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Icebergs; Their Birth and Southern Journey.

By P. T. McGrath in Tor. Globe

Few sights in nature are more imposing than that of a huge, solitary iceberg as, regardless alike of wind and wave, it pursues its path across the ocean, far away from land. The dazzling whiteness of its lofty sides, the fantastic forms of its towers, battlements, cliffs and pinnacles, the slow and stately grandeur of its march over the mountain waves, which it seems to beat down and despise, even in their fiercest wrath, all combine to invest this lonely wanderer of the deep with a profound interest. Woe to the unfortunate ship which in fog or darkness crashes against the walls of one of these icy monsters. Either the vessel receives her death wound and goes to the bottom or, maimed and crippled, turns her head to the nearest port.

The number of these frost giants is inconceivable. The year 1909 was memorable for the enormous number of them that crowded the waters of the North Atlantic. For weeks and months the ice argosies followed each other, sometimes in scattered squadrons of four or five hundred, sometimes in smaller detachments and then a giant would heave in sight, towering from one hundred to two hundred ft. above the waves, sailing along in stately grandeur. Seldom, if ever, did the Arctic regions disgorge such vast quantities of ice fields, floes and bergs as during the first half of the year 1909. From Signal Hill, overlooking the harbor of St. John's, Nfld., several hundred could often be counted at one time. Several were reported to be two or three miles in length. During June, even, the Labrador coast and the Straits of Belle Isle were so beset with ice as to be inaccessible. The birthplace of icebergs is on the coasts of Greenland. This great land mass stretches away twelve hundred miles toward the Pole. It might be named a continent, since it has an estimated area of five hundred and twelve thousand sq. miles.

The whole interior of Greenland is covered by an immense icecap, many hundred feet in thickness. The sun's rays, falling on the snow at the summits of the mountains, partially melt it into a granular mass. The valleys receive the drainage from these granular snowfields and the cold converts it into a solid mass of ice, a glacier. The great weight of snow acts as a propelling power from behind, and forces the icy stream constantly onward toward the coast, which it lines with an enormous crystal precipice. At last the front of the glacier is forced by the propelling power behind it into the sea, and into deeper and still deeper water. It begins to feel the action of the waves and tides which wear away its base deep fissures are discernible in its face. Suddenly, with a roar far louder than thunder, the ice mountain snaps asunder and the detached mass comes grinding, crashing down.

A cloud of spray dashes high into the air, and the young iceberg is born. It dives as it touches the waves, rises slowly, sways and tumbles to and fro, but at last secures its balance. Its front is one hundred and fifty feet above the waves, but there are eight times as much bulk beneath as above the surface; so that its weight may be millions of tons. The berg is scarcely launched into life before it begins to feel the influence of the great Arctic that is rushing southward through Baffin's Bay and Davis Strait. Borne on the bosom of this stream, it starts on its long voyage of six or possibly twelve months. At last the berg reaches southern latitudes and a warmer clime. What the fury of tempests and the blows of the billows could not accomplish, the silent rays of the sun and the action of the warmer air begin slowly to effect. The iceberg becomes relaxed in the joints. Streamlets are trickling down its sides. Its constitution is shaken. Great crags ever and anon fall from it, with a sudden plunge, into the ocean.

The process is called the calving of the berg, and the fragments dropped are calf-ice." Now it becomes top heavy, reels and turns over. Rocky fragments embedded in its now upturned base are exposed to the light. The berg presents a completely new front and summit, which have been sculptured by the waves, and is no longer recognizable as the same towering monster that left the portals of the north months before. It is now in a state of unstable equilibrium and frequently turns over with a hoarse roar. All the sailors know the danger of ice bergs in this condition. They call them "growlers," and give them a wide berth. Shorn of its glories, and greatly reduced in size, the berg still holds on its course and approaches the banks of Newfound land. Now it enters the warm water of the Gulf Stream, and its dissolution is at hand. Cascades are streaming down its sides. Caverns are worn right through its centre. Small lakes are formed on its summit. Rents and fissures are constantly widening. Finally it bursts with an explosion like thunder. Its shattered remains are scattered far and wide, and speedily melt in the warm waters. The berg is no more.

Such is the life history of an iceberg. When it reaches a certain stage and its cohesive powers are relaxed, when it becomes "rotten" as the sailors say, it is especially dangerous. Then a slight cause will make it explode, and it bursts into ten thousand fragments, raising huge billows which might swamp a vessel. The concussion of the air from the firing of a gun, or even the noise made by a steamer has been known to cause such an explosion. Sometimes a berg has projections or spurs underneath the water stretching far out from its base. A vessel that ventures too near may strike on one of these unseen reefs. Such an event, a precursor of the Titanic tragedy, happened in June 1890. The steamer Portia, with tourists from New York on board, bound from that port to St. John's Newfoundland, and anxious to have a near view of a large iceberg, induced the captain to approach so close to one that she struck on one of its jutting spurs. The shock and the weight of the heavily laden vessel broke off the spur, and at the same time a huge cliff of the berg, many hundreds of tons in weight, fell into the water with a fearful roar behind the steamer. A great wave lifted her stern, and with a violent plunge she seemed to be going down to the bottom. It was a trying moment for those on board, but the good ship slowly came up, her deck covered with ice fragments, and cataracts of water streaming from her on all sides. After a few conclusive tossings on the disturbed waters she righted and managed to get out of that dangerous neighborhood. It was an extremely narrow escape.

