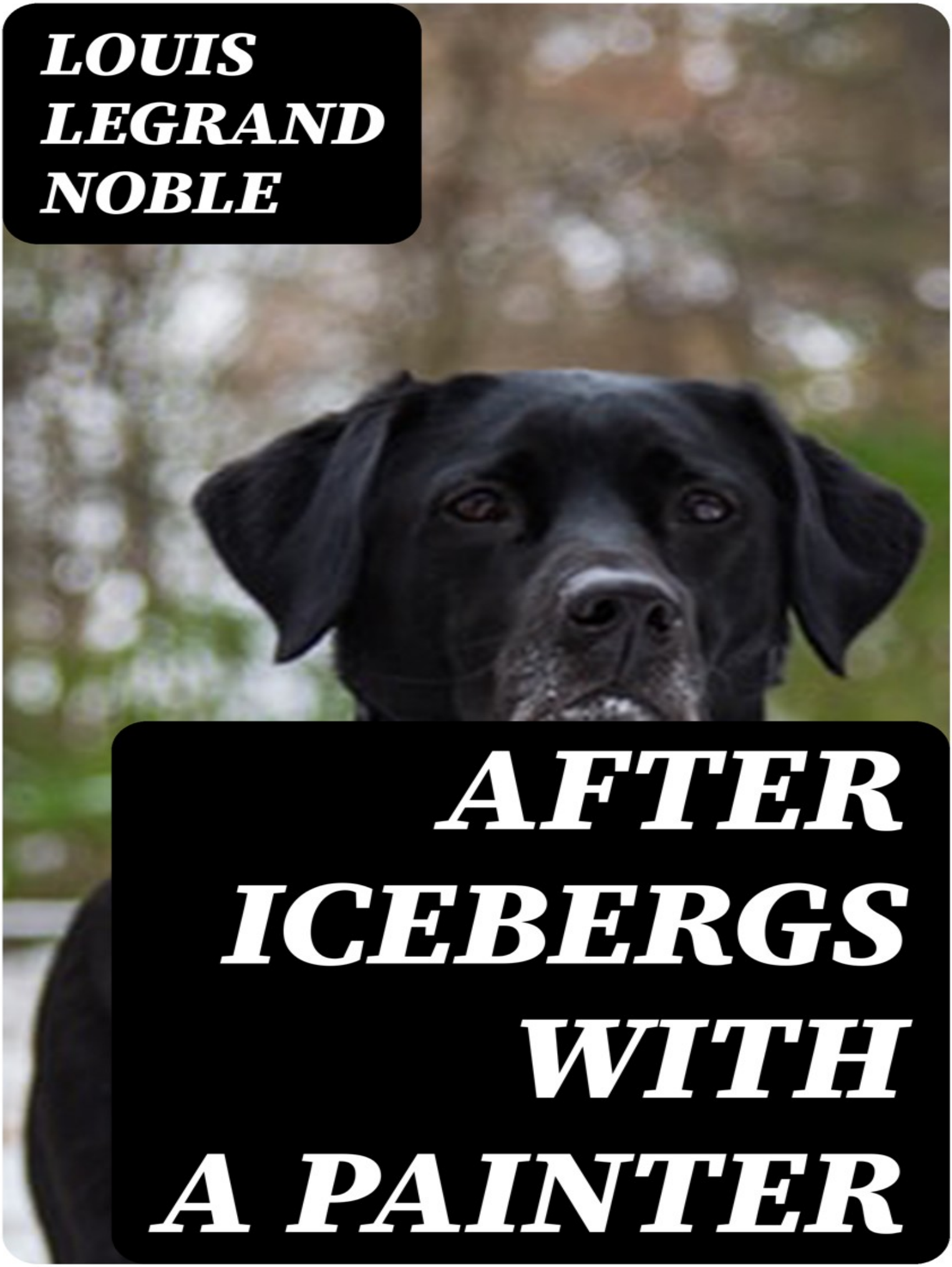
LOUIS
LEGRAND
NOBLE
AFTER
ICEBERGS
WITH
A PAINTER

Louis Legrand Noble

After Icebergs with a Painter

A Summer Voyage to Labrador and Around Newfoundland

EAN 8596547363293

DigiCat, 2022
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Table of Contents

PREFACE.

