

Barbour by name, well-known for his many successful voyages, and well-trusted for his skill and courage, had not erred in his presage of the threatening danger. The men, too, had taken warning at the sudden change in the weather, and their leader had in time brought them back to the edge of the ice. With thankful hearts indeed the crew heard the cheery barrel man's voice announce that he had sighted them.

But meanwhile precious time had been lost. Lurid clouds hid the heavens, a hurricane of wind was blowing, and heavy falling snow hid everything from view. The huge pans of ice were creaking and groaning and being rent asunder with the crash of cannons as the heavy swell heaved in under it. At length, while the brave crew were doing all in their power to drive their ship back to where over a hundred of their comrades had last been seen, a terrible conviction began to force itself upon them. 'The face of the ice had changed'—a phenomenon not uncommon in that part of the ocean where changing winds and strong tidal currents alike meet resistance from enormous areas of floating ice. Vast portions of the field had swung round—what had once been north became south—and worse still, an endless crystal barrier of ice, a mile and more in width, and many feet in thickness, had wheeled right across the vessel's course, absolutely blocking all her attempts at progress. Nor was this all. The violence of the storm now raging had separated this piece from the main body beyond, and a dark streak of water some three miles across, its angry surface lashed into foam, forbade any attempt so late in the day at hauling small boats across the ice and rowing to the assistance of the missing men. The only hope left to the anxious crew on board was that the castaways would escape before night to one of the other sealers, known to be fishing in the neighborhood. Only those who are seafaring folk can appreciate the anxiety in the 'Greenland' that night. They knew the cruelty of the piercing blast, the bitter cold, the thick darkness, making movement almost impossible, with no shelter possible in the wild whirling snow.

This horrible tension was, however, relieved by a sudden danger to their own lives. For the force of the wind catching the ship, with her hull fast against an edge of ice, had caused her to heel over ominously. The sense of their own danger was a distinct relief, for it brought back a sense of comradeship with their fellows also struggling for their lives. Suddenly a tremendous noise rose above the hoarse roar of the gale, and the good ship heeled over still more, her spars almost touching the ice floe. The deck cargo of coals and provisions had shifted—they had been unfortunately brought up to make room for more seals. There was imminent risk of the whole ship turning turtle, and not till next morning, after a hard fight with the furious elements, was she out of danger. It was a weird sight—those brave toilers of the deep battling, at the same time, for their own lives and for the lives of their lost comrades. Bright beacon fires had to be kept burning. All night long fierce oil-fed forks of flame leaped high into the darkness, whilst the screams of the steam siren rose above the shrieking of the wind till they were lost over the endless expanse of ice, serving, alas! only as a death-knell to the souls even then passing out into eternity.

But what had been taking place on the ice all this while? As soon as the furious blizzard came on, the various gangs of men had converged again to their starting point, in order to meet the ship. But they found no signs of her, and soon their desperate situation began to dawn upon them; it became apparent that the ice had turned round so that they did not know which way to go and look for her—they realized that they were lost in that vast floating ice-field. After earnest consultation among the leaders, they determined to separate into parties under the various masters of watches. Each party was then to set out in a different direction, and they hoped that, by taking different points of the compass, one lot might reach the ship and be able to direct a rescue party towards the others. Sad farewells and silent hand-shakes had to be taken—farewells which for many meant the last on earth. For now begun a most desperate struggle for existence. All the men were lightly clothed—nor was there any food among them. Two parties—led by William Davies and Jesse Knee, both men of great experience—came through fairly well, for they found rough ice, and were able to erect rude shelters made of large blocks. In these they passed the night huddled close together, to cherish the limited stock of heat their bodies would supply. In God's providence morning found them all alive, and the following afternoon all reached the ship in safety, save for a few 'frost-burns.' One party made a fire on the ice by cutting the wood handles of their seal gaffs into chips, which, together with their tow ropes, they then soaked in seal fat and lit. Over this they partly roasted the carcase of a seal, and even this small addition to their reserve strength pulled several through that awful ordeal—one man is said to have saved himself by smearing seal fat and blood over himself and letting it freeze on. Some poor fellows, finding the ice too smooth and too hard to cut blocks from without tools, gave way to utter despair and wandered hopelessly to and fro in the darkness. Their cries of distress were piteous to hear, while every now and again one more voice would be silenced, as the poor sufferer fell headlong through a fissure in the ice, or a blow-hole left by the seals, and so found rest at last in the chilly waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

