

Nevertheless, nothing is so full of peril to the navigator as these dazzling islands, these fields of ice.

He must have a heart of brass, says Malte-Brun, who dares to penetrate into the inhospitable seas of the pole ; for if the navigator has nought to apprehend from cyclone or tempest, he incurs other dangers which are far more capable of terrifying the most adventurous spirits. Sometimes enormous blocks of ice, loosed by the waters and driven by the winds, dash against his feeble vessel ; neither rock nor shoal is so difficult to shun. Sometimes these floating mountains perfidiously surround the voyager, and block up every issue : his ship is arrested, is fixed. In vain, with powerless hatchet, he seeks to hew a path through the gigantic mass ; in vain his flapping sails invite the breeze. His vessel is, as it were, wedged and welded into the ice ; and the mariner, separated from the world of the living, remains alone with Nothingness.

When the *ice-master* catches sight of an ice-field coming down from the recesses of the north, the ship must set all her canvas to avoid a certain destruction. The rapidity of movement of these colossal masses is, in fact, prodigious. They may sometimes be seen rotating on their own axis at the rate of several miles an hour.

The shock of two ice-fields dashing one against another surpasses all that the imagination can conceive or invent. Figure to yourself the effect of a mass of eighteen millions of tons abruptly arrested in its career ! If two masses of equal dimensions encounter with equal swiftness, from an opposite direction, what must become of a frail bark involved in the fearful collision ! Thus each succeeding year sees multiplied, in the circumpolar seas, these sad disasters, and vessels perish by scores.

I have seen a ship, says Dr. Scoresby, crushed between two meeting walls of ice, and instantaneously annihilated in their formidable shock : only the summit of her mainmast remained erect above the floating tomb, like a funereal signal. Another was reared erect on its poop, like a startled horse. Two other noble three-masters have, in my very sight, been pierced through and through by keen blocks of ice upwards of one hundred feet in length.

In ill-omened Melville Bay more than two hundred ships have already perished in this manner.

The ice-mountains are often almost immovable. In such a case they provide the whalers with a convenient mooring-place if the winds are violent or contrary, if stability is necessary for a proper prosecution of the fishery, or if they seek shelter from the icebergs which drift downwards in the storm-vexed currents. It is dangerous, nevertheless, to moor beneath very lofty mountains of ice, for often their equilibrium is so unstable that the touch of a finger will make them tremble. If they encounter any obstacle when floating upon