, bolts, etc., which were required in carpentry. It is true there was no mason amongst them, but as all the buildings were made of wood, there was no necessity for his services. Fortunately there was no want of trees in the neighbourhood, though there was not a rock nor a stone of any kind—there was nothing but sand on the earth. The sea-shore was covered by thousands of shells, which had been broken by the waves and mingled with marine plants or zoophytes, such as star-fish or sea-urchins ; but, as the Lieutenant remarked to Mrs. Barnett, there was not a single stone or flint to be seen. The cape was only formed by the accumulation of soft earths which a few plants kept together by their roots.

That same afternoon Hobson and MacNab, the

carpenter, set off to choose the site of the dwelling-house at the foot of Cape Bathurst. From that point the view extended over the lagoon and the land to the west for ten or twelve miles ; on the right, about four miles distant or less, were immense icebergs half shrouded in mists ; on the left were immense plains which, during the winter, it would be impossible to distinguish from the frozen water.

This place having been fixed upon, the two men traced with a string the outline of the house. This formed an oblong, sixty feet by thirty. The façade of the house would therefore be sixty feet long and have four openings, namely, a door and three windows on the side of the promontory, and four windows on the side of the lagoon. The door, instead of being at the back, was made at the left corner, so as to render the house more comfortable, as by such an arrangement the air could not penetrate to the innermost rooms.

The first compartment was to be an ante-chamber, protected from the weather by a double door ; the second compartment was to be used as a kitchen, so that no dampness could penetrate to the sitting-rooms ; the third compartment was an immense hall, in which the meals were to be eaten in common ; the fourth compartment was like the cabin of a ship, and divided into many small rooms. Such was the simple plan of the house arranged by the Lieutenant and his master-carpenter.

The soldiers were to occupy the great hall provision-

ally, and at the end of this compartment camp-beds were put up for their accommodation ; the other members of the party were to sleep in the cabins of the fourth compartment. This was pretty close packing, but under the circumstances it could not be helped, and so soon as the barracks were built the whole of the house would be appropriated to the occupants of the fourth compartment. Then, perhaps, this compartment might be divided into three chambers and all the other cabins destroyed, for a rule which travellers in arctic regions should never forget is, to beware of corners. They are nothing but receptacles for ice ; partitions prevent proper ventilation, and the dampness of the air, transformed to snow, renders these rooms uninhabitable, and they become hot-beds of fever and sickness.

For this reason explorers who make up their minds to winter in icy regions arrange the interior of their ship as a common sleeping-room for officers and men ; but Jasper Hobson could not so arrange, for obvious reasons.

It will be perceived there was only a ground-floor in this new habitation, above which would rise a large and very sloping roof, so that the water might run away more easily. The snow, however, would lie, and then the house would be hermetically sealed, and the temperature remain equal all through the winter. Snow is a very bad conductor of heat, which it will not permit to enter a house ; but on the other hand, and what is more im-

portant in arctic regions, it prevents the heat from getting out.

The carpenter had designed two chimneys, one from the kitchen, the other from the stove in the large room, which stove was at the same time to heat the cabins in the fourth compartment. From an architectural point of view this may not have been elegant; but it would make the house more comfortable, which, after all, was the chief point. Indeed, under such conditions as they must expect to exist in winter, the whole appearance of the house would present a strange and dismal aspect which an artist would not easily forget.

The plan of the house having been arranged, it was only necessary to act upon it. This was the business of Mr. MacNab and his assistants; while they worked, the hunters would prepare subsistence for all, so there was no want of employment for everybody.

MacNab had first to choose proper wood for the construction of the house. He selected a tree somewhat similar to the Scotch fir, of medium height and well adapted to the various uses to which it would be applied. It must be understood that in such a house as they purposed to construct, only the most elementary knowledge of building was necessary, and MacNab was therefore able to proceed very quickly, without in any way compromising the solidity of the house.

MacNab chose the straightest trees. About one hundred of these he cut down, but neither squared them

nor took off the bark. They thus formed a number of timbers about twenty feet long. This operation occupied but a few days, and the timber was dragged down by the dogs to the site chosen for the house.

This place had been carefully levelled, and the soil, which was a mixture of fine earth and sand, had been beaten to render it firmer. The short grass and thin shrubs which had grown there were burnt, and the ashes spread upon the ground, so as to prevent the damp from entering the house. Thus a dry foundation had been secured.

This first portion of the work having been finished, beams were fixed at each corner of the proposed building, so as to form the outline of the house. These posts were sunk some feet deep, after the ends had been hardened in the fire. The posts were hollowed out at the sides so as to receive the transverse beams of the wall, between which the openings for the windows and doors had been provided, and were joined together at the top by horizontal beams; and thus the whole building was consolidated. These horizontal beams supported the roof, which overhung like the roof of a chalet; over this the joists of the ceiling were laid, and on the ashes were placed the supports for the floor.

Of course the planks of the walls were only laid side by side; but, to make certain that they should not separate, Rae, the smith, connected them with strong bolts at intervals, but even these did not bring them so

close as was desirable. MacNab therefore was obliged to calk them, as they do the planks of a ship's deck, only, instead of tow, he used dry moss, which was found in abundance in the neighbourhood. This moss was forced into the spaces between the planks by the calking-irons and hammers, and filled up with tar, which was obtained from the pine-trees. By this means the walls were rendered impenetrable both to the cold and the rain.

The door and the windows were very roughly but very well constructed; the latter had very small panes made of isinglass, which was the only material they could procure for the purpose. This was of the less consequence as, in the summer, the windows were sure to be always open, and during the winter there was no light which they could admit, even if it were not necessary to shut and bolt the windows against the raging of the tempest.

In the interior of the house the arrangements were progressing rapidly. Double doors between the compartments prevented draughts and too sudden changes of temperature. Besides, the air-pumps, which they had brought from Fort Reliance, were fixed so that they could supply fresh air to the house when the weather was too cold to have the doors or windows open. One of these pumps was to eject the impure air, the other to supply the fresh. Lieutenant Hobson had given his whole attention to this, and no doubt his arrangement would be of the greatest service.

A large iron furnace was the great feature of the kitchen. This furnace had been brought up in pieces from Fort Reliance, and the smith put it together very easily. But the chimneys took much time and ingenuity to fix. They could not construct them of wood, and, after many attempts, Jasper Hobson decided to use some other material, but as no species of stone was to be found at Cape Bathurst, the difficulty appeared insurmountable.

But if there were no stone there were plenty of shells, and the Lieutenant suggested they should make the chimneys of them.

“Of shells?” exclaimed the carpenter.

“Yes,” replied Hobson; “but of shells reduced to lime, with which we can make a sort of bricks and use them as such.”

“Let us go and get the shells,” replied the carpenter.

Lieutenant Hobson’s idea was a good one, and immediately acted upon. As we have said, there were millions of shells upon the sea-shore similar to those which compose the lowest strata of the tertiary formation. MacNab collected many tons of them, and a sort of limekiln was constructed to decompose the carbonate, which enters largely into the composition of these shells. They thus obtained the lime they required.

This operation lasted about twelve hours, and the result, though not first-rate, answered its purpose satisfactorily, and when made into bricks served for the construction of the chimneys. In a few days, therefore,

two conical chimneys were raised above the roof of a solidity sufficient to resist the attacks of the expected storms.

Mrs. Barnett congratulated the Lieutenant and MacNab on their success.

“I hope they will not smoke,” she said, laughing.

“No doubt they will smoke, madam,” replied Hobson philosophically; “all chimneys smoke.”

The whole of their great work was completed in a month. The 6th August was fixed for the inauguration of the house; but while the carpenters were working so hard, Sergeant Long, Corporal Joliffe, and the hunters, led by Jasper Hobson, were exploring the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst, and ascertained that game of all kinds was abundant. Their mode of hunting had not yet been organised, for the trappers wished first to explore the country a little farther; nevertheless they managed to take a few couples of reindeer, with the view to domesticate them for the sake of their young and their milk. The animals were kept in a paddock, about fifty paces from the house. Mrs. Rae, who was an Indian, undertook the charge of them, and she was well fitted for the duty.

To Mrs. Barnett and Madge were entrusted the arrangement of the interior of the house, and before long the influence of their intelligence and good taste made itself felt in a multitude of ways.

After having explored the country for several miles round, the Lieutenant came to the conclusion that they

were on a vast promontory of about 1,500 square miles in extent. An isthmus about four miles wide united it to the American continent, and extended from Washburn Bay on the east to a corresponding slope on the other side. Mr. Hobson called this promontory Victoria.

The Lieutenant now proceeded to ascertain the resources of the lagoon and the neighbouring sea. On this point he was quite satisfied. In the former was abundance of trout, jack, and other fresh-water fish. The little river supplied salmon, whitebait, and smelt. The sea at that point appeared to be less productive than the lake, but they frequently saw enormous grampuses, whales, and cachalots, which no doubt were escaping from the Behring Strait fishermen. But there were no means of capturing these mammifers unless one were stranded on the coast. As for the western side of the river, it was at that time frequented by numerous families of seals; but Hobson would not permit his companions to kill them for the sake of sport. Later on they would be able to judge how to use them to the best advantage.

On the 6th August the colonists took possession of their new house, and after much consultation they determined to bestow upon it the name of Fort Hope, which was now the most advanced station of the Company on the American continent.

If it is not now to be found on the maps of the arctic regions, it is because a terrible future awaited it to the detriment of modern cartography.

CHAPTER XIV.

EXCURSIONS.

THE furnishing arrangements of the new house proceeded rapidly. The camp-bed, set up in the great hall, was soon ready for its occupants. MacNab, the carpenter, had made an enormous table with massive legs which would bear almost any weight. Around this were fixed solid benches, scarcely worthy of the name of "movables," as they were rather fixtures. Some lighter seats and some large presses completed the furniture of the room.

The farther room was as quickly prepared. It was divided into six sleeping compartments, separated by thick partitions, the end ones only being lighted by the windows at the front and back of the house. A bed and a table composed the whole furniture of each compartment. Mrs. Barnett and Madge occupied the cabin overlooking the lake. Hobson offered the corresponding room at the back of the house to Thomas Black, who immediately took possession of it. Jasper Hobson himself, pending the final arrangement of his men,

occupied a small cell adjoining the dining-hall, and which was only lighted by a bull's-eye window in the partition. Mrs. Joliffe, Mrs. MacNab, and Mrs. Rae, with their husbands, occupied the other rooms. These worthy couples all agreed so well that it would have been almost "cruelty to animals" to have separated them. Besides, a new arrival, in the person of an infantile MacNab, was expected, and Mrs. Barnett's services as godmother had already been requested, and accepted with much pleasure.

The sledges had been emptied entirely, and the bedding divided amongst the various rooms. In the garret, to which access was gained by means of a ladder from the entrance-hall, all the tools, provisions, and ammunition which were not immediately required were placed. Winter clothing, boots or caps, furs and skins, were stowed away in enormous presses to keep them dry.

Having seen these preliminary arrangements completed, the Lieutenant proceeded to provide for the warming of the mansion. There was plenty of fuel on the neighbouring hills, and a great quantity was laid in in anticipation of the rigorous winter, during which it would be quite impossible to collect combustibles. A large supply of oil was also collected from the seals which swarmed upon the shore. Condensers were also fitted in the house, under Hobson's superintendence, with a view to collect the moisture, and so arranged that the ice which would form therein could be immediately taken away.

This question of warming the house occupied the attention of the Lieutenant continually, and in reply to Mrs. Barnett he would explain that, as a native of the polar regions, he had had considerable experience in such matters, and had read many books upon the subject, besides :

“It is impossible to take too many precautions,” he said, “when we are preparing to encounter an arctic winter; one little thing forgotten might endanger the safety of the whole party.”

“I can quite understand it,” replied Mrs. Barnett, “and I already perceive that the cold will be a remorseless enemy. But the food question is not less important.”

“No doubt, and I have determined to live on what we can procure as far as possible, without diminishing our stores. So in a day or two, when we are a little more settled, we will have a general hunting expedition for that purpose. There will be plenty of time to think about the fur question afterwards, for as yet the animals have not got their winter clothing on, and the skins are not now within twenty-five per cent. of their proper value. No, we must first provision the fort. The reindeer, elk, and wapiti, if any have ventured so far, are the only game we can take at present. And it is no light undertaking to supply twenty human beings and sixty dogs with food; that is the reason I am so preoccupied at present.”

The Lieutenant was a person of methodical habits, and if his companions seconded him earnestly there would be no doubt of his success.

The weather continued generally favourable. The snowfall was not expected for about five weeks. When the principal dwelling-house had been finished, Jasper Hobson told the carpenters to build an enormous kennel for the dogs. This dogs' house was erected at the foot of the promontory, up against the slope, and about forty paces from the mansion. The barracks for the accommodation of the men were planned upon the ground opposite the kennels, on the left; the magazines and powder stores were to occupy the front of the *enceinte*.

This enclosure Hobson determined to complete before the winter set in. A firm palisade was erected, to protect the party from the encroachments of wild animals as well as against the natives—Indians or others—who might present themselves. The Lieutenant had not forgotten the traces of outrage committed on the coast-line, though miles distant from Fort Hope. He knew the violence of the nomad tribes, and thought it better to “shut the stable-door *before* the horse was stolen,” and protect himself from all chance of attack. The line of circumvallation was traced all around the fort, and at the two foremost angles, which commanded the lake, Master MacNab was instructed to build two “guard-houses,” for the accommodation of the pickets or advanced sentries.

If all worked hard—and indeed they *did* work hard—

it was supposed that all these arrangements would be finished before winter set in.

Meanwhile Jasper Hobson organised many hunting-parties, and for a few days the intended chase of the seals was postponed. He was more desirous to procure animal food which might be stored in the fort for the subsistence of the party during the winter.

So, from the 8th August, Sabine and Marbre, sometimes together, sometimes accompanied by the Lieutenant and Sergeant Long, who had much experience, beat the neighbouring country for many miles round. Very frequently the indefatigable Mrs. Barnett would accompany them, and as she handled a rifle as cleverly as the best, she was never behindhand.

During the month of August these expeditions were very successful, and the storehouses were filling visibly. It need scarcely be said that the hunters left no means untried to secure their prey, particularly the reindeer, which are very timid. With what patience the hunters would work round to leeward of the herds, lest their keen sense of smell might discover the party! Sometimes they attracted a victim by moving a pair of antlers above the bushes, and the reindeer—or rather the *cariboo*, as the Indians call them—deceived by this appearance of the horns, would approach within shot.

But very often a little bird—well known to Sabine and Marbre—a sort of owl about the size of a pigeon, would betray the retreat of the cariboo. This bird

attracted the attention of the hunters by a cry somewhat resembling the wail of an infant. The bird is known amongst the Indians as the *monitor*.

About fifty cariboo were killed. The flesh, cut into long strips, amounted to a very considerable supply of food, and the hides were kept for shoe-leather after being tanned.

But the cariboo did not supply the only nourishment. There were polar hares, which bred very fast in those latitudes. They did not appear to be so timid as their European cousins, and permitted themselves to be killed without an attempt to escape. These rodents have long ears, brown eyes, and white fur, something like swan's-down. They weigh about twelve pounds, and their flesh is very excellent eating. These animals were prepared by hundreds, and smoked, not to mention those which were made into pies by the clever Mrs. Joliffe.

But while thus providing for the future, the present was by no means neglected. Besides the polar hares, which were frequently sent to table, the hunters did not disdain venison occasionally.

Mrs. Joliffe was able to dish them up in every variety, and she surpassed herself, to the great delight of the Corporal, who praised her incessantly. Aquatic birds also varied the daily bill of fare, not to mention the ducks which abounded on the lake. They were able to take certain birds which congregated in the marshes. These belonged to the partridge family; so when Mrs. Barnett asked

Sabine what the names were, he replied that the Indians called them *willow-fowl*, but they are nothing more or less than the European black-cock. In fact they might have been called white partridges with long black feathers in the tail ; they were very good eating, and only wanted cooking before a quick fire.

In addition to these different sorts of game, they procured plenty from the lake and river. No one knew better how to fish than the calm and patient Sergeant Long, and his skill was equal to his patience, although he had a near rival in Madge, Mrs. Barnett's companion. For hours these two disciples of Isaac Walton would remain seated side by side, rod in hand, taking their fish but not uttering a word, and day by day they returned with some magnificent salmon.

During these excursions, which were continued daily during the month of August, these hunters had some severe encounters with wild animals. It was not without anxiety that Jasper Hobson noticed that bears were numerous in the neighbourhood. Scarcely a day passed without one or two of these formidable creatures being reported, and many times they were shot at. Sometimes they turned out to be brown bears, which are very common in the Cursed Land. Sometimes a representative of the white-bear family would appear, which the increasing cold had, no doubt, brought down to Cape Bathurst ; and in fact one may notice, in all books of exploration, that the greatest danger to which fisher-

men and explorers are exposed arises from these animals.

Marbre and Sabine also noticed many packs of wolves, which invariably retired at their approach. The hunters could hear the sound of their baying, particularly when they were tracking a reindeer or a wapiti. These wolves were of the great gray species, about three feet high, with very long tails. The fur becomes quite white during the winter. They abound in this region where food is plentiful, and they live in holes, like foxes in the woods. At this time of year they run away from the hunters, but in the winter, when they are hungry, their numbers would make them very formidable enemies ; and since their dens were so near they never left the neighbourhood at any time of the year.

One day the huntsmen returned to the fort bringing with them a hideous creature which none of the party, not even Thomas Black, had ever seen. This animal was something like the American glutton, a horrible carnivorous animal, with very short legs and tremendous claws, and, like all animals of the feline race, very supple in its movements.

“What can that horrible beast be?” asked Mrs. Barnett.

“Madam,” replied Sabine, who was always rather dogmatic in his answers, “a Scotchman would call it a *quick-hatch* ; an Indian, an *okelcoo-haw-gew* ; a Canadian would call it a *carcajou*.”

“What do you call it?” she inquired.

“A wolverene,” replied Sabine, who was much pleased with the manner in which he had rounded his answer.

In fact “wolverene” was its proper name. It is a nocturnal animal, and lives in hollow trees or caves. It destroys beavers, musk-rats, and other rodents; it is a declared enemy of the foxes and wolves, with which it will often dispute a prey. It is a very knowing animal, of great muscular power, and a very fine sense of smell. It is met with in the highest latitudes. Its short fur becomes almost black during the winter, and figures largely in the exports of the Hudson’s Bay Company.

During their excursions the hunters had paid as much attention to the flora as to the fauna, but the vegetables were necessarily less varied than the animals, as they had no shelter from bad weather. The pine and fir were abundant, and Jasper Hobson also remarked some *tacamahacs*, a sort of poplar. It grows to a great height, and puts forth yellow leaves which in the autumn turn green; but these were rare.

Certain black fir-trees succeeded better in sheltered places; they noticed the latter with satisfaction, for the young shoots of this tree are highly esteemed in North America, as from them the beverage known as spruce-beer is manufactured. Hobson caused a quantity of these small branches to be collected and placed in the cellars of Fort Hope. There were other trees, such as

the dwarf birch and the cedar, which supplied excellent fuel.

But of any vegetables which could fairly be used for food there was a great scarcity. Mrs. Joliffe, who was much interested in this branch of botany, could only find two specimens fit for cooking. One of these was difficult to distinguish because its leaves fall off in the flowering season, but it was pronounced to be a leek, and yielded a quantity of onions about the size of an egg, which proved useful.

The other plant is known in North America as the Labrador tea-plant, and grew in great abundance on the banks of the lagoon amongst the willow-trunks ; it is a favourite food of the polar hares. This plant, steeped in boiling water to which a few drops of spirit have been added, makes excellent tea, and served to economise the supply of the Chinese article which had been brought from Fort Reliance.

In view of the scarcity of vegetables, Jasper Hobson had provided himself with a quantity of seeds, which he intended to sow at the proper time. These were principally sorrel and scurvy-grass, the antiscorbutic properties of which are invaluable in those latitudes, and he hoped, by choosing a well-sheltered spot, that the seeds would grow up the following season.

Besides these the medicine-chest contained other antiscorbutics. The Company had furnished them with lemons and casks of limejuice, without which no polar

expedition could possibly make way ; but it was very necessary to economise this reserve, for continuous bad weather might seriously compromise all communication between Fort Hope and the southern stations.

CHAPTER XV.

FIFTEEN MILES FROM CAPE BATHURST.

SEPTEMBER had come ; in three weeks at least the winter season would commence, when the necessary works would be interrupted ; it was therefore obligatory to use all diligence. Fortunately the new buildings had been very quickly built, and the carpenters had performed prodigies of activity. The kennels were nearly finished, and the palisade round the fort was also near completion. There was nothing more to do than to erect the postern which would give access to the inner court. This formed a sort of half-moon, and was fenced with tall and pointed stakes about fifteen feet high. But with a view to complete the system of fortification, it was necessary to take possession of Cape Bathurst, which commanded the fort ; so it will be seen that Hobson favoured the system of detached forts and unbroken enclosures—an improvement on Vauban's and Cormontaigne's systems. But in the meantime the palisade was sufficient to protect the fort from all likely attacks.

On the 4th September, Hobson decided to go in chase of the seals and other amphibious animals on the shore, as he wanted to obtain a supply of oil and other material for lighting during the winter.

The seals were most plentiful at a spot about fifteen miles off, and Hobson asked Mrs. Barnett to accompany the expedition. She accepted the invitation, not because the proposed butchery had any attraction for her, but because she wished to see the country and satisfy her curiosity concerning it.

Sergeant Long, with Peterson, Hope, and Kellet, made up the party.

They started at eight o'clock in the morning. Two sledges, drawn by six dogs each, accompanied them in order to bring back the spoil.

In these sledges the party now set out. The weather was fine, but the low-lying fogs veiled the sun, and gave it a yellowish tinge. The orb was now beginning to disappear for some hours during the night.

The coast to the east of Cape Bathurst was quite flat, and rose very slightly above the level of the sea. Now this disappearance of the sun attracted Hobson's attention, and this is why :

The tides are very high in the polar seas, or at least are reported to be so by many explorers. Parry, Franklin, the Rosses, M'Clure, M'Clintock, and others have noticed the rise of the tide to be twenty-five feet above the usual level. If this observation be correct

—and there is no reason to question its truth—how was it that the sea did not come over Cape Bathurst at high tide, since there was nothing whatever to oppose its advance? It was evident that this submersion had not taken place.

Jasper Hobson could not help remarking upon this fact; and his companion replied that she supposed, notwithstanding all statements to the contrary, that there could be no tide in the Arctic Ocean.

“Quite the contrary,” replied Hobson. “All explorers agree in stating that the ebb and flow are most distinctly marked in these seas; they cannot all have been mistaken.”

“Well, then,” replied Mrs. Barnett, “will you be good enough to explain to me why the land is not submerged, as it is not ten feet above low-water mark?”

“That is just what puzzles me,” replied Hobson. “I cannot explain the fact. I have been observing the tides, during the month we have been here, and, as a rule, they have not varied twelve inches. I am positive that, even at the equinox, they will not rise or fall more than a foot and a half at Cape Bathurst. At any rate we must wait and see.”

“But there must be a reason; everything in the world is capable of explanation.”

“Well, it may be caused by one of two things: either all the Arctic explorers have been mistaken, which I cannot admit, or there is really no tide on this

part of the American coast; as occurs in the Mediterranean and other seas, the entrance to which is through very narrow straits."

"Suppose we adopt your latter hypothesis?" said Mrs. Barnett.

"It must be so, I suppose," replied the Lieutenant; "and yet I am not satisfied. I am quite sure there must be some explanation of the phenomenon."

At nine o'clock the sledges, having crossed a flat and sandy shore, arrived at the bay frequented by the seals. The dogs were left behind, so as not to frighten the animals.

This part of the coast was very different from that in the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst. Here it was rugged and broken, displaying fantastic forms, the effects of volcanic action, which, and not water, had evidently produced it. Stone, which is wanting at Cape Bathurst—a peculiarity not less remarkable than the absence of the ocean tides—was present here in large erratic blocks deeply embedded in the ground. On all sides were black sand and lava, sprinkled with pebbles of felspar, which demonstrated that the coast was formed of crystalline strata. On the surface glittered numerous Labradorites of various tints, with pumice-stones and obsidian. In the rear rose cliffs 200 feet above the level of the sea.

Jasper Hobson resolved to climb these cliffs so as to obtain a view of the eastern portion of the district. He had plenty of time, as the hour appointed for the attack

of the seals had not come, and but few of the animals were visible, for it was better to attack them after their mid-day sleep. The Lieutenant, however, discovered that the animals he sought were not the true seal, but walrus and morse, or sea-cows, as they are sometimes called, which are known by their long upper canine teeth.

The hunters, following the curve of the little bay, which they called Morse Bay, advanced in the direction of the cliffs. Peterson, Hope, and Kellet remained on a little promontory to watch the morse, while Mrs. Barnett, Hobson, and the Sergeant climbed to the top of the cliff. They arranged a signal of recall with their friends, so that they might return when the seals had assembled.

They reached the summit in about a quarter of an hour, and had a most extensive view. At their feet the sea stretched forth to the northern horizon ; not a single object, not even an iceberg, was visible ; and it looked as if it were easily navigable as far as Behring Strait. During the summer the Company's ships could reach Cape Bathurst by the North-West Passage.

On the western side they could perceive, about ten miles off, a chain of igneous hills with rounded tops and jagged outlines, as if some shaking hand had traced their form upon the horizon. Jasper Hobson having observed them attentively, turned his eyes in the opposite direction.

In the east there was a long strip of coast, apparently quite level, as far as Cape Bathurst. Had he possessed a

good telescope, Hobson would have been able to perceive Fort Hope, and even the thread of blue smoke which was no doubt issuing from Mrs. Joliffe's kitchen chimney.

Behind them the land presented itself under two different aspects. To the south-east was a vast plain many square miles in extent, while in the other direction, from Morse Bay to the volcanic mountains, the country showed traces of terrible convulsions, which clearly indicated its volcanic origin. The Lieutenant could not fail to remark the contrast, which appeared to him extraordinary.

"Do you think, sir," said Sergeant Long, "that those mountains yonder are volcanoes?"

"I have no doubt about it," replied Hobson. "All this pumice-stone, obsidian, and other pebbles, have been thrown here by them, and a few miles farther on we should find ourselves in the midst of lava and cinders."

"Do you think that those volcanoes are still in activity?" asked the Sergeant.

"I cannot answer that question."

"But there is no smoke visible."

"That is no reason. Your pipe is not always in your mouth, is it?"

"No, sir."

"Well, the volcanoes are not always smoking either."

"I understand so far," replied the Sergeant; "but I cannot comprehend how it is that there are volcanoes at all in polar countries."

“They are not very numerous,” said Mrs. Barnett.

“No,” replied the Lieutenant; “but we might count up several, nevertheless. They are to be found in the Isle of Jan Mayen, in the Aleutian Islands, in Kamtchatka, in Russian America, in Iceland, in Terra del Fuego, and other southern countries. Volcanoes are only chimneys from the great interior furnaces of the earth, and I think the Creator has placed them where they are most necessary.”

“No doubt,” replied the Sergeant; “but up in the snow here at the Pole——”

“Well, Sergeant, why not at the Pole as well as the Equator? I should say they were even more necessary in cold climates.”

“Why so?” exclaimed the Sergeant, who was much surprised.

“Because if these safety-valves are opened by the pressure of interior gases, they will escape where the crust is thinnest. Now, as the earth is flattened at the poles, it is only natural that—— But there is Kellet making signals,” he exclaimed. “Let us go. Will you come with us, Mrs. Barnett?”

“I will remain here,” she replied. “I do not like to see the poor animals slaughtered.”

“I can quite understand your feelings, madam,” replied Hobson, “and if you will rejoin us in an hour we will return to the fort.”

So Mrs. Barnett remained on the cliffs enjoying the

view. Hobson and his attendant reached the shore in a quarter of an hour. The morse had assembled in great numbers—there were at least a hundred. Some were hobbling about upon their clumsy-looking feet, but the greater number were asleep, surrounded by their families. One or two of the biggest males were posted as sentinels.

The hunters were obliged to exercise the greatest caution, and to take advantage of every shelter and cover, so as to gain a position from which they could cut off the animals' retreat to the sea. On land they are clumsy and maladroit, but in the water they are extremely active; being splendid swimmers, their movements are swift and graceful, and when aroused they are dangerous to attack in boats, which they will follow and upset.

However, the sentinels took alarm — they scented the danger. They raised their heads and looked; but before they had time to warn the herd, Hobson and Kellet on one side, the Sergeant, Peterson, and Hope on the other, rushed out and succeeded in despatching five morse; the remainder escaped into the sea.

This was an easy victory. The victims were very large and the ivory of their tusks, though somewhat rough, was of the first quality; and, what the Lieutenant appreciated still more, was the quantity of oil they would furnish. The bodies were immediately placed upon the sledges, and the dogs harnessed to their heavy loads.

It was now one o'clock, and Mrs. Barnett having rejoined the party, they all set out on foot for Fort Hope.

They had but ten miles to go, and in a direct line. The proverb says, "It is a long lane that has no turning;" and the proverb is right.

In order to beguile the tediousness of the way the hunters related their experiences. Mrs. Barnett frequently joined in the conversation, and profited by the special knowledge of her companions. Nevertheless the journey appeared very long, and it was with difficulty that the dogs could draw the sledges; on snow they could have got over the distance in two hours.

More than once Hobson ordered a halt, in order to rest the exhausted teams.

"I wish," said Sergeant Long, "that these morse would settle a little nearer our fort."

"They would not be able to find a suitable spot," replied the Lieutenant, shaking his head.

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Barnett with surprise.

"Because they only frequent a gently sloping shore, upon which they can easily climb up from the sea."

"Well, but the shore of the cape?"

"The shore there rises perpendicularly," replied Hobson, "there is no slope whatever, and it is a singular feature of the country; so if we wish to fish there our lines ought to be at least three hundred fathoms long. I do not know why the coast is so different, but I think that in the course of ages some violent volcanic action separated a portion of the continent and cast it on the borders of the Polar Sea."

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO SHOTS!

THE first half of September passed away. If Fort Hope had been situated at the Pole—that is to say, twenty degrees farther north—on the 21st of the month the polar night would have set in; but at the 70th parallel the sun would not disappear for another month. But the temperature had become very much colder. During the night the thermometer fell to 31 deg. Fahrenheit (one degree below zero centigrade). Thin ice formed in places, but was melted by the sun during the day.

Some snowstorms, or rather sleet-storms, fell, and everything indicated the approach of winter.

But the inhabitants of the factory could await its coming without fear; there was provision sufficient for the time; there was a good supply of venison and twenty-nine morse had been killed. MacNab had found time to build a stable for the domesticated reindeer, and, behind the house, an immense shed for the fuel. Winter—that is to say, night, snow, ice, and cold—might now come if it pleased; the detachment was prepared to receive it.

Now, having provided for all the wants of his party, Jasper Hobson thought of the interests of the Company. The animals had by this time assumed their winter clothing, and had therefore become valuable. The opportunity was favourable for shooting them (when the snow had fallen they intended to set traps), and Hobson now organised hunting-parties.

In these high latitudes one could not count upon Indians, who generally furnished furs to the Company. Hobson, Marbre, and Sabine, with two or three of their companions, therefore went out to hunt for their employers.

A family of beavers had been noticed on the affluent of a little river about six miles to the south of the fort, and in that direction Hobson proceeded.

Formerly the beaver fur was worth 400 francs a kilogramme, for it was used for making hats ; but if the use of the animal has diminished, the fur still commands a high price in consequence of its scarcity, for the beavers have been nearly exterminated.

The hunters reached the river, and Hobson pointed out to Mrs. Barnett the ingenious manner in which the beavers constructed their dwellings. There were about one hundred of them living together in pairs in the neighbourhood of the stream, but they had already commenced building for the winter, and were working very hard.

Across the rapid stream, which was so deep that it

never froze, even in the coldest winters, the beavers had constructed a dam, which was placed convexly towards the current, and consisted of upright stakes interlaced with flexible branches, the whole being fixed or cemented together with the clayey mud of the river, which the beavers had previously trodden under foot ; then, with the assistance of their tails, which are long, flat, and oval they plastered this mortar all over the woodwork of the dam.

“This dam, madam,” said Hobson, “is intended to preserve a constant depth of water, so as to permit the engineers of the tribe to erect their round huts, the tops of which you can now see. These are very solidly built, the walls being two feet thick. There is no entry, except by a narrow hole under water, so the beavers have to dive when they want to go home ; but this arrangement tends to the security of the family. If you were to examine one of the huts, you would find it composed of two stages—the lower is used as a store-house, the upper as a dwelling-place for the owner and his family.”

“But I do not perceive any beavers,” said Mrs. Barnett ; “have they abandoned their work ?”

“No,” replied Hobson, “but just now they are all resting or asleep, as they only work at night, and we wish to surprise them in their holes.”

The capture of the beavers was not a difficult matter. About one hundred were taken in the course of an hour, and amongst them were some of black fur, which

is extremely valuable. The fur of the others was long and silky, but of a reddish hue mixed with maroon, and beneath this was a fine hair of a silver-gray colour. The hunters returned to the fort much pleased with their spoils. The skins were stored and registered as "parchments" or "young beavers," according to price.

During the month of September and into the middle of October these expeditions were continued with most favourable results.

A few badgers were also captured for the sake of their skins, which serve as garniture for the collars of draught-horses, and the hair for making brushes. These carnivora—for they are really little bears—belong to the species which is peculiar to North America.

Other and almost as industrious specimens of the beaver family were esteemed very highly at the factory. These were musk-rats, which are about a foot long. The fur is very valuable. They were taken in their burrows without any trouble, for they multiply with extreme rapidity.

Some lynxes were also shot. These animals are very agile, and are formidable even to the reindeer; but neither Marbre nor Sabine were unaccustomed to the chase, and they killed about sixty of them, as well as some wolverenes.

The ermines very seldom appeared. These animals belong to the marten tribe, like the polecat, and had not yet assumed their beautiful white winter fur; so Jasper

Hobson told his people to spare them for the present, and "let them ripen," as Sabine said, during the winter. The polecats, however, which are unpleasant animals to hunt, in consequence of their disagreeable smell, were taken in large numbers, either by tracking them to their lairs in the trees or by shooting them as they glided amongst the branches.

The martens, properly so called, were specially hunted, their fur being highly esteemed, although it is inferior to the sable; but the latter did not frequent that neighbourhood, and it is in Siberia that it is chiefly procured. Nevertheless they succeeded in obtaining some other species of marten, such as weasels and the pine-marten or Canadian marten. These martens and weasels, during the month of September, supplied but a small number of furs, as the animals are very active and difficult to take. They are enabled to wriggle themselves through the smallest apertures, almost like worms, so that they escape the hunters, but in the winter they are easily trapped. Marbre and Sabine only waited for a favourable moment to set their traps, when there would be no want of weasels or martens in the Company's stores.

To wind up the enumeration of the furs taken by the party at Fort Hope, we have only to mention the blue and silver foxes, which are most highly valued in the Russian and English markets.

The blue fox comes first, and is known as the *isatis*. This pretty animal has a black muzzle, but the fur is

almost blue ; it is a whitish brown, and the beauty of its fur consists in its thickness, length, and softness. The blue fox is undoubtedly the king of fur-bearing animals, and is worth six times the price of any other. A cloak belonging to the Emperor of Russia, made throughout of fur from the neck of the blue fox, was exhibited in London in 1851, and valued at £3,400 sterling.

Several of these foxes were seen in the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst, but the hunters could not get near them ; they succeeded in killing a dozen of the silver foxes, the fur of which is a glossy black, dotted with white. Though not so valuable, it still fetches a high price in Russian and English markets.

One of the silver foxes was a magnificent animal, even larger than the common fox, and as the circumstances connected with his death deserve to be related, we will annex them, for they justified Hobson in having taken certain precautions.

On the morning of the 24th September, Mrs. Barnett, the Lieutenant, Sergeant Long, Marbre, and Sabine, went in two sledges to Morse Bay. Some fox-tracks had been noticed the evening before, and the hunters succeeded in striking the trail amongst the rocks. In a couple of hours they succeeded in bringing down their prey.

Two or three others were subsequently sighted, so the party divided, Marbre and Sabine going in one direction, while the others endeavoured to cut off the retreat of a fine specimen which was hiding amongst the rocks,

It was very necessary to use great caution, for the cunning animal took care not to expose itself to a bullet.

The pursuit continued for half an hour without result, but the animal at last, surrounded on three sides, with the sea in the front, made up its mind to escape, and with a prodigious bound it leaped over the rock. But Hobson was equal to the occasion, and as the animal passed like a shadow, he fired and hit it.

At the same moment another shot was heard, and a second bullet struck the animal dead.

“Hurrah!” cried Jasper Hobson, “he is mine!”

“And mine,” replied a stranger, who placed his foot upon the fox just as the Lieutenant was about to seize it.

Jasper Hobson drew back, greatly astonished. He thought that the second shot had been fired by the Sergeant, and he found himself in the presence of a strange hunter, whose gun was still smoking.

The rivals stood gazing at each other.

Mrs. Barnett and her companion now came up, and they were soon joined by Marbre and Sabine. At the same time, about a dozen men approached from the other side, and, joining the strangers, raised their hats politely to the lady.

The leader of the new-comers was a tall man, a perfect type of the Canadian trapper, whose presence Jasper Hobson so particularly objected to. The Canadian wore the traditional costume of the American romancists—a blanket arranged as a *capote*, a striped cotton shirt, wide

cloth trousers, leather gaiters, moccasins of deerskin, and a checked woollen scarf around his waist; in the last was suspended a knife, tobacco-pouch, pipe, and some camping utensils. In a word, he looked half savage and half civilised. Four of his companions were attired like himself; the other eight, who served as escort, were Chippeway Indians.

Hobson was not mistaken—the man was a Frenchman, or at least descended from the French Canadians, and perhaps an agent of the American company charged with the duty of observing the establishment of the new fort.

“This fox belongs to me,” said the Lieutenant after a short silence, during which the men looked into the whites of each other’s eyes

“It belongs to you if you killed it,” replied the other in good English, but with a slight foreign accent.

“You are mistaken,” replied Hobson quickly; “whether you killed it or not, the animal belongs to me.”

This reply was received with a disdainful smile, so indicative of the pretensions put forth by the Hudson’s Bay Company.

“So,” replied the unknown stranger, playing with his gun, “you think the Hudson’s Bay Company is mistress of all this part of North America, do you?”

“Most decidedly,” replied Hobson; “and if you belong to an American company, as I suppose——”

“To the Fur Company of Saint Louis,” replied the trapper, bowing.

“I think,” continued the Lieutenant, “that you will find it very difficult to show me the grant which gives you any privileges here.”

“Grants—privileges!” exclaimed the Canadian disdainfully; “these are old European terms, and do not sound well in America.”

“But you are not in America, you are on English territory,” replied Hobson proudly.

“Sir,” replied the trapper warmly; “this is not the time for any discussion. We know the sort of pretensions made to these hunting-grounds by England in general, and by the Hudson’s Bay Company in particular; but I believe sooner or later America will extend from the Straits of Magellan to the North Pole.”

“I do not believe it,” replied Jasper Hobson dryly.

“In any case,” said the Canadian, “we can afford to leave this international question for the present. Whatever pretensions the Company may have, it is evident that in these high latitudes, and particularly on the coast, that territory should belong to whoever occupies it. You have established a factory at Cape Bathurst: very well, we will not hunt upon your grounds, and on your part you must respect ours, when the Fur Company of St. Louis shall have established their fort on a point on the northern shore of America.”

The Lieutenant was by no means satisfied with such

a prospect, for he knew that in a not distant future the Hudson's Bay Company would have powerful rivals who would not respect their rights, and bloodshed was by no means impossible. But he was quite aware, nevertheless, that this was not the time to discuss a question of privilege, and he was not displeased when the trapper, who was very polite, changed the ground of argument.

"As for this particular business," said the Canadian, "it is of very little importance, and may be settled according to hunters' law. Your gun and mine are of different calibre, so the bullets will be easily recognised. Let the fox belong to him who actually killed it."

This was only fair, and could be immediately decided. So the body of the fox was examined; he had received two bullets, one in the side, the other had reached the heart; the latter was from the Canadian's rifle.

"The animal is yours, sir," said Hobson, endeavouring to conceal his chagrin at seeing the beautiful trophy pass into the stranger's hands.

The trapper took the fox, and just when they all thought he was going to throw it over his shoulder and carry it away, he turned to Mrs. Barnett and said:

"Ladies are very fond of beautiful furs; if they knew what it cost the hunters to obtain them, perhaps they would not be so anxious for them; but they are very fond of them at any rate. Permit me therefore, madam, to offer you this as a souvenir of our meeting."

Mrs. Barnett hesitated to accept it; but the Canadian

offered it with such courtesy and kindness that she felt it would wound him to refuse it. She therefore took it and thanked him.

He bowed to her, saluted the other members of the party, and, followed by his friends, quickly disappeared behind the rocks.

The Lieutenant and his party returned to the fort. Hobson was very silent and thoughtful. He was now obliged to recognise a rival ; and this meeting with the Canadian trapper promised to lead to many difficulties in the future.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE APPROACH OF WINTER.

ON the 21st September the sun was passing through the equinox ; night and day were of equal length, and these successive returns of light and darkness were delightful to the inhabitants of the fort. They could sleep better in the dark ; and as a matter of fact the eye is much more refreshed in the darkness than in the long daylight.

During the equinox, as we know, the tides are higher, for the influence of the sun and moon together is brought to bear, and increases the force of the flux and reflux. It became necessary, therefore, to make some observations as to its effect on the coast at Cape Bathurst. Jasper Hobson had made some marks, a sort of "maregraph," by which he hoped to estimate the displacement between high and low water. This point was settled ; and he maintained, notwithstanding all reports of travellers to the contrary, that in that portion of the Polar Sea there was scarcely any tide at all.

“There is something unnatural here,” exclaimed Hobson. Indeed, he did not know what to think about it, and he sought vainly for a long time for some explanation of the phenomenon.

On the 29th September the temperature suddenly changed. The thermometer fell to 41 deg. Fahrenheit (five degrees above zero centigrade). The sky became overcast and threatened rain. Winter was approaching.

Mrs. Joliffe occupied herself before the arrival of the snow by sowing seeds of scurvy-grass and sorrel, in the hope that they would be protected even by the snow, and sprout in the spring. She had prepared the ground in anticipation.

Jasper Hobson was not desirous to wait the arrival of the great cold before adopting his winter clothing. So he at once issued it to the men, and they were all soon invested with linen vests, capotes of deer-skin, seal-skin breeches, fur caps, and waterproof boots. The rooms were equally well defended against the weather. The wooden walls were hung with tapestry of skins to protect them from the formation of ice within, and Rae set up his condensers to collect the vapour suspended in the air, which condensers were to be emptied twice a week.

The stove was regulated according to the external temperature, and the heat was arranged to be fixed at 50 deg. Fahrenheit. Besides, the house would soon be quite covered with snow, which would prevent the escape of internal heat. So by these means they hoped

to contend against their enemies, damp and frost, successfully.

On the 2nd October the thermometer dropped still more, and the first snow fell. There was no wind to speak of, and consequently no snowdrifts, but one thick white carpet covered the ground. The waters of the lake and the sea, which were not yet frozen, stood out in clear contrast to the snowy ground; but on the northern horizon they could see the first icebergs rising in relief against the misty sky. The ocean had not yet been blocked up, but nature was collecting her forces with a view to form an impenetrable barrier.

Meantime the young ice was beginning to solidify the sea and the lagoon. The latter was frozen first. Here and there white patches appeared on the surface, precursors of the frost which the calm atmosphere favoured; and after one night, while the thermometer showed 15 deg. Fahrenheit, the surface of the lake was as smooth as the most fastidious skaters of the Serpentine could desire. Far away on the horizon the sky assumed that peculiar look called *blink* by whalers, which is produced by the reflection of the ice; and the sea then became gradually frozen over.

A vast ice-field was formed by degrees; but it did not present the mirror-like surface of the lake, as the movements of the waves broke the ice into fantastic and distorted forms. Here and there large pieces floated about, united to others like themselves. This appearance

is called "drift-ice," and the protuberances produced by the pressure of these floating pieces are known as "hummocks."

In a few days the appearance of the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst was completely altered. Mrs. Barnett was delighted, and would have gone through any fatigue or annoyance for the sake of witnessing such a novel spectacle. She could imagine nothing more sublime than this storming of the northern regions by winter. None of the sights which she was accustomed to notice could now be distinguished; the whole country was metamorphosed and a new tract springing into being. Details disappeared, only outlines were visible; one transformation succeeded another with the rapidity of a pantomime. The ocean was no longer visible, and the land was covered with a dazzling carpet; no more forests, but a collection of gaunt skeletons covered with hoarfrost. The sun no longer appeared; nothing but a pale disc could be perceived through the fog; and instead of the clear line of the horizon there was a barricade of rugged icebergs, forming an impenetrable barrier to the audacious explorers of the polar regions.

We can imagine the discussion and conversation to which this state of things gave rise. Thomas Black alone appeared to be indifferent to the beauty of the spectacle; but that was only to be expected of an astronomer who had but one idea, namely, contemplation of the heavenly bodies; for now the fogs and

clouds hid all the stars and made him furious. Hobson endeavoured to console him by promising him clear, beautiful, frosty nights, most favourable for astronomical observations, for the aurora borealis, lunar haloes, and other phenomena worthy even of *his* attention.

Meantime the temperature was not too cold, for there was no wind, and it is the cold wind which makes the winter most severe. Hunting was still carried on ; new stores of furs and provisions were brought home ; partridges and ptarmigans, on their way to more temperate regions, were shot in great numbers ; as well as polar hares, which had now put on their winter dress. About one hundred of these rodents were easily taken, and swelled the reserve of provisions in the fort.

There were also immense flocks of whistling swans—one of the most beautiful species in North America. They are magnificent birds, four or five feet long, with white feathers tending towards a coppery fringe at the head and neck. They were seeking a more hospitable zone, and they flew at a tremendous pace ; several couples of them, however, were killed. There were other swans called “trumpeters,” about the same size, but neither Marbre nor Sabine were fortunate enough to shoot any of them. They, however, saluted them with a loud “*Au revoir!*” for they knew that in the spring they would be more easily taken. The skin, feathers, and down are most highly valued by both hunters and Indians ; and in favourable years tens of

thousands of these birds have been exported at a price of ten shillings each.

During these excursions, which only lasted a few hours, as they were often interrupted by bad weather, the hunters occasionally met packs of wolves who were bold enough to come close to the factory. They were evidently attracted by the smell from the kitchen of the fort, for their scent is very keen. During the night they howled terribly. They are not individually dangerous, but when numbers of them collect they are very formidable, and the hunters were therefore obliged to go forth well armed.

But besides these visitors the bears also became aggressive—one or more were visible every day—and at night they came close up to the palisade. Some were wounded, but got away, tracking the snow with their blood; but till the 10th October none of them had left their valuable fur behind as a trophy. Hobson would not permit his men to attack them, as he thought it better to remain on the defensive, and very likely before long the bears, impelled by hunger, might even attack the fort; then the inhabitants could protect themselves and supply the larder at the same time.

For some days the weather was dry and cold, and the snow was firm and favourable to pedestrians, so many excursions were made to the southward. The Lieutenant was very anxious to ascertain whether the agents of the St. Louis Company had left the neigh-

bourhood, but no traces of them could be obtained. It was possible that they had gone still farther south for the winter.

But the fine weather did not last, and the first week in November the wind veered to the south and brought on some heavy snow-storms, though the temperature was warmer. The ground was soon covered many feet deep in snow, which it was necessary to clear away every day, and to construct paths to the sheds, the stables, and the kennels. Excursions became less frequent, for it was impossible to proceed without snow-shoes.

When snow is hard it will of course support man, but when it becomes soft one is apt to sink up to the knee in it. Under these circumstances the Indians use snow-shoes.

Hobson and his companions were quite accustomed to the snow-shoes, and could proceed almost as quickly as a skater on ice. Mrs. Barnett even was no stranger to their use, and soon became proficient. Excursions were made both on the ice and on the snow. They could even traverse the surface of the ocean, which was frozen to the depth of many feet, but progress was very fatiguing as the ice-fields were very rugged and uneven, and the hummocks and lumps of ice had to be avoided. Farther out icebergs formed an impassable barrier, 500 feet in height, which presented a magnificent sight. They appeared like the white ruins of a town, and again like some volcanic territory torn by earthquakes. Here was

a chain of mountains like the Alps frozen together, the crevasses, hillocks, and valleys all mingled together. A few birds, such as petrels, guillemots, and puffins, enlivened the solitude and uttered piercing cries. Enormous white bears appeared at intervals amongst the hummocks, and scarcely distinguishable from them. In truth there was no want of new sensations for all the travellers, and very different experiences from those of tropical countries, wherein Mrs. Barnett and Madge had hitherto travelled.

The excursions on the frozen ocean were soon relinquished in consequence of their severity; and besides, the sudden fall of the thermometer almost precluded walking exercise, for little exertion soon put one out of breath. The eyes were affected by the intense glare, which is often the cause of snow-blindness amongst the Esquimaux. By a singular phenomenon caused by the refraction of the rays of light, the distances, the depths and thickness of objects, appeared different from what they were. If there were five or six feet to jump across between two blocks of ice the distance appeared only about two feet, and in consequence the explorers had many falls.

On the 14th October the thermometer marked 3 deg. Fahrenheit below zero, which is a very severe temperature, particularly with a strong north wind. The air seemed to be full of needles, and those who ventured out were threatened with frostbite, that is to say, instant

taneous freezing if the circulation of the blood cannot be restored by rubbing the frozen parts with snow. Many of the inhabitants of the fort were frostbitten, but by timely friction they escaped all ill effects.

Of course all manual labour had become out of the question ; besides, the days were extremely short. The sun was only above the horizon for a few hours, but the twilight continued for a long time. Winter had set in in earnest. Nearly all the birds had disappeared, a few couples of quails alone remained, a species called by the Indians *winter-birds*, because they remain in the arctic regions till the polar night sets in ; but even they take their departure then.

Lieutenant Hobson, therefore, was anxious to finish the setting of the traps and snares which he had arranged to be fixed during the winter. These traps consisted of rough planks supported upon three pieces of wood, so that the least touch would cause them to fall. This, on a large scale, is very like the common trap set in fields by bird-catchers. The extremity of the horizontal beam was baited with a piece of venison, and any medium-sized animal, such as a fox or marten, which attempted to take the bait, was instantly crushed. These were the sort of traps which the famous hunters of whom Cooper has so picturesquely written used to spread, and about thirty of the snares were now established round Fort Hope, and visited at frequent intervals.

On the 12th November the little colony was increased

by a new member. Mrs. MacNab presented her husband with a fine boy, of whom he was very proud. Mrs. Barnett was godmother, and the child was named Michael Hope. The christening was carried out with much solemnity, and quite a fête was held in honour of the little fellow who had made his appearance beyond the 70th deg. N. latitude.

A few days afterwards, on the 20th November, the sun disappeared below the horizon, not to rise again for two months.

The polar night had commenced.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE POLAR NIGHT.

A VIOLENT tempest ushered in the long polar night. The cold was rather less severe, but the air was extremely damp. Notwithstanding all their preparations the dampness penetrated the house, and the condensers yielded several pounds of ice every morning.

Outside the house the snow drifted about like a water-spout. The flakes fell almost horizontally. Jasper Hobson forbade the opening of the door, for had he permitted it the passages would speedily have been filled with snow ; so the explorers were virtually prisoners.

The windows were hermetically closed ; the lamps were kept lighted all through this long dreary night.

But if darkness was supreme, silence had departed. The wind roared continuously between the cliff and the house, which trembled and threatened to fall every hour. It was extremely fortunate that the snow had been so built up as to deflect the force of the wind, and MacNab only trembled for the chimneys. However, they, as well as the other parts of the mansion, remained secure,

although they had to be cleansed from the accumulation of snow at intervals. In the midst of the tempest loud reports were frequently heard. These were occasioned by the fall of icebergs out at sea. The echoes took up the roar and rolled it from peak to peak like thunder. The earth shook as these immense masses tumbled, and none but firm nerves could bear to live amid such terrible phenomena. Lieutenant Hobson and his mates were accustomed to them, and Mrs. Barnett and her attendant were becoming inured to them by degrees, and besides, they had already had some experience of tempests in other climates. But at Cape Bathurst the circumstances were aggravated by the darkness and prevailing snow. The wind, if it did not demolish objects, smothered them in snow, and twelve hours after the beginning of the storm, the house and its surroundings would have all disappeared beneath the drift.

During their enforced imprisonment, the inhabitants of the fort amused themselves as they best could. They were in perfect accord, and if they were shut up they did not disagree on any point ; the majority were accustomed to this mode of life, and Mrs. Barnett was not surprised to see the men accommodate themselves to circumstances so readily.

Work, reading, and various games occupied them. Their work consisted in mending their clothes, rubbing up their weapons, repairing their boots, and the writing up of a journal of their lives by Lieutenant Hobson, with

meteorological observations. Besides these employments the house had to be kept clean and dry, the skins and furs to be examined; the stoves and fires required watching, and no damp was permitted to accumulate in the corners. Everyone had a task allotted to him, according to the regulations posted up in the great hall; without being too much occupied, everyone had something to do. All this time Thomas Black kept screwing and unscrewing his instruments, correcting his calculations, and, shut up in his cabin, he continually grunted against the tempest, which prevented him from making observations. The three married women had plenty to do: Mrs. MacNab was fully occupied with her baby; while Mrs. Joliffe and Mrs. Rae, closely attended by the Corporal, presided over the culinary department.

