

Hobson put the case before the whole party.

"The speed we have given to the ice," he said, "is causing it to wear away rapidly, and will perhaps hasten the inevitable catastrophe by a few hours. My friends, you must decide whether we shall still go on."

"Forwards!" cried all with one voice.

So it was decided, and, as it turned out, the decision was fraught with consequences of incalculable importance.

At six o'clock P.M. Mudge rose, and pointing to a point on the south-east, cried—

"Land!"

Every one started up as if struck by lightning. Land there was indeed, on the south-east, twelve miles from the island.

"More sail! more sail!" shouted Hobson.

He was understood, and fresh materials were hastily brought. On the shrouds a sort of studding sail was rigged up of clothes, furs, everything, in short, that could give hold to the wind.

The speed increased as the wind freshened, but the ice was melting everywhere; it trembled beneath the feet of the anxious watchers, and might open at any moment. But they would not think of that; they were buoyed up with hope; safety was at hand, on the land they were rapidly nearing. They shouted—they made signals—they were in a delirium of excitement.

At half-past seven the ice was much nearer the land, but it was visibly melting, and sinking rapidly; water was gushing from it, and the waves were washing over it, sweeping off the terrified quadrupeds before the eyes of the colonists. Every instant they expected the whole mass to be engulfed, and it was necessary to lighten it like a sinking vessel. Every means was tried to check the dissolution; the earth and sand were carefully spread about, especially at the edges of the ice, to protect it from the direct influence of the sunbeams; and furs were laid here and there, as being bad conductors of heat. But it was all of no avail; the lower portion of the ice began to crack, and several fissures opened in the surface. It was now but a question of moments!

Night set in, and there was nothing left for the poor colonists to do to quicken the speed of the islet. Some of them tried to paddle about on planks. The coast was still four miles to windward.

It was a dark gloomy night, without any moon, and Hobson, whose heroic courage did not even now fail him, shouted—