

Blizzards.

By S. BLAIR McBEATH.

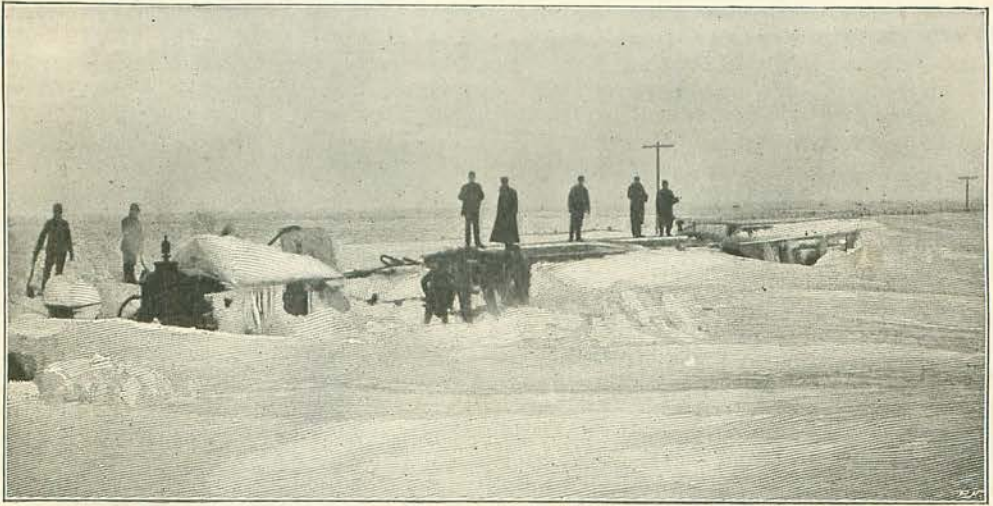


LIZZARDS have been aptly described as "mad, rushing combinations of wind and snow, which neither man nor beast could face." In less brilliant language, they are gales or hurricanes accompanied by intense cold, and dry, driving snow. Their favourite play-ground is the north-western part of the United States, particularly the States of North and South Dakota, which, during recent years, have had bitter reasons for remembering the icy touch of the Storm King.

trating passenger traffic and stalling great trains for many foodless days, burdened and paralyzed the land.

But the Westerners have learned by bitter experience how to handle the blizzards. Huge ploughs have been constructed to cut through the drifts for the relief of buried towns and snow-bound travellers.

The effects of a blizzard can be realized from our opening illustration of an almost buried train near Groton, South Dakota. The picture does not portray the fearful fury of a blizzard, or the blinding, bewilder-



From a Photo. by]

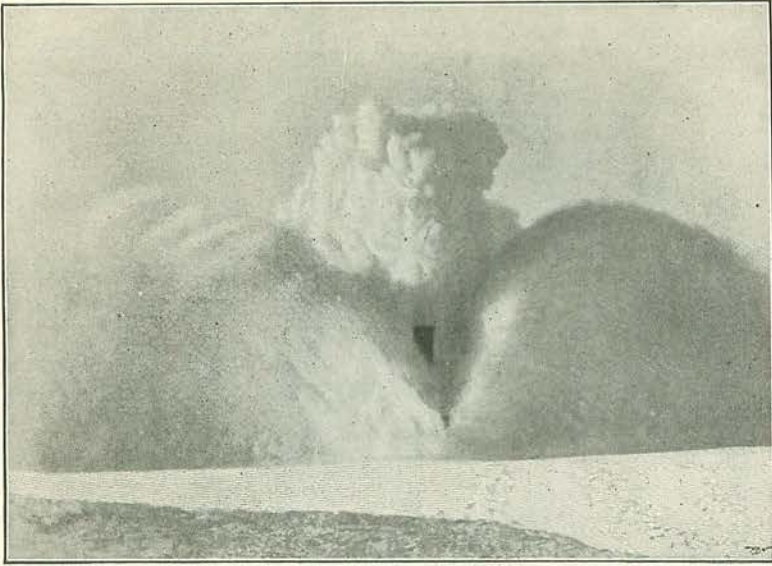
TRAIN STOPPED BY A BLIZZARD.

[H. Steinhauer, Groton, South Dakota.

The blizzards come almost without warning and leave suffering in their wake. In January, 1888, a fearful blizzard swept the west from Dakota to Texas, the thermometer in some places falling from 74deg. above zero to 24deg. below it, and in Dakota dropping 40deg. below. The weather was fine and clear, when suddenly the sky darkened, and was filled with snow and ice as thin and fine as dust or flour, driven in front of so furious a wind that the human voice could not be heard six feet away. Farmers were caught in the fields and frozen to death; children on their way from schools, unable to breathe in the fierce wind, were suffocated; and titanic snow-drifts, pros-

ing density of the snow, but it gives an idea of the *quantity* of snow that falls during a blizzard. And now, having gotten into this plight, the next question is how to get out of it. It becomes a serious question, this being stalled on the prairie, perhaps twenty miles from anywhere, and a train-load of passengers and nothing to eat and nowhere to procure provisions.

