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Towards the end of December absolute famine stared the whole party in the face. The Indians in shoals fell back on the fort as the only chance of prolonging their existence.

'In vain did we endeavor to revive their drooping spirits, and excite them to action; the scourge was too heavy, and their exertions were entirely paralysed. No sooner had one party closed the door, than another, still more languid and distressed, feebly opened it, and confirmed by their half-famished looks and sunken eyes their heart-rending tale of suffering. They spoke little, but crowded in silence round the fire, as if eager to enjoy the only comfort remaining to them. A handful of mouldy pounded meat, which had been originally reserved for our dogs, was the most liberal allowance we could make to each; and this meal, unpalatable and unwholesome as it was, together with the customary presentation of the friendly pipe, was sufficient to efface for a moment the recollection of their sorrows, and even to light up their faces with a smile of hope. "We know," they said, "that you are as much distressed as ourselves, and you are very good." Afflicting as it was to behold such scenes of suffering, it was at the same time gratifying to observe the resignation with which they were met. There were no impious upbraidings of Providence, nor any of those revolting acts, too frequent within late years, which have cast a darker shadow over the character of the Indian."—p. 210.

'Our hall was in a manner filled with invalids and other stupidly-dejected beings, who, seated round the fire, occupied themselves in roasting and devouring small bits of their reindeer garments, which, even when entire, afforded them a very insufficient protection against a temperature of 102° below the freezing point. The father torpid and despairing—the mother, with a hollow and sepulchral wail, vainly endeavoring to soothe the infant, which with unceasing moan clung to her shrivelled and exhausted breast—the passive child gazing vacantly around; such was one of the many groups that surrounded us.'—p. 218.

'Often,' says Captain Back, 'did I share my own plate with the children, whose helpless state and piteous cries were peculiarly distressing:—compassion for the full grown may or may not be felt, but that heart must be eased in steel which is insensible to the cry of a child for food.' The lamentable situation in which they were placed, the scanty rations of pemmican to which the party was reduced, produced, however, no sullen or sulky looks in the fine fellows Back had engaged in England and Canada: they were always cheerful and in good spirits. Back, in imitation of his old commander Franklin, instituted an evening school for their amusement. He pursued his astronomical obser-

vations, and when the thermometer at the end of December was at 70° below zero, made experiments on the effect and intensity of the cold on sulphuric and nitric ether, and pyroligneous acid, which are curious; but we must pass over the results.

'Such, indeed, was the abstraction of heat, that with eight large logs of dry wood in the fireplace of a small room, I could not get the thermometer higher than 12° plus. Ink and paint froze. The sextant cases, and boxes of seasoned wood, principally fir, all split. Nor was the sensation particularly agreeable to our persons; the skin of the hands especially became dry, cracked, and opened into unsightly and smarting gashes, which we were obliged to anoint with grease. On one occasion, after washing my face within three feet of the fire, my hair was actually clotted with ice before I had time to dry it. From these facts some idea may, perhaps, be formed of the excessive cold. It seemed to have driven all living things from us: we had been accustomed to see a few white partridges about, but even these, hardy as they are, had disappeared. Once, indeed, a solitary raven, whose croak made me run out to look at him, swept round the house, but immediately winged his flight to the westward. Nothing but the passing wind broke the awful solitude of this barren and desolate spot.'—p. 223.

The sufferings of the poor Indians at this period are not to be described. 'Famine, with her gaunt and bony arm,' says Back, 'pursued them at every turn, withered their energies, and strewed them lifeless on the cold bosom of the snow.' Nine had fallen victims already, and others were on the eve of perishing, when old Akaitcho, during this appalling period of suffering and calamity, proved himself the firm friend of the expedition. By his encouraging language and fortitude he kept up their desponding spirits, boldly encountered every difficulty, and made others act by the force of his example. Maufelly, also, another Indian chief, came opportunely with the joyful information, that he had five deer killed for them within a couple of days' walk. Shortly after another chief, Le Camarade de Mandeville, brought to the fort two sledges of dried meat; and at the same time came a further supply from Mr. McLeod, who had gone to a distance with a fishing party; accompanied, however, with the painful intelligence, that he and his family were surrounded by difficulties, privations, and deaths. 'Six more natives of either sex had sunk under the horrors of starvation.'

To add to the affliction suffered by Captain Back, he received a packet from Hudson's Bay by a person who told him that his old friend Augustus, the former affectionate