

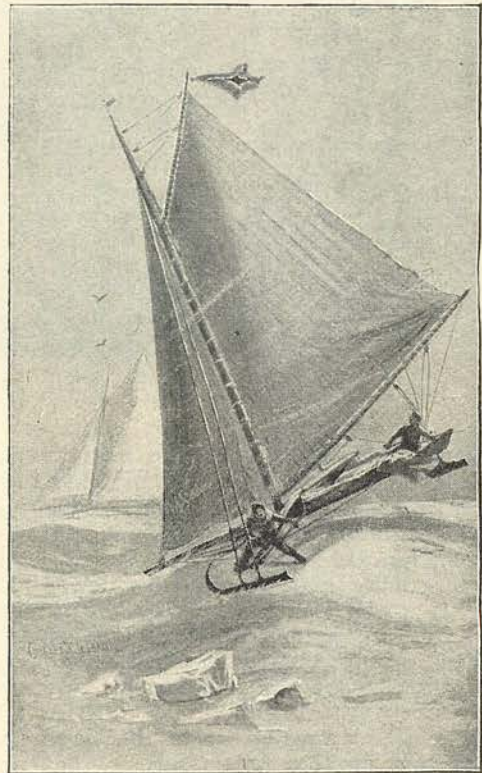
BY BECKLES WILLSON.

THE insatiable seeker after sport who has merely spent his days in whaling, wild-beast hunting, and ballooning does not yet know all of adventure. To feel the fiercest thrill, to drink the deepest draught of excitement he must have ridden on a Canadian ice-boat. In the way of speed and exhilaration, the wildest dreams of the French romancer have not surpassed this sport; and a faithful description of voyaging in such a skeleton craft can only be compared to the ravings of a lunatic.

To seat one's self, or rather to crouch, wrapped in furs, on the windward runner of one of these boats, to feel her dart over the glassy expanse of ice at a speed which makes the velocity of the fastest express train seem no faster than that of a snail, while the eddying blast, suddenly striking the boat with fury, heels her over until the dazed passenger, clinging to the shrouds, feels himself suspended in measureless ether, is only a suggestion of sensations not lightly forgotten.

The breeze, let us say, begins strong and steadily. The winter sun blazes from a sky as blue as steel; the icy surface of the lake flashes like polished silver; the dry, crisp air is as exhilarating as champagne. Faster and faster now glides the boat over a field smooth as plate-glass and level as a billiard-table. Now she is put about; with a strong wind on her quarter she dashes madly forward, the occupants catching their breath. The character of the surface changes; the ice, with the bubbles of water beneath clearly visible, with mighty cracks here and there, becomes a dark,

gleaming mass, embroidered with lines of silver. The iron runners hum a weird melody as they skim over the frozen lake. A mile ahead of the *Sir Wilfrid* lies a tremendous "crack," filled with ground-up



DAUNTED BY NOTHING.

ice and heaving black water. Faster, faster she flies, till she is quite outpacing the winter wind that drives her. The air is boisterous with electric sparks, a frosty haze blurs the view; every heart on board, long throbbing with delight, now seems to stand still. The dangerous crack seems to be rushing upon the boat—a moment of intense anxiety, a catching of breaths, a wild pumping of hearts, and then—a shriek of joy. For the

clouds sweep up on the horizon; the wind comes tearing down from the distant hills, bearing in its bosom a maddening whirl of fleecy white particles. The blast smites you stingingly on the cheek; the wire rigging, in conjunction with the wind, breaks out into a wailing melody. Through all her frame and fibre does the stricken craft start and shiver, she bounds forward like a crazed eagle, or the roc that bore Sindbad, for there

is no speed on earth that equals this, and you are carried onward into the midst of the striving elements, onward into the fathomless gloom.

