

CAST AWAY IN THE COLD

By Dr. Isaac I. Hayes
CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH THE ANCIENT MARINER, CONTINUING HIS STORY, BORROWS AN ILLUSTRATION FROM THE "ANCIENT MARINER" OF SONGS, AND THEN PROCEEDS TO TELL HOW THEY WENT INTO THE COLD, AND WERE CAST AWAY THERE.

"And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice-mast-high came floating by,
As green as emerald."

"I RECITE this from a famous poem because it suits so well what came of us, for you must understand that, while all I have been telling you was going on, we were approaching the northern regions, and were getting into the sea where ice was to be expected. You will remember that we were going after seals, and it is on the ice that the seals are found.

"At length the man aloft cried out that he saw ice. 'Where away?' shouted the red-faced mate.

"The crew of the ship did not give themselves much concern about the ice itself; for it was soon discovered that the floes were covered in many places with seals.

"As we came farther and farther into the 'pack,' the seals on the ice were observed to be more and more numerous. Most of them appeared to be sound asleep; some of them were wriggling about, or rolling themselves over and over, while none of them seemed to have the least idea that we had come all the way from New Bedford to rob them of their sleek coats and their nice fat blubber.

"As soon as we had reached the ice, we sprang out of the boat on to it, and after digging a hole into it with a long, sharp bar of iron, called an ice-chisel, we put therein one end of a large, heavy, crooked hook, called an ice-anchor, and then to a ring in the other end of this ice-anchor we made fast the end of the rope that we had brought with us. This done, we signaled to the people on board to 'haul in,' which they did on their end of the rope, and in a little while the ship was drawn close up to the ice. Then another rope was run out over the stern of the ship, and this being made fast to an ice-anchor in the same way as the other, the ship was soon drawn up with her whole broadside close to the ice, as snug as if she were lying alongside of a dock in New Bedford.

"And now began the seal-hunt. Each one of the seal-catchers was armed with a short club for killing the seals, and a rope to drag them over the ice to the ship. We scattered in every direction, our object being each by himself to approach a group of seals, and, coming upon them as noiselessly as possible, to kill as many of them as we could before they should all take fright and rush into the sea. In order to do this, we were obliged to steal up between the seals and the water as far as possible.

"My first essay at this novel business was ridiculous enough, and, besides nearly causing my death, overwhelmed me with mortification. It happened thus. I made at a large herd of seals, nearly all of which were lying some distance from the edge of the ice, and before they could get into the water I had managed to intercept about a dozen of them. Thus far I thought myself very lucky.

"The seals, of course, all rushed toward the water as fast as they could go, the moment they saw me coming. But I got up with them in time, and struck one on the nose, killing it, and was in the act of striking another, when a huge fellow that was big enough to have been the father of the whole flock, too badly frightened to mind where he was going, ran his head between my legs, and, whipping up my heels in an instant, landed me on his back, in which absurd position I was carried into the sea before I could recover myself. Of course, I sank immediately, and dreadfully cold was the water; but, rising to the surface in a moment, I was preparing to make a vigorous effort to swim back to the ice, when another badly frightened and ill-mannered seal, as I am sure you will all think, plunged into the sea without once looking to see what he was doing, and hit me with the point of his nose fairly in the stomach.

"I thought now for certain that my misfortunes were all over, and that my end was surely come. However, I got my head above the surface once more, and did my best to keep it there; but my hopes vanished when I perceived that I was at least twenty feet from the edge of the ice. It was as much as I could do to keep my head above water, without swimming forward, so much embarrassed was I by my heavy clothing, the great cold, and the terrible pains (worse than those of colic) caused by the seal hitting me in the stomach. I am quite certain that this would have been the last of John Hardy's adventures, had not one of my companions, seeing me going overboard on the back of the seal, rushed to my rescue. He threw me his line for dragging seals (the end of which I had barely strength to catch and hold on to), and then he drew me out as one would haul up a large fish.

"I came from the sea in a most sorry condition, as you can well imagine. My mouth was full of salt water. I was so prostrated with the cold that I could scarcely stand, and my pains were so great that I should certainly have screamed had I not been so full of water that I could not utter a single word.

"The sailors looked upon my adventure as a great joke, never once seeming to think how near I was to death's door, and my mate simply cried out 'Overboard, eh? Pity the sharks didn't catch him!'

"We continued at this seal-hunting for a good many days, during which we shifted our position frequently, and made what the sealers called a good 'catch,' but still the barrels in the hold of the ship were not much more than half of them filled with oil, when a great storm set in.

"This storm lasted, with occasional interruptions, thirteen days. We approached the ice several times, only to be driven off again before we had fairly succeeded in getting to work, and hence we caught very few seals.

"By the time the storm was over the season for seal-fishing was nearly over too; so we had no alternative, if we would get a good cargo of oil, but to go in search of whales. Accordingly, the course of the vessel was changed, and I found that we were steering almost due north, avoiding the ice as much as possible, but passing a great deal of it every day.

