

# FINDING THE POLE.....BY JULES VERNE



THE TIME FOR LEAVING CAME. THE DOGS WERE HARNESSSED, THE SCANTY SUPPLIES PACKED. THE MARCH WAS STARTED FOR THE SHIP PORPOISE, 400 MILES AWAY.

"Stanow was impatient to be off, and first the 22nd of February for starting. The sledge and the boat were packed as closely as possible with provisions and spirits and made out a word that sounded like Porpoise. Stopping over him he asked:

"Is it the Porpoise?"

Interesting News.

Altamont made a sign in the affirmative, and Hatteras went on with his queries, now that he had found a clue.

"In these seas?"

The affirmative gesture was repeated.

"Is she in the north?"

"Yes."

"Do you know her position?"

"Yes."

"Exactly?"

"Yes."

For a minute or so nothing more was said, and the onlookers waited with palpitating hearts.

Then Hatteras spoke again.

"Listen to me. We must know the exact position of our vessel. I will count the degrees aloud, and you will stop me when I come to the right one."

The American assented by a motion of the head, as Hatteras began: "We'll take the longitude first. One hundred and five degrees. No? 106 degrees, 107 degrees? It is to the west, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Altamont.

"Let us go on then: 109 degrees, 110 degrees, 112 degrees, 114 degrees, 116 degrees, 118 degrees, 120 degrees. 121 degrees?"

"Yes," interrupted the sick man.

"One hundred and twenty degrees of longitude, and how many minutes?"

"I will count."

Hatteras began at No. 1, and when he got to 15 Altamont made a sign to stop.

"Very good," said Hatteras; "now for the latitude. Are you listening? Eighty degrees, 81 degrees, 82 degrees, 83 degrees."

Again the sign to stop was made.

"Now for the minutes: Five minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes, 20 minutes, 25 minutes, 30 minutes, 35 minutes."

Altamont stopped him once more, and smiled feebly.

"You say, then, that the Porpoise is in longitude 120 degrees 15 minutes, and latitude 53 degrees and 35 minutes?"

"Yes," smiled the American, and fell back motionless in the doctor's arms, completely overpowered by the effort he had made.

"Friends!" exclaimed Hatteras,

"You see I was right. Our salvation lies, indeed, in the north, always in the north. We shall be saved!"

But the joyous, exulting words had hardly escaped his lips before a sudden thought made his countenance change.

The serpent of jealousy had stung him, for his stranger was an American, and he had reached three degrees nearer the pole than the ill-fated Forward.

By further patient questioning after a rest, the doctor soon ascertained that the Porpoise was a three-masted American ship, from New York, wrecked on the ice, with provisions and combustibles in abundance on board.

Altamont and his crew had left her two months previously, taking the long boat with them on a sledge. They intended to get to Smiths sound and reach some whaler that would take them back to America, but one after another succumbed to fatigue and illness, till only Altamont remained alive.

"Why had the Porpoise come so far north?" Hatteras asked.

"She was irresistibly driven there by the ice," Altamont replied, feebly.

Hatteras looked grim but he said nothing more.

"Well," said the doctor, "it strikes me that, instead of trying to get to Baffins bay our best plan would be to go in search of the Porpoise. It's a third nearer, and stocked with everything necessary for winter quarters."

Start for the Wreck.

"I see no other course open to us," replied Hatteras.

"If we start tomorrow," said the doctor, "we must reach the Porpoise by the fifteenth of March, unless we mean to die of starvation."

No time was lost in getting ready to start. A couch was laid on the sledge for the American. The provisions did not add much weight, and the wood was piled up on top.

The doctor calculated with three-quarter rations to each man and full rations to the dogs, they might hold out for three weeks.

By three in the afternoon everything was ready for the start.

It was almost dark, for though the sun had reappeared above the horizon since the 31st of January, its light was feeble and of short duration. The moon would rise about half past six.

The days wore on. Progress was slow. Blinding snow storms held them back. Moreover, the men, in spite of their iron will, began to show signs of fatigue. Halts became more frequent, and yet every hour was precious, for the provisions were rapidly coming to an end.

On the 14th of March, after 16 days' march, the little party found themselves only yet in the eighty-second latitude. Their strength was exhausted, and they had a hundred miles more to go. Rations had to be still further reduced. Each man must be content with a fourth part to allow the dogs their full quantity.

Worst of all, there were only seven charges of powder left and six balls.

The Last Meal.

A little game was shot, but quickly devoured. The weary men could hardly drag themselves along by now. The dogs had begun to gnaw their traces.

Their last meal, on the Sunday evening, was a very sad one—unless help came their doom was sealed. The next morning Johnson saw a bear of huge dimensions. The old sailor took it into his head that heaven had sent this bear specially for him to kill, and without waking his comrades, he seized the doctor's gun and was soon in pursuit.

On reaching the right distance he took aim, but just as his finger touched the trigger he felt his arm tremble. His thick gloves hampered him, he threw them off. But what a cry of agony escaped him! The skin of his fingers stuck to the gun as if it had been red hot, and he was forced to let it drop. The sudden fall made it go off, and the ball was discharged in the air. It was the last bullet.

Dr. Clawbonny came out and saw what had happened. He dragged the poor fellow into the tent, where he made him plunge his hands into a bowl of water. Johnson's hands had hardly touched it before it froze immediately.

"You are just in time; I should have had to amputate soon," said the doctor.

(To Be Continued.)

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