You are not far from the shore now, and something sombre and creeping bursts into view. You approach nearer and discern it fully. It is the Grand Trunk express train thundering along its steel rails at fifty-five miles an hour. The engineer has seen us; he opens wide and still wider his throttle-valve, and soon the mighty machine puffs



THE LEAP: A MOMENT OF INTENSE ANXIETY.

good boat has flown the gap as a hunter clears the fence—has flung it behind her with never a click of her heels, and is tearing away down the course as lightly and fearlessly as if air were her proper element.

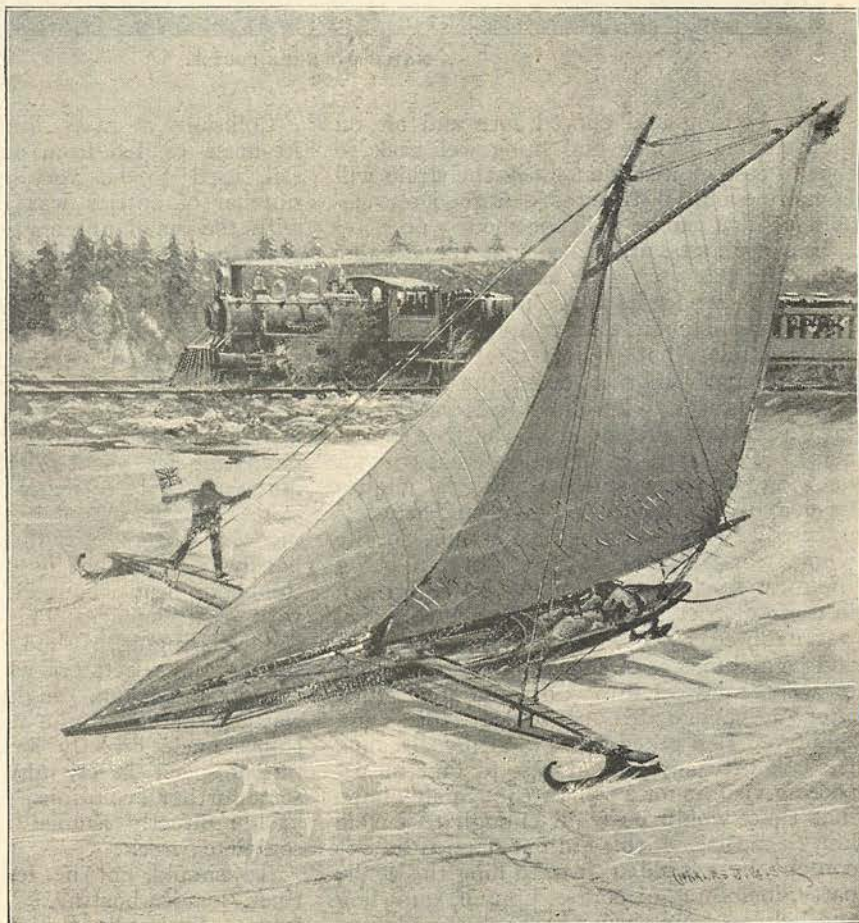
We count time by seconds now. The wind is on the beam, and the boat rears until her windward runner is at an angle of 45° , and the man on the runner-plank, clinging to the weather stays, descends with such an indescribable motion when she rights herself that he stands looking up in the air as one dazed and not altogether sure he has not left part of himself aloft. The sky darkens,

along at a speed hardly under seventy miles an hour. The passengers, in spite of the elements, obtrude their heads from the windows and cheer; but a moment more and their faces and clamour are but a memory. As well might the stallion hope to outstrip the greyhound; the mighty roaring express falls behind; for what is seventy miles an hour beside ninety, or even a hundred?

