

Pass Cape
Albert.

Beset in
Pack.

moreover, the westerly wind having set in in strength, which we expected would open a passage to the eastward of Cape Albert, we decided to bear up and return to the entrance of the Sound; accordingly the ships made a quick run under sail to Cape Albert, arriving off which the wind died away leaving the ice loosely packed. A clear space of water being visible along the shore of the mainland to the northward, and the coast between Cape Victoria and Cape Albert affording no protection, I ran the two ships into the pack under steam, with the hope of forcing our way through, but before midnight they were hopelessly beset; and the floe, to which the ships were secured at a distance of 100 yards apart, drifting rapidly towards an iceberg. Both ships were at once prepared for a severe nip, the rudders and screws being unshipped. At first the "Discovery" was apparently in the most dangerous position, but the floe in which we were sealed up, by wheeling round, while it relieved Captain Stephenson from any immediate apprehension, brought the "Alert" directly in the path of the advancing mass, which was steadily tearing its way through the intermediate surface ice. When only 100 yards distant the iceberg, by turning slightly, presented a broader front to the approaching ice, which then accumulated in advance of it to such an extent as to fill up the angle, and form, as it were, a point or bow of pressed up ice, sufficiently strong to itself divide and split up the floe, and act as a buffer in advance of the berg; and this it did in our case most successfully, our floe breaking up into numerous pieces. The ship herself escaped with a very light nip, and, sliding past the side without accident, was finally secured in the water space left in the wake of the iceberg by the faster drift of the surface ice.

The next twenty-four hours were spent in a constant struggle towards the shore through the pack, which fortunately consisted of ice seldom more than four feet in thickness, with occasional pieces up to twelve feet thick, formed by the over-riding and piling up of ordinary floes, and then cemented together by a winter's frost; the worn down rounded topped ice hummocks on these were from six to eight feet above the water-line. The icebergs, evidently derived from inferior glaciers, were from twenty to forty feet in height above water, and 100 yards in diameter.

Owing to the unsteady wind and the variable tidal currents we were unable to remain for long in any one pool of water—either the iceberg turned round and carried us with it to the exposed side, before we could change the position of the hawsers by which we were secured; or the pack ice, which was readily acted upon by the wind, drifting back the opposite way with any change, closed up the water space. Securing the ships in a dock in rotten ice in the presence of so many icebergs, was not advisable, and also would have carried the ships deeper into the pack to the southward. There was, therefore, no alternative before me but to get up full steam and dodge about as best we could, taking instant advantage of every change in our favour. The ships were seldom separated for long, and now as on all other occasions, they mutually assisted each other. The "Discovery" was handled by Captain Stephenson and her officers in the most masterly and daring manner, combined with great judgment, qualities essential in arctic navigation. She, as well as the "Alert," ran not a few hairbreadth escapes. Once in particular when in following us through a closing channel between an iceberg and heavy floe-piece, before getting quite past the danger she was caught and nipped against the berg, and had it not been for a fortunate tongue of projecting ice would certainly have had all her boats on the exposed side ground away from her. Fortunately, the moving ice pushed her clear, much in the same manner as it had done the "Alert" the previous day.

"Discovery"
clearing a
nip.

Having less beam than the "Alert," and a finer bow, with the very great advantage of an overhanging stem, the "Discovery" is better adapted for forcing her way through a pack. It will be difficult ever to efface from my mind the determined manner in which, when the bluff-bowed leading ship had become imbedded in the ice, which by her impetus against it had accumulated round and sunk under her bows, and a great quantity by floating to the surface again in her wake, had helplessly enclosed her abaft, the "Discovery" was handled, when advancing to our rescue; having backed some distance astern, for the double purpose of allowing the debris ice from a former blow to float away and for the vessel to attain distance sufficient for the accumulation of momentum with which to strike a second, coming ahead at her utmost speed she would force her way into the ice burying her bows in it as far aft as the foremast, the commanding officer on the bowsprit, carefully conning the ship to an inch, for had the ice not been struck fairly it would have caused her to cannon off it against ourselves with much havoc to the two. From the moment of the first impact the overhanging stem necessarily caused the ship's bow to rise three or four feet as she advanced from twelve to twenty feet into the solid floe and imbedded herself before the force of the blow was expended, and as the ship's