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SIR WALTER SCOTT.

XXVIII.—SCENES IN THE ARCTIC REGIONS.

SEPTEMBER 12.—To those who have not seen a northern ocean in winter—who have not seen it, I should say, in a winter's storm—the term “ice,” exciting but the recollection of what they only know at rest, in an inland lake or canal, conveys no idea of what it is the fate of an arctic navigator to witness and to feel. But let them remember that ice is stone—a floating rock in the stream, a promontory or an island when aground, not less solid than if it were a land of granite. Then let them imagine, if they can, these mountains of crystal hurled through a narrow strait by a rapid tide, meeting, as mountains in motion would meet, with the noise of thunder, breaking from each other's precipices huge fragments, or rending each other asunder, till, losing their former equilibrium, they fall over headlong, lifting the sea around in breakers, and whirling it in eddies; while the flatter fields of ice, forced against these masses, or against the rocks, by the wind and the stream, rise out in the sea till they fall back on themselves, adding to the indescribable commotion and noise which attend these occurrences.

It is not a little, too, to know and to feel our utter helplessness in these cases. There is not a moment in which it can be conjectured what will happen in the next: there is not one which may not be the last; and yet that next moment may bring rescue and safety. It is a strange, as it is an anxious position; and, if fearful, often giving not time for fear, so unexpected is every event, and so quick the transitions. If the noise, and the motion, and the hurry in every thing around, are distracting,—if the attention is troubled to fix on any thing amid such confusion,—still must it be alive, that it may seize on the single moment of help or escape which may occur. Yet with all this, and it is the hardest task of all, there is nothing to be acted, no effort to be made: and though the very sight of the movement around inclines the seaman to be himself busy, while we can scarcely repress the instinct that directs us to help ourselves in cases of danger, he must be patient, as if he were unconcerned or careless; waiting as he best can for the fate, be it what it may, which he cannot influence or avoid.

But I must not here forget the debts we owed to our ship on this and other occasions before and afterwards. Her light draught of water was of the greatest advantage, and still more the admirable manner in which she had been strengthened. It is plain that either of the ships employed on the former expeditions must have been here lost, from their mere draught of water, since they would have struck on the rocks over which we were hurried by the ice; while, however fortified, they would have been crushed like a nutshell, in consequence of their shape.

September 15.—The sky had worn a very settled aspect on the preceding evening; and the wind, rising, increased to a storm during the night. Also

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having veered round to the northward, it brought around us a great quantity of heavy ice; so that, at daylight, we found ourselves completely locked in, to our no small vexation, which was much augmented by seeing clear water within a quarter of a mile. Every exertion was made to warp out, or to extricate ourselves in some manner: but a whole forenoon of hard labour gained us scarcely more than four times the length of our ship. At length the ice accumulated to such a degree, that we were obliged to abandon the attempt.



SIR JAMES CLARK ROSS.

In the meantime the storm increased, with squalls of snow, so as to render our situation both critical and uncomfortable, since we could not regain the harbour which we had so prematurely left. Thus exposed to the storm, the pressure of the ice was also to be feared, as the icebergs were accumulating on the shores of the cape, which they were too deep to pass. At length the one to which we were moored went afloat, giving us much trouble; while the largest one near us split in six pieces, with a noise like thunder, falling over and throwing up the water all around. One of these fragments gave our ship a violent shock; and another, rising up beneath the Krusenstern, lifted her out of the water on the ice, and then launched her off again. Fortunately, no damage was sustained.

October 2.—Though the morning was cloudy, it was not an unfavourable day for an inland excursion. We landed on the north side of the harbour, as the ice was not such as to enable us to cross it to the southern one, which was, to us, the important point. After passing a valley containing a frozen

lake, I ascended a high hill, and thence discovered that a creek, which had caused us to make a circuit, was an inlet running about six miles within the land, in a north-west direction. Here I also saw the head of the great inlet which we had observed on the 13th, surrounded by land appearing considerably higher than that to the south-west, which consisted of a succession of uniform low hills. Beyond this land I could see no water. To the south-east, there was a perfect view of the islands that we had passed on the 30th of September, together with some land to the eastward and southward, which was probably the American continent; though this point could not then be determined, any more than I could ascertain whether it was a continuation of that on which I was now standing.