Mostly all locomotives are provided during the winter season with a snow plough, as shown in the illustration at the bottom of the next page. This kind of plough is worked successfully by returning down the cleared track for about a mile, then opening the throttle, and under a full head of steam, back comes



AFTER A BLIZZARD—LOCOMOTIVE CUTTING THROUGH A SNOW-DRIFT.
From a Photo. by H. Steinhauer, Groton, South Dakota.

the locomotive at top speed and takes a header into the drift. The remarkable photo. shown at the top of this page shows the locomotive just at the precise moment the drift is struck. Pictorially the effect is quite

occurs, and the locomotive cannot cleave a passage, then recourse must be had to man and the shovel, a slow process at best, provided there is not a very lengthy drift to pierce. Should the drift prove a lengthy one,

artistic. The glimpse of the smoke-stack of the locomotive belching forth steam suggests the quivering shock of the impact of the iron monster we cannot see, and, with the dainty semblance of the outstretched pinions of a startled bird, the snow gracefully yields to the violent onset.

Occasionally, however, the snow is successful in resisting the header of the locomotive, as we see in the accompanying photograph. When this



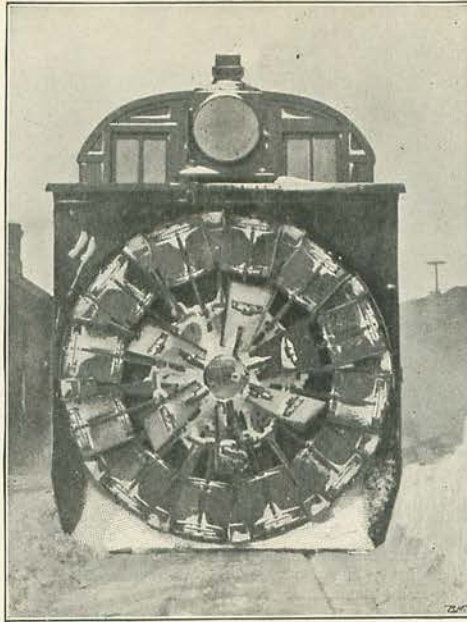
From a Photo. by]

THE SHOVEL AT WORK.

[H. Steinhauer, Groton, South Dakota.

then the snow plough is dispatched to the scene of action, or rather inaction. The snow plough is placed in front of the locomotive, and with a run of about a mile takes a header into the drift. One noted snow plough, aptly named the "Storm King," has a dead weight of sixty-five tons, a weighty enough argument, one would think, to overcome the scruples of the most obstructive snow that ever fell from the heavens. But history teaches us that Kings have occasionally met with opposition from their own subjects, and the "Storm King" cannot be expected to reign without finding his royal path obstructed by obstreperous subjects, and how can they be punished when there are so many of them?

How? Well, easily enough. A boxed-in structure on wheels containing an engine



THE BUSINESS END OF A ROTARY SNOW-PLOUGH.
From a Photo. by J. H. Jones, Redfield, South Dakota.

for rotating a wheel-like contrivance in front does the work, and does it well. Locomotives — there are generally two — are put in the rear, and bunt the rotary gently into the snow. Now glance at the accompanying illustration, and see the business end of a rotary plough. You will notice it is a series of iron plates differing only from the order of slates on a house-top in a space intervening between each plate or knife. This rotary, as the name implies, revolves very rapidly, and in action is as certain as an operating auger on wood. The rotary, as

shown in the next photo., simply bores a way through the snow, and the white cloud that has the appearance of escaping steam in front of the black smoke is the snow as it is thrown from the rotary.

From the same illustration an idea can be



From a Photo. by

ROTARY SNOW-PLOUGH AT WORK.

[J. H. Jones, Redfield, South Dakota.

formed of the distance the snow is thrown by the rotary. The *modus operandi* is beautifully simple, and as persuasively effective as a book agent. No matter how deep the snow on the railroad tracks, when the rotary gets to work its authority is as unquestionable as that of a London policeman when he says, "Move on." And what an artist the rotary is in working!

The rotary snow-plough is an object of perennial interest even to the Westerners themselves, and especially to the passing traveller who meets a blizzard for the first time. There have been men who have travelled especially through Dakota in the winter for the sake of

passengers dies and a look of blank despair appears. It is then that the arrival of the plough becomes eagerly awaited. The passengers clamber to the roof of the train or to the top of the snow-bank, and longingly peer through the sky for a slight speck of black in the distance. Then, as the plough gradually nears the stalled train, comes a thrilling cheer of welcome, which resounds for miles across the white prairie.

Our last photograph shows a drift through which the rotary has bored, and at the same time gives an idea of the depth of snow with which a Dakota blizzard can powder Nature's face.



From a Photo. by]

WAITING FOR THE "ROTARY."

