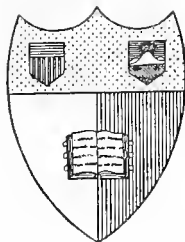


A DASH AT THE POLE



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A
Dash at the Pole

By

William Lyon Phelps, R.F.D.

Champion Pole Vaulter

Ehrenmitglied des Ananias-Klubes

Knight of the Order of the Midnight Sons

Membre de l'Institut de Gall

Illustrations by

John Goss



Boston

The Ball Publishing Company

1909

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The Stetson Press, Boston

This book is affectionately dedicated
to the members of the New Haven
Choral Union, who, if they did not
believe my story, had the grace to
conceal their emotions

A Few Press Notices

“Away, away, good William de la Pole!”

— HENRY VI., Part I

“Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole.”

— HAMLET

“Over the Pole thy thickest mantle throw.”

— MILTON


“Spread the truth from Pole to Pole.”

— ADDISON

“Paradise and the Peary.”

— MOORE

Preface

OME of the more vital extracts from this narrative were first laid before the New Haven Choral Union in my annual President's Report to that august body. I felt it to be only fair that, while I was besieged by heckling reporters, the Choral Union should be the first organization to get the galley-proofs of my great discovery. For the sole reason why I had been elected President was the reasonable desire of this Musical Society to have a presiding officer whose loud annual reports should remind them of the Lyre.

W. L. P.

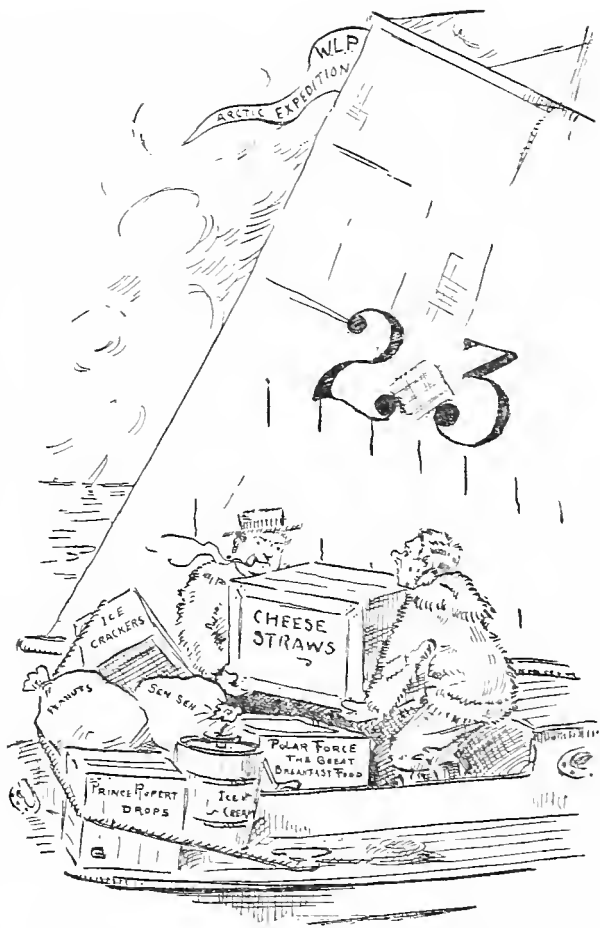
Yale College, Halloween, 1909.



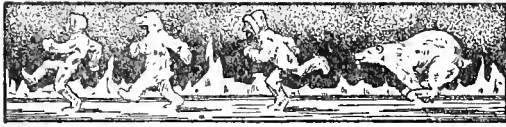
Early preparation — a walk in the Arctics



A course of reading on high latitudes



"I packed everything in one fell swoop"



