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## A Round of Bleak Coasts.

(Norman Duncan.)

(From 'Dr. Grenfell's Parish.')

The coast of Labrador, which, in number of miles, forms the larger half of the doctor's round, is forbidding, indeed—naked, rugged, desolate, lying sombre in a mist. It is of weather-worn gray rock, broken at intervals by long ribs of black. In part it is low and ragged, slowly rising by way of bare slopes and starved forest, to broken mountain ranges, which lie blue and bold in the inland waste. Elsewhere it rears from the edge of the sea in stupendous cliffs, and lofty, rugged hills. There is no inviting stretch of shore the length of it—no sandy beach, no line of shingle, no grassy bank; the sea washes a thousand miles of jagged rock. Were it not for the harbors—innumerable, and snugly sheltered from the winds and ground swell of the open—there would be no navigating the waters of that region. The Strait Shore is buoyed, lighted, minutely charted. The reefs and currents and tickles\* and the harbors are all known. A north-east gale, to be sure, raises a commotion, and fog and drift-ice add something to the chance of disaster; but, as they say, from one peril there are two ways of escape to three sheltered places. To the north, however, where the doctor makes his way, the coast is best sailed on the plan of the skipper of the old 'Twelve Brothers.'

'You don't catch me meddlin' with no land!' said he.

Past the Dead Islands, Snug Harbor, Domino Run, Devil's Lookout, and the Quaker's Hat—beyond Johnny Paul's Rock and the Wolves, Sandwich Bay, Tumbledown Dick, Indian Harbor, and the White Cockade—past Cape Harrigan, the Farmyard Islands, and the Hen and Chickens—far north to the great craggy hills and strange peoples of Kikkertadsoak, Scoralik, Tunnulusoak, Nain, Okak, and, at last, to Cape Chidley itself—northward, every crooked mile of the way, bold headlands, low outlying islands, sunken reefs, tides, fogs, great winds and snow make hard sailing of it. It is an evil coast, ill-charted where charted at all; some part of the present-day map is based upon the guess-work of the eighteenth century navigators. The doctor, like the skippers of the fishing craft, must sometimes sail by guess and hearsay, by recollection and old rhymes.

The gusts and great waves of open water—of the free, wide sea, I mean, over which a ship may safely drive while the weather exhausts its evil mood—are menace enough for the stoutest heart in the world. But the Labrador voyage is inshore—a winding course among the islands, or a straight one from headland to headland, of a coast off which reefs lie thick; low-lying, jagged ledges, washed by the sea in heavy weather; barren hills, rising abruptly—and all isolated—from safe water; sunken rocks, disclosed upon approach, only by the green swirl above them. They are countless—scattered everywhere, hid-

\*A 'tickle' is a narrow passage to a harbor or between two islands.



"THERE'S NO CHART FOR ICEBERGS."

den and disclosed. They lie in the mouths of harbors, they lie close to the coast, they lie offshore; they run twenty miles out to sea. Here is no plain sailing; the skipper must be sure of the way—or choose it gingerly else the hidden rock will inevitable 'pick him up.'

Recently the doctor was 'picked up.'

'Oh, yes,' said he, with interest. 'An uncharted rock. It took two of the three blades of the propeller. But, really, you'd be surprised to know how well the ship got along with one!'

To know the submerged rocks of one harbor and the neighboring coast, however evil the place, is small accomplishment. The Newfoundland lad of seven years would count himself his father's shame if he failed in so little. High tide and low tide, quiet sea and heavy swell, he will know where he can take the punt—the depth of water, to an inch, which overlies the danger spots. But here are a hundred harbors—a thousand miles of coast—with reefs and islands scattered like dust the length of it. The man who sails the Labrador must know it all like his own backyard—not in sunny weather alone, but in the night, when the headlands are like black clouds ahead, and in the mist, when the noise of the breakers tells him all that he may know of his whereabouts. A flash of white in the gray distance, a thud and swish from a hidden place: the one is his beacon, the other his fog-horn. It is thus, often, that the doctor gets along.

You may chart rocks, and beware of them; but—it is a proverb on the coast—'there's no chart for icebergs.' The Labrador current is charged with them—hard, dead-white glacier

ice from the Arctic; massive bergs, innumerable, all the while shifting with tide and current and wind. What with flocs and bergs—vast fields of drift-ice—the way north in the spring is most perilous. The same bergs—widely scattered, diminished in number, dwarfed by the milder climate—give the transatlantic passenger evil dreams; somewhere in the night, somewhere in the mist, thinks he, they may lie; and he shudders. The skipper of the Labrador craft knows that they lie thick around him; there is no surmise; when the night fell, when the fog closed in, there were a hundred to be counted from the mast-head.

Violent winds are always to be feared—swift, overwhelming hurricanes: winds that catch the unwary. They are not frequent; but they do blow—will again blow, no man can tell when. In such a gale, forty vessels were driven on a lee shore; in another, eighty were wrecked overnight—two thousand fishermen cast away, the coast littered with splinters of ships—and, once (it is but an incident), a schooner was torn from her anchors and flung on the rocks forty feet above the high-water mark. These are exceptional storms; the common Labrador gale is not so violent, but evil enough in its own way. It is a north-easter, of which the barometer more often than not gives fair warning; day after day it blows, cold, wet, foggy, dispiriting, increasing in violence, subsiding, returning again, until courage and strength are both worn out.

Reefs, drift-ice, wind and sea—and over all the fog: thick wide-spread, persistent, swift in coming, mysterious in movement; it compounds the dangers. It blinds men—they curse