

pan was on a level with the sea. From time to time I heard the cracking and grinding of the newly-formed "slob," and it seemed that my little floe must inevitably soon go to pieces.

At last the sun really did rise, and the time came for the sacrifice of my shirt. I stripped, and much to my surprise and pleasure, did not find it half so cold as I had anticipated. I now re-formed my dog skins, with the raw side out, so that they made a kind of coat, quite rivalling Joseph's. But with the rising of the sun the frost came out of the joints of my dog's legs, and the friction—caused, I suppose by waving it—made my flag-pole almost tie itself into knots. Still, I could raise it three or four feet above my head, which seemed very important.

Now, however, I found that, instead of having drifted as far as I had reckoned, I was only off some cliffs called Ireland Head, near which there is a little village looking seaward, whence I should certainly have been seen had the time been summer. But as I had myself, earlier in the season, been night-bound at the place, I had learnt that there was not a single soul living there in the winter. The people had all, as usual, migrated to their winter houses up the bay, where they get together for schooling and social purposes.

It was impossible to wave so heavy a flag as mine all the time, and yet I dared not sit down, for that might be the exact moment someone would be in a position to see me from the hills. The only thing in my mind was how long I could stand up, and how long go on waving that pole at the cliffs. Once or twice I thought I saw men against their snowy faces, which I judged were about five or six miles from me. In reality, however, all the time I knew in my heart of hearts that the black specks were only trees. Once, also, I thought I saw a boat approaching. A glittering object kept appearing and disappearing in the water, but it was merely a small piece of ice sparkling in the sun as it rose on the surface.

Physically I felt as well as I ever did in my life, and with the hope of a good long sunny day I felt sure I was good to last another twenty-four hours if my ice-raft would only hold out. I determined to kill a big Eskimo dog I had at midday and drink his blood (only a few days before I had been reading an account of the sustaining properties of dogs' blood in Dr. Nansen's book) if I survived the battle with him.

I could not help feeling, even then, my ludicrous position, and I thought if I ever got ashore again I would have to laugh at myself standing hour after hour waving my shirt at those lofty cliffs, which seemed to assume a kind of sardonic grin, so that I could almost imagine they were laughing at me. I thought of the good breakfast my colleagues were enjoying just at the back of those same cliffs, and of the snug fire and comfortable room which we call our study.

I can honestly say that from first to last not a single sensation of fear entered my mind, even when struggling in the "slob" ice. It all seemed so natural; I had been through the ice half-a-dozen times before. Now I merely felt sleepy, and the idea was very strong in my mind that I should soon reach the solution of the mysteries that I had been preaching about for so many years.

It was a perfect morning, a cobalt sky, and an ultramarine sea, a golden sun, and an almost wasteful extravagance of crimson pouring over hills of purest snow, which caught and reflected its glories from every peak and crag. Between me and their feet lay miles of rough ice, bordered with black "slob" formed during the night. Lastly, there was my poor little pan in the foreground, bobbing up and down on the edge of the open sea, stained with blood, and littered with carcasses and debris. It was smaller than last night; the edges, beating against the new ice around, had heaped themselves up in fragments that, owing to its diminutive size, it could ill spare. I also noticed that the new ice from

the water melted under the dogs' bodies had also formed at the expense of its thickness. Five dogs and myself in a colored football costume and a blood-smeared dogskin cloak, with a grey flannel shirt on a pole of dogs' legs, completed the picture.

The sun was almost hot by now, and I was conscious of a surplus of heat in my skin cloak. I began to look longingly at one of my remaining dogs, for an appetite will rise even on an ice pan. The idea of eating made me think of fire, so once again I inspected my matches. Alas! the heads had entirely soaked off them all, except three or four blue-top wax matches which were in a paste. These I now laid out to dry, and I searched around on my snow pan to see if I could get a piece of transparent ice with which to make a burning-glass, for I was pretty sure that, with all the unravelled tow stuffed into my nether garments and the fat of the dead dogs, I could make smoke enough to be seen if I could only get a light.

I had found a piece which it seemed might answer the purpose, and had gone back to wave my flag, which I did every two minutes, when suddenly, for the second time, I thought I saw the glitter of an oar. It did not seem possible, however, for it must be remembered that it was not water that lay between me and the land, but "slob" ice, which, a mile or two inshore of me, was very heavy. Even if people had seen me, I did not think they could get through, though I knew all of them would be trying. Moreover, there was no smoke rising on the land to give me hope that I had been seen. There had been no gun flashes in the night, and I felt sure that, had anyone seen me, there would have been a bonfire on every hill to encourage me to keep going. So I gave it up and went on with my work. But the next time I went back to my flag it seemed very distinct, and though it kept disappearing as we rose and fell on the surface, my readers can well imagine I kept my eyes in that direction. Through my dark spectacles having been lost, however, I was already partly snowblind.

I waved the flag as high as I could raise it in a direction to be broadside towards those places where I thought people might have gone out around the ice after ducks, which is their main occupation a little later in the year. I hoped that they might have seen my flag and come straight on for me. At last, beside the glitter of a white oar, I made out the black speck of the hull. I knew then if the pan held out for another hour that I should be all right.

