

among the pine groves they had examined, and their great object anyway was to see as much of the country as possible. So they struck out on a different route on their return tramp. Every now and then they came upon most enticing groves of pine which it was impossible to pass without examination. The country they traversed was even richer in pine of that superior grade of which they were in search than that which they had passed through on their outward bound trip. There was so much to attract the lumberman's eye and delight his fancy that they lingered and examined longer than was prudent or safe. As W—— said, "we would sometimes get to the top of a high mountain from which we would have a wide view of the country on every side, we would see perhaps several miles off a fine grove of pine; 'we must go and examine that Ned,' Wetheral would say, 'it would never do to go back without some idea of the quantity and quality of that grove.'"

Though it was against W——'s better judgment, still the attraction was too great, and so they did, and in this way repeatedly. Thus unknowingly to themselves they deviated from the proper course, and became more and more entangled in the pathless windings of that vast northern wilderness. In this way four days passed, and their stock of provisions was just about exhausted. Still so confident were they that they were travelling in the right direction, and rapidly nearing the shanty, that they felt no alarm. On the morning of the fifth day—the ninth out from the shanty—they ate the last scrap of their provisions, "and a mighty poor breakfast it was" said W——. They were so sure however of their course, and that they would reach the shanty that night by a forced march that they resolved to cache their blankets and any articles they had, and make a rush for it. They took nothing but the rifle, which W—— carried, and a small axe each by the others; thus in light marching order they set off in full confidence of reaching the shanty that night.

All day long they rapidly walked in the supposed true course till late in the afternoon, when Wetheral said to his brother, "Keep a sharp lookout, Ned, for a partridge, or a rabbit, I am getting awfully hungry." But neither rabbit nor partridge was to be seen.

Thus they tramped sturdily on till the near approach of night compelled them to halt, and yet no sign of the shanty, nor any familiar landmarks to indicate that they were in its vicinity. Perforce, therefore, they knew that they must make what preparations they could in the failing light to camp for the night. These were quickly made, and they made up their minds to pass the night as best they could in the circumstances. It was a dreary outlook—the night was bitterly cold, without blankets or a morsel to eat, nothing more dismal or depressing could be conceived. But they were not the men to lose heart or give way to useless forebodings. Such incidents are not of uncommon occurrence in the experience of backwoodsmen, and must be met and borne with patience and resolution. So they prepared to "tough it" for the night in the most practicable manner possible. It was agreed that they would take turns of two hours each of watching and sleeping, as it was a matter of imperious necessity that the fire should be kept fully replenished until daylight. Joe volunteered to take the first watch, and W—— and his brother gladly stretched themselves before the great cheery blaze and sought for the much needed repose, and almost immediately were wrapped in deep overpowering sleep. And now occurred what might have been a most tragical and fatal issue to them, and from which they escaped in an almost miraculous manner. Big Joe proved faithless. Left to himself, he soon became drowsy, and, after a few attempts to keep awake, succumbed, and almost unconsciously sank down by his companions in as profound a slumber as their own. The situation was a terrible one. The fire, un replenished by light dry wood, soon began to die away, and, with it, the lives of those three vigorous stalwart men. It was an awful and a pitiful sight. The temperature was probably thirty-five or forty degrees below zero, and the merciless cold, no longer moderated by the great blazing fire, was exerting its full deadly effect over those sleeping unconscious forms. Without any covering or protection, with upturned faces to the starry sky, they slept on hour after hour more deeply still into the sleep from which there would be no awakening. In the weird, solemn stillness of that almost Arctic winter's night, unbroken only by the sharp pistol snaps of the keen frost among the twigs and boughs, in the dense solitude of the piny forest they were sleeping their lives away as surely and hopelessly as mortal life can be lost. But it was not so fated. By some unaccountable influence which he could never understand, W—— suddenly awoke to consciousness and life, but that awakening, he said, was the most terrible experience he ever underwent. At first he thought he was dead—every limb and muscle was so benumbed with cold that he felt absolutely paralysed, and bereft of life and feeling. He had to pinch and pound himself to find out, as he said, "whether it was really himself in the flesh or not." The first thing that fully recalled him to his senses and to the horrors of his position was the stony whiteness of his companions' faces, apparently set in the rigid frozen cast of death. Then the active strong will-power of the man asserted itself, and with a great shout he leaped to his feet and began without stint or mercy to kick and pommel their senseless bodies. And none too soon was this vigorous method of resuscitation applied—in all probability in another hour it would have been a hopeless case with them. But gradually, and with many a grunt and groan and heavy sigh, life and full awakening came back to them. The fire was rekindled and soon made into a great roaring flame, and in its warming, cheering blaze they danced and leaped and shouted like maniacs till the circulation was fully restored, and they began to feel like live human beings once more. No more thoughts of sleep entered their heads that night, you may be sure, and with the first glimmer of daylight they resumed the tramp full of hopeful expectation of reaching the shanty in a few hours at the most. But it was not so to be. Mile after mile was covered, the hours slipped past until again the afternoon came round, and yet no sign

of the shanty, or any indications of being nearer to it. The cravings of hunger, intensified by fatigue and the keen frosty air, were painfully pressing. Wetheral's appetite was getting less fastidious.