There are many berg-producing glaciers on the Greenland coast. The largest known, the Humboldt, was reported by Dr. Kane as extending forty miles along the coast, and presenting a perpendicular front three hundred feet high. The glacier, which has been measured most carefully, is eighteen hundred feet wide and nineteen hundred feet thick, and it advances at a rate of forty seven feet a day. Sir John Ross once saw a berg two and one fifth miles broad, two and a half miles long and one hundred and fifty three feet high. He calculated that the entire mass weighed fifteen hundred million tons. In the southern hemisphere much larger bergs have been seen, towering seven hundred to eight hundred feet above the waves.

Nearly all these bergs, being of fresh water ice and of snow, are of dazzling brilliance in the noonday sun. Generally the shadows in the crevices are a wonderful green, the general contour of the berg changing in marvellous fashion as the day waxes and wanes. Frequently a berg will assume strange and grotesque shapes, now resembling a turreted palace again a cathedral or mosque, and often times an animal of gigantic proportions. Oddly enough, the polar bear, is a shape very often woven by the frost magician. Once in a while passengers on an ocean express will recognize the exaggerated lineaments of a national hero or heroine, a St. George slaying a dragon, or a reigning queen, for the grotesque and beautiful not infrequently float side by side.

Many miles off the coast of Newfoundland the bottom of the ocean rises in a remarkable way a forms a comparatively shallow basin, enormous in extent, and surrounded by water miles deep. This region is known as the Newfoundland Banks and is the famous trusting place of the merciless fogs and ice clad brotherhood of the north. As these icebergs approach the warmer climate the action of the sun and water upon them is remarkable and does for them what the sculptor's chisel does for the block of marble. Out of shapeless masses appear forms of the finest architecture; a drifting mountain careens, topples over and finally twists itself into a beautiful cathedral or a many turreted fortress, set high up on an elevation of clearest marble; vast interiors formed by icy arches springing from great bits of a breaking berg, and all these forms draped with rich traceries of cream-white lace in designs undreamed of. Then, too, the melting ice on the crests of these bergs falls down the slippery sides and into the sea in streams and cascades, and, strange as it seems, this water is always fresh, despite the surrounding salt of the ocean.-Ex.

DEMOCRACY IN QUEBEC

A Proposal to Abolish Government Houses Was Voted Down

The Opposition in Quebec endeavored to have the official residence of the Lieutenant-Governor abolished but were voted down. The amendment proposed by Mr. Bernard Shefford, was to the effect that the House requests the Government to adopt the necessary measures for the abolition of Spencerwood as the residence of the Lieutenant-Govern - of the province, so as to utilize the property for humanitarian or educational purposes and to give to the Lieutenant-Governor a fixed salary, permitting him to lodge where he liked, so as to make the post of Lieutenant-Governor more conformable to democratic ideas, and thus save considerable expenses to the province. Mr. Cousineau, speaking to the amendment, said that while he had respect for the person of the Lieutenant-Governor, he was of the opinion that Quebec should spend much less money for the official residence of the official head of the province. Ontario, he affirmed, spent but $5.000, while Quebec spent about $18,000.

LIFEGUARD FOR TRAMCARS

The Edinburgh and District Tramways Company have been conducting experiments with a view to devising an improved form of lifeguard for the cable cars, and an automatic lifeguard has now been constructed which promises to fulfil the requirements. The apparatus consists of a wooden gate hinged to the front of the car, and the guard, which is fixed some distance behind the gate. Whenever any object strikes the gate the guard is immediately released and falls flush with the ground. Experiments with a "dummy" figure proved entirely satisfactory.

BROTHER IN MOTION PICTURE

At one of the presentations of the Durbar at the Princess in Montreal a lady whose son is an officer in the Indian army, visited the theatre, accompanied by her daughter. To the astonishment, in one of the pictures representing the movement of troops her brother marched across the canvas at the head of his regiment.

Buttermilk.

This much-despised by-product of the dairy seems to be coming to its own, says The Canadian Farm. Of late years there has sprung up in cities and towns a big demand for buttermilk as a beverage. It can now be had at first-class hotels, being sold over the bar like ale and "Scotch" at so much per glass. Then many householders use buttermilk whenever they can get it. So great has grown the demand the supply is always below requirements. To meet this demand producers are devising ways and means of increasing the supply. True, as yet, the farmer has not realized its true value, and the supply of buttermilk on the average farm still finds its way to the hog trough, while people in towns and cities cannot get all they require. This increased demand has come about largely because of recent scientific investigations which show buttermilk to be of great value in keeping the human system in good working order. It is especially good for intestinal disorders. A physician recently discovered in the south of Russia a people who lived almost entirely on a diet of buttermilk or a milk product having the same properties as buttermilk. He found also that these people lived to a good old age. This led to further investigation, and the production of artificial buttermilk.

Nearly 12,000 'Phones In Province.

At the annual meeting of the New Brunswick Telephone Company in Fredericton Thursday, S. H. White said that during the year 1911, 939 additional telephones were installed, while during the present fiscal year 1197 phones were added, making an increase of 258 over the previous year. The total number of phones now in use in the province is 11,171., He also reported that $15,000 worth of supplies written off as of doubtful value at the time of the merger had been found good and that amount had been added to the assets. The finding of the Public Utilities Commission regarding the rates was commented on with satisfaction and the president promised a continuance of their policy of extending the rural lines.

The report of the auditor shows total assets of $1,557,286, leaving a surplus of $6,365. During the year the earnings were $355,629, the expenses $197,181; reconstruction and depreciation, $79,220, leaving the net earnings $78,627. The balance on hand at the first of the year was $5,802. During the year interest on bonds amounted to $5,000 and dividends of $35,278 and $37,786 were declared.