AN ARCTIC BOAT JOURNEY.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

It is well known that the Advance, a brigantine of one hundred and forty-four tons, under command of Dr. E. K. Kane of the United States Navy, sailed from New York, May 30th 1853, on her second cruise to the arctic seas, in search of Sir John Franklin.

My connection with the expedition dates from the day prior to that of sailing. Five months before, while yet a student of medicine, I had volunteered to join the party. The offer could not be accepted at that time; and it was not until the 18th of May that I received notice that there was a probability of its acceptance. It was not until the afternoon of the 29th that I obtained my appointment. In a few hours I had purchased and sent aboard my outfit. Next morning the Advance was headed for Greenland.

The historian of the expedition has left nothing new for me to communicate concerning the more important events of the cruise; and I will detain the reader over this introductory chapter, only long

enough to recall such facts as are needed to connect the narrative of Dr. Kane with the events which it is the purpose of this book to record.

In consequence of the prevalence of head-winds and calms, the coast of Greenland was not reached until the first of July; but, the season being unusually forward, we made up for lost time by a quick passage through that gauntlet of the Baffin Bay whale fishers, the "middle ice," and were at the seat of our future operations, Smith Strait, by the 7th of August.

Having deposited in a cairn on Lyttleton Island, near the mouth of the strait, a record of our proceedings thus far; and having placed on the main land, about two miles farther to the north and east, our Francis' metallic life-boat, together with a provision depôt upon which to fall back in case of accident, we pushed northward through the strait, on the Greenland side.

Since leaving Cape Dudley Diggs we had encountered no ice, except here and there a vagrant berg; and everything looked bright and promising as we sank the cavernous cliffs of Cape Alexander. With a fair wind and topgallant-sails set we sped over a broad sheet of iceless water, whose white-capped waves, bounding away toward the unknown north, led the imagination on to the *terra incognita* of our dreams; but an ominous "blink" appeared from the top of Lyttleton Island; and, before the close of the next day, our dreams were effectually broken by a heavy pack of massive ice-fields. In this we lay beset, and escaped from it not without some severe shocks, to Refuge Inlet.

During the twelve following days, by hard labor and almost continual battling with the ice, we succeeded in making about forty miles; and then found ourselves at the bottom of a broad, shallow bay, (called then Bedevilled Reach, but named more seriously afterwards in honor of Mr. Peter Force,) and there, hemmed in by grounded bergs, we lay awaiting a change of weather.

On the 20th a violent gale set in from the south-east, and the ice was driven off rapidly from the coast. The Advance was broken loose from her anchorage; and, unable to keep her head against the driving wind, she was swept in the wake of the drifting floes across the bay, and was finally brought up among the loose "trash" which margined a solid field resting on the north face of Cape Ingersoll.

The flight across Force Bay was sufficiently terrific, but worse followed. The dodging among the bergs which dotted the sea, and the plunging over the waves which beat and broke against them; the escape from being crushed between two closing ice-islands; the carrying away of our jib-boom against another in an attempt to wear, after a fruitless effort to go to windward; the losing of our best bower anchor in a struggle to bring up under Cape Grinnell; the general confusion; the clattering of blocks; the jibing of the main boom, from port to starboard, and from starboard to port, as every few minutes we went about; the whistling of the wind through the rigging; the dashing of the spray; the general babel of voices, were, altogether, less startling than the tossing, grinding, surging, of the broken, crushed, and crumbling masses which, riding on the billows, opened to

receive us. At first they were few in number and far between, but they thickened as we advanced; and we were soon inclosed in the main body of them, and could no longer hold our course. The bluff of the port bow struck a floe, luckily not large enough to do us damage; the brig veered around and brought up with her waist against a larger mass, which slipped along her side and dropped us around broadside to the wind. Thus we rode, powerless to move but as the elements listed. That we were not ground to pieces seemed a wonder. Thump followed thump in quick succession; bows, quarter, waist, stem, and stern successively received the shocks as the brig rose and fell and plunged with the waves. Soon we had run this gauntlet, and then came the hardest trial of all: we were rushing upon the solid floe, which was firm as a rock. A huge wave lifted us high in the air, and, as it slipped from under the brig, down went her forefoot upon the ice. The shock was terrible; the masts creaked and shivered; every person on board expected to see them fly in splinters, but they held firm. Next moment the stern fell off, and we lay grinding against the floe. Then a large field bore down upon us from the windward, and the brig was squeezed out of the water. The crew, powerless to help her, sprang upon the ice; and there she lay high and dry for several hours. At length the storm abated, the ice relaxed, and the Advance settled down into her proper element. A lead having opened toward the shore, a warp was run out, and we first hauled under the lee of a grounded berg, then to the land. Worn out with constant work, we made fast to

the land-ice, the watch was set, and all hands turned in.