Table of Contents

The title-page alone would serve for a preface to the present volume. It is the record of a voyage, during the summer of 1859, in company with a distinguished landscape painter, along the north-eastern coast of British America, for the purpose of studying and sketching icebergs.

It was thought, at first, that the shores in the neighborhood of St. Johns, Newfoundland, upon which many bergs are often floated in, would afford all facilities. It was found, however, upon experiment, that they did not. Icebergs were too few for the requisite variety; too scattered to be reached conveniently; and too distant to be minutely examined from land. One needed to be in the midst of them, where he could command views, near or remote, of all sides of them, at all hours of the day and evening.

For that purpose a small vessel was hired to take us to Labrador. Favoring circumstances directed us to Battle Harbor, near Cape St. Louis, in the waters of which icebergs, and all facilities for sketching them, abounded.

To diversify the journey, we returned through the Gulf of St. Lawrence, coasting the west of Newfoundland, and the shores of Cape Breton, and concluding with a ride across the island, and through Nova Scotia to the Bay of Fundy.

If the writer has succeeded in picturing to his reader, with some freshness, what he saw and felt, then will the purpose of the book, made from notes pencilled rapidly, have been accomplished.

L. L. N.
Hudson, New Jersey,
March, 1861.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Table of Contents

AFTER ICEBERGS WITH A PAINTER.

CHAPTER I.

Table of Contents

COOL AND NOVEL.

“After icebergs!” exclaims a prudent, but imaginary person, as I pencil the title on the front leaf of my note-book.

“Why, after deer and trout among the Adirondack Mountains with John Cheeney, the Leather-stocking of those wilds, who kills his moose and panther with a pistol; or after salmon on the Jaques Cartier and Saguenay, is thought to be quite enough for your summer tourist.

“After buffalo is almost too much for any not at home in the great unfenced, Uncle Sam’s continental parks, where he pastures his herds, and waters them in the Platte and Colorado, and walls out the Pacific with the Rocky Mountains. He is rather a fast hunter who indulges in the chase in those fair fields. It is no boy’s play to commit yourself to mule and horse, the yawls of the prairie, riding yourself sore and thirsty over the gracefully rolling, never-breaking swells, the green seas sparkling with dewy flowers, but never coming ashore. The ocean done up in solid land is weary voyaging to one whose youthful footsteps were over the fields, to the sound of sabbath bells.

“After ostriches, with the ship of the desert, although rather a hot chase for John and Jonathan over broad sands, yellow with the sunshine of centuries, and the bird speeding on legs swift as the spokes of the rapid wheels, is, nevertheless, a pleasure enjoyed now and then.

“But after icebergs is certainly a cool, if not a novel and perilous adventure. A few climb to the ices of the Andes; but after the ices of Greenland, except by leave of government or your merchant prince, is entirely another thing.

“You will do well to recollect, that nature works in other ways in the high north than in the high Cordilleras and Alps, and especially in the latter, where she carefully slides her mer-de-glace into the warm valley, and gently melts it off, letting it run merrily and freely to the sea, every crystal fetter broken into silvery foam. But in Greenland she heaves her mile-wide glacier, in all its flinty hardness, into the great deep bodily, and sends it, both a glory and a terror, to flourish or perish as the currents of the solemn main move it to wintry or to summer climes. After icebergs! Weigh well the perils and the pleasures of this new summer hunting.”