With that strange perversity of the human intellect, the first thing I thought of when I realized that a rescue boat was under way was what trophies I could carry with my luggage from the pan! I pictured the dog-bone flagstaff adorning my study—the dogs intervened, however, and ate it later on—and I thought of preserving my ragged puttees in my museum.

I could see that my rescuers were irrationally waving, and when they came within shouting distance I heard someone shout, "Don't get excited; keep on the pan, where you are." As a matter of fact, they were infinitely more excited than I. Already it seemed just as natural to me to be saved as half an hour before it seemed inevitable that I should be lost. Had my rescuers only known, as I did, the sensations of a bath in the ice when you cannot dry yourself afterwards, they need not have expected me to throw myself into the water.

At last the boat came up, crashing into my pan with such violence that I was glad enough to catch hold of the bow, being more or less acquainted by now with the frail constitution of my floe, and being well aware it was not adapted for collisions. Moreover, I felt for the pan, for it had been a good and faithful friend to me.

A hearty handshake all round and a warm cup of tea—thoughtfully packed in a kettle—inside, and we hoisted in my remaining dogs and instantly

started back, for even then a change of wind might have penned the boat with ice, which would have cost us dearly. Indeed, the men thought we could not return, and we started for an island, in which direction the way was all open.

There were not only five Newfoundland fishermen at the oars, but five men with Newfoundland muscles on their backs and arms and five as brave hearts as ever beat in the bodies of human beings. So we presently changed our course and forced our way through to the shore.

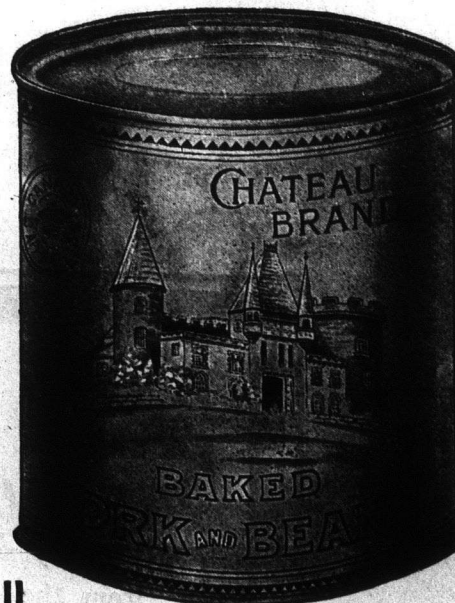
To my intense astonishment they told me that the night before four men had been out on a point of land, from which the bay is visible, cutting some, dead harp seals out from a store. The ice had been extraordinary hard, and it had taken them till seven o'clock at night to cut out twenty-four seals. Just at the very moment before they left for home, my pan of ice had drifted out clear of the island called Hare Island, and one of them, with his keen fisherman's eyes, had seen something unusual. They at once returned to their village, saying there was a man on a pan, but they had been discredited, for the people there thought it could only be the top of some tree.

All the time I had been driving along I knew well that there was one man on the coast who had a good spy-glass, and that he had twelve children, among them some of the hardest young men on the coast. Many times my thoughts had wandered to him, for his sons are everywhere, hunting seals and everything else. It was his sons, and another man with them, who saw me, and were now with him in the boat. The owner of the spy-glass told me he got up instantly in the middle of tea on hearing the news, and hurried over the cliff to the lookout with his glass. Immediately, dark as it was, he made out that there really was a man out on the ice. Indeed, he saw me wave my hands every now and again towards the shore. By a process of reasoning very easy on so unfrequented a shore, they immediately knew who it was, but tried to argue themselves out of their conviction. They went down at once to try and launch a boat, but found it absolutely impossible. Miles of ice lay between them and me, the heavy sea was hurling great blocks on the land-wash, and night was already falling, with the wind blowing hard on shore. These brave fellows, however, didn't sit down idly. The whole village was aroused, messengers dispatched at once along the coast, and look-outs told off to all the favorable points, so that while I considered myself a laughing-stock, waving my flag at those irresponsible cliffs, there were really men's eyes watching from them all the time.

Every soul in the village was on the beach as we neared the shore, and everybody wanted to shake hands when I landed. Even with the grip that one after another gave me, some no longer trying to keep back the tears, I did not find out that my hands were frostbitten—a fact I have not been slow to appreciate since. A weird sight I must have looked as I stepped ashore—tied up in rags stuffed with oakum, wrapped in the blood-stained skins of dogs, with no hat, coat or gloves, and only a short pair of knickers on! It must have seemed to some of them as if the Old Man of the Sea had landed.

No time was wasted before a pot of tea was exactly where I wanted it to be, and some hot stew was locating itself where I had intended an hour before that the blood of one of my remaining dogs should have gone.

Rigged out in the warm garments that fishermen wear. I started with a large team as hard as I could race for hospital, for I had learnt that the news had gone over that I was lost. It was soon painfully impressed upon me that I could not much enjoy the ride; I had to be hauled like a log up the hills, my feet being frost-bitten so that I could not walk. Had I guessed this before I might have avoided much trouble.



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