[J. H. Jones, Redfield, South Dakota.

getting caught in a snowstorm, in order that their experiences on board the snow-bound train might be incidentally and picturesquely written up for the Metropolitan Press. The blizzard leaves the passengers fairly cold, but in a state of friendly hilarity, which conduces to general intercourse and time-killing games. In the excellent illustration on this page are shown a number of passengers waiting for the rotary to do its work. Here the snow averages a depth of some 14ft. The men enjoy themselves by climbing over the smoke-stack into the snow-bank and sitting down. They play cards and make bets on the probable length of time they will spend in the snow. Gradually, however, the food and drink begin to give out, and with starvation staring them in the face the merriment of the

A word is due on the heroism of the railroad *employés*. Many a man has sallied forth to obtain relief for a belated train, and whoever ventures takes his life in his hands. The great danger lies in getting lost and aimlessly wandering around on the open prairie. With a wind blowing at a velocity of thirty to forty miles an hour, with the thermometer anywhere from thirty to forty degrees below zero, with the snow swirling so densely that it is impossible to distinguish objects ten yards distant, with the scurrying flakes clinging to the eyelashes and freezing instantaneously, a man is brave who will face this. Then there is the physical strain of struggling on foot through the snow into which one may sink middle deep at every step. More than one hero lost his life in this manner during the past winter,

and was not found till months afterwards, a sacrifice to his own bravery and a victim to exhaustion and cold.

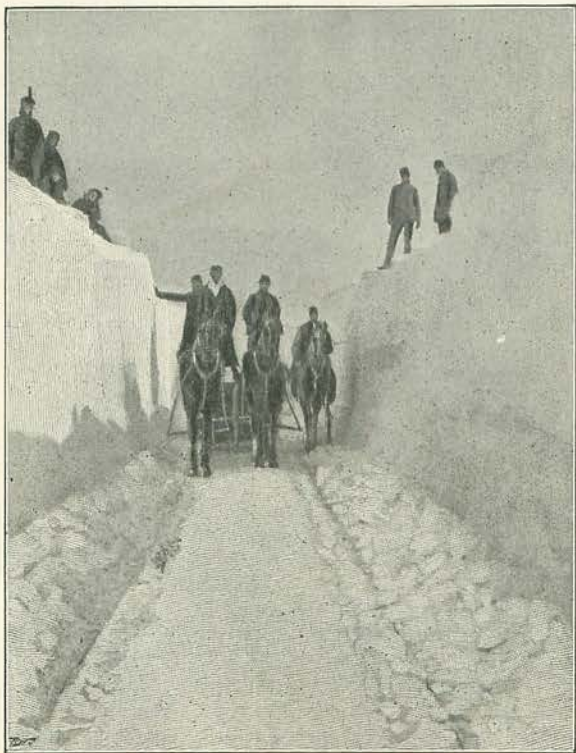
Fortunately blizzards do not happen with alarming frequency, and though each visitation paralyzes the railroads, and suspends out-door locomotion of all kinds, reducing the little towns to a state of siege, for they are utterly dependent on the railroad for fuel supplies, withal there is a spirit of making the best of it in any circumstances. I call to mind one wag of a storekeeper, whose sidewalk was piled with snow 6ft. deep, who effected a clearance and decorated the snow bank in front of his store with a top-boot, upside down, having a placard underneath which pertinently asked, "Say, mister, is my hat on straight?" And I remember a kind-hearted citizen, one of a little crowd watching the rotary at work, reminding another that his nose was freezing, to have the compliment returned to him, tersely and most certainly to the point, by the rejoinder, "So's yours!"

And now let us leave the towns for a moment, and revert once again to photo. No. 1. The buried train is in the foreground, and behind the train observe the miles of level country "expanding to the skies." The

occasional farm-horses appear as mere dots in the picture, and by studying this view a moment you should derive an impression of the featureless character of the prairie. Trees are practically unknown, the eye sweeps across in a comprehensive glance and sees nothing to relieve the sameness, and yet that snow-covered level has a beauty of its own. It is a prospect in which the white snow, the brilliant sun, and the cloudless sky form a panorama of a height and breadth, of an expansive, wholesome breeziness, which charms in its suggestion of illimitableness.

To drive behind a pair of bronchos, to feel the exhilaration brought with every inhalation of the ozone-laden air, even though the thermometer be 30deg. below zero, to do this mile after mile and hour after hour, with not a sound to break the silence, save that of the sleigh bells' rhythmic tinkle, engenders a communion with self which brings the conviction of man's littleness home to him,

and develops a spirit of reverential admiration for the work of the Creator of the Universe, suggested by that "something" beyond the visual range limited to the distant sky-line of the snow-covered prairie, horizon-bound though it be.



SNOW-DRIFT 18FT. DEEP CUT THROUGH BY THE ROTARY PLOUGH.
From a Photo. by J. H. Jones, Redfield, South Dakota.