

LEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

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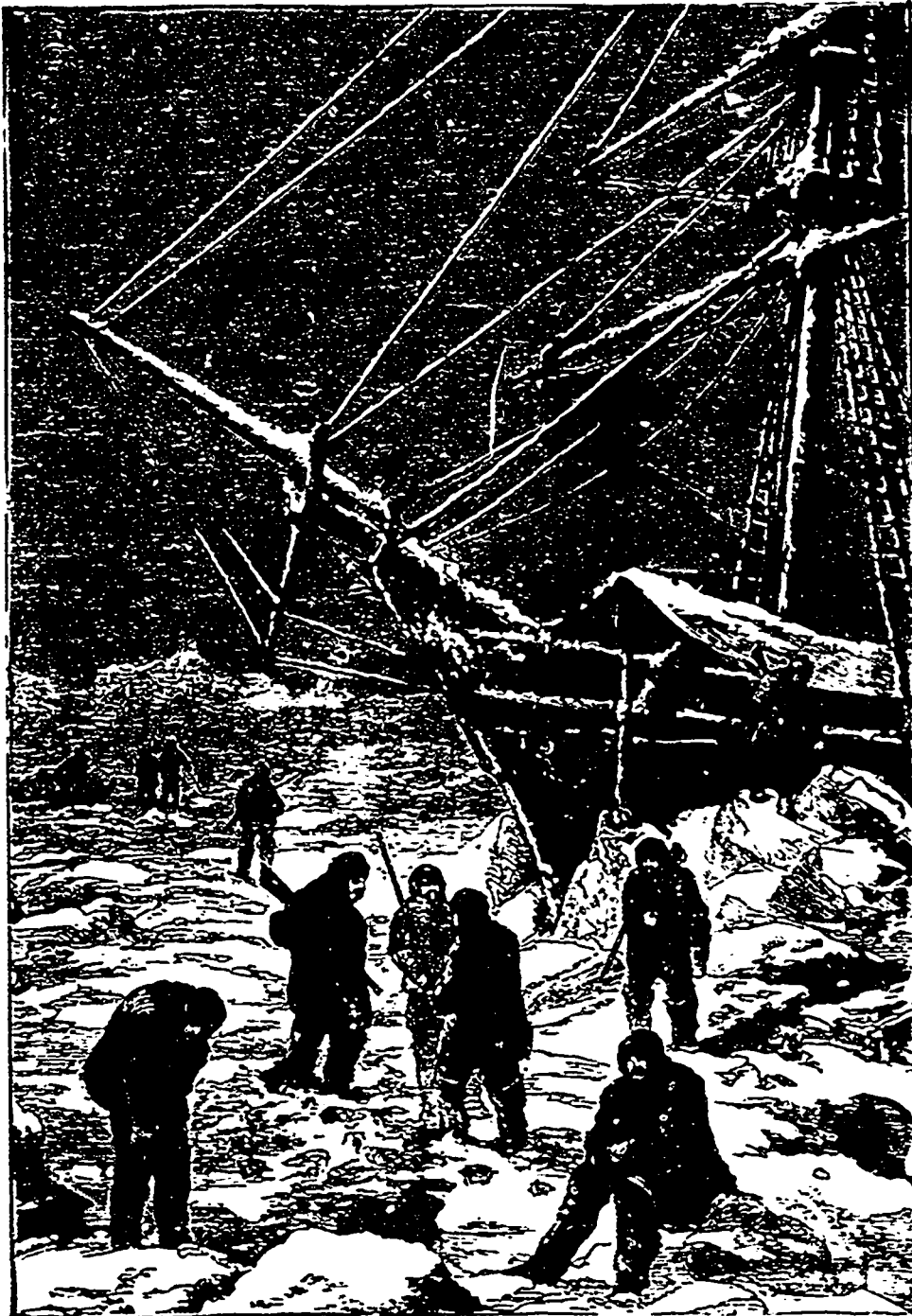
No. 9.

IN THE WHITE JAWS OF THE ICE-PACK.

