

THE LAND OF ICE AND SNOW.

BY MRS. CLARK MURRAY.



REPARING for the winter !

What is it to the Canadian in his land of ice and snow? When the summer is over and the harvest is home, in town and country it is no idle word.

The farm-people see to the shelter and the fodder for their cattle, the well and the wood-pile for their kitchen. There is wool to spin, and weave, and knit; there are tubs of butter to pack; flocks of poultry to kill and pluck; and great sacks of grain to have in readiness for the market when the snow comes.

The town housewife puts on her double windows, plastering up every crack and crevice, and taxes her ingenuity in her endeavours to checkmate the plumber in his architectural attacks upon her water and gas pipes. Her cellar is packed to the ceiling with coal, hard anthracite, with little smoke for the pipes and flues of her stoves; whilst large wood sawn and split to kindle the coal, and smaller wood to light the larger, must find their way to their respective bins in the economy of her domicile. The wardrobe of her household is overhauled, repaired, and replenished. Furs are turned out, and an account with the ravages of moths is settled. Then the knitting! There are socks, over-stockings, sashes, mittens, clouds, tuques, hoods, and endless supplies of soft becoming wraps for fair forms in evening attire—part of the nimble nothings which fill up the spare moments of a woman's life. The *cloud*, is a scarf, knitted loosely of fine wool, and generally of bright warm colours, worn by women and children to protect the neck and ears in mild weather—say with the thermometer above zero—and gathered over cheeks and nose when the mercury falls below that point. The *tuque* is the typical French Canadian head-gear for men and boys, being neither more nor less than an old-fashioned night-cap decorated by a tassel. Among the *habitants*, however, it has long been supplanted by a more modern, though much less comfortable-looking cap of fur, and the rage for antiquity has now promoted it into one of the most fashionable necessities of winter costume.

But the preparations for the winter are not confined to the farm and the home. Shopkeepers and tradesmen have their own anxieties about their stores and their contracts; the street cars run on wheels by daily sufferance; railways have their snow-ploughs at hand; and the steam and sailing craft from river and lake have been safely docked. Freight sheds and parapet railings are removed from wharves, and the harbours of Quebec and Montreal are the scene of many a hurryscurry among ocean ships, lest on some unwary night there should be a sudden "dip" in the thermometer, which would leave them in the ice fast bound for six months, with the ultimate result of crushing them to atoms.

An abundance of early snow is always welcomed as

a softener of many of the winter's hardships. It forms a blanket to the earth, protecting the autumn seeds from the severe frost. With it the farmer covers over his root-house, and banks up the foundations of his cellars and barns. It converts newly-made and rough roads into smooth highways, enabling him to send to market on a sleigh a much heavier load than wheels can carry. It very often makes altogether new roads for him, and more direct, regardless of river and fence obstacles, and cutting off long and weary windings. It gives a start to the winter trade over the whole country, as the autumn importations do not begin to move until a brisk demand is created by well-supplied markets. Indeed, out or in doors, for business or for pleasure, there is no sort of comfort till there is plenty of snow.

The tinkle of the first sleigh-bell sends a quick pulsation through all Canadian life. The children of the rich buy new sleds, and the children of the poor mend up their old ones. Boys get their snow-shoes, and girls their skates; young men their tabogans, and young women their costumes. Their fathers, in the russet time of life, look in at the curling rink to arrange their matches; and even grandmamma experiences a keener pleasure in anticipating the enjoyment of a breath of the sharp frosty air, wrapped in furs and gliding over the snow under the bluest and sunniest of skies.

A heavy storm is a wind-fall to an army of idlers, masters of no trade, though not Jacks of all, who start on their rounds with a large wooden shovel and a broom, passing up and down the streets, ringing door-bells, in search of a clearing. The children turn out clad in blanket-coats, bright-coloured sashes and tuques, and long over-stockings. They dig and sweep the lovely snow, or toss it up in the air; they build forts, with whole arsenals of white cannon-balls; or, on their little sleds, make a long and merry line down some sloping foot-path, steering themselves in a wonderful manner out and in among each other, and among the few pedestrians who are bold enough to risk themselves in such dangerous quarters. When the dinner-bell calls them, it is for a very temporary recess. Picking up their sleds and shovels, and making trysts for immediate return, they stamp their feet, brush their coats and stockings in the portico, and go dancing in to their mother, who, as she looks at their smiling rosy faces and listens to their merry chatter, fills and re-fills the plates, and, with mingled joy and dismay, beholds the result of her whole morning's work disappear in a very few minutes.

Skating is an accomplishment acquired in Canada more by nature than by art. Long practice enables the street Arabs to be quite at home on skates even on the roughest surface, but good ice has come to be an essential for more refined enjoyment. This is secured in all ordinary weather, by a large space on a river or lake kept quite clear of snow; and on a bright after-

noon thousands of people take advantage of the exhilarating exercise procurable in this way. For the more fastidious, however, especially in large towns where the investment may be profitable, rinks have become permanent institutions.