At present, it was more important to know what the state of the ice was, and what it was likely to be; but what we saw gave us no hope of any further progress. We were at a stand. We had indeed long suspected that the event which could not be very distant was impending, nor could we, in reason, be surprised that it had arrived. Yet we had been busy and active up to the present point, and our perpetual efforts had, as is usual in life, prevented us from thinking of the future, from seeing that the evil which could not for ever be protracted was drawing nearer every hour, that it was coming every minute, that it was come: thus nourishing that blind hope, which even in the face of inevitable danger or of certain ruin, even on the bed of death itself, is the result of effort and resistance; that hope which ceases only with the exertions by which it was supported, when the helpless ship falls asunder on the rock, and the sun fades before the eyes of the dying man.

It was now that we were compelled to think, for it was now that there was nothing more to be performed; as it was now also that the long and dreary months, the long-coming year I might almost say, of our inevitable detention among this immovable ice rose full in our view. The prison door was shut upon us for the first time; while feeling that if we were helpless as hopeless captives, that not even Nature could now relieve or aid us, for many a long and weary month to come, it was impossible to repel the intrusion of those thoughts which, if they follow disappointment, press on us more heavily, under that subsidence of feeling which follows on the first check to that exertion by which hope was supported. Should we have done better, been further advanced, have passed through these difficulties, and more, should we have passed all, and found ourselves where we wished, forming a junction with the discoveries to the westward, had the engine not disappointed us, had we been here, as we ought to have been, a month or six weeks sooner? was it the badness of our vessel, or complication of defects not to have been foreseen, which had prevented us from completing the outline of America, from ascertaining the "north-west passage" in a single season? This was the thought that tormented us; and not unnaturally, when we recollected all that we had endured, all our delays and disappointments. But, like that self-tormenting under which mankind make themselves so often fruitlessly miserable, these thoughts were purposeless, and worse; so that we hastened to discard them as they arose: aware, on reflection, that we could not see into the distant and the future; that we could not speculate on the nature of the land before us; could not be sure what the ice had been before our arrival; and could, therefore, as little know whether there was a passage westward to be found in this direction, as whether we should have been one foot further advanced had every thing we desired conformed to our wishes.

We saw here many tracks of hares, and shot some. which were, even at



BREAKING UP OF THE ICE.

this early period, quite white; this needful change taking place, as should now be well known to naturalists, long before the ground has become permanently covered with snow, and long before the weather has become truly cold, proving that it is, at least, not the effect of temperature, as it is assuredly a prospective arrangement for meeting the cold of winter. The track of a bear was also found; and in the interior we could see, even through the snow, that the plains were covered with vegetation, while the protruding rocks consisted of red granite, accompanied by fragments of limestone near the shores, indicating a continuity of the same geological structure that we had traced ever since entering this strait. There were many Esquimaux traps, with a great number of those cairns or stones, resembling men when at a distance, which these people erect for the purpose of frightening the deer within their reach. In this space, amounting to five miles, which we had traversed, there were two large lakes.