Recreation was taken at certain intervals, and they rested all day Sunday, when reading was the chief feature. The Bible and some books of travel composed their whole library, but they were sufficient for them. Mrs. Barnett usually read aloud, greatly to the delight of her audience. The Bible narratives as well as those of travellers received a great charm when read by her, for she had a beautiful voice, and her actions were particularly expressive. An imaginary hero seemed to live before them. Thus all the party were happy and contented when she took up her book. She was the life of the community, ready to advise or suggest, and at all times willing to do anything for anybody. She possessed

all the tact and grace of woman united to the energy of man, which gave her the foremost place in the estimation of the soldiers, who would have laid down their lives for her if necessary. She never hid herself in her cabin, but mingled freely with her companions, working and reading with them, and provoking conversation by her questions and appreciation. Thus they worked, talked, and as a matter of course kept in good health. Good-humour and good health triumphed over the weariness of their enforced imprisonment.

Meanwhile the storm continued. For three days the party had all been confined to the house, and the drifts were hurrying past as thickly as before. Hobson began to grow anxious. He was very urgent to obtain fresher air, and the lamps were already burning dimly in the vitiated atmosphere. It was then discovered that the air-pumps would not work, for the pipes were frozen, as they were not intended for use when the house was buried in snow. It was necessary to take counsel as to what should be done. The Lieutenant and Sergeant Long therefore talked matters over, and it was decided that one of the windows at the end of the corridor, which was less exposed to the wind, should be opened.

This was by no means easy. It was not difficult to open the window from the inside, but the shutter, blocked by the snow, resisted all efforts. They had to take it off its hinges, and cut away the snow, which

was at least ten feet thick, with pickaxes and shovels ; they then obtained access to the outer air.

Jasper Hobson, the Sergeant, Mrs. Barnett, and a few soldiers crept through this cutting, but not without difficulty, in consequence of the storm. When they got outside, the scene presented to their gaze was remarkable. It was noon, and only a few rays glittered on the southern horizon. The cold was not so great as might have been expected, being only fifteen degrees above zero, but the snowdrifts were hurried along with tremendous force, and the whole party would have been thrown to the ground had they not been supported by the snow, which reached to their waists. They could not speak, and could not face the snow. In less than half an hour they were obliged to give up their promenade. Everything was white around them, and covered with snow, and if it had not been for the blue smoke from the house they could have believed themselves miles from human habitation. They quickly returned indoors, but Mrs. Barnett had managed to take in the surroundings of this desolate scene. She went back again impressed by the grandeur of an arctic snow-storm, which she would never forget.

The atmosphere of the house had been renewed in a few minutes ; Hobson and his companions quickly returned, and the window was shut, but every day after that they opened the shutters for ventilation ; so the week passed. Fortunately the animals had plenty of food, and

there was no need to visit them. For eight days the party remained in the house, which was a long time for men accustomed to the open air. It must be confessed that under these circumstances reading lost its charm, and cribbage became monotonous. They went to bed every night hoping to find that the storm had abated by morning, but in vain. The snow fell as fast as ever, the wind roared, and icebergs tumbled over each other with a noise like thunder, and, so far from abating, the storm seemed to increase.

On the 28th November, however, the aneroid barometer showed symptoms of an improvement in the weather. At the same time the thermometer, which was placed outside, fell to four degrees below zero. These were signs that could not be mistaken, and the next day the universal silence of nature told them that the storm had ceased.

Everyone was now anxious to get out, for the imprisonment had been very irksome, but they could not open the door, so they were obliged to get through the window and clear away the snow. This time it was no soft mass they had to cut away, but solid ice, which had to be removed with pickaxes.

It took about half an hour to clear the doorway, and then everybody, except Mrs. MacNab, who was not well enough to go out, hurried into the courtyard.

The cold was very great, but the wind having subsided it was more bearable. However, it was necessary

to take precautions when coming from heated rooms into the cold air, for there was a difference of fifty-four degrees in the temperature.

It was eight o'clock in the morning. The stars were most brilliant, and the polar star was particularly bright. The eye seemed to take in millions of stars at once, but as the number of visible stars is not more than 5,000, that was impossible. Thomas Black was delighted, he had nothing but praise for the firmament, which was not veiled by vapours or shaded by a single cloud. He had never seen such a lovely sky.

While the astronomer was thus in ecstasies, perfectly oblivious of mundane affairs, his companions had wandered away from him as far as the *enceinte*. The snow was very hard, and so slippery that they frequently tumbled, but no serious injuries supervened.

It is needless to say that the courtyard of the fort was quite filled up. The roof of the house only was visible, the top of which had been kept smooth by the action of the wind. Only the top of the palisade could be seen, and the laziest of wild animals could have climbed over. But what was to be done? They could only think of cutting out ten feet or so of snow, so that the ditch and counter-scarp thus formed outside might protect the palisade. But the winter was only beginning, and the snow-storm might fill up the ditch again in a few hours.

While the Lieutenant was examining his defences, which could no more protect the house than a single ray

of sunshine could melt the snow, Mrs. Joliffe cried out :

“ But our dogs and the reindeer ! ”

It was indeed time to think about the poor animals ; the kennel and stable were much lower than the house, and were most likely entirely covered, and the animals suffocated. The party hurried in various directions, some to the kennel, some to the stable, but were delighted to find that the wall of ice which connected the house with the cliff had in a great measure protected the buildings. They found all the animals quite well, and when the kennels were opened the dogs rushed out barking joyously.

After an hour's walk, all the party were very glad to return to the stove in the large room, and indeed there was nothing to do outside. The traps were buried deeply in snow, and could not be visited, so they went home, shut the windows, and sat down to dinner.

The conversation naturally turned upon the sudden cold and severe frost. It was an unfortunate circumstance that the snow had been frozen so hard, as it might have compromised the safety of the fort.

“ But, Mr. Hobson,” said Mrs. Barnett, “ shall we not have a day or two's thaw which will get rid of this ice ? ”

“ No,” replied the Lieutenant, “ a thaw at this time of the year is not probable. In fact, I rather think that the cold will increase. It is rather unfortunate we did not clear away the snow when it was soft.”

“Do you really think it will become colder?”

“Most decidedly, madam. Four degrees below zero is nothing in this latitude.”

“But what must it be up at the Pole?” asked Mrs. Barnett.

“It does not follow that the Pole is the coldest part of the globe,” replied Hobson. “Most navigators agree in saying that the sea is open there. It appears from observations that the coldest place in the world is on the shore of North Georgia, 95 deg. longitude and 78 deg. latitude, where the thermometer marks two degrees below zero all the year round on an average. It is therefore known as the ‘Pole of Cold.’”

“But, Mr. Hobson, we are more than eight degrees from that place.”

“Well, I do not consider we shall suffer so much as if we were in North Georgia. I only mentioned the ‘Pole of Cold,’ in order that you might not confound it with the Pole properly so called when speaking of lowness of temperature; but extreme cold has been experienced in other parts of the globe, although it has not been lasting.”

“What parts do you mean, Mr. Hobson? I am very much interested in this question.”

“If my memory serves me,” replied the Lieutenant, “the thermometer at Melville Island has marked sixty-one degrees below zero, and at Port Felix, sixty-five degrees.”

“ But those places are much to the north of this ? ”

“ No doubt, madam ; but within certain limits latitude goes for nothing. Various atmospheric combinations will produce intense cold, and I remember, in 1845—— By-the-bye, Sergeant Long, were you not at Fort Reliance then ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” replied Long.

“ Well then, was not the cold extraordinary in the January of that year ? ”

“ Yes,” replied the Sergeant. “ I remember the thermometer marked seventy degrees below zero.”

“ What ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Barnett. “ Seventy degrees at Fort Reliance, on the Slave Lake ? ”

“ Yes,” replied the Lieutenant, “ and that was only in 65 deg. N. latitude, on the same parallel as that of Christiania or St. Petersburg.”

“ Then, Mr. Hobson, we may make up our minds for the worst ? ”

“ Yes, indeed, when we winter in arctic countries.”

During the 29th and 30th November there was no diminution of the cold, and enormous fires had to be kept up to prevent the moisture freezing in the corners of the room ; but there was plenty of fuel, and they did not spare it, so they managed to keep up an average temperature of 52 deg. Fahrenheit.

Notwithstanding the lowness of the temperature, Thomas Black, attracted by the clearness of the sky, wished to make observations. But he was obliged to

relinquish the attempt, his instruments burned his hands. Burned is the only word which we can use to express the feeling produced by the touch of metal exposed to such intense cold; and besides, the sensation is that of scorching. Whether heat is violently introduced into the flesh by a burning mass, or withdrawn suddenly from the body, the effect is physically the same. The worthy professor discovered this to his cost—the cost of the skin of his fingers. Under these circumstances he suspended his observations.

But the sky did all it could to make up the loss by exhibiting its most beautiful auroras and other celestial fireworks.

A lunar halo surrounded the moon, and formed a white circle with a pale red tint about it. This meteor was forty-five degrees in diameter, and was caused by the diffraction of the moon's rays through the minute ice-particles in the atmosphere. The Queen of Night shone brilliantly from the centre of the crown, which was similar to the oft-described lunar rainbow.

Subsequently the aurora borealis, describing an arc of more than a hundred degrees, was displayed above the northern horizon. The summit of the bow was placed in the magnetic meridian, and, as is sometimes the case, the rays were all the colours of the rainbow, red prevailing. In places the stars appeared to be suffused with blood, and the rays darted, oscillating, even to the zenith, and overcame the brilliant moonlight itself.

It is impossible to give any adequate description of this magnificent display, which, after lasting for about half an hour, suddenly disappeared, as if it had been "turned out" by some invisible hand.

It was quite time it had ended, for Thomas Black had been nearly congealed as he stood watching it. Five minutes more and he would have been frozen in his boots.

CHAPTER XIX.

VISITORS.

ON the 2nd December the cold diminished. The aurora and the halo indicated a certain amount of vapour in the atmosphere, and the thermometer rose accordingly to fifteen degrees above zero, while the barometer fell a little.

Though this amount of cold would have appeared very severe to an inhabitant of a temperate climate, the party were enabled to support it easily; besides, there was no wind. Hobson having noticed that the snow was becoming softer, set his men to clear away the upper layers from the *enceinte*. This task was completed by MacNab and his mates in a few days. After this the traps were searched for, uncovered, and re-set. The numerous footprints of furred game in the neighbourhood showed there were plenty of animals which would, in all probability, be soon attracted by the bait and the snares.

Following the advice of Marbre, a reindeer-trap was made in the Esquimaux fashion. This was a large trench

about twelve feet deep, and a plank was balanced see-saw fashion across it. A bunch of herbs was placed at one end, and any animal attempting to eat it would be thrown into the ditch, and quite unable to get out again. By making this plank self-acting, it re-set itself for another victim. The only difficulty they had to contend against was the hardness of the ground, and the workmen were much surprised when, having dug out about five feet of earthen sand, they came down to a very thick bed of snow, as hard as a rock.

"It seems to me," said the Lieutenant, "that this part of the coast must have been thoroughly frozen, year after year, for a long period. The sand and earth have thus by degrees covered the ice, which probably rests upon granite."

"Well," replied the hunter, "our deer-trap will not be the worse for that. On the contrary, the reindeer will not be able to climb the icy wall."

Marbre was right, and the event justified him.

On the 5th September he and Sabine were going towards the deer-trap, when they heard loud growls rising from the ground. They stopped.

"That is not a reindeer," said Marbre; "I think I know what animal we have caught."

"A bear?" asked Sabine.

"Yes," replied his friend, as his eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

"Well," replied Sabine, "we shall not lose by the

exchange ; bear's flesh is better than reindeer's, and we get the skin besides. Come along."

The men were armed of course. They loaded their rifles with ball, and hurried towards the trap. The plank was in its place, but the bait had disappeared. Marbre and Sabine looked down into the hole. The growling increased, and there, in a corner of the pit, they saw a mass of white fur with glittering eyes. The sides of the pit were scored with the marks of claws, and if they had not been of ice the animal would surely have escaped. As it was, he had merely enlarged his prison.

Under these circumstances the capture was easy ; a couple of bullets settled the matter ; and then the hunters returned to the fort for assistance to pull out their prize. Ten of their companions, supplied with ropes, returned with them, and after great exertions the carcass was drawn up. The bear was of enormous size, quite six feet high, and weighed at least 600 pounds. Its flattened head, long neck, and short curved claws, white skin, and muzzle showed that it belonged to the sub-family of white bears. All parts fit for food were handed to Mrs. Joliffe and served up as a *plat de résistance*.

During the following week the traps were in full swing. About twenty martens in all their beautiful winter clothing were taken, but only two or three foxes. These cunning animals were quite aware of the trap laid for them, and by scraping up the snow they managed to run

off with the bait. For this manœuvre Sabine was very angry with them, and stigmatised them as a "mean lot," unworthy of the name of honest foxes.

About the 10th December the wind veered to the south-west, and some fine snow fell, but not a great quantity. It immediately froze, and the wind being high the cold was very much felt. So our explorers returned to the house again to their domestic employments. As a matter of precaution Hobson distributed lemonjuice and limejuice to his party, in order to guard against scorbutic attacks, which are the result of continued damp cold. Thanks to the precautions taken, none of the party suffered from this disease.

The polar night was now extremely dark. The winter solstice was approaching, and then the sun would be at its lowest point below the horizon. A sort of twilight appeared to touch the northern horizon at midnight, but scarcely dispersed the shadows. An impression of sadness had fallen upon the earth thus enveloped in darkness on all sides.

Some days were passed indoors. Hobson was more easy respecting the attacks of wild beasts since he had cleared away the snow, but ominous and unmistakable growlings were heard.

There was no chance of any visit from the Canadians; nevertheless an incident occurred which proved that, even in the depth of winter, the solitudes are not entirely deserted. Some human beings still remained on the coast

hunting the morse, and camping under the snow. They appeared to be Esquimaux—or “raw-flesh eaters” as they are called—who seldom come farther south than the Great Slave Lake.

On the morning of the 14th December—or rather nine hours before noon—Sergeant Long came in and reported that, unless his eyes had deceived him, he had noticed a wandering tribe encamped about four miles off, near a small promontory, which he indicated.

“What do you think they are?” asked Hobson.

“They must be men or morse,” replied the Sergeant; “there is no medium.”

The Sergeant would have been astonished if he had been told that naturalists do admit the medium which he would not recognise. Some more or less humorous savants have classed the Esquimaux as the connecting link.

Some of the party immediately set forth to ascertain the fact, and, well wrapped up in furs and well armed, they proceeded along the coast.

The last quarter of the moon threw a feeble light across the mist. After an hour’s walking the Lieutenant began to think that the Sergeant had made a mistake. That what he had seen were morse, which had meantime returned to sea through their holes in the ice.

But Sergeant Long pointed out a gray curl of smoke, about a hundred paces off, and said quietly :

“Look there, the morse are smoking !”

At that moment some living creatures came out of the hut. They were Esquimaux, but whether men or women nobody but a native could tell, for they were all dressed exactly alike. They might easily have been taken for seals, or other amphibious creatures.

There were six of them—four grown up and two children ; broad-shouldered, but short, with flat noses, thick lips, large mouths, long black hair, but no beard or whiskers. They were dressed in walrus-skins : hoods, boots, and mittens, all alike. They were half savage, and gazed at the Europeans in silence.

“I suppose none of us know Esquimaux?” said Hobson to his companions.

Nobody knew the language ; but everybody started when a voice cried in English :

“Welcome, welcome !”

This was an Esquimaux, a woman, as they learnt afterwards, who advanced to Mrs. Barnett, and held out her hand. The lady was much surprised, but replied in a few words, which were at once understood, and the whole family were invited to the fort.

The Esquimaux looked at each other, and after some hesitation complied. When they arrived at the palisade the native woman cried out :

“House, house, snow-house !”

She asked if the habitation really was a snow-house ; and that is not surprising, as it was almost buried in snow. They told her it was made of wood. She

interpreted this intelligence to her companions, who signified their approbation. The whole party then entered the house by the postern.

Then, when they removed their hoods, the sexes could be distinguished. There were two men, between forty and fifty years of age, whose sharp teeth and projecting cheek-bones gave them something the appearance of wild animals. Two young women, whose hair was adorned with the teeth and claws of polar bears, and two children, about five or six years old, who stared about them wonderingly, made up the party.

“One generally supposes that the Esquimaux are hungry,” said Hobson. “I think a morsel of venison would not hurt them.”

So Joliffe brought out some reindeer flesh, which the poor Esquimaux devoured ravenously. But the young woman who had spoken English behaved with more propriety, and kept her eyes fixed upon Mrs. Barnett and the other women of the fort. Then noticing Mrs. MacNab's little baby, she rose, and, running up to it, caressed it very tenderly.

This young woman appeared to be, if not superior, at any rate more civilised than her companions, and this was particularly remarked when, suddenly attacked by a fit of coughing, she put her hand before her mouth as Europeans usually do.

This gesture escaped nobody. Mrs. Barnett talked with the Esquimaux woman, and using the simplest

English she could muster learnt that the girl had been in service for a year with the Danish Governor of Upper Nawik, whose wife was an Englishwoman, but she had left Greenland to follow her family on the hunting-ground. The two men were her brothers, the other woman was married to one of them and was the mother of the two children. They were all returning from Melbourne Island, which is on the east coast of British America, and were bound for Point Barrow, in Russian America, where their tribe lived, and they had been much astonished to find a factory at Cape Bathurst. The men shook their heads when they spoke of it, but Hobson could not ascertain from them whether they did not approve of the construction of the fort, or whether they considered the place badly chosen.

The young Esquimaux girl was called Kalumah, and she appeared to have taken a great fancy to Mrs. Barnett. Nevertheless she did not at all regret having left her situation in the governor's family, for she was very much attached to her relations.

After having partaken of some refreshment the Esquimaux took their leave, but before saying good-bye the young girl invited Mrs. Barnett to pay them a visit at their snow hut, which that lady promised to do if the weather permitted. The next day Mrs. Barnett, accompanied by Madge, Lieutenant Hobson, and a few soldiers well armed—not because of the Esquimaux, but for fear of bears—set out for Cape Esquimaux,

as they had named the spot where those people were encamped.

Kalumah ran out to meet her new friend, and introduced her to the hut with a self-satisfied air. This hut was nothing more or less than a great cone of snow with a hole in the roof through which the smoke escaped. These huts, which are very quickly made, the Esquimaux call *igloo*; they are wonderfully suited to the climate, and the inhabitants are enabled to support, without fire, forty-two degrees of cold below zero. During the summer the Esquimaux camp in reindeer-skin and seal-skin tents, which they call *tupic*.

To get into the hut was not a very easy matter; there was but one entrance, which was close to the ground, through which it was necessary to crawl on hands and knees for a distance of three or four feet, for the walls are always as thick at least. But Mrs. Barnett did not hesitate. Followed by Madge she bravely penetrated the tunnel, but Hobson and his men dispensed with the ceremony.

Mrs. Barnett soon found out that it was not so difficult to get into the hut as to remain in it when you had got there. The atmosphere, heated by a fire on which bones of morse were burning, and impregnated with the smell of lamp-oil, greasy clothes, and the flesh of the amphibious animals which form the chief food of the Esquimaux, was by no means inviting. Madge could not remain. Mrs. Barnett, with superhuman

courage, and anxious not to offend the young native, stayed for quite five minutes, which seemed to her five centuries. The two children and their mother were at home, but the men had gone morse-hunting some miles away.

When Mrs. Barnett had got outside, the Lieutenant asked her what she thought of the Esquimaux houses.

“There seems to be a slight want of ventilation,” she replied, as the colour returned to her white cheeks.

For eight days this interesting family party remained in the same place. For twelve hours out of the twenty-four the men hunted morse. They displayed a patience in this pursuit which was wonderful. They would watch the animals until they came up to breathe through the holes in the ice. When the morse appeared, a cord with a running noose was thrown round its body, and then, not without difficulty, the animal is hauled on to the ice and killed with hatchets. It is really more like fishing than hunting. The great treat on these occasions is to drink the warm blood of the animal, a luxury in which the Esquimaux indulge to excess.

Kalumah came to the fort the same day notwithstanding the severity of the weather. She took great pleasure in going through the rooms, watching the women sewing, or superintending Mrs. Joliffe's cooking. She inquired the English name of everything, and talked for hours with Mrs. Barnett, if we can call it talking when every word had to be considered most carefully on

both sides. When Mrs. Barnett read aloud Kalumah listened attentively, although she probably understood nothing about it.

She also sang songs in a sweet voice, and songs of a peculiar rhythm—a sort of cold, melancholy, frosty ditties. Mrs. Barnett took the trouble to translate one of these curious specimens of Greenland sagas which was set to a sad air with long pauses, which gave it a most peculiar effect. The following is a translation of the song copied from Mrs. Barnett's album :

THE GREENLANDER'S SONG.

The sky is dark,
 The sun is gone,
 My trembling heart
 Will still ache on.
 The infant smiles whene'er I sing,
 Though round his heart the ice-drops cling.

My darling sleep,
 My love will cheer,
 Though sorest frost
 May still be near.
 Alas ! by tears I cannot part
 The icicles around thy heart.

The morn for thee
 Will yet arise
 When thou wilt meet
 My longing eyes.
 The sun will fall with tender ray
 And melt the frost for aye away.

On the 20th December the Esquimaux took leave of

the people in Fort Hope. Kalumah was much attached to Mrs. Barnett, who would have kept her, but the young girl would not leave her family. She promised to return to the fort the following summer.

The parting was tender. Kalumah presented Mrs. Barnett with a small copper ring, and received a necklace of black beads in return, which she at once put on. Hobson would not permit the Esquimaux to depart without a good stock of provisions, which they packed in their sledge, and after a few words of thanks from Kalumah, the whole family set out in a westerly direction, and quickly disappeared in the mist that lay along the sea-shore.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MERCURY FREEZES.

THE dry calm weather still favoured the hunters, but they did not go far away from the house. Indeed, the abundance of game rendered it unnecessary for them to go far afield. Hobson congratulated himself on having chosen such an excellent situation for the fort. A number of fur animals of different kinds were trapped, and Sabine and Marbre shot a number of polar hares and about twenty half-famished wolves. The latter had become very aggressive, and, surrounding the fort, filled the air with their growling. Amongst the ice-hummocks large bears were frequently perceived, the approach of which were most carefully reported.

On the 25th December they were obliged to give up all excursions. The wind went round to the north, and the cold became intense. It was quite impossible to remain out of doors without getting frost-bitten. The thermometer fell to eighteen degrees below zero, and the wind roared like a volley of grape-shot. Before

this, however, Hobson had taken care to supply the animals with food for some weeks. Christmas Day, so dear to English people, was celebrated with all religious observances. The inhabitants of the fort returned thanks to Providence for their protection, and the soldiers, having a holiday for Christmas, sat down to dinner with the others, and two enormous puddings figured on the board. In the evening a flaming bowl of punch was placed on the table, the lamps were put out, and the room, lighted by the flames of the spirit, assumed a fantastic appearance. The soldiers' faces lighted up in every sense, and their good spirits were not appreciably lessened after they had partaken of the punch.

Then the flame died out as it licked the dark sides of the national pudding.

But an unexpected phenomenon occurred. Although the lamps had not been re-lighted the room was not in darkness. A bright light penetrated the windows; the gleam must have been overcome by the light of the lamps.

All at table started to their feet, and gazed at each other in astonishment.

“It is a fire!” someone exclaimed.

But unless the house was burning there could be no fire at Cape Bathurst.

The Lieutenant rushed to the window, and immediately perceived the cause of the fire: it was a volcanic eruption.

Yes, beyond Morse Bay the whole horizon was in flames; the tops of the burning hills could not be perceived, but the fan-like flame shot up to a great height and illuminated the country with an unearthly glare.

“That is much more grand than an aurora borealis,” exclaimed Mrs. Barnett.

But to this statement Thomas Black strongly objected. The idea of a terrestrial phenomenon being grander than a meteor? But no one argued the point, for all were in a hurry to go out, notwithstanding the cold, to witness this most wonderful spectacle. If the ears and mouths of the whole party had not been wrapped up in thick fur, they would have heard the loud reports which accompanied the eruption; but wrapped up as they were they could neither hear nor speak—they were content to watch. But such a scene as that was sufficiently imposing, and one never to be forgotten.

Between the darkness of the sky and the white expanse of snow, the effects produced by the lurid flames were something that no pen could depict. The reverberation extended up to the zenith, quenching even the light of the stars. The snowy ground gave back the golden tints, while the hummocks and the icebergs in the far distance reflected the divers colours like so many golden mirrors. The rays of light were deflected from the ice at all angles, and the whole scene was like a fairy spectacle, got up expressly for this occasion only.

But the excessive cold obliged the spectators to go indoors, and more than one nose paid dearly for the enjoyment the eyes had experienced.

The intensity of the cold increased during the next few days. The thermometer was no longer of any use for taking the temperature, and an alcoholic thermometer was taken into use. On the night of the 28th December it fell to thirty-two degrees below zero.

The stoves were stuffed with fuel, but the temperature could not be kept up above twenty degrees. The bed-chambers were very cold, and no heat could be felt ten feet from the stove; the best place was of course given up to the little baby, and those who came to the fire in turn rocked its cradle. It was quite impossible to open either door or window, for the vapour in the rooms would then have immediately been converted into snow as the breath of the men had already been in the corridor. Frequent detonations were heard, which surprised those unaccustomed to the phenomena of these climates; these noises were caused by the cracking of the trunks of trees of which the walls were composed. The supply of liquors (brandy and gin) in the garret were brought down, as the alcohol was freezing; the spruce-beer they had made burst its barrels as it froze; all solid bodies, as if they were petrified, resisted the heat; the wood burnt with great difficulty, and they had to pour morse-oil upon it to quicken its combustion. It was very fortunate that the chimneys drew so well, otherwise the

smell would have been very unpleasant ; as it was, the air outside was vitiated by the foetid fumes.

Everyone was much afflicted by thirst ; to relieve it they were obliged to thaw frozen liquids at the fire, for in the form of ice they would have been unwholesome to take. Another symptom, against which Hobson warned his companions, was extreme drowsiness, which some of them could not overcome. Mrs. Barnett, always brave, by her advice, conversation, and movement, kept herself and others awake. She often read aloud, or sang to them English songs, in which she induced them to join whether they would or not, and roused up the sleepy ones. Thus the long days passed while the cold increased, and on the 31st December the mercury was completely frozen, for the temperature was forty-four degrees below zero.

On the 1st January, 1860, Lieutenant Hobson wished Mrs. Barnett a "happy new year," and congratulated her on the manner in which she sustained the miseries of the winter. Similar compliments were paid to the astronomer, who only cared to enter the year 1860 because the famous eclipse was to take place in it. Good wishes were exchanged by all the members of the colony, whose health fortunately continued excellent. Any symptoms of scurvy had been promptly checked by the administration of limejuice.

But it is no use to hallo till one clears the wood ; the winter had still three months to run, and though the

sun would of course appear at the right moment, still they could not flatter themselves till the cold had reached its lowest point, as February is generally the coldest month in those regions. At any rate there was no diminution of the cold at the beginning of the new year, and on the 6th January the alcohol thermometer outside the passage-window was sixty-six degrees below zero. A few degrees more and the lowest temperature of Fort Reliance, in 1835, would be reached, or even passed.

This continued increase of cold rendered Hobson more and more uneasy. He began to think that the animals would have to go farther south, which would of course spoil his hunting in the spring. Besides, he often heard subterranean grumblings, which were connected with the eruption, and it was evident some formidable convulsion was going on beneath them. The neighbourhood of an active volcano might endanger the safety of the fort; but whatever apprehensions he felt he kept them to himself.

Of course nobody went out of doors; the dogs and reindeer had been provided for, and were accustomed besides to a long fasting in the winter. Indeed it was hard enough to live in an atmosphere in which oil and wood were continually burning, without going out of doors to be frozen; but notwithstanding all their care damp crept in, and ice formed every day in the rooms. The condensers were choked, and one even burst from the pressure of ice.

Under these circumstances the fuel was used unsparingly ; but notwithstanding this the temperature was sometimes as low as fifteen degrees. The men on watch had to keep the fire up, but one day Sergeant Long said to the Lieutenant :

“ We shall soon be out of wood, sir.”

“ Out of wood ? ” exclaimed Hobson.

“ I should say,” replied the Sergeant, “ that our supply in the house is failing, and we must soon renew it. Now, if we go out in this cold, we shall assuredly be frozen to death.”

“ I see,” said the Lieutenant ; “ we have made a mistake ; we ought to have built our wood-shed up against the house and communicating with it, but it is too late now. However, what is done can't be helped. Now tell me, Long, how long will the wood last ? ”

“ Two or three days more,” replied the Sergeant.

“ Perhaps by that time the cold may have diminished, and we shall be able to get out.”

“ I am afraid not, sir,” replied the Sergeant, shaking his head. “ The sky is quite clear, and the wind is in the north. I expect we shall have this weather for another fortnight, till the new moon comes.”

“ Well then,” replied the Lieutenant, “ we cannot die of cold, and when we must go out——”

“ We will brave the cold,” replied Sergeant Long.

Hobson shook his subordinate by the hand. He knew he could count upon his devotion.

Perhaps you may think that Sergeant Long and Hobson were exaggerating when they expected a sudden cold to cause death ; but they had lived for many years in the arctic regions, and knew the consequences of such exposure. They had seen strong men fall upon the ice, and had seen them taken up again half suffocated from sudden cold. Incredible as these facts may appear, they are nevertheless true, and of frequent occurrence amongst travellers. William Moor and Smith, in their journey across the coast of Hudson's Bay in 1746, relate several accidents of this kind, and some of their companions were actually struck dead by cold. It is almost certain death to brave a temperature in which mercury freezes, an intensity of cold which cannot be measured.

Such was the disquieting state of affairs when an accident occurred which tended to aggravate the sufferings of the inhabitants.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREAT POLAR BEARS.

THE window opening from the end of the corridor was the only one through which the inhabitants of the fort could look out ; but before it could be made available they were obliged to wash the panes with boiling water, in consequence of the thick formation of ice. This washing was repeated during the day, and then the state of the surrounding country and the appearance of the heavens were most carefully observed.

On the 6th January, about eleven in the forenoon, Kellet, who was on the look-out, called the Sergeant, and pointed out to him some large bodies moving about in the snow.

Sergeant Long approached the window, and said :

“ Those are bears ! ”

There were half-a-dozen of them. These animals had succeeded in climbing over the palings, and, attracted by the smoke, were advancing to the house.

As soon as Hobson had been informed of the approach of these formidable beasts, he gave orders to have the window barricaded. This was the only unprotected place in the house, and when it was fastened it appeared impossible for the bears to come inside. The window was accordingly barred and firmly fastened by MacNab. A small hole for observation of the animals' movements was left.

"Now," said the master-carpenter, "these fellows cannot enter without our leave, and we have time to hold a council of war."

"Well, Mr. Hobson," said Mrs. Barnett, "nothing is wanting up here. We have experienced cold, now the bears have come upon us."

"Not after the cold, but with it, which is a more serious matter," replied Hobson, "and with such cold to boot that we cannot get outside. I really do not know how we are to get rid of the brutes."

"Oh, they will get tired," she replied, "and go away of their own accord."

Hobson shook his head. "You do not know these animals," he replied; "they are probably starving, and will not leave unless forced to do so."

"Are you anxious about it, then?"

"Well, I am and I am not," replied Hobson. "I do not see how the bears can get in; but, on the other hand, I do not see how we can get out if we want to."

Hobson turned to the window as he spoke. Mrs.

Barnett joined the other women and listened to what the Sergeant, as a man of experience, had to say about the bears. Sergeant Long had often encountered the animals even in a more southern land, where they are not so dangerous, but here the men were blocked up in the house, and cold prevented any sortie by the garrison.

All day the bears were closely watched. Occasionally one of them would put his head close to the window and growl. Hobson and the Sergeant took counsel together, and made up their minds that if the bears did not go soon they would pierce a few loopholes and shoot them. But this was kept as a last resource, for the air was too cold to permit of such measures being taken. Even the oil was frozen so hard that it had to be cut with hatchets before it could be used.

The day passed without incident. The bears continued to prowl about but made no attack. The watch was kept all night, and about four o'clock in the morning the bears appeared to have left the enclosure—at any rate they could not be seen. But at seven o'clock Marbre reported the animals were walking about on the roof.

Hobson, the Sergeant, MacNab, and a few soldiers, seizing their arms, rushed up the ladder to the loft; but the cold was so intense up there that after a few moments they were quite unable to hold their muskets, and their breath was frozen and floated about like snow.

Marbre was quite right. The bears were on the roof, and their growls could be heard. Sometimes their claws

came through the ice and the lathes, and the men were afraid that the brutes would be strong enough to tear away the beams.

The Lieutenant and his men could not endure the cold, and they returned in a half-fainting condition to report as hopefully as they could.

“There is no doubt,” said Hobson, “that the bears are on the roof, though we need not fear for ourselves, for they cannot reach our rooms, but they may force their way into the loft where the Company’s furs are deposited. It is our duty to preserve these furs uninjured, and I ask you to assist in placing them in safety.”

Everybody immediately set to work, and by relieving each other they managed to store all the furs in the great hall in the course of an hour.

Meantime the bears endeavoured to get through the roof, and in places their paws came through. MacNab was in a terrible state of anxiety ; he had not anticipated such a weight on the rafters, and feared they would give way altogether. So the day passed ; but no entrance was made by the bears. Nevertheless a formidable enemy—namely, the cold—came into the rooms by degrees ; the fires burnt low, the reserve of fuel was almost exhausted. Before twelve o’clock the last log would be burnt and the fires must go out.

This meant death in its most fearful form from cold. Already the poor creatures were huddled round the stove, getting more and more chilled, but they did not

complain—the women bore up heroically. Mrs. MacNab convulsively pressed her little baby to her frozen body. Some of the soldiers slept, or rather lay in a sort of torpor, for it could scarcely be called sleep.

At three o'clock in the morning Hobson found the thermometer, which was hanging ten feet from the stove, marked 4 deg. Fahrenheit below zero.

The Lieutenant passed his hand over his face and looked at his companions without speaking. They were all motionless and silent. His breath rose about him like a white cloud.

As he stood thus a hand was placed upon his shoulder. He turned and beheld Mrs. Barnett.

“We must do something,” said this energetic woman. “We cannot die without a struggle!”

“Yes,” replied the Lieutenant, rousing himself, “something must be done, and that’s a fact.”

He called Long, MacNab, and Rae the blacksmith, who were the bravest men of the party. As a first step they washed the window-glass and consulted the thermometer which was hanging outside.

“Seventy-two degrees!” exclaimed Hobson. “We must do one of two things. We must either risk our lives to obtain fuel, or burn everything combustible in the house. This is a last alternative, for the cold may continue for some time. There is no sign of change in the weather.”

“Let us go out for the fuel,” said Long, “and take the risk.”

All agreed with this suggestion, and immediately set to work to carry it out.

The shed in which the wood was stored was about fifty paces from the house, on the left. It was arranged that one man should run thither, carrying one cord about his body and another in his hand, the end of the latter being held by his companions. When he reached the shed, he was to load a sledge with fuel, and then, by means of the ropes, he and his companions would draw it backwards and forwards till they had a sufficient supply. A shaking of the rope was to be the signal that the sledge was full or empty respectively.

This was a clever notion, but there were two objections to carrying it out. It was possible that the door of the shed might be blocked by ice and be very difficult to open, and besides, the bears might come down from the roof and interfere. These were the risks.

Sergeant Long first, then MacNab and Rae, volunteered to go across the court; but the Sergeant insisted on going, as the other two were married men. The Lieutenant also wished to go, but Mrs. Barnett reminded him that he was the head of the expedition, and had no right to expose himself unnecessarily; so she said, “Let Sergeant Long go.”

Hobson perceived that his position imposed certain

duties upon him, and, called upon by his companions to decide, he voted for the Sergeant.

The other inhabitants of the fort, asleep or half-torpid with cold, knew nothing of what was going on. Two long ropes were provided ; one the Sergeant twined round his body, the other was tied to his belt, to which hung a tinder-box and loaded revolver. He swallowed half a glass of rum before he started, to drink success to his expedition.

Hobson, Rae, and MacNab went with him through the kitchen, where was no longer any fire, and so into the corridor. Then Rae ascended the ladder to the loft, and perceived the bears were still on the roof. This was the time for action.

The first door was opened, and Hobson and his companions, notwithstanding the thick furs they wore, were chilled to the bone ; but when the door opening into the court was thrown back they recoiled, half-suffocated. Instantly the damp vapour held in suspension in the corridor was condensed into fine snow, which covered the floor and the walls.

The weather was perfectly dry, and the stars shone with wonderful brilliancy.

Sergeant Long, without waiting a moment, rushed into the darkness, dragging his ropes behind him. The outer door was then closed, and Hobson and the others retired to the corridor and shut the inner door. Then they waited. If Long did not return in a few moments

they would conclude he had succeeded, and was loading the sledge ; but ten minutes would suffice for this, if he was able to get in.

Hobson and MacNab returned to the end of the corridor, while Rae went to watch the bears. It was so dark outside that they were in hopes the Sergeant would not be perceived by the animals.

In about ten minutes the three men went back to their position between the doors, in readiness for the signal.

Five minutes more passed ; the cord did not move ! Their anxiety may be imagined. The Sergeant had now been gone a quarter of an hour, and had had plenty of time to load the sledge, but no signal came.

They waited a few minutes more ; then, taking hold of the cord, he signed to his companions to assist him in pulling. If the sledge was not ready the Sergeant could easily stop it.

They pulled vigorously. A heavy object glided over the ground, and in a few moments was dragged to the outer door.

It was the body of the Sergeant, with a rope round its waist. The unfortunate man had never reached the shed, he had succumbed to the cold. After twenty minutes' exposure to such weather they could scarcely hope to recover him.

With a cry of despair his companions lifted him from the ground and carried him inside the house. But just

as the Lieutenant was shutting the outer door something pushed violently against it, and a horrible growling was heard.

“ Help, help ! ” cried Hobson.

MacNab and Rae rushed to his assistance. Mrs. Barnett, however, was quicker, and pushed with all her strength against the door. But the enormous beast outside was too much for them, and in a few minutes would have forced its way in if Mrs. Barnett had not snatched a pistol from Hobson’s belt, and, quietly waiting till the bear had thrust its open mouth inside the door, she discharged it down its throat.

The bear fell back mortally wounded, and the door was shut and barricaded.

The poor Sergeant was immediately carried to the stove in the great hall, but the fire was dying out. How could they reanimate him without warmth ?

“ I will go, ” said Rae the smith, “ and bring in the wood, or—— ”

“ Yes, Rae, ” said a voice beside him ; “ we will go together ! ”

The speaker was Mrs. Barnett.

“ No, my friends, no, ” said Hobson ; “ you shall not die by cold, nor by the attacks of bears. Let us burn everything combustible in the house, and leave the issue to God. ”

Then all the poor half-frozen wretches set to work with hatchets like madmen. The benches, the tables,

the partitions were cut up and thrust into the furnaces. In a short time the stoves were burning brightly with the well-oiled fuel.

The temperature rose twelve degrees, and every care was lavished on the Sergeant. He was rubbed with hot rum, and by degrees the circulation was restored. The horrible white patches on his body disappeared at last; but he had suffered cruelly, and it was many hours before he was able to speak. He was placed in a warm bed, and Mrs. Barnett and Madge watched by him till morning.

Meanwhile Hobson, MacNab, and Rae took counsel as to the best means of escape from the awkward position in which they were placed. It was evident that the new supply of fuel would be exhausted in a day or two, and then what would become of them if the cold continued? The new moon had appeared eight-and-forty hours before, but there was no change in the weather. The barometer was still up to "very dry," and there was not a cloud to be seen. There was no sign of the cold abating, and what was to be done? Was it practicable to get to the wood-shed now the bears were aroused, or should they fight these terrible animals in the open? No; that would be foolhardiness, and might risk the lives of all.

However, the temperature in the house was now supportable. Mrs. Joliffe sent them up a breakfast of hot meats and tea. Hot punch was served out, and

even Sergeant Long was able to take some ; the heat had reanimated them all, and they only awaited Hobson's orders to attack the bears. But the Lieutenant thought the odds too great, and would not risk the encounter. So things were very quiet till about 3 P.M., when a great noise was heard on the roof of the house.

"There they are !" cried two or three soldiers, as they armed themselves with hatchets and pistols.

It was evident that the bears had torn out the rafters and got into the loft.

"Let no one stir !" cried Hobson. "Rae, the trap."

The smith rushed down the corridor, mounted the ladder and shut the trap-door.

A great noise of tearing and growling was heard overhead. It was a question whether things were altered for the better or not, and the inhabitants took counsel on the point. The greater part thought the situation had improved ; for if the bears had all entered the loft, as was probable, it was more easy to attack them in a narrow space without having to fight in such extreme cold, which would paralyse all their efforts. There was no doubt that the encounter was full of danger, but success was now by no means impossible.

Should they, then, remain where they were, or attack their invaders ? In the latter case only one soldier could go through the trap at a time, and Hobson hesitated to give the order. Acting on the advice of the Sergeant and others, whose bravery no one could doubt, he

resolved to wait. Perhaps something would turn up. It was almost impossible for the bears to get through the ceiling as they had through the outer roof.

So the day passed, and at night no one could sleep in consequence of the noise made by the enraged animals.

At nine o'clock the next morning the situation became more complicated, and Hobson was obliged to take active measures.

We know that the stove-pipes passed through the loft to the open air. These pipes were only made of imperfectly cemented bricks, not intended to resist lateral pressure. Now it happened that some of the bears scratched at this masonry, while others, to warm themselves, leant against the pipes ; the consequence was, the flues refused to draw.

This appeared to be an irreparable evil, and less energetic men would have despaired. But worse remained behind. As the fire got low, a black, acrid, nauseous smoke, produced by the burning of the wood and oil, filled the house. The tubes were knocked to pieces, and in a few moments the smoke became so thick that the lamps were extinguished. Hobson now perceived that all must quit the house if they did not wish to be suffocated. But if they left the house they would probably be frozen to death. At this juncture the women became very frightened, and some screams were heard.

“My lads,” exclaimed the Lieutenant, as he seized a hatchet, “we must attack the bears !”

It was their last chance ; the animals must be exterminated. All the men without exception rushed down the corridor, and, headed by Hobson, mounted the ladder. The trap-door was thrown back, a volley was immediately fired into the thick clouds of smoke. Cries and groans were heard on both sides, and blood flowed freely. The battle was fought in thick darkness.

But at the moment the fight was most desperate a peculiar rumbling sound was heard. This was succeeded by some violent shocks of earthquake. The house rocked as if it would tear itself from its foundation. The beams of the walls separated, and through the openings Jasper Hobson and his terrified companions perceived the bears, as frightened as they were themselves, rushing away, howling through the darkness.

CHAPTER XXII.

FIVE MONTHS LONGER.

A VIOLENT earthquake had occurred. Certainly such phenomena were by no means unfrequent in such a volcanic country.

Jasper Hobson quite appreciated the danger and was very anxious for the results. An opening in the ground might swallow his house and its inhabitants. But there were no more shocks. The earthquake was rather a rebound than a direct upheaval of the ground, and the house leant over and the walls gaped; then the earth settled down again.

It had become necessary to do something at once. The house, although damaged, was not uninhabitable. The openings in the walls were quickly repaired. The flues were made as serviceable as possible.

The soldiers who had been wounded by the bears were then attended to. The wounds were not serious, however.

Two terribly long days were passed by the unhappy

creatures in the fort. During this time the woodwork was burnt. MacNab and his assistants repaired the house as well as they could. The piles, which had been firmly driven into the ground, had not given way; but the earthquake had caused a decided sinking of the ground, and the safety of the whole fort was threatened. Hobson was very anxious to ascertain the extent of this subsidence, but the extreme cold prevented anyone from leaving the house.

However, there were signs of a change in the weather. The stars were not so brilliant, and on the 11th January the glass fell a little. Vapours formed in the air, and their condensation would warm it.

On the 12th January the wind veered to the southwest, and snow began to fall. The thermometer outside rose at once to fifteen degrees above zero. To the inhabitants of the fort this was almost spring-time.

The same day, at eleven o'clock, they all went out of doors. They appeared like so many prisoners suddenly set free; but they were forbidden to go without the limits of the fort for fear of accidents.

At this time of year the sun had not appeared, but it had approached near enough to the horizon to cause a long twilight. Objects could be distinctly perceived two miles off. Hobson's first care was to find out in what way the earthquake had altered the natural features of the country.

And he found that changes had been made. The

promontory of Cape Bathurst had been broken off, and large pieces thrown down upon the sea-shore. It also appeared as if the whole of the cape was leaning over the lake, and thus displacing the plateau on which the fort was built. The ground on the west had sunk, while that on the east had been raised. The consequence of this movement would probably be very serious, for as soon as the thaw set in, the waters of the lake would probably be displaced, and the ground to the west would be inundated. The stream would find another channel, and the harbour at the mouth would no longer exist. The hills on the east side also appeared to be less high than before, but the cliffs on the west side were too far off for their exact condition to be estimated. In fact the effects of the earthquake may be described as follows: in a space of four or five miles the ground, formerly horizontal, was now sloping from east to west.

“Well, Mr. Hobson,” said Mrs. Barnett, laughing, “you were kind enough to call the river and the harbour after me, but now there is neither Pauline River nor Fort Barnett. I think I have been very ill-used.”

“At any rate,” replied the Lieutenant, “if the river has gone, the lake remains, and, if you will permit me, I will call it Lake Barnett. I think it will remain faithful to you.”

As soon as Mr. and Mrs. Joliffe came out of the house, one ran to the kennels, and the other to the reindeer stable. The dogs did not appear to have

suffered by their long confinement, for they rushed out and gambolled about the court. One reindeer had died, but the others, though very thin, seemed to be quite well.

“Well, madam,” said the Lieutenant to Mrs. Barnett, “we have got through better than I expected.”

“I never despaired,” she replied; “you and your men are not the sort of people to be overcome by the miseries of an arctic winter.”

“Since I have been in these regions,” replied Hobson, “I never experienced such cold before, and, to tell you the truth, I believe, had it lasted a few days longer, we should all have been lost.”

“Then the earthquake came just in time, not only to scare away the bears, but to drive away the cold.”

“That is very likely,” replied the Lieutenant, “all natural phenomena influence each other more or less, but I confess the volcanic nature of the country makes me uneasy. I am sorry we have built our house so near an active volcano; if the lava cannot reach us the earthquakes can, as you may see by the condition of our house at present.”

“That can be repaired, Mr. Hobson, as soon as the fine weather sets in, and you can profit by your experience to make it more solid.”

“No doubt, madam; but in the meantime I am afraid we shall not be very comfortable.”

“For my own part,” she replied, “I am too old a

traveller to care about it. I shall fancy myself in the cabin of a ship, and as there will be no pitching or tossing, I shall not be afraid of sea-sickness."

"Oh, madam," replied Hobson, "we all know how courageous you are. Your wonderful energy and good-humour have contributed more than you imagine to keep up our spirits, and in my own name and that of my companions I thank you."

"Now, Mr. Hobson, you are exaggerating."

"No, indeed, I am not; anyone would tell you the same thing; but allow me to ask you a question. You know that, in June, Captain Craventy is going to send us a convoy with food, which will take back our furs to Fort Reliance. Most probably our friend Black will return with them after the eclipse. Do you intend to go back with him?"

"Do you want to send me back?" she asked, smiling.

"Oh, madam!"

"Well then," she replied, extending her hand to him, "I must ask your permission to spend another winter here; probably next year one of the Company's ships will come round to Cape Bathurst. If so, I should like to go back through Behring Strait, as I came here overland."

The Lieutenant was delighted to hear this, for he highly appreciated his companion. A great bond of sympathy united him and Mrs. Barnett, and both of them would have regretted the separation. Who could tell

what might yet be in reserve for the expedition, and the example of these two people might be very beneficial.

On the 20th January the sun reappeared for the first time, and the polar night was over. Though the orb remained but a few moments above the horizon it was greeted with three cheers by the colonists. From this time the days would get longer and longer.

But up to the 15th March the weather was very unsettled. On the fine days the cold was so great that they could not venture out, and in bad weather the snow-storms kept them indoors. It was only at certain intervals that they could perform any outdoor work, but no long excursions could be attempted. But after all there was no necessity to go far afield, for the traps were in full activity. At the end of the winter the take of martens, foxes, ermines, and other animals had been very large, and the trappers had plenty to do in the immediate neighbourhood. In the month of March one single excursion was made to Morse Bay, and it was then ascertained that the earthquake had considerably lowered the cliffs, while the mountains beyond looked more threatening than ever.

About the 20th March the hunters perceived the first swans approaching from the south. Some snow-buntings and winter-hawks also made their appearance, but the ground was still deep in snow, and the sun's rays had yet no effect upon the thick ice of lake and sea.

The break-up of the ice did not begin till early in April—it then burst with tremendous noise, like the discharge of heavy guns. Sudden changes also took place in the icebergs, more than one of which tumbled over with a fearful crash, and greatly hastened the breaking-up of the ice-fields.

At this time the mean temperature was thirty-two degrees above zero, so the upper ice quickly dissolved, and the icebergs drifted away until they were lost in the fogs on the horizon. By the 15th April the sea was free, and a ship coming from the Pacific by Behring Strait might have reached Cape Bathurst by the American coast.

Lake Barnett was not behindhand in getting rid of its icy cuirass, greatly to the delight of thousands of ducks and other aquatic birds which frequented its shores. But as Hobson had foreseen, the level of the lake had been altered by the slope caused by the earthquake. The portion of the shore which extended in front of the fort had increased very much, and Jasper Hobson estimated that the waters had receded 500 paces. Of course, the water on the western side had increased, and would inundate the country unless some natural barrier prevented it.

It was very fortunate that the slope was not in the opposite direction; if so, the fort would have been inundated.

The little river ran dry very soon after the surface

had thawed; so abrupt was the slope from north to south that it appeared as if the waters had run back to their source.

“There,” said Hobson to the Sergeant, “we have now to erase a river from the map. If we only had that stream to depend upon for our drinking-water we should be in a very awkward position. Fortunately, Lake Barnett still remains, and I do not suppose we shall drink it quite dry just yet.”

“Yes,” replied the Sergeant, “we have the lake, but do you think its waters are still sweet?”

Hobson looked fixedly at his subordinate and frowned. It had not occurred to him before that the earthquake might have opened a communication between the sea and the lake; if so, the evil was beyond remedy, and the factory would have to be abandoned.

They ran quickly down to the lake and tasted the water. It was still sweet.

The snow had partly disappeared by the beginning of May, and patches of verdure began to be visible under the influence of the sun's rays. Some mosses and grasses timidly pushed up their heads, while the seeds which Mr. Joliffe had sowed also began to sprout, for the thick snow had protected them through the winter. But it was now necessary to keep the birds off. This important task devolved upon the Corporal, who acquitted himself with all the seriousness of a scarecrow in a kitchen-garden.

The long days had now set in, and hunting was resumed. Hobson was very anxious to lay in a stock of furs for the men who were expected from Fort Reliance in a week or two, so they commenced their campaign vigorously. But they had not to take long or fatiguing excursions, as the game was so extremely plentiful, and martens, reindeer, hares, caribos, foxes, and ermines passed close in front of them.

There was some regret expressed that no traces could be found of the bears; not only had they themselves fled, but they had taken all their relatives with them. Perhaps the earthquake had completely frightened them, for those animals are very nervous, if one may apply such a term to them.

The month of May was very wet. Snow and rain alternated throughout. The mean temperature was only forty-one degrees above zero; fogs were frequent, and sometimes so very thick that it would have been imprudent to go far from home. Peterson and Kellet on one occasion were absent for eight-and-forty hours, and caused their companions the greatest anxiety. They took a wrong turn, which they did not at first find out, and they wandered away southwards when they thought they were close to Morse Bay. They were very much exhausted from want of food when they returned.

June came, and fine warm weather with it. The colonists now left off their winter clothing and set about repairing the fort. Hobson also gave orders for the

construction of an immense store-house at the south angle of the court—the neighbourhood was so full of game that it justified the erection of this new building. The reserve of furs was very large, and it was necessary to have some place to store them safely.

The detachment from Fort Reliance was now expected every day ; many things were still wanting at the new factory. Stores were running short. If the detachment had quitted Fort Reliance at the beginning of May, it ought to reach Cape Bathurst by the middle of June. It may be remembered that that was the rendezvous fixed upon, and as Hobson had built his house upon the cape itself the agents could scarcely fail to find him.

So from the 15th June an anxious watch was kept. The English flag waved from the top of the cliff, and could be seen for a long distance. They expected the convoy to approach by the same route which the Lieutenant had followed, namely, along the coast from Coronation Gulf to Cape Bathurst. This was the safest, if not the shortest route, and at that time of year the sea-shore could easily be skirted.

However, when the month of June had passed and the convoy had not arrived, Hobson began to get uneasy, particularly as fogs now enveloped the landscape. He was afraid that the agents had lost their way, and the fogs would impede them considerably.

Hobson often took counsel with his friends. The

astronomer did not hide his apprehensions, for he had made up his mind to return with a party as soon as he had seen the eclipse. Now if the detachment did not come he would have to face the cheerful prospects of another winter in those latitudes. He confided his fears to Hobson, who hardly knew what reply to make to him.