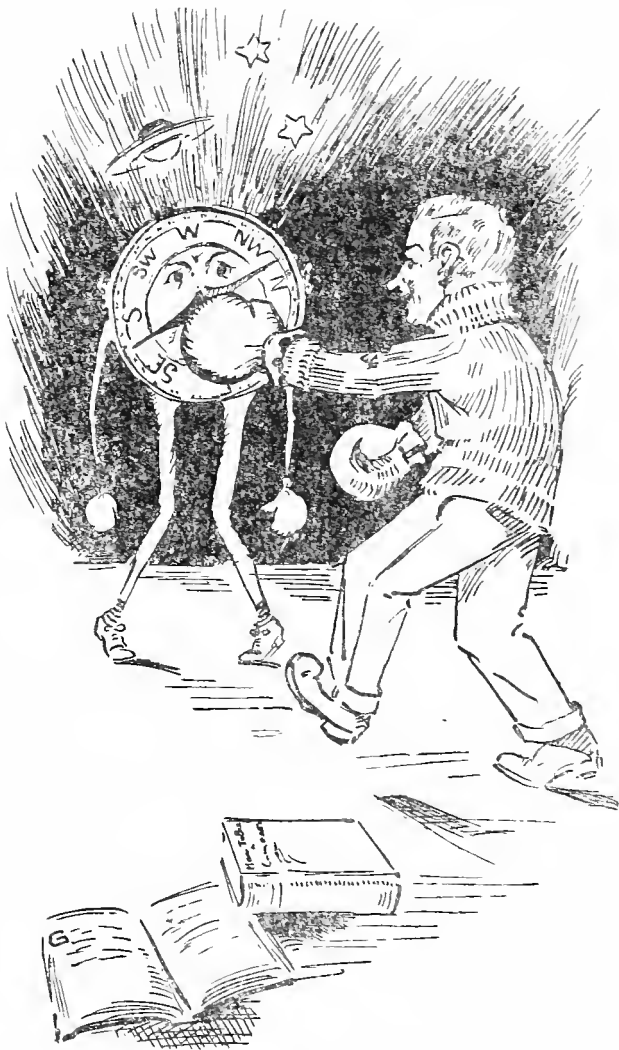
A Dash at the Pole

CHAPTER I

Early Preparations

Icebergs, Sunset, October, 1909

DURING all my life I had felt in my bones that I should some day discover the pole. This assurance was especially strong in slushy winter weather, when I had taken many a walk in the arctics, which seemed to belong to me; and the



Boxing the compass

A Dash at the Pole

arctics, instead of terrifying me, gave me confidence in myself, and enabled me to keep my feet, even on the most slippery ice. Physically I was always fit; even in my undergraduate days at Yale, when I came out for a contest, everyone gave me a "Why" in athletics. Then, I was absolutely familiar with the use of the necessary instruments; my great bodily strength caused me to box the compass, and returning to my rooms after midnight, I had frequently observed the artificial

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horizon. With a thermometer under my tongue and an adenoid barometer in my nose, I could always ascertain progress. The altitude of the sun had sometimes bothered me, but I determined to make my final dash in the dark; hence this matter occasioned no serious annoyance. Books about high latitudes, such as "Stepping Heavenward," I had read and re-read.