"Ned," said he, "look out sharp for a woodpecker, or a squirrel, anything to eat."

"Yes," said Big Joe, "shoot an Indian if you see him. I am hungry enough to eat even him."

But not a living object came within observation; all was still and lifeless as a churchyard. But now the terrible thought began to take possession of their minds, though they hardly dared to utter it to one another, that they had lost their reckoning and true course, and were wandering they knew not where. The day had been overcast with black clouds since early morning, and they had no compass; in those days it was seldom carried by bushrangers, though now it is of more general use. At length Wetheral could no longer conceal his anxiety. "Ned," said he, "I believe you have lost the course; instead of going towards the shanty, for all we know we may be going the opposite direction, right for Hudson's Bay." But W——, in his positive manner, would not admit this, but was sure they were in the proper direction, and would likely reach the shanty that night if they would only "keep up the steam." So, after a short rest, they again pushed on at their very best speed.

But night and darkness, which put a stop to all travelling in the bush, again settled down upon them, and with wearied limbs and jaded spirits they made the necessary arrangements for passing another night in the snow around the fire. If their situation of the previous night was bad, it was tenfold worse now. With fierce hunger gnawing at their vitals, and limbs aching at every joint, and eyelids heavy as lead for want of sweet sleep, yet they knew that they dared not repeat the terrible experiment of the night before. No one could trust the other to keep watch while he slept, and sleep in their exhausted condition without fire meant death. Though they had plenty of tobacco, yet, when they lit their pipes, they found they couldn't smoke; their mouths and throats were so dry and parched that the smoke pained and stifled them. They did not dare even to lie down, for the moment the head got into a recumbent position sleep overpoweringly seized them. Not a friendly star shone out from the overcast sky to give them an inkling as to their whereabouts, or decide the miserable uncertainty as to their proper course. Thus, in alternate sitting and walking about the fire, and throwing on all the firewood they could gather, they passed the long dreary hours of that terrible night, until the welcome dawn broke through the darkness. Then the tramp was resumed, but with far less heart and spirit than the morning before. Though W—— still stoutly maintained that he knew where he was and that they were in the right direction for the shanty, still the others were thoroughly dispirited, and followed in his wake with listless and heavy steps.

About mid-day Wetheral, whose strained eyes were eagerly scanning the country on every side, suddenly gave a great shout and joyously called out: "There is the shanty at last. I can see the smoke rising over the top of the trees," and sure enough, a thin column of smoke could be distinctly seen about a mile off, at right angles to the course they were pursuing, in the direction to which he pointed.

"It can't be my shanty," said W——, "but it must be an Indian camp, and we'll get something to eat, anyway."

Hunger, fatigue and anxiety were all forgotten in the cheering prospect of succour and direction, and they quickly covered the ground between them and the column of smoke. But if ever men in such distressing circumstances met with a bitter and heart-breaking disappointment it was our friends. Instead of the outrush and loud yelping of dogs, and the usual accompaniments of an Indian camp, there was a stillness and dearth of all life which betokened something ominous and foreboding, which, alas, soon became evident. The smoke which had so cheered their hearts rose from a huge fallen pine, whose butt end was brightly burning, and in front of it, as near as she could sit without being burned, crouched an old and decrepit squaw, drawing tightly round her shivering body her scanty and ragged clothes. She was apparently over seventy years of age, and in the awful loneliness and solitude of the place seemed the very embodiment of desolation and misery. Our friends stood aghast at the spectacle. Their own trials and troubles were forgotten for a time as they gazed upon this awful picture of absolute wretchedness. With their experience of Indian life and manners they quickly understood what it meant. The old squaw had been abandoned by her friends; enfeebled by old age and infirmity she had been unable to travel, and had been left there to die in her loneliness and misery. No doubt the party may have been starving themselves and could do nothing for her; at least they had humanity enough left not to murder and eat her. With the exception of a few strings for snaring rabbits and a tin pail to boil them in, she was absolutely destitute, not a scrap of provisions, nor a blanket or covering of any kind except the rags she wore were to be seen. And yet she had lived on in this terrible destitution and exposure for some considerable time. They could see where she had camped first in a cedar swamp near by, but this becoming too cold from the scarcity of dry firewood she had set fire to this large standing dead pine, and, when burned through at the butt, it had fallen. She had slept at night in front of the burning trunk. As the fire gradually burned up the tree she had scraped away the ashes and slept on the warm ground underneath. They counted nine successive sleeping places, showing as many nights where she had made her bed, and as there were plenty of dead pine standing near there was no saying how long, provided she could snare a rabbit now and then, she might contrive to drag out her miserable existence. To all appearance she was in the last stage of dissolution, and seemed, in fact, almost insensible of their presence. They could neither make her understand their own destitution, nor get from her any information as to the direction they ought to go. They could do nothing for her,