On the 4th July, as there were no tidings of the convoy, some of the men went out to explore, but returned without having discovered any traces of them.

It was now evident that either the men had not started at all, or they had lost their way. Unfortunately the latter hypothesis was only too probable. Hobson was certain Captain Craventy would send off the convoy as agreed.

It may easily be imagined how anxious the Lieutenant had become. The summer was gradually passing away. In two months more the Arctic winter, with all its north wind, snow-storms, and long nights, would again be upon them.

But Hobson was not a man to remain in a state of uncertainty; he must do something; and after consultation with his companions, the following was agreed upon:

It was now the 5th July; in another fortnight, that is on the 18th, the solar eclipse was to take place. After that Thomas Black wished to leave Fort Hope. It was therefore decided that if the convoy had not arrived by the 18th some of the men should take sledges

and set off for the Slave Lake. They would take with them some of the most valuable furs, and in about six weeks—that is to say, at the end of August—if the weather continued fine, they would reach Fort Reliance.

This point settled, Thomas Black became once more absorbed in the total eclipse of the sun.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ECLIPSE OF THE 18TH JULY, 1860.

ALL this time the fog continued, the sun shone through the mists, and the astronomer began to be afraid that the eclipse would not be visible. At times the fog was so thick that the top of the cape could not be seen from the courtyard.

Lieutenant Hobson grew more and more uneasy. He had no longer any doubt that the convoy had lost its way, and vague apprehensions and presentiments weighed upon his mind. This man, usually so energetic, was afraid to think of the future, though he could not explain why. Everything apparently was reassuring. Notwithstanding the severity of the winter, all his companions had enjoyed excellent health. There had been no disagreements, and everyone had worked hard. They had plenty of game and furs, and the Company could not be but satisfied with the results. Even supposing that the supplies did not come, there was plenty of food in the neighbourhood, and no fear of a second winter need

be entertained. Why, then, was Lieutenant Hobson so uneasy?

More than once he and Mrs. Barnett had talked on the subject. She sought to raise his spirits, and brought forward the reasons quoted above. One day, while walking with him, she pleaded with more than usual insistence in favour of Cape Bathurst and the factory which had been founded with so much trouble.

“You are quite right, madam,” replied Hobson; “but I cannot help my presentiments. Yet I am no visionary. More than twenty times in my life I have been in very critical situations, but have never felt anxious. I am now uneasy for the first time. If I had to face some actual danger, I should not care; but this vague peril of which I have a presentiment——”

“But what danger,” asked Mrs. Barnett, “do you fear—men, animals, or nature?”

“Certainly not animals,” replied the Lieutenant—“they fear us; nor do I care about other men. There are only Esquimaux in these districts, for Indians rarely come so far.”

“And I may add that the Canadians, whom you rather dreaded last season, have not appeared this summer.”

“And I am sorry for it, madam.”

“Do you mean to say you regret the enemies of your Company?”

“Madam,” he replied, “I am glad, and yet I am

sorry. That you will perhaps think difficult of explanation ; but you know the convoy from Fort Reliance has not yet arrived, nor have the agents of the Fur Company put in an appearance. Not a single Esquimaux has visited this part of the coast during the summer."

"Well, what do you deduce from all this?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"That it is not so *easy* as they expected, to come to Cape Bathurst and to Fort Hope."

Mrs. Barnett looked at the Lieutenant. He had a very careworn expression, and she had not overlooked his peculiar emphasis on the word *easy*.

"Well, then," she said, "as you fear neither men nor animals, you are afraid of the elements, I presume?"

"Madam," replied Hobson, "I do not know if my spirit is broken or whether I am blinded by presentiments, but it appears to me that there is something very strange about this country. If I had been better acquainted with it, I do not think I should have settled here. I have already pointed out to you certain peculiarities which appear to me inexplicable, such as the total absence of stones and the clean-cut line of the coast. The primitive formation of this part of the continent is not clear to me. I know very well that the neighbourhood of the volcano would give rise to certain phenomena. You remember what we said about the tides?"

"Yes, quite well."

“According to observations made in these latitudes, the sea ought to have risen fifteen or twenty feet, but it has scarcely risen twelve inches.”

“No doubt,” replied Mrs. Barnett; “but you have explained the effect by the peculiar formation of the land, the narrowness of the straits——”

“I have only attempted to explain it,” replied Hobson; “but the day before yesterday I noticed a still more extraordinary phenomenon, which I cannot explain, and I doubt if a philosopher would be able to do so.”

Mrs. Barnett looked at him, and said, “What has happened?”

“Well, you know the day before yesterday the moon was full, and the tide ought to have been very high; but it did not even rise a foot higher than usual, for in fact it did not rise at all.”

“Perhaps you might have been mistaken.”

“No, I am not mistaken; I looked at it particularly. There was positively no tide whatever on the coast.”

“And to what conclusion have you come, Mr. Hobson?”

“I conclude that here the laws of nature are changed, or that this is a very peculiar situation; but as a matter of fact I can explain nothing, and I am very uneasy.”

Mrs. Barnett did not pursue the subject farther. The absence of tide was as unaccountable as the absence of the sun would be; perhaps the earthquake had altered the conformation of the coast; but this hypothesis could

not be supported by any careful observer of terrestrial phenomena.

It was impossible to suppose that the Lieutenant had been mistaken, for that very same day—the 6th July—he and Mrs. Barnett ascertained by marks made on the beach that there was absolutely no tide.

This curious fact was kept secret, for the Lieutenant did not wish to alarm his men, but he often went up to the summit of the cape to make observations of the ocean, which was now free, and stretched out as far as the eye could reach.

During July the chase of furred animals was given up, for they had lost their fine winter clothing. The colonists only hunted game for food, such as caribos and polar hares, which curiously enough increased and multiplied close to the fort, and took no notice of the guns.

On the 15th July things were in the same state. There was no news from Fort Reliance, and Hobson resolved to carry out his project of sending to Captain Craventy, as the captain had not sent to him.

Sergeant Long was naturally chosen to lead the expedition, but he did not wish to leave the Lieutenant; he argued that he must be away for a long time, for he could not return to the fort before the following summer, and so would be obliged to pass the winter at Fort Reliance. This would entail an absence of at least eight months. Either MacNab or Rae might have

taken the Sergeant's place, but they were both married men, and one being the carpenter, and the other the blacksmith of the expedition, they could not be spared from the fort.

It was for the above reasons that the Lieutenant chose Sergeant Long, who obeyed as in duty bound. The four soldiers chosen to accompany him were Belcher, Pond, Peterson, and Kellet, who were soon ready to start.

Four sledges and teams of dogs were placed at their disposal, and they were to take with them a large quantity of furs. The 19th July, the morning after the eclipse, was the day fixed for the start. Thomas Black of course went with the expedition. He and his precious instruments had a sledge placed at their disposal.

It must be confessed that the worthy savant was very unhappy during the few days preceding the eclipse. The intermittence of good and bad weather, the continual fogs, and the heavily rain-laden atmosphere and changeable winds worried him tremendously. He could neither eat nor sleep, and if, while the eclipse lasted, the sun and moon should both be enshrouded in mists, and it should turn out that his journey had been fruitless, what a disappointment it would be! All that fatigue, all those dangers incurred, and with no result after all!

"Fancy having come so far to see the moon, and then not to see it after all!" he would exclaim piteously.

But this he would not acknowledge. Every evening he would mount to the summit of the cape, and watch the sky. He had not even the consolation of seeing the moon, for it being three days before a "new moon," she was accompanying the sun round the earth, and consequently her light was dimmed in his.

Thomas Black would often pour his troubles into the sympathising ears of Mrs. Barnett. She felt very sorry for him, and one day she raised his spirits by telling him that the barometer was rising, while she also reminded him that they were then in the fine season.

"The fine season!" exclaimed Black, shrugging his shoulders, "how can you talk of a fine season in such a country as this?"

"But, after all, Mr. Black, supposing by some accident that you fail to observe this eclipse, there will be some others, I suppose—it will not be the last one in the century, surely?"

"No," replied the astronomer, "there will be five more total eclipses of the sun before the year 1900. One on the 31st December, 1861, will be total for the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Desert of Sahara; the second, on the 22nd December, 1870, for the Azores, the South of Spain, Algeria, Sicily, and Turkey; a third, on the 19th August, 1887, for the north-east of Germany, South Russia, and Central Asia; a fourth, on the 9th August, 1896, in Greenland, Lapland, and Siberia; and lastly, on the 20th May, 1900, a fifth,

which will be total for the United States, Spain, Algeria, and Egypt."

"Well, then, Mr. Black, if you miss the eclipse of July, 1860, you may console yourself with that of the 31st December, 1861. It is only seventeen months to wait."

"I shall have to wait twenty-six years to console myself, not only seventeen months."

"Why so?"

"Because the eclipse of the 9th August, 1896, will be the only one total for these high latitudes, such as Lapland, Siberia, or Greenland."

"But why is it particularly necessary to make the observation so far north?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"Why?" exclaimed Black. "It is of the highest importance to science. Eclipses have very rarely been observed in polar regions, where the sun, being but little above the horizon, looks so much larger. The moon also apparently increases in size, so the luminous corona and protuberances can be more easily examined; and that is the reason, madam, why I have come so far to see the eclipse. These conditions will not again occur till 1896, and I may not be alive then."

Of course no answer could be made to such an argument, and Thomas Black continued very unhappy for the weather threatened to become worse.

The 16th was a very fine day, but the 17th, on the contrary, was cloudy and foggy. Thomas Black began

to despair and got really ill. The feverish condition in which he had lately been living threatened to result in serious illness. In vain Mrs. Barnett and Hobson tried to calm him, while the soldiers could not understand why on earth he worried himself so much about the moon.

At length the 18th July, the important day, arrived. The eclipse was to last 4 min. 37 sec., that is, from 43 min. 15 sec. past eleven, till 47 min. 57 sec. past eleven.

“After all, what is it I want?” cried the astronomer, almost tearing his hair. “I only ask for one little bit of clear blue sky where the eclipse is to take place, and only for four minutes. After that it may snow and thunder, and do all kinds of mischief, and I shall care no more for it than a snail would for a chronometer.”

Thomas Black had some reason after all for his alarm; it appeared likely that any observation would be impossible. At daybreak the horizon was covered with mist, heavy clouds came up from the south, just in the spot where the eclipse was expected; but perhaps the patron saint of astronomers would have pity on Black, for about eight o'clock the wind got up from the north and cleared the sky.

A cry of gratitude and thankfulness went up from the astronomer's heart. The sky was now clear; the sun was shining brightly, and the moon which was to obscure it had not yet appeared.

The astronomer immediately took his instruments up to the top of the promontory, and having laid them towards the southern horizon, he waited. He had recovered his usual serenity, for what was there to fear?—nothing, unless the sky were to fall. At nine o'clock there was not a cloud in the sky. The conditions could never be more favourable.

Hobson and all his companions, male and female, climbed to the top of Cape Bathurst to assist in the operations. The sun rose slowly, describing an extended arc above the southern plane. No one said a word—they awaited the eclipse in solemn expectation.

About half-past nine the eclipse commenced. The disc of the moon encroached on that of the sun, but the former was not to cover the sun completely till forty-three minutes past eleven. That was the time fixed by astronomers for the totality, and we know that no mistake can possibly creep into those marvellous calculations, controlled by all the observatories of the world.

Thomas Black had brought with him a number of darkened glasses, so that all could watch the phenomenon comfortably.

The brown disc of the moon advanced slowly. Terrestrial objects had assumed an orange tint. The atmosphere in the zenith had changed colour. At a quarter-past ten half the sun was obscured. Some of the dogs which were at liberty became very uneasy and

howled dismally. The water-fowl remained on shore, calling each other to rest and seeking their sleeping-places. The mothers called the chickens under their wings. All animals thought night had come, and sought sleep. At eleven o'clock two-thirds of the sun was covered; objects then took a reddish tint, a sort of gloomy twilight reigned, and this would soon be succeeded by total darkness. Some of the planets, Mercury and Venus, appeared, and some of the constellations. Darkness became more intense every moment.

Thomas Black, with his eye fixed to the glass of his instrument, was intently watching the eclipse. At forty-three minutes past eleven the two discs ought to be one in front of the other.

"Eleven forty-three!" cried Hobson, who was watching his chronometer.

Thomas Black remained motionless. Half a minute elapsed. He then rose, his eyes opened to their fullest extent; he then stooped to the telescope once more, and in half a minute jumped up excitedly, exclaiming:

"It is going, it is going! The moon is disappearing!"

And in fact the disc of the moon was actually gliding away from the sun without having entirely concealed it. Only about two-thirds of the orb had been covered.

The astronomer was perfectly stupefied. The four

minutes had passed. Light was returning, the luminous corona had not been visible.

“What can be the matter?” asked Jasper Hobson.

“The matter?” exclaimed the astronomer. “Why, the eclipse is not complete. It is not total for this part of the globe—do you understand me?—not total!”

“Then your almanacks must be wrong.”

“Wrong! Tell that to the marines, Mr. Hobson.”

“Well, then——” Hobson’s face clouded as he stopped.

“Then,” replied Black, “we are not on the 70th parallel.”

“What do you mean?” cried Mrs. Barnett.

“We shall soon know,” said the astronomer, whose eyes flashed with anger and disappointment. “The sun will soon pass the meridian. Give me my sextant—quick, quick!”

One of the soldiers ran to the house and brought back the instrument.

Thomas Black then made his observation, and put down his calculations in his note-book.

“How was Cape Bathurst situated when we took the latitude last year?” he asked.

“It was 70 deg. 44 min. 37 sec.,” Hobson replied.

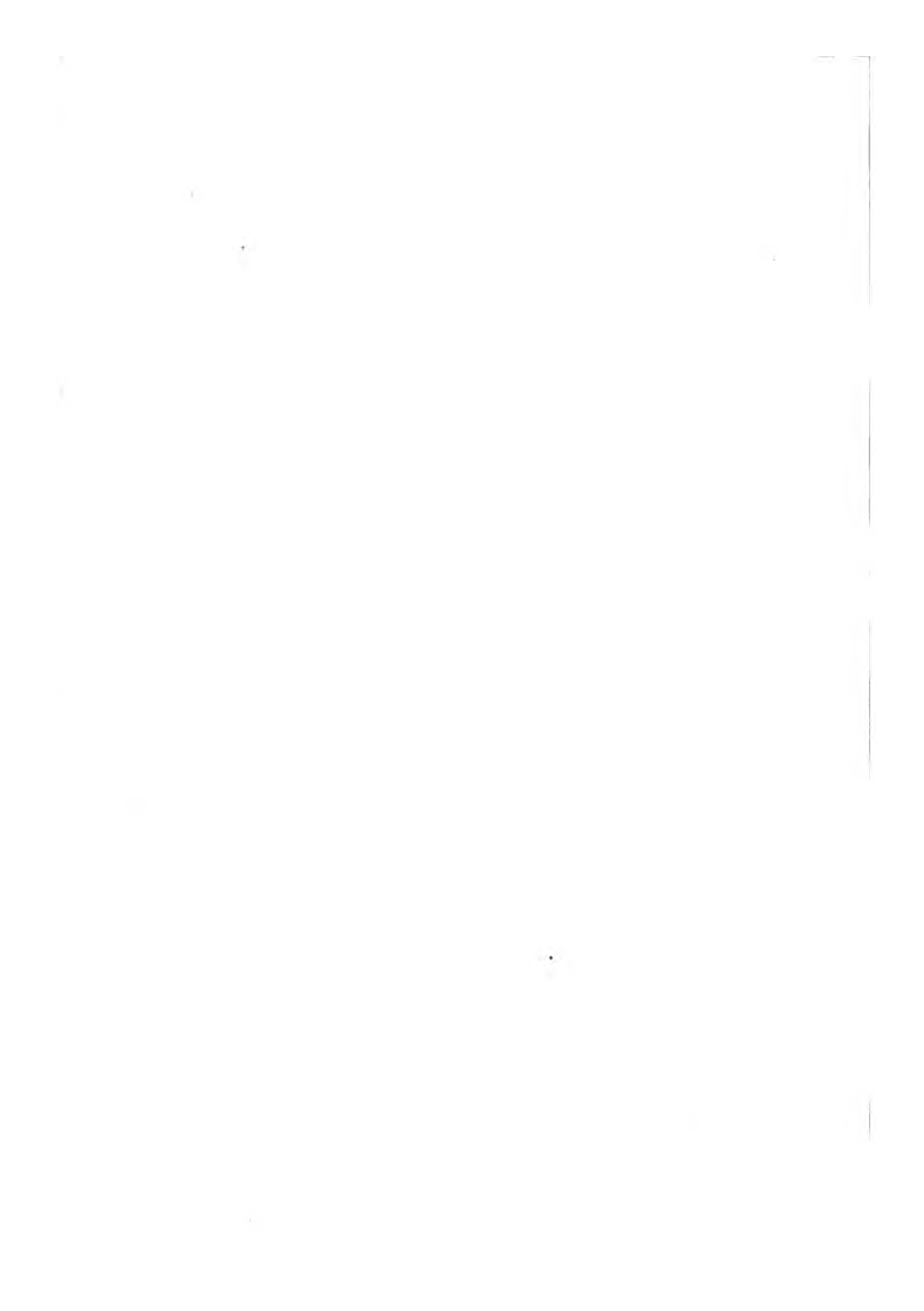
“Well, sir, it is now 73 deg. 7 min. 20 sec. You see we are not under the 70th parallel after all.”

“Or, rather, we are no longer there,” muttered Jasper Hobson.

A sudden revelation seemed to have come upon his mind. All the phenomena hitherto so unexplicable were now accounted for.

Cape Bathurst, since the arrival of the expedition, had drifted three degrees farther north !

END OF PART I.

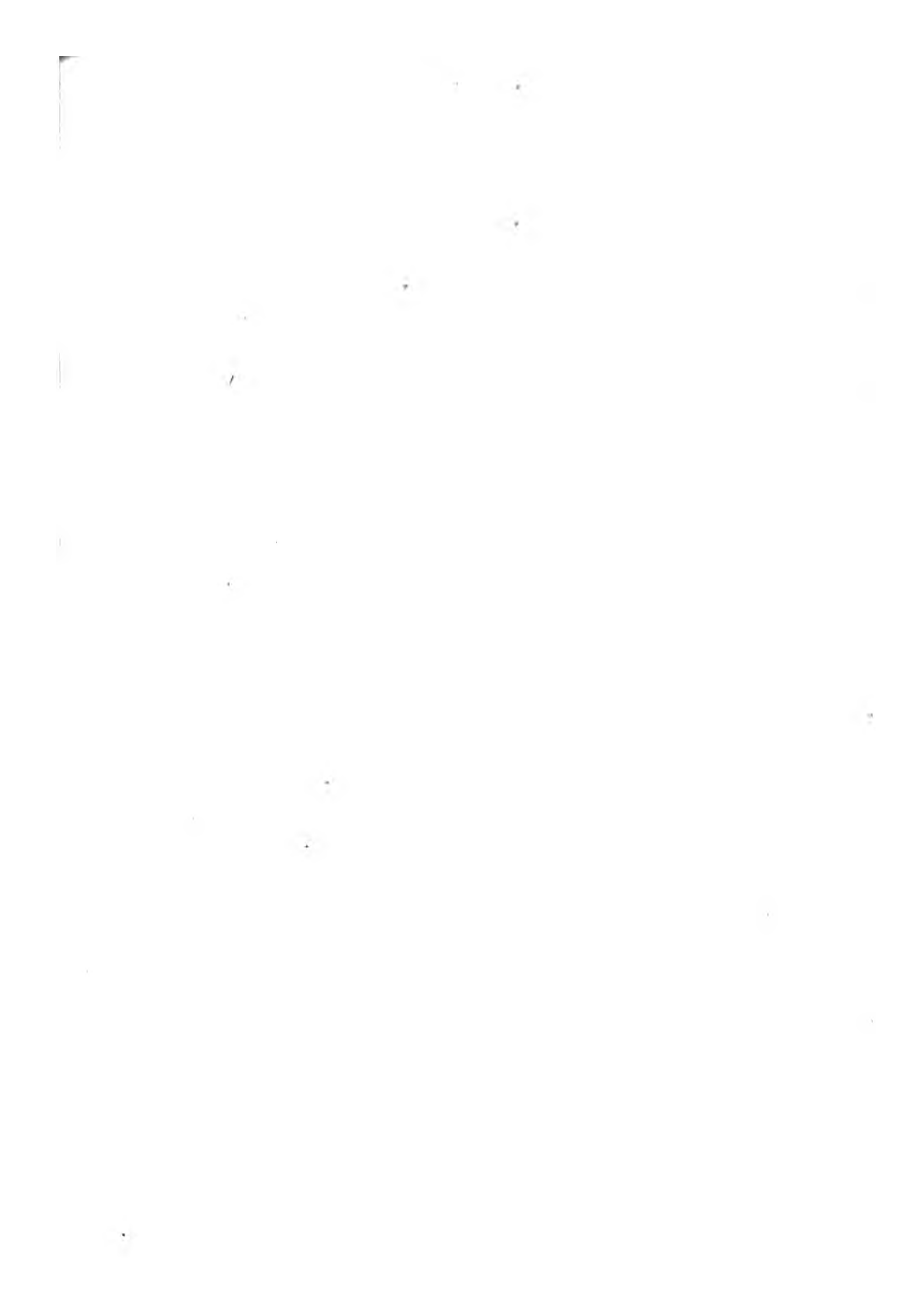


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THE FUR COUNTRY.—PART II.

THE FUR COUNTRY.

CHAPTER I.

A FLOATING FORT.

FORT HOPE, established by Lieutenant Hobson on the shores of the Polar Sea, had drifted. Was any blame attributable to the brave agent of the Company on this account? No. Anyone might have been equally mistaken. No one could possibly have anticipated such an occurrence. He thought he had built his house upon a rock, and, lo! he had not built it even on the sand. The peninsula had been suddenly torn away from the continent. This peninsula was in reality nothing but an immense glacier, five hundred square miles in area, which, in consequence of successive alluvial deposits, looked like solid ground. It had been connected to the main-land for centuries, but the earthquake of the 3rd of January had broken it away, and it was now nothing but a wandering and floating island, and had been tossed upon the Atlantic Ocean for three months.

Yes, it was nothing but a raft of ice upon which Fort

Hope and its inhabitants were resting. Hobson now perceived why the latitude had changed. It was evident that the isthmus had been actually separated some time before, yet as long as the winter lasted and the sea was frozen, the peninsula remained in *statu quo*. But when the thaw came, and the sea became open, then the peninsula moved away with its woods and cliffs, its lake and coast-line, and drifted on under the influence of some unknown current. For many months this movement had been proceeding unnoticed by the colonists, who, it will be remembered, did not go far from Fort Hope in their hunting expeditions. Even if landmarks had been made they would have been of no use, for, in the first place, the fogs were too thick, and besides, the soil was apparently firm, and gave no sign of any movement whatever. It was also remarkable that the position of the peninsula with regard to the sun had not changed, notwithstanding its movement; for had the points of the compass been in any way altered, the sun and the moon would have risen or set in an entirely new direction, and Hobson, or Mr. Barnett, or certainly Thomas Black, would have noticed the change; but so far the movement of the island, though rapid, had not been felt, and it had followed a certain parallel of latitude.

Jasper Hobson, although he had no misgiving respecting the courage and endurance of his companions, did not wish to acquaint them with the actual state of affairs. It would be quite time enough to tell them all

about it when he had studied them thoroughly. Very fortunately all of his companions, whether soldiers or workmen, took little or no notice of his astronomical observations, and as they did not care for the latitude or longitude they could not have any suspicion of the anxiety which just then occupied Hobson's mind.

So the Lieutenant determined to hold his tongue, and to keep the secret, which it required all his energy to do. He even endeavoured to console Thomas Black, who was lamenting his disappointment and tearing his hair.

For the astronomer had not the slightest doubt of the cause of the phenomenon by which he had been victimised. Not having, like the Lieutenant, observed the peculiarities of the district, he could not understand the failure of his observations; nor did he care to look beyond the one object of his existence—the failure of the eclipse of the sun, which had not “come off” at the time named. So he only concluded that the almanac-makers, to their eternal shame, had made a great mistake, and that this eclipse, the peculiar property of Thomas Black, had not been total on the 70th degree as announced. It was almost impossible that an error could have been made, and he would not believe it—yet there was the fact! His disappointment was very great, but he would very soon learn the truth.

Hobson meanwhile said nothing to his men, and they proceeded about their usual occupations. But just as they were leaving the summit of the cape to return to

the Factory, Corporal Joliffe came up, and touching his hat, said :

“I beg your pardon, sir, but may I ask you a question ?”

“Certainly, Corporal,” Hobson replied. “What is it ?”

However, Joliffe hesitated ; he did not speak until his wife nudged his elbow.

“Well, sir, it is about that 70th degree of latitude. If I do not mistake, we are not where you thought we were.”

The Lieutenant frowned.

“In fact,” he replied evasively, “we made a mistake in our calculation, we are a little out of our reckoning ; but what can that matter to you ?”

“Well, it is this way, sir, it’s the pay ; you know the Company promised us double pay.”

Hobson breathed freely. The men had been promised double pay if they succeeded in establishing a fort on the 70th degree north latitude or higher, and Joliffe, who was always wide awake, had looked upon the whole thing as a question of pay, and was afraid he would not get his extra money.

“You may make your mind quite easy on that point,” replied Hobson smiling, “and you can tell all the men so. Our mistake, which is inexplicable, will not in any way prejudice your interests. We are above, and not below, the 70th parallel, so you will be certain to get your double pay.”

“Thank you, sir,” replied the Corporal, who brightened up immediately. “It is not the money as we sticks to, but the money as sticks to us.”

With this very profound aphorism, Corporal Joliffe retired with his men, little thinking that such a great and terrible change had come over their position.

Sergeant Long was about to descend to the Fort with the others, but Hobson stopped him. He turned on his heel and waited for orders.

Everybody had now left the summit of the cape except Mrs. Barnett, Madge, Thomas Black, Hobson, and Long.

Since the eclipse Mrs. Barnett had not spoken a word. She looked at Hobson inquiringly, but he avoided her glance. She seemed rather more astonished than anxious, and it was doubtful whether she actually comprehended the full extent of the calamity as Hobson did. However, she leant against her faithful attendant, who supported her round the waist.

The astronomer paced backwards and forwards, and could not keep quiet. His hair was dishevelled, and he gesticulated wildly, now striking his hands together violently, and now letting them drop listlessly to his sides. He shook his fist at the sun, staring at it all the time, to the imminent injury of his eyes.

At length he grew somewhat calmer, he was able to speak coherently, and, with folded arms and flashing eyes, he strode angrily up to the Lieutenant.

“I have a crow to pluck with you, Mr. Agent of the Hudson’s Bay Company.”

This appellation, and the tone of his address, looked very like a challenge; but Hobson did not wish to regard it in that light, for he quite felt for the poor man in his great disappointment, and made no reply.

“Mr. Hobson,” continued the astronomer, with ill-concealed irritation, “will you tell me what is the meaning of all this? Is it your fault? In any case, you have struck at people higher than I—do you understand?—and you will live to repent your conduct.”

“What do you mean?” asked Hobson quietly.

“I mean, sir, that you have engaged to lead your detachment to the 70th degree of latitude.”

“Or beyond it,” replied Hobson.

“Beyond it!” exclaimed the astronomer. “What is that to me? To observe the eclipse, I should have been stationed actually upon the 70th parallel, and now we are three degrees farther north.”

“Well,” replied Hobson, in the same calm tone, “we are mistaken, that’s all.”

“Oh, is that all?” retorted the astronomer, who was fast losing his temper at the Lieutenant’s calmness.

“I would just remind you, Mr. Black, that you are as much to blame as anyone. On our arrival at Cape Bathurst we took the latitude together—you with your own instruments, I with mine. You cannot, then, hold

me responsible for an error to which you are equally committed."

Thomas Black was quite taken aback by this reply, and, in spite of his irritation, he could not answer. What excuse had he got? If anyone had made a mistake, he had; and in Europe what would they think of an astronomer who had made such an error? The idea of Thomas Black making a mistake of three degrees in the sun's altitude—and under what circumstances too! Thomas Black was dishonoured for ever.

"But how *could* I make such a mistake?" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that I do not know how to handle a sextant, or to calculate an angle? Am I blind? Under these circumstances, I suppose I had better throw myself over the cliff."

"Mr. Black," said Hobson quietly, "you need not accuse yourself; you have made no mistake."

"Ah, then it is only you who——"

"I am no more to blame than yourself. Just listen to me, all of you; but you must promise to keep secret what I am about to disclose. There is no use in frightening our associates."

They all drew near the Lieutenant; no one spoke, but there was a tacit agreement to keep the secret he was about to impart.

"My friends," said Hobson, "when, a year ago, we reached this point of British America, we found that Cape Bathurst was situated exactly on the 70th parallel;

and if we are now nearly three degrees farther north, it is because we have drifted thither."

"Drifted!" exclaimed Thomas Black. "Do not talk such nonsense to me! When was a cape ever known to drift?"

"It is true, for all that, Mr. Black," replied Hobson gravely. "The whole of this (former) peninsula is now an island, a raft of ice. It was separated from the continent by the late earthquake, and it is now drifting with an arctic current."

"Where to?" asked Sergeant Long.

"God only knows!" replied the Lieutenant solemnly.

The whole party remained silent for some time. They looked towards the south involuntarily, but they could perceive nothing but sea. If Cape Bathurst had been a few hundred feet higher, they would have been able to ascertain the extent of their floating island.

All were much impressed at the thought that Fort Hope and its inhabitants were drifting hither and thither at the mercy of the wind and sea.

"So this explains all the curious anomalies of our position," said Mrs. Barnett.

"Yes, madam," replied the Lieutenant. "This peninsula of Victoria, now an island, is only an ice-raft; though for centuries it has been welded to the American continent. By degrees it has become covered with earth and sand; seeds have been dropped, and have

germinated ; trees and grass have sprung up ; the clouds have formed the lake and the river. Vegetation quite transformed its appearance. But beneath the lake and under the ground—ay, under our very feet—there is nothing but a sheet of ice, which, being lighter than water, floats easily upon it. That is the reason why we have not found a single stone on the surface. That is why the shores are perpendicular. That is why we found ice ten feet down when we dug the reindeer-trap. That is why, in short, there was no tide observable, since the island rose and fell with the flux and reflux of the sea.”

“ Everything is now quite clear,” replied Mrs. Barnett, “ and your presentiments are not without foundation. But I should like to know why we did perceive some tide when we first came to Cape Bathurst.”

“ Because, madam, at that time the peninsula had not been disconnected from the continent. It opposed a certain resistance to the tide, and on the north shore there was a rise and fall of about two feet, instead of twenty, as might have been expected. So when the earthquake cut us adrift, our island rose and fell with the tide ; and as we saw the other day, there was a difference even at the full moon.”

Thomas Black, notwithstanding his not unnatural indignation, was much interested by Hobson’s explanation. Although his reasoning appeared quite logical, the astronomer was furious that such an absurd

and unexpected phenomenon had caused him to lose the eclipse. So he preserved a strict silence.

“Poor Mr. Black!” said Mrs. Barnett, “it must be confessed that never has an astronomer been so badly treated as you have been.”

“In any case,” replied Hobson, “it is no fault of ours. It is nature that is to blame. The earthquake made our peninsula an island; and this quite explains why the animals which were thus imprisoned in our neighbourhood have become so very numerous.”

“And this is the reason,” said Madge, “why those rivals of yours, Mr. Hobson, did not put in an appearance, notwithstanding the fine weather.”

“And,” added the Sergeant, “this is why the convoy has not arrived from Cape Bathurst.”

“And also,” continued Mrs. Barnett, “it is the reason why I must give up all hope of returning to Europe, this year at least.”

The tone in which the lady made this last remark indicated that she had resigned herself philosophically to the inevitable. She appeared to have made up her mind on the subject, and promised herself, no doubt, a series of interesting observations. Besides, what would have been the use of complaining? They could not alter the fact, nor stop the floating island, nor could they re-attach it to the main-land. Providence alone could decide the future of Fort Hope and its inhabitants. They must submit to the divine will.

CHAPTER II.

WHERE CAN WE BE?

IT was necessary to study very carefully the peculiar situation in which the agents of the Company were now placed; and Jasper Hobson, map in hand, proceeded to do so. But he found he must wait till the next day to ascertain the longitude of Victoria Island—for it still preserved the original name. To make this calculation, it was necessary to find the altitude of the sun, both before and after noon, and to measure the hour angles.

At two o'clock in the afternoon Hobson and Black took the sun's altitude, and they hoped to repeat the operation about ten o'clock the next morning. From these observations they would be able to determine the position the island occupied in the Arctic Ocean.

But they did not return to the fort immediately. They all continued in conversation on the promontory for some time. Madge said she had made up her mind to accept the will of Providence, but she could not look on her dear Paulina without emotion, for she anticipated sufferings and trials for her. Madge was

ready to lay down her life for Paulina, but such a devotion was useless under the circumstances. Mrs. Barnett was not a woman to give way to trouble. She possessed a wise and brave spirit; and, indeed, to tell the truth, there was no reason why anyone should despair, for, as a matter of fact, there was no immediate danger; and all hoped that the catastrophe might eventually be avoided, as Jasper Hobson clearly explained.

They were only threatened by two dangers—either the island would be carried by the currents to high latitudes, whence they could never return; or they would be carried to the south, perhaps through Behring Straits, to the Pacific Ocean.

In the former case, the colonists, enclosed by ice, would have no possible communication with their fellow-creatures, and would die of cold and hunger. In the second contingency, Victoria Island, carried into the Pacific, would melt by degrees, and subside under the feet of its inhabitants. In either case death stared them in the face, and Jasper Hobson, his companions, and the Fort they had erected with so much care and trouble, would sink beneath the waves.

On the other hand, it was not probable that either of these contingencies would occur. The season was now well advanced, and in less than three months the sea would again be frozen, when, by means of sledges, they might all gain the nearest continent. It might be

Russian America, if the island stayed in the east, or perhaps the coast of Asia, if it were carried to the westward.

“We have no control whatever over our floating island,” said Hobson, in conclusion. “We have no sails to guide it, so we must drift helplessly with it.”

Hobson’s arguments admitted of no dispute. It was certain that the great cold would anchor the island of Victoria to the ice when winter arrived; and most likely it would not drift far either north or south. To cross a few hundred miles of ice, more or less, was not a very terrible prospect for such men as they were, so well seasoned to Arctic winters. It would, of course, be necessary to abandon Fort Hope, the object of so much care and trouble, and they would, of course, have to lose the benefit of their work; but what did that matter? The factory having been built on a shifting foundation, could be of no possible use to the Hudson’s Bay Company, and sooner or later it would be swallowed up by the sea; so it was evidently only their duty to abandon it as quickly as possible.

There was only one unfavourable chance, and that was that, during the eight or nine weeks before the sea froze, they might drift too far to the north or south. Arctic explorers often had related instances of this, and Hobson dwelt upon it very much.

Thus it will be seen that everything depended on the unknown currents from Behring Strait, and it would

be necessary to find out their direction on the map. Fortunately Hobson had one with him, and he requested Mrs. Barnett and the others to join him in his private room for consultation ; but he once again imposed strict silence upon them as to their position.

“The situation is not desperate, as far as I can see,” he said ; “so it is no use troubling our companions, and useless to damp their ardour ; for they may not be able to understand, as we do, our chances of escape.”

“Nevertheless, would it not be prudent to build a large boat as soon as possible?” said Mrs. Barnett ; “we might cross a few hundred miles of sea in such an one.”

“It certainly would be advisable, and we will do it ; and I must find some excuse for ordering the commencement of the work. But I fancy we need only resort to such means of escape as a last resource. There are two important things, viz. : we must not be on the island when the ice breaks up, and we must endeavour to gain the continent on foot as soon as the ocean freezes.

And this was really the true view of the position. It could not take less than three months to build a boat such as Mrs. Barnett had suggested, and by that time it would be no use, as the sea would be frozen ; but if the Lieutenant could guide the party to the continent, that would be a very fortunate termination of their experience, for to embark his people when the thaw was setting in was very dangerous. No wonder Hobson looked upon

the boat as a forlorn hope, and that everybody agreed with him.

All present promised secrecy, for they recognised Hobson as their leader ; and shortly afterwards the two women and three men were eagerly poring over an excellent map of the atmospheric and oceanic currents, which the Lieutenant placed before them, and they examined minutely that portion of the Polar Sea between Cape Bathurst and Behring's Strait.

Two principal currents divide the dangerous portion of the sea between the Polar Circle and the North-West Passage, as it was called by the brave discoverer M'Clure ; at least, only two have been placed on the maps.

One of these currents is called the Kamtchatka current. It commences beyond the peninsula of the same name, and following the coast of Asia, passes through Behring's Strait to Cape East, an advanced point of Siberia. Its general direction from south to north is about 600 miles ; and it then turns suddenly to the east, following the same parallel as the North-West Passage, which it probably tends to keep open in the warm season.

The other current is called the Behring, and goes in the other direction. After running parallel with, and about 100 miles distant from, the American coast, it collides with the Kamtchatka at the mouth of the strait, and descending to the south, it approaches the coast of Russian America. It finishes by crossing the Behring

Sea, and exhausts itself upon that circular dam formed by the Atlantic Islands.

This map gave a very exact *résumé* of recent nautical discoveries. There could be no mistake about it.

Jasper Hobson examined it attentively, and then, passing his hand across his eyes, as if to banish some unpleasant presentiment, he said :

“We must only hope that fate will not draw us into such distant latitudes ; if so, our island might never return.”

“Why so ?” asked Mrs. Barnett quickly.

“Because there are two currents running opposite ways, either of which is very dangerous. Where they meet, our island will necessarily become stationary, and in this very spot we should have to pass the winter ; and when the next thaw set in we should either have to follow the Kamtchatka currents to the desolate countries of the north-west, or float down on the Behring currents, and melt away in the depths of the Pacific Ocean.”

“That will never happen,” said Madge seriously. “Heaven would not permit such a thing.”

“But,” resumed Mrs. Barnett, “I cannot quite make out our present position. I can only see the Kamtchatka current outside Cape Barnett. Do you not think it has already got us in its clutches and is carrying us towards North Georgia ?”

“I do not think so,” replied Hobson, after reflecting a moment.

“Why?”

“Because that is a very rapid current, madam, and if we had followed it for three months we should have come in sight of land by this time.”

“Then where do you think we are?”

“I have very little doubt that we are between the Kamtchatka current and the shore—perhaps in some enormous eddy.”

“I do not think that is likely,” replied Mrs. Barnett.

“Why not?” said Hobson in his turn.

“Because, if we were in an eddy, the island would move about more or less, and the points of the compass would have relatively changed in these three months, but they have not done so.”

“You are quite right, madam; you have evidently grasped the situation, and the only explanation I can give is, that there is some other current that is not marked on the map. This uncertainty has become terrible. I wish to-morrow were here, so that we could find out exactly where we are.”

“To-morrow will soon be here,” replied Madge.

There was nothing for it but patience. The party broke up, and each one sought his usual occupation. Sergeant Long told his companions that the expedition to Fort Reliance was postponed, and he gave as a reason that, after mature consideration, it had been decided that the season was too far advanced, and the astronomer

wished to complete his observations, and would submit to another winter in those latitudes, that the revictualling of Fort Hope was not indispensable, and other similar excuses.

But the soldiers did not trouble their heads about these things in the least.

Lieutenant Hobson gave special directions that no furred animals were to be killed in future, only those which could be eaten were to be slaughtered. He also forbade his men to go more than two miles from the fort, for he was not willing that any of the hunters should suddenly discover the open sea where the peninsula was formerly visible. Such a discovery would have betrayed everything.

The day appeared interminable to Hobson; he frequently returned to the summit of Cape Bathurst, either alone or with Mrs. Barnett, who was not the least afraid. She even quizzed the Lieutenant about this wandering island, and suggested that perhaps it was the proper way to reach the North Pole; with a favourable current they might yet attain it.

Hobson shook his head as this theory was broached; but he watched the horizon, attentively seeking for indications of land, whether known or unknown mattered little. But none met his gaze, and his view was confirmed, namely, that Victoria Island was drifting westward.

“Mr. Hobson, do you intend to make a tour of the island?” asked Mrs. Barnett.

"Most decidedly, madam, as soon as I have found out where we are. I intend to ascertain the shape and extent of our dwelling-place. It is almost indispensable to do so, so as to appreciate the change that has been made. It seems to me that the whole peninsula has become an island, and that the rupture took place at the isthmus."

"Ours is a strange fate, Mr. Hobson; other travellers return to add new lands to the continent, but we shall have to erase from the map the reputed peninsula of Victoria."

Next day, the 18th July, at ten o'clock in the morning, Jasper Hobson was enabled to take a very satisfactory observation of the sun's altitude. By working this out with the observation of the previous day he found out exactly where they were.

During the operation the astronomer did not put in an appearance. He was sulking in his room like a spoilt child. On that day the island was in 157 deg. 37 min. W.

The latitude obtained the day before was, as we know, 73 deg. 7 min. 20 sec. N.

This spot was looked out upon the map, with the following result :

It appeared that the island was moving in a westerly direction by an unknown current, which was carrying it towards Behring's Strait; so the dangers anticipated by Hobson were much to be feared if Victoria Island did

not reach some point of the main-land before winter set in.

“But what is our exact distance from the American continent?” said Mrs. Barnett. “That is the important question just now.”

Jasper Hobson took his compasses, and measured the narrowest portion of the sea on the map between the coast and the 70th parallel.

“We are actually more than two hundred and fifty miles from the nearest point of North America.”

“We then ought to know how far we have drifted,” said Sergeant Long.

“At least seven hundred miles,” said Hobson, after consulting the chart.

“And when do you think the drifting commenced?”

“About the end of April, for at that time the ice began to break up; we may consequently conclude that Victoria Island has been carried along parallel with the coast westward for about three months, at the rate of about nine or ten miles a day.”

“But is that so very quick?” asked Mrs. Barnett.

“It is in fact,” replied Hobson, “when you consider how far we may yet be carried in the next two months while the sea will remain open.”

After this reply they were all silent. They could not take their eyes from the map of the Polar regions, which have defended themselves so obstinately from the in-

ursions of the human race, and to which this little band were now being irresistibly impelled.

“So there is nothing more to be done?” said Mrs. Barnett.

“Nothing whatever,” said Hobson. “We can only wait, and pray with all our hearts for the Arctic winter, generally, and very rightly, so dreaded by sailors. It alone can save us. The winter will bring the ice, and the ice is our only sheet-anchor—the only one, in fact, which can arrest the march of this wandering island.”

CHAPTER III.

THE TOUR OF THE ISLAND.

FROM that day it was decided that the situation of their floating island should be taken, as on board ship, whenever the state of the atmosphere would permit. Indeed, this isle of Victoria was really a disabled ship, being tossed about without sails or helm.

The next day, after taking the bearings, Jasper Hobson found out that the island had changed direction, and had moved several miles more to the west. Orders were given to MacNab, the carpenter, to make a large boat. Jasper Hobson's reason for this was that he wished to make a survey of the coast the following summer. The carpenter asked no inconvenient questions; he immediately set about to choose the wood, and selected as his dockyard the beach situated at the foot of Cape Bathurst, so that he might be able to launch his vessel easily.

That very day Hobson had intended to execute a project which he had formed, viz. to make a reconnaissance of the island on which he and his friends were imprisoned. Considerable changes might be expected

to take place in this mass of ice, now so exposed to the varying temperature of the water; besides, it was important that he should determine its form, thickness, and extent. The line of separation, which was most likely at the isthmus, ought to be very carefully examined; and as the fracture was quite new, perhaps they might be able to ascertain the strata of ice and earth which composed the soil of the island.

But the atmosphere that afternoon became suddenly thick, and a breeze arose, accompanied by mists. The rain soon fell in torrents, hailstones soon began to patter on the roof of the house, and even some peals of distant thunder were heard—a very rare phenomenon in those latitudes.

So the Lieutenant was obliged to postpone his excursion and to wait till the weather cleared. But for the next three days—namely, the 20th, 21st, and 22nd of July—no change took place; the storm raged, the rain fell, and the waves dashed upon the shore with a tremendous violence. Liquid avalanches were hurled against Cape Bathurst, and with such force that those in the secret feared it might give way. Indeed, there was some reason for the apprehension, as the cape was merely a mound of sand and earth on no substantial basis. Any ships at sea in such a tempest were to be pitied, but the wandering island was too large to feel the effects of the storm.

During the night of the 22nd of July the gale

suddenly broke. A strong north-east wind chased the mists away. The barometer rose a little, and things looked favourable for Hobson's projected excursion.

Mrs. Barnett and Sergeant Long were to accompany him on this expedition, which was expected to last a couple of days only, so as not to astonish the other inhabitants. They took with them some salt meat and biscuits and some flasks of rum. The days were very long, for the sun was absent but a few hours.

They had no fear of meeting any wild animals. The bears seemed to have disappeared by instinct; nevertheless each one of the party carried a gun as a matter of precaution. The Lieutenant and Sergeant Long carried hatchets and ice-axes as usual besides.

During his absence Hobson made over the command of the fort to Corporal Joliffe, or rather to his little wife, for Hobson knew he could depend upon her. It was no use to put Thomas Black in command—he would not even join the explorers; but the astronomer undertook to watch the northern districts very carefully, and to note any changes either in the sea or in the movement of the island while the party were absent.

Mrs. Barnett had tried to reason with the poor *savant*, but he would not attend to her. He thought, not without reason, that he had been mystified by Dame Nature, and he would never forgive her for the deception she had practised.

After many hearty shakes of the hand, Mrs. Barnett

and her two companions quitted the fort, and started in a westerly direction. They followed the length and curve of the shore, which extended between Cape Bathurst and Cape Esquimaux.

It was eight o'clock in the morning ; the sun's rays fell obliquely on the coast, and touched it with many sparkling colours. The sea was going down fast, and the ptarmigan, guillemots, puffins, and petrels, which had been driven away by the storm, were returning by thousands. Flocks of ducks, hastening back to Lake Barnett, were coming very near Mr. Joliffe's cooking-pot, although they were not aware of it. Numerous polar hares, musk-rats, and ermines, rose up in front of the travellers and fled away, but not in great haste. The animals evidently were more inclined to seek man's society in the presence of the common danger.

"They know very well that we are surrounded by water, and they cannot get away," said Hobson.

"All these animals are in the habit of seeking warmer climates in winter, are they not?" inquired Mrs. Barnett.

"Yes," replied Hobson ; "but as this time they cannot cross the ice-fields ; they must remain with us ; and it is to be feared that during the winter the greater number will die of cold or hunger."

"I am glad to think that these animals will serve us for food for a long time," said the Sergeant ; "it is a very fortunate thing for us that their instinct did not cause them to run away before we broke adrift."

“I suppose the birds will abandon us?” said Mrs. Barnett.

“Yes, madam; anything with wings is sure to go as soon as the cold commences. Birds can traverse immense distances without fatigue, and, more lucky than we, will be able to reach the main-land.”

“Well, why can we not use them as messengers?”

“That is a good idea, madam, an excellent idea,” said Hobson; “there is nothing to prevent us from catching a few hundreds of these birds and attaching papers to their necks, giving the particulars of our situation. John Ross, in 1848, used a similar method to make known the presence of his ships—the *Enterprise* and *Investigator*—to the survivors of the Franklin expedition. He caught a number of white foxes, placed copper collars round their necks, with the necessary information inscribed on them, and let the animals loose in all directions.”

“Perhaps the shipwrecked people may have caught some of these messengers,” said Mrs. Barnett.

“Perhaps so,” replied Hobson; “in any case, however, I remember that one of these foxes, then very aged, was caught by Captain Hatteras during his voyage of discovery, and the animal was then wearing a half-worn collar, almost entirely concealed in his thick white fur. As we cannot make use of quadrupeds, we will try what we can do with the birds.”

Chatting thus, and forming projects for the future, the

three friends followed the line of the coast; but no change was observable, and there was nothing whatever to show that the extent of the island had in any way been diminished. But it was not unlikely that the enormous mass of floating ice would be melted by the warm sea currents, and on this account Hobson was naturally very anxious.

By eleven o'clock the adventurers had crossed the eight miles which divided Cape Bathurst from Cape Esquimaux. They found some few traces of the encampment of Kalumah's tribe; the snow huts had melted, but some cinders and walrus-bones showed where the huts had been placed.

Here the three friends halted. They intended to pass the few hours of night at Morse Bay, which they would reach before long. They breakfasted, seated on a small mound, which was clothed with a scanty herbage. As far as they could see the ocean extended in all directions. There was not a sail or an iceberg to break the line of the horizon.

"Would you be very much surprised, Mr. Hobson, if a vessel were to come in sight?"

"I should not be very much, but very agreeably surprised," he replied. "During the summer it is no uncommon thing for whalers to come into these latitudes; but it is now the 23rd July, and the season is far advanced, all the fishing fleet is probably in Kotzebue Gulf, at the entrance of Behring's Strait. Whalers are afraid of

the changes in the Arctic Ocean, and I do not blame them. They dread the ice, and fear to be shut in by it; but the very thing that they object to we most earnestly wish for."

"It will turn out all right, sir," replied Sergeant Long; "let us have patience. A couple of months hence the waves will not be beating on Cape Esquimaux."

"Cape Esquimaux!" echoed Mrs. Barnett, smiling. "This name, like others we bestowed upon points of our peninsula, may turn out unfortunate. We have already lost Cape Barnett and Paulina River. Who knows if Cape Esquimaux and Morse Bay may not disappear in their turn?"

"They will disappear," replied Hobson, "and by degrees the whole of Victoria Island will follow—for it is no longer connected with the continent, and must melt away. That result is inevitable, and our geographical nomenclature has been useless. Fortunately the names have not yet been adopted by the Geographical Society, and there will be nothing to erase from the maps."

"There will be one name to strike out," said the Sergeant.

"Which one?" asked Hobson.

"Cape Bathurst," replied Long.

"Indeed you are right, Sergeant. Cape Bathurst must be removed from Polar cartography."

Two hours sufficed for rest, and at one o'clock the travellers continued their journey.

Just as they were leaving, Hobson took a last fond look from the top of Cape Esquimaux, but seeing nothing to attract his attention, he descended and joined his companions.

“Mrs. Barnett,” he said, “have you forgotten the family of Esquimaux whom we met here last winter?”

“No, Mr. Hobson, I have often thought of little Kalumah; she promised to come and see us at Fort Hope; but she will not be able to perform her promise. Why do you ask?”

“Because something has just occurred to me which I am sorry I did not attach more importance to at the time.”

“What is that?”

“You remember how astonished and how uneasy the Esquimaux appeared when they heard that we had founded a factory at the foot of Cape Bathurst.”

“Perfectly, Mr. Hobson.”

“You also remember that I could not make out what they meant, though I tried very hard to do so.”

“Yes; well?”

“Well,” said Hobson, “now I know why they shook their heads so wisely. Those fellows knew either by tradition or from experience what the origin and nature of the peninsula is. They knew that we had not built upon solid ground. But no doubt, as things had probably remained in that state for centuries, they did not believe there was any immediate danger, and

that is why they did not explain themselves more clearly."

"That may be, Mr. Hobson," replied Mrs. Barnett, "but it is certain that Kalumah did not know of her friends' suspicions. If she had, I am sure she would have told us."

The Lieutenant agreed with Mrs. Barnett on this point.

"It must be confessed," said the Sergeant, after a pause, "that it is very unfortunate that we should have settled ourselves on the peninsula just at the very time when it was about to be detached; for I suppose it had been joined to the main-land for centuries."

"You may say for thousands and thousands of years, Sergeant Long," replied Hobson. "Just consider that the earth we are treading on has been brought hither as dust by the wind, that the sand has accumulated grain by grain. Think of the years it must have taken for the seeds to have grown up into firs, willows, and arbutus. Perhaps this mass of ice which now sustains us was formed and welded to the continent even before the creation."

"Well then," replied the Sergeant, "I think it might as well have remained fixed a few centuries longer while it was about it. It would have saved us a world of danger and trouble."

This very just reflection of Sergeant Long terminated the conversation, and they resumed their journey.

From Cape Esquimaux to Morse Bay the coast ran due north and south along the 127th meridian. Looking back the travellers could perceive, four or five miles distant, the pointed extremity of the lake sparkling in the sun, and a little farther off the wooded heights surrounding the lake. Some large eagles now soared overhead, and numerous fur-bearing animals, such as martens, polecats, and ermines, crouched down and gazed at the travellers from amongst the bushes. They seemed to understand they had no guns to fear. There were a few beavers wandering about, evidently very unhappy at the disappearance of the little river. Without huts to shelter them, and without water to construct their village, the poor animals were doomed to die of hunger as soon as the frost set in. Sergeant Long also caught sight of a band of wolves.

It was very evident that specimens of all the Polar animals were imprisoned in the island; and it was not unlikely that when winter set in the carnivorous animals would become very formidable to the inhabitants of Fort Hope.

However, it was a matter of congratulation that there were no white bears. On one occasion the Sergeant fancied that he saw a moving white mass behind a clump of bushes, but on investigation he was found to have been mistaken.

The part of the coast by Walrus Bay was very little above the sea-level; and waves broke upon it as they

would do upon a gently sloping beach. It was to be feared that this portion of the island was not very stable; but as no landmarks had been made, Hobson was unable to determine whether any subsidence had taken place. He determined, however, to take this precaution on his return.

