

murmuring a prayer for strength, I grasped my stick more firmly and treaded the slippery surface of the ice still more cautiously. My chief care now was to keep from falling, as I felt certain, that should this mishap occur, the ice was not strong enough to resist the shock. As I proceeded it was becoming worse, until at last I was compelled to turn in another direction; after a moment's consideration I decided to pursue a course at right angles with the one I had been on, still exercising the same caution as heretofore. My journey now was becoming an exceedingly painful one; the excited state of my feelings at first had given place to a more cool and determined attempt to preserve, if possible, my existence, and the silent prayers I had uttered were not without their effect.

The water on the surface of the ice lay in "ponds;" in some places it did not reach to my ankles, but in others it came up nearly to the tops of my boots. Several times I was on the point of retracing my steps, as the water would continue to deepen, and then grow shallow again. The stout boots I wore were not sufficiently water proof to prevent the moisture from penetrating, and my feet had, in consequence, become quite cold and benumbed, a feeling, indeed most disagreeable and unpleasant. I dared not stamp them briskly on my feeble support, as the result must have been fatal, and how to devise means to contribute to them the warmth so necessary I knew not; I was literally at my wit's end.

It now seemed almost an age since I first realized the dangers of my situation, and how much longer the suspense and agony would have to be endured, I could not form the slightest estimate. The horrible stillness of the gloom was becoming more and more painful, and it seemed as if nature itself was watching, breathlessly, my silent and cautious journey to I could not and dared not think where. To stop a moment when the ice beneath me was slowly but surely melting away seemed folly; and still to continue a course that, perhaps, was only leading me farther and farther from that goal which contained all that made life dear. I had to acknowledge almost a delusion. But this was a risk I had to run, and self-preservation urged me on.

As these fears were beginning to depress more than ever my spirits, and, as I thought, taking a more tangible form, a dull, muffled sound broke through the solemn stillness, causing me to pause, and listen attentively for a repetition. Again, and at regular intervals, came the sound, which I recognised as the noise made by an axe in the hands of a woodsman. Never to human ear was sound more welcome or hailed with more joy. The soft and weird notes of the Eolian-harp, the grand and measured tones of Cathedral music, or the inspiring strains of martial melody, have their admirers, and I have listened spell-bound, to each; but the homely music of that axe rang in my ear a still sweeter and a nobler peal. But my joy was short, for again in my front appeared another open space,

stretching to the right and left. Hope and despair had alternately been mine, and as I followed this opening, the sound broke ominously on my ear as the bell did on Guy Fawkes'. As I continued the sound appeared to become each moment more distinct. Was I approaching the opposite shore, and had Providence intervened that space to more surely guide my wandering steps to a haven of rest? Yes, thank God, it was so; for now there arose to my excited fancy, almost a babel of sounds. In my joy I forgot all else, and, with a shout, pushed boldly forward; already, in thought, I felt Millie's warm kiss upon my lips, and heard young voices lisping papa's return. The caution that a short time before marked my conduct, I forsook, and looked forward hopefully to a speedy termination of my perilous journey. Joy caused the tears to roll as freely down my cheeks now as despair did a short time before; and I hurried on, almost blindly, until ere I was aware, my feet sank beneath me, and I was immersed in the water, and had it not been for the short pole I carried, must have sunk. For a time I struggled to regain my foothold on the ice, but it proved rotten, and broke under my weight. Concluding at last my efforts to be vain, I looked in the direction of the sound that had filled me with hope, and which I had followed as steadfastly as the belated wanderer would the Wil-o-Wisp. The fog, to my great joy, was rolling slowly away, and objects were becoming, each moment, more distinct on the shore. Wistfully I watched from my watery bed, the smoke curl gracefully above the peaceful farm-houses, and prayed earnestly for strength as I remembered my own quiet home beyond those hills. But another maddening idea took possession of me; perhaps I would not be observed from the bank, or if seen, might perish with cold before I could be rescued; and then, with only the energy of a drowning man, I made another attempt to crawl upon the ice, but failed, and sank back, nearly exhausted. Raising myself and bringing the pole as far as was necessary under my chest, so as to sustain the weight of my body, I ceased all struggles, and began shouting, as loudly as possible, but failed at first to attract attention. At last a figure came down the bank, and then another, and another. I soon felt confident that efforts were being made for my rescue, as two persons appeared on the ice, and advanced slowly, oh! so very slowly, it seemed, toward me. My strength was fast failing, my hands were almost useless from cold, and I felt my hold on the pole gradually relaxing; darkness appeared stealing over all objects around me; I thought I heard voices whispering words of encouragement; something grasped my hair, and I remembered nothing more. When I again became conscious, I was lying on a couch in a strange room, a cheerful fire blazing near, and in front of it sat, with arms folded, and legs spread out to their utmost extension, my poetical friend Sniffles, determined, apparently, to absorb within himself,