Many English readers may now properly ask the question: What *is* an ice-boat? Englishmen who have looked with astonishment and distrust upon the American trotting-waggon, with its fragile body and

web-like running gear, will not, perhaps, be reassured by hearing of a yacht whose total weight is between eight and nine hundred pounds! Yet, incredible as it may seem, such is ordinarily the weight of an ice-yacht, or, as Canadians prefer to call it, an ice-boat, measuring fifty feet over all. In brief, the boat consists of a few slender, but strong, timbers, sitting close to the ice, and looking, as one who saw one for the first time remarked, "like a huge water spider, with a sail on her back." Although the question of their Canadian or American origin remains, I believe, unsettled, as long ago as 1790 there were ice-boats built at Poughkeepsie, and, indeed, the sport may claim to be the father of competitive yachting in America. The first Hudson River ice-boat, the relics of which are still religiously preserved, seems to have been simply a square box on three runners, with a small, flat-headed sprit-sail. The fore-runners were nailed to the sides of the box and the runner was set in an oak-post with an iron tiller. But, after a period of neglect, the development of the ice-boat was rapid. An ice-boat to-day has her timbers arranged in the form of the letter T. The perpendicular line of the letter represents the centre timber, which runs from the foot of the mast to the stern of the boat, while the horizontal line represents the runner-plank, on each end of which is affixed an iron runner very much like a large skate. On the top of the runner-plank is the mast-bench, in which the mast is stepped. Rails run diagonally

from the stern end of the centre timber side to points about half-way between the mast and the ends of the runner-plank. A couple of braces cross the centre timber, into whose forward end is mortised the heel of the bowsprit, from one side to the other. By way of conveying an idea of the proportions of an ice-boat, let us give the dimensions of an average one, such as the *Sir Wilfrid*: Length of centre timber or backbone, 21 feet 5 inches; length of runner-board, 17½ feet; length over all, 46 feet 5 inches. Heavy canvas is a thing of the past, and in this case the sail area is but 428 feet, which is less than the average. Until recently some of the American boats spread 1,000 feet of sail. The essential requirements of an up-to-date ice-boat are extreme lightness, strength of construction in backbone, spars, and rigging; a runner-plank strong, but springy, in case of uneven ice or running suddenly into a patch of snow. The runners, which are practically the heart of an ice-boat,



"IT IS THE GRAND TRUNK EXPRESS TRAIN THUNDERING ALONG."



A MATCH OVER THE COURSE.

should be long and curved, fore and aft, on their cutting surface, and hung well back, so that in case of a sudden shock the strain will be more evenly distributed. A good, serviceable ice-boat can be built for about £60.

But, it may be urged, are not the dangers attending this sport such as to confine it to a few and to render its vogue precarious? Not at all; the danger, although confessedly not contemptible, but whets the enthusiasts' appetite and ought to cause the lakes and rivers of Canada to become the Mecca for all in whom stirs the blood of the true sportsman. The rare exhilaration that tingles one's every nerve when guiding a mighty ice-boat over smooth ice in a stiff wind is unequalled by any other experience in the whole world. Some experts glory in being the most fearless and reckless ice-yachtsmen in their district. One man I once heard of was daunted by nothing; snow hummocks and jagged masses of heavy ice were jumped or were smashed into, until on his return after a voyage his craft was torn and splintered as if raked fore and aft by shrapnel. His favourite amusement was to take unsuspecting visitors for a sail in the amiable hope that there would be wind enough to enable him to capsize. If this did not happen he was content, by a sudden turn, to fling the whole party, including, of course, himself, sprawling and helpless from the yacht, or else sail deliberately to the nearest air-hole or ferry track.