“We have weighed them, I confess, not very carefully; only ‘hefting’ them a little, just enough to help us to a guess that both are somewhat heavier than the ordinary delights and dangers of sporting nearer home. But, Prudens, my good friend, consider the ancient saw, ‘Nothing venture nothing have.’ Not in the least weary of the old, we would yet have something new, altogether new. You shall seek the beauties of scales and of plumage, and the graces of motion and the wild music of voices, among the creatures of the brooks and woodlands. Our game, for once, is the wandering alp of the waves; our wilderness, the ocean; our steed, the winged vessel; our arms, the pencil and the pen; our game-bags, the portfolio, painting-box, and note-book, all harmless instruments, you perceive, with mild report. It is seldom that they are heard at any distance, although, at

intervals, the sound has gone out as far as the guns of the battle-field.

“Should we have the sport we anticipate, you may see the rarest specimen of our luck preserved in oil and colors, a method peculiar to those few, who intend their articles less for the market than for immortality, as men call the dim glimmering of things in the dusky reaches of the past.

“But you shall hear from us, from time to time, if possible, how we speed in our grand hunt, and how the pleasures and the risks make the scale of our experience vibrate. Within a few minutes, we shall be on our way to Boston, darting across grassy New England, regardless as the riders of the steeple-chase of cliff and gulf, fence, wall and river, with a velocity of wheels that would set the coach on fire, did not ingenuity stand over the axles putting out the flame with oil.

“This evening, we meet a choice few in one of those bowery spots of Brookline, where intelligence dwells with taste and virtue, and talk of our excursion.

“To-morrow, amid leave-takings, smiles and tears, and the waving of handkerchiefs, of which we shall be only quiet spectators, with the odor of our first sea-dinner seasoning the brief excitement of the scene, and all handsomely rounded off with the quick thunder of the parting gun, we sail, at noon, in the America.”

CHAPTER II.

Table of Contents

ON THE EDGE OF THE GULF-STREAM.

Friday Morning, June 17, 1859. Here we are on the edge of the Gulf-Stream, loitering in a fog that would seem to drape the whole Atlantic in its chilly, dismal shroud. We are as impatient as children before the drop-curtain of a country show, and in momentary expectation that this unlucky mist will rise and exhibit Halifax, where we leave the steamer, and take a small coasting-vessel for Cape Breton and Newfoundland.

As we anticipated, both of us have been sea-sick continually. I had hoped that we should have the pleasure of one dinner at least, with that good appetite so common upon coming off into the salt air. But before the soup was fairly off there came over me the old qualm, the herald of those dreadful impulses that drive the unhappy victim either to the side of the vessel, or down into its interior, where he lays himself out, pale and trembling, on his appointed shelf, and awaits in gloomy silence the final issue. It is needless to record, that, with that unlucky attempt to enjoy the luxuries of the table, perished, not only the power, but the wish to eat.

Yesterday, when I came on deck, I found C—— conversing with Agassiz. Although so familiar with the Alpine glaciers, and all that appertains to them, he had never seen an iceberg, and almost envied us the delight and excitement of hunting them. But not even the presence and the fine talk of the great naturalist could lay the spirit of sea-sickness. Like a very adder lurking under the doorstone

of appetite, it refused to hear the voice of the charmer. Out it glided, repulsive reptile! and away we stole, creeping down into our state-room, there to burrow in damp sheets, taciturn and melancholy “wretches, with thoughts concentred all in self.” An occasional remark, either sad or laughable, broke the sameness of the literally rolling hours. By what particular process of mind, I shall not trouble myself to explain, the Painter, who occupied the lower berth, all at once gave signs that he had come upon the borders of a capital story, and with the spirit to carry even a dull listener to the further side of it, and keep him thoroughly amused. It was a traveller’s tale, a story of his own first ride over the mountains of New Granada, accompanied by a friend, on his way to the Andes.

CHAPTER III.

Table of Contents

THE PAINTER’S STORY.

Twenty days, and most of them days of intense heat and sea-sickness, were spent on a brig from New York to the mouth of the Magdalena. In twenty minutes all that tedious voyage was sailed over again, and he was in the best humor possible for the next nine days in a steamboat up the river, a mighty stream, whose forests appear like hills of verdure ranging along its almost endless banks.

