

Every one was quite revived by this plan, slight as was the chance it afforded, and all lent a helping hand, even Kellet, who had not yet reminded Mrs Barnett of her promise.

A beam, which had once formed part of the roof of the barracks, was sunk deep into the earth and sand of which the little hill was composed, and firmly fixed with ropes arranged like shrouds and a stay. A sail made of all the clothes and coverlets still remaining, fastened on to a strong pole for a yard, was hoisted on the mast. This sail, or rather collection of sails, suitably set, swelled in the breeze, and by the wake it left, it was evident that the strip of ice was rapidly moving towards the south-east.

It was a success, and every one was cheered with newly-awakened hope. They were no longer stationary; they were advancing slowly, it was true, but still they were advancing. The carpenter was particularly elated; all eagerly scanned the horizon, and had they been told that no land could be sighted, they would have refused to believe it.

So it appeared, however; for the strip of ice floated along on the waves for three hours in the centre of an absolutely circular and unbroken horizon. The poor colonists still hoped on.

Towards three o'clock, the Lieutenant took the Sergeant aside, and said to him—

“We are advancing at the cost of the solidity and duration of our islet.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“I mean that the ice is being rapidly fretted away as it moves along. Its speed is hastening its dissolution, and since we set sail it has diminished one-third.”

“Are you quite sure?”

“Absolutely certain. The ice is longer and flatter. Look, the sea is not more than ten feet from the hill!”

It was true, and the result was what might naturally have been expected from the motion of the ice.

“Sergeant,” resumed Hobson, “do you think we ought to take down our sail?”

“I think,” replied Long, after a moment's reflection, “that we should consult our comrades. We ought all to share the responsibility of a decision now.”

The Lieutenant bent his head in assent, and the two returned to their old position on the little hill.