



PUT IN THE SNOW.

THE winter of 1863-4 will be remembered in North America for its fierce storms. In almost every instance these storms arose suddenly, came from the north-west, raged furiously for about three days, and were followed by pleasant winter weather.

The autumn of 1863 was unusually pleasant. Onward till near the end of December the plough, unhindered by frost or snow, pursued its work on the prairies and along the shores of Lake Huron. To the great delight of pleasure-seekers, a slight fall of snow afforded in some places tolerable sleighing for Christmas. Thursday of the following week was so warm that men wrought outdoor work in their shirt-sleeves. Towards midnight, as the old year was passing into the new, a heavy storm of rain came on from the south, accompanied with a strong wind. As day broke the wind veered to the west, and the rain became sleet. As day advanced sleet gave place to finest snow, and the wind kept moving round to north-west, and growing in violence and in coldness, till on Saturday, the second day of the year, the storm culminated in one of the most frightful tempests ever experienced in North America. The wind for three days raged with unceasing violence. The temperature at times sunk to some twenty-eight degrees below zero. The snow was so fine that it penetrated wherever air found admission.

So sudden was the storm, that thousands were totally unprepared for it. Travellers were snowed up in wayside inns for several days, families overtaken without a proper supply of firewood were forced to keep to their beds as the

only chance of escaping being frozen, and many more than can ever be known were frozen to death. On the Saturday three inquests were held in the city of Toronto, and some four in the city of Hamilton, on persons that thus died. €

Two young men, Masse and Proulx, on snow-shoes, and accompanied by a sleigh drawn by two dogs, left Rat Island, in the northern part of Lake Huron, to proceed on the ice to the great Manitoulin. Though New Year's Day was such a day as Indians never travel on, these men continued their journey. So strangely did the wind sweep the frozen and level surface of the lake, that one could see throughout the day only a few yards ahead. The travellers, as might be expected, soon lost their course, and, turning round gradually to the left, walked at length back upon their own track. They wandered about among the islands for some time. Lighting on a hay-stack, they made a hole in it, where they slept for that night.

The next day, Saturday, which was as stormy as the preceding one, they started on their journey with snow-shoes, dogs, and sleigh. They wandered about on that day and on Sunday, which was as stormy as either of the preceding days. During Sunday night poor Masse is supposed to have died. On Monday it cleared up, though the cold was still intense. Proulx, leaving his fellow-traveller dead, started in the morning for Rat Island. He walked a few hundred yards, then retraced his steps to where his companion lay. He started again in the same direction, at this time creeping on hands and feet over the ice and snow, and succeeded in approaching within one hundred yards of Rat Island, when his strength gave way, and he lay down to die on the ice. Here he

was found not long afterwards, some parts of the body being still warm, by an Indian. The track was followed, and the dead body of Masse was soon discovered. One of the dogs was frozen to death, and partially eaten by the other dog, which was found alive, but quite savage, so that none could go near him.

A terrible episode in connection with the storm on Saturday occurred during the night, in a house just outside the northern boundary of the city of Chicago. A poor woman whose husband was killed in the American war lived there with her two boys, one aged five years and the other aged two. The woman went into the city on Saturday to make purchases, leaving her two little boys at home. About four o'clock in the afternoon she was met by a policeman, who, knowing her, and perceiving that she was under the influence of liquor, advised her to go home. Promising to do so, she started off in that direction. Late in the evening, however, she was found in the street, insensible from cold and intoxication. She was taken in by some benevolent individual, and cared for during the whole of that terrible night.

Towards daylight on Sunday she recovered sufficiently to be able, in company with her preserver, to return home. When they both reached the humble dwelling, about seven o'clock, they found it full of smoke. On the floor lay the youngest child in a heap of snow, and frozen stiff. The eldest boy lay on the bed: he, too, was dead, but not then quite cold. During the night the storm must have blown the door open. The younger boy, suffering from cold, had probably risen to close it, or to seek warmth at the black and cold fireplace. Overpowered by the frost, he died without rousing his brother. When the elder brother awoke he found the room filled with snow, and his little brother dead. Perishing with cold, he closed the door,

and built a fire against the side of a trunk that stood near, and lay down benumbed. The fire had kindled and burned a hole in the trunk, another in the floor, and had also set a portion of the bed-clothes on fire. The mother and the stranger arrived in time to save the house, but too late to save life. The anguish of the mother, on finding her two boys dead through her sin and neglect, is said to have been very great.

On Friday the train on the Michigan Central Railroad, when within six miles of Chicago, plunged into an immense drift which lay across its path. For a time the powerful locomotive urged its way through the huge bank, scattering the snow as a ship parts the foam. It came, however, at last to a stand. From that spot it could neither advance nor retreat. The train thus buried in the drift had *on board*, as the Americans express it, about a hundred passengers, many of them women and children. Running short of fuel for the stoves, with which the American cars are furnished in winter, some of the men, leaping out, dug up the pine boards of the neighbouring fences, and piled the wood on until one of the cars took fire. The fire was overcome, but the car was no longer tenable, and all the passengers were crowded into the remaining one.

After eight hours of suffering and anxiety, the hopes of the passengers were revived by the shrill whistle of another Chicago train, whose track crossed the line of the Michigan Central, about four hundred yards from the spot where the cars had stuck fast. The conductor of this train kindly offered to take the passengers of the Michigan Central into the city. The four hundred yards between the two trains were filled up with a drift ten feet in depth. To make the passage was a work of danger and difficulty. The storm was then at its height, and the frost so intense that the faces of the women and children were frozen white as soon as they came in

contact with the wind. "Scarcely any one," it is said, "made the passage from one train to the other without being badly frost-bitten."