After the steamboat, came a tiresome time in a canoe, followed by a dark and fireless night in the great woods, where they were stung by the ants, and startled by the hootings and howlings, and all the strange voices and noises of a tropical forest.

Then the tale kept pace with the mules all day, jogging on slowly, an all-day story that pictured to the listener’s mind all the passing scenery and incidents, the people and the travellers themselves, even the ears of the self-willed, ever-curious mules. Towards sunset, the wayfarers found themselves journeying along the slope of a mountain, willing to turn in for the night at almost any dwelling that appeared at the road-side. The guide and the baggage were behind, and suggested the propriety of an early halt. But each place, to which they looked forward, seemed sufficiently repulsive, upon coming up, to make them venture on to the next. They ventured, without knowing it, beyond the very last, and got benighted where it was difficult enough in the broad day. After a weary ride up and up, until it did appear that they would never go down again

in that direction, they stopped and consulted, but finally concluded to continue on, although the darkness was almost total, trusting to the mules to keep the path. At length it was evident that they were at the top of the mountain, and passing over upon its opposite side. Very soon, the road, a mere bridle-path, became steep and rugged, leading along the edges of precipices, and down rocky, zigzag steps, that nothing but the bold, sure-footed mule would or could descend. The fact was, they were going down a fearfully dangerous mountain-road, on one of the darkest nights. And, wonderful to tell, they went down safely, coming out of the forest into a level vale beset with thickets and vine-covered trees, a horrible perplexity, in which they became heated, scratched, and vexed beyond all endurance. At last, they lost the way and came to a dead halt. Here C—— got off, and leaving the mule with F——, plunged into the bushes to feel for the path, pausing occasionally to shout and to wait for an answer. No path, however, could be found. In his discouragement, he climbed a tree with the hope of seeing a light. He climbed it to the very top, and gazed around in all directions into the wide, unbroken night. There was a star or two in the black vault, but no gleam of human dwelling to be seen below.

Extremes do indeed meet, even the dreadful and the ridiculous. And so it was with C—— in the tree-top. From almost desperation, he passed into a frolicsome mood, and began to talk and shout, at the top of his voice, in about the only Spanish he could then speak, that he would give cinco pesos, cinco pesos,—five dollars, five dollars, to any one that would come and help them. From five he rose to ten.

But being scant of Spanish, he could express the ten in no other way than by doubling the cinco—cinco cinco pesos, cinco cinco pesos. Fruitless effort! A thousand pounds would have evoked no friendly voice from the inhospitable solitude.

The airing, though, was refreshing, and he clambered down and attempted his way back, shouting as usual, but now, to his surprise, getting no reply. What could it mean? Where was F——? Had he got tired of waiting, and gone off? With redoubled energy C—— pushed on through the interminable brush to see. He was in a perfect blaze of heat, and dripping with perspiration. A thousand vines tripped him, a thousand branches whipped him in the face. When he stopped to listen, his ears rung with the beating of his own heart, and he made the night ring too with his loud hallooing. But no one answered, and no mules could be found. Nothing was left but to push forward, and he did it, with a still increasing energy. Instantly, with a crack and crash he pitched headlong down quite a high bank into a broad brook. For a moment he was frightened, but finding himself sound, and safely seated on the soft bottom of the brook, he concluded to enjoy himself, moving up and down, with the warm water nearly to his neck, till he had enough of it; when he got up, and felt his way to the opposite bank, which, unfortunately for him, was some seven or eight feet of steep, wet clay. Again and again did he crawl nearly to the top, and slip back into the water—a treadmill operation that was no joke. A successful attempt at scaling this muddy barrier was made, at length, through the kindly intervention of some vines.