It will readily be understood that from the mode of progression and investigation the party did not advance rapidly. They often stopped to examine the coast, and sometimes wandered inland. In places the Sergeant planted branches of trees as landmarks, and by these means they hoped to ascertain the changes which took place.

But they made some progress nevertheless, and about 3 P.M. they were about three miles from Morse Bay; and then Hobson called attention to the great change which the breaking away of the island had caused.

Formerly the south-west horizon had been shut in by a long line of slightly curved coast, forming Liverpool Bay, now the sea bounded the horizon. Victoria Island ended in an abrupt angle; and they all felt that, once they reached that angle, the ocean alone would meet their gaze, and what was once the southern side of the island would now be the sea-shore.

Mrs. Barnett could not contemplate the change without emotion. Though she had expected it, her heart beat very fast, her eyes vainly sought the missing continent which was now two hundred miles away,

and she experienced the presentiment that she would never set foot on the American continent again. Hobson and the Sergeant quite sympathised with her emotion.

They all hurried forward to reach the south point. The ground rose a little in that direction. The earth and sand were thicker, which the proximity of this portion of the island to the mainland would fully account for. The thickness of this icy crust, which increased every century, would explain how the isthmus had resisted so long, and that nothing short of volcanic rupture could have broken it away. The earthquake of the 8th of January had only affected the American continent, but the concussion had been sufficient to detach the peninsula, which was now an island given over to all the caprices of the ocean.

At length, at four o'clock, they reached the angle; Morse Bay was no longer visible; it had remained attached to the continent.

"Upon my word, madam," said Sergeant Long gravely, "it is fortunate for you that we did not call it Pauline Barnett Bay."

"Indeed," replied Mrs. Barnett; "I begin to think that I am an unlucky godmother for geographical nomenclature."

CHAPTER IV.

A NIGHT ENCAMPMENT.

So Hobson was right. The isthmus had given way to the earthquake. No trace of the American continent was visible, not even a cliff or a volcano. The sea alone met the eyes of the colonists.

The angle formed at the south-east of the island by the detachment of the ice was now sharpened to a point which was evidently due to the action of the warmer water of the sea, which must shortly dissolve it.

The travellers resumed their march, following out the line of fracture, which was almost straight, and ran from west to east. The fracture itself was "clean;" there were no ragged edges. One could easily observe the conformation of the soil. The beach—half ice, half sandy earth—rose about ten feet from the sea in a perpendicular line; but there were some traces of former landslips. Sergeant Long indicated some small lumps of ice, which had evidently been broken off from the main block, and were now fast melting in the sea. They felt that the waves would soon wear away the icy coastline, which had not yet been covered with sand or earth

like the rest of the beach ; so the prospect was not very assuring.

The party, before taking any rest, wished to finish their survey of the southern part of the island. The sun would not set till eleven o'clock at night, so there was plenty of daylight before them. The brilliant orb threw long shadows in front of them. At times their conversation flagged, and they paused to gaze upon the sea and contemplate the future.

Jasper Hobson's intention was to camp at Washburn Bay for the night, where they would have made about eighteen miles from home, or, if their calculations were correct, about half their journey would be accomplished. After a few hours' rest, he hoped to return to Fort Hope by the western shore.

No incident marked the rest of the journey for that day, and at seven o'clock they reached their camping-ground. The same forces had been at work here as on the other side. Nothing remained of Washburn Bay but its northern boundary. The coast stretched away in a straight line to Cape Michael, as they called it, though this portion of the island did not seem to have suffered by the actual rupture of the isthmus. The pine and birch thickets were in full leaf at this time of the year, and a number of fur animals were visible on the plain.

Here the party halted, and though their view to north was limited, that to the south was perfectly open.

The sun was setting, and its rays were interrupted by the rise of the ground to the west, so they did not reach Washburn Bay. But night had not come—not even twilight, for the sun had not yet set.

“I wonder,” said Long, in a most serious manner, “I wonder if a bell were to ring just now, by some miracle, what it would ring for?”

“For supper, I should think,” replied Hobson. “Don’t you agree, Mrs. Barnett?”

“Decidedly,” she replied; “and as we have only to sit down, let us do so. Here is a tablecloth of moss—a little worn it is true, but evidently spread by Providence for our benefit.”

The provision-sack was opened. Some salt meat and hare pie from Mr. Joliffe’s larder was produced, with some biscuits for the supper.

In a quarter of an hour they had finished their meal. Hobson returned to the south-west angle of the island, Mrs. Barnett remained by the fir-trees, while Sergeant Long prepared the camp for the night.

Hobson was anxious to make an examination of the ice which formed the island. A small bank enabled him to descend to the level of the sea, and there he was in a position to observe the icy wall of the coast.

At this place the ground rose about three feet above the water. The upper part was composed of a thin layer of earth and sand, mixed with powdered shells; the

lower portion consisted of hard metallic ice, which supported the soil of the island.

This stratum of ice was only a foot above the sea-level. It was easy to see the stratification which divided the ice-field; the horizontal layers appeared to indicate that successive frosts had produced this disposition of the ice in more tranquil seas.

Freezing commences on the surface of water at rest, but in running water the contrary process is often observed, the congelation rising from the bottom to the top.

But there was no doubt that, in the case of Victoria Island, the ice had been formed in calm water. The freezing had commenced on the surface, so the melting would commence underneath. The ice would diminish in thickness and decrease in weight, and the island would sink by degrees.

This was the great danger.

Jasper Hobson had observed that the ice was only a foot above the sea. It is well known that four-fifths of an iceberg are always under water; one foot, therefore, is above the water for every four below it. However, we must mention that the density, or rather the specific gravity, of floating ice varies according to its formation or origin. Ice formed in sea water is lighter than that formed in fresh water, so the surface is higher above the ocean. Now it is certain that the base of Victoria Island had been formed of sea water, and, all things considered,

Hobson was obliged to come to the conclusion, after making proper allowance for the weight of earth and sand upon the island, that it was about from four to five feet thick under water.

This decision made Hobson very anxious. Only five feet! But without reckoning the causes of dissolution to which the ice was liable, even a shock might cause a rupture, a rough sea or a storm might dislocate it, and complete its demolition. Ah, if the winter, with its cold even so great as to freeze the mercury, were here, he would be glad. Only the Polar winter would be able to consolidate their island, and to establish communication between it and the continent.

The Lieutenant returned to the camping-ground. Sergeant Long was busy arranging the sleeping-places, for he had no intention of passing the night in the open air, although Mrs. Barnett had expressed her willingness to do so. The Sergeant told the Lieutenant that he was going to dig a hole in the ice large enough to contain them all—a kind of snow house, which would preserve them from the cold of the night.

“In the country of the Esquimaux we must do as the Esquimaux do,” he said.

Hobson approved, but recommended the Sergeant not to dig too deep, as the ice was only five feet thick.

Sergeant Long set to work. He soon cleared away the earth with his hatchet, and he hollowed out a gently sloping place to the ice, which he then attacked, notwith-

standing that it had been covered for so many centuries. It would not take him more than an hour to hollow out his subterranean retreat, and between the ice walls the heat would be retained during the few hours of darkness.

While Sergeant Long was working like a termite, Lieutenant Hobson rejoined Mrs. Barnett, and communicated to her the result of his observations. He did not disguise from her his anxiety. The want of thickness of the ice, he thought, would very soon induce cracks on the surface—fissures impossible to foresee, and therefore to prevent. The wandering island might at any moment become immersed by a change in its specific gravity, or break up into a number of small islands, the existence of which would be ephemeral ; he therefore decided that it would be best for all the party not to leave the fort, so that they might all have the same chances of safety.

Hobson was in the midst of this explanation when loud cries were heard.

He and Mrs. Barnett both started to their feet, looked in every direction, but could see nothing.

Meantime the cries continued more loudly.

“The Sergeant ! the Sergeant !” exclaimed Hobson ; and he rushed towards the camping-ground, followed by Mrs. Barnett.

They had scarcely reached the opening of this snow house when he perceived Sergeant Long, holding tightly with both hands to his knife which he had stuck into the

wall of ice, and calling out loudly but with great coolness for assistance.

Only his head and arms could be seen ; while he had been digging the ice had given way, and he had fallen into the water up to his waist !

“ Hold hard ! ” cried Hobson. Then creeping along the groove, he quickly reached the hole, and extending his hand to the Sergeant, soon pulled him out of danger.

“ Good heavens, Sergeant Long,” cried Mrs. Barnett, “ what has happened ? ”

“ The fact is, madam,” said Long, shaking himself like a water-spaniel, “ the ice fell out, and I fell in.”

“ So then,” said Hobson, “ you forgot what I told you about not digging too deeply.”

“ Excuse me, sir, you can see for yourself that I have cut only fifteen inches deep. I think there is a sort of hollow in it. The ice does not rest upon the water. It was like going through a ceiling ; if I had not caught tight hold by my knife I should have gone under the island like a fool, and that would have been a pity, madam, wouldn't it ? ”

“ A very great pity indeed, Sergeant,” replied Mrs. Barnett, as she shook him by his hand.

The explanation given by the Sergeant was quite correct. In that particular spot the ice, from some cause or other—most likely from a deposit of air—had formed a sort of hollow or vault above the water, and the thin

crust had naturally given way under the Sergeant's weight, supplemented by the blows of his ice-axe.

It was not a very comfortable reflection to think that a similar thing might occur at any point of the island ; one could now never be certain of a secure footing anywhere. The soil might give way at any moment, and when they considered that nothing but a thin crust of ice separated them from the fathomless ocean, no wonder the hearts of our brave explorers beat painfully.

However, Sergeant Long made no fuss about his immersion, and was quite willing to begin to dig in some other spot. But this time Mrs. Barnett would not permit it. A night in the open air would not hurt her. The shelter of the neighbouring wood would be sufficient for them, and she decidedly objected to Sergeant Long's digging any more ; so they were obliged to obey.

Their camping-ground was then changed to a place about a hundred yards farther inland, to a rising ground on which grew a few clumps of trees not worthy to be called a wood. A small fire of dead branches was lighted about ten o'clock, for at that time the sun was beginning to set.

Sergeant Long took advantage of the fire to dry his clothes. Jasper Hobson and he talked until twilight began. Mrs. Barnett joined in the conversation from time to time, and did all she could to cheer the Lieutenant. The night was lovely and starlight, and its influence was sufficient to calm the most troubled mind.

The wind murmured softly through the pines, the sea seemed to be sleeping on the shore. A gentle breathing seemed to move the surface of the ocean, and the swell broke almost noiselessly upon the beach. There was not a sound in the air, the crackling of the branches had died away, the flames rose up steadily, and except the murmur of the travellers' conversation not a sound broke the sublime stillness of the night.

"Who could possibly imagine," said Mrs. Barnett, "that we are actually floating on the surface of the ocean? Indeed I can hardly credit it myself. The sea appears perfectly motionless, and yet it is carrying us along irresistibly."

"Yes, madam," replied Hobson; "and I confess that if the floor were solid, if the keel of the boat were not sure sooner or later to give way, or the hull to break, I think I should quite enjoy floating about like this."

"I do not think there could be a more agreeable mode of locomotion," replied Mrs. Barnett; "we do not appear to be moving, though we are progressing at exactly the same speed as the current. Is it not like a balloon voyage in the air? Then what could be more pleasant than to travel thus, with one's house and garden, park, etc? A wandering island—I mean a real island with a solid base—would be really the most comfortable and most marvellous which one could imagine. Hanging gardens have been constructed they say. Why, then, cannot we have floating parks which would take us to

different parts of the globe? Their size would render them indifferent to the winds and waves; perhaps with a favourable breeze they might be navigated, with the assistance of immense sails; and then what miracles of vegetation might be wrought upon the passage from temperate to tropical zones? I can imagine that, with skilful pilots well acquainted with the currents, one might live always in perpetual spring."

Jasper Hobson could not help smiling at Mrs. Barnett's enthusiasm, she chatted so pleasantly and so easily. Her ideas and words flowed as smoothly as the current which carried the island along; and was she not right besides? There would be no reason to complain of the strange conveyance if one were sure that it would not founder at sea.

The night passed, and each one of the party snatched a little sleep. At daybreak they rose and made an excellent breakfast. The fire, relighted, warmed their limbs which had been chilled by the frost of night; and at six o'clock they resumed their journey.

The coast from Cape Michael to the former Port Barnett was almost eleven miles in a straight line from north to south, but offered no particular features. The shore was low and undulating. Sergeant Long, according to orders, made a few landmarks, so that any alteration of the soil might be at once perceived.

Hobson was naturally desirous to return to Cape Hope that evening, and Mrs. Barnett also wished to

rejoin her friends. So the party marched as quickly as possible, and by a short cut they reached the little promontory, which formerly sheltered Port Barnett, at midday.

From this spot to Fort Hope was about eight miles; and before four o'clock that afternoon they had travelled the distance, and were welcomed by Corporal Joliffe.

CHAPTER V.

FROM THE 25TH OF JULY TO THE 20TH OF AUGUST.

HOBSON'S first care was to learn from Thomas Black whether any change had taken place during his absence. Nothing had occurred ; but, as was subsequently ascertained, the island had drifted one degree farther south while retaining its westerly movement. It was then at the same elevation as Ice Cape in Georgia, and two hundred miles from the American coast. The rapidity of the current did not appear to be so great as in the eastern parts of the Arctic Ocean ; but the island continued to move, and, to Hobson's great distress, it advanced towards Behring Strait. It was now only the 24th of July, and at a moderate computation it would reach the Pacific in less than a month, when it would melt like a lump of sugar in a glass of water.

Mrs. Barnett told Madge the result of their expedition round the island ; explained to her the arrangement of the strata of earth and ice, the thickness of the latter ; told her of Sergeant Long's accident ; and, in fine, gave her all their reasons for their anticipation of the island breaking up.

However, complete confidence reigned in the factory ; not one of the soldiers had the slightest idea that Fort Hope was floating, or that the inhabitants were in hourly danger. They were all quite well ; the weather was fine ; the climate healthy and bracing. Men and women were equally in good spirits. The baby was progressing wonderfully, and was able to toddle about between the house and the palisade ; and Corporal Joliffe, who took great notice of him, was actually teaching him to hold a gun, and to go through some of the drill !

Ah ! if Mrs. Joliffe would only have given him such a son, what a soldier he would make of him ; but Heaven had hitherto refused such a blessing to the Joliffes.

All this time there was no want of occupation for the soldier. MacNab and his mates, Peterson, Belcher, Garry, Pond, and Hope, worked hard at the boat, a long and difficult job, and one likely to occupy them for some months. But as this boat could not be used until the ice melted the following summer, they did not neglect their duty to the fort in the meantime. Jasper Hobson maintained discipline as if there was nothing to fear, and persisted in keeping the men in ignorance of their situation. Many times this grave question had been discussed by him ; and what we may call his staff, Mrs. Barnett and Madge, did not agree with the Lieutenant on this point. They maintained that the men were brave and energetic, and would not yield to despair ; and in any case the shock of the intelligence would be more

rude when the danger was so close at hand that they could not possibly hide it. But nevertheless Hobson would not yield, and Sergeant Long supported him. Perhaps after all these two were right. They were both men of experience and knew the temperament of the soldiers.

So the work of victualling and strengthening the fort was continued. The palisade was repaired and raised in places, and now formed an excellent defence. MacNab even carried out a project which he had long contemplated; at the corners near the lake he constructed two little sentry-boxes, and Corporal Joliffe sighed for the moment when he should be able to relieve guard; and he approved of the military air they gave the fort.

The palisade finished, MacNab, recollecting the experience of last winter, built a new woodshed against the house, with a door in communication, so that no one need go out for fuel. On the left side of the house, opposite the woodshed, he constructed a large room for the soldiers' accommodation, and into which the camp-bed was now moved. This left the large hall free for its legitimate purposes of eating, drinking, or working. The three married couples were established in their private rooms near the other soldiers. A special storehouse for furs was also erected near the powder magazine, and this left the attic free for provision storage, and the roof and rafters were strengthened with iron clamps in a way to resist all aggression.

MacNab also intended to build a small wooden chapel. This had been included in Hobson's original plan, but its erection was postponed till the following summer.

With what care and interest would the Lieutenant formerly have watched the growth of his establishment if it had only been built on *terra firma*; with what delight and pleasure he would have watched the building of the sheds and magazines around the fort. And that project of his to crown Cape Bathurst by a work which would secure the safety of Fort Hope—what of it now? Fort Hope! The very name made his heart sink. Cape Bathurst had disappeared for ever, and Fort Hope might rather be called Fort Despair.

These various employments occupied the whole of the fine season. The construction of the boat proceeded steadily. MacNab intended it to be of thirty tons measurement, which would be sufficiently large to carry twenty passengers some hundreds of miles. He had fortunately picked up some bent timbers, so that he was able to make the first ribs pretty easily, and the stem and stern-post, fitted to the keel, were soon erected at the foot of Cape Bathurst.

While the carpenters were thus busy, the hunters were equally well employed shooting reindeer and Polar hares which abounded near the fort. The Lieutenant had particularly enjoined Sabine and Marbre not to go far afield for fear of attracting the notice of rival parties.

The truth was they did not wish them to notice the changes that had taken place in the island.

But one day Marbre asked if it was not time to go to Morse Bay to hunt the walruses and get a fresh supply of oil. Hobson, however, quickly replied that it would be of no use.

The Lieutenant was fully aware that Morse Bay was two hundred miles off, and there were no walruses on the island at all.

It must not be imagined, however, that Hobson thought their situation hopeless. On the contrary, he more than once assured Mrs. Barnett and Sergeant Long that he believed the island would last until the winter frosts consolidated the ice once again.

After his return from the expedition Hobson had calculated exactly the extent of his new domain. The island measured more than forty miles in circumference, and would contain about a hundred and forty square miles, or somewhat more than the island of St. Helena, and about the size of Paris within the fortifications. So even if it should break up there might still be blocks of sufficient size for the castaways to exist upon for some time.

Mrs. Barnett was astonished that any ice-field should be so large, but Hobson assured her that arctic explorers had encountered fields a hundred miles long and fifty wide. Captain Kellet abandoned his ship on a field of ice measuring at least three hundred square miles. What was their island Victoria to that !

However, its size was sufficient to enable it to resist a thaw until the cold set in again. Hobson would not permit himself a doubt on this point. His anxiety came rather from the knowledge that all his efforts had been fruitless, all his plans vain, and that his dreams would never be realised. This was why he despaired, and no wonder he did not take an interest in the progress of the works. He just let things go, that was all.

But Mrs. Barnett as usual kept good heart. She encouraged her companions and even participated in their work, as if a long future were before them. So perceiving that Mrs. Joliffe was much interested in gardening she assisted her by advice. The scurvy-grass and sorrel had sprouted well, thanks to the Corporal, who had proved a most efficient scarecrow.

The attempt to domesticate the reindeer had proved quite successful. Many young ones had been born, and the little Michael had been partly nourished on the milk of the herd, which numbered thirty head. The animals grazed close to the fort, and a supply of food was laid up for them for winter use. The reindeer had already become quite tame, and suffered themselves to be employed in drawing sledges for the transport of wood.

Besides, a number of wild reindeer were taken in the trap halfway between the fort and Port Barnett. It will be remembered that a large bear was caught in that trap the year before, but this season only reindeer were

secured. Their flesh was salted and put by for future use. Twenty were taken in this way.

But one day, in consequence of the subsidence of the soil, the reindeer-trap became useless, and after visiting it, Marbre came to Hobson and said significantly :

“ I’ve just been visiting the trap, sir ! ”

“ Well, I hope you have had as good luck to-day as yesterday, and that you have secured a couple. ”

“ No, sir, ” replied Marbre. “ No, sir, ” he repeated, with some embarrassment.

“ What ! Has your trap failed, then ? ”

“ No, sir ; but if any beast had fallen in he would have been drowned to a certainty. ”

“ Drowned ! ” exclaimed the Lieutenant, regarding the hunter anxiously.

“ Yes, sir, the pit is full of water ! ”

“ Oh, is that all ? ” cried Hobson, in the tone of a man who attached no importance to the intelligence. “ You know that this pit was dug out of the ice, the walls are only melting with the heat of the sun, so—— ”

“ I beg your pardon, sir, ” said Marbre, “ but the water cannot have come from that cause. ”

“ Why not, Marbre ? ”

“ Because if ice had melted the water would be fresh, whereas the water in the pit is salt. ”

Though wonderfully self-possessed, Hobson grew pale, and had not a word to say in reply.

“Besides,” added the hunter, “I wanted to find out how deep the water was, and I was astonished, I can tell you, for I could not sound it.”

“Well, Marbre, what did you expect?” with assumed gaiety, “there was nothing extraordinary in that. Most likely some opening in the ground has established a communication between the trap and the sea. That does happen sometimes even in the most solid territories. So do not alarm yourself, my good fellow. Do not trouble about the trap for the present. You can amuse yourself setting snares near the fort.”

Marbre saluted and turned away, after looking fixedly at his chief.

Hobson remained very pensive for a few moments. The intelligence brought by Marbre was very alarming. It was evident that the bottom of the trench had been melted by the warmth of the sea, and had at length broken through.

The Lieutenant immediately sought Sergeant Long and told him the news. Unperceived they went together to the foot of Cape Bathurst, where they had fixed their landmarks.

They examined them and found that since their last observation the island had sunk six inches !

“We are sinking by degrees,” murmured Long. “The ice is melting underneath !”

“Oh, if the winter were but here !” exclaimed Hobson, striking his foot against the cursed soil.

But there was no sign of winter yet. The thermometer was steady at 59 deg. Fahrenheit, and even during the night the mercury only went down a few degrees.

Preparations for the winter, however, continued to be made. Even though assistance had not been sent by Captain Craveny there was no want of supplies at Fort Hope, and the long arctic nights might be endured with impunity. Of course the supplies must be economised as much as possible, but there was still a good supply of spirits and of biscuits left, and these once expended could not be replaced. They had fresh venison and salt meat in abundance, to which they added a supply of antiscorbutic plants, and with this healthy diet they all continued well.

A quantity of timber was cut down from the wood near Cape Barnett. Numbers of birch, pine, and fir fell to the hatchet of MacNab, and were dragged home by the reindeer. The woodman did not spare the tree though he cut judiciously, yet it did not seem to him that the supply could ever fail, for he looked upon the island as a peninsula, and he supposed that Cape Michael was close at hand, and well clothed with trees.

So MacNab frequently congratulated the Lieutenant on having discovered a spot so favoured by Heaven, and on an establishment so well supplied. Plenty of wood, game, fur-bearing animals, were piled up in the Company's storehouses. A lake full of various fish, grass for the animals, and double pay for the men, Joliffe would

certainly have added, Was not this Cape Bathurst a sort of Promised Land, the equal of which could not be found in the arctic regions? Truly the Lieutenant was a lucky man, and ought to thank Providence every day for having been permitted to reach such a unique spot.

A unique spot! Honest MacNab! He did not know what pain he caused the Lieutenant by his well-meant congratulations.

All this time the manufacture of winter garments was not neglected. All the women were equally indefatigable, and worked hard. Mrs. Barnett knew that they would have to quit the fort before long, and, with the prospect of a long journey in mid-winter before her, she determined that everyone should be well and warmly clad. The cold during the long night would be terrible, and they would have to endure it for many weeks if Victoria Island was frozen up far from the land. To pass over some hundred miles, under those conditions, both boots and clothing must be cared for, so Mrs. Barnett and Madge gave themselves up to dressmaking.

The furs, which it would be impossible to save, were liberally used. They were doubled over, so that the hair was both inside and out; and it was very certain that the soldiers and their wives, as well as the officers, would be as richly clad as Russian princesses. Certainly Mrs. Rae, Mrs. MacNab, and Mrs. Joliffe were astonished at the apparently reckless manner in which the furs were used, but Hobson's orders could not be gainsaid; besides, the

number of animals around the fort would supply the hunters with almost any amount of furs. However, when Mrs. MacNab saw the beautiful little ermine dress which Madge had made for the baby, the good mother no longer thought anything extraordinary.

So time passed until August set in. The weather had been continuously fine, and the sun had quickly dispersed any mists.

Every day Jasper Hobson took an observation, but was careful to go away some distance from the fort, so as not to excite remark. He visited various parts of the island, and was delighted to find that no serious disturbance had taken place.

On the 16th of August Victoria Island was in west longitude 167 deg. 27 min., and north latitude 70 deg. 49 min. The island had therefore drifted a little to the south, but had got no nearer to the American coast, which curved away from it; so the continent was still two hundred miles distant, in a south-easterly direction.

The island must have drifted, since the last thaw, not less than eleven or twelve hundred miles to the west.

But what was this distance, compared to the immense extent of the ocean? Had not boats been known to drift for many thousands of miles? For instance, had not the British ship *Resolute*, the American brig *Advance*, and finally the *Fox*, been carried over ice-fields for many degrees, until the arrival of winter brought their involuntary wanderings to a close?

CHAPTER VI.

TEN DAYS OF STORM.

DURING the four days, from the 17th to the 20th of August, the weather kept fine and the temperature high. The mists did not change into clouds, and it was very seldom that the atmosphere was so clear in such a high latitude. But it can be understood that Hobson was not best pleased with the climate.

On the 21st of August the barometer gave notice of a change, and fell considerably. However, it rose the next day and fell again, and on the 23rd the fall became continuous.

On the 24th the mists rose; the sun at the moment of culmination was quite obscured, and Hobson could not take his bearings. The wind began to blow strongly from the north-west, and heavy rain fell at intervals; nevertheless the temperature was not sensibly diminished, and the thermometer remained at 54° Fahr.

Very fortunately the outdoor works had all been finished, and the hull of the boat had been completed. Hunting, too, might be suspended, for the supplies of food were sufficient for all purposes. At any rate the

weather was now so bad, with heavy rain, wind, and thick fog, that it was almost impossible to go outside the palisade.

“What do you think of this change of weather?” asked Mrs. Barnett on the morning of the 27th. “Do you think it will be in our favour?”

“I should not like to say as much,” he replied; “but anything is better for us than the fine weather we have lately had, when the waters were getting warmer every day. I see the wind is steady to the north-east, and that is fortunate, as it may drive us nearer the American continent.”

“Unfortunately,” said Sergeant Long, “we cannot take our bearings in this fog—we can see neither sun, moon, nor stars.”

“At any rate, Sergeant,” said Mrs. Barnett, “we shall be able to see the land, I warrant you. Whatever shore it may prove to be it will be welcome. Most likely we shall touch upon Russian America, probably Western Georgia.”

“That is most likely,” said Hobson, “for unfortunately for us there is not an island nor a rock in all this portion of the Arctic Sea on to which we can make fast.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Barnett, “why should we not drift right on to the coast of Asia? Is it not possible for the current to carry us past the mouth of Behring Strait to the shores of Siberia?”

“No, no,” replied Hobson, “our island would soon

encounter the Kamtchatka current, and be carried to the north-west by it, which would be very unfortunate. It is more probable that with this wind we shall reach Russian America."

"We must keep careful watch then, Mr. Hobson, so as to find out our situation as soon as possible."

"We will watch," he replied, "although the fog limits our view very much; at any rate, if we should be cast ashore the shock will give us notice of the fact. Let us hope we shall not be broken into pieces—that is one danger we have to fear. However, we shall see what we shall see, we cannot help ourselves."

Of course the conversation was not carried on in the public room where the soldiers and women were at work. Mrs. Barnett only spoke of such things in her own room, which possessed a window looking out on to the court. There was very little light admitted through the semi-opaque windows. The tempest howled outside, but luckily Cape Bathurst protected the house from the north-east gales. But the sand and earth from the summit of the promontory fell down upon the roof like so much hail. MacNab became anxious about the chimneys, particularly the kitchen chimney, which ought always to be in good order. The howling of the wind was also mingled with the roaring of the sea as it broke upon the shore. The tempest had become a hurricane.

Notwithstanding the violence of the gale, on the 28th of August Hobson determined to mount Cape Bathurst,

so as to try to see the horizon and the state of the sea and sky. So he wrapped himself up very carefully and ventured out.

Without very great difficulty he managed to reach the foot of the hills. Half-blinded by the sand, he was nevertheless somewhat protected by the cliff; but he had not yet actually met the gale.

It was much more difficult when he began to scale the steep side of the promontory; but nevertheless, by clinging to the tufts of grass, he managed to reach the summit. Here the force of the gale was so terrible that he could neither sit nor stand. He was, therefore, obliged to lie down upon his chest and cling to the shrubs, while only his head and shoulders were exposed to the storm.

Hobson looked through the mists, the spray dashing over his head. The appearance of the sea and sky was truly awful. Overhead the heavy ragged rain-clouds hurried past at tremendous speed, and long bands of vapour were piled up in the zenith. Occasionally a great calm seemed to fall upon all nature, and then nothing could be heard but the roaring of the sea. Then again the tempest would recommence, with unequalled fury, and Hobson could feel the cape trembling beneath him. At these times the rain, impelled almost horizontally by the wind, dashed down like showers of grapeshot.

It was indeed a fearful storm, and from the worst quarter too. This north-east wind might last for a long time, and cause great destruction, but Hobson would not

complain of that. He who, under other circumstances, would have deplored the effects of the hurricane, now positively rejoiced at it; for if the island would only resist, as he hoped it would, it would be blown to the south-west by this wind, which was stronger than the currents, and the south-west meant land and safety. Yes, for all their sakes, he hoped that the storm would last until it drove them on shore, no matter where. An occurrence which would be fatal to a ship would prove their salvation.

For a quarter of an hour Hobson remained lying on the ground, half drenched by the spray and rain, and holding on with the tenacity of a drowning man, endeavouring to balance the chances of safety. He then descended, and, in the midst of a whirlwind of sand, managed to regain the fort.

As soon as he got inside he told his companions that the hurricane had not reached its height, and might be expected to last some days longer. But his tone was that of a man bringing glad tidings, and was remarked as singular by all who heard him. They thought the chief was delighted with the strife of the elements.

On the 30th Hobson again braved the storm, but this time he went down to the shore. There he noticed, floating on the top of the waves, some weeds which did not grow on the island. These weeds were still fresh, as if they had only lately been detached from the main-land, so it could not be very far off. Christopher Columbus

never rejoiced more than did Hobson at the sight of these seaweeds, which told him of the proximity of the land.

The Lieutenant hurried home, and confided his discovery to Mrs. Barnett and Sergeant Long. At that moment he had a great mind to tell the truth to all the others, but a presentiment kept him silent.

Meanwhile the inhabitants of the fort had not been idle all these long days. They made some necessary improvements in the interior of the buildings, and dug trenches in the court to carry away the accumulation of rain-water. MacNab, with hammer and nails, was always busy in one corner or another. So they worked all day, without thinking much of the storm; but at nightfall it always appeared as if the hurricane blew with redoubled fury. It was impossible to sleep. The gusts beat against the house like the blows of a battering-ram. Sometimes a kind of waterspout was formed between the house and the cape, and then the planks cracked, and the whole building appeared in danger of being blown away. The carpenter and his mates were accordingly in continual dread, and were always on the *qui vive*.

Hobson was more anxious about the stability of the island than about the house upon it. The tempest had now become so violent, and the waves so enormous, that there was some reason to fear that the ice would break up. It seemed almost impossible for that enormous glacier, now so worn away at its base, to resist the waves

much longer. The inhabitants did not feel any movement, but there was no doubt it suffered from the motion. The question in Hobson's mind was, whether the island would stop long enough to be thrown ashore, or would go to pieces in mid-ocean.

It had resisted well so far, for, had any dislocation taken place, the separation must have been noticed by the occupants, as the smaller pieces would have been affected by the movement of the sea, and they would have been rolled and pitched about like passengers on board ship. But this was not the case, and, in all his observations, Hobson had never noticed the slightest trembling of the island, which really appeared to be as firm as if it were still attached to the continent.

But the separation might come at any moment.

All this time Hobson was very anxious to ascertain whether the island, driven out of the current by the north-east wind, had approached the continent, and this was really their only chance of safety. But in the absence of the sun, moon, and stars, no observations could be taken. Instruments were useless, so if they were approaching land they would not be aware of it till they could see it, and then Lieutenant Hobson would not be able to ascertain anything in time to enable him to get to the south side of the island so as to sustain the shock in safety.

But, in fact, the position of the island had not altered in any appreciable degree, as far as the points of the

compass were concerned. Cape Bathurst still pointed to the north as it used to do, so it was evident if the island were driven on shore that the southern portion, between Cape Michael and Morse Bay, would first touch the land; in a word, the connection would be made by the former isthmus, and it was therefore necessary that Hobson should see what was going on in that direction.

Hobson therefore resolved to go to Cape Michael notwithstanding the storm, but he intended to keep his real object a secret; only Sergeant Long would be permitted to accompany him.

So on the 31st August, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Hobson sent for the Sergeant, that they might make ready for any eventuality.

"Sergeant Long," he said, "it is now necessary that we should find out the position of the island, and whether we have really approached the American continent, as I hope we have."

"I think so too, sir, and the sooner the better," replied Long.

"Well, then, we must go to the south of the island."

"I am quite ready, sir."

"I know that you are always ready to do your duty, Sergeant; but you must not go alone. We ought to go together, so as to be able to give our companions notice if land is in sight. Besides, I want to see for myself."

"As you please, sir, and when you please."

“We shall start this evening at nine o’clock, when all the others are asleep.”

“They must not know we are going, of course, or they might wish to come with us,” said Long.

“No, they must on no account be told, and I will do my best to keep the secret from them till the last.”

“That is arranged then, sir.”

“You had better take a tinder-box, in case it is necessary to make a signal, which we shall do if land is in sight.”

“Yes, sir.”

“We shall have a rough time of it, Sergeant.”

“No doubt, sir; but what does that matter? Shall we tell Mrs. Barnett?”

“Well, I did not think of doing so. She might wish to accompany us.”

“And that would be impossible,” replied the Sergeant.

“She never could stand against such a gale as this; just listen to it.”

Indeed as he spoke the house rocked to its foundation.

“No,” continued Hobson, “this brave woman must not and cannot accompany us; but I think it would be as well to inform her of our design; she ought to be told, in case accidents should happen.”

“Yes,” assented Long, “we ought not to keep anything secret from her, and in case we do not come back——”

“Well then, at nine o'clock, Sergeant.”

“At nine o'clock, sir, I shall be ready.” And the Sergeant retired, with a military salute.

A few moments afterwards Hobson told Mrs. Barnett of his intended expedition. As he expected, she was anxious to join him, and was ready to brave the fury of the tempest. The Lieutenant did not attempt to dissuade her on account of the danger of the expedition, but explained that in his absence her presence at the fort was indispensable, else his mind would not be at ease. If anything should happen to him it would be some consolation to know that she could take his place.

Mrs. Barnett understood, and did not press the matter. She begged Hobson to be careful, and to recollect that he was commander of the fort, that his life did not belong to himself alone, but was necessary for the common safety. The Lieutenant promised to be prudent, but the exploration of the south coast was absolutely necessary, and he must make it at once. So Mrs. Barnett undertook to inform his companions the following day that Hobson and the Sergeant had merely gone to make a reconnaissance before the winter set in.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIRE AND A CRY !

THE Lieutenant and Sergeant Long passed the evening in the great hall until bedtime. All the colonists were assembled there except the astronomer, who remained, as it were, hermetically sealed in his cabin. Men and women worked at their various occupations, while Mrs. Barnett read aloud. Her reading was frequently interrupted, however, not only by the terrible gusts of wind, but by the cries of the baby. Corporal Joliffe, who had undertaken to amuse him, had his hands quite full. He had converted his knees into horses until they were tired, and he was at last obliged to place his little rider upon the large table, where he rolled about until he fell asleep.

At eight o'clock, as usual, prayers were read, the lamps were extinguished, and everyone retired to rest.

When all was quiet, Hobson and the Sergeant passed noiselessly across the empty room and gained the corridor. There they found Mrs. Barnett, who had waited to press their hands once more.

“Good-bye—till to-morrow,” she said to the Lieutenant.

“Until to-morrow, without fail,” he replied.

“Suppose you are delayed?”

“You must wait patiently for us,” he said; “for if we should happen to see a fire on the horizon, which is not unlikely this dark night, we should know that we were approaching the coast of New Georgia. Under these circumstances I should have to wait till daylight to ascertain our position—so we may be away eight-and-forty hours. Still, if we can reach Cape Michael before midnight, we shall return to the fort to-morrow evening; so be patient, madam, and remember that we are not running a risk without good reason.”

“But,” said Mrs. Barnett, “suppose you do not return in two days?”

“Then we shall not return at all,” said Hobson simply.

He opened the door. Mrs. Barnett closed it after him, and then, feeling restless and pensive, she returned to her room, where Madge awaited her.

Jasper Hobson and Sergeant Long crossed the inner court, and in the midst of a whirlwind which nearly overturned them. But by supporting each other and leaning upon their iron-shod staves, they managed to reach the postern gate, and set forward between the hills and the eastern side of the lake.

A dim twilight seemed to rest upon the earth. The new moon had not yet appeared, and the darkness of the night was almost unrelieved. Fortunately the

obscurity would not last long. They could only just see where they were going.

How it did rain and blow !

The Lieutenant and his companion were clad in waterproofs from head to foot, and they proceeded at a rapid pace, for the wind was behind them, and sometimes hurried them faster than they wished. They could not have heard themselves speak even had they attempted it ; the storm rendered them breathless, and almost deaf.

Hobson's intention was to take a direct route, and cut off the irregularity of the shore which would have taken them a long way round, and exposed them to the full fury of the tempest. He determined to go in a straight line from Cape Bathurst to Cape Michael, and had brought a pocket-compass with him for that purpose. In this way he would only have ten or eleven miles to traverse to reach his journey's end, and he hoped to arrive before the twilight gave place to the darkness which preceded the dawn.

So the two men, with their backs bent and heads stooping, pressed rapidly on. As long as they kept by the lake they did not meet the storm full face. The hills protected them to a certain extent, but the wind was still blowing as if it would tear the trees up by the roots. Even the rain had been converted into mist when it reached them, and for about four miles the explorers had less to contend against than they had expected.

But when they reached the extremity of the little wood, where there were no trees or any rising ground, the wind swept by with such terrific force that they paused involuntarily. They had still six miles to go to reach Cape Michael.

“We are going to have a hard time of it,” shouted the Lieutenant in Sergeant Long’s ear.

“Yes,” replied the Sergeant, “the wind and rain are going to join forces against us.”

“I am afraid we shall have hail as well,” said the Lieutenant.

“It will not be so bad as grape-shot, and we have both been through that before now, sir, so let us go on.”

“Forward, my brave friend!”

It was then ten o’clock. The twilight was fading, as if it had been drowned in the fog or put out by the wind. There was still a faint reflection of light however. The Lieutenant struck a light and managed to see the compass, and then wrapping his cloak tightly round him, and followed by the Sergeant, they started across the unprotected plain.

They were immediately dashed to the ground, but they managed to rise, and gripping each other tightly, and with backs bent like two old men, they started again at an ambling trot.

There was something very magnificent in the storm, notwithstanding its horrors. Great masses of ragged cloud swept close along the ground, the sand and earth

were hurried past, and the men's lips tasted quite salt, although Hobson and his companion both knew that the sea was two or three miles away at least.

Whenever the gale slackened for a moment, which was very seldom, the Lieutenant took his bearings as accurately as he could.

But the tempest seemed to increase as night came on, the air and water seemed absolutely mingled together. Low down on the horizon an enormous water-spout was forming; such a one as could overturn houses, destroy trees, and at which ships fire cannon-shots. It appeared as if the ocean were being torn from its bed and thrown upon the wandering island.

Indeed Hobson wondered how the ice-field ever managed to support the attacks made upon it by the elements, and why it had not long ago broken up. The roaring of the sea could now be distinctly heard, and just then Sergeant Long, who was a little in advance, suddenly stopped, and returning to the Lieutenant, called out :

“Not that way !”

“Why not ?”

“The sea.”

“What do you mean ? The sea ! we cannot have got to the south-east coast yet.”

“Look, sir.”

And indeed a large sheet of water was just visible in front, and the waves were even rolling up, and breaking close to the Lieutenant's feet,

Hobson lighted his tinder a second time, and consulted his compass very attentively.

“No,” he said, “the sea is more to the left. We have not yet passed by the wood near Cape Michael.”

“Then this is——”

“This is a fracture of the island,” cried Hobson to his companion, as they were both obliged to throw themselves flat upon the ground to avoid the wind. “Either a large piece of the island has been detached and drifted away, or merely a piece has been broken off, and we can go round the gulf. Let us proceed.”

They rose together and turned to the right, following the foam of the sea which broke at their feet. They proceeded thus for about ten minutes, fearing all the while, and not without reason, that they might find their communication with the south of the island cut off. After awhile they no longer heard the roar of the breakers, which was distinct from every other sound.

“It is only a gulf,” roared Hobson in the Sergeant’s ear. “Let us turn.”

They resumed their route to the south; but those brave men knew very well without speaking that they were exposing themselves to terrible danger. In fact, the part of the island on which they were wandering at that time was cracked for some distance, and it might at any time fall away altogether. If it should break off under the influence of the surf, they would be carried away without a hope of rescue. Still they did not hesitate,

and pressed forward into the darkness without ever thinking of how they would get back again.

Hobson's reflections were very sad ; he scarcely could hope that the island would hold together till winter time ; for was not this the commencement of the breaking up of the ice ? If the wind did not soon drive them to the main-land they would certainly perish in the sea, and leave not a trace behind. What a fearful prospect this was ! What chance now remained for the unfortunate inhabitants of the island !

Nevertheless, though bruised, battered, and beaten by the gale, those two energetic men struggled along. They reached at last the large wood which surrounded Cape Michael. They would be obliged to cross this so as to reach the coast by the shortest way. They entered it accordingly, but in total darkness, amid the thunder of the wind through the pines overhead. All around them branches appeared to be breaking to pieces. Their way was encumbered with fallen timber, and every moment they ran the risk of being crushed by a falling tree, and now and then they stumbled over a stump unperceived in the gloom. But still they did not proceed blindly—the roar of the sea on one side was a guide ; and now and then the enormous waves actually shook the ground beneath their feet. So holding tightly to each other they sustained themselves, helping each other when they fell, and by these means they managed to reach the farther side of the wood in safety.

But when they stepped into the open ground a furious blast of wind tore them one from the other and threw them upon the ground.

“Sergeant, Sergeant!” roared Hobson, as loudly as he could, “where are you?”

“Here I am, sir!” screamed Long.

Then creeping along the ground they endeavoured to rejoin each other, but it seemed as if some powerful hand held them down. At length they managed to come together, and to obviate any further separation they tied themselves together by their belts, and then they crawled along the sand, so as to gain a small mound crowned with a cluster of pines. There they were more protected; and they immediately dug a hole into which they crept, and lay down in a state of prostration.

It was half-past eleven o'clock at night.

Hobson and his companion remained for some time without speaking. They remained in a state of stupor, with their eyes half closed in sleep, while the branches of the pines overhead crackled like the bones of a skeleton. But they managed to resist the tendency to sleep, and after a few sips of rum from the Sergeant's flask they felt revived.

“I hope these trees will hold,” said Hobson.

“And that the hole we have dug will not be filled up,” added the Sergeant, as he crouched down in the sand.

“Well, here we are at last,” said Hobson, “not far from Cape Michael, which we have come to see, so let

us make the observations. Look you, Sergeant Long, I have a presentiment that we are not very far from the main-land. It is only a presentiment, mind."

From their position they ought to have been able to see the southern horizon ; but at that time the darkness was so great they could see nothing, and unless a fire should happen to be lighted they must wait till daylight to see the coast—supposing they had been driven within range of it.

Now, as the Lieutenant had told Mrs. Barnett, it was no uncommon occurrence for fishermen to visit that portion of America which is called New Georgia. This land includes numerous settlements, the natives of which collect the teeth of mammoths, for skeletons of those great fossil antediluvians are very common in those latitudes. Some degrees farther south is New Archangel, the chief place of Russian America, the influence of which extends over the Aleutian Islands. But the hunters more frequently resort to the shores of the Arctic Sea, especially since the Hudson's Bay Company have taken over the hunting-grounds, formerly owned by the Russians. Jasper Hobson, without knowing anything of the country, was well acquainted with the habits of the agents who visited it at that time of year ; and he was quite justified in believing that he might meet some fellow-countrymen, or even some of his own colleagues, or at any rate, failing them, he would encounter some of the native Indians who hunted on the coast.

But was Jasper Hobson justified in believing that his island was being driven ashore?

“Yes; a hundred times yes,” he repeated to the Sergeant. “A hurricane has been blowing from the north-east for seven days; and although the island is very flat, still there is something for the wind to catch hold of, and these little woods and hills must act more or less as sails. Besides, the sea which carries us along must have a certain effect, for waves always run in-shore; it is quite out of the question that we could have kept in the current which was carrying us westwards, and we must have been driven to the south. When we last took our bearings we were two hundred miles from land, and seven days would make a great difference.”

“Your arguments are quite right, sir,” replied Sergeant Long; “and besides the wind, we have the assistance of Providence, who, I am sure, would never allow us to perish. I put all my trust in Him.”

The two men talked thus, in sentences constantly interrupted by the roaring of the tempest. They endeavoured to penetrate the thick gloom and fog which extended all round them; but they could see no light whatever.

About half-past one in the morning a lull took place, but the sea seemed to be roaring louder than ever.

Suddenly Hobson, seizing his companion's arm, cried out:

“Sergeant, don't you hear anything?”

“What?”

“The noise of the sea.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Long, listening attentively; “and it seems to me that lately the noise of the waves——”

“Is not the same,” interrupted Hobson. “Is it not so, Sergeant? Listen, listen! It is like the noise of breakers on the rocks.”

Hobson and the Sergeant listened most attentively. The noise of the waves was no longer that monotonous roar and rush of water in the open sea; but it appeared more like the regular beating of water against a hard body and the recoil from the rocks. Now, they knew that there was not a single rock all round their island, which was entirely composed of earth and sand.

Had not therefore Hobson and his companion been deceived? The Sergeant endeavoured to stand upright, so as to listen more attentively. But he was immediately overthrown by the hurricane, which recommenced with renewed violence. The slight lull had ceased, and the whistling of the storm was again mingled with the noise of the sea, and drowned the peculiar sound which had struck upon their ear.

One may judge of the anxiety of the two explorers. Once more they crouched into their hole, and wondered whether it would not be better to quit their resting-place, for they could feel the sand give way beneath them, and the pine-trees seemed to crack in their very roots. But the men still continued to gaze steadily towards the south.

It seemed as if their whole existence was centred in their eyes, in their endeavour to pierce the darkness which would soon give way to the dawn.

Suddenly, a little before half-past two in the morning, the Sergeant cried out :

“ I saw it.”

“ What ? ”

“ A fire ! ”

“ A fire ? ”

“ Yes ; over there,” and the Sergeant pointed to the south-west as he spoke.

Was he mistaken ? No ; for Jasper Hobson, following the course indicated, plainly discovered a glimmer on the horizon.

“ Yes,” he exclaimed ; “ yes, Sergeant, it is a fire, and land must be over there.”

“ Unless the light is on board a ship,” said Sergeant Long.

“ That would be impossible in such weather as this,” replied Hobson. “ No, no ; the main-land is over there, a few miles away.”

“ Well then, let us make a signal.”

“ Yes, Sergeant, let us reply to this fire on the continent by a fire on our own island.”

Neither Hobson nor the Sergeant had a torch to kindle a flame ; but above their heads rose the resinous pines.

“ Your flint, please, Sergeant,” said Hobson.

Long struck the flint and steel, lighted the touch-wood, then creeping along the sand they reached the thicket. There was plenty of dead-wood, and piling it up at the root of one of the pines, they set it on fire, and, with the assistance of the wind, the whole thicket was soon in a blaze.

“ Ah ! ” said Hobson, “ since we saw their fire they must see ours. ”

The firs burnt with a livid flame like an enormous torch. The resin in the old trunks rapidly consumed them ; and at last the flames died away and went out.

Hobson and Long waited for a reply to their signal. But nothing was to be seen. They waited for ten minutes hoping to see the flame again, and were already despairing, when suddenly they heard a cry—a distant cry for help, coming from the sea.

Hobson and Long, overcome with anxiety, rolled down to the shore.

But the cry was not heard again.

However, daylight was now approaching, and it appeared as if the storm was decreasing as the sun rose ; the light was soon strong enough to permit them to see all round the horizon.

But there was no land in sight. The sky and sea met in one unbroken line.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. BARNETT'S EXCURSION.

ALL the morning Hobson and the Sergeant wandered along that part of the coast. The weather had improved very much. The rain had almost ceased, and the wind had suddenly gone round to the south-east, but unfortunately it did not diminish in violence. This circumstance affected Hobson very much, for all hope of reaching the main-land now diminished.

In fact, this south-east wind would drive the island farther from the American continent, and cast it into those dangerous currents which might carry it to the north of the Arctic Ocean.

But were they justified in thinking that they had actually approached near the continent that dreadful night? Was it not, perhaps, after all, an idea of Hobson's? The atmosphere was now clear, and although they could see for several miles round in all directions, there was no land in sight. Probably the Sergeant might have been right after all, and a ship might have passed the island during the night, from which a cry of distress might have gone up, and on board which the fire-signal

had been made. But if this vessel had not foundered, what had become of it?

In any case, whatever the cause, there was no wreck, no *débris* to be seen. The sea, now driven in the contrary way by the wind, was rough enough to overcome any ship.

“Well, sir,” said Sergeant Long to the Lieutenant, “what are we to do now? We must do something.”

“We must stop upon the island,” replied the Lieutenant, passing his hand over his forehead. “We must await the winter where we are—that is our only chance.”

It was then midday. Jasper Hobson was anxious to arrive at Fort Hope before night, so he immediately took the road to Cape Bathurst. The wind aided the travellers as it had done before, and blew steadily at their backs. They were very anxious, for they feared, and not without reason, that the island might have separated during the night. The gulf they had passed round might have extended, and if so they would be quite cut off from all their friends.

They were not long reaching the wood which they traversed the night before. A number of trees had been torn up by the roots, and were now lying on the ground. The others, with broken stems, were stripped of leaves, and only a few creaking branches were left. Two miles farther the explorers reached the margin of the gulf which they had turned the night before, when they were not able to judge of its extent in the darkness. They now

examined it carefully. It was a large fracture about fifty feet wide, cutting the shore halfway between Cape Michael and the former Port Barnett, making a sort of estuary a mile and a half into the interior; any rough sea would naturally widen it more and more.

As Hobson approached the shore he saw an enormous lump of ice break off and float away from the island.

“Yes,” murmured Sergeant Long, “that is the danger.”

They then turned and proceeded at a rapid pace westward, so as to get round the great gulf, and then they took a straight line for Fort Hope.

They did not notice any other change as they proceeded. At four o'clock they passed the postern-gate, and found all their companions occupied as usual.

Jasper Hobson informed his people that he had wished to try and find some trace of Captain Craventy's convoy, but he could not perceive anything of it.

“Then,” said Marbre, “I suppose that we must definitively give up all hope of seeing our companions at Fort Reliance, for this year, at any rate.”

“I think so, Marbre,” replied Hobson quietly, as he entered the common sitting-room.

Mrs. Barnett and Madge were soon told of the two chief incidents of the expedition—viz. the fire and the cry. Jasper Hobson firmly declared that neither he nor the Sergeant could have been mistaken. The fire had been actually seen, the cry had been distinctly audible.

Then, after mature deliberation, all were agreed upon this point : that a ship in distress had passed within sight of the island during the night ; that it—the island—had not approached the continent.

However, under the influence of the south-east wind, the sky soon cleared and the mist disappeared. Hobson therefore began to hope that he would be able to take his bearings on the following day. The night was colder, and a fine snow fell and soon covered the ground, and when Hobson got up next morning he was glad to see the first sign of winter.

It was the 2nd September. The sun gradually broke out from the mists. The Lieutenant waited patiently. At midday he got a good observation, and at two o'clock he was able to calculate his position with the following result :

Latitude 70 degrees 57 minutes.

Longitude 170 degrees 30 minutes.

So it appeared that, in spite of the violence of the storm, the wandering island had remained in the same parallel, only it had gone farther west. They were now opposite Behring Strait, but four hundred miles at least to the north of Cape East and Cape Prince of Wales, which mark the narrowest part of the strait.

This view of the situation was even more serious than before. The island was every day approaching the great Kamtchatka current, which, if it once seized it, would carry it away far to the north. Evidently the destiny of

the island would soon be decided. It must either remain between the two currents while the sea froze round it, or it must be lost in the solitudes of the arctic regions.

Hobson was very much distressed, but as he wished to hide his anxiety, he shut himself in his own room during the remainder of the day. With his maps spread before him he did all in his power, and racked his brain, to discover some solution of the difficulty.

The temperature fell that day, and the mists which had collected above the south-eastern horizon during the evening descended in snow during the night, and next day it was two inches thick. Winter was coming at last.

On that day, the 3rd September, Mrs. Barnett resolved to make an expedition some miles along the coast between Cape Bathurst and Cape Esquimaux. She wished to see the changes that had taken place. She was sure if she had proposed to Hobson to accompany her he would have done so, but she did not wish to disturb him, so she took only Madge with her. There was really no danger to fear. The bears were the only formidable animals, and they had quitted the neighbourhood since the earthquake ; so two women might without imprudence go as far as the cape for a few hours' excursion.

Madge at once consented to Mrs. Barnett's suggestion, and without telling anyone, they started out at eight o'clock in the morning, armed with an ice-axe, a flask of rum, and a haversack of provisions, and proceeded in a westerly direction from Cape Bathurst.

