

THE WESTERN HOME MONTHLY.

WINNIPEG, CANADA.

VOL. X. No. 7

JULY, 1909.

A Voyage on an Ice-Floe.

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[Dr. Grenfell may be described as the "Good Angel of Labrador," having for years devoted himself to ministering to the hardy toilers who live in that grim land of snow, ice and fog. In the enthralling story he describes how, while on an errand of mercy, he and his dog-team got adrift in the open sea on a tiny cake of ice; how he killed three of the dogs to provide himself with warm clothing; how he made a flagstaff out of their bones; and how he was finally rescued when hope was well-nigh dead.]



It was Easter Sunday, but still winter with us, and everything was covered with snow and ice. Immediately after morning service word came from our hospital to say that messengers with a large team of dogs had come from sixty miles to the southward to get a doctor for a very urgent case—that of a young man on whom we had operated about a fortnight before for an acute bone disease in the thigh.

There was obviously no time to be lost, so, having packed up the necessary instruments, dressings, and drugs, and fitted out the sleigh with my best dogs, I left at once, the messengers following me with their own team.

Late in April there is always a risk of getting wet through on the ice, so that I was prepared with a spare outfit, which included, besides a change



"One of the dogs got on my shoulders, pushing me farther down in the ice."

or ice barricades, much farther up the bay than I had expected. The sea of the night before had smashed up the ponderous covering of ice right to the land-wash, and great gaping chasms between the enormous blocks, which we call "pans," made it impossible to get off. As soon as I topped the first hill outside the village I could see that half a mile out it was all clear water.

An island which lies off about three miles in the bay had preserved a bridge of ice, however, and by crossing a few cracks I managed to reach this island. The arm of the bay beyond this point is only about four miles straight across. This would bring me to a rocky promontory and would save some miles on the round. As far as the eye could see the ice seemed good, though it was very tough. Obviously it had been smashed up by the sea, and packed in again by the strong wind from the north-east, but I judged it had been frozen solid together again.

I set off to cross this stretch, and all went well till I was about a quarter of a mile from the landing point. Then the wind suddenly fell, and I noticed I was travelling over loose "sish" ice, almost of the consistency of porridge; by stabbing down, I could drive my whip-handle clean through it. This "sish" ice consists of the tiny fragments made by large pans

pounding together on the heaving sea.

So strongly did the breeze now come off-shore, and so quickly did the packed mass, relieved of the wind pressure, begin to scatter, that already I could not see one floe larger than ten feet square. I realized at once that retreat was absolutely impossible; the only thing to be done was to make a dash for it and try to reach the shore.

There was not a moment to lose, so I tore off my oilskins, threw myself out on my hands and knees by the side of the komatik to give a larger base to hold, and shouted to the dogs to go ahead.

Before we had gone twenty yards, the animals, divining their peril, hesitated for a moment, and the komatik instantly sank into the slush. It then became necessary for the dogs to pull, and they promptly began to sink in also. Earlier in the season the father of the man I was going to operate on had been drowned by his dogs tangling their traces round him in the "slob." This unpleasant fact now flashed into my mind, and I managed to loosen my sheath-knife, scramble forward, find the traces in the water, and cut them, meanwhile taking a turn with the leader's trace around my wrist.

There was a pan of ice some twenty-five yards away, about the size of a dining-table, and on to this the lead-

er very shortly climbed. The other dogs, however, were hopelessly bogged in the slushy ice and water.

Gradually I hauled myself along the leader's line towards the pan, till he suddenly turned round and slipped out of his harness. It was impossible to make any progress through the "sish" ice by swimming, so I lay there helplessly, thinking it would be soon over, and wondering if anyone would ever know how the tragedy happened. Suddenly I saw the trace of another big dog, who had himself fallen through just before he reached the pan. Along this I hauled myself, using the animal as a bow anchor, but much bothered by the other dogs, one of which, in his struggle for life, got on to my shoulders, pressing me farther down in the ice. Presently, however, I passed my living anchor, and soon, with the dogs around me, I lay on the little piece of ice. I had to help the dogs on to it, though they were able to work their way to me through the



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of garments, snowshoes, rifle, compass, and axe, and oilskin overclothes.

My dogs, being a powerful team, would not be held back, and though I managed to wait twice for the other sleigh I had reached a village about twenty miles on the journey before nightfall, had fed the dogs, and was gathering one or two people for prayers, when they caught me up.

During the night the wind shifted to the north-east. This brought in fog and rain, softened the snow, and made travelling very bad, besides sending a heavy sea into the bay. Our drive next morning would be somewhat over forty miles—the first ten miles across a wide arm of the sea, on salt-water ice.

In order not to be separated too long from my friends, I sent them ahead two hours before me, appointing a rendezvous at a log shanty we had built in the woods for a half-way house. There is no one living along all that lengthy coast-line, and so, in case of accident, we keep dry clothes, food, and drugs at the hut.

The first rain of the year was falling when I left, and I was obliged to keep on what we call the "ballicaters,"



The Author's Dog Team.



The Author as he appeared after his terrible experience on the ice-floe, showing the flagstaff made of dogs' bones.

lane of water that I had made. We were safe for the moment, yet it was obvious that we must be drowned before long if we remained on this little fragment, so, taking off my moccasins, coat, gloves, and cap, and everything that I could spare, I tied my knife and moccasins separately on the backs of the dogs. My only hope of life seemed to be to get ashore at once. Had I been able to divine the long drift before me, I might have saved, in the same way as I saved my knife, a small bag of food. The moccasins, made of tanned sealskin, came right up to my thigh, and, as they were filled with water, I thought they accounted for my being able to make no progress.

Taking the long traces from all the dogs but the two lightest, I gave them the full length of the lines, tied the near ends around my own wrist, and tried to make the animals go ahead. Nothing would induce them to move, however, and though I threw them off the pan two or three times, they always struggled back on to it. Fortunately, I had with me a small black spaniel, a featherweight, with large furry paws, something like