"At first, when we concluded to go after whales, there were several vessels in company with us. At one time I counted nine, all in sight at one time; but we had become separated in thick weather; and whether they had gone ahead of us, or had fallen behind, we could not tell. However, we kept on and on and on; where we were, or where we were going, I, of course, had not the least idea; but I became aware, from day to day, that greater dangers were threatening us, for icebergs came in great numbers to add their terrors to those which we had already in the ice-fields. They became at length (and suddenly, too) very numerous, and not being



able to go around them on account of the field-ice, which was on either side, we entered right amongst them. The atmosphere was somewhat foggy at the time, and it seemed as if the icebergs chilled the very air we breathed. I fairly shuddered as we passed the first opening. The ice was now at least three times as high as our masts, and very likely more than that, and it appeared to cover the sea in every direction. It seemed to me that we were going to certain destruction, and indeed I thought I read a warning written as it were on the bergs themselves. Upon the corner of an iceberg to the left of us there stood a white figure, as plain as anything could possibly be. One hand of this strange, weird-looking figure was resting on the ice beside it, while the other was pointing partly upward toward heaven, and backward toward the south whence we had come. I thought I saw the figure move, and, much excited, I called the attention of one of the sailors to it. 'Why, you lubber,' said he, 'don't you know that the sun melts the ice into all sorts of shapes. Look overhead, if there isn't a man's face!' I looked up as the sailor had directed me, and, sure enough, there was a man's face plainly to be seen in the lines of an immense tongue of ice which was projecting from the side of a berg on the right, and under which we were about to pass.

"I became now really terrified. In addition to these strange spectral objects, the air was filled with loud reports, and deep, rumbling noises, caused by the icebergs breaking to pieces.

"I merely mention this as the feeling which oppressed me, and which I could not shake off.

"It seemed to me now that our doom was sealed—that all our hope was left behind us when we passed the opening to this vast wilderness of icebergs.

"The fog kept on thickening more and more, until we could scarcely see anything at all. I have never, I think, seen so thick a fog, and it was with the greatest difficulty that the ship was kept from striking the icebergs. Then, after a while, the wind fell away steadily, and finally grew entirely calm. The current was moving us about upon the dead waters; and in order to prevent this current from setting us against the ice, we had to lower the boats, and, making lines fast to the ship and to the boats, pull away with our oars to keep headway on the ship, that she might be steered clear of the dangerous places. Thus was made a slow progress, but it was very hard work. At length the second mate, who was steering the foremost boat, which I was in, cried out, 'Fast ice ahead.' Now 'fast ice' is a belt of ice which is attached firmly to the land, not yet having been broken up or dissolved by the warmth of the summer. This announcement created great joy to everybody in the boats, as we knew that land must be near, and we all supposed that we would be ordered to make a line fast to the ice, that we might hold on there until the fog cleared up and the wind came again. But instead of this we were ordered by the mate to pull away from it. And then, after having got the vessel, as we supposed, into a good, clear, open space of water—at least, there was not a particle of ice in sight—we were all ordered, very imprudently, as it appeared to every one of us, to come on board to breakfast.

"We had just finished our breakfast and were preparing to go on deck, and then into the boats again, when there was a loud cry raised. 'Ice close aboard! Hurry up! Man the boat!' were the orders which I heard among a great many other confusing sounds; and when I got on deck, I saw, standing away up in the fog, its top completely obscured in the thick cloud, an enormous iceberg. The side nearest to us hung over from a perpendicular, as the projecting tongue on which I had before seen the man's face. It was very evident that we were slowly drifting upon this frightful object—directly under this overhanging tongue. It was a fearful sight to behold, for it looked as if it was just ready to crumble to pieces; and indeed, at every instant, small fragments were breaking off from it, with reports, and falling into the sea.

"We were but a moment getting into the boats. 'Carry your line out to the fast ice,' was the order we received from the master; and every one of us, realizing the great danger, pulled as hard as he could. The 'fast ice' was dimly in sight when we started, for we had drifted while at breakfast toward it, as well as toward the berg. Only a few minutes were needed to reach it. We jumped out and dug a hole, and planted the ice anchor. The ship was out of sight, buried in the fog. A faint voice came from the ship. It was, 'Hurry up! we have struck.' They evidently could not see us. The line was fastened to the anchor in an instant, and the second mate shouted, 'Haul in! haul in!' There was no answer, but 'Hurry up! we have struck.' 'Haul in! haul in!' shouted the second mate, but still there was no answer. 'They can't hear nor see,' said he, hurriedly; and then turning to me, said, 'Hardy, you watch the anchor that it don't give way, then turning to me, said, 'Hardy, you watch the anchor that it don't give way. Boys, jump in the boat, and we'll go nearer the ship so they can hear.' The boat was gone quickly into the fog, and I was then alone on the ice by the anchor—how much and truly alone you shall hear.

"Quick as the lightning flash, sudden as the change of one second to another, there broke upon me a sound that will never leave my ears. It was as if a volcano had burst forth, or an earthquake had instantly tumbled a whole city into ruins. A fearful shock, like a sudden explosion, filled the air. I saw faintly through the thick mists the masts of the ship reeling over, and I saw no more; vessel and iceberg and the disappearing boat were buried in chaos. The whole side of the berg nearest the vessel had split off, hurling thousands and hundreds of thousands of tons of ice, and thousands of fragments, crashing down upon the doomed ship. Escape the vessel could not, nor her crew, the shock came so suddenly. The spray thrown up into the air completely hid everything from view; but the noise which came from out the gloom told the tale.

"Presently there was a loud rush. Great waves, set in motion by the crumbling iceberg, and white crests that were frightful to look upon came tearing out of the obscurity, and, perceiving the danger of my situation, I ran from it as fast as I could run. And I was just in time; for the waves broke up the ice where I had been standing into a hundred fragments, and, crack after crack opened close behind me.

(TO BE CONTINUED
NEXT SUNDAY)