The Michigan Southern train, with two hundred passengers now on board, after proceeding some two or three miles, encountered an immense drift. After repeated attempts to penetrate it, the train got fast, and the engine in a short time was frozen up. Night was coming on, and all hope of assistance or escape was abandoned.

At length three brave fellows started for Chicago on foot, a distance of about four miles. The hotels, railroad offices, and livery stables, sent out several sleighs, but two only, laden with provisions, found their way to their destination. The sleighs, in returning to Chicago, lost their way, and the men were obliged to go before the horses, to break the road for them. After wandering for some hours, they took shelter in the house of a hospitable German, and in the morning discovered that they were just one-half mile from the cars. The passengers, with the help of the provisions and blankets sent from the city, passed the night in tolerable comfort. Early on Saturday morning the line was cleared by the snow-plough, and the cars were brought into the city. Many of the passengers got severe frost-bites, but fortunately no life was lost.

To this great storm succeeded fine winter weather, until the middle of January, when another storm, of less violence, however, swept over the country. On one of the Ohio railways the express train, consisting of five passenger-cars filled, and a sleeping-car containing some thirty people, got fast in a huge snow-drift. The passengers were dozing away their time, and fretting, as people do in these circumstances, when another train of cars came dashing on, sending its engine right through the sleeping-car, crushing

it to atoms, and breaking badly the two cars next it. In an instant the *débris* of the broken cars took fire, and before anything could be done three passenger coaches were in a blaze. So sudden and fierce was the fire that it was impossible to remove all the wounded. The two foremost cars were full of suffocation when the flames reached them. Their inmates escaped by dashing through doors and windows; but, fleeing from the flames, they leaped into danger almost equally great.

Since early morning the thermometer had been falling with terrible rapidity, and the cold was now very intense and the wind pitiless. The heat of the cars, before the accident took place, had caused many to lay aside their furs and warm clothing: they had not time to resume these when they found themselves shivering in the penetrating cold. It happened providentially, however, that houses were near. To these the wounded were conveyed, and there the women and children found hospitable entertainment. Had it not been for this, a few hours of that intense cold would have left none to tell the tale of their disaster.

After another interval of fine weather a third storm began on the 15th day of February. The wind was not so high as in the January storms, but the cold was more intense. On the morning of the 16th the thermometer stood, in a neighbouring town, thirty degrees below zero. The writer happened to get caught in this storm. Professional duties called him away from home for a week. Starting on Monday, he seemed to think that in the bright sky and clear full moon there was promise of a week of good weather. Monday night set in wildly. It continued to snow and blow and drift on Tuesday, but he managed to get over some twenty miles of heavy untoward travelling, over a hill-road just beginning to close up badly with deep drifts. As he set out from the hotel on Wednesday the host expressed grave doubts

regarding the prudence of the step. He knew his way, however, and, trusting to the shelter of one of the highest hill ranges in Upper Canada, along whose base the road for the most part ran, he set out in the piercing morning frost and amid blinding drift. He had, however, calculated rightly.

The road soon struck in between the overhanging rocks and the shore line of Lake Huron, and was completely sheltered from the storm that raged on the uplands, rendering travelling all but impossible there. For some twenty-five miles the road was thus sheltered. It was indeed a privilege to travel over such ground in such weather. At no very distant period the waters of the lake had bathed the feet of these limestone cliffs. Retiring gradually, as is still the action of our great American lakes, a narrow belt has been left between the modern and the ancient shore. Along this belt, now wide, then narrow, ran the road, sometimes skirting the base of the rocks, and anon trenching closely on the pebbly beach. A thick growth of swamp cedar had sprung up on the ground abandoned by the lake, and amid this jungle the solitude was deep and impressive. The road was heavy till a cavalcade of teamsters, with goods for the country merchants, was met and passed. After that the horse bowled along lightly to the jingling of the merry sleigh-bells. A roadside inn afforded very opportunely the usual "entertainment to man and beast," and some twenty-five miles of the journey were got over pleasantly.

About four in the afternoon, however, the shelter of the overhanging cliffs was lost, as the road emerged on the open plain. Along this plain the westerly wind swept unchecked, with tremendous violence. Entering the town where the road turned to the right, a few minutes were spent in warming hands and feet at the bar-room stove of one of the hotels. Here information was given that the

roads were blocked up, and that it would be highly unwise to venture on them. Business was very urgent, the horse steady, trusty, and hardy, and the *rig* light. An attempt must be made.

Seven miles of the road were got over with considerable difficulty. One mile yet remained; but it seemed a desperate undertaking to face it. Up the side of the hill that had given such kindly shelter during the day lay this mile, and across it lay wreath after wreath of deep drift, like the great billows of some angry sea. Into the first of these the horse plunged, and, after hard struggling, he gained solid ground on the other side. Another and another wreath was passed in the same manner, and quite half the distance made.

Then came a wall of snow some six feet high. The horse, shying, refused to take this drift. Whip and voice were put in requisition, and, with the faithfulness characteristic of the noble animal, he went at the task, though he knew well it was hopeless. Repeated plunges, and deeper and still deeper snow, and then the poor brute, unable to proceed, lay down in the drift with a heavy groan.

There was no possibility of backing or turning. The only alternative lay in breaking the path before the horse. Onwards, for a weary half-mile, this had to be done. The quiet, sagacious animal waited patiently till it saw the way fairly broken, and then, unbidden, it moved steadily on, laying its feet in its master's footprints. The cold was intense—between 20° and 30° below zero—and all the labour of moving through the heavy drift was insufficient to impart warmth to the frame. The feet and hands were slowly losing feeling and power. The reader who has never been out in one of these relentless storms can have no conception of the feeling of helplessness, similar to that felt in contending with fire or water, that is induced by them. Shelter was reached, however, just in time.