

DOOR DAVIE'S DRIVE.*

MANAGER WAS ON snow-shoes, making a bee-line toward the end of saw-logs dark on the ice of Wolverine River. He crossed shanty roads, trod heaps of brush, forced his way through the tops of felled pines, jumped from little ledges into seven feet of snow—Pinnager's men called it "a terror on snow-shoes." They never knew the direction from which he might come—an ignorance which kept them all busy with axe, saw, cant-hook, and horses over the two square miles of forest comprising his "cut." It was "make or break" with Pinnager. He had expected to put on the ice all the logs he might make; and every one left in the woods he must pay stumpage and forfeit. Now his axe-men had done such wonders at Pinnager's difficulty was to get his logs hauled out. Teams were scarce that winter. The shanty was fifty miles from any settlement; ordinary teamsters were not eager to work for a small speculative jobber, who might or might not be able to pay in the spring. But Pinnager had some extraordinary teamsters, sons of lumberjacks who neighbored him at home, and who were sure to work for him, though he should have to mortgage his land.

The time was late February; seven feet of snow, crusts, on the level; a thaw might turn the whole forest floor to slush; but if the weather should "hold hard" for two weeks longer, Pinnager might make and not break. Yet the chances were heavily against him.

Any jobber so situated would feel vexed on hearing that one of his best teams had suddenly been taken out of his service. Pinnager, crossing a shanty road with the side of a moose, was hailed by Jamie Stuart with the news:

"Hey, boss, hold on! Davie McAndrews' leg's broke. His load slewed at the hill—log caught him against a tree."

"Where is he?" shouted Pinnager furiously.

"Carried him to shanty."

"Where are his horses?"

"Stable."

"Tell Aleck Dunbar to go get them out. He must take Davie's place—confound the lad's carelessness!"

"Davie says no; won't let any other man drive his horses."

"He won't. I'll show him!" and Pinnager made a bee-line for his shanty. He was choking with rage, all the more so because he knew nothing short of breaking Davie McAndrews' neck would break Davie McAndrews' stubbornness, a reflection that cooled Pinnager before he reached the shanty.

The cook was busy about the caboose fire, getting supper for fifty-three devourers, when Pinnager entered the low door, and made straight for one of the double-tiered dingy bunks. There lay a youth of eighteen, with an unusual pallor on his weather-beaten face, and more than the usual sternness about his formidable jaw.

"What's all this, Davie? You sure the leg's broke? I'd a thought you old enough to take care."

"You would?" said Davie grimly. "And yourself not old enough to have yon piece of road mended—you that was so often told about it!"

"When you knew it was so bad, the more you should take care."

"And that's true, Pinnager. But no use in you and me choppin' woods. I'm needing a doctor's hands on me. Can you set a bone?"

"No, I'll not meddle with it. Maybe Jack Scott can; but I'll send you out home. A fine loss I'll be at. Confound it—and me like to break for want of teams!"

"I've thought o' yer case, Pinnager," said Davie, with a curious judicial air. "It's sore hard for ye; I ken that well. There's me and me feyther's horses gawn off, and you countin' on us. I feel for ye, so I do. But I'll not put you to any loss in sendin' me out."

"Was you thinking to tough it through here, Davie? No, you'll not chance it. Anyway, the loss would be the same—more, too. Why, if I send out for the doctor, there's a team off for full five days, and the expense of the doctor! Then he mightn't come. Wow, no! it's out you must go."

"What else?" said Davie coolly. "Would I lie here till spring and my leg mendin' into the Lord kens what-like shape? Would I be lettin' any ither drive the horses my feyther entrustit to my lone? Would I be dependin' on Mr. Pinnager for keep, and me idle? Man, I'd eat the horses' heads off that way; at home they'd be profit to my feyther. So it's me and them that starts at gray the morn's morn."

"Alone!" exclaimed Pinnager.

"Just that, man. What for no?"

"You're light-headed, Davie. A lad with his leg broke can't drive three days."

"Maybe yes an' maybe no. I'm for it, anyhow."

"It may snow, it may—"

"Aye, or rain, or thaw, or hail; the Lord's no in the habit o' makin' the weather suit ony but himself. But I'm gawn; the cost of a man wi' me would eat the wages ye're owing to my feyther."

"I'll lose his team, anyhow," said Pinnager, "and me needing it bad. A driver with you could bring back the horses."

"Nay, my feyther will trust his beasts to nane but himself or his sons. But I'll have yer case in mind, Pinnager; it's a sore necessity you're in. I'll ask my feyther to send back the team, and another to the tail of it; it's like that Tam and Neil will be home by now. And I'll spread word how ye're needin' teams, Pinnager; it's like your neighbors will send ye in sax or eight spans."

"Man, that's a grand notion, Davie! But you can't go alone; it's clean impossible."

"I'm gawn, Pinnager."

"You can't turn out in seven feet of snow when you meet loading. You can't water or feed your horses. There's forty miles the second day, and never a stopping-place; your horses can't stand it."

"I'm wae for the beasts, Pinnager; but they'll have no force but to travel dry and hungry if that's set for them."

"You're bound to go?"