The prospect of advancing farther north with the brig was now very unpromising. Dr. Kane had hoped to reach with her at least latitude 80°; and here we were completely beset at 78° 40′. All to the north was one unbroken ice-field, crossed by no crack, and with not a drop of water visible, except here and there a puddle of melted snow.

Along the land, which trended eastward, opened a narrow lead, from twenty to sixty feet in width; which, although clogged with loose, ragged pieces, was, nevertheless, wide enough to admit the vessel. Into this lead she was hauled; and inch by inch, and foot by foot we tracked and warped her along the frozen wall of the land-ice, for the next five days, making thus about six miles. This was along the southern shore of a deep bay, afterwards called Rensselaer. Being close under the land, we grounded at nearly every low tide.

The head of the bay was reached on the 27th. Finding here the ice much more broken, we hauled over to the opposite shore, and then commenced again to track; but the lead was soon found to be completely closed. The winter was now fast approaching; the young ice was forming rapidly; and there was nothing left for us but to retreat and seek a harbor.

Dr. Kane, with a boat's crew of six men, put off up the coast to inspect the ice; the remainder of us meanwhile working to get the Advance to a place of safety. The sailing-master, Mr. Wilson, being sick, and the two mates having accompanied Dr.

Kane, the superintendence of the work devolved upon Mr. Ohlsen, who was ordered to get the vessel clear of the ice, and then to await the return of our chief.

We were four days in making two miles. The "bay ice" was, in places, two inches thick; and, with all the power we could apply with capstan and windlass, we could not force the vessel forward without first breaking a track with poles and handspikes.

The islands at the head of the bay were at length reached; but the ice was there found locked against the outer point of Fern Rock, above which we had passed on our way in; and it was not until the evening of the 6th of September that it became possible to execute further the commander's instructions. Then a gale set in from the southeast, and in a few hours the ice was driven nearly out of sight. Preparations were at once commenced for getting under weigh. The watch was called; the click, click, of the capstan was again heard; the men were sent aloft to shake out the foresail. All was ready, and in a few minutes we should have been off. Then came a cry from the masthead that Dr. Kane and his party were in sight. They were on the ice a mile or so below Cape Leiper. Immediately a boat put off for them, and in a couple of hours they were aboard.

This journey had convinced Dr. Kane that it was practicable to travel over the ice with sledges, and that the search could be thus continued in the spring. Of this there had been not a little doubt at his starting. Mr. Petersen had given it as his decided opinion that, owing to the roughness of the ice, nothing

could be done with the dogs; and the prospect certainly looked no more promising for the men.

By his journey up the coast, Dr. Kane had decided the question of the propriety of wintering, even in this low latitude. On the following morning, the brig was hauled between the islands, and was moored fast. The temperature fell to 19°. The gale died away, allowing the old floes to drift back about us; the young ice cemented them together; and, by the morning of the 9th of September, we could walk ashore. The Advance was firmly locked up.

Now commenced busy preparations for meeting the four months of the winter which was closing upon us. The hold of the vessel was unstowed, and the stores were carried on sleds over the ice, about thirty yards, to Butler Island, and there deposited in a temporary house. The upper deck was covered in with boards. The between-decks were bulkheaded at about twelve feet abaft the foremast; the cabin and hold were united in one long room, and this was decked and bunked all around. The little stove was retained in the cabin; the cook-stove was placed amidships; the men moved aft from the forecastle; the nautical day was changed to the old-fashioned day which commences at midnight; and, with the Advance thus virtually converted into a *house*, both as concerned herself and her domestic arrangements, we entered upon the winter.