But skating does not monopolise the Canadian's relaxation. *Snow-shoeing* comes in for a large share of it. Almost every young man is a member of a Snow-shoe Club, whose principal entertainment is derived from wandering in the stillness of the evening away out of town and up over the hills, heedless of fence or other obstacle, and resting at some wayside inn for supper. The *shoe* is a light frame of wood about three feet in length and twelve inches in width at the centre, rounded and curling upwards a little in front, and tapering to a point at the back. This frame is filled in by a network of gut, leaving a space vacant for the free use of the toes when the heel is lifted. When not in use the shoes are slung across the back. In walking they are fastened to the feet—or, rather, the feet are lashed to the shoes—by narrow bands of buckskin, which, while making the connection quite sure, leave perfect freedom of action. Some practice is necessary to enable one to get along on such foot-gear, even on firm, level ground; and when the difficulties are increased by soft, undulating drifts of snow, ludicrous failures are excusable in first lessons.

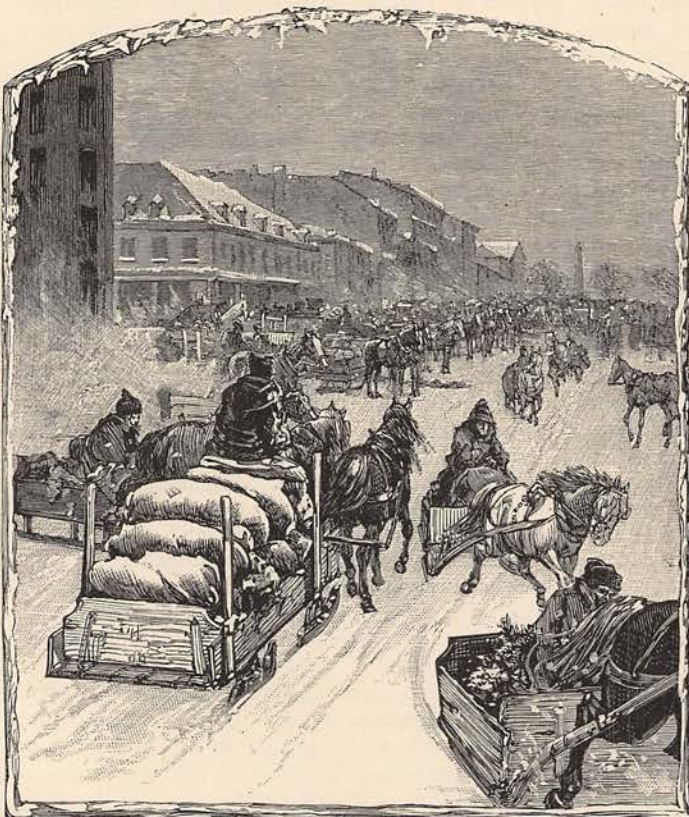
The dress for this sport consists of knee-breeches, and double-breasted coat of white blanket stuff, the coat having a hood or capuchin, which is drawn over the head in cold or stormy tramps. Bands of tasteful colour run round the coat, sleeve, and capuchin, and a sash similarly decorated is worn round the waist. Long stockings and tuque to match, with warm mittens and a soft shoe of buckskin called a *moccasin*, complete what is, generally speaking, a becoming costume, but which is a questionable acquisition to a figure to whom Nature has dealt with niggardly hand, or, rather, on whom ignorance and art have done their best to thwart Nature in her development of full and graceful proportion.

Each club has its own colours for decoration, and the most punctilious etiquette is observed in wearing them.

During Carnival week in Montreal, these snow-shoers form a prominent feature in every scene. At the storming of the ice palace, all the clubs—French and English—are present in full force. Squads are told off for the attack, and others are quartered inside for the defence. Attack and defence are conducted by fireworks, and when the palace is at length surrendered, the entire army strap on their snow-shoes, light their torches, and start, Indian file, for a tramp through the city and over the snow-clad mountains

beyond, returning down the gulleys with their torches blazing among the trees, and icicles hanging from their beards. On the occasion of the arrival in Canada of H.R.H. the Princess Louise, one of Montreal's decorations was an arch of evergreen thrown across the street and literally *manned* by snow-shoers—several hundreds of them being adroitly perched upon it from abutment to keystone. Athletic sports of all sorts are indulged in, and the winter drill of the volunteer force of the Dominion is incomplete without practice in the expert use of the snow-shoe.