"Div you tak' me for an idjit to be talkin' and no meanin' in it? Off wi' ye, man! The leg's no exactly a comfort when I'm talkin'."

"Why, Davie, it must be hurting you terrible!"

Pinnager had almost forgotten the broken leg, such was Davie's composure.

"It's no exactly a comfort, I said. Get you gone, Pinnager; your men may be idlin'. Get you gone, and send in Jack Scott, if he's man enough to handle my leg. I'm wearin' just now for my ain company."

As Davie had made his programme, so it stood. His will was inflexible to protests. Next morning at dawn they set him on a hay-bed in his low, unboxed sleigh. A bag of oats supported his back; his unhurt leg was braced against a piece of plank spiked down. Jock Scott had pulled the broken bones into what he thought their place, and tied that leg up in splints of cedar.

The sleigh was enclosed by stakes, four on each side, all tied together by stout rope. The stake at Davie's right hand was shortened, that he might hang his reins there. His water-bucket was tied to another stake, and his bag of provisions to a third. He was warm in a coon-skin coat, and four pairs of blankets under or over him.

At the last moment Pinnager protested: "I must send a man to drive. It shan't cost you a cent, Davie."

"Thank you, kindly, Pinnager," said Davie, gravely, "I'll tell that to your credit at the settlement. But ye're needin' all your help, and I'd take shame to worsen your chances. My feyther's horses need no drivin' but my word."

Indeed, they would "gee," "haw," or "whoa" like oxen, and loved his voice. Round-barrelled, deeply-breathed, hardy, sure-footed, active, gentle, enduring, brave, and used to the exigencies of "bush roads," they would take him through safely if horses' wit could.

Davie had uttered never a groan after those involuntary ones forced from him when the log, driving his leg against a tree, had made him almost unconscious. But the pain-sweat stood beaded on his face during the torture of carrying him to the sleigh. Not a sound from his lips, though! They could guess his sufferings from naught but his hard breathing through the nose, that horrible sweat, and the iron set of his jaw. After they had placed him, the duller agony that had kept him awake returned; he smiled grimly, and said, "That's a comfort."

He had eaten and drunk heartily; he seemed strong still; but what if his sleigh should turn over at some sidling place of the rude, lonely, and hilly forest road?

As Davie chirruped to his horses and was off, the men gave him a cheer; then Pinnager and all went away to labor fit for mighty men, and the swinging of axes and

the crashing of huge pines and the tumbling of logs from rollways left them fancy-free to wonder how Davie could ever brace himself to save his broken leg at the cahots.

The terrible cahots—plunges in snow-roads! But for them Davie would have suffered little more than in a shanty bunk. The track was mostly two smooth ruts separated by a ridge so high and hard that the sleigh-bottom often slid on it. Horses less sure-footed would have staggered much, and bitten crossly at one another while trotting in those deep, narrow ruts, but Davie's horses kept their "jog" amiably, tossing their heads with glee to be travelling towards home.

The clink of trace-chains, the clack of harness, the glide of runners on the hard, dry snow, the snorting of the frosty-nosed team, the long whirring of startled grouse—Davie only heard these sounds, and heard them dreamily in the long, smooth flights between cahots.

Overhead the pine tops were a dark canopy with little fields of clear blue seen through the rifts of green; on the forest floor small firs bent under rounding weights of snow which often slid off as it moved by the stir of part-ridge wings; the fine tracery of hemlocks stood clean; and birches smuggled in snow that mingled with their curling rags. Sometimes a breeze eddied downward in the aisles, and then all the undergrowth was a silent commotion of snow, shaken and falling. Davie's eyes noted all things unconsciously; in spite of his pain he felt the enchantment of the winter woods until—another cahot! he called his team to walk.

Never was one cahot without many in succession; he gripped his stake hard at each, braced his sound leg, and held on, feeling like to die with the horrible thrust of the broken one forward and then back; yet always his will ordered his desperate senses.

Eleven o'clock! Davie drew up before the half-breed



Peter Whitehead's midwood stopping-place, and briefly explained his situation.

"Give my horses a feed," he went on. "There's oats in this bag. I'll no be moved myself. Maybe you'll fetch me a tin of tea; I've got my own provisions." So he ate and drank in the zero weather.

"You'll took lil' drink of whiskey," said Peter, with commiseration, as Davie was starting away.

"I don't use it."

"You'll got far need some 'ore you'll see de Widow Green place. I ass twenty-tree mile."

"I will need it then," said Davie, and was away.

Evening had closed in when the bunch of teamsters awaiting supper at Widow Green's rude inn heard sleigh-bells, and soon a shout outside:

"Come out, some one!"

That was an insolence in the teamsters' code. Come out, indeed! The Widow Green, bustling about with fried pork, felt outraged. To be called out!—of her own house!—like a dog!—not she!

"Come out here, somebody!" Davie shouted again.

"G' out and break his head one of you," said fighting Moses Frost. "To be shoutin' like a lord!" Moses was too great a personage to go out and wreak vengeance on an unknown.

Narcisse Larocque went—to thrash anybody would be glory for Narcisse, and he felt sure that Moses would not, in these circumstances, let anybody thrash him.

"What for you shout lak' dat? Call mans hout, hey?"

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