The sun was languidly dragging itself along the horizon, for it did not ascend much above it at that time of year ; but its oblique rays were clear and penetrating, and had already begun to melt the newly-fallen snow.

Numerous birds, such as ptarmigan, guillemots, puffins, wild-geese, and ducks of all species, flew about and enlivened the shore. The air was full of their cries as they fluttered between the sea and the lagoon, according as their tastes led them to salt or fresh water.

Mrs. Barnett was now able to see how numerous the fur animals were in the neighbourhood of Fort Hope. The magazines might easily have been filled, but what good would that be under the circumstances? The harmless creatures, comprehending that they were no longer hunted, became quite tame, and ventured close up to the palisades. No doubt their instinct told them that they were prisoners upon the island as well as the bipeds, and a common danger made them friendly. But it struck Mrs. Barnett as curious that Marbre and Sabine, two such energetic hunters as they were, should without remonstrance obey the Lieutenant's orders to spare the fur animals, and did not appear to care to shoot the valuable game all round them. It is true that the foxes and other animals had not yet put on their winter garb, but this fact was not sufficient to explain the hunters' indifference.

Meanwhile Mrs. Barnett and Madge proceeded at a good pace, talking as they went, and attentively observing the coast. The incursions made lately by the sea were quite visible, new subsidences of the ground permitted them to see new fractures in the ice quite plainly. The beach, torn away in places, had sunk very much, and waves now dashed along the level shore where the perpendicular cliffs had once checked their progress. It was evident that some part of the island had sunk and was almost on a level with the sea.

“My good Madge,” said Mrs. Barnett, as she pointed to the long level tracts over which the sea broke, “our situation has become more dangerous. It is certain that the whole island has sunk, and our safety is only a question of time. Will the winter arrive soon enough to save us? That is the point.”

“The winter will come, dear,” replied Madge, with her usual confidence. “We have had two snowy nights already. Cold is beginning to make itself felt, and Providence will not desert us, I am sure.”

“You are right, Madge ; we must have confidence in Him. We women, who do not seek for the scientific reason for things, can hope where professors despair. That is one blessing. Unfortunately, our Lieutenant does not reason as we do ; he knows the why and wherefore of things. He reflects and calculates, he reckons up the time remaining to us, and is already beginning to lose heart.”

“He has a brave energetic heart, for all that,” replied Madge.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Barnett, “and he will save us, if man can do it.”

At nine o'clock Mrs. Barnett and Madge had walked four miles. They were frequently obliged to leave the coast-line, to avoid the sea. Here and there the waves had passed inland for half a mile, and the thickness of the ice-field had been considerably reduced; so there was reason to fear that it would give way in many places, and, in consequence, new bays and gulfs would be formed upon the coast.

Mrs. Barnett remarked that the farther they got from the fort, so in proportion did the animals decrease in number. They evidently felt more secure in the presence of man. The wild beasts had all fled, except a few wolves, which wandered about the plain at a distance; but they soon disappeared behind the hills on the south side of the lagoon.

“I wonder what will become of all these animals when food fails them in the winter? They will be famished.”

“Famished, Madge!” replied Mrs. Barnett. “Well, believe me, we have nothing to fear from them. They will not want for food while all these martens, ermines, and polar hares will prove an easy prey. No, the danger is beneath our feet. Look, Madge, how the sea is encroaching! It already covers a large portion of the

plain, so the comparatively warm water is eating away the ice both above and below. If the frost does not stop it before long, the sea will join the lagoon, and we shall lose our lake, as we have lost our harbour and our river."

"When that happens, it will be an irreparable misfortune," said Madge.

"Why so?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"Because we shall have no more fresh water," replied Madge.

"Ah, we shall not want for fresh water. Rain, snow, ice, the icebergs of the ocean, even the soil on which we are floating, will furnish us with fresh water. No, I assure you that is not our danger."

About ten o'clock the women had reached the high level of Cape Esquimaux, but about two miles inland, as it was impossible to follow the coast-line, in consequence of the incursions of the sea. As they felt somewhat fatigued by their long walk, they determined to rest a little before setting off on their return journey. A small clump of trees, growing on this spot, gave them shelter, and a mossy bank, from which the snow had melted, offered them a convenient seat. So they rested, and ate their frugal luncheon.

Half an hour later, Mrs. Barnett suggested that they should, before taking the east road to the factory, explore the actual state of Cape Esquimaux. She professed herself anxious to find out whether it had resisted the tempest. Madge was quite ready to accompany her, but

remarked that they were still eight or nine miles from home, and that they must not cause anxiety by too long an absence.

However, Mrs. Barnett felt impelled to proceed; and it was fortunate that she did so, as the event proved. And, after all, it would only make half-an-hour's difference; so they started.

But they had not gone more than a quarter of a mile when Mrs. Barnett suddenly stopped, and pointed out some regular tracks clearly imprinted on the snow. Now these marks must have been quite fresh, else they would have been concealed by the last fall of snow.

"I wonder what animal has passed here?" said Madge.

"It is not an animal," replied Mrs. Barnett, as she stooped to examine the footprints. "Any quadruped would have left different traces from these. You can see that these were made by a human foot."

"But who could have been here?" said Madge. "Nobody has left the fort, and we are on an island. You must be mistaken, my dear. However, let us follow the tracks, and see whither they lead."

They proceeded, and fifty paces farther they stopped again.

"Look, Madge, and now say if I have been mistaken."

Close to the footprints were traces as if a heavy body had recently been dragged over the snow, and also the distinct impression of a hand.

“A hand of a woman or a child,” said Madge.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Barnett, “a child or a woman has fallen here exhausted. Then the poor creature has struggled up again—see, here are the footprints farther on, and again more falls.”

“But who—who could it be?” asked Madge.

“How can I tell?” replied Mrs. Barnett; “perhaps some poor unfortunate creature may have been imprisoned on this island during the last three or four months. Perhaps some shipwrecked person may have been thrown on the coast during the storm. Do you not remember the fire and the cry of which Sergeant Long and Lieutenant Hobson spoke? Come, come, Madge, there may be some poor wretch for us to succour.”

As she spoke, Mrs. Barnett dragged her companion along the track, which was now tinged with blood in places.

“There may be some poor wretch for us to succour,” the brave woman had said; but she had forgotten that there was no real safety for any one on the island, which was destined sooner or later to be swallowed up by the sea.

The impressions of the footsteps were directed towards Cape Esquimaux. Mrs. Barnett and Madge followed them attentively, but soon the stains of blood increased and the steps disappeared. It was evident that the poor wretch had been unable to walk farther, and had dragged

herself along upon hands and knees. Here and there were bits of clothing, of sealskin and fur.

“Let us hurry on,” cried Mrs. Barnett, whose heart beat fast.

Madge followed her. Cape Esquimaux was only a few paces distant, and rose but a little above the sea. It was deserted.

The tracks now led up to the right side of the cape; Mrs. Barnett and her companion, still running, soon reached the summit. But the track led them directly to the sea.

Mrs. Barnett hurried on to the right, but just as she reached the shore, Madge, who had followed her closely, looked round uneasily and cried :

“Stop, stop !”

“No, Madge, no,” cried Mrs. Barnett, who seemed to be dragged on by some instinct.

“Stay where you are and look round you,” cried Madge, holding her companion tightly.

About fifty paces from Cape Esquimaux, on the very brink of the sea, was an immense white mass, which moved about and growled loudly.

It was a polar bear of immense size. The women stood watching it in terror. The enormous animal was moving round and round a bundle of furs lying on the snow. Sometimes it lifted it up and let it fall again. It looked like the dead body of a morse.

Mrs. Barnett and Madge did not know what to think,

till, as the bear moved the body, a kind of hood fell off, and long brown hair was visible.

“It is a woman!” cried Mrs. Barnett, who wished to hurry to her assistance, and to find out whether she were dead or alive.

“Stay where you are,” cried Madge, still holding her back. “The bear will not hurt her.”

The bear, in fact, was attentively looking at the body, now and then turning it over, but making no attempt to tear it. The animal occasionally went away and came back again. It seemed uncertain what to do, it had not yet perceived the two women who were watching it so anxiously.

Suddenly a cracking noise was heard. The ground shook as if the whole of Cape Esquimaux was tumbling into the sea.

A large piece of the island had become detached and drifted away, carrying with it the bear and the body of the woman.

Mrs. Barnett uttered a scream, and rushed down to reach the ice-block before it drifted quite away.

“Stop, stop, I tell you!” said Madge, holding her hand convulsively.

When the bear heard the noise made by the breaking of the ice he started back, and quitting the body rushed to the side of the ice-block, which was now about forty feet from the island. In his terror he ran round and round, tearing up the ground with his claws, and making

the snow and sand fly round him. He then returned to the inanimate body.

Then, to the horror of the women, the animal seized the body by the clothes, carried it to the brink of the ice, and plunged into the sea.

In a few strokes, the bear, being an excellent swimmer, like all his kind, soon reached the island. With a vigorous effort he climbed up and put down his burden.

Mrs. Barnett could now no longer be restrained, and, without thinking of the risk she ran, escaped from Madge and hurried to the beach.

The bear seeing her, rose on his hind-legs and advanced towards her; however, at about ten paces distant he stopped, shook his enormous head, and then, as if he had lost his natural ferocity under the influence of that terror which had so affected all the beasts on the island, he turned away, uttering a low growl, and walked quietly off inland, without even looking behind him.

Mrs. Barnett immediately ran up to the body lying upon the snow.

A cry of astonishment and horror escaped her.

“Madge, Madge!” she screamed.

Madge approached and looked at the inanimate body.

It was the young Esquimaux girl, Kalumah!

CHAPTER IX.

THE ADVENTURES OF KALUMAH.

KALUMAH on the floating island, two hundred miles from the American continent!—it was scarcely credible.

The first question was whether she still breathed; was it possible to restore her to life? Mrs. Barnett loosened the girl's dress, and found that she was not yet quite cold. She felt her heart, which still beat feebly. The blood they had noticed had only come from a wound in her hand. It was of no importance, and Madge bound it up with her handkerchief.

Meantime Mrs. Barnett supported Kalumah's head, and gave her a few drops of rum. She then bathed her forehead and temples with the icy water.

For a few moments neither Mrs. Barnett nor Madge spoke a word. They waited in the greatest anxiety, for the vital spark might go out at any moment.

But a gentle sigh escaped from Kalumah's breast. Her hands moved about feebly; and as soon as her eyes opened she recognised her presence, and murmured:

“Mrs. Pauline—Mrs. Pauline.”

The lady was much surprised to hear her own name

pronounced under such circumstances. Had Kalumah voluntarily come to the wandering island, and did she know she would meet her European friend there, whose goodness she had not forgotten? But how could she know that, and how had she reached Victoria Island? Had she guessed that the ice was carrying away Mrs. Barnett and all her companions far from the continent? It was one of those things which appear quite inexplicable.

“She lives, she will recover!” said Madge, who could feel the heat and life returning to the poor bruised body.

“Poor thing!” murmured Mrs. Barnett, who was deeply moved. “It was my name, and my name only, that was on her lips, even at the point of death.”

But now Kalumah opened her eyes again. Her expression at first appeared vague and wandering, but suddenly it brightened as her eyes rested on Mrs. Barnett. She had seen her but for an instant, but that was sufficient. The young native recognised her good lady, whose name once more escaped her lips, while she raised her hand with difficulty and let it fall into Mrs. Barnett’s grasp.

And now the young Esquimaux began to revive quickly under the care of the two women. The girl’s exhaustion arose not only from fatigue but from hunger. Mrs. Barnett soon learnt that Kalumah had eaten **nothing** for eight-and-forty hours. Some slices of cold

venison and a little rum revived her, and she soon felt able to accompany her friends to the fort.

But during the time she rested, seated on the sand between Madge and Mrs. Barnett, Kalumah had overwhelmed them with thanks and demonstrations of affection, and told them her story. She had never forgotten the Europeans of Fort Hope; and Mrs. Barnett's image had ever since been in her memory. It was not by accident that she had been thrown half dead upon the shores of Victoria Island.

The following is what Kalumah told them :

It will be remembered that the young Esquimaux had promised to come and see her English friends again, the following summer; so when the month of May arrived she did her best to keep her word. She left New Georgia, where her tribe had wintered, and, accompanied by her brother-in-law, started for the peninsula of Victoria.

Six weeks afterwards she reached British territory near Cape Bathurst. She perfectly remembered the Volcanic Mountains, which overlooked Liverpool Bay, and twenty miles farther she reached Morse Bay, where her people had so often hunted the walrus.

But beyond this bay, on the north, she could see nothing. The coast trended away to the south-east in a straight line. Cape Esquimaux and Cape Bathurst were no longer in existence.

Kalumah soon understood what had happened.

Either the whole territory of Victoria Island had been swallowed up in the sea, or it was wandering on its surface.

Kalumah wept as she reflected that she should never again see those she had come so far to seek.

But her brother-in-law was not very much surprised at the catastrophe. A sort of legend, a tradition, was extant amongst the nomad tribes of North America, to the effect that the territory of Cape Bathurst was not a portion of the main-land; but, although it had been joined to it for thousands of years, it would some day be detached by a natural convulsion. On this account, the Esquimaux had manifested some surprise at finding Hobson's factory established at Cape Bathurst. But with a deplorable reserve peculiar to their race, or perhaps influenced by the sentiment of dislike which all natives have for strangers in their country, they said nothing to Hobson, whose fort was then built. Kalumah was unacquainted with the tradition, which, after all, had no substantial foundation, and was only one of the many legends of arctic cosmogony, and that is why the colonists of Fort Hope had not been warned of the danger they ran in establishing themselves on that particular spot.

And, certainly, Jasper Hobson, if warned by the Esquimaux, and already suspecting the ground which presented such peculiar features, would have sought for some other and surer foundation for his factory.

When Kalumah actually understood that Cape

Bathurst was no longer in existence she continued her expedition beyond Washburn Bay, but without meeting any trace of those she sought ; so then there was nothing for her to do but to return westward to the fisheries of Russian America.

She and her brother-in-law left Morse Bay at the end of June. They followed the coast-line, and at the end of July, after that useless journey, they reached the establishment of New Georgia.

Kalumah, at that time, never expected to see Mrs. Barnett or any of her companions again. She believed them to have been all lost in the ocean.

At this part of her narrative the young Esquimaux turned her tearful eyes towards Mrs. Barnett and pressed her hand affectionately, and then she thanked God for having saved her by means of her friend.

Kalumah, having returned home, resumed her usual occupations, working with her tribe near Ice Cape, which is about six hundred miles from Cape Bathurst.

Nothing worthy of notice occurred during the first half of the month of August, but towards the end of it the storm began which had disquieted Hobson so greatly, and which, it appeared, had extended all over the polar regions and beyond Behring Strait. At Ice Cape it was as violent as on Victoria Island, when the latter was not two hundred miles from the coast, as Hobson had ascertained by his observations.

While Mrs. Barnett was listening to Kalumah her

mind rapidly grasped the circumstances which had brought the young native to the island.

During the first few days of the storm the Esquimaux had been confined to their huts. They could not get out, much less go fishing; but on the night of the 31st August, impelled by a sort of presentiment, Kalumah went down to the beach, and braving the wind and rain, she endeavoured to pierce the darkness while the waves in front of her rolled mountains high.

Some time after midnight she thought she saw an immense mass driven by the wind parallel to the coast. She possessed very keen sight, like all people accustomed to the long arctic winter nights, and she could not believe herself mistaken. Some enormous thing was passing, two miles from the coast, which could not be a whale nor a ship, nor an iceberg, at that time of year.

But she did not stop to reason about it. It flashed upon her mind like a revelation. The image of her friends rose before her excited imagination. She fancied she could see them all again—Mrs. Barnett, Madge, Lieutenant Hobson, and the baby she had caressed at Fort Hope. Yes, they were surely passing; carried before the tempest on a floating mass of ice!

The girl did not hesitate for a moment. She felt that she ought to warn those poor people that they were close to the land. She ran at full speed to her hut, and seizing a torch of tow and resin, which the Esquimaux used for

their night fishing, she lit it and waved it from the summit of Ice Cape.

This was the fire which Jasper Hobson and Sergeant Long had seen through the fog on the night of the 31st of August.

What was the joy of the young Esquimaux, when she saw her signal replied to by the flaming thicket of pines, lighted by Hobson, the reflection of which reached the coast, though the Lieutenant did not believe it so near.

But the signal was soon extinguished. The calm lasted but a few minutes, and the storm veering to the south-east, recommenced with new violence.

Kalumah saw that her prey had escaped her, for she called the island her prey, and it could not be drawn ashore. She saw it passing away into the darkness, driven furiously across the sea.

This was a terrible moment for the young native, and she made up her mind to advise her friends of the situation at all risks, as there might still be time for them to do something, though every hour carried them farther from the main-land.

She did not hesitate. Her kayak was there, that frail canoe in which she had more than once braved the arctic storms. She pushed it down to the sea, fastened round her waist the sealskin jacket which enclosed her within it, and paddle in hand, plunged into the darkness.

At this point of the recital Mrs. Barnett embraced Kalumah affectionately, while Madge shed tears.

Kalumah once embarked found herself aided by the wind, which carried her out to sea. She paddled in the direction of the island, which was still faintly visible in the gloom. The waves dashed over her kayak, but were powerless to harm her, as the boat floated like a straw on the crest of the waves. She was frequently overturned, but a stroke of the paddle always righted her canoe.

After about an hour of hard work, Kalumah saw the island more distinctly. She now no longer despaired of reaching her object, as she was only a quarter of a mile from it.

It was then that she uttered that cry which Hobson and Long both heard.

But at that moment she felt herself carried away to the west by an irresistible current, to which she could not offer any resistance. It was in vain that she used her paddle, the light boat was carried along like an arrow. She cried out loudly, but was not heard, she was already too far away, and when day broke, New Georgia and the island which she had pursued appeared only like two masses on the horizon.

But she did not yet despair. Though it was now impossible to return to the continent in the teeth of such a gale, still she thought that she might reach the island by keeping in the same current which was carrying the island with it.

But alas! her strength gave way before her courage.

She became faint for want of sustenance, and fatigue soon paralysed all her efforts.

Nevertheless she struggled for many hours, and it seemed to her that she got nearer the island, though its inhabitants could not see her, as she was but a speck on the ocean. Still she struggled on, until her bleeding hands and exhausted arms refused all further service. She lost consciousness, and her frail bark became a toy for the wind and waves.

How long this lasted she could not tell. She knew nothing until, with a sudden shock, her kayak opened beneath her, and Kalumah was plunged into the cold water, which reanimated her, and a few seconds later she was thrown by a wave on a sandy beach.

This had happened the previous night, just before daybreak, that is to say between two and three o'clock in the morning; so from the time she embarked until she was wrecked was just seventy hours.

However, she had no idea where she was. Whether she had been cast on the continent, or reached the island she had been seeking so bravely, she did not know; but she hoped the latter, even though she knew that the current had carried her and it far out to sea, and that she could not reach the coast.

The thought of reaching her friends revived her, and, wounded as she was, she tried to crawl along the beach.

Fortunately she had been cast upon that portion of

the island which had formed the upper angle of Morse Bay, but in its present condition she did not recognise it.

Kalumah pushed on; then, finding her strength failing, she struggled hard to advance, but the way seemed very long. Every mile she had to make long *détours* where the sea had encroached upon the land; so, dragging herself along, often falling and getting up again, she arrived near the little wood at which that very morning Mrs. Barnett and Madge had rested. We know that they, on their way to Cape Esquimaux, had found Kalumah's footprints in the snow, and, a little distance off, the poor girl had fallen for the last time. From that point, worn out by fatigue and hunger, she could only crawl along on hands and knees.

But a great hope supported her, for, at a little distance off, she recognised Cape Esquimaux, at the foot of which she and her tribe had encamped the year before. She knew that she was then only eight miles from the factory, and that she had but to follow the old path which she had often travelled when she went to visit her friends at Fort Hope.

This idea sustained her; but when she reached the shore her strength finally gave way, and she fell back upon the snow unconscious. Without Mrs. Barnett's assistance she would have died.

"But, my dear lady," she said, "I felt that you would come to my assistance, and that God would save me by your hands."

We know the rest.' We know that a presentiment had impelled Mrs. Barnett and Madge to explore that part of the coast, and how the same feeling had carried them to Cape Esquimaux before they returned to the factory. We know what Mrs. Barnett told the young native—how the piece of ice had broken away, and what the bear had done.

Mrs. Barnett smiling, added: "So you see that I did not save you, after all, but that good animal, without whose assistance you would have been lost. If we ever see him again we will regard him as your preserver."

During this conversation Kalumah, warmed and refreshed, had recovered her strength. Mrs. Barnett proposed an immediate return to the fort, and the young Esquimaux professed herself ready to start.

Mrs. Barnett had some reason to hurry, for she wished to tell the Lieutenant all that had passed, and how near the island had approached the American continent that night of the storm. But she particularly requested Kalumah to keep silent respecting the situation of the island. She might well be thought to have come naturally along the shore, in performance of the promise made to visit her friends that year. Her arrival would serve to confirm the inhabitants of the factory in the idea that no changes had taken place in the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst, supposing that any of them had entertained such an opinion,

It was about three o'clock when Mrs. Barnett, with the young native leaning on her arm, and accompanied by the faithful Madge, set out on the homeward way, and before five in the afternoon they reached Fort Hope.

CHAPTER X.

THE KAMTCHATKA CURRENT.

THE reception given to Kalumah by the inhabitants of the fort may be imagined. It seemed as if the communication with the outer world had been renewed. Mrs. MacNab, Mrs. Ray, and Mrs. Joliffe were prodigal of their caresses, and Kalumah in her turn covered the little baby with kisses.

The young Esquimaux was truly affected by the generous hospitality of her European friends. They held quite a fête in her honour. They were all delighted to think that she would remain with them during the winter, for the year was too far advanced to permit of her returning to New Georgia.

But if the inhabitants of Fort Hope were agreeably surprised by the arrival of the young native, what must Jasper Hobson have thought when he saw her leaning on Mrs. Barnett's arm! He could scarcely believe his eyes. The thought flashed through his mind that Victoria Island had actually grounded on the continent.

Mrs. Barnett read in the Lieutenant's eyes this improbable hypothesis, and she shook her head.

Hobson saw at once that no change had taken place in the situation, and he waited until Mrs. Barnett could explain the presence of Kalumah, which she did a few minutes later, as they walked along the beach together.

So, after all, he had been right in his conjecture. The tempest from the north-east had carried the island out of the current, and during that terrible night of the 30th of August the island had actually been within a mile of the American continent. It was not a fire on board ship they had seen, nor had they heard the cry of any shipwrecked sailor; the land had been close by, and if the wind had blown for another hour in the same direction Victoria Island would have been cast up on the shore of Russian America.

Thus, at the critical moment, the wind had carried them away again; and, aided by the current, the island was being hurried to that dangerous place where, exposed to contrary attractions, it must be lost, with all those upon it.

For the hundredth time the Lieutenant and Mrs. Barnett talked over these things, and Hobson inquired if any change of importance had taken place between Cape Bathurst and Morse Bay.

Mrs. Barnett replied that the coast seemed to be lower, and that the waves encroached more upon it. She related also what had happened at Cape Esquimaux, and how the ice-block had broken off.

Nothing could have been less reassuring. It was

evident that the island was dissolving by degrees. What had happened at Cape Esquimaux might happen at Cape Bathurst at any time. The factory might be swallowed up, and all its inhabitants engulfed, and the only bright side to the situation was the approach of winter, but it was very tardy in its approach.

Next day, the 4th of September, an observation taken by Hobson proved that the situation was not altered sensibly since the previous day. The island was motionless between two contrary currents, which was about the best thing that could have happened.

“If the sea would only freeze around us where we are, I should look upon our safety as assured,” said Hobson. “We are only two hundred miles from the main-land at this moment, and by crossing the ice-fields we could reach Russian territory, or, perhaps, the coast of America. Oh for the winter at any price! but quickly.”

However, meanwhile, all preparations for wintering were completed. Food enough to last the animals all through the polar night was provided. The dogs were in good health but very fat, and had nothing to do; yet they could not be taken too much care of, for the poor beasts would have to work very hard when at length Fort Hope was abandoned. It was therefore most important to keep them in a perfect state of health, so they were fed on raw reindeer meat, which was not difficult to procure in the neighbourhood.

The domesticated reindeer also prospered, their stable was very commodious, and a quantity of moss was laid up for them during the winter. The females of the herds furnished abundance of milk to Mrs. Joliffe for culinary purposes.

The Corporal and his little wife had also resown some seeds which had succeeded so well in the warm season. The ground had been prepared before the snow fell, for the scurvy-grass and Labrador tea, as it was very necessary there should be no lack of anti-scorbutics.

The wood-sheds were filled to the top, the winter and ice might now come, and the mercury might even freeze, but there was no danger of their being reduced to burn their furniture as before. The carpenter and his mates, warned by experience, had preserved all the chips from the boat-building.

About this time some few animals which had assumed their winter furs were captured. Marbre and Sabine had obtained the Lieutenant's permission to set some traps outside the enceinte. Jasper Hobson did not like to refuse, for fear his men should become discontented, for he had no serious reason for stopping the supply of furs, though he knew that it would be no use to destroy these precious and inoffensive animals. However, their flesh would do to feed the dogs, and thus economise the reindeer venison.

Everything was prepared for the winter as if Fort

Hope had been established on solid ground, and the soldiers worked with a zeal which they would probably not have shown had they been aware of the secret of the situation.

During the following days observations were made with the greatest care, but no appreciable alteration in their position could be discovered. Jasper Hobson perceiving that the island was immovable took heart, though there were at present no indications of winter in inorganic nature, as the temperature was only 49 deg. Fahrenheit ; still, some swans had been noticed flying southwards, as if seeking a warmer climate. Other birds, long fliers, which could traverse immense distances over the ocean, began to desert the island. They knew that the main-land, with all its resources, was not far off, and that they would be able to reach it. A number of these birds were captured, and at Mrs. Barnett's suggestion a cloth ticket was tied round their necks, and on it was written the position of the wandering island and the names of its inhabitants. Then the birds were let fly, and it was not without envy that the parties saw them set forth on their journey south. Of course this operation was conducted by those only who were in the secret.

As for the quadrupeds imprisoned on the island it was impossible for them to seek a warmer climate. Under ordinary circumstances, the reindeer, polar-hares, and even the wolves, would have left the neighbourhood for the Great Bear Lake, or Slave Lake, far from the

complain of that. He who, under other circumstances, would have deplored the effects of the hurricane, now positively rejoiced at it; for if the island would only resist, as he hoped it would, it would be blown to the south-west by this wind, which was stronger than the currents, and the south-west meant land and safety. Yes, for all their sakes, he hoped that the storm would last until it drove them on shore, no matter where. An occurrence which would be fatal to a ship would prove their salvation.

For a quarter of an hour Hobson remained lying on the ground, half drenched by the spray and rain, and holding on with the tenacity of a drowning man, endeavouring to balance the chances of safety. He then descended, and, in the midst of a whirlwind of sand, managed to regain the fort.

As soon as he got inside he told his companions that the hurricane had not reached its height, and might be expected to last some days longer. But his tone was that of a man bringing glad tidings, and was remarked as singular by all who heard him. They thought the chief was delighted with the strife of the elements.

On the 30th Hobson again braved the storm, but this time he went down to the shore. There he noticed, floating on the top of the waves, some weeds which did not grow on the island. These weeds were still fresh, as if they had only lately been detached from the main-land, so it could not be very far off. Christopher Columbus

never rejoiced more than did Hobson at the sight of these seaweeds, which told him of the proximity of the land.

The Lieutenant hurried home, and confided his discovery to Mrs. Barnett and Sergeant Long. At that moment he had a great mind to tell the truth to all the others, but a presentiment kept him silent.

Meanwhile the inhabitants of the fort had not been idle all these long days. They made some necessary improvements in the interior of the buildings, and dug trenches in the court to carry away the accumulation of rain-water. MacNab, with hammer and nails, was always busy in one corner or another. So they worked all day, without thinking much of the storm; but at nightfall it always appeared as if the hurricane blew with redoubled fury. It was impossible to sleep. The gusts beat against the house like the blows of a battering-ram. Sometimes a kind of waterspout was formed between the house and the cape, and then the planks cracked, and the whole building appeared in danger of being blown away. The carpenter and his mates were accordingly in continual dread, and were always on the *qui vive*.

Hobson was more anxious about the stability of the island than about the house upon it. The tempest had now become so violent, and the waves so enormous, that there was some reason to fear that the ice would break up. It seemed almost impossible for that enormous glacier, now so worn away at its base, to resist the waves

much longer. The inhabitants did not feel any movement, but there was no doubt it suffered from the motion. The question in Hobson's mind was, whether the island would stop long enough to be thrown ashore, or would go to pieces in mid-ocean.

It had resisted well so far, for, had any dislocation taken place, the separation must have been noticed by the occupants, as the smaller pieces would have been affected by the movement of the sea, and they would have been rolled and pitched about like passengers on board ship. But this was not the case, and, in all his observations, Hobson had never noticed the slightest trembling of the island, which really appeared to be as firm as if it were still attached to the continent.

But the separation might come at any moment.

All this time Hobson was very anxious to ascertain whether the island, driven out of the current by the north-east wind, had approached the continent, and this was really their only chance of safety. But in the absence of the sun, moon, and stars, no observations could be taken. Instruments were useless, so if they were approaching land they would not be aware of it till they could see it, and then Lieutenant Hobson would not be able to ascertain anything in time to enable him to get to the south side of the island so as to sustain the shock in safety.

But, in fact, the position of the island had not altered in any appreciable degree, as far as the points of the

compass were concerned. Cape Bathurst still pointed to the north as it used to do, so it was evident if the island were driven on shore that the southern portion, between Cape Michael and Morse Bay, would first touch the land; in a word, the connection would be made by the former isthmus, and it was therefore necessary that Hobson should see what was going on in that direction.

Hobson therefore resolved to go to Cape Michael notwithstanding the storm, but he intended to keep his real object a secret; only Sergeant Long would be permitted to accompany him.

So on the 31st August, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Hobson sent for the Sergeant, that they might make ready for any eventuality.

"Sergeant Long," he said, "it is now necessary that we should find out the position of the island, and whether we have really approached the American continent, as I hope we have."

"I think so too, sir, and the sooner the better," replied Long.

"Well, then, we must go to the south of the island."

"I am quite ready, sir."

"I know that you are always ready to do your duty, Sergeant; but you must not go alone. We ought to go together, so as to be able to give our companions notice if land is in sight. Besides, I want to see for myself."

"As you please, sir, and when you please."

"We shall start this evening at nine o'clock, when all the others are asleep."

"They must not know we are going, of course, or they might wish to come with us," said Long.

"No, they must on no account be told, and I will do my best to keep the secret from them till the last."

"That is arranged then, sir."

"You had better take a tinder-box, in case it is necessary to make a signal, which we shall do if land is in sight."

"Yes, sir."

"We shall have a rough time of it, Sergeant."

"No doubt, sir; but what does that matter? Shall we tell Mrs. Barnett?"

"Well, I did not think of doing so. She might wish to accompany us."

"And that would be impossible," replied the Sergeant.

"She never could stand against such a gale as this; just listen to it."

Indeed as he spoke the house rocked to its foundation.

"No," continued Hobson, "this brave woman must not and cannot accompany us; but I think it would be as well to inform her of our design; she ought to be told, in case accidents should happen."

"Yes," assented Long, "we ought not to keep anything secret from her, and in case we do not come back——"

“Well then, at nine o’clock, Sergeant.”

“At nine o’clock, sir, I shall be ready.” And the Sergeant retired, with a military salute.

A few moments afterwards Hobson told Mrs. Barnett of his intended expedition. As he expected, she was anxious to join him, and was ready to brave the fury of the tempest. The Lieutenant did not attempt to dissuade her on account of the danger of the expedition, but explained that in his absence her presence at the fort was indispensable, else his mind would not be at ease. If anything should happen to him it would be some consolation to know that she could take his place.

Mrs. Barnett understood, and did not press the matter. She begged Hobson to be careful, and to recollect that he was commander of the fort, that his life did not belong to himself alone, but was necessary for the common safety. The Lieutenant promised to be prudent, but the exploration of the south coast was absolutely necessary, and he must make it at once. So Mrs. Barnett undertook to inform his companions the following day that Hobson and the Sergeant had merely gone to make a reconnaissance before the winter set in.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIRE AND A CRY!

THE Lieutenant and Sergeant Long passed the evening in the great hall until bedtime. All the colonists were assembled there except the astronomer, who remained, as it were, hermetically sealed in his cabin. Men and women worked at their various occupations, while Mrs. Barnett read aloud. Her reading was frequently interrupted, however, not only by the terrible gusts of wind, but by the cries of the baby. Corporal Joliffe, who had undertaken to amuse him, had his hands quite full. He had converted his knees into horses until they were tired, and he was at last obliged to place his little rider upon the large table, where he rolled about until he fell asleep.

At eight o'clock, as usual, prayers were read, the lamps were extinguished, and everyone retired to rest.

When all was quiet, Hobson and the Sergeant passed noiselessly across the empty room and gained the corridor. There they found Mrs. Barnett, who had waited to press their hands once more.

"Good-bye—till to-morrow," she said to the Lieutenant.

“Until to-morrow, without fail,” he replied.

“Suppose you are delayed?”

“You must wait patiently for us,” he said; “for if we should happen to see a fire on the horizon, which is not unlikely this dark night, we should know that we were approaching the coast of New Georgia. Under these circumstances I should have to wait till daylight to ascertain our position—so we may be away eight-and-forty hours. Still, if we can reach Cape Michael before midnight, we shall return to the fort to-morrow evening; so be patient, madam, and remember that we are not running a risk without good reason.”

“But,” said Mrs. Barnett, “suppose you do not return in two days?”

“Then we shall not return at all,” said Hobson simply.

He opened the door. Mrs. Barnett closed it after him, and then, feeling restless and pensive, she returned to her room, where Madge awaited her.

Jasper Hobson and Sergeant Long crossed the inner court, and in the midst of a whirlwind which nearly overturned them. But by supporting each other and leaning upon their iron-shod staves, they managed to reach the postern gate, and set forward between the hills and the eastern side of the lake.

A dim twilight seemed to rest upon the earth. The new moon had not yet appeared, and the darkness of the night was almost unrelieved. Fortunately the

obscurity would not last long. They could only just see where they were going.

How it did rain and blow !

The Lieutenant and his companion were clad in waterproofs from head to foot, and they proceeded at a rapid pace, for the wind was behind them, and sometimes hurried them faster than they wished. They could not have heard themselves speak even had they attempted it ; the storm rendered them breathless, and almost deaf.

Hobson's intention was to take a direct route, and cut off the irregularity of the shore which would have taken them a long way round, and exposed them to the full fury of the tempest. He determined to go in a straight line from Cape Bathurst to Cape Michael, and had brought a pocket-compass with him for that purpose. In this way he would only have ten or eleven miles to traverse to reach his journey's end, and he hoped to arrive before the twilight gave place to the darkness which preceded the dawn.

So the two men, with their backs bent and heads stooping, pressed rapidly on. As long as they kept by the lake they did not meet the storm full face. The hills protected them to a certain extent, but the wind was still blowing as if it would tear the trees up by the roots. Even the rain had been converted into mist when it reached them, and for about four miles the explorers had less to contend against than they had expected.

But when they reached the extremity of the little wood, where there were no trees or any rising ground, the wind swept by with such terrific force that they paused involuntarily. They had still six miles to go to reach Cape Michael.

“We are going to have a hard time of it,” shouted the Lieutenant in Sergeant Long’s ear.

“Yes,” replied the Sergeant, “the wind and rain are going to join forces against us.”

“I am afraid we shall have hail as well,” said the Lieutenant.

“It will not be so bad as grape-shot, and we have both been through that before now, sir, so let us go on.”

“Forward, my brave friend!”

It was then ten o’clock. The twilight was fading, as if it had been drowned in the fog or put out by the wind. There was still a faint reflection of light however. The Lieutenant struck a light and managed to see the compass, and then wrapping his cloak tightly round him, and followed by the Sergeant, they started across the unprotected plain.

They were immediately dashed to the ground, but they managed to rise, and gripping each other tightly, and with backs bent like two old men, they started again at an ambling trot.

There was something very magnificent in the storm, notwithstanding its horrors. Great masses of ragged cloud swept close along the ground, the sand and earth

were hurried past, and the men's lips tasted quite salt, although Hobson and his companion both knew that the sea was two or three miles away at least.

Whenever the gale slackened for a moment, which was very seldom, the Lieutenant took his bearings as accurately as he could.

But the tempest seemed to increase as night came on, the air and water seemed absolutely mingled together. Low down on the horizon an enormous water-spout was forming; such a one as could overturn houses, destroy trees, and at which ships fire cannon-shots. It appeared as if the ocean were being torn from its bed and thrown upon the wandering island.

Indeed Hobson wondered how the ice-field ever managed to support the attacks made upon it by the elements, and why it had not long ago broken up. The roaring of the sea could now be distinctly heard, and just then Sergeant Long, who was a little in advance, suddenly stopped, and returning to the Lieutenant, called out :

“Not that way !”

“Why not ?”

“The sea.”

“What do you mean ? The sea ! we cannot have got to the south-east coast yet.”

“Look, sir.”

And indeed a large sheet of water was just visible in front, and the waves were even rolling up, and breaking close to the Lieutenant's feet,

Hobson lighted his tinder a second time, and consulted his compass very attentively.

“No,” he said, “the sea is more to the left. We have not yet passed by the wood near Cape Michael.”

“Then this is——”

“This is a fracture of the island,” cried Hobson to his companion, as they were both obliged to throw themselves flat upon the ground to avoid the wind. “Either a large piece of the island has been detached and drifted away, or merely a piece has been broken off, and we can go round the gulf. Let us proceed.”

They rose together and turned to the right, following the foam of the sea which broke at their feet. They proceeded thus for about ten minutes, fearing all the while, and not without reason, that they might find their communication with the south of the island cut off. After awhile they no longer heard the roar of the breakers, which was distinct from every other sound.

“It is only a gulf,” roared Hobson in the Sergeant’s ear. “Let us turn.”

They resumed their route to the south; but those brave men knew very well without speaking that they were exposing themselves to terrible danger. In fact, the part of the island on which they were wandering at that time was cracked for some distance, and it might at any time fall away altogether. If it should break off under the influence of the surf, they would be carried away without a hope of rescue. Still they did not hesitate,

and pressed forward into the darkness without ever thinking of how they would get back again.

Hobson's reflections were very sad ; he scarcely could hope that the island would hold together till winter time ; for was not this the commencement of the breaking up of the ice ? If the wind did not soon drive them to the main-land they would certainly perish in the sea, and leave not a trace behind. What a fearful prospect this was ! What chance now remained for the unfortunate inhabitants of the island !

Nevertheless, though bruised, battered, and beaten by the gale, those two energetic men struggled along. They reached at last the large wood which surrounded Cape Michael. They would be obliged to cross this so as to reach the coast by the shortest way. They entered it accordingly, but in total darkness, amid the thunder of the wind through the pines overhead. All around them branches appeared to be breaking to pieces. Their way was encumbered with fallen timber, and every moment they ran the risk of being crushed by a falling tree, and now and then they stumbled over a stump unperceived in the gloom. But still they did not proceed blindly—the roar of the sea on one side was a guide ; and now and then the enormous waves actually shook the ground beneath their feet. So holding tightly to each other they sustained themselves, helping each other when they fell, and by these means they managed to reach the farther side of the wood in safety.

But when they stepped into the open ground a furious blast of wind tore them one from the other and threw them upon the ground.

“Sergeant, Sergeant!” roared Hobson, as loudly as he could, “where are you?”

“Here I am, sir!” screamed Long.

Then creeping along the ground they endeavoured to rejoin each other, but it seemed as if some powerful hand held them down. At length they managed to come together, and to obviate any further separation they tied themselves together by their belts, and then they crawled along the sand, so as to gain a small mound crowned with a cluster of pines. There they were more protected; and they immediately dug a hole into which they crept, and lay down in a state of prostration.

It was half-past eleven o'clock at night.

Hobson and his companion remained for some time without speaking. They remained in a state of stupor, with their eyes half closed in sleep, while the branches of the pines overhead crackled like the bones of a skeleton. But they managed to resist the tendency to sleep, and after a few sips of rum from the Sergeant's flask they felt revived.

“I hope these trees will hold,” said Hobson.

“And that the hole we have dug will not be filled up,” added the Sergeant, as he crouched down in the sand.

“Well, here we are at last,” said Hobson, “not far from Cape Michael, which we have come to see, so let

us make the observations. Look you, Sergeant Long, I have a presentiment that we are not very far from the main-land. It is only a presentiment, mind."

From their position they ought to have been able to see the southern horizon ; but at that time the darkness was so great they could see nothing, and unless a fire should happen to be lighted they must wait till daylight to see the coast—supposing they had been driven within range of it.

Now, as the Lieutenant had told Mrs. Barnett, it was no uncommon occurrence for fishermen to visit that portion of America which is called New Georgia. This land includes numerous settlements, the natives of which collect the teeth of mammoths, for skeletons of those great fossil antediluvians are very common in those latitudes. Some degrees farther south is New Archangel, the chief place of Russian America, the influence of which extends over the Aleutian Islands. But the hunters more frequently resort to the shores of the Arctic Sea, especially since the Hudson's Bay Company have taken over the hunting-grounds, formerly owned by the Russians. Jasper Hobson, without knowing anything of the country, was well acquainted with the habits of the agents who visited it at that time of year ; and he was quite justified in believing that he might meet some fellow-countrymen, or even some of his own colleagues, or at any rate, failing them, he would encounter some of the native Indians who hunted on the coast.

But was Jasper Hobson justified in believing that his island was being driven ashore ?

“Yes ; a hundred times yes,” he repeated to the Sergeant. “A hurricane has been blowing from the north-east for seven days ; and although the island is very flat, still there is something for the wind to catch hold of, and these little woods and hills must act more or less as sails. Besides, the sea which carries us along must have a certain effect, for waves always run in-shore ; it is quite out of the question that we could have kept in the current which was carrying us westwards, and we must have been driven to the south. When we last took our bearings we were two hundred miles from land, and seven days would make a great difference.”

“Your arguments are quite right, sir,” replied Sergeant Long ; “and besides the wind, we have the assistance of Providence, who, I am sure, would never allow us to perish. I put all my trust in Him.”

The two men talked thus, in sentences constantly interrupted by the roaring of the tempest. They endeavoured to penetrate the thick gloom and fog which extended all round them ; but they could see no light whatever.

About half-past one in the morning a lull took place, but the sea seemed to be roaring louder than ever.

Suddenly Hobson, seizing his companion’s arm, cried out :

“Sergeant, don’t you hear anything ?”

“What?”

“The noise of the sea.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Long, listening attentively; “and it seems to me that lately the noise of the waves——”

“Is not the same,” interrupted Hobson. “Is it not so, Sergeant? Listen, listen! It is like the noise of breakers on the rocks.”

Hobson and the Sergeant listened most attentively. The noise of the waves was no longer that monotonous roar and rush of water in the open sea; but it appeared more like the regular beating of water against a hard body and the recoil from the rocks. Now, they knew that there was not a single rock all round their island, which was entirely composed of earth and sand.

Had not therefore Hobson and his companion been deceived? The Sergeant endeavoured to stand upright, so as to listen more attentively. But he was immediately overthrown by the hurricane, which recommenced with renewed violence. The slight lull had ceased, and the whistling of the storm was again mingled with the noise of the sea, and drowned the peculiar sound which had struck upon their ear.

One may judge of the anxiety of the two explorers. Once more they crouched into their hole, and wondered whether it would not be better to quit their resting-place, for they could feel the sand give way beneath them, and the pine-trees seemed to crack in their very roots. But the men still continued to gaze steadily towards the south.

It seemed as if their whole existence was centred in their eyes, in their endeavour to pierce the darkness which would soon give way to the dawn.

Suddenly, a little before half-past two in the morning, the Sergeant cried out :

“ I saw it.”

“ What ? ”

“ A fire ! ”

“ A fire ? ”

“ Yes ; over there,” and the Sergeant pointed to the south-west as he spoke.

Was he mistaken ? No ; for Jasper Hobson, following the course indicated, plainly discovered a glimmer on the horizon.

“ Yes,” he exclaimed ; “ yes, Sergeant, it is a fire, and land must be over there.”

“ Unless the light is on board a ship,” said Sergeant Long.

“ That would be impossible in such weather as this,” replied Hobson. “ No, no ; the main-land is over there, a few miles away.”

“ Well then, let us make a signal.”

“ Yes, Sergeant, let us reply to this fire on the continent by a fire on our own island.”

Neither Hobson nor the Sergeant had a torch to kindle a flame ; but above their heads rose the resinous pines.

“ Your flint, please, Sergeant,” said Hobson.

Long struck the flint and steel, lighted the touch-wood, then creeping along the sand they reached the thicket. There was plenty of dead-wood, and piling it up at the root of one of the pines, they set it on fire, and, with the assistance of the wind, the whole thicket was soon in a blaze.

“ Ah ! ” said Hobson, “ since we saw their fire they must see ours. ”

The firs burnt with a livid flame like an enormous torch. The resin in the old trunks rapidly consumed them ; and at last the flames died away and went out.

Hobson and Long waited for a reply to their signal. But nothing was to be seen. They waited for ten minutes hoping to see the flame again, and were already despairing, when suddenly they heard a cry—a distant cry for help, coming from the sea.

Hobson and Long, overcome with anxiety, rolled down to the shore.

But the cry was not heard again.

However, daylight was now approaching, and it appeared as if the storm was decreasing as the sun rose ; the light was soon strong enough to permit them to see all round the horizon.

But there was no land in sight. The sky and sea met in one unbroken line.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. BARNETT'S EXCURSION.

ALL the morning Hobson and the Sergeant wandered along that part of the coast. The weather had improved very much. The rain had almost ceased, and the wind had suddenly gone round to the south-east, but unfortunately it did not diminish in violence. This circumstance affected Hobson very much, for all hope of reaching the main-land now diminished.

In fact, this south-east wind would drive the island farther from the American continent, and cast it into those dangerous currents which might carry it to the north of the Arctic Ocean.

But were they justified in thinking that they had actually approached near the continent that dreadful night? Was it not, perhaps, after all, an idea of Hobson's? The atmosphere was now clear, and although they could see for several miles round in all directions, there was no land in sight. Probably the Sergeant might have been right after all, and a ship might have passed the island during the night, from which a cry of distress might have gone up, and on board which the fire-signal

had been made. But if this vessel had not foundered, what had become of it?

In any case, whatever the cause, there was no wreck, no *débris* to be seen. The sea, now driven in the contrary way by the wind, was rough enough to overcome any ship.

“Well, sir,” said Sergeant Long to the Lieutenant, “what are we to do now? We must do something.”

“We must stop upon the island,” replied the Lieutenant, passing his hand over his forehead. “We must await the winter where we are—that is our only chance.”

It was then midday. Jasper Hobson was anxious to arrive at Fort Hope before night, so he immediately took the road to Cape Bathurst. The wind aided the travellers as it had done before, and blew steadily at their backs. They were very anxious, for they feared, and not without reason, that the island might have separated during the night. The gulf they had passed round might have extended, and if so they would be quite cut off from all their friends.

They were not long reaching the wood which they traversed the night before. A number of trees had been torn up by the roots, and were now lying on the ground. The others, with broken stems, were stripped of leaves, and only a few creaking branches were left. Two miles farther the explorers reached the margin of the gulf which they had turned the night before, when they were not able to judge of its extent in the darkness. They now

examined it carefully. It was a large fracture about fifty feet wide, cutting the shore halfway between Cape Michael and the former Port Barnett, making a sort of estuary a mile and a half into the interior; any rough sea would naturally widen it more and more.

As Hobson approached the shore he saw an enormous lump of ice break off and float away from the island.

“Yes,” murmured Sergeant Long, “that is the danger.”

They then turned and proceeded at a rapid pace westward, so as to get round the great gulf, and then they took a straight line for Fort Hope.

They did not notice any other change as they proceeded. At four o'clock they passed the postern-gate, and found all their companions occupied as usual.

Jasper Hobson informed his people that he had wished to try and find some trace of Captain Craventy's convoy, but he could not perceive anything of it.

“Then,” said Marbre, “I suppose that we must definitively give up all hope of seeing our companions at Fort Reliance, for this year, at any rate.”

“I think so, Marbre,” replied Hobson quietly, as he entered the common sitting-room.

Mrs. Barnett and Madge were soon told of the two chief incidents of the expedition—viz. the fire and the cry. Jasper Hobson firmly declared that neither he nor the Sergeant could have been mistaken. The fire had been actually seen, the cry had been distinctly audible.

Then, after mature deliberation, all were agreed upon this point : that a ship in distress had passed within sight of the island during the night ; that it—the island—had not approached the continent.

However, under the influence of the south-east wind, the sky soon cleared and the mist disappeared. Hobson therefore began to hope that he would be able to take his bearings on the following day. The night was colder, and a fine snow fell and soon covered the ground, and when Hobson got up next morning he was glad to see the first sign of winter.

It was the 2nd September. The sun gradually broke out from the mists. The Lieutenant waited patiently. At midday he got a good observation, and at two o'clock he was able to calculate his position with the following result :

Latitude 70 degrees 57 minutes.

Longitude 170 degrees 30 minutes.

So it appeared that, in spite of the violence of the storm, the wandering island had remained in the same parallel, only it had gone farther west. They were now opposite Behring Strait, but four hundred miles at least to the north of Cape East and Cape Prince of Wales, which mark the narrowest part of the strait.

This view of the situation was even more serious than before. The island was every day approaching the great Kamtchatka current, which, if it once seized it, would carry it away far to the north. Evidently the destiny of

the island would soon be decided. It must either remain between the two currents while the sea froze round it, or it must be lost in the solitudes of the arctic regions.

Hobson was very much distressed, but as he wished to hide his anxiety, he shut himself in his own room during the remainder of the day. With his maps spread before him he did all in his power, and racked his brain, to discover some solution of the difficulty.

The temperature fell that day, and the mists which had collected above the south-eastern horizon during the evening descended in snow during the night, and next day it was two inches thick. Winter was coming at last.

On that day, the 3rd September, Mrs. Barnett resolved to make an expedition some miles along the coast between Cape Bathurst and Cape Esquimaux. She wished to see the changes that had taken place. She was sure if she had proposed to Hobson to accompany her he would have done so, but she did not wish to disturb him, so she took only Madge with her. There was really no danger to fear. The bears were the only formidable animals, and they had quitted the neighbourhood since the earthquake ; so two women might without imprudence go as far as the cape for a few hours' excursion.

Madge at once consented to Mrs. Barnett's suggestion, and without telling anyone, they started out at eight o'clock in the morning, armed with an ice-axe, a flask of rum, and a haversack of provisions, and proceeded in a westerly direction from Cape Bathurst.

The sun was languidly dragging itself along the horizon, for it did not ascend much above it at that time of year ; but its oblique rays were clear and penetrating, and had already begun to melt the newly-fallen snow.

Numerous birds, such as ptarmigan, guillemots, puffins, wild-geese, and ducks of all species, flew about and enlivened the shore. The air was full of their cries as they fluttered between the sea and the lagoon, according as their tastes led them to salt or fresh water.

Mrs. Barnett was now able to see how numerous the fur animals were in the neighbourhood of Fort Hope. The magazines might easily have been filled, but what good would that be under the circumstances? The harmless creatures, comprehending that they were no longer hunted, became quite tame, and ventured close up to the palisades. No doubt their instinct told them that they were prisoners upon the island as well as the bipeds, and a common danger made them friendly. But it struck Mrs. Barnett as curious that Marbre and Sabine, two such energetic hunters as they were, should without remonstrance obey the Lieutenant's orders to spare the fur animals, and did not appear to care to shoot the valuable game all round them. It is true that the foxes and other animals had not yet put on their winter garb, but this fact was not sufficient to explain the hunters' indifference.

* Meanwhile Mrs. Barnett and Madge proceeded at a good pace, talking as they went, and attentively observing the coast. The incursions made lately by the sea were quite visible, new subsidences of the ground permitted them to see new fractures in the ice quite plainly. The beach, torn away in places, had sunk very much, and waves now dashed along the level shore where the perpendicular cliffs had once checked their progress. It was evident that some part of the island had sunk and was almost on a level with the sea.

“My good Madge,” said Mrs. Barnett, as she pointed to the long level tracts over which the sea broke, “our situation has become more dangerous. It is certain that the whole island has sunk, and our safety is only a question of time. Will the winter arrive soon enough to save us? That is the point.”

“The winter will come, dear,” replied Madge, with her usual confidence. “We have had two snowy nights already. Cold is beginning to make itself felt, and Providence will not desert us, I am sure.”

“You are right, Madge ; we must have confidence in Him. We women, who do not seek for the scientific reason for things, can hope where professors despair. That is one blessing. Unfortunately, our Lieutenant does not reason as we do ; he knows the why and wherefore of things. He reflects and calculates, he reckons up the time remaining to us, and is already beginning to lose heart.”

“He has a brave energetic heart, for all that,” replied Madge.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Barnett, “and he will save us, if man can do it.”

At nine o'clock Mrs. Barnett and Madge had walked four miles. They were frequently obliged to leave the coast-line, to avoid the sea. Here and there the waves had passed inland for half a mile, and the thickness of the ice-field had been considerably reduced; so there was reason to fear that it would give way in many places, and, in consequence, new bays and gulfs would be formed upon the coast.