Canadian ladies are fond of this exercise, and seldom allow themselves to be beaten in the strapping of a shoe, or the climbing of a snow-drift. In order to gratify their taste, snow-shoe parties are fashionable. A moonlight evening is chosen; invitations are sent out by a chaperon, and the party starts from her house. The ladies wear deep coats, sashes, capuchins, tuques, and moccasins, all of the same material as the gentlemen's, but more fancifully coloured. The deeper the snow, the more enjoyable the walk. On and on, amidst chatter and laughter, over drifts and pitfalls, stumbling and scrambling, the qualities of the



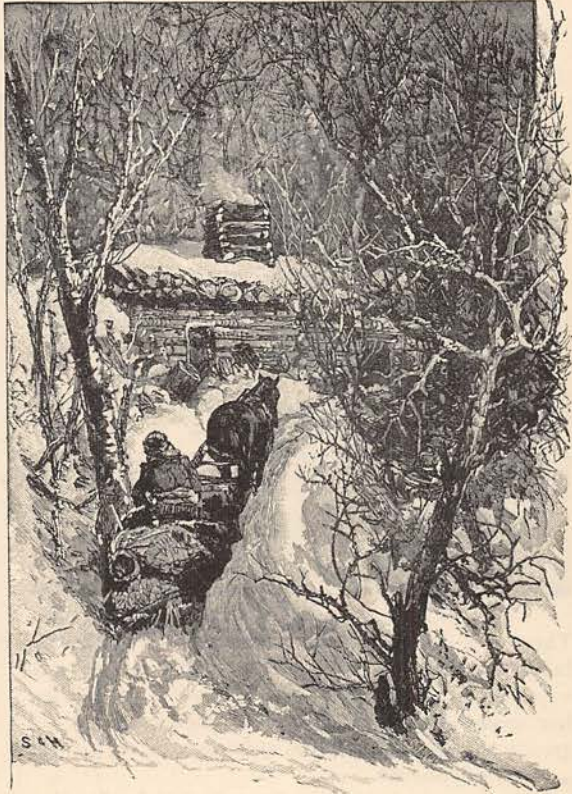
A CANADIAN WINTER—IN TOWN.

shoes are tested until a halt is called. Seats are made on a bank of the dry snow, and the rest is welcome to all. The moon lights up the scene, and casts shadows from the distant town over the sparkling snow; and the stillness is broken only by the merry voices of the party, whose footprints are the sole signs of life around. The bare, brown trees are softened and clothed with snow, which, like glistening moss, has lighted and clung, and nestled and piled itself on every twig and nook and cranny. But the cold is a persistent reminder that the rest, however enchanting, must be short, and sharpened appetites suggest a return and a thought of the supper which is waiting on the hospitable tables of the hostess.

In the Old Land most of us have seen a stream of schoolboys "keep the mill turning" when frost and a little snow permitted them to slide down a sloping hill or street, each boy seated on a short piece of board or a vagrant barrel-stave. The Canadians have refined and elaborated the barrel-stave into the *tabogan*, and when Nature gives them no hill they make one. A steeply-sloping and very strong erection is put up, with a broad landing at the top. This is called the *chute* (fall), and the slide is continued from the foot of this along a gentler descent, gradually slackening off into the level fields beyond. A course of this sort is somewhat costly, being artificially made of snow every winter, and requiring daily sweeping and repair. The expense is usually met by a club with annual subscriptions, and as tabogganing is the most popular (perhaps because the most dangerous) of all the Canadian sports, an energetic club with a well-kept slide may enlist over a thousand members at £1 apiece. The clubs are courteous to each other, and exchange hospitalities in the shape of invitations for an evening's sliding, when every tabogganner wears on his breast the membership badge of his own club; and as each member is privileged to take with him as many ladies as his tabogan can seat, and as the dress both for ladies and gentlemen is the same as the snow-shoer's, these evenings are often sparkling with gaiety and fashion.

The tabogan is made of very strong, light wood, cut in thin, narrow strips running lengthwise, which are securely fastened by nails to bars running crosswise, these cross-bars being on the upper side in order to leave an uninterruptedly smooth surface below. The front is turned up and rounded backwards; a strong rod for the hands runs from end to end on each side of the flat strips; and the whole thing is comfortably cushioned. The manufacture of tabogans and snow-shoes forms the principal occupation of the Canadian Indian tribes.

Day after day, night after night, for about four months, these slides are alive with people. Young gentlemen, young ladies, and children, whole families, father and mother sometimes included, may be seen dressed in full costume, dragging tabogans behind



A CANADIAN WINTER—IN THE COUNTRY.

them along the streets and up those chutes. It is the duty of the steersman to seat his guests as wisely as possible, with compactness and security, reserving the heaviest weight for the centre; and at the word "Ready," he springs on at the rear, and by a swinging motion of one foot guides the descent. The more passengers the greater the momentum, and a steep chute not only gives a terrific force to the start, but prolongs the pleasure away over the fields. Sometimes a *leap* is put into the course, which throws the tabogan off the snow into the air for a few seconds, but such frightful accidents have resulted from this that sliders are gaining wisdom to dispense with it.

Though physically the Canadian winter is one of almost uninterrupted sunshine, metaphorically the picture has its shadows. In family life the discomforts, hardships, and dangers of the intense and long-continued cold present many perplexities to the house-keeper, and increase to a very serious extent the cost of living; whilst, in trade, the cessation of all river and canal traffic, with the idle capital involved, the duplicate vehicles of every description required, the occasional blocking up of railways by snow, are obstacles to the more rapid development of the country. Nevertheless, the cold is healthful enough to a sound constitution with an occupation permitting regular exercise and earning an abundance of good food, fuel, and clothing. Though even to such the out-door sports are not merely an amusement—they are a necessity.