The tales of individual survivors are pathetic indeed. One man narrates how with many others he camped on a good-sized pan as night fell. The shelter obtainable was of the very poorest, and as early as ten o'clock one of their number, a stowaway in the ship, died. 'As we didn't like staying in the pan with the corpse,' he writes, 'we moved into another pan and made a fresh shelter as best we could. Early on Tuesday morning another of our number lost his reason. He got up and rushed about among the men crying out "The ship is coming!" "Here is the ship!" This livened our poor fellows a bit, and many getting up on to their legs staggered off in different directions expecting to find her. But, alas! the alarm was a false one, and the men, after dragging along some distance in different directions, were soon lost in the blinding snow storms. Some fell on the smooth ice and could not rise again, others walked deliberately into the water and were drowned, others just lay down, and slept their last long sleep alone.'

One man relates how he spent the night

on a pan with seven others. 'We walked round and round and round all night. We knew, if we gave way to the peculiar drowsiness we felt, we should certainly never wake again, and we tried several times to make a shelter, but we could make no success of it. By Tuesday morning two of us lay dead on this pan. When the ship at last came in sight we could hardly understand what it was.' Another says: 'There were two lots of us near one another about two gun-shots apart. Our men kept kicking one another and running round to rouse themselves—beating our hands together and stamping on the ice. By morning five corpses lay around us. All sorts of queer views kept passing through my mind. I could see beautiful houses and gardens—one man fell into the water near me, but another pulled him out. Poor fellow, he bravely struggled on to keep life in him by moving about, but at last he sank down and was soon frozen. Some were raving now, and one in his delirium seized one young fellow who lay dying, and took off even his scanty clothes while yet he lived. Both of these men were soon lying near one another dead. At last the steamer was really in sight, and I was getting near it, but I dropped a hundred yards away and remember no more till I found myself on board.' Another says: 'I saw my nephew fall forward on the ice as I had seen others do, but a friend went and picked him up, rubbed him and tended him so well that he was actually the means of saving the lad's life. We camped in an ice shelter soon after until the morning, but when I got up there were five men sitting dead around me.'

Alfred Gaulton, aged only eighteen, was more than forty-eight hours on the ice in all that awful cold, and without any food whatever. Yet he lived to tell the tale. During Monday night he lay down, covering his hands and face and entire body with snow, hoping to die in peace. But the very covering no doubt saved him. When Tuesday dawned he gathered courage, and started on his march once more. On and on he wandered, leaving the others far behind him, till at nightfall he found himself on the weather edge of the ice. Here he at last fell down and lay still, once more hoping that all might soon be over; but the fearful wind still raging almost forced him on to his feet again, and so all that second night he wandered on and on before it, a lone figure driven like a helpless barque before a resistless gale. Mercifully reason had now left him, and he was no longer conscious of his sufferings as he still wandered on. Next afternoon at 4 p.m. he was found by the gallant band of rescuers led by chief officer Gaulton still wandering about. He was taken to the ship, and, marvellous to relate, recovered with only severe frost-bites.

It was terrible work that the relief party had to do, and terrible sights they had to witness. Some poor fellows fell dead just as their rescuers reached them; some thought they were all right, and only found out their awful condition when they were taken to the warmth of the ship. Strong men as they were, and accustomed to hard times, many shed bitter tears as fresh evidences of awful suffering heroically borne by their friends kept being brought to light.

By sundown on Wednesday twenty-three men were still missing. Twenty-five bodies had been recovered—five living men had returned from the sealer 'Iceland,'