

upon their own camp and nearly destroyed it. On one occasion one of the labourers thoughtlessly struck a match on his boot in a patch of long grass, and in an instant the fire flew, and though the camp was saved, the effect of that fire was afterwards ascertained to have destroyed the grass for 150 miles of longitude, and then to have turned southwards, when it is probable its progress in that direction was not arrested till it reached the Missouri River. The result of all these prairie-fires, which raged in different localities between the middle of August and middle of September, was that the general appearance of the country was now changed from the universal yellow tint to a dismal black, and the whole surface of the plains was as bare of herbage as the sand on the sea-shore. The homeward march was consequently rendered doubly anxious by the want of fodder for the horses and oxen; but by diligent search patches of grass in marshy places were found, where the fire could not reach, and to such places mowers would be sent with light waggons to cut as much grass as they could find during the day's march, and bring it to the main body later on in the day, at the camping-ground.

From the experience of the previous year at Red River, the period of the autumnal equinox was looked to with some anxiety; and the equinoctial snow-storm of the autumn of 1873 was unusually severe. The operations of the Commission had at that time advanced so far westward into the plain as to be beyond the reach of fuel of any kind, and the line of travel as well as the camping-grounds were necessarily in a shelterless country. The great snow-storm commenced suddenly with little or no warning, on the 23rd of September; and the various working parties, as well as the commissariat trains that happened to be on the march at the time, made such shelter for themselves as circumstances would permit. By placing the waggons in a horse-shoe form, and stretching canvas-sheets on the interior side, shelter was afforded to the horses from the driving sleet, which now set in with great violence from the north-west. The light canvas-tents formed but a poor protection for the men, and, in the absence of fuel, there was no help for it but to huddle together and get under their blankets. The storm continued, with scarcely any intermediate lulls, for seven days, during which period it was impossible to get the horses to graze, for as soon as they were turned out they would all come back again to the shelter of the waggons. During these seven days of forced inactivity, the horses lost flesh sadly, and many were incapacitated from work for the remainder of the season. Although this storm, as we well knew, was the forerunner of some weeks of fine autumn