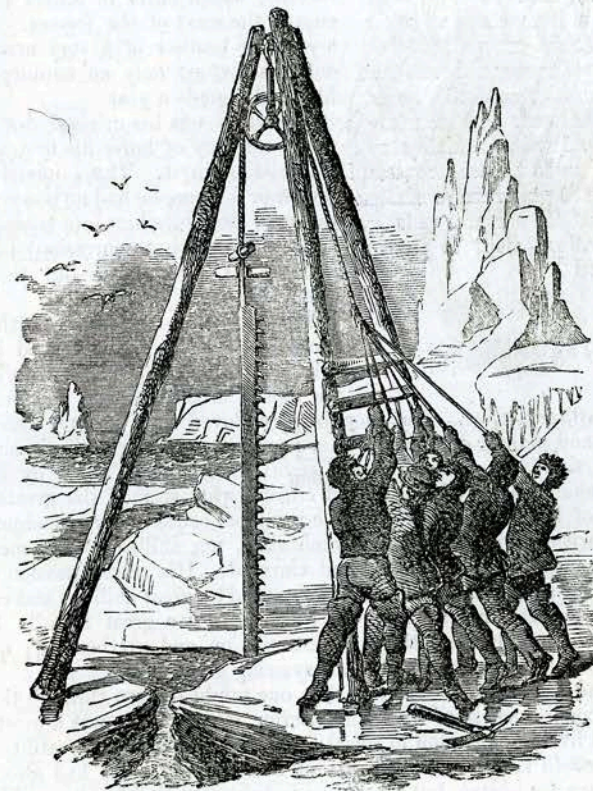
October 8.—There could, in fact, no longer be the least doubt that we were at our winter's home, if we could indeed have reasonably doubted this some days before. But, as I have already said, it was a time to come sooner or later; and if we had, within this last week, found reasons enough to feel neither surprise nor disappointment, so, as I had concluded at our first entanglement in this place, were we far from being sure that we had any thing to regret. We could not, indeed, expect to lead an active life now; we did not even know that we should find any thing useful to do; but it was our business to contrive employment, and to make ourselves as easy and as happy as we could under circumstances which we had ample reason to expect. We were, I believe, all pretty well provided with patience, and there was no reason to want hope; it was for after years to draw somewhat deeply on the former, and to prove of the latter, that more perhaps depends on a fortunate constitution than on aught else.

Our conviction was indeed absolute, for there was now not an atom of clear water to be seen anywhere; and, except the occasional dark point of a protruding rock, nothing but one dazzling and monotonous, dull and wearisome extent of snow was visible all round the horizon in the direction of the land. It was indeed a dull prospect. Amid all its brilliancy, this land, the land of ice and snow, has ever been, and ever will be, a dull, dreary, heart-sinking, monotonous waste, under the influence of which the very mind is paralysed, ceasing to care or think, as it ceases to feel what might—did it occur but once or last but one day—stimulate us by its novelty; for it is but the view of uniformity and silence and death. Even a poetical imagination would be troubled to extract matter of description from that which offers no variety; where nothing moves and nothing changes, but all is for ever the same, cheerless, cold, and still.

November 24.—An overcast sky caused the thermometer to rise a few degrees, but the change was only temporary. There was enough of work for the day in cutting out the various iron-work of the engine, as well as the whale-boat, which was in the same predicament. A cairn on the island, intended as a guide to the ship for those who might lose their way, was completed; and a thermometer, constructed purposely for us, was fixed on it. There was a brilliant aurora to the south-west, extending its red radiance as far as the zenith. The wind vacillated on the following day, and there was a still more brilliant one in the evening (November 25), increasing in splendour till midnight, and persisting till the following morning. It constituted a bright arch, the extremities of which seemed to rest on two

opposed hills, while its colour was that of the full moon, and itself seemed not less luminous; though the dark and somewhat blue sky by which it was backed was a chief cause, I have no doubt, of the splendour of its effect.

We can conjecture what the appearance of Saturn's ring must be to the inhabitants of that planet; but here the conjecture was perhaps verified—so exactly was the form and light of this arch what we must conceive of that splendid planetary appendage when seen crossing the Saturnian heavens. It varied, however, at length, so much as to affect this fancied resemblance, yet with an increase of brilliancy and interest. While the mass or density of the luminous matter was such as to obscure the constellation Taurus, it proceeded to send forth rays in groups, forming such angular points as are represented in the stars of jewellery, and illuminating the objects on land by their coruscations. Two bright nebulae, of the same matter, afterwards appeared beneath the arch, sending forth similar rays, and forming a still stronger contrast with the dark sky near the horizon. About one o'clock it began to break up into fragments and nebulae, the coruscations becoming more frequent and irregular, until it suddenly vanished at four.—*Ross's Second Voyage in Search of the North-West Passage.*



WORKING AN ICE-SAW.