

## SLEIGHS AND SLEIGH DOGS.

BY MRS. BOMPAS, MACKENZIE RIVER.

I is not often that ladies of the far north have much to do with sleigh driving; their experience of that mode of travelling is mostly limited to the ten or twelve miles over which their husbands or friends may propose to take them, as a great treat, once or twice in the course of the winter. Yet the sleigh is part of the necessary equipment of every mission station, and forms an important agency in the work of the mission itself. Among the Indians there is always a rivalry in the get-up of their sleigh and dog harness—the latter, made by dint of immense labor, of moose leather, all the metal appendages of which are procured from the store of the Hudson's Bay Company. Each dog has also to be furnished with a gay "tapis" or saddle cloth made by the Indian women, and in the production of which all the taste and skill and power of invention of which they are so capable is expended. Some of the tapis are made of deer's skin with quaint devices worked upon them, but the most popular are of dark blue cloth elaborately beaded and adorned with broad fringes of wool or leather. It is not often that our Indian silk or bead work finds its way into these more southern regions—but whenever it is seen it excites wonder and admiration from the delicate intricacy and effective mingling of the colors; they have an instinctive knowledge of perspective too, which they often bring to bear upon a turned back leaf or distant spray, and in bead work their skill in making the beads fast is well adapted to the rough usage their handiwork has to encounter in the long winter journeys. Another necessary appendage to the dog harness is the chain of bells—these are fastened on the collars or across the gay tapis. Each dog should have six or eight bells, and the merry tinkle of these doubtless keeps up the spirit of both dogs and men, as surely as do the bagpipes in a Highland regiment. The sound of sleigh bells have a friendly cheering effect upon all as they are caught across the snowy plain or icebound river.

And now a word about the dogs themselves which are to haul our sled through miles and miles of thick tangled wood, or along the trackless lake or river. Fine patient creatures they are, well used to hardship, and sad to say, too often to ill usage. We have no society for the prevention of cruelty to animals in the north, or our poor four footed friends would often get a voice lifted up in their behalf. These dogs are strong and enduring to the last degree, and I doubt if any parallel were ever found to the constancy and devotion of an Indian dog to his master. I made a great mistake some years since in taking out a pair of quasi Newfoundland dogs for the Bishop's sleigh. He had never allowed himself a decent team of dogs, and in my vanity I thought to have ensured his possessing one at last. Alas! my

scheme was defeated on two points; first, it happened to be a winter when provisions were particularly scarce at Fort Simpson, and it promised to be a hard struggle to feed ourselves with certainly not so much as a scrap left for our dogs; moreover my valuable gift was pronounced worthless and my pride had to submit to its well merited fall. The dogs were web footed and as such unfit for hauling through the snow. I may say, however, that some of "Zulu" and "Lassie's" descendants have made their way into the Indian camps, and are available for sled hauling, the web foot having nearly disappeared.

How the sleigh dogs manage to live is often a problem; which it is hard to solve. The greater part of their time, poor brutes, they are on the brink of starvation, for the Indians find it hard enough to feed themselves, and every morsel of meat being demolished the bones are kept to break and boil down and so convert into grease. At our mission stations part of the Fall fishery is reserved for our dogs—fortune favors them some seasons when the frost does not come at the very nick of time, and so our hung fish is anything but savory, and unless dire necessity compels us to make use of it (as is the case sometimes) it is reserved for the dogs' winter supply. One or two white fish per day will keep a dog in good working condition.

A well equipped sleigh should have four dogs harnessed tandem fashion. The sleigh driver, with reins and whip in hand, runs an easy jaunty pace by the side—his whip handle elaborately carved and ornamented—the lash of leather, cleverly twisted, its efficiency tested on the backs of the poor brutes with but short interruptions. Our sleigh driver, (and my memory here reverts to "Whutale," a Fort Norman Indian, who acted in that capacity for us during the winter of '72) is dressed in leather and well worked moose skin with fringed shirt and cloth leggings profusely beaded down the side of each leg. His cap is of fur, marten, mink or beaver, for Whutale is a good trapper and has made quite a fortune of furs he has trapped and sold to the Hudson's Bay Co. His leather mittens, lined with duffle, are slung round his neck with a twisted braid of many colors. Now with his handsomely beaded fire bag at his side and a good warm comforter which some kind industrious friend to our mission has sent out from Canada or England, and our good looking driver's outfit is complete. But the sleigh, or sled as it is called in the north, must now be loaded. First comes our travelling blankets and pillow, then kettle and saucepan, an axe, (without which no traveller would ever think of travelling) and lastly our "prey," consisting of a few ribs of dried moose or deer's meat, a few dried fish, a small bag of biscuits or a little flour to mix with water and fry in grease, a very favorite dish in the north which goes by the name of "bangs," and which our sleigh boy concocts with great skill; another bag will contain tea, and of this we must