

THE FROZEN PIKES.

BY W. CLARK RUSSELL. (Continued.)

CHAPTER XI. I MAKE FURTHER DISCOVERIES.

So long as I moved about and worked I did not feel the cold; but if I stood or sat for a couple of minutes I felt the nip of it in my very marrow. Yet, fierce as the cold was here, it was impossible to feel comparable with the rigors of the parts in which this schooner had originally got locked up in the ice, and as I rose from the cask shuddering to the heart with the frosty, motionless atmosphere, my mind naturally went to the consideration of a fire by which I might at last toast myself.

I put a bunch of candles in my pocket—these were as hard as a parcel of marine spikes—and took the lantern into the passage and inspected the next room. Here was a cot hung up by hooks, and a large black chest stood in cleats upon the deck; some clothes hanged from pins in the bulkhead, and upon a kind of tray fixed upon short legs and serving as a shelf were a miscellaneous bundle of boots, lace waistcoats, three corner hats, a couple of swords, three or four pistols, and other objects not very readily distinguishable by the candle light. There was a part which I tried to open, but found it so hard from rust that I should need a handpick to start it. There were three cubby holes—the last cabin, that is, the one in the stern, being the biggest of the lot. Each had its cot, and each also had its own special muddle and litter of boxes, clothes, fire-arms, swords, and the like.

Indeed, by this time I was beginning to see how it was, and I was satisfied that this schooner had been a pirate or buccaner, twenty years before I took her down there were sitting dead in the cabin! He on deck was keeping rocks with his hands locked upon his knees as sunk in blank and frozen contemplation.

Every cabin had its port, and there were ports in the vessel's side opposite; but on reflection I considered that the cabin would be the warmer for their remaining closed, and so I came away and entered the great cabin ahead, bent on exploring the forward part.

I must tell you that the man-made, piercing the upper deck, came down close against the bulkhead that formed the forward wall of the cabin, and on approaching this partition, the daylight being broad enough now that the hatch lay open on top, I remarked a sliding door on the forward side of the vessel. I put my shoulder to it and very easily ran it along its grooves, and then found myself in the way of a direct communication with all the fore portion of the schooner. The arrangement indeed was so odd that I stopped and gazed at this uncommon method of opening out at will the whole range of deck. The air here was as vile as in the cabins, and I had to wait a bit.

On entering I discovered a little compartment with racks on either hand filled with small arms. I stepped into a hundred and thirteen muskets, blunderbusses, and fuses, all of an antique kind, while the sides of the vessel were hung with pistols great and little, boarding pikes, cutlasses, hangers, and other sorts of sword. This armory was a sight to set me walking very cautiously, for it was not only a practical device in this uncommon method of opening out at will the whole range of deck. The air here was as vile as in the cabins, and I had to wait a bit.

There was another sliding door in the forward partition; it stood open, and I passed through it into what I immediately saw was the cook-house. I turned the lantern about and perceived that equipment of kitchen furniture as you would not expect to find in the galley of an Indian built to carry two or three hundred passengers. About half a chaldron of small coal lay heaped in a wooden angular fire fitted to the ship's side, for the sight of which I thanked God. I held the lantern to the furnace, and observed a crooked chimney rising to the deck and passing through it. The mouth or head of it was no doubt covered by the snow, for I had not noticed any such object in the survey I had taken of the vessel above. Strange! I thought, that those men should have frozen to death with the material in the ship for keeping a fire going. But then my whole discovery I regarded as one of those secrets of the deep which defy the utmost imagination and experience of man to explain them. Enough that here was a schooner which had been interred in a sepulchre of ice, as I might naturally conclude, for near half a century; that there were dead men in her, who looked to have been frozen to death; that she was apparently stored with miscellaneous booty; that she had manifestly gone crowded with men. All this was plain, and I say it was enough for me. If she had papers there were to be met with presently; otherwise, conjecture would be mere imbecility in the face of those whites and front-bowed countenances and iron-still lips.

I thrust back another sliding door, and entered the ship's fore-cabin. The ceiling, as I chanced to call the upper deck, was lined with hammocks, and the floor was covered with chests, bedding, clothes, and I know not what else. The ringing of the wind's high did not disturb the stillness produced on my mind by this extraordinary scene of confusion behead amid the silence of that tomb-like interior. I stood in the door-way, not having the courage to venture farther. For all I knew, many of those hammocks might be tenanted; for as this kind of bed expressed by the curvature the rounded shape of a seaman, whether it be empty or not, it is impossible by merely looking to know whether it is occupied or vacant. The dimensions of the prospect was, of course, vastly exaggerated by the feeble light of the candle, which swayed in my hand, dang a swarming

Children Cry for

of shadows upon the scene, through which the hammocks glimmered wan and melancholy.