A Dash at the Pole

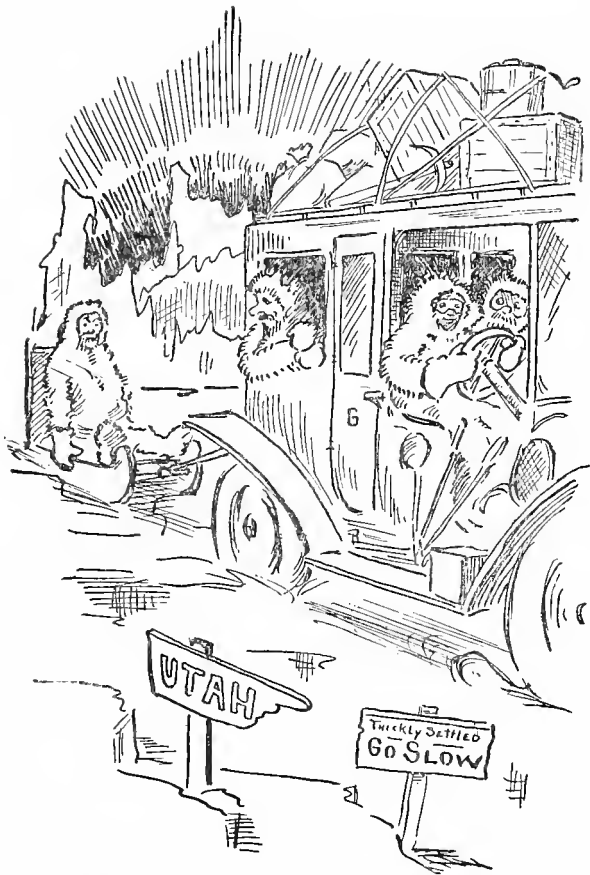
CHAPTER II

Water and Gasoline

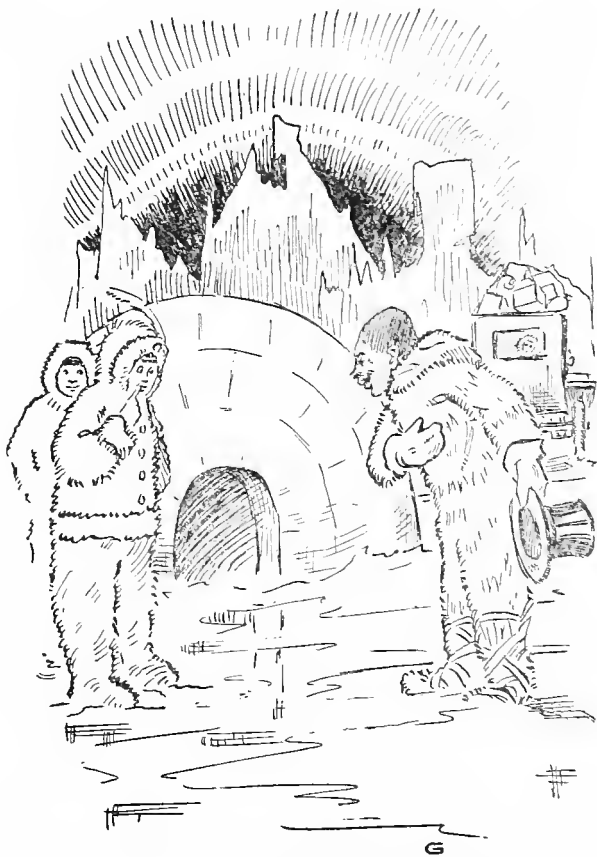
I INSISTED on making the journey from North America to Greenland by water. Accordingly I packed everything in one fell sloop, and got away from Hoboken in a spanking breeze. We came very near being caught on Sandy Hook; the only incident in the

A Dash at the Pole

voyage worth recording. The crew were very stupid; the mate would do nothing until I gave him a check; even the engine was a donkey. Arriving in Southwestern Greenland, I took a large six-cylindered listerine for Utah. I was constantly delayed by my sentimental negro chauffeur, who insisted on making formal calls on the Eskimo ladies, dressed in a sack suit, which also served as a sleeping-bag, and a silk hat, which he called his sparking plug. For my part, I could not



“I took a large six-cylindere listerine for Utah”



My chauffeur with his sparking-plug in hand

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see the necessity of these calls. I got along perfectly by merely giving the natives Prince Rupert Drops, which were invariably received with a pleasant retort. Finally on this automobile trip we struck an exceedingly bad and rough road, and what with the rattling in front, and the rumble behind, the chauffeur became so rattled that he lost his head. We threw his trunk overboard, thus greatly reducing our waits.



“Giving the natives Prince Rupert Drops”



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CHAPTER III

Big Game

NOW we made steady progress. Soon we saw our first Aurora. This gladdened us all, for we knew that Aurora was not far from Buffalo, and that we should have plenty of game. Sure enough, game abounded. We saw not only Buffalo, but Moosehead, Elkhart,



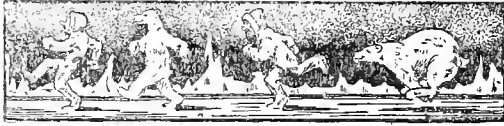
“We struck an exceedingly bad and rough road”

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Phoenix, Pigeon, Anaconda, Shel-drake, and many other beasts and birds. I had most fortunately just before leaving home read the Book of Proverbs, and I found it a comparatively easy task to get these animals with the Maxims. When we came within sight of Utah, my guide left me, but insisted on receiving, in addition to the stipulated sum, a large gratuity. As he acted like a perfect bear, I finally gave him a big silvertip.