But how was all that? Where was he? He never crossed a stream in going to the tree. He must be lost. He must have become turned at the tree, and gone in a wrong direction. And yet he could not relinquish the notion that all was right. He decided to continue forward, pausing more frequently to halloo. To his exceeding joy, he presently heard a faint, and no very distant reply. He quickly heard it again—close at hand—“C——, come here!—come here!” He hastened forward. F—— was sitting on the mule. He said, in a low tone of voice, “Come here, and help me off. I am very sick.” He was alarmingly sick. C—— helped him down, and laid him on the ground. The only thing to be done was to make a rough bed of the saddles and blankets, secure the mules, and wait for daylight. While engaged in this, one of the mules suddenly broke away, and with a perilous flourish of heels about C——’s head, dashed off through the thickets, and was seen no more. To crown their troubles, a ferocious kind of ant attacked them at all points, and kept up their assault during the remainder of the miserable night. They had made their bed upon a large ant-hill. In the morning, there they were, they knew not where, with but one mule, trappings for two, and F—— too indisposed to proceed. C —— mounted the mule and set off for relief. A short ride brought him out upon the path, which soon led down to the border of a wide marsh. The crossing of the marsh was terrible. The poor animal sank into the mire to the girth, reared, plunged and rolled, plastering himself and rider all over and over again with the foulest mud. When they reached the solid ground, and trotted along towards some natives coming abroad to their labor, the appearance of our

traveller, in quest of the sublime and beautiful, was certainly not imposing. He told his story to the staring Indians in the best way his ingenuity could invent, none of which they could be made to comprehend. He inquired the way to the town, the very name of which they seemed never to have heard. He asked the distance to any place,—the nearest,—no matter what. It was just as far as he was pleased to make it.

“Was it two leagues?”

“Si, Señor.”

“Was it five leagues?”

“Si, Señor.”

“Was it eight, nine, ten leagues?”

“Si, Señor.”

“For how much money would they guide him to the town?”

Ah! that was a different thing; they had more intelligence on that subject. They would guide him for a great deal. In fact, they would do it for about ten times its value. He spurred his muddy mule, galloped out of sight and hearing, more amused than vexed, and went ahead at a venture. The venture was lucky. In the course of the morning he made his entrance into the city, succeeded in finding out the residence of the person to whom he had letters of introduction, presented himself to the gentleman of the house, an American, and had both a welcome and a breakfast. Before the day was past, F—— and himself were comfortably settled, and, with their kind host, were making merry over their first ride on the mountains of South America. I am sure I was made merry at the quiet recital.

Lying as I was in my berth, rolled in cloak and blanket, and looking neither at the face nor motions of the speaker, but only at the blank beams and boards close above, I laughed till the tears ran copiously, and I forgot that I was miserable and sea-sick.

CHAPTER IV.

Table of Contents

HALIFAX.

We have now been lying for hours off Halifax. The fog appears to be in a profound slumber. Whistle, bell and big guns have no power to wake it up. The waves themselves have gone to sleep under the fleecy covering. Old Ocean lazily breathes and dreams. The top-mast, lofty and slim, marks and flourishes on the misty sky, as an idler marks the sand with his cane. Pricked on by our impatience, back and forth we step the deck, about as purposeless as leopards step their cage. They are letting off the steam. It is flowing up from the great fountains, a deep and solemn voice, a grand ventriloquism, that muffles in its breadth and fulness all the smaller sounds, as the mighty roar dampens the noisy dashings of the cataract. What a sublime translation of human skill and genius is an engine, this stupendous creature of iron! How splendid are its polished limbs! What power in all those easy motions! What execution in those still and oily manœuvres!

Among the ladies there is one of more than ordinary beauty. Luxuriant, dark hair, a fair complexion with the bloom of health, a head and neck that would attract a sculptor, and surpassingly fine, black eyes. There is a power in beauty. Why has not God given it to us all? You shall answer me that in heaven. There is indeed a power in beauty. It goes forth from this young woman on all sides, like rays from some central light. I have called her a New England girl, but she turns out to be Welsh.