I came away in a fright, sliding the door to my hurry with a bang, that fetched a groaning echo out of the hold. If this ship were haunted, the fore-cabin would be the abode of the spirits! Before I could make a fire the chimney must be cleared. Among the furniture in the arms-room were a number of spade-headed spears—the spears wide as the length of a man's thumb, and about a foot long, mounted on light, thin wood. Armed with one of these weapons, the like of which is to be met with among certain South American tribes, I passed into the cabin to proceed on deck; but though I leave the two figures were there, the coming upon them fresh struck me with as much astonishment and alarm as if I had not before seen them. The man starting from the table confronted me on this entrance, and I stopped dead to that astonishing living posture of terror—was he receding, as though he were alive indeed, and was jumping up from the table in his amazement at my apparition.

The brilliance of the snow was very striking after the dusk of the interiors I had been penetrating. The glare seemed like a blaze of white sunshine, yet it was the dazzle of the ice and nothing more for the sun was hidden; the fairness of the morning was passed; the sky was lead-colored down to the ocean line, with a quantity of smoke-brown so as to fly along it. Though it was frightful to be alone in this frozen vault, with no other society than that of the dead, not even a scowling to put life into the scene, I could not but feel that, by my prospects what they might, for the moment I was safe—that is to say, I was immeasurably safer than ever I could have been in the boat, which, when I had emerged into the storm now coming on, and realized the sea that was running outside.

I speedily spied the chimney, which showed a head of two feet above the deck, and made short work of the snow that was frozen in it, [as nothing could have been fitter to cut ice with than the spade-shaped weapon I carried. This done, I returned to the cook-room, and with a butcher's axe that hung against the bulk-head I knocked away one of the boards that confined the coal, split it into small pieces, and in a short time had kindled a good fire. The heat was exquisite. I pulled a little bench, after the pattern of those with the men staid in the cabin, to the fire, and, with outstretched legs and arms, thawed out of me the frost that had lain latent in my flesh ever since the wreck of the Leaping Mary. When I was thoroughly warm and comforted I took the lantern and went aft to the steward's room, and brought thence a cheese, a ham, some biscuit, and one of the jars of spirits, all of which I carried to the cook-room, and placed the whole of them in the oven. But how was I to make a bowl without fresh water? I was on deck and scratched up some snow, but the salt in it gave it a sickly taste, and it was not only certain it would spoil and make disgusting whatever I mixed it with or cooked in it, but it stood as a drink to disorder my stomach and bring on an illness. I searched about all the hold for the special instrument, and I found the scullibutt and went for the chopper, with which I returned and got into the forward hollow where I had discovered them. After chopping one or them and knocking off the staves I found there were three-quarters of a cask full of sparkling clear water, and I brought off a piece and sucking it, I found it to be very sweet fresh water.

I found it as much as when dissolved, would make a couple of gallons and with it clambered on to the fore-cabin deck and returned to the cook-room. It was extremely disagreeable and disgusting to me to have to pass the chesty contents of the cabin over my head, but I went in and out; and I made up my mind to get them on deck when I felt a qual to the work, and cover them with the fire.

The fire burned brightly, and its ruddy glow was sweet as human companionship. I put the ice into a saucepan and set it upon the fire, and then pulling the cheese and ham out of the oven found them warm and thawed. On smelling to the mouth of the jar I discovered its contents to be brandy. I can give no better idea of the cold of the latitudes in which this schooner had lain, than by speaking of the brandy as being frozen. This may have happened through its having lost twenty or thirty per cent. of its strength. Only about an inch of it was melted. I poured this into a pannikin and took a sup, and a drop of spirits I never swallowed in all my life; its elegant perfume proved it amazingly good and old. I fetched a lemon and some sugar and speedily prepared a small smoking bowl of punch. The ham cut readily; I fried a couple of potatoes, and fell to the heartiest and most delicious repast I ever sat down to; at any time there is something fragrant and appetizing in the smell of fried ham; conceive then the relief that the appetite of a starved, half-frozen, ship-wrecked man would find in it! The cheese was extremely good, and was as sound as if it had been made a week ago. Indeed, the preservative virtues of the cold struck me with astonishment. Here was I taking a fine meal of stores which in all probability had lain in this ship fifty years, and they ate as choicely as like food of a superior quality ashore. Possibly some of these days science may devise a means for keeping the stores of a ship frozen, which would be as great a blessing as could befall the mariner, and a sure remedy for the sailor, for then as much fresh meat might be carried as salt, besides other articles of a perishable kind.

(To be continued.)

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Table with 4 columns: CHATHAM TO FREDERICTON, FREDERICTON TO CHATHAM, CHATHAM TO MONCTON, MONCTON TO CHATHAM. Lists departure and arrival times for various stations.

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