Giving the guide a big silver tip



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CHAPTER IV

The Estuary

WHEN we came within sight of Utah, as mentioned above, our automobile was temporarily stopped by a little bay, or estuary, on the other side of which we could plainly see the lights of the town. Even on this side there was a small settlement, to which the

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Eskimos gave a name that sounded like Saliva: it was on the extreme point of a spit of land. As we were wondering how we should cross this bay, which had a mean width of only a mile, we saw a large, full-rigged barque just leaving the dock. This made me sick, and I threw up signals of distress. The captain of the barque was playing a con game in the steering tower, and neither saw the rocket nor heard the racket that I produced; but the cook, who was climbing up the

A Dash at the Pole

companion-way with a covered pot of pemmican, perceived us at once. In his excitement he dropped the pot bottom-side up in the binnacle, where it stuck fast. He shouted to the captain, who sprang to the deck, put the ship about, and ran her prow deep into the bank where we stood. The check on this bank was so big that everybody on deck fell overboard. We picked them up with the search-light, and found that no one had suffered, except the boatswain, who

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had a finger cut off. We called all hands together, and easily healed him with digitalis.



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CHAPTER V

Fire and Food

THERE was a large deposit of sand in the bank where we were stuck.

The captain was singularly apathetic, saying he had no interest in the bank anyway, and that we must wait for the tide to float us. I was intensely indignant, and determined to have him cash-

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iered. While we were waiting, we became hungry, and called for the cook. He found the galley full of pie — a typical case. We felt it necessary to have something hot, and the galley being impossible, we were at a loss, until we found that the starboard bulkhead was stove: we accordingly lit a fire there. The cook bending down to blow on the kindling wood, the hair on the back of his neck became ignited; he was particularly hot under the collar, and used language that

A Dash at the Pole

seemed to me adequate to the situation. He might have lost his life; but, with rare presence of mind, the fourth officer rolled up his trousers and turned the hose on him, a regular sockdolager. This enraged the cook; and he seemed thoroughly put out. Now the question was, *what to eat?* I caught a large fish with a boat-hook; and with the scales on his back, we found he weighed four pounds. The captain said he was worth eighty shillings. The fish seemed quite ill, and lay gasping

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on the deck; we sent for the sturgeon, I mean the surgeon, for we felt that the fish must be cured. He at once began to work, kindly but firmly; but some of the minor scales flew into his eye, causing him excruciating agony. No one knew what to do; but at this moment a beam from the sinking moon fell across the ship. With a united effort we tipped the beam, and the scales fell from his eyes. Suddenly the cook be-thought him of the pemmican, which was in the closed pot,

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tightly imbedded in the binnacle. How should we get it out? We called the engineer, who took the deck, and at once opened the pot with a pair of jacks.



A part of my outfit



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CHAPTER VI

The Shiptwreck

THE tide rose; and the barque floated majestically. Soon we weighed the anchor; it was about twelve ounces. We felt thoroughly unstrung, so the captain gave each of us a rope's end; and we had made perhaps four knots when the forward watch — an old re-

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peater from New York — called out “Breakers Ahead!” On the starboard side we could hear nothing; but we had a list to port, and there the awful sound of the surf could be distinctly heard. The helm was jammed, so nothing could be done. It seemed impossible that we could be shipwrecked in so small an estuary; but the captain said that severe storms were frequent here, and that the barque was even worse than the bight. So, indeed, it proved; and we prepared for