Meanwhile the work of exploration went on. The anchor had scarcely been dropped before Mr. Wilson and myself were sent to the interior, with the view, mainly, of determining how far we might rely upon the land to supply us with game.

We left the vessel on the 8th of September, carrying upon our backs our slender equipment. Our only companion was the Greenlander, Hans Hendrich, a fine little fellow who joined us at Lichtenfels, South Greenland; and who, after serving faithfully the expedition for nearly two years, finally fell in love with a pair of black eyes and a fat face, and left us to live with the wild Esquimaux.

Our route lay, for two days, over an uneven primitive country, from which we emerged upon a table-land of weather-worn greenstone. Over this we travelled for about fifteen miles, when we came again upon the porphyritic and gneissoid rocks; and, on the fourth day, after a laborious travel, we descended into a deep broad valley, which proved to be the bed of a river. This was almost dry, but it bore upon its banks evidences of having recently been a deep and rapid torrent, which, as it rolled and tumbled over the rocks, was fed, through the many gorges which flanked it, by the melting snow from the mountain sides. Here we spread our buffalo skins upon the stones, and rested for the morrow's work.

The morrow found our poor Esquimau unable to travel; and we were in not much better condition. Our route had lain over a very uneven country. The snow of the previous winter having all disappeared, we clambered over the naked rocks; and as each of us carried upon his shoulders a burden of about thirty pounds' weight, this was no slight task.

On the second day there was a light fall of snow, which rendered the rocks slippery and our footing insecure, and added greatly to the difficulties of the

journey. No evidences of life were seen, save a solitary rabbit and the footmarks of a fox.

Before us the country was no less rugged than that which we had just traversed, and we resolved to leave behind us, in charge of Hans, all our travelling gear; and each taking in his pocket a lump of pemmican and an ounce or so of coffee, we started, at noon of the fifth day, up the bank of the river, resolved if possible to trace it to its source.

As we proceeded the prospect became more enlivening. The fall of snow had been mainly confined to the coast, and the bare rocks, over which we made our way by springing from one boulder to another, gave us firmer foothold. The hills became more even in their outline; and between them rested picturesque valleys, sloping down to the river banks, which were often broad and clothed with verdure. Patches of andromeda, — arctic type of Scotia's heather, — its purple blossoms not yet nipped by the winter frosts, — gave here and there a carpet to the feet, and furnished us fuel for the cooking of a meal. Beds of green moss and turf, whose roots supplied pabulum to some festucine grasses, on which were browsing little herds of reindeer, gave to the scene an air of enchantment, and brought to recollection the verdure of my native Chester. These meadows often tempted us from our course, sometimes to catch a closer glimpse of the stunted flowers, sometimes to steal a shot at the deer. In the former purpose we were always amply successful, but in the latter we were frustrated by the timidity of the animals, who could not, with all our arts, be surprised, nor approached within rifle shot. The old

buck who stood guard over the herd, gave the alarm by a significant snort; and, angry at being disturbed, led away his charge, the whole troop bounding off to the mountains. Thence looking down over the cliffs, they were seen watching us until they were lost among the rocks, from which, in the distance, they could not be distinguished. The vegetation of the marshes and meadow-lands was richer than anything I had seen north of Melville Bay. Dwarf willows, — representatives of the beautiful shade-trees of our lawns and river banks, — with branches which trailed on the ground as thin as one's little finger, and a foot long, (the whole tree being of about the circumference of a large dinner plate,) were, in places, quite abundant.

At length we emerged upon a broad plain or valley, wider than any we had yet seen, in the heart of which reposed a lake about two miles in length by half a mile in width, over the transparent, glassy surface of which we walked. On either side of us rose rugged bluffs, that stretched off into long lines of hills, culminating in series in a broad-topped mountain ridge, which, running away to right and left, was cut by a gap several miles wide that opened directly before us. Immediately in front was a low hill, around the base of which flowed on either side the branches of the stream which we had followed. Leaving the bed of the river just above the lake, we ascended to the top of this hillock; and here a sight burst upon us, grand and imposing beyond any power of mine adequately to describe. From the rocky bed, only a few miles in advance, a sloping wall of pure whiteness rose to a broad level plain