How like magic is the work of this fog! Instantly almost it is pulled apart like a fleece of wool, and lo! the heavens, the ocean, and the rugged shores. A pilot comes aboard from a fishing-boat, looking as rough and craggy as if he had been, toad-like, blasted out of the rocks of his flinty country, so brown and warty is his skin, so shaggy are his beard and hair, so sail-like and tarry is his raiment. The ancient mariner for all the world! His skinny hand touches no common mortal. His glittering eye looks right on, as he moves with silent importance to the place where shine the gilded buttons of the captain.

This is a wild northern scene. Hills, bony with rock and bristling with pointed firs, slope down to the sea. But yet how beautiful is any land looking off upon the barren deeps of ocean. Distant is the city on a hill-side, glittering at a thousand points, while on either hand, as we move in at the entrance of the harbor, are the pleasant woods and the white dwellings, country steeples and cultivated grounds. As the comfortless mist rolls away, and the golden light follows after, warming the wet and chilly landscape, I feel that there are bliss and beauty in Nova Scotia.

Grandly as we parade ourselves, in the presence of the country and the town, I prefer the more modest, back-street entrance of the railroad. The fact is, I am afraid of your great steamer on the main, and for the reason given by a friend of mine: if you have a smash-up on the land, why, there you are; if, on the sea, where are you?

I have been talking with the fair lady of Wales. She was all spirit. “There was much,” she said, “that was fine, in America; but Wales was most beautiful of all. Had I ever

been in Wales?” One could well have felt sorry he was not then on his way to Wales. We parted where we met, probably to meet no more, and I went forward to gaze upon the crowded wharf, which we were then approaching. A few hasty adieus to some newly-formed acquaintances, and we passed ashore to seek the steamer for Cape Breton. It was waiting for us just behind the storehouse where we landed, and soon followed the America with a speed not exactly in proportion to the noise and effort.

CHAPTER V.

Table of Contents

THE MERLIN.

Be it known that the Merlin, the name in which our vessel delights, is a small propeller, with a screw wheel, and a crazy mess of machinery in the middle, which go far towards making one deaf and dumb by day, but very wakeful and talkative by night; so thoroughly are the rumbling, thumping and clanking disseminated through all those parts appointed for the passengers. The Merlin has not only her peculiar noises, but her own peculiar ways and motions; motions half wallowing and half progressive; a compound motion very difficult to describe, at the time, mainly on account of a disagreeable confusion in the brain and stomach.

The arrangements in the Merlin for going to repose are better than those for quitting it. No chestnut lies more snugly in the burr than your passenger in his berth. If he happen to be short and slender, it is sure to fit him all the better. But when he gets out of it, he is pushed forward into company immediately, and washes in the one bowl, and looks at the one glass. On board the Merlin, one feels disposed to give the harshest words of his vocabulary a frequent airing. He sees how it is, and he says to himself: I have the secret of this Merlin; she is intended to put a stop to travel; to hinder people from leaving Halifax for Sydney and St. Johns. Wait you eight and forty hours after this ungenerous soliloquy, and speak out then. What do you say? The Merlin is the thing!

Away in this dusky corner of the world Peril spins her web. High and wide and deep she stretches her subtle lines: cliffs, reefs and banks, ice, currents, mists and winds. But the Merlin is no moth, no feeble insect to get entangled in this terrible snare. Dark-winged dragonfly of the sea, she cuts right through them all. Your grand ocean steamer, with commander of repute, plays the tragic actress quite too frequently in the presence of these dread capes. But the Merlin, with Captain Sampson's tread upon the deck, in the night and in the light, with his look ahead and his eye aloft, and his plummet in the deep sea, trips along her billowy path as lightly as a lady trips among her flowers. A blessing upon Captain Sampson who sails the little Merlin from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland. He deserves to sail an Adriatic.