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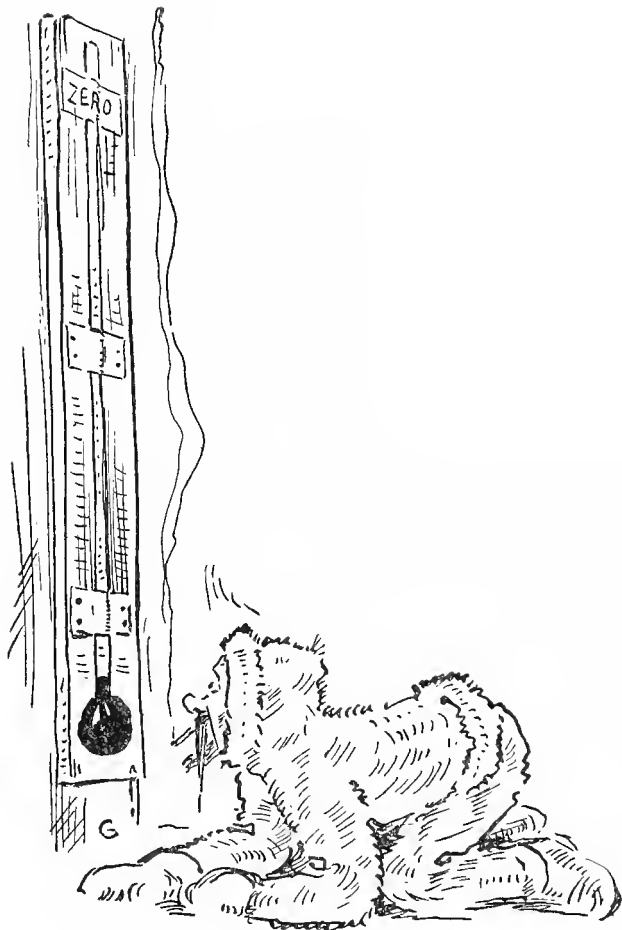
death by getting into the shrouds. In ten minutes, or perhaps eleven, we were all wildly struggling in the raging water, and the barque had gone to the bottom. I could clearly hear one of her bilge keels scrape on the rocky bed far below.



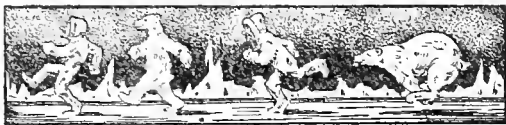
— Wotsdematter —



"Cutitout"



Below foreign-height



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CHAPTER VII

The Escape

HERE is where my long practice in boxing the compass stood me in good stead. I knew the meaning of the word *spar*. Seizing one with a sharp left-hand hook, by repeated short-arm jabs with my right, by constant ducking and clever foot-work, I reached the

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shore. But I was alone. Every one of my companions had perished miserably. All that I could hear was the melancholy boom of the mainsail, as it flapped on the phosphorescent sea. And I was very wet.

After some hours I was dry, but fortunately found a spring, which made me leap for joy. Looking about me, I saw that I was only half a mile from Utah. The night was dark, but the stars were magnificent; those who are out late in the Boston Subway, or in

A Dash at the Pole

a Colorado silver mine can obtain only an imperfect conception of the Arctic heavens. The signs of the zodiac made the sky look like the great white way. Even with the naked eye I could realize the splendour of the night. I put on eye-glasses, and felt the spectacle to be superb. With this artificial aid I was able to discard my sea-boots, and I walked ahead about six feet in my stockings, when I stepped on a tack. This was too much, after all my sufferings; for I felt the iron enter



Blacksmiths with their sledges — for hammering purposes

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into my sole. I drew it out, and dejectedly limped into Utah.



Making a musk-ox



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CHAPTER VIII

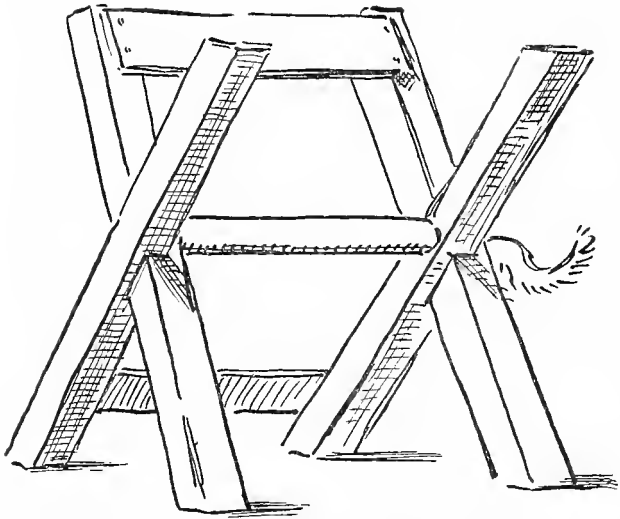
Final Preparations

I ARRIVED at Utah before dawn, and found it a poverty-stricken country; for the moon had just risen with its last quarter. Seeing that no winter-quarters were to be had here, I boldly determined to start at once for the pole. My final and complete out-