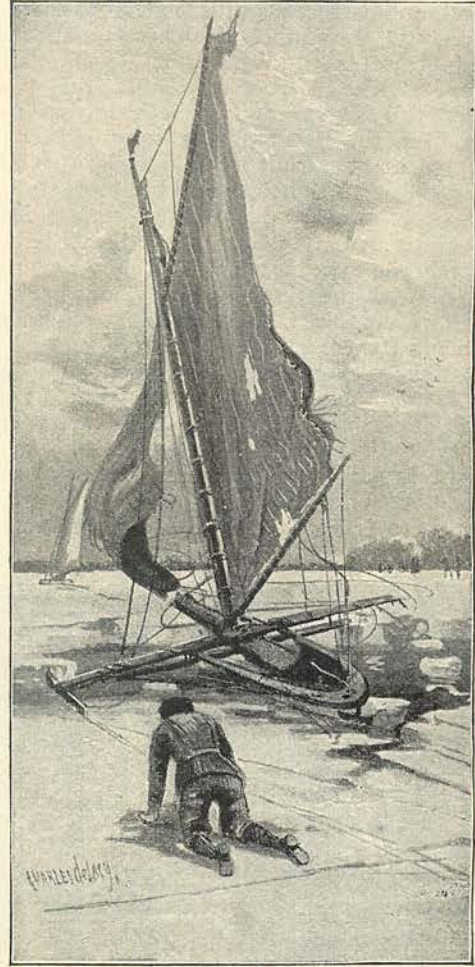
Collisions at races, in the days when the ice-boats carried from 600 to 1,000 feet of sail, used to be very common until the number of entries was limited. Yet even with the small number of competitors, the great majority of spectators prudently remains ashore. You cannot watch the vagaries of an ice-boat with impunity, for sometimes they take the bit from their driver, run away at fearful speed, and dash themselves to pieces. A typical accident of this kind, which might have been attended with great loss of life, is furnished by the case of the handsome ice yacht *Jack Frost*. A fierce north-west gale of many flaws and variations started the boat from her anchorage. Commodore Rogers, standing near by, sprang hastily after her, but only caught the end of the boom, from whence he was quickly flung with great violence. The yacht, with guiding rudder swinging, rushed towards a crowd of skaters and spectators who, as many as were not panic-stricken, sought to get out of the way. Whereupon the runaway, like a live thing, made directly for them at a terrific rate of speed, barely missing them, and, after some further evolutions, dashed between two yachts directly against the rocky shore, a complete wreck.

Ice should not be less than four inches thick for ice-boating. Thin ice, especially ferry tracks but lightly frozen over, is amongst the greatest dangers of the pastime. Once,

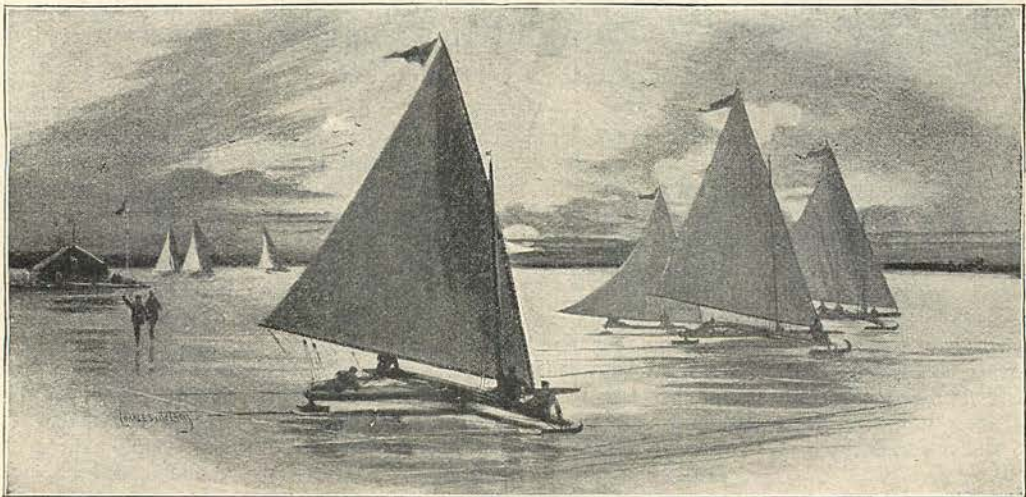
on the Hudson River, when there was about sixty feet of open water, a party of yachtsmen, flying along at the rate of a mile a minute, sped directly into a most dangerous track of the thinnest ice. The velocity of their boat carried them to the farther edge, where a bordering of thin ice prevented rescuers from coming to them. Two of the crew, who could swim, managed to break through this to safety; the third, immersed in the freezing water, clung to the boat, moaning like some wounded beast helpless from terror. When, after what must have seemed an unreasonable delay, a rope was brought he could hardly get the loop over his shoulder to enable his rescuers to drag him through the water to safety. It is hardly necessary to add he was not seen on an ice-boat again.