Mrs. Barnett remarked that the farther they got from the fort, so in proportion did the animals decrease in number. They evidently felt more secure in the presence of man. The wild beasts had all fled, except a few wolves, which wandered about the plain at a distance; but they soon disappeared behind the hills on the south side of the lagoon.

“I wonder what will become of all these animals when food fails them in the winter? They will be famished.”

“Famished, Madge!” replied Mrs. Barnett. “Well, believe me, we have nothing to fear from them. They will not want for food while all these martens, ermines, and polar hares will prove an easy prey. No, the danger is beneath our feet. Look, Madge, how the sea is encroaching! It already covers a large portion of the

plain, so the comparatively warm water is eating away the ice both above and below. If the frost does not stop it before long, the sea will join the lagoon, and we shall lose our lake, as we have lost our harbour and our river."

"When that happens, it will be an irreparable misfortune," said Madge.

"Why so?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"Because we shall have no more fresh water," replied Madge.

"Ah, we shall not want for fresh water. Rain, snow, ice, the icebergs of the ocean, even the soil on which we are floating, will furnish us with fresh water. No, I assure you that is not our danger."

About ten o'clock the women had reached the high level of Cape Esquimaux, but about two miles inland, as it was impossible to follow the coast-line, in consequence of the incursions of the sea. As they felt somewhat fatigued by their long walk, they determined to rest a little before setting off on their return journey. A small clump of trees, growing on this spot, gave them shelter, and a mossy bank, from which the snow had melted, offered them a convenient seat. So they rested, and ate their frugal luncheon.

Half an hour later, Mrs. Barnett suggested that they should, before taking the east road to the factory, explore the actual state of Cape Esquimaux. She professed herself anxious to find out whether it had resisted the tempest. Madge was quite ready to accompany her, but

remarked that they were still eight or nine miles from home, and that they must not cause anxiety by too long an absence.

However, Mrs. Barnett felt impelled to proceed ; and it was fortunate that she did so, as the event proved. And, after all, it would only make half-an-hour's difference ; so they started.

But they had not gone more than a quarter of a mile when Mrs. Barnett suddenly stopped, and pointed out some regular tracks clearly imprinted on the snow. Now these marks must have been quite fresh, else they would have been concealed by the last fall of snow.

“I wonder what animal has passed here?” said Madge.

“It is not an animal,” replied Mrs. Barnett, as she stooped to examine the footprints. “Any quadruped would have left different traces from these. You can see that these were made by a human foot.”

“But who could have been here?” said Madge. “Nobody has left the fort, and we are on an island. You must be mistaken, my dear. However, let us follow the tracks, and see whither they lead.”

They proceeded, and fifty paces farther they stopped again.

“Look, Madge, and now say if I have been mistaken.”

Close to the footprints were traces as if a heavy body had recently been dragged over the snow, and also the distinct impression of a hand.

“A hand of a woman or a child,” said Madge.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Barnett, “a child or a woman has fallen here exhausted. Then the poor creature has struggled up again—see, here are the footprints farther on, and again more falls.”

“But who—who could it be?” asked Madge.

“How can I tell?” replied Mrs. Barnett; “perhaps some poor unfortunate creature may have been imprisoned on this island during the last three or four months. Perhaps some shipwrecked person may have been thrown on the coast during the storm. Do you not remember the fire and the cry of which Sergeant Long and Lieutenant Hobson spoke? Come, come, Madge, there may be some poor wretch for us to succour.”

As she spoke, Mrs. Barnett dragged her companion along the track, which was now tinged with blood in places.

“There may be some poor wretch for us to succour,” the brave woman had said; but she had forgotten that there was no real safety for any one on the island, which was destined sooner or later to be swallowed up by the sea.

The impressions of the footsteps were directed towards Cape Esquimaux. Mrs. Barnett and Madge followed them attentively, but soon the stains of blood increased and the steps disappeared. It was evident that the poor wretch had been unable to walk farther, and had dragged

herself along upon hands and knees. Here and there were bits of clothing, of sealskin and fur.

“Let us hurry on,” cried Mrs. Barnett, whose heart beat fast.

Madge followed her. Cape Esquimaux was only a few paces distant, and rose but a little above the sea. It was deserted.

The tracks now led up to the right side of the cape; Mrs. Barnett and her companion, still running, soon reached the summit. But the track led them directly to the sea.

Mrs. Barnett hurried on to the right, but just as she reached the shore, Madge, who had followed her closely, looked round uneasily and cried:

“Stop, stop!”

“No, Madge, no,” cried Mrs. Barnett, who seemed to be dragged on by some instinct.

“Stay where you are and look round you,” cried Madge, holding her companion tightly.

About fifty paces from Cape Esquimaux, on the very brink of the sea, was an immense white mass, which moved about and growled loudly.

It was a polar bear of immense size. The women stood watching it in terror. The enormous animal was moving round and round a bundle of furs lying on the snow. Sometimes it lifted it up and let it fall again. It looked like the dead body of a morse.

Mrs. Barnett and Madge did not know what to think,

till, as the bear moved the body, a kind of hood fell off, and long brown hair was visible.

“It is a woman!” cried Mrs. Barnett, who wished to hurry to her assistance, and to find out whether she were dead or alive.

“Stay where you are,” cried Madge, still holding her back. “The bear will not hurt her.”

The bear, in fact, was attentively looking at the body, now and then turning it over, but making no attempt to tear it. The animal occasionally went away and came back again. It seemed uncertain what to do, it had not yet perceived the two women who were watching it so anxiously.

Suddenly a cracking noise was heard. The ground shook as if the whole of Cape Esquimaux was tumbling into the sea.

A large piece of the island had become detached and drifted away, carrying with it the bear and the body of the woman.

Mrs. Barnett uttered a scream, and rushed down to reach the ice-block before it drifted quite away.

“Stop, stop, I tell you!” said Madge, holding her hand convulsively.

When the bear heard the noise made by the breaking of the ice he started back, and quitting the body rushed to the side of the ice-block, which was now about forty feet from the island. In his terror he ran round and round, tearing up the ground with his claws, and making

the snow and sand fly round him. He then returned to the inanimate body.

Then, to the horror of the women, the animal seized the body by the clothes, carried it to the brink of the ice, and plunged into the sea.

In a few strokes, the bear, being an excellent swimmer, like all his kind, soon reached the island. With a vigorous effort he climbed up and put down his burden.

Mrs. Barnett could now no longer be restrained, and, without thinking of the risk she ran, escaped from Madge and hurried to the beach.

The bear seeing her, rose on his hind-legs and advanced towards her; however, at about ten paces distant he stopped, shook his enormous head, and then, as if he had lost his natural ferocity under the influence of that terror which had so affected all the beasts on the island, he turned away, uttering a low growl, and walked quietly off inland, without even looking behind him.

Mrs. Barnett immediately ran up to the body lying upon the snow.

A cry of astonishment and horror escaped her.

“Madge, Madge!” she screamed.

Madge approached and looked at the inanimate body.

It was the young Esquimaux girl, Kalumah!

CHAPTER IX.

THE ADVENTURES OF KALUMAH.

KALUMAH on the floating island, two hundred miles from the American continent!—it was scarcely credible.

The first question was whether she still breathed; was it possible to restore her to life? Mrs. Barnett loosened the girl's dress, and found that she was not yet quite cold. She felt her heart, which still beat feebly. The blood they had noticed had only come from a wound in her hand. It was of no importance, and Madge bound it up with her handkerchief.

Meantime Mrs. Barnett supported Kalumah's head, and gave her a few drops of rum. She then bathed her forehead and temples with the icy water.

For a few moments neither Mrs. Barnett nor Madge spoke a word. They waited in the greatest anxiety, for the vital spark might go out at any moment.

But a gentle sigh escaped from Kalumah's breast. Her hands moved about feebly; and as soon as her eyes opened she recognised her presence, and murmured:

“Mrs. Pauline—Mrs. Pauline.”

The lady was much surprised to hear her own name

pronounced under such circumstances. Had Kalumah voluntarily come to the wandering island, and did she know she would meet her European friend there, whose goodness she had not forgotten? But how could she know that, and how had she reached Victoria Island? Had she guessed that the ice was carrying away Mrs. Barnett and all her companions far from the continent? It was one of those things which appear quite inexplicable.

“She lives, she will recover!” said Madge, who could feel the heat and life returning to the poor bruised body.

“Poor thing!” murmured Mrs. Barnett, who was deeply moved. “It was my name, and my name only, that was on her lips, even at the point of death.”

But now Kalumah opened her eyes again. Her expression at first appeared vague and wandering, but suddenly it brightened as her eyes rested on Mrs. Barnett. She had seen her but for an instant, but that was sufficient. The young native recognised her good lady, whose name once more escaped her lips, while she raised her hand with difficulty and let it fall into Mrs. Barnett’s grasp.

And now the young Esquimaux began to revive quickly under the care of the two women. The girl’s exhaustion arose not only from fatigue but from hunger. Mrs. Barnett soon learnt that Kalumah had eaten **nothing for eight-and-forty hours.** Some slices of cold

venison and a little rum revived her, and she soon felt able to accompany her friends to the fort.

But during the time she rested, seated on the sand between Madge and Mrs. Barnett, Kalumah had overwhelmed them with thanks and demonstrations of affection, and told them her story. She had never forgotten the Europeans of Fort Hope; and Mrs. Barnett's image had ever since been in her memory. It was not by accident that she had been thrown half dead upon the shores of Victoria Island.

The following is what Kalumah told them :

It will be remembered that the young Esquimaux had promised to come and see her English friends again, the following summer; so when the month of May arrived she did her best to keep her word. She left New Georgia, where her tribe had wintered, and, accompanied by her brother-in-law, started for the peninsula of Victoria.

Six weeks afterwards she reached British territory near Cape Bathurst. She perfectly remembered the Volcanic Mountains, which overlooked Liverpool Bay, and twenty miles farther she reached Morse Bay, where her people had so often hunted the walrus.

But beyond this bay, on the north, she could see nothing. The coast trended away to the south-east in a straight line. Cape Esquimaux and Cape Bathurst were no longer in existence.

Kalumah soon understood what had happened

Either the whole territory of Victoria Island had been swallowed up in the sea, or it was wandering on its surface.

Kalumah wept as she reflected that she should never again see those she had come so far to seek.

But her brother-in-law was not very much surprised at the catastrophe. A sort of legend, a tradition, was extant amongst the nomad tribes of North America, to the effect that the territory of Cape Bathurst was not a portion of the main-land; but, although it had been joined to it for thousands of years, it would some day be detached by a natural convulsion. On this account, the Esquimaux had manifested some surprise at finding Hobson's factory established at Cape Bathurst. But with a deplorable reserve peculiar to their race, or perhaps influenced by the sentiment of dislike which all natives have for strangers in their country, they said nothing to Hobson, whose fort was then built. Kalumah was unacquainted with the tradition, which, after all, had no substantial foundation, and was only one of the many legends of arctic cosmogony, and that is why the colonists of Fort Hope had not been warned of the danger they ran in establishing themselves on that particular spot.

And, certainly, Jasper Hobson, if warned by the Esquimaux, and already suspecting the ground which presented such peculiar features, would have sought for some other and surer foundation for his factory.

When Kalumah actually understood that Cape

Bathurst was no longer in existence she continued her expedition beyond Washburn Bay, but without meeting any trace of those she sought ; so then there was nothing for her to do but to return westward to the fisheries of Russian America.

She and her brother-in-law left Morse Bay at the end of June. They followed the coast-line, and at the end of July, after that useless journey, they reached the establishment of New Georgia.

Kalumah, at that time, never expected to see Mrs. Barnett or any of her companions again. She believed them to have been all lost in the ocean.

At this part of her narrative the young Esquimaux turned her tearful eyes towards Mrs. Barnett and pressed her hand affectionately, and then she thanked God for having saved her by means of her friend.

Kalumah, having returned home, resumed her usual occupations, working with her tribe near Ice Cape, which is about six hundred miles from Cape Bathurst.

Nothing worthy of notice occurred during the first half of the month of August, but towards the end of it the storm began which had disquieted Hobson so greatly, and which, it appeared, had extended all over the polar regions and beyond Behring Strait. At Ice Cape it was as violent as on Victoria Island, when the latter was not two hundred miles from the coast, as Hobson had ascertained by his observations.

While Mrs. Barnett was listening to Kalumah her

mind rapidly grasped the circumstances which had brought the young native to the island.

During the first few days of the storm the Esquimaux had been confined to their huts. They could not get out, much less go fishing; but on the night of the 31st August, impelled by a sort of presentiment, Kalumah went down to the beach, and braving the wind and rain, she endeavoured to pierce the darkness while the waves in front of her rolled mountains high.

Some time after midnight she thought she saw an immense mass driven by the wind parallel to the coast. She possessed very keen sight, like all people accustomed to the long arctic winter nights, and she could not believe herself mistaken. Some enormous thing was passing, two miles from the coast, which could not be a whale nor a ship, nor an iceberg, at that time of year.

But she did not stop to reason about it. It flashed upon her mind like a revelation. The image of her friends rose before her excited imagination. She fancied she could see them all again—Mrs. Barnett, Madge, Lieutenant Hobson, and the baby she had caressed at Fort Hope. Yes, they were surely passing; carried before the tempest on a floating mass of ice!

The girl did not hesitate for a moment. She felt that she ought to warn those poor people that they were close to the land. She ran at full speed to her hut, and seizing a torch of tow and resin, which the Esquimaux used for

their night fishing, she lit it and waved it from the summit of Ice Cape.

This was the fire which Jasper Hobson and Sergeant Long had seen through the fog on the night of the 31st of August.

What was the joy of the young Esquimaux, when she saw her signal replied to by the flaming thicket of pines, lighted by Hobson, the reflection of which reached the coast, though the Lieutenant did not believe it so near.

But the signal was soon extinguished. The calm lasted but a few minutes, and the storm veering to the south-east, recommenced with new violence.

Kalumah saw that her prey had escaped her, for she called the island her prey, and it could not be drawn ashore. She saw it passing away into the darkness, driven furiously across the sea.

This was a terrible moment for the young native, and she made up her mind to advise her friends of the situation at all risks, as there might still be time for them to do something, though every hour carried them farther from the main-land.

She did not hesitate. Her kayak was there, that frail canoe in which she had more than once braved the arctic storms. She pushed it down to the sea, fastened round her waist the sealskin jacket which enclosed her within it, and paddle in hand, plunged into the darkness.

At this point of the recital Mrs. Barnett embraced Kalumah affectionately, while Madge shed tears.

Kalumah once embarked found herself aided by the wind, which carried her out to sea. She paddled in the direction of the island, which was still faintly visible in the gloom. The waves dashed over her kayak, but were powerless to harm her, as the boat floated like a straw on the crest of the waves. She was frequently overturned, but a stroke of the paddle always righted her canoe.

After about an hour of hard work, Kalumah saw the island more distinctly. She now no longer despaired of reaching her object, as she was only a quarter of a mile from it.

It was then that she uttered that cry which Hobson and Long both heard.

But at that moment she felt herself carried away to the west by an irresistible current, to which she could not offer any resistance. It was in vain that she used her paddle, the light boat was carried along like an arrow. She cried out loudly, but was not heard, she was already too far away, and when day broke, New Georgia and the island which she had pursued appeared only like two masses on the horizon.

But she did not yet despair. Though it was now impossible to return to the continent in the teeth of such a gale, still she thought that she might reach the island by keeping in the same current which was carrying the island with it.

But alas! her strength gave way before her courage.

She became faint for want of sustenance, and fatigue soon paralysed all her efforts.

Nevertheless she struggled for many hours, and it seemed to her that she got nearer the island, though its inhabitants could not see her, as she was but a speck on the ocean. Still she struggled on, until her bleeding hands and exhausted arms refused all further service. She lost consciousness, and her frail bark became a toy for the wind and waves.

How long this lasted she could not tell. She knew nothing until, with a sudden shock, her kayak opened beneath her, and Kalumah was plunged into the cold water, which reanimated her, and a few seconds later she was thrown by a wave on a sandy beach.

This had happened the previous night, just before daybreak, that is to say between two and three o'clock in the morning; so from the time she embarked until she was wrecked was just seventy hours.

However, she had no idea where she was. Whether she had been cast on the continent, or reached the island she had been seeking so bravely, she did not know; but she hoped the latter, even though she knew that the current had carried her and it far out to sea, and that she could not reach the coast.

The thought of reaching her friends revived her, and, wounded as she was, she tried to crawl along the beach.

Fortunately she had been cast upon that portion of

the island which had formed the upper angle of Morse Bay, but in its present condition she did not recognise it.

Kalumah pushed on; then, finding her strength failing, she struggled hard to advance, but the way seemed very long. Every mile she had to make long *détours* where the sea had encroached upon the land; so, dragging herself along, often falling and getting up again, she arrived near the little wood at which that very morning Mrs. Barnett and Madge had rested. We know that they, on their way to Cape Esquimaux, had found Kalumah's footprints in the snow, and, a little distance off, the poor girl had fallen for the last time. From that point, worn out by fatigue and hunger, she could only crawl along on hands and knees.

But a great hope supported her, for, at a little distance off, she recognised Cape Esquimaux, at the foot of which she and her tribe had encamped the year before. She knew that she was then only eight miles from the factory, and that she had but to follow the old path which she had often travelled when she went to visit her friends at Fort Hope.

This idea sustained her; but when she reached the shore her strength finally gave way, and she fell back upon the snow unconscious. Without Mrs. Barnett's assistance she would have died.

"But, my dear lady," she said, "I felt that you would come to my assistance, and that God would save me by your hands."

We know the rest. We know that a presentiment had impelled Mrs. Barnett and Madge to explore that part of the coast, and how the same feeling had carried them to Cape Esquimaux before they returned to the factory. We know what Mrs. Barnett told the young native—how the piece of ice had broken away, and what the bear had done.

Mrs. Barnett smiling, added: "So you see that I did not save you, after all, but that good animal, without whose assistance you would have been lost. If we ever see him again we will regard him as your preserver."

During this conversation Kalumah, warmed and refreshed, had recovered her strength. Mrs. Barnett proposed an immediate return to the fort, and the young Esquimaux professed herself ready to start.

Mrs. Barnett had some reason to hurry, for she wished to tell the Lieutenant all that had passed, and how near the island had approached the American continent that night of the storm. But she particularly requested Kalumah to keep silent respecting the situation of the island. She might well be thought to have come naturally along the shore, in performance of the promise made to visit her friends that year. Her arrival would serve to confirm the inhabitants of the factory in the idea that no changes had taken place in the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst, supposing that any of them had entertained such an opinion,

It was about three o'clock when Mrs. Barnett, with the young native leaning on her arm, and accompanied by the faithful Madge, set out on the homeward way, and before five in the afternoon they reached Fort Hope.

CHAPTER X.

THE KAMTCHATKA CURRENT.

THE reception given to Kalumah by the inhabitants of the fort may be imagined. It seemed as if the communication with the outer world had been renewed. Mrs. MacNab, Mrs. Ray, and Mrs. Joliffe were prodigal of their caresses, and Kalumah in her turn covered the little baby with kisses.

The young Esquimaux was truly affected by the generous hospitality of her European friends. They held quite a fête in her honour. They were all delighted to think that she would remain with them during the winter, for the year was too far advanced to permit of her returning to New Georgia.

But if the inhabitants of Fort Hope were agreeably surprised by the arrival of the young native, what must Jasper Hobson have thought when he saw her leaning on Mrs. Barnett's arm! He could scarcely believe his eyes. The thought flashed through his mind that Victoria Island had actually grounded on the continent.

Mrs. Barnett read in the Lieutenant's eyes this improbable hypothesis, and she shook her head.

Hobson saw at once that no change had taken place in the situation, and he waited until Mrs. Barnett could explain the presence of Kalumah, which she did a few minutes later, as they walked along the beach together.

So, after all, he had been right in his conjecture. The tempest from the north-east had carried the island out of the current, and during that terrible night of the 30th of August the island had actually been within a mile of the American continent. It was not a fire on board ship they had seen, nor had they heard the cry of any shipwrecked sailor; the land had been close by, and if the wind had blown for another hour in the same direction Victoria Island would have been cast up on the shore of Russian America.

Thus, at the critical moment, the wind had carried them away again; and, aided by the current, the island was being hurried to that dangerous place where, exposed to contrary attractions, it must be lost, with all those upon it.

For the hundredth time the Lieutenant and Mrs. Barnett talked over these things, and Hobson inquired if any change of importance had taken place between Cape Bathurst and Morse Bay.

Mrs. Barnett replied that the coast seemed to be lower, and that the waves encroached more upon it. She related also what had happened at Cape Esquimaux, and how the ice-block had broken off.

Nothing could have been less reassuring. It was

evident that the island was dissolving by degrees. What had happened at Cape Esquimaux might happen at Cape Bathurst at any time. The factory might be swallowed up, and all its inhabitants engulfed, and the only bright side to the situation was the approach of winter, but it was very tardy in its approach.

Next day, the 4th of September, an observation taken by Hobson proved that the situation was not altered sensibly since the previous day. The island was motionless between two contrary currents, which was about the best thing that could have happened.

“If the sea would only freeze around us where we are, I should look upon our safety as assured,” said Hobson. “We are only two hundred miles from the main-land at this moment, and by crossing the ice-fields we could reach Russian territory, or, perhaps, the coast of America. Oh for the winter at any price! but quickly.”

However, meanwhile, all preparations for wintering were completed. Food enough to last the animals all through the polar night was provided. The dogs were in good health but very fat, and had nothing to do; yet they could not be taken too much care of, for the poor beasts would have to work very hard when at length Fort Hope was abandoned. It was therefore most important to keep them in a perfect state of health, so they were fed on raw reindeer meat, which was not difficult to procure in the neighbourhood.

The domesticated reindeer also prospered, their stable was very commodious, and a quantity of moss was laid up for them during the winter. The females of the herds furnished abundance of milk to Mrs. Joliffe for culinary purposes.

The Corporal and his little wife had also resown some seeds which had succeeded so well in the warm season. The ground had been prepared before the snow fell, for the scurvy-grass and Labrador tea, as it was very necessary there should be no lack of anti-scorbutics.

The wood-sheds were filled to the top, the winter and ice might now come, and the mercury might even freeze, but there was no danger of their being reduced to burn their furniture as before. The carpenter and his mates, warned by experience, had preserved all the chips from the boat-building.

About this time some few animals which had assumed their winter furs were captured. Marbre and Sabine had obtained the Lieutenant's permission to set some traps outside the enceinte. Jasper Hobson did not like to refuse, for fear his men should become discontented, for he had no serious reason for stopping the supply of furs, though he knew that it would be no use to destroy these precious and inoffensive animals. However, their flesh would do to feed the dogs, and thus economise the reindeer venison.

Everything was prepared for the winter as if Fort

Hope had been established on solid ground, and the soldiers worked with a zeal which they would probably not have shown had they been aware of the secret of the situation.

During the following days observations were made with the greatest care, but no appreciable alteration in their position could be discovered. Jasper Hobson perceiving that the island was immovable took heart, though there were at present no indications of winter in inorganic nature, as the temperature was only 49 deg. Fahrenheit; still, some swans had been noticed flying southwards, as if seeking a warmer climate. Other birds, long fliers, which could traverse immense distances over the ocean, began to desert the island. They knew that the main-land, with all its resources, was not far off, and that they would be able to reach it. A number of these birds were captured, and at Mrs. Barnett's suggestion a cloth ticket was tied round their necks, and on it was written the position of the wandering island and the names of its inhabitants. Then the birds were let fly, and it was not without envy that the parties saw them set forth on their journey south. Of course this operation was conducted by those only who were in the secret.

As for the quadrupeds imprisoned on the island it was impossible for them to seek a warmer climate. Under ordinary circumstances, the reindeer, polar-hares, and even the wolves, would have left the neighbourhood for the Great Bear Lake, or Slave Lake, far from the

Polar Circle, but now the sea imposed an impassable barrier, and they must wait till it froze before seeking a temperate zone. No doubt, their instinct had impelled them to leave the island, but having failed, they were obliged to return to Fort Hope, near to man, prisoners like themselves, and near to hunters, formerly their most dreaded enemies.

Observations up to the 9th September showed no difference in the position of the island, which was kept stationary between the two currents. If they remained thus for another fifteen days Hobson believed that they would be saved.

But they were not yet in safety, and many almost superhuman trials awaited the inhabitants of Fort Hope.

On the 18th September a slight displacement was noticed, and in a northerly direction.

Hobson was dismayed, the island was now in the stream of the Kamtchatka, and was drifting to unknown regions, where icebergs are born. It was on its way towards the solitude of the Polar Sea, hitherto closed against the investigation of men, and from which region they never return.

Hobson did not hide this new danger from those in the secret of the situation, who all received the new blow with resignation.

“Perhaps the island may yet stop,” said Mrs. Barnett, “or it may only move very slowly. Let us hope for the best, and wait. Winter is not far off;

and besides, we are going to meet it. But God's will be done."

"My friends," said the Lieutenant, "do you not think that I ought to tell the rest of our companions? You see the situation we are in, and what may yet be in store for us. Is it not assuming too great a responsibility to hide from our comrades the dangers that threaten them?"

"I would wait a little longer," said Mrs. Barnett, without hesitation. "Until we have tried everything we must not give our companions reason to despair."

"That is my opinion," said Long simply.

Jasper Hobson had thought the same himself, and was glad to find his opinion confirmed by the others.

On the 11th and 12th of September the movement towards the north became more determined; the island drifted at the rate of about twelve or thirteen miles a day. It was evident they were following the Kamtchatka current. Before long they would pass the 70th parallel, which cut across the extreme point of Cape Bathurst, and beyond which there was no land to be met with in that portion of the arctic regions.

Every day Jasper Hobson marked their position on the map, and he could see towards what unknown abysses they were drifting. Their only chance—a bad one at best—was, as Mrs. Barnett had said, they were going to meet the winter. To drift thus northwards they must soon meet the cold, which would very soon con-

solidate the ice-field ; but if the inhabitants of Fort Hope were not swallowed up by the sea, what a terrible journey they would have to get back from these hyperborean solitudes ! If the boat were only finished Hobson would not have hesitated to embark in it with all the colony ; but notwithstanding all the carpenter's diligence it was not nearly ready, and would not be for some time longer ; for MacNab had been hard put to it to construct a boat which would carry twenty people over such dangerous seas.

On the 16th of September Victoria Island had drifted nearly eighty miles northwards from the place where it had remained motionless between the two currents of Kamtchatka and Behring Sea. But now winter seemed to be approaching. There were frequent falls of snow, and sometimes in large flakes. The mercury fell steadily. The mean temperature was during the day 44 deg. Fahr. ; but at night the thermometer marked 32 deg. only. The sun traced a very long curve above the horizon ; at mid-day it only rose a few degrees above it, and disappeared entirely for eleven hours out of the twenty-four.

At last, on the night of the 16th of September, the first indications of ice appeared on the sea. These were small isolated crystals, almost like snow, which were observed on the surface of the water. It was remarked by the celebrated explorer Scoresby, that these crystals quickly calmed the sea, as if oil had been poured upon it. The little lumps of ice had a tendency to unite ; and

they would have done so in calm water ; but they were soon broken and separated on the restless sea.

Hobson watched the formation of the new ice very attentively. He knew that four-and-twenty hours would suffice to form a crust of ice two or three inches thick, or sufficient to bear the weight of a man ; he therefore was sure that the island would quickly be arrested in its course towards the north.

But just at present the daytime undid the work of the night ; and if the island did not drift so quickly during the darkness, in consequence of the resistance of the young ice, this obstacle was removed during the daytime, when the current carried it along with great speed.

So the movement towards the north increased more and more, and nothing could be done to stop it. After the autumnal equinox, on the 21st of September, the nights got longer than the days. Winter was visibly approaching, but not quickly nor with great severity. At this time Victoria Island had passed nearly a degree beyond the 70th parallel, and for the first time a rotatory movement was observed, which Hobson estimated at about one quarter of its circumference.

Hobson's anxiety may be imagined. The situation which he had endeavoured to hide would now be betrayed to the least clear-sighted of the colonists, for by this rotating movement the cardinal points of the island would be changed. Cape Bathurst no longer was to the north, it lay to the east. The sun, the moon, and stars, all rose

in directions different from usual, and it was impossible but that men like MacNab, Ray, Marbre, and others, would not remark and understand these changes.

But to Hobson's great delight, the men did not appear to notice anything. It is true the displacement was not very great, and the atmosphere was frequently very foggy, so that the exact position of the rising and setting sun could not be ascertained.

However, this rotating movement was accompanied by still more rapid progress, and the island was drifting at the rate of a mile an hour, more and more in a northerly direction, and far from all land. Jasper Hobson would not yield to despair, for it was not his nature to do so, but he felt lost, and longed for the winter at any price.

But the temperature got lower and lower, heavy snow fell on the 23rd and 24th of September, and added to the thickness of the ice already on the sea. The immense ice-field formed slowly. The island frequently broke through it, but its resistance increased hourly. The sea all around was frozen as far as the eye could reach.

At last, on the 27th of September, the observation showed that Victoria Island had not moved since the previous day, and was actually frozen in. It was immovable, in 177 deg. 22 min. longitude, and 77 deg. 57 min. latitude, more than six hundred miles from any continent.

CHAPTER XI.

A COMMUNICATION FROM JASPER HOBSON.

SUCH was the situation ; Sergeant Long said that the island had cast ashore and was as stationary as when it had been connected with the main-land. But now six hundred miles separated it from the continent, and those six hundred miles would have to be traversed in sledges over the frozen surface of the sea, in the midst of icy mountains, which would accumulate during the frost ; and they must make that journey, too, in the severest months of the arctic winter.

It was a terrible undertaking, but nevertheless it would not do to hesitate. The winter so ardently desired had come at last, and had stopped the progress of the island northwards, and had thrown a bridge six hundred miles long between the island and the continent. They must now take advantage of the chances of safety, and leave these hyperborean regions.

In fact, as Hobson explained, it was impossible to wait till the spring, for they would then be carried into Behring Strait by the current. They would have to wait patiently till the sea was firmly frozen, which would

be in about three or four weeks. In the meantime, Hobson decided on making frequent excursions on the ice, to ascertain its thickness, the facilities it offered for sledges, and the best route to take either towards Asia or America.

“Of course,” said Hobson, “we would rather reach New Georgia than the coast of Asia if the chances are equal, and we shall probably make for Russian America, I think.”

“Kalumah will be very useful, in that case,” said Mrs. Barnett, “for she is well acquainted with New Georgia.”

“Very useful indeed,” replied Hobson, “and her arrival here was really providential. With her assistance we shall be able to reach the settlement of Fort Michael or Norton Sound, or perhaps we may even reach New Archangel, where we can pass the winter.”

“Poor Fort Hope!” said Mrs. Barnett, “built at such an expense of trouble, and so fortunately arranged by you, Mr. Hobson. It almost breaks my heart to leave it behind us in the midst of this ice, and I shall be almost sorry to bid it farewell.”

“I will not suffer any less than you, madam, and I shall probably feel it more. This was the most important work of my life. I brought all my intelligence and energy to the establishment of Fort Hope, so unhappily named, and I can never console myself for having been forced to abandon it. And what will the Company say

to me for having abandoned the tasks they set me?"

"The Company, Mr. Jasper, will say that you have done your duty!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnett, with animation. "The Company will see that you are not responsible for the caprices of nature, which are always more powerful than the minds of men. They will understand that you could not foresee what has happened, for that was beyond human knowledge. They will know that, thanks to your prudence and moral courage, it will not have to regret the loss of one of your companions."

"A thousand thanks, madam," replied the Lieutenant, as he pressed her hand. "I thank you for your words, which your generosity inspires; but I know something of men, and, believe me, it is better to succeed than to fail, however gloriously. But Heaven's will be done!"

Sergeant Long wished to divert the Lieutenant from melancholy thoughts, and turned the conversation to their present circumstances. He spoke of the preparations for their approaching departure, and asked if it were not now time to tell his companions of the real situation of the island.

"Let us wait a little longer," replied Hobson. "By keeping silence we have spared the poor fellows much anxiety. Let us wait till the day of our departure is definitely fixed, and then we will tell them the whole truth."

This point settled, the usual work of the factory continued for a few weeks longer.

How different the situation of the inhabitants of Fort Hope had been the year before! They were then, as now, anticipating the cold season, but they were happy and content. The young ice was gradually forming along the coast. The lagoon was the first to freeze, and its waters were quieter than the sea. During the day the mercury remained a degree or two above freezing-point, and fell three or four degrees below it at night. Jasper Hobson directed his men to assume their winter garments. The condensers were erected inside the house, the reservoir and the pumps were cleaned, the traps were set, and Sabine and Marbre congratulated themselves on their success, and finally the last few touches were given to the house.

This year the brave colonists proceeded in the same way. Although Fort Hope was now two degrees farther north than it had been the previous winter, there was no great difference in the temperature. In fact, between the 70th and 72nd parallel the distance was not sufficient to affect the thermometric mean. Indeed, the cold appeared to be less severe than at the commencement of last winter; but this, perhaps, was because they were acclimatised.

It must nevertheless be remarked that the winter did not set in with its usual severity. The weather was very damp, the atmosphere was charged with vapour, which

sometimes fell as rain and sometimes as snow. Lieutenant Hobson was certainly of opinion that it was not cold enough.

Although the sea was frozen all round the island, it was not frozen in a regular or continuous manner; large patches showed that it was not thoroughly cemented. Loud cracks were frequently heard in places where the rain had dissolved the upper layers of ice. There was not that enormous pressure that is produced when ice is rapidly formed, and accumulates in large blocks under intense cold. Icebergs, and even hummocks, were rare, and no ice-wall intercepted their view of the horizon.

“This is the kind of season,” said Sergeant Long, “which would have suited the seekers of the North-West Passage, or the discoverers of the North Pole, but it is very unfavourable for us.”

Things were in this condition all through the month of October, and Hobson announced that the mean temperature had scarcely exceeded 32 deg. Fahr. Now we know that seven or eight degrees below zero are required before the sea becomes solidified.

Besides, it was evident that the ice-field was not practicable. If it had been, all the furred and other animals would have quitted the island for warmer regions; but, instead of doing so, they continued in the neighbourhood of the fort, and sought the society of men. Even the wolves came within musket range, to devour the martens and hares. The starving reindeer,

having neither herbs nor moss to browse on, roamed in the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst. A bear, no doubt the same which Mrs. Barnett and Kalumah were indebted to, often wandered on the banks of the lagoon ; so it was evident that if these animals, most of which depended on a vegetable diet, did not quit Victoria Island, it was because flight was impossible.

We have said that the temperature remained at freezing-point ; now Hobson knew that the previous October the thermometer had been 20 deg. below zero.

But the colonists did not suffer much, and were not kept in the house at all, although the dampness was very great, as there were frequent storms of rain and snow, and a rapidly-falling barometer proved how saturated with moisture the atmosphere continued.

During this month Jasper Hobson and Sergeant Long made many excursions on the surrounding ice-fields. One day they went to Cape Michael, another to the angle where Morse Bay had been, to endeavour to find if a passage were practicable, either to the American or Asiatic continent.

But the surface of the ice was covered with water, and in certain places there were holes which rendered it impracticable for sledges. It scarcely seemed safe for a pedestrian to venture upon. It was evident that the cold had not been continuous nor sufficient ; hence this incomplete solidification. The ice showed a multitude of crystals and prisms of every variety, like so many

stalactites. It was more like a glacier than a field, and the journey upon it would have been very distressing even if possible.

Hobson and Sergeant Long ventured on the ice for a mile or two in a southerly direction, but they took a very long time, and returned to Fort Hope disheartened.

November arrived. The temperature fell a little, but not enough. Thick fogs wrapped the island in their wet shrouds, and lamps had to be kept burning all day in the rooms. But the oil was running short, and it was necessary to use it sparingly, for the factory had not been revictualled by Captain Craventy, and morse-hunting was now out of the question. So if the winter lasted very long the colonists would soon be reduced to the use of animal fat, or even to the resin of the pine-tree, to procure light. The days were now very short, and the sun appeared only as a pale disc, without light or heat, and only remained above the horizon for a few hours. Yes, winter had indeed come, with its fogs, its snow, its rain, but without its cold.

On the 11th of November there was a fête at Fort Hope, and something extra was sent up for dinner by Mrs. Joliffe, for this was the first anniversary of little Michael MacNab's birthday. He was a charming little fellow, with fair curly hair and large blue eyes, very like his father, who was very proud of the resemblance. The baby was solemnly weighed at dessert; how he kicked about in the scales, and how he cried! He weighed just

thirty-four pounds. Mrs. MacNab was loudly congratulated on the result, and three cheers were given for the boy. It is not so clear why Corporal Joliffe took some of the credit to himself, except that he had acted as a kind of foster-father or nurse to the baby. The worthy Corporal had carried the child about so long and rocked him so often that he fancied he had something to do with his weight.

The next day the sun did not appear above the horizon at all. The long polar night had commenced, and had begun nine days sooner than in the preceding winter on the American continent, in consequence of the difference of latitude of Victoria Island and the mainland.

However, the disappearance of the sun made no change in the state of the atmosphere. The temperature remained very capricious as usual; the barometer rose one day only to fall the next. The snow and rain alternated; the wind was soft but very unsettled, going all round the compass in a day. The constant humidity of the climate was very unhealthy, and tended to scorbutic affections amongst the colonists; but although the lemon and lime juice were failing, scurvy-grass and sorrel were fortunately abundant, and Hobson recommended each person to eat a portion every day.

Nevertheless, every nerve must be strained to leave Fort Hope. Under the circumstances three months would be hardly sufficient to enable them to reach the

nearest continent. Now they ought not to expose the expedition to any chance of thaw before reaching the main-land; it would therefore be necessary to start at the end of November if they started at all.

On the question of departure there was no difference of opinion; but even had the ice been good they would have had a great deal of difficulty. In the present uncertain weather things looked very serious.

On the 13th of November, Jasper Hobson, Mrs. Barnett, and Sergeant Long, met to fix the day of departure. The Sergeant was of opinion that they should start at once. "For," said he, "we must make allowance for delays during our journey of six hundred miles. We should reach the continent before March, or the thaw will have begun, and then we shall be in a worse predicament than we are now."

"But is the sea sufficiently frozen to allow us to start?" asked Mrs. Barnett.

"Yes," replied Long, "and every day the ice gets thicker; besides, the barometer is rising a little, and that indicates more frost; so in about a week, by which time all our preparations will have been made, I hope that the really cold weather will have begun."

"Nevertheless, the winter has begun very badly," said Hobson, "and everything has been against us. Sometimes the seasons are very curious in these districts, and whalers have been able to sail where in other seasons they would not have had an inch of water

under their keels. But, in any case, I think that we have not a day to lose. I only regret that the weather is not as cold as usual."

"It will become so," said Mrs. Barnett, "so we must be ready to take advantage of it. When do you think we should start?"

"At the end of November at latest. "But if we are ready about the 20th of the month, and the ice is practicable, we will start then."

"Very well," said Sergeant Long, "we will make ready at once."

"Now, Mr. Hobson," said Mrs. Barnett, "I suppose you will tell our companions the circumstances of our situation."

"Yes, the time has come. We must now act together."

"And when do you think of telling them?"

"At once. Sergeant Long," added Hobson, turning to his subordinate, who immediately stood at attention, "call all your men into the big room to receive a communication from me."

Sergeant Long saluted, turned on his heel and departed.

For some minutes neither Mrs. Barnett nor Hobson spoke a word. The Sergeant then entered, and said that all was ready.

Jasper Hobson and Mrs. Barnett immediately went into the large room. All the inhabitants of the factory,

men and women, were assembled there. Hobson advanced into the midst, and said, in a grave tone :

“My friends, till now I have thought it right, in order to spare you useless anxiety, to conceal from you the situation of Fort Hope. The earthquake separated us from the continent. Cape Bathurst has been detached from the American coast. Our peninsula is only an island of ice—a wandering island.”

At that moment Marbre advanced towards Hobson, and said, in a firm voice :

“We know that, sir.”

CHAPTER XII.

A CHANCE TO BE TRIED.

So these brave men had known it all the time, and for fear of adding to their commander's trouble they had pretended to know nothing about it, and had worked with the same ardour as before.

Tears rushed to Hobson's eyes; but he made no attempt to hide his emotion; he took the hand which Marbre extended to him and shook it warmly.

Yes, those brave fellows had known it, for Marbre had guessed it long ago. The filling of the reindeer-trap with salt water, the non-arrival of the expected relief from Fort Reliance, the fact of observations being taken every day, which on *terra firma* would have been unnecessary, and Hobson's precautions when taking the bearings, the change in the cardinal points, which they had noticed immediately, as well as the fact that the animals had not left them for the winter—all these told the tale to the inhabitants of Fort Hope. The only thing they could

not understand was the arrival of Kalumah, and they supposed, what was the real fact, that she had been cast ashore by the storm.

Marbre was the first to discover it, and he had confided his suspicions to MacNab and to Ray. These three looked the situation in the face and agreed that they ought to inform not only their comrades but also their wives; then they all decided not to let the Lieutenant suspect that they had any knowledge of the true state of affairs.

“You are truly brave men, my friends,” said Mrs. Barnett, who was much impressed by the manner in which Marbre made this confession. “You are true and brave soldiers.”

“The Lieutenant may depend upon us,” said MacNab; “he has done his duty, we will do ours.”

“Yes, my dear companions,” said Hobson, “Heaven will not abandon us, but will assist us if we help ourselves!”

Then Hobson told them all that had happened since the earthquake had sent them adrift. He related how, when the sea became free of ice, the island had been carried by an unknown current more than two hundred miles from the main-land; how the storm had driven it back in sight of land, and again carried it away on the night of the 31st August; how the brave Kalumah had risked her life to come to their assistance. And then he

told them the changes that had taken place ; how he feared that the island was gradually melting in the warmer water, and his fear that it might be carried into the Pacific, or seized by the Kamtchatka current. Finally, he informed his companions that the island had been motionless since the 27th of the previous September.

Then the map was brought, and Hobson showed them their position—six hundred miles from any land !

He told them that the situation was extremely perilous ; that the island must be crushed when the thaw began ; and that before having recourse to the boat, which would be of no use till the summer, they must profit by the winter to reach the American continent by traversing the ice.

“ We shall have to travel six hundred miles in cold and darkness,” he said. “ It will be hard, my friends ; but you and I are aware that we must not shrink.”

“ When you give the signal for departure, sir,” said MacNab, “ we will all follow you.”

Everything being settled, the preparations for the perilous expedition rapidly proceeded. The men boldly made up their minds for the long journey. Sergeant Long directed the work, while Hobson, the hunters, and Mrs. Barnett frequently tested the state of the ice. Kalumah accompanied them, for her advice and

experience might be very useful. The start was fixed for the 20th November, and they had not a moment to lose.

As Hobson had anticipated, the wind rose and the temperature fell a little, to 24 deg. Fahr., and snow succeeded the previous rain, and froze as it fell. A few more days of such cold and travelling by sledge would be possible. The bay near Cape Michael was partly filled with ice and snow, but calm water always freezes very quickly, and the open sea was not yet in a satisfactory state.

The wind, in fact, continued to blow with some violence, and the waves thus caused prevented the consolidation of the ice. Large openings in the ice-field were frequent, and it was impossible to cross it.

“The weather is decidedly colder,” said Mrs. Barnett to Hobson, on the 15th of November, when they were exploring the south of the island. “The temperature has sensibly diminished, and those openings will soon be frozen over.”

“I agree with you,” replied Hobson; “but the manner in which they will freeze will not be favourable for us. The pieces of ice are small, so, when frozen, they will jut out, and make the surface very uneven, and it will be difficult for our sledges to traverse such ice.”

“But a few hours’ heavy snow would soon level the surface,” said Mrs. Barnett.

“No doubt,” replied the Lieutenant, “but if snow fall,

the temperature will have risen, and if it rise, the ice will be still less consolidated; so we are on the horns of a dilemma."

"It must be confessed that it will be very curious and very unfortunate if we experience a temperate winter in a polar latitude."

"It would not be the first time, madam, that such a thing has happened. You remember that last winter was very severe indeed, and, as has often been remarked, two severe winters seldom come in succession. It is certainly unfortunate that we should have had a severe winter when we wished for a mild one, and *vice versa*; and when I think that we have six hundred miles to traverse with women and a child——"

And Hobson pointed towards the south, where a vast white plain ascended, capriciously cut like guipure work, stretching away as far as the eye could reach, and very sad did that imperfectly frozen sea appear. Now and then the surface cracked with an ominous sound. A pale moon, half shrouded in fog, rose just above the sombre horizon, and threw a melancholy light on the prospect. The half-light, aided by refraction, magnified every object. Icebergs of medium size assumed enormous proportions, and sometimes were magnified into the shapes of fabulous beasts. Birds flew overhead flapping their wings loudly, the smallest of them appearing as large as a condor. In places in the mountains of ice large black tunnels, into which the bravest

of men might hesitate to enter, appeared to open, and now and then these icebergs fell over with a loud crash, and awoke the sonorous echoes of the shore. The scene changed like a fairy extravaganza, and it was with feelings of terror that the unfortunate colonists regarded these phenomena which were taking place around them.

Notwithstanding her courage, Mrs. Barnett felt an involuntary terror ; her heart, like her body, shivered at the prospect. She was tempted to shut her eyes and ears. When the moon was veiled for a moment by the fog, the sinister aspect of the polar landscape became more marked, and she pictured to herself the caravan of men and women endeavouring to cross these solitudes in storm and snow, and exposed to avalanches, in the profound darkness of the arctic night.

But she forced herself to look round. She wished to accustom her eyes to the prospect, and to harden her heart against fear. She looked, therefore ; but suddenly a loud cry escaped her, and seizing Hobson's hand, she pointed to an enormous but ill-defined object, which was moving about, scarcely a hundred paces distant.

It was a monster of dazzling brightness, more than fifty feet high. It passed over the broken ice, jumping from one block to another, and moving its enormous paws, in which it could have embraced ten large dogs at once. It appeared to be searching for a practicable passage across the ice, and the travellers could see the floes give

way beneath its feet, and it did not regain its equilibrium without considerable trouble.

The monster advanced thus for about a quarter of a mile, and then, apparently finding no way of proceeding, it turned round, and came towards Hobson and Mrs. Barnett.

The Lieutenant seized his gun, which was hanging across his shoulder ; but he had scarcely presented it at the animal, when he said to Mrs. Barnett :

“ It is only a bear after all, the size of which has been immensely magnified by refraction.”

Mrs. Barnett immediately perceived that they had been victims of an optical illusion. She breathed more freely, and cried out :

“ It is my bear, the good-natured one, perhaps the only one on the island. But what is he doing there?”

“ He is trying to escape,” replied Hobson, shaking his head, “ trying to get away from this doomed island ; but he cannot do so yet. And he is showing us that if the way is closed to him, it is closed to us also.”

Hobson was right. The animal had tried to leave the island, and not having succeeded, was returning to the shore. The bear, shaking his head and growling angrily, passed scarcely twenty paces from the Lieutenant and his companion. Either it did not see them, or did

not condescend to notice them, for he continued his leisurely pace, and soon disappeared.

That afternoon the Lieutenant and Mrs. Barnett returned to the fort, silent and sad.

Nevertheless the preparations for departure went on as actively as if the ice were in a fit state. Nothing was neglected to insure success. It was necessary, not only to foresee everything, and to provide for the ordinary dangers of ice-travelling, but the caprices of arctic weather had also to be anticipated.

The teams of dogs had been taken great care of. They were permitted to run about near the fort, so that the exercise might restore their strength, which had been somewhat enervated by long rest ; in fact, these animals were soon in a most satisfactory condition, and ready for the long journey.

The sledges were carefully inspected. The rough surface of the ice-field would expose them to violent shocks, so they were prepared and strengthened. This work was carried out by MacNab and his mates, who rendered the vehicles as strong as possible.

Two sledge-carts of large size were built for the transport of provisions and furs. These were to be drawn by reindeer, trained to the service. The furs were articles of luxury, which perhaps it was scarcely prudent to take with them, but Hobson was desirous to preserve the interest of the Company as much as possible ;

but it was decided, nevertheless, to abandon the furs *en route*, if they hindered the advance of the caravan. They did not risk the furs, for if left behind they would have been irretrievably lost.

It was quite a different thing with provisions, of which an abundant and easily transportable supply was necessary. They could not count upon the products of the chase, for as soon as the passage was practicable all edible game would cross the ice before them for the southern regions; so salt meat, corned beef, hare pies, dried fish, and biscuit—the supply of which was unfortunately much reduced—with an ample reserve of sorrel, scurvy-grass, rum, and spirit of wine, for hot drinks, etc. etc., were all placed in a special sledge. Hobson wished to take some fuel; for, probably, during the whole six hundred miles he would not encounter a tree, a shrub, or even moss, nor could he hope for drift-wood from the sea; but he could not overload his sledge, and was obliged to leave the fuel behind. Luckily there was no want of warm clothing, and they could always borrow from the furs in the waggon-sledge if necessary.

As for Thomas Black, who had shut himself up in his room since his disappointment, without taking any part in the counsels of his companions, he reappeared as soon as the day of departure was fixed. But even then he took no trouble about anything except his own sledge, his instruments, and his registers. Very taciturn at the best of times, it was now impossible to extract a word

from him ; he had forgotten everything, even that he was a philosopher, and since the eclipse had played him false, he took no notice of any other arctic phenomenon whatever.

Everybody worked so hard that on the 18th of November the caravan was ready to start.

But the ice was not practicable. Though the temperature had fallen, the cold had not been sufficient to freeze the sea solidly, and the snow did not fall thickly nor continuously. Hobson, Marbre, and Sabine explored the coast daily as far as Morse Bay. They even went over the ice about a mile and a half ; but they could not disguise from themselves the fact, that it was full of crevasses and fissured in all directions. Not only was it impassable for sledges, but it was unsafe for pedestrians. The fatigue they endured, even on these short expeditions, was very great, and more than once they began to fear that they would not be able to reach the island again in consequence of the movement of the ice. It seemed as if Nature's forces were leagued against the unfortunate colonists. On the 18th and 19th of November the thermometer rose while the barometer fell. This betokened some great change. As the cold got less the sky became covered with clouds, and with 34 deg. Fahr. the rain fell instead of the wished-for snow. These comparatively warm showers began to melt the ice in many places. One can imagine the effect they would have on the ice-field, and a thaw appeared imminent. And Lieutenant

Hobson, who, notwithstanding the terrible weather, had proceeded to the south of the island, returned almost despairing.

On the 20th another tempest, resembling in violence that which had broken over the island a month before, was let loose upon the Arctic Sea. The colonists were obliged to remain in the house, and for five whole days they were unable to go outside the fort.

CHAPTER XIII.

ACROSS THE ICE-FIELD.

ON the 22nd of November the weather began to clear up. In a few hours the tempest suddenly ceased, a north wind sprang up, and the thermometer fell several degrees. Some birds equal to a long journey took their departure. There was now some hope that the cold season was about to set in as usual. The colonists might truly regret that the cold had not been as great as the previous season, when the mercury fell to 72 deg. Fahrenheit.

Hobson determined to wait no longer, and on the morning of the 22nd all were ready to leave Fort Hope and the island, which was now connected with the continent by an ice-field of six hundred miles in length.

At half-past eleven in the morning Hobson gave the signal for departure, the dogs were harnessed to the sledges, three couples of tame reindeer drew the sledge-waggon, and the whole caravan started silently in the

direction of Cape Michael, where they would leave the island proper for the ice-field.

The caravan first skirted round the wooded hill, to the east of Lake Barnett, but before they passed the point, all turned to take a last fond look at Cape Bathurst, which they were never to see again. Under the light of the aurora borealis, they perceived some rafters covered with snow, and two or three white lines marked out the *enceinte* of the factory. A white mass, and a little smoke, which still rose from the fire so soon to be extinguished forever, was all that remained of Fort Hope, which had caused so much trouble and labour.

“Good-bye, good-bye!” said Mrs. Barnett, as she waved her hand. “Adieu to our poor arctic home.”

And all resumed their journey in melancholy silence.

They arrived at Cape Michael, at one o'clock, having had to go round the gulf, still imperfectly frozen. So far the difficulties had not been great, for the ground was comparatively even; but the ice-field perfectly bristled with icebergs and hummocks, amongst which it was absolutely necessary to find a way, though at the cost of immense fatigue.

By evening they had advanced some miles on the ice-field, and it was now time to arrange a camping-place, which was done Esquimaux fashion, namely, by cutting out snow houses in the ice-blocks. This was quickly done with hatchets, and after a supper of salt meat, the

travellers crept into the holes, which were much warmer than anybody who has not tried them would believe.

But before they retired, Mrs. Barnett asked the Lieutenant how far they had come from Fort Hope.

“I should think about ten miles,” replied Hobson.

“Only ten !” exclaimed Mrs. Barnett ; “at this rate we shall take three months to reach the American continent.”

“Three months, and perhaps more,” replied Hobson ; “but we can go no faster. We are not now travelling, as we were last year, on a frozen plane, but on an ice-field distorted by pressure, which offers us no such easy route. I expect to meet with very great difficulties, but I trust we shall be able to surmount them. In any case speed is not so important as good health, and I shall think myself happy if all our companions answer the roll-call at Fort Reliance. Heaven grant that in three months we shall have reached some point or other of the American continent! If so, we never can be thankful enough for our preservation.”