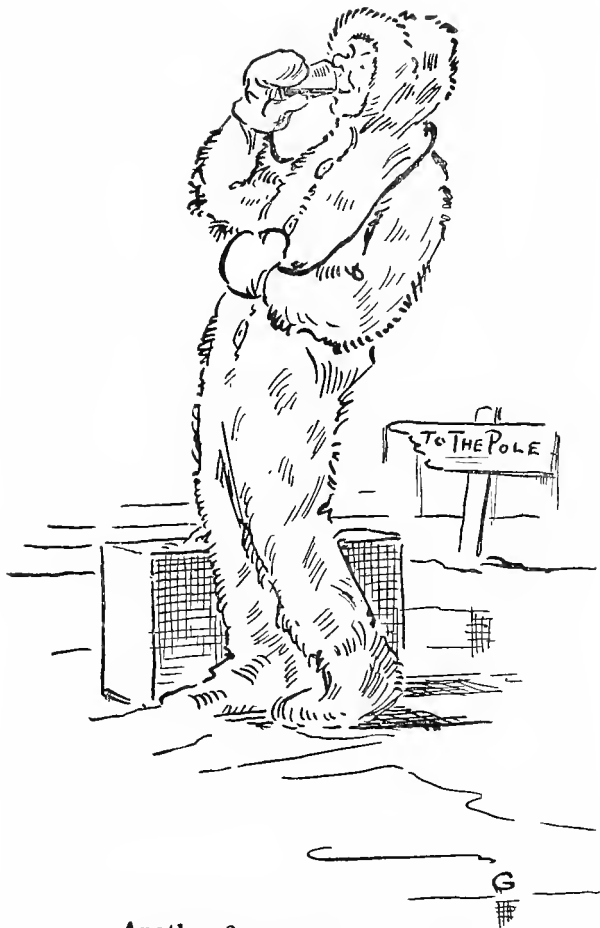
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fit was as follows: one stout saw-horse, one stiff pony of brandy (whose hairs I later found in my throat), three blacksmiths with their sledges, one ring containing a large seal, a good supply of furze, one common or garden ox, thickly sprinkled with musk to deceive the natives in the long Arctic night, and a big pike. I had all the food thoroughly pickereled, so that at times it was impossible to tell whether it was flesh or fowl.

Just as I was despairing of fur-



A fiery steed—also indicative of a determination
to saw wood



Another fiery steed — branded



Collecting blubber for provision

A Dash at the Pole

ther provisions, a boy came along and began to blubber. With the exception of the smiths with their sledges—they made Smith Sound — I was accompanied (their stomachs were frequently out of tune) by two Eskimos and one Narwhal. I asked the Narwhal his name, and he replied, “My name is Narwhal; on the Gram-pian Hills my father feeds his flocks.” I took him along, thinking he might not return. The names of the two Eskimos were Wotsdematter and Cutitout.



My companions



“The Eskimos crossed easily”

