

master's bells, and changes his warning bark, as he recognises them, to one of joyous welcome.

One evening, the close of a March day,—it matters not how long ago,—that merry peal might have been heard approaching the shore of one of the fairest of these island-studded “back lakes,” which, if they cannot vie with the broad Huron and Ontario in grandeur, yield in beauty to none of their mighty rivals. The winter had been severe and protracted, and the lake was still frozen over, but the ice had been for some days reckoned unsafe, and in the darkness which was now fast gathering over all things, to cross upon it seemed a perilous attempt.

The person who now appeared, however, driving rapidly towards the shore; looked like one who had braved such dangers many a time before. Every thing about him, from his own blanket coat and crimson sash, to the rough but powerful team he drove, and the shaggy, good-natured collier dog which lay at his feet in the sleigh, spoke the true back-woodsman—one of those hardy, fearless, much-enduring men, who seem made to be the pioneers of civilization; clearing away forests for others to plant cities in their room.

As the night, however, closed about him, it became evident, that even to him the prospect of crossing the unsound ice in the darkness was far from welcome. “It will be as dark as pitch,” said he, half aloud, “and the ice is rotten in a dozen places. Well, there’s no help for it now, and I know the road blindfold. Once safe on the other side, and I’ve done with the ice for this winter. I promised Mary this should be the last time.”

As the young teamster, for such he was, spoke, he urged his already tired horses to greater speed, for their hoofs were plashing in several inches of water, and the ice beneath was in a state which allowed no dallying by the way.

The moon had not risen, nor could she have given him any assistance if she had, for the sky was covered with thick, black clouds, and not so much as a solitary star peeped forth through the gloom. Relying, however, on his own knowledge of the track, James Gray drove on fearlessly; until he was convinced that he must be nearing a point where it became necessary to make a wide *detour*, to avoid a spot where the ice was both