WHAT a picture of desolation is Arctic scenery!—white, white everywhere save up in the blue sky, and that whiteness the chilling death-pallor of ice-pack and iceberg. Caught and held a prisoner in icy chains is the staunch vessel. Her masts, yards and rigging are all coated with snow and ice; her deck is roofed, and the roof is quickly frosted; her crew are muffled in the thickest, warmest clothing, and look like Esquimaux. They may leave the vessel, and, crawling over the iceblocks heaped about her, descend to the floe, and armed with guns, accompany the sledge off on a hunting trip. Such seemingly awkward, clumsy creatures,—will they run down a bear or the bear run them down? Life on an ice-pack is not very agreeable.

There must be occupation of some kind for the ship's crew. In the evenings they may sing, read, play chess. Hark! after a game of chess hear them singing "Home, sweet home!" Amid cold and snow and ice, how strange seems that chorus of the Arctic sailors, singing about home, and singing in the shadow almost of the North Pole! How the thought moves us!

The morning and afternoon of the day will be given to occupation of another kind. If one looks up into the rigging of an Arctic navigator, he will see "the crow's nest." It is a large cask holding about sixty gallons; its head has been knocked out, and then it has been hoisted to the fore or main-royal pole. Here it serves as a lookout station. It is white as if covered with marble. Peeping over the edge of the crow's nest you may see the beak of the crow, and at the present time this is the spy-glass held to his eye by the man on the lookout. He has seen a bear away off upon the ice, and passes down the word. Men and dogs are off at once. The bear has turned to see the meaning of the hubbub made by the barking dogs in its rear. Now it runs, escaping perhaps to a stretch of open water, where he will not be followed, or he may turn, rise up on his hind legs to receive his canine pursuers, and give them an unwelcome box on the ears. Those ears will never need boxing again. But the hunters have come up, and



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their breech-loaders send Monsieur Bear where he will not give boxing-lessons any more. He may weigh a thousand pounds, and for those who like bear-meat there is an abundance of food in store.

Engineer Melville, the Arctic explorer, speaks of a bear shot while he and his companions were off on the ice in wet tents, wet clothes, on soft, wet snow-beds. What a damp location! Fortunately, they shot a bear. Using

their "empty pemmican-cans for stoves"—imagine it, all grumbling cooks at home—they found that bear a most welcome addition to their scanty bill of fare. They fried his steaks, broiled his chops, roasted his paws and made stews of the flank-pieces, using the blubber for fuel. What a blessing arrived inside of that bear's furry skin! and the skin too had its value.

It may be necessary to go off on an exploring-tour, and then a dog-team

must be made up. There they go, those gaunt, yelping dogs harnessed to the sled burdened with its rider and his baggage. Away they dash, the wind driving down from the North Pole and bristling with its sharp frost teeth. A fierce, blinding snow-storm may set in, throwing huge nightcaps one after the other down upon the travellers. Oh how rough the limitless, unfenced, unmarked highway may be—rough with its blocks of ice! and if it be an ice-floe the sledge is jolting over, then perhaps there is a tract of broken ice ahead, the detached fragments swimming in the cold, dark sea-water. The dogs halt upon that gap in the floe, they know what a bath in that water means. But ahead they are forced, and they scramble from block to block, struggling and yelping—now in the water, now out, reaching at last the solid ice, the water in their fur quickly freezing, the cold stinging deeper and sharper. As for the driver, he feels bad enough to be willing to be a dog! He could only have a warm kennel. Such a ride!

But what if the ice-floe conclude to give the worried Arctic navigator a ride, and so start off on a strange, perilous journey? In September, 1879, the Jeannette, sailing from this country and trying to find that way mysterious stick, the North Pole, was caught in the ice north of the Siberian coast. She was not only caught between the jaws of an ice-pack, but held there. It was one vast field of ice, and it was off too on a long, cheerless journey. This traveller that had taken the Jeannette on its white back, attempting to turn the corner of an island was very indignant at the crowding it received, and manifested its anger in violent agitations of its surface and in various horrible noises. Immense masses of ice were thrown

up, endangering the safety of the vessel. Storms affected the ice-floe, provoking it to violent changes. This great field kept on drifting, drifting, and for months the Jeannette remained in its icy grip.

One night there was a terrible split in the floe on a line with the ship's keel, and it canted her over on her right side. The next day the ship was abandoned. The end was not far distant. "Good-bye, old ship!" cried