The night passed without accident, but Jasper Hobson, as he lay awake, thought he felt some ominous trembling of the ground, which indicated the unsafe condition of the ice-field. It appeared probable that there would be large fissures in places, which would render their chance of reaching *terra firma* very uncertain. Besides, before his departure Hobson had noticed that none of the animals had left the neighbourhood of the factory, and

there was no doubt that they would have sought a warmer climate had their instinct told them that there was a possibility of escape. However, Jasper Hobson felt that he had done his duty in starting before the thaw came on, and whether he succeeded in escaping, or whether he would have eventually to turn back, he felt that in any case he had done his best.

Next day, the 23rd November, the detachment could not even advance ten miles to the east, in consequence of the difficulties they met with. The ice-field was extremely distorted, and they could now observe that the ice was piled up in layers, having been driven by the waves into that vast tunnel of the Arctic Sea. And the whole ice-field looked as if masses had been dropped down, or strewn about in every direction as they fell.

It was evident that a caravan composed of sledges could not pass over those blocks, and it was not less clear that no way could be cut with hatchets or ice-axes. Some of the icebergs had taken the most curious forms, and had grouped themselves into the appearance of a ruined town. Several of them measured three or four hundred feet above the ice-field, and at their tops were balanced enormous masses which, with the slightest shock or even vibration of the air, would fall down in avalanches.

So when rounding these icy mountains the greatest care was necessary. Orders were given not to speak

above a whisper in these dangerous passes, and not to excite the dogs by cracking the whips. Nor were these exaggerated precautions, for the least imprudence might have terminated fatally.

But in order to turn these obstacles, and in endeavouring to find a practicable passage, a great deal of time was lost, and the travellers were worn out by the fatigue of their efforts ; for frequently, though they scarcely advanced more than a mile, they had to go ten miles round to accomplish that distance. However, the ice still remained firm beneath their feet ; but on the 24th other obstacles arose, which Hobson, not unnaturally, feared would prove insurmountable.

After having crossed the first range of ice-hills, which rose about twenty miles from Victoria Island, the party found themselves on a more level ice-floe, the various portions of which had not been subjected to very great pressure. It was evident that, according to the direction of the current, the pressure of the ice-blocks had not been carried so far ; but Hobson and his companions also found that these floes were intersected by immense openings hardly yet frozen over. The temperature was comparatively warm, and the thermometer showed a mean height of 34 deg. Fahrenheit. Salt water requires some degrees of cold below freezing before it becomes solid, consequently the sea was not frozen. All the hard portions of ice had come from higher latitudes, and at the same time they were supporting themselves by their

own cold, so to speak. This portion of the Arctic Sea was not uniformly frozen; and, besides, a thin warm rain was falling, which brought with it new elements of dissolution.

That same day the advance of the party was absolutely stopped by a crevasse, full of rough water and small lumps of ice. This crevasse was probably not more than a hundred feet wide, but, no doubt, many miles long.

For two hours the travellers marched alongside this gap, hoping to reach the extremity of it, and to be able to cross it in an easterly direction, but they were disappointed. They were obliged to halt and camp.

Jasper Hobson, followed by Sergeant Long, went on a quarter of a mile farther, to see what they could do, and execrating the mild winter, which had brought them to such a pass.

“We must get across, somehow or other,” said Sergeant Long; “we cannot stay here.”

“Yes, we must cross,” replied Hobson, “and we *will* cross—either by going north or south, for it must have an end. But when we have succeeded we shall meet others; and so it will be, perhaps, for hundreds of miles, as long as this uncertain and deplorable temperature continues.”

“Well, sir, we must find out the actual state of affairs before we continue our journey,” said the Sergeant.

“Indeed we must,” replied Hobson resolutely, “or we shall run the risk—after having gone out of our way five or six hundred miles — of not reaching the American continent after all. Yes, it is absolutely necessary, before going farther, that we should ascertain the state of the ice-field, and that is what I am going to do !”

Then, without another word, Hobson stripped off his outer clothing and plunged into the half-frozen water. Being a vigorous swimmer, he soon gained the other side, where he disappeared amongst the icebergs.

Some hours later, Jasper Hobson, much exhausted, reached the encampment, whither Long had already returned. He took the Sergeant and Mrs. Barnett apart, and told them the ice-field was impracticable.

“It is not unlikely that a man, alone, on foot, without sledge or baggage, might pass,” he said ; “but for our caravan it is impossible. The crevasses increase to the east, and even a boat would be more useful than a sledge in reaching the American continent.”

“Well,” replied Long, “if one man can go, ought not one of us to try and seek help ?”

“I had thoughts of going,” replied Hobson.

“You, Mr. Jasper !”

“You, sir !”

These two responses, uttered simultaneously, to the proposition made by Jasper Hobson, proved to him how unexpected and inopportune his suggestion was. Was

it for him, the chief of the expedition, to go away, to abandon those who had trusted to him, although he would encounter the greatest peril in their interests? No, it was impossible, and Hobson did not insist upon it.

“I see how it appears to you, my friends,” he said, “and I will not abandon you. But it would be useless for one of you to attempt the passage; he would not succeed, and he would perish when the thaw came on—his only tomb the gulf which had opened beneath him in the ice. But in any case, what could he do if he reached New Archangel? how could he come to our assistance? He might charter a ship. Quite so; but this ship would not be able to pass until after the thaw; and who can tell where Victoria Island might be by that time?”

“Yes, you are right, sir,” replied Long; “let us stay together, and if it is possible for a boat to save us, there is MacNab’s vessel still at Cape Bathurst, and we shall not have to wait for it.”

Mrs. Barnett had listened without speaking, but she very well understood that they could not get across the ice-field. They would have to wait for the thaw, and depend upon the carpenter’s boat for a release.

“Well then, what are we to do?” she said.

“We must return to Victoria Island.”

“Let us return then, and Heaven protect us!”

The other members of the expedition had now joined

them, and the proposition to return was laid before them.

The first impression produced by Hobson's communication was very unfavourable. These poor people had made up their minds to reach home, and their disappointment was almost despair. But they soon regained their usual spirits and declared themselves ready to obey.

Jasper Hobson then told them the result of his late exploration. He showed them how obstacles would increase as they proceeded eastward, and it was physically impossible to pass with all the material of their caravan, which nevertheless was absolutely indispensable on such a journey.

"At this moment," he said, "we are actually cut off from all communication with the American coast, and if we proceed, at the price of great fatigue, we shall also run the risk of being cut off from our island, our only refuge. Now, if the thaw surprise us on the ice-field we are lost. I have not disguised the truth from you, my friends, but I have not exaggerated the facts. I know I am speaking to brave men, who know that I am not one to turn back if it can be helped; but I repeat, that the journey is impossible."

The soldiers had absolute confidence in their chief; they knew his courage and energy, and when he said they could not succeed, they knew the passage was indeed impracticable.

So it was decided that they should return to Fort Hope on the following day, and their journey was made under the saddest conditions imaginable. The weather was fearful ; heavy squalls rushed over the surface of the ice-fields, and rain fell in torrents, and one can judge of the difficulty in finding their way in a labyrinth of icebergs under such circumstances, aggravated by almost total darkness.

The party took not less than four days and nights to re-traverse the distance to the island. Several of the sledges and teams fell into crevasses ; but Hobson, by his prudence and devotion, had the good fortune to bring all his charge safely home. But what fatigue and danger, and what a future was presented to these unfortunate people, who had the prospect of another winter before them on the wandering island !

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WINTER MONTHS.

HOBSON and his party did not reach Fort Hope again till the 28th, after great fatigue. They had now nothing to depend upon for escape except the boat, which could not be used for six months.

Preparations to winter were now begun. Sledges were unloaded, provisions were replaced in the larders, and the clothing, arms, tools, furs, etc., put in the magazine. The dogs returned to their kennels and the reindeer to their stable.

Thomas Black, in despair, retired to his own room again ; he carried back all his instruments and books, and, more disgusted than ever with his evil fate, he remained aloof as before from everything that passed in the fort.

A single day sufficed to reinstall them in the house, and then their winter life once more began ; a life of a most monotonous character even to inhabitants of cities. Needlework, clothes-mending, fur-dressing — for they

hoped some of the furs might yet be saved—taking observations, watching the ice-field, and reading aloud were their daily occupations. Mrs. Barnett was the leader in all these things, and her influence was felt everywhere. If sometimes a little disagreement arose between the soldiers, now rendered somewhat irritable by the worries of the present and by anxiety for the future, a few words from Mrs. Barnett set matters to rights, for she had obtained great power in the little colony, and she always used her influence with a good object.

Kalumah became a great favourite; everyone liked her, because she was so good-natured and obliging. Mrs. Barnett had undertaken her education, and she succeeded wonderfully, for her pupil was really intelligent and anxious to learn. She quickly mastered the English language, and could read and write it; besides, Kalumah had ten masters, all ready to teach her, as the soldiers were natives of England, or had been born in British territory, and all knew how to read, write, and cipher.

The construction of the boat proceeded rapidly, and it would be entirely planked and decked by the end of the month. In the midst of the polar night MacNab and his mates worked as hard as ever by the light of torches, while the others occupied themselves making the rigging. Though the season was far advanced, the weather was undecided; and though the cold was some-

times intense, it did not last, owing to the prevalence of westerly winds.

Thus the whole of December passed, rain and snow succeeding each other at intervals, while the temperature varied from 26 deg. to 34 deg. Fahr. They did not burn much fuel, although they had plenty in reserve. This economy was not obligatory. But unfortunately they were badly off for means of light. The oil was failing, and Hobson could only permit the lamps to be lighted for a few hours each day. They made an attempt to use reindeer fat for this purpose, but the smell was so bad, they preferred being in the dark, when work was of course suspended, and the hours appeared very long.

The aurora borealis and two or three lunar rainbows appeared at the full moon; and Thomas Black might have observed these phenomena minutely, and made precise calculations upon their intensity, their coloration, their connection with the electric state of the atmosphere, and their effect on the magnetic needle. But the astronomer did not quit his room; his spirit was quite crushed.

On the 30th of December a long circular line of iceberg was perceived, by the aid of moonlight, shutting up the north-east horizon. This was the ice-wall, the masses of which were piled up, one above the other, to a height of about three hundred or four hundred feet. This enormous barrier nearly surrounded the island, and they began to fear it would shut them in completely.

During the first week in January the sky was clear, and the year 1864 was ushered in by intense cold, which sent down the mercury to 8 deg. Fahrenheit. This was the lowest reading yet recorded during this singular winter; but it was by no means low for such a latitude.

Lieutenant Hobson thought it his duty to ascertain the latitude and longitude of the island by observations by the stars, and he found that it had not moved.

About this time, notwithstanding all their economy, they found their oil was failing. Now the sun did not return before the beginning of February, so there was still a month during which the colonists would have to live in darkness. But, thanks to the young Esquimaux, a supply of oil was obtained.

It was the 3rd of January. Kalumah had gone to Cape Bathurst to find out the state of the ice. Here, as all along the south of the island, the ice-field was compact; and the surface, though extremely rough, was quite solid. No doubt this arose from the fact that the field, pressed towards the north by the ice-wall, had become squeezed between it and Victoria Island.

The young Esquimaux, though she saw no crevasses, perceived several neatly-cut circular holes in the ice, which she immediately recognised. They were holes kept open by the seals, at which these creatures came up to breathe, or left the water to seek for mosses on the coast.

Kalumah knew that bears, in winter time, waited patiently beside these holes, in order to strangle and carry off the seals when they came up for fresh air. She knew also that Esquimaux were equally patient, and secured the animals by casting a noose over their heads when they appeared above the surface.

Now what bears and Esquimaux could do, adroit hunters could do equally well, and as the seals were in the neighbourhood, the inhabitants of the factory need no longer be deprived of oil.

So Kalumah immediately ran back to the fort, and told Hobson. He called Marbre and Sabine, and the girl instructed them in the manner in which the Esquimaux catch the seals, and she suggested that they should attempt it.

Before she had finished speaking, Sabine fetched a strong rope with a running noose, and he, Mrs. Barnett, Marbre, and Kalumah, with a few soldiers, set off to Cape Bathurst. While the women remained on the beach, the men advanced to the holes indicated by Kalumah. Each man was provided with a rope and took up his position at a different hole.

They had to wait a very long time—an hour passed and yet no seal appeared, but at last the water was disturbed at the hole at which Marbre was watching. A head armed with long tusks appeared: it was the head of a morse. Marbre threw the noose skilfully and pulled it tight. His companions ran to his assistance,

and after some difficulty, the huge animal was dragged out upon the ice and killed.

This was a success. The inhabitants of Fort Hope were delighted with this kind of fishing. Other morses were taken in the same way, and furnished plenty of oil, which, though not vegetable oil, was sufficient to keep the lamps burning, and there was no longer any want of light in the fort.

However, the cold did not increase and was not very severe. If the colonists had been on the main-land they would have congratulated themselves on such a winter, but the month of January passed, and the thermometer never marked more than a few degrees below freezing-point.

But in consequence of the mildness of the season, the sea round the island was never thoroughly frozen, and being much fissured was quite impracticable, as was proved by the presence of the furred animals, which had become quite tame, and were almost part of the domestic menagerie attached to the fort.

None of these animals were killed, as Hobson thought the slaughter would be perfectly useless. They did not kill the reindeer, except for necessary food, but the ermines, martens, lynxes, etc., were unmolested. Some of them even ventured within the *enceinte*, and were not driven away. The martens and foxes were in all the glory of their winter furs, and were very valuable. These rodents, thanks to the mild temperature, found

plenty of moss under the snow, and did not draw upon the reserves of the factory.

The termination of the winter was awaited with some anxiety for the future, but Mrs. Barnett did all she could to cheer their monotonous existence.

Only one incident occurred during the month of January, but that was a sad one. The baby was taken ill — headaches, burning thirst, alternating cold and fever, soon brought the little fellow into a very sad condition. The despair of his mother, and the anxiety of all can be imagined. They did not know what to do, as they were ignorant of the nature of the malady, but under the advice of Madge, who never lost her presence of mind, refreshing drinks were administered, and poultices applied, while Kalumah nursed the little invalid day and night.

On the third day an eruption came out. There was no longer any doubt that the disease was malignant scarlet fever. It is seldom that children of a year old are violently attacked by this disease, but cases do happen. The medicine-chest of the fort was unfortunately ill stocked, but Madge, who had seen several cases of scarlet fever, knew the efficacy of tincture of belladonna. One or two drops were given to the child every day, and he was carefully protected from the least cold. He had been removed to his parents' room, and the eruption soon came out all over him. But two days later the skin took a violet tinge, then white, and then it fell off in scales.

It was now necessary that care should be redoubled ; but the boy was so well nursed that on the 20th of January, twelve days after the attack commenced, he was out of danger. Everybody was delighted. The baby was the "child of the fort." He had been born in that climate and amongst these brave soldiers. He had been called Michael Hope, and was looked upon as a sort of talisman, which Heaven would not take away. Kalumah was quite sure she would have died if he had ; but little Michael recovered by degrees, and new life returned to all as he grew better. So the 23rd of January came round, and no change had taken place in the island. The polar night still lasted ; snow fell fast for some days, till it was quite two feet deep.

On the 27th an unexpected visitor appeared. Belcher and Pond, who were on guard that morning, perceived an enormous bear calmly approaching the fort. They hurried indoors, and reported what they had seen.

"I expect it is only our own bear," said Mrs. Barnett to Hobson ; and they, followed by some soldiers with loaded guns, went out to the postern-gate.

The bear was now only two hundred paces distant, and was coming quietly along, as if to pay a morning call.

"I know him," exclaimed Mrs. Barnett. "It is your preserver, Kalumah."

"Oh, do not kill my bear !" cried the young Esquimaux.

“We will not kill him,” replied Hobson. “Do not do him any harm, my good fellows; let him go as he came.”

“But if he wants to get inside—what then?” said Sergeant Long, who did not believe in the good qualities of polar bears.

“Well then, let him come,” replied Mrs. Barnett; “the animal has lost all his savageness—he is a prisoner like ourselves, and you know that prisoners——”

“Do not eat each other,” said Hobson; “that is true, madam, when they are of the same species, not otherwise. But at your request we will spare this gentleman, unless he attacks us. Nevertheless, I think it prudent to return to the house; we must not put such great temptation in his way.”

The advice was good; they re-entered the house and shut the windows, though the shutters were not put up. They could then watch the animal's movements through the glass. The bear arrived at the postern, and finding it open, pushed his head in, examined the interior of the yard and entered. When he reached the centre of the court, he inspected all the buildings, and then advanced towards the stable and the kennel. He stopped for a moment to listen to the growling of the dogs and the uneasy movements of the reindeer; then continuing his inspection of the palisade he reached the house at last, and put his great head against one of the windows of the common room.

All the spectators jumped back, and some of the soldiers seized their guns ; and Jasper Hobson began to fear that the joke had gone too far.

But Kalumah came and placed her pretty face against the thin pane. The bear seemed to recognise her, at least that was her opinion ; and no doubt being then quite satisfied, he turned away with a loud growl, and left the fort as he had entered it, according to Hobson's prediction.

This was the only incident, and things went on as before. The bear did not appear again.

Meanwhile the little boy acquired strength, and at the end of the month he had regained his rosy cheeks and bright looks.

About midday on the 3rd of February a pale tinge of light was visible for about an hour on the southern horizon. A yellow disc showed itself for an instant. This was the sun, which was now reappearing for the first time after the long polar night.

CHAPTER XV.

A LAST EXPEDITION.

FROM this date the sun rose higher above the horizon every day ; but the nights continued very long, the cold increased, as is often the case in February, and the thermometer marked 1 deg. Fahr. only. This was the lowest temperature recorded all the winter.

“When does the thaw commence?” inquired Mrs. Barnett.

“Not till the middle of May in average years,” replied Hobson; “but the winter has been so mild that, if no more frost occurs, the break-up will begin about April—at least I suppose so.”

“So we have still two months to wait?” said Mrs. Barnett.

“Yes; for it would not be prudent to embark too soon, and I think our chances of success would be greater if we remain on the island until it drifts into the narrowest part of Behring Strait, which is not more than two hundred miles wide.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Mrs. Barnett, who was much surprised at the Lieutenant’s answer. “Do you forget that the Kamtchatka current brought us here, and may carry us away farther north?”

“I do not think so,” replied Hobson. “Indeed I am sure it will not. The thaw always moves from north to south, while the Kamtchatka current is in the opposite direction, and the ice always goes down the Behring current. But in any case the icebergs always drift to the Pacific, the warm waters of which melt them. Ask Kalumah; she knows these latitudes, and she will tell you the same thing.”

And indeed Kalumah confirmed the Lieutenant in every particular. It was therefore probable that at the beginning of April their island would be drifted with the ice-field to the narrow portion of Behring Strait, which is visited in summer by the experienced pilots and fishermen of New Archangel; so, making allowances for all possible stoppages and for lost time, they might hope to reach the continent at the beginning of May. Besides, although the cold had not been very great, the island had certainly become thicker underneath, and would resist for some months to come.

The colonists therefore could only wait patiently.

The little boy continued to improve. On the 20th of February, forty days after his attack, he went out for the first time; it must be understood by going out that he merely left his bedroom for the large sitting-room, where

he was very much petted. His mother, acting on Madge's advice, continued to nurse him ; and this treatment, with a course of reindeer's milk, soon brought back his strength. He found a number of little toys awaiting him which his good friends the soldiers had made, and he was the happiest baby in the world.

The last week of February was extremely wet. It blew hard from the north-west, and snow fell for some days in great abundance. But the storm still continued from Cape Bathurst, and in the direction of the icebergs the roar of the tempest was almost deafening. The bergs were driven up against each other, and fell with a roar like thunder. They pressed down the ice from the north side, and piled it up on the shore of the island. It really appeared as if the cape itself (which, after all, was a sort of iceberg, covered with earth and sand) would be thrown down. Some immense pieces of ice, notwithstanding their weight, were driven right up to the palisade of the fort. Very fortunately for the factory the cape stood firm, and preserved the buildings from complete destruction.

It will easily be understood that the position of Victoria Island, at the mouth of a narrow strait, towards which the ice was accumulating, was very perilous. The island might at any moment be swept by an avalanche or crushed beneath the ice-blocks, even before the thaw set in. This was a new danger to be added to all the others. Mrs. Barnett, seeing the tremendous pressure of

the ice beyond the island, and the irresistible force with which the blocks came together, understood to the full the peril that threatened them until the thaw commenced. She frequently spoke to Lieutenant Hobson about it, but he could only shake his head, for he had no satisfactory answer to give.

The storm ceased at the beginning of March, and then the settlers could see how far the aspect of the ice-field had been changed. It seemed as if the wall of icebergs had slipped along the surface of the floes towards the island; in places it was not more than two miles distant, and kept advancing like a glacier, though horizontally. Between this high barrier and the shore the ice-field was extremely distorted: strewn with hummocks, and broken angular pieces, and overturned pyramids, like a tempestuous sea suddenly frozen, or a ruined town, of which not a monument remained upright. The high ice-wall, in a strange profile, stood out against the sky, with rugged peaks and fantastic cones, making a solid and superb frame for the wonderful landscape.

But now the vessel was quite finished. It was rather a bluff build, as one might have expected, but did credit to MacNab, and being Dutch-built would resist the ice better. She was rigged fore-and-aft, like a cutter, and the canvas of the tent had been used for the sails.

This boat would easily contain all the inhabitants of Victoria Island, and it was evident that if, as they hoped, the island drifted into Behring Strait, the little

vessel would easily traverse even the greatest distance to the American coast ; so they could only wait for the thaw.

Hobson now determined to make an excursion to the south-east, to see if there were any signs of the ice breaking up, and to examine the ice-wall ; to see, in fact, the actual state of the sea, and if they could reach the continent. Many incidents would occur, many risks would have to be run when the thaw began, and it was only an act of prudence to make a reconnoissance.

The expedition was resolved upon, and the start was fixed for the 7th March. The party was composed of the Lieutenant, Mrs. Barnett, Kalumah, Marbre, and Sabine. It was arranged that if the route was practicable they were to seek a passage across the chain of icebergs, but in any case they were not to be absent more than eight-and-forty hours. Provisions were prepared, and the party, well armed, left Fort Hope, and turned their steps towards Cape Michael.

The thermometer marked 32 deg. Fahrenheit, there was a slight mist but no wind. The sun was now above the horizon seven or eight hours every day, and afforded plenty of light.

At nine o'clock, after a short halt, the party descended the sloping *débris* of Cape Michael, and advanced on the ice-field in a south-easterly direction. The ice-wall was about three miles distant.

The progress of course was very slow. At every

moment they had to turn a deep crevasse or some unscalable hummock ; no sledge could possibly have got over such ground, which was simply an accumulation of blocks of ice of every shape and size, and how they held together was a miracle. Some had been quite recently upset, as was evident from their sharp fractures and corners. But with all this there was not a trace of any animal or human footstep. Not a living being was to be seen. Even the birds seemed to have deserted the place.

Mrs. Barnett asked in astonishment whether they could possibly have passed this ice-field in December, but the Lieutenant informed her that at that time the ice-field did not present the same appearance. The enormous pressure of the ice-wall had not then begun, and they had found the flow comparatively level. The only obstacle had been the number of fissures. The passage was impracticable it is true, in consequence of the inequality of the ice-field, but at the commencement of the winter these were not in existence.

However, they kept advancing towards the ice-wall, Kalumah leading. The quick clever girl passed like an alpine chamois from hummock to hummock. It was wonderful how she managed to go so fast without hesitation or mistake, and to thread the labyrinth of icebergs. But they followed her with every confidence.

About noon they reached the base of the ice-wall,

but they had taken at least three hours to make three miles.

This icy barrier was of a most imposing appearance; it rose in places at least four hundred feet above the ice-field. The strata of which it was formed were clearly marked, and the surface was tinted with divers colours of extreme delicacy. They could see long strips of ice sometimes of jasper colour, sometimes like bits of broken rainbows strewn all about with crystals and delicate ice-morsels. No cliff, however strangely distorted, could give an idea of this ice-wall, and no description could do justice to the light and shade which played about it.

But it was not safe to approach too near, for the solidity of the wall was very problematical. Rents and fractures were already numerous in the interior. Air-bubbles, imprisoned in the mass, were aiding disintegration rapidly, and they all felt how fragile this frost-built edifice was, which could not survive the arctic winter, and was doomed to melt beneath the sun's rays, while there was water enough in it to supply many rivers.

Lieutenant Hobson had warned his companions to beware of avalanches, which might fall at any moment; so the party did not keep close to it. It is fortunate they did not do so, for about two o'clock an enormous block, weighing more than a hundred tons, fell right across their path, with a tremendous crash. The ice

gave way beneath the shock, and the water was thrown to a great height. Fortunately no one was hit by the fragments of the block, which burst like a bombshell.

From two o'clock until five our explorers followed the course of a narrow winding valley which led to the ice-wall. But did it cross it? That was the point. The interior structure of this high barrier might thus be examined, the blocks which composed it were arranged most symmetrically. In many places trunks of trees were seen frozen in, but all of tropical growth; they had evidently been brought by the gulf-stream to arctic regions, and would be taken up and returned to the ocean with the melting ice. Besides these there were ship timbers, and many portions of vessels in that icy vault.

About five o'clock the approach of darkness stopped any further exploration. The party had not advanced more than two miles in this difficult valley, but its sinuosities prevented any exact estimate of the distance being made.

Hobson gave the signal to halt. In half an hour Marbre and Sabine had cut a grotto in the ice. They all crept in, and, after supper, were soon asleep.

They were all on foot at eight o'clock next morning, and Hobson resumed the course through the valley for another mile, with the object of ascertaining whether it passed through the ice-wall or not. According to the situation of the sun the situation of the passage had

changed from north-east to south-east, and at eleven o'clock the party came out on the opposite side of the icebergs. So there was no doubt the passage existed right through the barrier.

The eastern side presented the same aspect as the western. The same heaped-up masses of ice, icebergs, and hummocks extended as far as the eye could reach. There were some flat places intersected by crevasses, which were rapidly melting. The same solitude, the same deserted appearance, not an animal or a bird was to be seen.

Mrs. Barnett climbed to the summit of a hummock, and there remained for an hour looking at the desolate polar landscape. She could not help thinking of the attempt they had made to get away five months previously. She pictured to herself their miserable caravan wandering through the night amongst all these perils, in their vain endeavours to reach the American continent.

The Lieutenant at last broke in upon her reverie. "Madam," he said, "we have been absent more than twenty-four hours; we now know how thick the ice-wall is, and as we promised not to be absent more than eight-and-forty hours, I think it is time that we returned."

Mrs. Barnett acquiesced; the ice-wall was only of moderate thickness, and would not be long before it thawed sufficiently to permit MacNab's boat to make its

way through after the thaw, so they had better return at once, for fear a snow-storm or a change in the weather should render their way more difficult.

They had breakfast, and about one o'clock set out homewards. At five o'clock they camped as before, and the night passed without any accident, and next day at eight o'clock Hobson gave the signal for departure.

The weather was beautiful, the rising sun was throwing its rays across the valley. Hobson and his party turned their backs upon the orb, as they were marching westward, but the reflection of the light was cast across the path in front and on either side of them.

Mrs. Barnett and Kalumah walked a little behind the others, chatting, yet observing and following the narrow passage indicated by Sabine and Marbre. They hoped to have crossed the ice-wall by midday, and to have reached Victoria Island about one or two o'clock, so that they could arrive at the fort at sunset. They would then be a few hours behind time, but not enough to give their companions any uneasiness.

But they reckoned without an incident which no human being could have foreseen.

It was about ten o'clock when Marbre and Sabine, who were ahead, suddenly stopped. They appeared to be discussing some point. The others having joined them, they saw that Sabine was holding out his compass to his companion, who was gazing at it in astonishment.

“Here is an extraordinary thing!” he cried. “Will

you tell me, sir, please, whether the island is on the east or west of the ice-wall?"

"On the west," replied Hobson; "you know that well enough, Marbre."

"Yes, I know it—I know it well enough," replied Marbre, nodding his head; "but if it be on the west, we are going wrong, and walking away from it!"

"Going away from the island!" exclaimed the Lieutenant, who was much astonished at the hunter's decided manner of speaking.

"There is no doubt about it," replied Marbre. "Just look at the compass, and my name is not what it is if that do not show we are going to the east, and not to the west."

"It is impossible!" said Mrs. Barnett.

"Well, look, madam," replied Sabine.

In fact, the needle was pointing in exactly the opposite direction to that they expected. Hobson was plunged in thought, and did not speak.

"We must have made a mistake this morning—we should have turned to the left, instead of to the right," said Sabine.

"No," exclaimed Mrs. Barnett, "we cannot have made such a mistake."

"But——" said Marbre.

"But," interrupted Mrs. Barnett, "look at the sun—does it not rise in the east? Now as we turned our backs on it this morning, and it is still behind

us, we must be going westward ; so, as the island is in the west, we shall find it when we pass the western side of the ice-wall."

Marbre had nothing to say to this argument, so he folded his arms and held his tongue.

"All right!" said Sabine, "then the sun and this compass contradict each other."

"Yes, just now they do," replied Hobson, "it is not an isolated case. In these high latitudes, in the neighbourhood of the magnetic pole, the compass is frequently disturbed and becomes absolutely misleading."

"Very well," said Marbre, "then we have only to go on with our backs to the sun."

"Certainly," replied Hobson, "there can be no question which is right—the sun or the compass. The sun never gets out of order."

The march was resumed. They kept the sun behind them, for there could be no possible objection to Jasper Hobson's argument.

They proceeded down the valley, but the time occupied in traversing it was longer than they had calculated upon. Hobson had counted on getting out before noon, but it was past two o'clock before they got to the entrance of the passage.

Though they were astonished at the delay they were not uneasy, but the stupefaction of the party may be imagined when on emerging upon the ice-field no sign of Victoria Island was visible.

The island had disappeared. In its place was a vast expanse of ice-field stretching to the horizon.

Each one of the party looked at the other.

“The island ought to be there,” said Sabine.

“Yes, but it is not,” replied Marbre. “Oh sir, what can have become of it?”

Jasper Hobson had not a word to say, and Mrs. Barnett could offer no explanation.

At this moment Kalumah approached Hobson, and touching his arm said: “We took the wrong turn in the valley—we should have gone down, not up; we must reach the place where we crossed yesterday. Come, come!”

Mechanically they all followed the young Esquimaux, and permitted her to act as guide. She retraced her steps though appearances were against her, for they were now walking towards the sun.

But Kalumah offered no explanation. All she said was: “Let us make haste. Quick, quick!”

The whole party were very much exhausted when at night-fall, after three hours' hard walking, they found themselves on the other side of the ice-wall. They could not see if the island were in front of them, but they were not left long in uncertainty.

About a hundred paces off on the ice-field, burning torches were moving about, and the report of guns was carried to their ears. Then shouts were heard.

To these the party replied, and were soon joined by Sergeant Long, Thomas Black, who had left his solitude in his anxiety for his friends' safety, and others from the fort. In truth, the poor people left on the island had been very uneasy, for they thought that Hobson and his party had lost their way, which was indeed the fact, and that they would not be able to regain the island.

But what made them think so? Why did they imagine that the Lieutenant and his party had missed their way?

Because during the last twenty-four hours the immense ice-field and the island with it, had turned half round, and in consequence of this displacement, it was no longer on the west, but on the east side of the ice-wall, that the party would have to seek the wandering island.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE THAW.

Two hours after this the whole party reached Fort Hope. The next day, 10th March, the sun for the first time illuminated what had hitherto been the western side of the island. Cape Bathurst, instead of pointing to the north, pointed to the south. Kalumah, to whom this phenomenon was known, had been right, so neither the compass nor the sun was to blame.

Thus the position of the island had been quite changed. Both the island and the ice-field had made a half turn, which proved that the whole mass had become disconnected from the main-land, and the thaw

- would soon set in.

“After all,” said the Lieutenant, “this change is in our favour. Cape Bathurst and Fort Hope are now turned towards the south-east, the point nearest to the American continent, and the ice-wall no longer intrudes between us and the main-land.”

"Yes, it is all for the best, I suppose," replied Mrs. Barnett.

"Everything is for the best, madam," replied Hobson, who appreciated at its just value the change of position which had just taken place.

Between the 10th and the 21st of March nothing unusual happened, but there were indications of an approaching change. The temperature varied between 43 deg. and 50 deg. Fahr., and the thaw threatened to be sudden. New crevasses opened and water came out upon the ice-field. As whalers express it, these crevasses were wounds through which the ice-field bled—the noise of the breaking ice was like the noise of artillery. A warm rain now began to fall, and hastened the dissolution of the ice.

The birds which had abandoned the island at the beginning of winter, now returned in large flocks. Marbre and Sabine killed a number of them, and on some were found the tickets which had been tied round their necks the previous year. Flocks of white swans came back, and filled the air with their trumpeting; the quadrupeds, both rodents and carnivora, still continued to haunt the vicinity of the fort like tame animals.

Hobson took the sun's altitude nearly every day. Sometimes Mrs. Barnett assisted him, or even took the observation herself, for she had become skilful in handling the sextant. It was very important to note the least changes in the position of the island. The

question of the two currents was still pending, and whether the island would be carried north or south was the great subject for consideration.

Mrs. Barnett had always shown herself possessed of a courage superior to most of her sex. Her companions noticed that every day, in all weathers, she was working, or venturing across the half-melting ice-field, braving all fatigue ; then on her return to the fort, she was the life and soul of the party, ably seconded by her devoted Madge.

Mrs. Barnett looked courageously to the future, and, though full of sad presentiments, she never permitted her uneasiness to be seen. No one could have imagined that beneath that calm exterior, such a conflict of feeling was raging. Jasper Hobson's admiration for her was profound.

He had also entire confidence in Kalumah, and he often depended upon her natural instinct, as a hunter would depend upon his faithful dog. She was very intelligent, and familiar with all the phenomena of the polar regions. On board a whaler she would have well replaced a pilot or an ice-master to guide the ship through the ice. Every day she took note of the state of the ice-field, and the peculiar noises made by the breaking of the iceberg was sufficient to tell her the progress of the thaw. No one possessed a surer foot upon the ice than she, no one could skim more lightly

than she across the fragile ice-floe nor find a way more quickly over an ice-field, seamed with crevasses.

Between the 20th and the 30th of March the thaw progressed rapidly, for rain fell in abundance. The settlers hoped that the ice-field would soon divide, and that in about a fortnight they would be able to launch their ship. Hobson was not a man to hesitate when he had made up his mind, and he was afraid that the Kamtchatka current might take the island to the north before the Behring current could reach it.

“There is no fear of that,” Kalumah said, “the thaw always works downwards. Our danger is there,” she added, pointing to the south, towards the Pacific.

The young Esquimaux was absolutely certain, and Hobson was reassured on this point, for he was not afraid of the island drifting into the Pacific. In fact, long before that could happen he hoped that he and all his companions would be on board the vessel, and the voyage would not be long, for the strait forms a kind of tunnel between East Cape on the Asiatic side, and Prince of Wales Cape on the American shore.

It can be understood with what attention it was necessary to notice the least displacement of the island. The position had to be ascertained whenever the weather would permit, and the Lieutenant and his companions took every precaution in view of an immediate and perhaps very sudden embarkation.

Of course, all special work, such as hunting, and trap-setting, and indoor repairs, was stopped. The stores or magazines were filled with furs, most of which would be lost, and the hunters and trappers would have nothing to do. The boat was complete, and MacNab and his mates were now attending to the strengthening of the fort, pending the launching of the vessel, for the thaw would probably expose the factory to very great pressure to accumulated ice. Strong beams were fixed against the walls outside, and upright supports were fixed inside, so as to strengthen the ceiling and the roof. All this was finished by the beginning of April, and its utility was very soon put to the proof.

Spring now approached rapidly, and there was every appearance of a very early season, succeeding to a winter extremely mild to polar regions. The trees were beginning to put forth shoots, and the sap was swelling out the bark of the beeches, willows, and other trees. Mosses were sprouting up, and tinging the soil with a pale green hue, but these would not spread in any abundance, as the rodents devoured them almost as soon as they appeared above ground.

But the most troubled of all the party was Corporal Joliffe. He had undertaken, as we know, to guard the plots sown by his wife, and under other circumstances he would only have to defend them from winged robbers, such as guillemots and puffins—even a scarecrow would

have sufficed for that purpose ; but now he had to protect the sorrel and scurvy-grass from all the rodents and ruminants on the island, which despised all his threats, so the poor man was in agony, for while he defended one side of the field the animals were eating up the other.

It certainly would have been wiser to have left what the colonists could not use to the starving animals, as the factory was so soon to be abandoned for ever. Mrs. Barnett had told the Corporal so twenty times a day when he came to complain, but he would not hear a word on the subject.

“After all our trouble,” he would say, “to leave a garden while in the fulness of its prosperity, to sacrifice the seeds which my wife and I have sown so carefully ! Ah madam, I am sometimes tempted to let you all go, and to remain here with my wife. I am sure the Company would consent to give up all claim on the island.”

Mrs. Barnett could not help laughing at this absurd notion, and she sent the Corporal back to his wife, who had long ago made up her mind to sacrifice her plants.

Meantime the health of the colonists remained excellent. They had all escaped illness ; even the baby was now quite well again, and thriving wonderfully under the influence of the spring weather.

During the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th of April the thaw continued rapidly. The weather was warm but cloudy,

and heavy drops of rain fell frequently. The wind blew from the south-west, charged with the warm influence of the continent; but it was impossible to make any observation, as the atmosphere was so misty, and neither the sun, moon, nor stars could be seen. This was the more regrettable, as it was absolutely necessary to notice the slightest movement of Victoria Island.

On the night of the 7th of April the ice began to break up. In the morning, Hobson, Mrs. Barnett, Kalumah, and Sergeant Long climbed to the top of Cape Bathurst, and perceived that a change had taken place in the wall of icebergs. That enormous barrier had divided into two parts; the larger one appeared to be moving towards the north.

Was this the influence of the Kamtchatka current, and would the island follow in the same direction? The fears of the party may be imagined. A few hours would now decide the question; for if it were fated that they should drift some hundred miles farther towards the north, they would have great difficulty to regain the continent in such a little boat as they possessed.

It was, unfortunately, impossible to ascertain the nature of the displacement now going on. The island was not moving, so much was certain, or, at any rate, not in the same direction as the icebergs, as they could see the progress of the latter. It was probable, therefore, that one portion of the ice-field was going north; the portion with them was stationary.

However, this movement of the icebergs did not change Kalumah's opinion in the least. She still declared that the thaw would work southwards, and that the icebergs would soon feel the influence of the Behring current; and, with a piece of wood, she drew a rough sketch of the current on the sand, and conveyed to her companions the idea that, by following it, the island must approach the American coast. Nothing could shake her conviction, and, indeed, everyone felt convinced by her explanation.

Nevertheless, the 8th, 9th, and 10th of April seemed to discredit Kalumah's opinion; the upper part of the ice-wall drifted more and more towards the north, and the ice broke up with a great noise. This dislocation manifested itself with astounding noises, and out of doors it was impossible to hear oneself speak. The noise was like the continuous roar of artillery. Half a mile from the coast, near Cape Bathurst, the ice-blocks were beginning to be piled up, the wall of ice had resolved into separate bergs, which were still proceeding northwards—at least it seemed so. Hobson, though he said nothing, became more and more uneasy; nor could all Kalumah's assertions assure him. He stated his opinions to her, but she obstinately combated them.

At last, on the morning of the 11th of April, Hobson pointed out to Kalumah the fast-disappearing icebergs, and once more endeavoured to prove to her that her arguments were wrong.

“No, I tell you,” replied Kalumah, with a deeper appearance of conviction than ever. “Those icebergs are *not* moving to the north; it is our island that is drifting to the south.”

Hobson began to think that perhaps she was right, after all, and was much struck by her reply. It was not at all impossible that the movement of the ice-wall was only apparent, and that it was really the island that was in motion; but this could not be ascertained until they could get an observation of the latitude and longitude.

The weather not only remained very cloudy, but, unfortunately, a phenomenon peculiar to the arctic regions made the darkness greater, and all observations impossible; for, at the breaking up of the ice, the temperature greatly diminished, a thick but by no means ordinary fog rose; the ground was covered with a white crust, quite different from frost, which was only a watery vapour, which congeals after precipitation. The minute particles of which this fog is composed lay thickly on trees and shrubs and all projecting surfaces, and bristled in little pyramidal crystals, the apex of each pointing to windward.

Hobson understood the meaning of this, which whalers have often noted in spring-time at the polar regions. “It was a frost-rime,” he said, “which remains in a condition of complete congelation.”

But, whether fog or rime, this occurrence was none the less regrettable, for the vapour rose at least a hundred

feet above the level of the sea, and so thick was it that none of the party could see each other at more than three paces distant.

Their disappointment was very great. It appeared that nature did not wish to spare them a single pang. Just when the thaw had come on, just at the moment when the wandering island was to be freed from its imprisonment; when observations were absolutely necessary, this fog obstructed everything.

Four days passed in this manner. The frost-rime was not dissipated till the 15th April, but on that morning a strong south wind dispersed it.

The sun shone brilliantly. Hobson rushed to his instruments; he took the altitude, and he found Victoria Island was then in latitude 69 deg. 57 min., longitude 179 deg. 33 min.

Kalumah was right. Victoria Island was being carried southwards by the Behring current.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AVALANCHE.

THE colonists were at last approaching the frequented neighbourhood of Behring Sea. They were no longer afraid of being carried to the north; to watch the displacement of the island, and to estimate its speed, was all they had to do; but the speed would be very unequal, because of the various obstacles. These observations were made very minutely by Hobson, who took the solar and stellar altitudes alternately. On the 16th April he calculated that, if the speed then obtaining were continued, they would reach the Arctic Circle about the beginning of May.

It was supposed that, when the island got to the narrowest part of the strait, it would remain stationary till the thaw broke it up. Then the boat could be launched, and the colonists could set sail for the American continent at a moment's notice, for everything was prepared.

They now began to feel more confident of rescue, and that in a few days they would surely land on one coast or another. This prospect reanimated them, and their natural gaiety, so long banished by anxiety, at length returned. Their meals became quite cheerful repasts, and so much the more so as there was no want of provisions and no economy was necessary. The influence of the spring made itself felt, and they all breathed the fresh air with intoxicating feelings of delight.

During the following day many excursions were made in and about the island. None of the animals had abandoned it, for even now it was impossible for them to reach the continent, a fact which proved that the island was actually drifting. But no change had taken place, neither at Cape Esquimaux nor Cape Michael, nor at any other part of the island. The great gulf, which had been opened by the tempest near the latter cape, had been closed up by the winter, and no other fissure was apparent.

During these excursions many bands of wolves were observed. These were the only animals which the sentiment of a common danger had not domesticated.

The good-natured bear which had saved Kalumah was often noticed wandering about in a melancholy fashion over the deserted plains, and stopping when the explorers wished to pass. He often followed them to

the fort, knowing very well that he had nothing to fear from these brave people.

On the 20th April the island was still drifting to the south. All of the ice-wall that remained—that is to say, the southern part of it—followed in its track ; but the changes of position could only be ascertained by astronomical observation.

Jasper Hobson also took several soundings in places, notably at the foot of Cape Bathurst and on the banks of the lagoon. He wished to find out what thickness of ice supported them. He ascertained that it had not increased during the winter, and that the level of the island did not appear to be higher than that of the sea. So it was evident that no time should be lost in quitting this fragile foundation, which would soon dissolve when it reached the warm waters of the Pacific Ocean.

About the 12th of April the situation of the island was again changed. The whole ice-field had moved round from east to west about three-eighths of its circumference, and Cape Bathurst now pointed north-west. The last peaks of the icebergs shut in the northern horizon. It was now certain that the ice-field was moving freely in the strait, and was not attached to any land.

The fatal moment was approaching. Daily and nightly observations gave them the precise situation of the island, and consequently of the ice-field. On the

30th of April both were drifting across Kotzebue Sound, a large gulf which indents the American coast. Its southern extremity is formed by Prince of Wales Cape, which might perhaps stop the wandering island if it deviated from the centre of the passage.

The weather was now pretty fine, and the thermometer marked 50 deg. Fahr. The colonists had thrown off their winter garments some time ago, and were all ready to start. Thomas Black had moved all his books, instruments, and baggage into the boat. A quantity of provisions, as well as some of the most valuable furs, had already been put on board.

On the 2nd of May a very minute observation showed that Victoria Island had a tendency to drift east, and consequently towards the American continent.

This was a most fortunate circumstance, for they knew that they were out of the Kamtchatka current, which runs along the Asiatic coast. Fortune at last was favouring the colonists.

"I think our ill-luck is at an end, madam," said Sergeant Long to Mrs. Barnett. "I think we have no more to fear now."

"I think so too, Sergeant Long. It is a very fortunate thing, as it has turned out, that we were obliged to give up our journey across the ice. It was all for the best, you see."

Mrs. Barnett was right, after all. What dangers they

would have had to overcome during the winter, and what fearful perils they would have encountered during the long polar night, crossing those five hundred miles of ice!

On the 5th of May Hobson announced that Victoria Island had crossed the Polar Circle. It had re-entered at last that zone which the sun does not entirely abandon. The poor travellers felt they were returning to civilisation. They had a little festivity that evening crossing the Polar Circle, in much the same way as they might have celebrated the crossing the Equator for the first time on board a ship.

There was nothing now to do but to wait till the ice would permit the passage of the boat.

During the 7th of May the island turned round to the extent of another quarter of its circumference. Cape Bathurst now pointed to the north. It had then nearly resumed the position which was assigned to it in maps before it had broken away from the continent. The island had turned completely round on itself, and the sun had risen successively on all points of the coast.

The observation of the 8th of May showed that the island was then immovable in the middle of the strait, less than forty miles from Prince of Wales Cape. Land being at such a little distance, the safety of the colonists appeared assured.

That evening there was a grand supper, and the healths of Mrs. Barnett and Lieutenant Hobson were drunk with enthusiasm.

The same evening the Lieutenant determined to go and see whether any change had taken place in the ice-field on the south side which might make a start possible. Mrs. Barnett wished to accompany him, but he suggested that she had better rest ; so he took Sergeant Long only. The others retired to their apartments.

The night was fine and the stars shone brilliantly, though there was no moon. The light reflected from the ice-field was well diffused, and it was possible to see for a long distance through the clear atmosphere. Hobson and Long left the fort at nine o'clock, and directed their steps towards that portion of the shore which is comprised between Port Barnett and Cape Michael.

They followed the coast for two or three miles ; but what a state the ice-field was in—it was a perfect chaos ! If one can imagine an immense concretion of different-sized crystals, like a sea frozen in its roughest state, this is what they saw. There was not even a passage for a man between the blocks, and all use of the boat was out of the question.

They remained talking and making notes respecting the ice-field till midnight. Seeing that things were in such a condition they resolved to return to Fort Hope, to get some hours' rest. They had advanced about a

hundred paces when an unexpected noise caused them to halt. This was a distant rumbling, which seemed to rise in the northern part of the ice-field. The uproar increased rapidly, and soon assumed formidable proportions. What phenomenon did this portend? Some terrible catastrophe had taken place, and Hobson fancied he felt the ice tremble beneath his feet.

“The noise comes from the direction of the ice-wall,” said Sergeant Long. “What can be the matter?”

Hobson did not reply, but being in a most anxious state of mind he dragged his companion towards the shore.

“To the fort, to the fort!” he cried. “Perhaps the ice may have given way, and we shall be able to launch our boat.”

And they ran as fast as they could by the shortest way to Fort Hope.

A thousand thoughts assailed them. What new phenomenon had produced this uproar? Were the sleeping inhabitants of the fort aware of it? Yes, no doubt, for, in vulgar parlance, the noise was loud enough to wake the dead.

In twenty minutes Jasper Hobson and Sergeant Long had traversed the two miles that separated them from Fort Hope, but before reaching the palisade they

perceived their companions, men and women, flying in disorder, uttering cries of despair.

The carpenter MacNab came towards the Lieutenant; he was carrying his little boy in his arms.

“Look, sir!” he said, drawing the Lieutenant toward a hill which rose a little behind the *enceinte*. Hobson looked as directed.

He perceived that the last range of the ice-wall, which before he left the fort had been two miles away, had fallen upon the coast of the island. Cape Bathurst existed no longer, and the mass of earth and sand had been swept away by the icebergs, and thrown upon the court of the factory. The principal house and the buildings to the north of it were buried in the avalanche. The spectators could see the masses of ice falling and crushing each other as they fell. It was like an assault of icebergs upon the island.

The boat had been entirely destroyed. The last resource of the unfortunate colonists had been swept away.

At this moment the building which the soldiers and women had only just escaped from was crushed by the fall of an enormous block of ice. The unfortunate people uttered a cry of despair.

“Where are the others?” cried the Lieutenant, with a most terror-stricken accent.

“There,” replied MacNab, pointing to the mass of

sand, earth, and ice which rose above the principal building.

Yes, under that heap lay Mrs. Barnett, Madge, Kalumah, and Thomas Black, whom the avalanche had surprised in their sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALL HANDS TO WORK !

A TERRIBLE catastrophe had occurred. The ice-wall, being five times the size below the water that it was above it, had been acted upon by the submarine currents, and, unable to resist them, it had been forced upon Victoria Island, and falling upon it drove it rapidly to the south.

At the first moment, aroused by the noise of the blocks falling upon the out-houses and the principal building, MacNab and his companions had been able to escape from their house in time, but now the work of destruction was complete. Of the dwelling-houses not a trace remained, and now the island was dragging its inhabitants with it to the depths of the sea. But perhaps, under the *débris* of the avalanche, their brave companions might still be living. They must be dug out, dead or alive.

Hobson, who at first had been completely upset,

now recovered his presence of mind, and cried out :

“Get your shovels and pickaxes; the house is very strong, it may have resisted. To work, to work !”

There was no want of implements, but just then they could not approach the palisade. Masses of ice were falling from the bergs, and a portion of the ice-wall was hanging two hundred feet overhead. One can imagine the force with which these surging masses had fallen ! The coast between Cape Bathurst and Cape Esquimaux was not only surrounded, but was invaded, by these moving mountains, which, impelled by irresistible force, had already advanced a quarter of a mile across the island. Every instant a trembling of the ground and a deafening report announced that another mass had fallen, and there was really some fear lest the island should sink beneath such a weight. A very sensible sinking of the island had already taken place, and the sea was rolling up nearly as far as the lagoon.

The situation of the colonists was terrible, and during the remainder of the night they could do nothing to assist their companions, as they were driven from the neighbourhood of the palisade by the avalanches. They were obliged to wait, and were a prey to the gloomiest foreboding.

At length the day dawned and revealed a terrible

spectacle. The horizon was now shut in by the icy barrier, but its advance seemed stopped for the present. Nevertheless, here and there, a few blocks rolled down occasionally from the summits of the icebergs. But the whole mass, the greater being under water, communicated to the island the force it derived from the current, and was carrying the island to the south with considerable speed.

Those who were thus borne along did not notice the progress. They had to save the victims of the catastrophe, and amongst them that brave and energetic woman for whom each one would gladly have laid down his life. The time for action had now arrived. They were now able to approach the *enceinte*. There was no time to lose, for the poor things had been buried beneath the avalanche for six hours already.

We have said that Cape Bathurst no longer existed. It had been struck by an enormous iceberg, and fallen upon the factory, breaking the boat, and overwhelming the stable and dog-kennels with the animals. Then the principal house disappeared beneath a mass of sand and earth, on top of which large masses of ice were piled to a height of fifty or sixty feet. The court was completely filled up. Not a single post of the palisade was visible. It was from under this mass of ice, earth, and sand that the victims were to be sought with almost incredible labour.

Before commencing operations, Hobson called

MacNab, and asked him whether he thought the house would bear the weight of the avalanche.

“I think so,” replied MacNab, “I am certain it will. You know we made the house very strong, the casement, the roof, and the vertical beams must have had great power of resistance. Besides, the house was first covered with sand and earth, which would lessen the shock of the ice-blocks.”

“Heaven grant you may be right,” replied Hobson, “and that we may be spared a great grief!”

Hobson then sent for Mrs. Joliffe, and asked her whether the house was well stocked with provisions.

“Yes, sir,” she replied; “the pantry and kitchen contained plenty of food.”

“Was there any water?”

“Yes; both water and rum,” replied Mrs. Joliffe.

“Good,” said the Lieutenant; “they will not perish from hunger or thirst. But I wonder if they will have sufficient air!”

To this question the master-carpenter could give no answer. If the house had resisted as he hoped, the want of air would be the chief danger threatening the poor victims; but they could be relieved by rapid action, and the thing to do was to establish communication between the buried mansion and the outer air.

Everybody seized a shovel or pickaxe and set to work. They dug into the pile of sand, earth, and ice, at the risk of bringing down fresh avalanches. MacNab

took the direction of the work upon himself, and carried it out methodically.

It appeared to him most convenient to begin at the very top, so that he could roll down the masses as they were dislodged. With pickaxes and levers they easily moved the smaller blocks, but the large ones had to be broken. Some of more than usual magnitude were melted by means of a fire, and every effort was made to destroy or get rid of the mass of ice as quickly as possible.

But the heap was so great, that, though the workers laboured without a pause, except to take some refreshment, they had made no apparent progress at sunset. Nevertheless they had made an impression. It was resolved, therefore, to continue the work during the night; and when there was no longer any danger of avalanches, the carpenter hoped to sink a shaft through the mass, so as to admit the air as quickly as possible.

