

a dark expanse of water to the S.S.E., and at 3.45 we steered through the last ice-floes out into open water.*

WE WERE FREE! Behind us lay three years of work and hardships, with their burden of sad thought during the long nights, before us life and reunion with all those who were dear to us. Just a few more days! A chaos of contending feelings came over each and every one. For some time it seemed as if we could hardly realize what we saw, as if the deep blue, lapping water at the bow were an illusion, a dream. We were still a good way above the eightieth degree of latitude, and it is only in very favorable summers that ice-free water stretches so far north. Were we, perhaps, in a large, open pool? Had we still a great belt of ice to clear?

No, it was real! The free, unbounded sea was around us on every side; and we felt, with a sense of rapture, how the *Fram* gently pitched with the first feeble swells.

We paid the final honors to our vanquished antagonist by firing a thundering salute as a farewell. One more gaze at the last faint outlines of hummocks and floes, and the mist concealed them from our view.

We now shaped our course by the compass S.S.E., as the fog was still so dense that no observation could be taken. Our plan was at first to steer towards Red Bay, get our landfall, and thence to follow the west coast of Spitzbergen southward till we found a suitable anchoring-place, where we could take in water, shift the coal from the hold into the bunkers, and, in fact, make the *Fram* quite ship-shape for our homeward trip.

At 7 A.M., when the fog lifted slightly, we sighted a sail on to port, and shaped our course for her, in order to speak to her and try to get some news of Dr. Nansen and Johansen. In an hour or so we were quite near her. She was lying to, and did not seem to have sighted us until we were close on her. The mate then ran down to announce that a monster ship was bearing down upon them in the fog. Soon the deck was crowded with

* Twenty-eight days' work of forcing this more or less closely packed ice had brought us a distance of 180 miles.