But the riskiest proceeding of all, and one productive of the most exciting adventures, is jumping "cracks." The owner of the *Aeolus*, with a friend, once took a trip which he will probably never forget to his dying day. The ice was safe and the wind strong on the journey up the river, and before returning the pair went ashore and spent an hour or two over lunch. Meanwhile, the wind increased; but the sun's rays had caused the ice to expand until some large gaps had been made on its surface. On their return the yachtsmen, unaware of anything of this serious nature, set to with a will. At each fresh burst of speed each uttered irrepressible yells of exultation; but, in the midst of their enjoyment, both were paralysed to see, directly ahead and impossible of evasion, a long reach of open water, fully twenty feet across.

Before it was possible to alter their course



"SOMETIMES THEY TAKE THE BIT FROM THEIR DRIVER."



ICE-BOATS (NOT YACHTS) : SHOULDER OF MUTTON SAIL.

by a fraction there was a swift and sudden splash, and the runner-plank threw a sheeted mass of water as high as the gaff. The abrupt shock, as the rudder of the boat caught the farther edge of the ice, tossed the man from the rudder-plank, causing him to perform a somersault high in mid-air, while the grip of the helmsman was not strong enough to prevent his sliding forward into the water, partly under the "box." Fortunately the men escaped death by drowning, and quitted the scene without any broken bones, leaving the *Aeolus* spinning round and round in the current.

On the other hand, by reason of great speed, jumping a crack, even of considerable width, is accomplished successfully, and there are even Canadian ice-yachtsmen who take delight in this very dangerous form of the sport. When masts or runner-planks give way there is very small chance of harm, if



EVENING AFTER A MATCH: ICE-BOATS AND YACHTS IN THE BACKGROUND.

the sportsmen can scramble out upon the ice. If the accident occurs to a yacht about a mile or two distant from the spectator, and his gaze has been temporarily diverted to another direction, the rapid disappearance is a little startling. When the boat's standing rigging lies flat on the ice, the absence from the horizon of the gleaming white canvas is naturally somewhat of a mystery. But the speed is, after all, the great charm and the proudest boast of the ice-boat. So fast is it at times, that the skeleton craft are lifted from the ice and fairly fly for yards through the air.

To those who have never seen an ice-

boat dart away and shrink to a mere speck on the horizon, in a few minutes, the speed, were it not well vouched for, would be wholly incredible. A gentleman residing at Poughkeepsie wished to speak to his brother, who had just started by train for New York. He therefore sprang into his ice-boat, soon passed the train, although it was an express, and was on the platform of the station at Newburg when the train drew up. At one point of his journey he had made two miles in one minute. Nevertheless, in spite of the various published records, it may confidently be stated that the greatest speed is never recorded, because it always occurs when no one is expecting it. Over one hundred miles in an hour is, however, an authenticated performance.

In all the foregoing no mention has been made of the consummate skill which proper management of an ice-boat exacts, or what

notable sailors ice-boat sailors often are. The best mariner that ever manned a wheel would find himself at a loss on an ice-boat until he had acquired a knowledge of her peculiarities. The craft is steered by a rudder-skate. This is a runner like the others, set on the end of a rudder-post and turned by a tiller, as in a water-boat. The skate must, of course, be very sharp in order to get a "grip" on the ice, and the helmsman directs it

from a small cockpit, called a box. The rig of the ice-boat is usually that of a sloop-jib and mainsail, though the cat-rig, consisting of mainsail alone, is occasionally met with.

Such, then, is the sport of which England is robbed through the aloofness and caprice of King Frost. Frequent attempts have been made to introduce it into Scotland, and even in the Fen district. It is but seldom, however, that the ice is thick enough to bear the weight of an ice-yacht, although last winter, in Scotland, a Canadian ice-boat was rumoured to have been seen careering about on Cobbinshaw, a spacious loch near Carstairs.