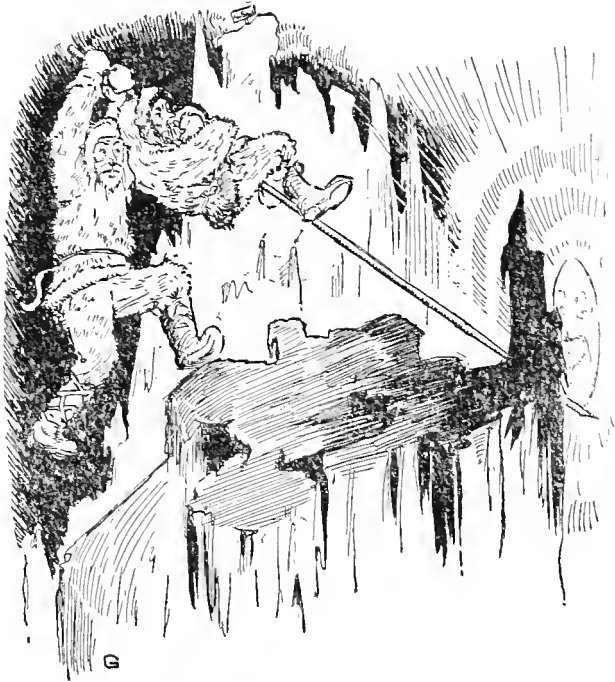


A Dash at the Pole

CHAPTER IX

The Start

WE started about midnight, having in vain tried to get a rise out of the sun. The temperature was much below foreign-height. Everything went well until we reached latitude '87. We encountered some leads and observed *en passant* that the flow of



Trying to get a rise out of the sun

A Dash at the Pole

water seemed considerably faster than the floe of ice. We crossed these leads lightly and gracefully, as the pony of brandy was water-tight. To be sure, the three blacksmiths, heavily weighted with their sledges, were drowned. I regretted this, as I had intended feeding the Narwhal with one of the sledges. The Eskimos crossed easily, as they wore claw-hammer coats and long finger-nails, thus giving them a strong hold, and at the same time providing the neces-

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sary implements to fasten the flag to the pole.



A Dash at the Pole

CHAPTER X

The Dash

AT latitude '87 I made my final dash, consisting of a few parenthetical remarks on the weather. Previous explorers had used bird-dogs, and then, when pressed by famine, had fed the short-haired dogs to the long-haired ones. I had once tried this myself but had no relish



The final dash, consisting of a few parenthetical remarks

A Dash at the Pole

for it. It consumes too much time. Every morning you have to get the setters together, and then give them a few pointers. I greatly preferred my hearty little span, the saw-horse and the pony. When I looked at them hitched and ready to start my heart thrilled with pride, as I realized that the pole was in sight. The splendid lines of old Isaac Watts came into my mind, and I shouted aloud:

“Were I so tall to reach the pole,
Or grasp the ocean with my span,
I must be measured by my soul.
The mind’s the standard of the man!”



Feeding the long-haired dogs to the short-haired ones



A Dash at the Pole

CHAPTER XI

The Pole



HITCHED the span to a new buck-bored wagon, cutting off the tongue so that I might be the first to announce my discovery. Ten miles had swiftly flown by, when the pony, thinking that the saw-horse was a sea-horse, tried to eat him. The saw-horse natu-



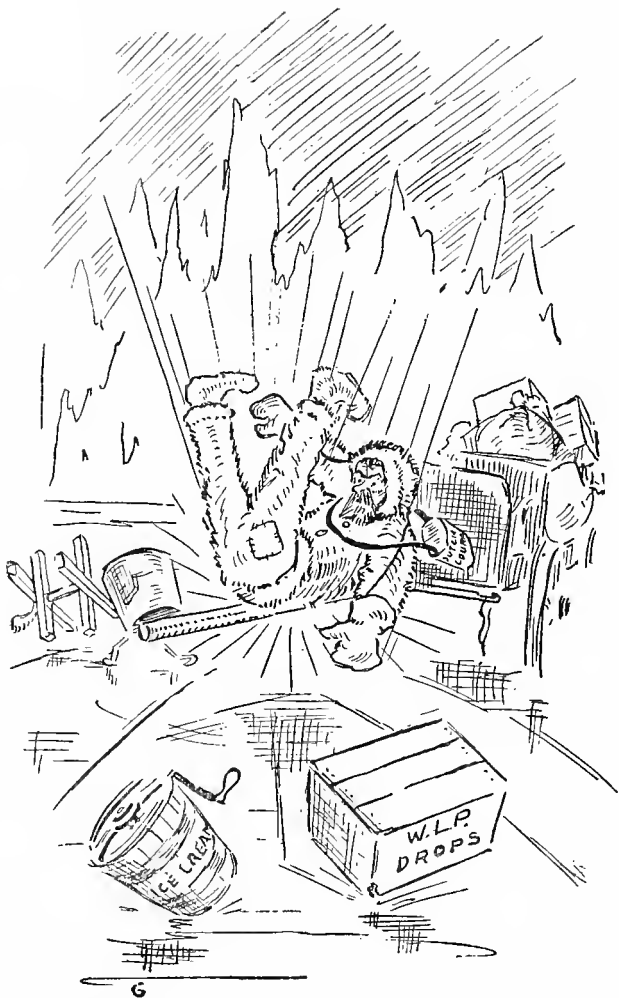
Cutting of the tongue so that I should be first to announce my discovery

