

THE INSTRUCTOR.

No. XLIV.]

MONTREAL, MARCH 5, 1836.

[PRICE 2s.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE DOGS OF ST. BERNARD.

The convent of the Great St. Bernard is situated near the top of the mountain known by that name, near one of the most dangerous passages of the alps, between Switzerland and Savoy. In these regions the traveller is often overtaken by the most severe weather, even after days of cloudless beauty, when the glaciers glitter in the sunshine, and the pink flowers of the rhododendron appear as if they were never to be sullied by the tempest. But a storm suddenly comes on; the roads are rendered impassable by drifts of snow; the avalanches, which are huge loosened masses of snow or ice, are swept into the valleys, carrying trees and crags of rock before them. The hospitable monks, though their revenue is scanty, open their doors to every stranger that presents himself. To be cold, to be weary, to be benighted, constitute the title to their comfortable shelter, their cheering meal, and their agreeable converse. But their attention to the distressed does not end here. They devote themselves to the dangerous task of searching for those unhappy persons who may have been overtaken by the sudden storm and would perish but for their charitable succour. Most remarkably are they assisted in these truly Christian offices. They have a breed of noble dogs in their establishment, whose extraordinary sagacity often enables them to rescue the traveller from destruction. Benumbed with cold, weary in the search for a lost track, his senses yielding to the stupifying influence of frost, which betrays the exhausted sufferer into a deep sleep, the unhappy man sinks upon the ground, and the snow-drift covers him from human sight. It is then that the keen scent and the exquisite docility of these admirable dogs are called into action. Though the perishing man lies ten or even twenty feet beneath the snow, the delicacy of smell with which they can trace him offers a chance of escape. They scratch away the snow with

their feet; they set up a continued hoarse and solemn bark, which brings the monks and labourers of the convent to their assistance. To provide for the chance that the dogs, without human help, may succeed in discovering the unfortunate traveller, one of them has a flask of spirits round his neck, to which the fainting man may apply for support: and another has a cloak to cover him. These wonderful exertions are often successful; and even where they fail of restoring him who has perished, the dogs discover the body, so that it may be secured for the recognition of friends — & such is the effect of the temperature, that the dead features generally preserve their firmness for the space of two years. One of these noble creatures was decorated with a medal, in commemoration of his having saved the lives of twenty-two persons, who, but for his sagacity, must have perished. Many travellers who have crossed the passage of St. Bernard, since the peace, have seen this dog, and have heard, around the blazing fire of the monks, the story of his extraordinary career. He died about the year 1816, in an attempt to convey a poor traveller to his anxious family. The Piedmontese courier arrived at St. Bernard in a very stormy season, labouring to make his way to the little village of St. Pierre, in the valley beneath the mountain, where his wife and children dwelt. It was in vain that the monks attempted to check his resolution to teach his family. They at last gave him two guides, each of whom was accompanied by a dog, of which one was the remarkable creature whose services had been so valuable to mankind. Descending from the convent, they were in an instant overwhelmed by two avalanches, and the same common destruction awaited the family of the poor courier, who were toiling up the mountain in the hope to obtain some news of their expected friend. They all perished.

A story is told of one of these dogs, who, having found a child unhurt whose mother had been destroyed by an avalanche, induced the