So all night Lieutenant Hobson and his companions worked hard. Both fire and iron were employed incessantly; the women attended to the former, the men wielded the latter. All were animated with a single thought—the desire to save Mrs. Barnett, Madge, Kalumah, and Thomas Black.

But when morning dawned these unfortunate people had been buried for thirty hours, in air which was getting more and more impure.

The carpenter, seeing the progress which had been made during the night, determined to sink his shaft direct to the roof of the house. This shaft he calculated would be less than fifty feet in depth ; the work would be easy enough through the ice for about twenty feet ; but the difficulty would be much greater when the bed of earth and sand was reached, which being very friable, would tend to fill in the pit. So it would have to be lined. Long pieces of wood were prepared for this purpose, and the boring commenced. Only three men could work at once. The soldiers therefore took it in turns, relieving each other constantly, so there was every hope that the shaft would soon be accomplished.

As always happens under such circumstances, these poor people alternated between the extremes of hope and fear. When some difficulty retarded them, or some fall destroyed the work they had finished, they were greatly discouraged, and the firm and confident tone of the master-carpenter was necessary to keep them up to their work. While they worked in gangs the three women stood watching them attentively, speaking seldom but praying frequently. They had nothing now to do but to prepare the food which the men devoured in the intervals of rest.

Meanwhile the shaft was bored without much difficulty, but slowly, as the ice was so very hard. At the end of this day the workers had only reached

the sand and earth, and could not expect to get to the roof of the house before the end of the following day.

Night fell ; work was not suspended, for torches were lighted. They hastily constructed a sort of ice-house in the hummocks, to serve as a shelter for the women and child. The wind was now south-west, and a cold rain was beginning to fall, accompanied by squalls. However, neither Hobson nor his men thought of suspending their work for a moment.

Now commenced their greatest difficulty. It was impossible to bore through the shifting material ; so it was indispensable to make a sort of wooden passage, and prop up the inside of the pit. Then the loosened earth was drawn up by a bucket and rope. Under these circumstances the work could not proceed rapidly. The earth might fall in at any moment, and every possible precaution had to be taken to prevent the miners sharing the fate of those they sought.

MacNab himself was generally at the bottom of the shaft, directing the work, and sounding frequently with a long pickaxe ; but he could find no resistance, so the roof of the house was evidently not yet within reach.

Next morning only ten feet had been excavated in* the sand, so there were still twenty to be bored through, even supposing the house had not given way.

It was now fifty-four hours since Mrs. Barnett and her companions had been buried in the avalanche.

The Lieutenant and MacNab frequently wondered whether the victims had attempted to open a communication upward. With her usual courage and coolness, they had no doubt that Mrs. Barnett, if she were free to work, would have made some such attempt. Some tools had been left in the house, and one of the carpenter's mates remembered perfectly well having left his pickaxe in the kitchen. Perhaps the prisoners might have broken open one of the doors, and had begun to drive a gallery through the mass of earth; but this gallery could only be pierced horizontally, and would be a much longer business than MacNab's perpendicular shaft—for the mound caused by the avalanche, though it measured only sixty feet in height, covered a space more than five hundred feet in diameter. The prisoners, of course, would be ignorant of this; and, admitting that they might have commenced such a gallery, they would not reach the end of their toil for at least eight days, and by that time they would, of course, be deprived of air, if not of food.

Nevertheless, Hobson surveyed every portion of the mound himself, and listened eagerly for any noise of subterraneous work, but he could hear nothing.

The working party resumed their labour earnestly

at daybreak. Earth and sand were pulled up incessantly to the top of the shaft. The rude support sufficed to keep back the friable substances. Some falls of earth occurred, but they were quickly stopped, and no accident of a serious nature happened. The soldier Garry was the only one hurt, by the fall of a piece of ice; but the wound was not serious, and he would not leave his work.

At four o'clock they had reached a depth of fifty feet—that is to say, twenty feet in the ice and thirty through the sand and earth.

This was the depth that MacNab had estimated would bring them to the roof of the house, if it had not given way.

He was then at the bottom of the pit. His disappointment and despair may be imagined when he drove his pick into the ground and met with no resistance.

He remained silent for a moment, with his arms crossed, looking at Sabine, who was with him.

“Is there nothing?” asked the hunter.

“No,” replied the carpenter, “nothing at all. Let us continue. The roof may, perhaps, have been deflected, but it is impossible that the floor of the loft can have given way.”

“We shall come to the floor about ten feet lower, or else——”

MacNab did not finish his sentence, and he

and Sabine resumed their work with the energy of despair.

By six o'clock in the evening they had dug ten or twelve feet lower.

MacNab sounded again. There was still nothing. His pick passed through the shifting earth.

Then the carpenter, flinging down the pickaxe, buried his face in his hands. "Poor things!" he murmured; and then, by means of the supports in the woodwork, he mounted to the mouth of the shaft.

There he found Hobson and the Sergeant, more anxious than ever, and, taking them aside, he told them of the terrible disappointment he had experienced.

"Well then," said Hobson, "the house must have been crushed by the avalanche, and those poor creatures——"

"No," replied the carpenter, in a tone of conviction. "No, the house cannot have been crushed. It must have resisted, strengthened as it had been lately. It would be impossible to crush it so."

"But what can have happened, MacNab?" asked the Lieutenant, as the tears gathered in his eyes, and rolled slowly down his cheeks.

"The fact is," said MacNab, "that the house has resisted, but the ground underneath it has given way. The house has gone bodily through the

crust of ice which forms the bottom of the island. It is not crushed, it is engulfed, and the poor victims——”

“Are drowned!” exclaimed Long.

“Yes, Sergeant, drowned without a chance to help themselves as if they had been on board a ship that foundered at sea.”

For some time the men did not speak. MacNab’s suggestion was not at all improbable. Nothing more likely than to suppose that the ice had given way under such a pressure. The vertical props of the house had probably aided in the destruction of the icy foundation, and the house had sunk bodily.

“Well, MacNab,” said Hobson, “if we cannot find them living——”

“We must find them dead,” said the carpenter. “Yes.”

As he spoke, MacNab, without saying anything to the others of what he feared, returned to his work at the bottom of the pit; Hobson descended with him.

During the whole night the boring was continued. The men worked in relays from hour to hour, but all that time MacNab and Hobson superintended their labour.

At three o’clock in the morning Kellet’s pickaxe struck upon a hard substance which gave out a dull sound. The master-carpenter felt it almost before he heard it.

“Here they are!” cried the soldier. “They are saved.”

“Hold your tongue and go on with your work,” replied the Lieutenant in a choking voice.

It was just seventy-six hours since the avalanche had fallen upon the house.

Kellet and his companion, Pond, resumed their work. The depth of the shaft must now have nearly reached the level of the sea, and MacNab felt that all chance of saving the victims was over.

In less than twenty minutes the hard substance which had been struck was discovered. It was one of the rafters. The carpenter, jumping down to the bottom of the pit, seized a pickaxe, and sent the lathes flying in all directions. In a few minutes a large hole was made.

At the opening a face appeared; it was scarcely recognisable in the gloom.

The face was Kalumah's!

“Help, help!” murmured the poor Esquimaux.

Hobson let himself down through the aperture. A cold seized upon him, and water mounted up to his waist. Contrary to general expectation, the roof had not been crushed, but, as MacNab had suggested, the house had been driven down and the water had come in. But fortunately it had not filled the loft, though the sea was a foot above the floor. There was still hope.

The Lieutenant, advancing in the darkness, ran against a body, and dragging it to the aperture, Pond and Kellet seized it, and hauled it up. It was Thomas Black.

Another body was soon released, that of Madge. Ropes had been let down from the top of the shaft, and Madge and Thomas Black were drawn up, and slowly regained consciousness in the fresh air.

Mrs. Barnett still remained below. Jasper Hobson, guided by Kalumah, advanced to the very end of the loft, and there he found her whom he sought, lying motionless, her head scarcely a foot above the water. She appeared lifeless. Hobson took her in his arm and carried her to the aperture. A few seconds later she and he, with Kalumah and MacNab, arrived at the surface. Everybody was awaiting her appearance. No one spoke ; they were nearly despairing.

The young Esquimaux, herself so weak, threw herself beside her friend's body.

Mrs. Barnett still breathed ; her heart was beating ; the pure air entering into her lungs had restored her to life. She opened her eyes at last.

A cry of joy burst from all. A cry of thankfulness which rose to heaven.

At this moment the day began to break, the sun was rising, and throwing its first rays over the ocean.

Mrs. Barnett, by a supreme effort, rose to her feet. From the mountain which had been formed by the

avalanche, she looked all over the island. Then with a strange voice, she said :

“ The sea, the sea ! ”

Yes, on all sides the sea was now clear of ice. The ocean was now visible from east to west.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEHRING SEA.

So the island, impelled by the ice-wall, had been driven at a great speed into Behring Sea, after having crossed the strait without having run ashore. It was still drifting, pressed by the irresistible barrier, which, in its turn, was hurried on by the submarine current. It was drawing nearer and nearer to the warm water of the ocean, in which it would soon dissolve—and the boat was now useless.

When Mrs. Barnett had recovered she told them in a few words what had happened after the fall of the avalanche. Thomas Black, Madge, and Kalumah had been surprised by the noise of the falling ice. They had rushed to the door and windows, but there was no exit, the house was completely covered with sand and earth. Almost immediately afterwards the prisoners heard the crash of the enormous ice-blocks which fell on the fort.

In a quarter of an hour they felt the house sinking

under the pressure. The base of the island was breaking through, and the salt water began to appear.

They immediately seized what provisions they could, and hurried up into the loft. They did this under a vague impression of self-preservation, but what hope was there they would be saved? However, the loft appeared able to resist, and it was probable that two blocks of ice rising above the roof saved it from immediate destruction.

While they were thus imprisoned in the loft they heard the continuous falling of the ice-blocks above. Below, the sea was rising. It was a question whether they would be crushed or drowned first.

But by miracle, as one may say, the solid roof of the house resisted, and the house itself having sunk a little, stopped; but the water was a foot deep on the loft. The prisoners were therefore obliged to climb upon the rafters, and there they remained for hours. The devoted Kalumah waited on them all, and brought food to them through the water. It was impossible for them to save themselves. Help must come from outside.

It was a fearful situation. Breathing was very difficult in such a vitiated atmosphere; and in a few hours more Hobson would only have found their dead bodies.

Besides, the physical torture was increased by moral fears. Mrs. Barnett understood what had passed. She knew that the ice-wall had fallen upon the island, and

that it was being driven towards the south ; and that is why, as soon as she opened her eyes above ground, she looked round and pronounced those words, to which the destruction of the boat lent a terrible significance : “ The sea, the sea ! ”

But at that time those about her thought of nothing but of having saved her and the others ; and so, notwithstanding all the dangers and difficulties that had befallen them, not one of the party had been lost.

But matters had not yet got to the worst ; the *dénouement* was not far off.

Lieutenant Hobson’s first care was to take the bearings of the island. It was no use to think of leaving it, as the boat had been destroyed and the sea was perfectly open. Nothing but the *débris* of the ice-wall remained. The summit had crushed Cape Bathurst ; but the base, deep in the water, was driving the island southwards.

In searching the ruins of the house the instruments and maps belonging to Thomas Black were fortunately found uninjured. The sky was usually cloudy ; but the sun showed occasionally, and Hobson was enabled to take the altitude with sufficient accuracy.

From this observation they ascertained that Victoria Island was that day, the 12th of May, in longitude 168 deg. 12 min. West, and latitude 63 deg. 37 min. North. This point was looked out on the map, and they discovered that they were in Northern Sound, between Cape Tchaplin on the Asiatic side and Cape Stephens on the

American coast, but more than one hundred miles from both.

“We must give up all attempts to reach the continent,” said Mrs. Barnett.

“Yes, madam,” said Hobson, “all hope of that is over. The current is carrying us out to sea very rapidly, and we can only expect to meet with a whaling ship—it is our last chance.”

“But if we cannot reach the continent,” said Mrs. Barnett, “might not the current cast us on one of the islands in Behring Sea?”

There was indeed a faint chance of such a thing, and the colonists seized the hope as drowning men will grasp at straws. There are numerous islands in Behring Sea—St. Lawrence, St. Matthew, St. Paul, George Island, etc. Indeed the wandering island was not very far from the first named, which is of some extent, and surrounded by small islets; and if Victoria Island passed it by, there was a chance that its course might be arrested by the Aleutian group, which bound Behring Sea on the south.

Yes, no doubt the island of St. Lawrence would be a refuge for the colonists. If it failed, St. Matthew, and all the group of islands of which it formed the centre, would still be available; but they might never reach these Aleutian islands, which were more than eight hundred miles away. Long before they could traverse that distance, Victoria Island, worn by the waves and melted

by the sun, would have gone to the bottom of the sea.

It must not be supposed that there was any fixed point at which the advance of ice ceases to approach the equator. It comes nearer in the southern than the northern hemisphere. Ice is frequently seen off the Cape of Good Hope, about the 36th parallel, while icebergs descending from the north never pass 46 deg. north. But the limit of fusion evidently depends upon the state of the atmosphere—in severe winters the ice remains solid in comparatively low latitudes, and *vice versa*.

Now this warm season had set in very early in the year 1861, and would probably hasten the dissolution of Victoria Island. The waters of Behring Sea were green and not blue, as they always are, according to Hudson, on the approach of icebergs; so a catastrophe might be expected, and the colonists had now no boat to depend upon.

Jasper Hobson determined to construct a raft, big enough to carry them all to the continent. He caused wood to be put together with that object; and, after all, the chances of meeting with some whaling vessel were not improbable. So MacNab was ordered to construct a large raft, which would float when the island sank into the sea.

But first it was very necessary to prepare some shelter for the inhabitants of the island. It appeared easiest to dig out the old barracks which had been

attached to the principal house, the walls of which were still standing. Everyone set to work at once, and in a few days they had sufficient shelter from the capricious climate.

They also searched in the house, and a great many things, such as tools and arms, furniture, the air-pumps, and the air-reservoir were recovered.

Next day, the 13th of May, they were obliged to give up all hope of drifting up to St. Lawrence Island. Their observation showed they were passing far to the east of it; and, in fact, currents do not as a rule run against natural obstacles, but turn round them; so Lieutenant Hobson understood that there was not much chance of running aground. But the Aleutian Islands cover so many degrees, that it was not impossible that they might stop the island in its course if it reached their neighbourhood. Though the island was drifting very quickly, the speed would decrease in proportion as the ice which impelled it was melted.

Lieutenant Hobson, Mr. Barnett, Sergeant Long, and MacNab often talked about these things, and came to the conclusion that their island would never reach the Aleutians, either because its speed would diminish, or because it would be thrown out by the Behring current, or because it would be quickly dissolved.

On the 14th of May the construction of the immense raft was commenced. It was necessary to make it so that it would float high above the sea, to avoid the wash

of the waves. This was a big undertaking, but the workmen did not despair. The blacksmith fortunately produced a number of boats which had been brought away from Fort Reliance, and they were used for fixing the beams together firmly.

The place where the raft was constructed must be mentioned. It was the suggestion of Hobson. Instead of having it built on the ground, he decided to have it put together on the surface of the lagoon. The various pieces were made ready on the bank and then thrust into the water, where they were easily adjusted. This method had two advantages; in the first place, the carpenter was at once able to judge of the point of flotation, and the stability which he must give to the raft. Secondly, supposing Victoria Island did melt, the raft would be already in the water, and would not suffer from the shocks which the breaking up of the shafts would necessarily impart.

During the construction of the raft Hobson frequently wandered along the coast, sometimes alone, sometimes with Mrs. Barnett. He took note of the condition of the sea and the changing curves of the coast-line.

Frequently he would gaze over the horizon, which was absolutely free from icebergs. In vain he sought for ships. The solitude of the ocean was only disturbed by a few whales, which came to feed upon the animalcula which abound in those waters. Occasionally

floating pieces of timber, probably carried from warm climates, were observed.

On the 16th of May Mrs. Barnett and Madge took a walk together along that portion of the island between Cape Bathurst and Port Barnett. It was a beautiful warm day; the snow had departed for some time, and there was nothing to recall winter, except the rapidly melting remains of the avalanche. Before long even these would have departed.

The appearance of Victoria Island was certainly curious, and less anxious eyes would have gazed over it with interest. Vegetation had advanced more rapidly than usual, in consequence of the mild weather, and Mrs. Joliffe's garden was particularly fruitful. All the trees were budding fast. Leaves and flowers were no longer of a pale hue, but were more vividly coloured; and indeed, the arctic landscape was quite transformed; in a parallel of latitude similar to Christiania or Stockholm in Europe—for to that temperature had the island now reached.

But Mrs. Barnett did not care for this display which nature had prepared for her. She could not alter fate. She felt the impending catastrophe equally with the hundreds of animals which collected in the neighbourhood of the factory. Foxes, martens, ermines, lynxes, beavers, musk-rats, and even wolves, rendered less savage by the approaching danger, drew nearer and nearer to their dreaded enemy man, as if he could save

them. It was a tacit and instinctive recognition of human superiority, but in circumstances where superiority would not avail.

No, Mrs. Barnett did not care for these things, and she continued to look upon the boundless and pitiless ocean.

“My poor Madge!” she said, one day, “I have brought you to this terrible pass, you who served me so faithfully, and whose friendship deserves a very different reward. Will you forgive me?”

“There is only one thing in the world which I could not forgive you, dear,” replied Madge, “and that is, a death which I did not share with you.”

“Oh Madge, Madge!” cried Mrs. Barnett, “if my death would serve those with us here I would not hesitate to die.”

“My dear friend,” said Madge, “you have no longer any hope then?”

“No,” replied Mrs. Barnett, as she threw herself into her friend’s arms.

The womanly nature triumphed for the moment over that masculine mind—and who would not excuse such a weakness under the circumstances?

Mrs. Barnett sobbed, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Madge, Madge,” she said, “do not say that I have been weeping, do not tell them that.”

“Indeed, no,” replied Madge; “but they would not

believe me if I said so. It is only a passing weakness. Cheer up, be yourself, take courage !”

“But do you still hope then?” exclaimed Mrs. Barnett, looking stedfastly at her companion.

“I always hope,” replied Madge simply.

But hope could no longer be sustained, when a few days afterwards the wandering island passed the St. Matthew group of islands at a distance, and there was no longer any land which they could reach in Behring Sea.

CHAPTER XX.

AT SEA.

VICTORIA ISLAND was now drifting about in the widest part of Behring Sea—six hundred miles from the nearest of the Aleutian Islands, and two hundred from the nearest continent. Its speed varied considerably; but supposing it continued at its present pace, three weeks at least must elapse before it would reach the southern boundary of Behring Sea.

Could the island last for that time in water the mean temperature of which was 50 degrees Fahrenheit?

Hobson hurried the construction of the raft, which MacNab wished to make as solid as possible, for they would have to sail a long distance, unless they met with some vessel before they reached the Aleutian Islands.

However, no important change had taken place in Victoria Island. Expeditions were made daily, but it was necessary to be very cautious, for pieces of the island might break off at any time and separate the party. Indeed, those that undertook these explorations

frequently started with the idea of never returning again. The deep gulf near Cape Michael had now re-opened, and extended quite a mile into the interior, as far as the dried-up bed of the little river. It was feared that it would soon follow up the water-course itself, which naturally was protected by a very thin crust of ice. If this should happen, the whole of the portion of the island beyond the river would disappear—that is to say, the colonists would lose many square miles of their territory. Hobson therefore cautioned his companions not to go beyond the stream unless obliged, for a rough sea might cut them off from their companions.

However, soundings were taken in many places to find out the relative thickness of the ice; and it was ascertained that, in the neighbourhood of Cape Bathurst, not only was the earth and sand deeper, which was of little importance, but the ice was thickest there too. This was very fortunate. The holes through which they had sounded were kept open, so that they might measure the base of the island daily. Its diminution was slow but certain every day, and they estimated that it could not last more than three weeks longer.

During the week from the 19th to the 25th of May the weather was very bad. A violent tempest came on; the lightning flashed, thunder roared, and the sea, impelled by a strong north-west wind, broke over the island, which shook visibly. All the colonists were on the *qui vive*, ready to take to the raft, which was nearly

finished. They even carried some provisions and fresh water on board.

Rain fell in torrents ; the earth was washed away on the hills, and the ice was melted in many places. The inhabitants hastened to fill up any fissures with earth and sand, to protect the ice from the action of the air. But for this precaution, the soil would soon have been perforated like a colander.

This storm caused irreparable damage to the woods bordering the lagoon. The earth was carried away from the roots of the trees in large numbers. In one night the aspect of this part of the island was changed. A few groups of birch-trees and pines had alone resisted the tempest. There was no mistaking this warning. Everyone perceived that the island was giving way—everyone except Thomas Black, who did not seem to care for anything.

During the storm Sabine the hunter left his hut, in the fog, and fell into a large hole which had opened during the night, on the very place formerly occupied by the chief house of the fort.

Hitherto this house, buried under the earth and sand, and three-quarters engulfed, had remained fixed in the ice-crust ; but, no doubt, the undulations of the sea had enlarged the hole, and the house had sunk down altogether. The earth and sand had fallen down after it into the raging sea beneath.

Sabine's companions, hearing his cries, hurried to the

crevasse just in time to save him, as he clung to the slippery sides, and he was pulled out, having experienced only a ducking.

Later on the colonists saw the beams of the house, which had slipped from under the ice, floating about in the sea. This was the worst misfortune which had happened, for the waves would now be able to eat a way into the island, through the fissure, like an enormous cancer.

On the 25th May the wind veered to the north-east, but only blew a strong breeze. The wind ceased and the sea went down. The night passed quietly, and in the morning Hobson was enabled to take an observation. At midday the position of the island was 56 deg. 13 min. north latitude, 170 deg. 23 min. longitude.

The speed of the island had been very great, for it had drifted nearly eight hundred miles since the thaw had set in.

This rapid progress gave Hobson some hope.

“My friends,” said he, pointing out their position on the map to his companions, “do you see the Aleutian Islands? They are now only two hundred miles from us; we shall probably reach them in eight days.”

“Eight days!” replied Sergeant Long, shaking his head. “Eight days is a long time.”

“I may tell you,” said Hobson, “that if our island had followed the 168th meridian it would

have now reached the parallel of those islands, but the Behring current has been carrying it southwest."

This observation was correct. The current was apparently carrying the island out of sight of all land, even away from the Aleutians.

Mrs. Barnett studied the map in silence. She saw the pencil-mark which indicated their position on the chart, which was drawn on a large scale, so their island looked but a tiny speck on the expanse of Behring Sea. She retraced their whole journey, which had been imposed upon them by the immutable direction of the currents, by which they had been carried away from all the islands and both continents, towards the Pacific Ocean.

She fell into a melancholy train of thought, but at length rousing herself, she said :

"Could not something be done to direct the course of the island? In eight days at this speed we should reach the last of the Aleutians."

"Those eight days are in the hands of Providence," replied Hobson bravely. "We are in the hands of God."

"I quite agree with you so far," replied Mrs. Barnett ; "but remember that 'Heaven helps those who help themselves.' Cannot we do anything?"

Hobson shook his head doubtfully. For his own part he knew of but one means of safety—the raft.

But were they to embark at once, and make what sail they could to the nearest land?

He consulted his friends, and all agreed that they had better wait until they were forced to go. For the raft was only a last resource; the waves would continually break over it if they launched it, and it would not travel half as fast as the island. Besides, as the wind generally blew from the east, it would most likely carry the raft away from all land.

They could only wait, for, after all, the current was drifting them rapidly towards the Aleutian Islands; when they got nearer they would consult as to their proceedings.

This was the wisest course after all. And in eight days, if the speed was continued, the island would be stopped by the southern shore of Behring Sea, in safety, or hurried to the south-west into the Pacific Ocean and lost for ever.

But the fatality which had pursued the unhappy colonists had one more shaft in its quiver of ill-luck. The speed of the island diminished.

On the night of the 26th May the position of the island changed once again, and very seriously. It turned half round, and the remaining icebergs which had bounded the north shore were now on the south side.

On the morning of the 27th the castaways saw the sun rise over Cape Esquimaux instead of behind Port Barnett.

What would the consequence of this change be?—would the icebergs separate from the island?

Each one felt a presentiment of some new misfortune, and there was no need to explain Kellet's observation: "Before evening we shall have lost our propeller."

Kellet meant that the icebergs would be no longer behind them. It was by their speed that the island had been impelled so quickly, for, for each foot above water there were six below it. This thickness of ice acted on by the current had of course very great influence on the island, which, deprived of the icebergs, would have but little motion left.

Yes, Kellet was right. Victoria Island would then be like a steamship deprived of its masts and screw.

No one replied to Kellet's observation. Scarcely a quarter of an hour had elapsed when a terrible cracking noise was heard. The tops of the icebergs shook, then broke away, and the remaining masses were carried by the current far away to the south.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ISLAND BECOMES AN ISLET.

THREE hours later the ice-wall had disappeared, so it was evident the island was now stationary, and that the force of the current was below the surface of the sea.

Observations were taken at midday, and again twenty-four hours afterwards. It was then ascertained that Victoria Island had not advanced a mile.

Their only chance of safety was that they might be picked up by some whaling vessel, either on the island, or when they had taken to the raft, after the sinking of their ice-island.

They were now in 54 deg. 33 min. latitude, and 177 deg. 19 min. longitude, several hundred miles from the nearest land, namely, the Aleutian Islands.

Hobson called his companions together to consult with him what was best to be done.

All agreed that it would be best to remain on the island and wait as long as possible, and only take to the raft as a last resource.

They would wait still.

So the raft was completed. MacNab had constructed a large cabin upon it, in which all could find some shelter. A mast had been made, which could be "stepped," if necessary, and the sails intended for the boat were ready. The whole structure was very strong; and if the wind blew from the right quarter, and the sea were not too rough, this rude arrangement of planks and beams might save their lives.

"Nothing is impossible to Him who rules the winds and waves," said Mrs. Barnett.

Hobson had made an inventory of their supplies. The stores had been abundant, but the avalanche had considerably diminished their stock, though there were plenty of animals still on the island, and the moss and shrubs were sufficient to nourish them. It was found necessary to supplement the dried meat in store, and a few reindeer and hares were slaughtered by the hunters.

The health of the colonists was good, they had not suffered much during the mild winter, and all the trouble they had gone through had not affected their physical strength. But it must be confessed they did not relish the idea of abandoning the island, or, to speak more correctly, of it abandoning them. They feared to float upon the surface of that immense sea, on such a frail raft, subject to all the caprices of the waves. Even in moderate weather the sea would dash over

them, and make them extremely uncomfortable, to say the least of it. Besides, none of the men were sailors, and as such, accustomed to the sea. They were all soldiers trained to the Company's service. Their island was fragile and only rested on a thin slip of ice; but above the ice was earth, and trees, and shrubs. It was absolutely indifferent to the action of the waves, and appeared motionless. They had all become attached to Victoria Island, upon which they had lived nearly two years. They knew every portion of it, which they had cultivated, and which, in fact, had resisted so many convulsions of nature. Yes, they would not quit it without great regret, and they would not part from it till it was actually disappearing under their feet.

Lieutenant Hobson knew the feelings of his men, and understood them. He knew that they objected to embark on the raft; but the end must soon come, for grave symptoms already appeared, and the warning could not be neglected.

We may describe this raft. It was thirty feet square, and rose two feet above the sea, therefore the small waves would pass by it, but it was evident that any swell of the sea would break over it. In the centre of it, the master-carpenter had constructed a deck-house which would hold twenty people; all round it were lockers for provisions and water, solidly bolted to the deck. The mast, thirty feet high, was attached to the deck-house, and supported by "stays" fastened to each

finished. They even carried some provisions and fresh water on board.

Rain fell in torrents ; the earth was washed away on the hills, and the ice was melted in many places. The inhabitants hastened to fill up any fissures with earth and sand, to protect the ice from the action of the air. But for this precaution, the soil would soon have been perforated like a colander.

This storm caused irreparable damage to the woods bordering the lagoon. The earth was carried away from the roots of the trees in large numbers. In one night the aspect of this part of the island was changed. A few groups of birch-trees and pines had alone resisted the tempest. There was no mistaking this warning. Everyone perceived that the island was giving way—everyone except Thomas Black, who did not seem to care for anything.

During the storm Sabine the hunter left his hut, in the fog, and fell into a large hole which had opened during the night, on the very place formerly occupied by the chief house of the fort.

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Sabine's companions, hearing his cries, hurried to the

And, in fact, Lake Barnett had disappeared, as Pauline River had done.

But Hobson hastened to reassure his friends respecting potable water.

“There is no want of ice, my friends,” said he, “you need not be afraid. We can easily break off a piece of the island at any time, and I do not think we shall be able to drink it all,” he added, with an attempt at a smile.

It is known that in freezing, the salt always separates from sea water; so the colonists cut out a few blocks of ice and melted them, not only for present wants, but also to fill the casks on the raft.

However, this new warning could not be neglected. It was evident that the island was now melting away at the base—the soil might give way at any moment, so Hobson forbade his men to go far from headquarters.

It seemed that the animals also had a presentiment of approaching danger. They assembled near the site of the fort, and since the disappearance of the fresh water, they had begun to lick the ice-blocks which protruded through the soil. They were all very uneasy, and some of them seemed half mad, particularly the wolves, which would occasionally rush up in bands and then run away again, uttering pitiable cries. The furred animals remained together round the circular pits which had been sunk to the buried house. There were several hundreds of these animals, and the bear roamed about

inoffensively amongst them. He was very restless, and it seemed as if he was asking protection against the impending danger.

The birds too, which had hitherto been very numerous, flew away in great numbers. Considerable flocks of the strongest winged, such as swans, took flight for the Aleutian Islands. Their departure was noticed and remarked upon by Mrs. Barnett and Madge, who were walking along the beach, and they considered it a bad omen.

“You see the birds are leaving us,” said Mrs. Barnett, “though there is plenty of food for them still. Depend upon it, Madge, they have good reason.”

“Yes,” replied Madge, “their instinct suggests flight. But we ought to profit by the warning; and the other animals appear more uneasy than usual.”

That day Hobson decided to put nearly all the provisions, and all the utensils necessary for camping, on board the raft. He decided also that they should all embark upon it.

But just then the sea was very rough, and the little Mediterranean was just as much agitated as the exterior water of the sea. Indeed, it was rougher, for, in such a small space, the waves dashed up very high, and broke furiously upon the banks. There was quite a storm in the lakes. The raft was terribly tossed about, and the water dashed over it incessantly, so all embarkation of provisions or effects had to be suspended.

Under such circumstances, Hobson could not insist upon his orders being carried out, so they passed another night upon the island, hoping to be able to embark next day.

The night was finer than they expected. The wind fell, and the sea went down by degrees. It was only one of those quickly-passing storms, and, at eight o'clock in the evening the ocean was again calm, and even the lake was not violently agitated.

Certainly the island had escaped for the present ; but it was better that it should be broken by degrees than sunk by a tempest, as must happen sooner or later. But it was hoped the catastrophe would not occur during a storm.

To the tempest a light fog succeeded, but it threatened to get thicker during the night. It came from the north, and covered the greater part of the island.

Before going to bed Hobson inspected the moorings of the raft, which had been attached to the trunks of some large birch-trees. As an extra precaution, he fastened them more tightly ; so, should the worst come to the worst, the raft would only be carried across the lake, where it could easily be recovered if it got adrift.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOUR DAYS MORE.

THE night was calm ; Hobson got up early next morning, and resolved to set about the embarkation that day. So he went down to the lake at once.

The fog was still thick, but the rays of the sun could be seen above it. The sky was clear, and the day promised to be hot.

When Hobson reached the shores of the lake he could not distinguish anything, in consequence of the fog. As he was endeavouring to make out the raft, he was joined by Mrs. Barnett, Madge, and some others of his party.

The fog lifted by degrees from the surface of the water, but the raft was nowhere to be seen.

At last the breeze cleared the fog away entirely.

There was no raft ; there was no longer a lake ; the sea stretched out before them unconfined !

Hobson could not restrain a gesture of despair ; and when he and his companions looked round about them

they saw nothing but the ocean on every side. A cry of terror broke from them all—their island was nothing now but an islet!

During the previous night six-sevenths of the island had floated away; it had been carried silently off to sea, without the slightest shock, and the raft had drifted away with it. The last hope of the colonists had now disappeared.

They were now quite despairing; without resources, without any means of escape, what could they do? Some of the soldiers went mad, and would have thrown themselves into the sea had not Mrs. Barnett withstood them. They turned back, some of them in tears.

There was now actually no apparent hope for the colonists. Their position was really terrible; twenty-one persons crowded together on a little bit of ice, which would open beneath their feet. With the larger portion of the island the wooded hills had disappeared. Not a tree was left; and they had no timber whatever, except the planks of which their rude hut was composed—a supply of wood quite insufficient for a raft. Their lives were now limited to the duration of the ice—a few days at most, for June had set in, and the thermometer was above 68 deg. Fahrenheit.

During that day Hobson thought he would make a reconnoissance, in the hope of finding some other and thicker place of refuge. Mrs. Barnett and Madge accompanied him.

"Do you still hope?" said Mrs. Barnett to her faithful companion.

"I do," replied Madge. "I always hope."

Mrs. Barnett did not reply. They walked rapidly along the shore. All this part of the coast as far as Cape Esquimaux, a distance of eight miles, remained uninjured. The fracture had begun at Cape Esquimaux, and continuing inland, had followed a curved line towards the extreme point of the lagoon. From that point the newly-made seashore was the same which had formerly been the shore of the lake. Towards the upper side of the lake was another fracture, which extended to the coast between Cape Bathurst and where Port Barnett had been. The island was now a long band of ice about a mile wide.

Of the hundred and forty square miles, which the island had once contained, but twenty remained.

Lieutenant Hobson paid great attention to the new formation of the island, and perceived that the thickest portion was where the fort had been built. He therefore determined to keep the headquarters where they were, and, curiously enough, the animals congregated there too, as if by instinct.

They found out that a number of the poor animals had been carried away, as well as some of the dogs which had been wandering about. But a great many ruminants still remained, and the bear continued to

wander restlessly up and down the curtailed ice-field, as if in a cage.

About five o'clock in the evening Hobson and his companions returned. They found all their friends assembled in silence, not wishing to hear or to see anything. Mrs. Joliffe was preparing some food; the hunter Sabine, less melancholy than his companions, had gone in search of some fresh venison. The astronomer was seated by himself and looking at the sea in an absent way. He did not appear as if anything could astonish him now.

Jasper Hobson told his companions the result of his observations. He said that they were safest where they were, and recommended them not to go far from that spot, for there were signs of another rupture half way to Cape Esquimaux. It was probable, therefore, that the island would be still further reduced very soon, and they could do nothing.

The day was really very warm. The ice which they had dug up for drinking-water actually melted before the fire could be lighted; pieces of the coast fell away into the sea in slices, and there was no doubt that the island was rapidly sinking, as the base was worn away by the tepid water.

None of the colonists got much sleep during the night. Who could have slept under the circumstances? Who but the little child?—which still smiled at his mother, who would not leave him for a moment.

The sun rose next morning, the 4th of June, in a cloudless sky. No change had taken place during the night.

That day a blue-fox took refuge in the hut, and would not go out. Martens, ermines, polar-hares, muskrats, and beavers swarmed upon the site of the fort, like a band of domestic animals. The wolves alone did not appear. They had evidently been swallowed up when the island broke away. As if by presentiment, the bear had remained near Cape Bathurst, and the other animals did not appear to notice him. The colonists themselves, now familiarised with the enormous brute, let him come and go as he chose. The common danger had brought down instinct and intelligence to the same level.

Just before midday the colonists experienced a vivid emotion, which unfortunately only ended in disappointment.

Sabine the hunter, who had been watching from the highest point of the islet, suddenly cried out :

“A ship, a ship !”

Everyone jumped up as if they had been electrified, and rushed up to the hunter. Hobson looked at him inquiringly.

Sabine simply pointed to the east to a sort of white vapour on the horizon. Each one looked at it without speaking a word, and saw the form of a ship growing more and more distinct.

No doubt about it. The vessel was probably a whaler, and at the end of an hour the hull was visible.

Unfortunately the ship had come up on the east, that is to say on the side opposite to that from which the raft had drifted. The whaler therefore had only come by chance, and not, in consequence of meeting with the raft, to search for the castaways.

Now, would the ship perceive the islet so low down in the water? Was the vessel approaching—would those on board perceive the signals made to them? In open day in such a bright sunlight it was scarcely probable. Had it been night they could have made a fire with the planks of the house; but the ship would have disappeared before darkness set in, which only lasted an hour. But, nevertheless, signals were made and guns fired from the island.

Meantime the ship kept approaching. They could see its three masts. Evidently it was a whaler from New Archangel, which, having doubled the peninsula of Alaska, was on its way to Behring Strait. It was to windward of the island, on the starboard tack, with all sails set, and going northwards. A sailor would have seen at once that the ship would not pass near the islet, but perhaps it might be perceived.

“If they do see us,” whispered Hobson to Sergeant Long, “they will most likely give us a wide berth.”

Jasper Hobson was right. Ships in these latitudes

always keep clear of icebergs and floes. They are floating rocks against which they may strike, particularly at night, so they always avoid them carefully. This vessel would most likely act in the same way as soon as it perceived the islet.

The castaways endured all the gradations between hope and despair. Their sufferings may be imagined but cannot be described. Till two o'clock that afternoon they believed that Providence had taken pity on them at last, and that help was at hand—that they were saved. The ship was still approaching obliquely. They made signal after signal. They fired guns, they even made a thick smoke with some of the burning planks of the hut—but all in vain. They were not perceived, or, if so, they were avoided.

At half-past two the vessel luffed up a point, and bore away to the north-east.

An hour later nothing of it but a white vapour was visible, and soon it had disappeared altogether.

Then Kellet, uttering shouts of maniacal laughter, rolled himself upon the ground. They thought he had gone mad.

Mrs. Barnett looked Madge stedfastly in the face, as if to ask her if she still hoped.

But Madge turned away her head.

That same evening a loud cracking was heard, and a large piece of the island broke off and sank. The cries

of the poor drowning animals were terrible to hear. There was nothing now left of the island but the portion between the site of the Fort and Cape Bathurst.

There was nothing remaining but a strip of ice!

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON A PIECE OF ICE.

AN irregular triangular piece of ice, measuring a hundred feet at the base, and scarcely a hundred and fifty in length, and on this twenty-one human beings, a hundred furred animals, some dogs, and an enormous bear, which was then crouching at the very edge.

Yes, all the castaways were there; none had been lost as yet. The rupture had occurred when they were all together in the shed. Fate had thus protected them all—perhaps that they might all perish together.

But what a terrible situation it was! No one spoke, no one moved, for perhaps a slight movement or a gentle shock might be sufficient to break the ice.

No one would eat the dried meat which Mrs. Joliffe had served up. What was the use of eating now?

Nearly everyone passed the night in the open air. They preferred to be drowned while free, and not while shut up in a wooden hut.

The next day, the 5th of June, the sun rose

gloriously upon that group of despairing people. They spoke seldom, and seemed anxious to avoid each other. Some looked anxiously round the horizon. The sea was absolutely deserted ; not a sail, not even a piece of ice, was visible ; the strip they were floating on was probably the last piece drifting on the Behring Sea.

The temperature got higher, the wind had subsided, and a horrible calm reigned. A long lazy swell lifted this last piece of earth and ice which was left of Victoria Island. It rose and fell without change of position, like a wreck—which in fact it was.

But of a wreck, the hull, a mast, some spars, perhaps, remain floating ; they offer some resistance and do not melt. But a piece of ice must dissolve before the sun's rays.

That particular piece of ice had formed the thickest portion of the island, and that is why it had lasted so long. Besides a layer of earth and grass had covered it. The great cold of the Polar Sea had no doubt been adding ice to it for centuries, and Cape Bathurst had become the most northerly point of the American continent.

Even then the ice-block was five or six feet above the level of the sea, and was at least as much below it. If then in this calm water there was no fear of it being broken, it would be surely and gradually melted. Indeed, they could perceive it being incessantly washed

away by the waves, which continually carried off some piece of earth with its mossy covering.

Such an occurrence took place that very afternoon at one o'clock, close to the shed, which was very near the edge. Fortunately no one was in the hut at the time, but only a few planks were saved. Most of the utensils, and all the astronomical instruments, were lost.

All the colonists were now obliged to take refuge on the highest ground, where they had no protection from the inclemency of the weather.

They found some tools—the air-pump and the reservoir which Hobson had used to collect some few gallons of rain-water—for it would have been madness to have reduced the island still more to procure water from the ice, every bit of which was most valuable.

About four o'clock, Kellet the soldier, who had already shown symptoms of insanity, came to Mrs. Barnett, and said to her quietly :

“Madam, I am going to drown myself.”

“Kellet !” exclaimed the lady.

“I tell you I am going to drown myself,” he repeated. “I have thought about it ; there is no hope for us, and I would rather finish it at once.”

“No, Kellet,” replied Mrs. Barnett, taking the hand of the soldier, whose appearance was strangely calm.

“No, Kellet, you will not do that.”

“I will, madam ; but as you have been so kind to

us all, I did not like to do so without bidding you good-bye. Adieu, madam !”

He turned towards the sea as he spoke. Mrs. Barnett, who was very much alarmed, caught hold of him. Jasper Hobson and the Sergeant ran up when they heard her cries, and they prevented Kellet from accomplishing his purpose. But the unhappy man shook his head ; he was not to be diverted from his design.

He was not in a condition to hear reason, and his example might be contagious, for he might induce some of his companions to commit suicide also, so it was necessary to stop him at any cost.

“ We have always been good friends, have we not, Kellet ? ” said Mrs. Barnett, in a pleasant voice, and smiling at him as she spoke.

“ Yes, madam, ” replied Kellet quietly.

“ Well then, if you wish, we will die together, but not to-day. ”

“ Not to-day ! ” exclaimed Kellet.

“ No, my brave fellow, I am not ready ; but to-morrow if you like. ”

The soldier looked steadily at her and hesitated for a moment, he glanced longingly towards the sea, then passing his hand over his eyes, he said :

“ Very well then, to-morrow. ”

And without another word he rejoined his comrades.

“ Poor fellow ! ” murmured Mrs. Barnett, “ I have asked

him to wait till to-morrow, but perhaps we may be all swallowed up by that time. Who knows?"

Nevertheless, Hobson would not give way to despair. He kept considering whether there was not some way or other by which the melting of the ice could be arrested, and if it could not be kept afloat until they came in sight of land.

Mrs. Barnett and Madge kept together continually. Kalumah lay down like a dog beside her mistress and tried to keep her warm. Mrs. MacNab, wrapped up in the few furs now remaining from the rich storehouses of Fort Hope, was in a half-torpid state, clasping her child to her bosom.

The other castaways, stretched here and there, did not move. Scarce a sound broke the terrible stillness—now and then a wave broke upon the shore, and carried away a small piece of ice, that was all.

Sergeant Long rose occasionally and looked about him, but quickly lay down again. At the extremity of the islet the bear was crouching and looking like a great snowball.

There was but one hour of darkness, but nothing of any importance occurred. The morning fogs were tinged by the rising sun, which soon dispersed the clouds, and glistened upon the surface of the water.

The Lieutenant's first care was to examine the islet. It had become smaller, and what was more important, it was not so high above the level of the sea.

The waves, though not very small, washed the greater part of it, the summit of the little hill alone was out of their reach.

Sergeant Long also had noticed the changes that had taken place. The progress of the dissolution was so marked that he felt all hope was gone.

Mrs. Barnett sought Lieutenant Hobson, and said to him :

“ It will be all over to-day then ? ”

“ Yes, madam,” he replied, “ and you will keep your promise to Kellet.”

“ Mr. Jasper,” she said gravely, “ have we done everything that it becomes us to do ? ”

“ Yes, madam.”

“ Well then, God’s will be done ! ”

Nevertheless, that day they made a last despairing attempt. A strong breeze from the north-west had sprung up, which would carry them to the south-east towards the Aleutian Islands. How far off they were it was impossible to say, as in the absence of all nautical instruments no observation could be taken ; but the position of the island could not have been very much altered unless by the current, as there had been no wind. However, there was one hope, and that was, they might be nearer to the land than they thought. If a current had affected them it must have carried them nearer to the Aleutian Islands, in the desired direction. The wind was now taking them towards the same islands,

and it might affect the ice-block if they could only give it some purchase. The ice had still some hours to float, and in that time they might come in sight of land, or of some fishing-boat.

The first crude idea of Hobson's now began to grow in substance. Why could they not fix up a sail on an islet, as on a raft? It was quite possible.

Hobson communicated his idea to the carpenter.

"You are right!" exclaimed MacNab; "bring out all the canvas here."

This plan, though it afforded but a very faint hope, still reanimated the castaways. Every one lent a hand, even Kellet, who had not yet claimed Mrs. Barnett's promise.

A large beam which had formerly been used in the roof of the soldiers' barracks was thinned off, and driven firmly into the soil, at the top of the little hill. It was supported by cords in the form of stays, a yard was rigged up with a strong pole, upon which all the blankets and counterpanes were fastened in the form of a sail, and were hauled up to the top of the mast. This sail, or rather this collection of sails, properly trimmed, caught the breeze, and judging by the "wake," the island was making good progress to the south-east.

This was a great success, and the spirits of all rose rapidly. They were no longer stationary, and though they advanced but slowly they still made way. The carpenter was particularly delighted. Everybody scanned

the horizon eagerly, and if any one had told them that it was impossible they could see land they would not have believed it.

But nevertheless, it was so. For three hours they sailed along, but not a single object did they sight. They met with no resistance from the wind or waves ; the castaways still hoped on.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, the Lieutenant took Long apart, and said :

“We are advancing, but at the expense of our island.”

“What do you mean, sir ?” replied the Sergeant.

“I mean that the ice is being rapidly melted by the increased force of contact with the water. Since we have set sail it has diminished at least one third.”

“Are you sure ?”

“Absolutely certain, Long. The islet is longer and flatter, you can see it yourself—the sea is not ten feet from the hill.”

Hobson was right ; the effect was only what might have been expected from the increased speed at which they were moving.

“Do you think we ought to haul down sail and stop ?” said Hobson.

After a moment's thought the Sergeant replied :
“I think that we should consult our companions. The responsibility of the decision should be shared by all.”

The Lieutenant nodded assent. They returned to the hill, and Hobson put the case to all assembled.

“The speed at which we now proceed,” he said, “is rapidly wearing the ice away. This will hasten the final catastrophe by some hours. Now, my friends, will you decide? Shall we continue to sail as we are doing?”

“Let us go on!” they all cried.

So the sail was not hauled down, and the decision they arrived at was fraught with most important consequences.

At six o'clock Madge got up, and pointing to the south-east, exclaimed: “Land!”

Everyone rose as if electrified. Land was, in fact, visible about twelve miles off.

“More sail, more sail!” cried Hobson.

He was understood. Every available piece of cloth, or anything that would give a hold to the wind, was outspread.

The speed increased as the wind was freshening, but the ice was melting everywhere. They could feel it crumble beneath them. It might open at any moment.

But they would not think of that. Hope buoyed them up. They would be in safety on the continent yonder. They shouted, they made signals, they were half crazy with delight.

At half-past seven they had evidently approached

the land, but the ice was as evidently melting fast. Water was spurting from it in places, the waves were dashing over it, carrying away the terrified animals. Every moment the castaways expected to founder, and they felt obliged to lighten it, as they would a sinking ship.

They spread earth and sand on the icy surface, so as to neutralise as much as possible the action of the sun. They even placed furs on the edges, as being bad conductors of heat. In short, these brave men did everything that human nature could do to postpone the inevitable catastrophe. But to no purpose. Fissures appeared in the centre of the islet and beneath it. The water now beat right over it, and the coast was still four miles to leeward.

“Let us make a signal,” exclaimed Lieutenant Hobson, who was sustained by heroic energy; “perhaps somebody will see us.”

Everything combustible was collected. Only two or three planks and a beam were left, and these were set on fire. A bright flame soon mounted up.

Nevertheless, the ice continued to melt, and in a short time nothing but the little hill remained above water. On this mound all the living had taken refuge. The numbers were sadly diminished, but they huddled together, the bear growling angrily all the time.

The water rose higher and higher. There was nothing to indicate to the castaways that they had been

perceived. In a quarter of an hour they must expect to be engulfed in the sea.

Were there no means of prolonging the existence of the ice? Only three hours more, and they yet might reach the land, which was now only three miles to leeward. But what was to be done?

"Ah!" exclaimed Hobson, "if I could only see how I could prevent the ice from melting, I would give my life—yes, my life, in exchange!"

At that moment someone said quietly: "There is a way."

The speaker was Thomas Black, who had not spoken for so long, and who appeared now like a living being come suddenly amongst so many people devoted to death. And the first words he spoke were to affirm that there was a way to stop the ice from melting—that there was a way of saving them all.

Hobson rushed towards the astronomer. All the others looked at him curiously. They thought they could not have understood him.

"What way do you mean?" asked Hobson.

"By the pumps," replied Black simply.

Was the man mad? Did he imagine the ice-block was a ship with ten feet of water in its hold?

However, there were the air-pumps, and the air-reservoir, which had been used as a cistern for drinking water—but of what possible use could they be?—how could they harden the fissures which were opening in all directions?

“He is mad,” said Sergeant Long.

“To the pumps !” repeated the astronomer ; “fill the air-reservoir.”

“Do as he says,” exclaimed Mrs. Barnett.

The pumps were attached to the reservoir, the cover of which was quickly closed and bolted. The men then set to work, and the air was stored in the reservoir under the pressure of many atmospheres. Then Thomas Black, taking one of the leathern tubes, opened the valve and allowed the compressed air to escape upon the melting ice as he walked along.

The effect produced astonished everybody. Wherever the air was projected by the astronomer the thaw ceased, the cracks filled up, and re-froze.

“Hurrah, hurrah !” cried the poor colonists.

It was hard work to keep pumping, but there was no want of willing help. The men relieved each other. The fissures re-froze as if they had been subjected to an intense frost.

“You have saved all our lives,” said Jasper Hobson.

“It is the most natural thing in the world,” replied the astronomer.

Nothing could have been more natural, indeed ; and the following is the explanation of the effect produced.

The ice had re-frozen for two reasons. In the first place, because, under the pressure of the air, the water vaporised on the ice produced intense cold ; and, secondly, because this compressed air, as it expanded,

drew the heat from the thawed surface, which re-froze. Wherever a fracture had taken place the cold generated by the compressed air cemented the edges, and by these means the ice by degrees gained its former solidity.

This work continued for several hours. The men, now buoyed up by hope, worked with an ardour which nothing could restrain.

They were approaching the coast.

When they were about a quarter of a mile from the shore the bear jumped into the water, and, reaching the land, soon disappeared.

A short time afterwards the ice-block grounded on the sand. The few quadrupeds still left took to flight. Then the shipwrecked colonists struggled ashore, and falling on their knees, returned thanks to Heaven for their miraculous deliverance.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

THE castaways had landed at the very end of Behring Sea, or Blejinic Island, the last of the Aleutians, having drifted eighteen hundred miles since the thaw had set in. Some fishermen received them hospitably, and before long put Hobson and his friends in communication with the agent of the Hudson's Bay Company.

It is useless to insist upon the courage of these brave people, so worthy of their chief, and the energy which had sustained them through so many trials. Courage had never been wanting to men or women, to all of whom the brave Pauline Barnett had set such an example of energy and of resignation to the will of Heaven. They all had struggled against despair to the very end: even when they saw the continent on which Fort Hope had been founded change into a wandering island—the island to an islet—the islet to a strip of ice—nor even when that piece of ice had been melting beneath the action of the winds and waves.

If the attempt of the Company had not succeeded—if the new fort had been destroyed, no blame could be attached to Hobson and his companions, who had sustained trials beyond human foresight to provide against. Of the nineteen people placed under Hobson's care not one was missing; he had even gained two new members, Kalumah the Esquimaux, and MacNab's little child, Mrs. Barnett's godson.

Six days after the rescue the castaways arrived at New Archangel, the capital of Russian America.

There all these friends, who had been so strongly bound together by a common danger, were obliged to separate, perhaps for ever. Jasper Hobson and his following had to make their way to Fort Reliance, through Hudson's Bay Territory; while Mrs. Barnett, Kalumah—who would not leave her friend, Madge, and Thomas Black agreed to return to Europe *viâ* San Francisco and the United States. But, before parting, Lieutenant Hobson, with deep emotion, addressed Mrs. Barnett before all his companions, and said:

“Madam, Heaven bless you for all the blessings that you have bestowed upon us! You have been our comforter, our consoler, the life and soul of our little world. In the name of all, I thank you.”

The soldiers gave three ringing cheers for Mrs. Barnett, and each one pressed forward to shake her by the hand. The women embraced her affectionately.

Lieutenant Hobson had conceived such a sincere

affection for Mrs. Barnett that it was with great difficulty he could persuade himself to part from her.

“Is it possible that we are never to meet again?” he said.

“No, Jasper Hobson,” she replied. “We shall meet again; and if you do not come to Europe, I shall come and see you again here—here or in the new factory, which you will one day establish.”

At this moment Thomas Black, who had found his tongue since he had regained *terra firma*, advanced and said:

“Yes, we shall all meet again twenty-six years hence. My friends, I missed the eclipse of 1860, but I will not miss the next one, which will take place under the same conditions, and in the same spot, in 1886; so in twenty-six years, my dear madam, and my brave friend Hobson, I hope to have the pleasure of meeting you again on the borders of the Polar Sea.”

THE END.

7



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