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rally resented this, and the team, already frightened by the narrowness of the meridian lines, and by the spectacle of a large Waterman penguin, became unmanageable. The two Eskimos were thrown out and were immediately devoured by polar bears, who, seeing their long beards, took them for arctic hairs, esteemed a great delicacy by these animals. I was pitched high in the air, and landed on the small of my back, thus discovering not only the pole, but the



The span is frightened by the narrowness of the
meridian lines



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whiffletree. At this moment my right ascension was about ten seconds. My declination, so far as any future attempts are concerned, was final and absolute.

Please note that in all of the following views of the pole, an observation taken from any angle gives the same result—Absolutely 0.

View taken at the pole looking North

NOTE.—The operator forgot to open the slide.

**View taken at the pole by Wotsdematter
looking East**

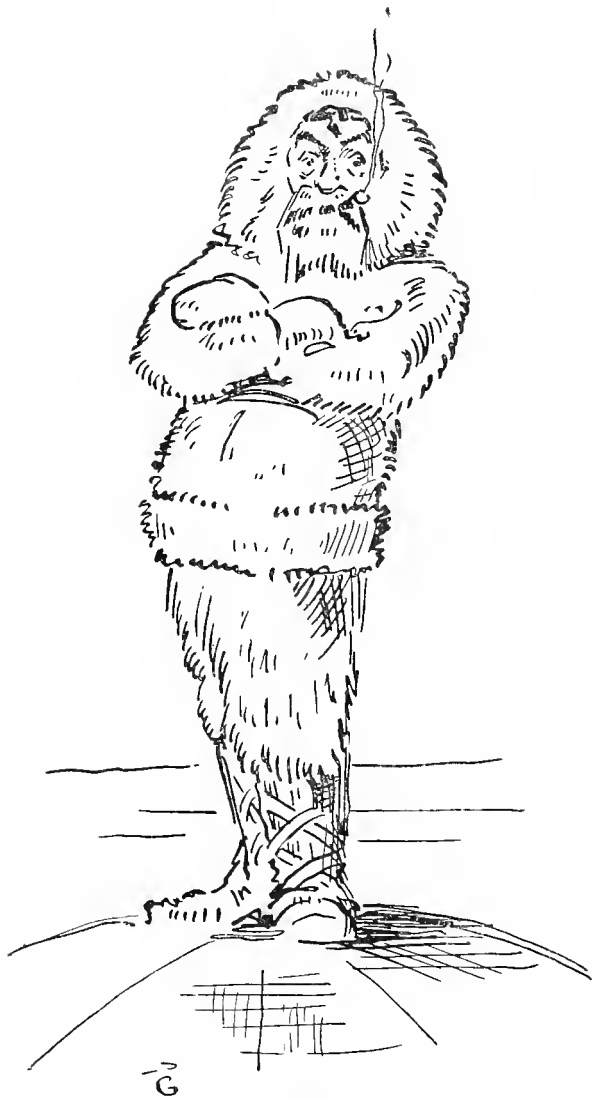
NOTE.— Owing to the inexperience of Wotsdematter
the results are not as satisfactory as might be.

View taken at the pole looking South

NOTE.—The absence of the igloo ordinarily seen in polar views is explained by the fact that the photographer was standing on it when the picture was taken.

View taken at the pole looking West

NOTE.—Those possessing clairvoyant powers may see things here that they have never seen before.



J' y suis