Here we are again in that same bad fog, that smothered much of our pleasure, and some of our good luck, in the America. It is gloomy midnight, and the sea is up. A pale, blue flame crowns the smoke-stack, and sheds a dreary light upon the sooty, brown sails. The breeze plays its wild music in the tight rigging, while the swells beat the bass on the hollow bow. To a landsman, how frightfully the Merlin rolls! But we are dashing along through this awful wilderness, right steadily. Every hour carries us ten miles nearer port. Ye wandering barks, on this dark, uncertain highway, do hear the mournful clang of our bell, and turn out in time as the law of nature directs! Ye patient, watchful mariners that keep the look-out forward, pierce the black mist with your keen sight, and spy the iceberg, that white sepulchre of the careless sailor. Just here there is a mountain in the deep, and we are crossing its summit, which accounts for the

sharp, rough sea, the captain tells me. The vessel now turns into the wind, the loose sails roar and crack, and bound in their strong harness, like frightened horses; loud voices cut through the uproar, rapid footsteps thump, and rattling ropes lash the deck. Then there is a momentary lull: they heave the lead. The mountain top is under us, say, five hundred feet. All is right. Captain Sampson puts off into wider waters, and I, chilly and damp, creep into my berth, full of hope and sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

Table of Contents

SYDNEY.—CAPE BRETON.—THE OCEAN.

Monday, June 19, 1859. We are still rising and sinking on the misty ocean, and somewhere on those great currents flowing from the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Yesterday, at an early hour, we were entering Sydney Harbor, Cape Breton, with a tide from sea, and a flood of brightness from the sun. The lively waters, the grassy fields dotted with white dwellings, and the dark green woodlands were bathed in splendor. A few clouds, that might have floated away from the cotton-fields of Alabama, kept Sunday in the quiet heavens. We went ashore with some thought of attending church, but found the time would not permit. A short walk to some Indian huts, with the smoke curling up from their peaks like the pictures of volcanoes, a cup of tea of our own making, some toast and fresh eggs in the village tavern, with the comfort of sitting to enjoy them at a steady table on firm land, gave an agreeable seasoning to the hour we lingered in Sydney, and braced us for the long stretch across to Newfoundland.

As you enter Sydney Bay, you see northward some remarkable cliffs, fan-like in shape as they rise from the sea. In the clear and brilliant morning air, they had a roseate and almost flame-like hue, which made them appear very beautiful. I thought of them as some gigantic sea-shells placed upon the brim of the blue main. When they set in the waves, along in the afternoon, the picturesque coast of Cape Breton was lost to view, and we became, to all appearance, a fixture in the centre of the circle made by the

sky and the sea. How wearisome it grew! Always moving forward,—yet never getting further from the line behind,—never getting nearer to the line before,—ever in the centre of the circle. The azure dome was over us, its pearl-colored eaves all around us. Oh! that some power would lift its edge, all dripping with the brine of centuries, out of the ocean, and let the eye peep under! But all is changeless. We were under the centre of the dome, and on the hub of the great wheel, run out upon its long spokes as rapidly and persistently as we would. Our stiff ship was dashing, breast-deep, through the green and purple banks that old Neptune heaved up across our path. Bank after bank he rolled up before us, and our strong bows burst them all, striking foam, snowy foam, out of them by day, and liquid jewelry out of them by night. The circle was still around us, the tip of the dome above. We were leaving half a world of things, and approaching half a world of things, and yet we were that same fixture. Our brave motions, after all, turned out to be a kind of writhing on a point, in the middle of the mighty ring, under the key-stone of the marvellous vault. The comfort of the weary time was, that we sailed away from the morning, passed under the noon, and came up with, and cut through the evening.

When we caught up with the evening yesterday, and saw the sun set fire to, and burn off that everlasting ring, we were sitting quietly on deck, touched with the sweet solemnities of the hallowed hour. The night, with all that it would bring us, was coming out of the east, moving up its stupendous shadow over the ocean; the day, with all it had been to us, was leaving us, going off into the west over the