

ADVENTURE IN THE NORTH-WEST TERRITORY.

AFTER residing nearly a year in one of the most distant posts of the North-west Company, and conducting the fur trade there, I began to look forward to my return to Montreal. I waited with the greatest impatience for the arrival of the period which was to terminate my banishment, and restore me to society. I was nearly three thousand miles distant from any settlements, and my only companions were two young men, clerks of the establishment, whose characters, and limited acquirements, rendered them very uninteresting associates. My situation was one of considerable responsibility. A great number of Canadians, in the service of the Company, resided at the post, and were under my controul; but I found it a very difficult matter to keep them in a state of due subordination, and to prevent them from quarrelling and fighting with the detached parties of Indians that occasionally visited us for the purpose of trading. Interest and personal safety, alike, required that we should be on friendly terms with the natives; and I spent many anxious hours in endeavouring to promote mutual peace and good-humour.

Our post was situated upon the banks of a small lake, about sixteen miles broad. This lake discharged itself by means of a river into another of much greater dimensions, and thick forests covered every part of the neighbouring country.

One afternoon I took my gun, and strolled out in search of game. Though it was now the beginning of spring, the lake was still frozen completely across, the cold of the preceding winter having been very intense. I soon fell in with a flock of wild ducks, but before I could get a shot at them, they began to fly towards the middle of the lake; however, I followed them fearlessly over the ice, in the expectation that they would soon alight. The weather was mild, though rather blowy. Detached black clouds moved rapidly along the face of Heaven in immense masses, and the sun blazed forth in unobscured splendour at one moment, and was completely shrouded from the eye the next. I was so intent on the pursuit of my game, that I hastened forwards almost unconsciously, my progress being much facilitated by a

thin layer of snow which covered the ice, and rendered the footing tolerably secure. At last, I fired at the ducks, and killed one and wounded another. I immediately picked up the first, but its companion, having only been winged, began to leap away before I caught hold of it. I followed, but had not advanced more than twenty yards, when, to my astonishment, I found that the ice was in many places covered with water to the depth of several inches. I stopped short full of alarm, and irresolute what to do. It was evident that a thaw had already commenced, and as I well knew with what rapidity the ice broke up when once affected by a change of temperature, I became alive to all the dangers of my situation, and almost shuddered at the thought of moving from the spot on which I stood.

The weather had grown calm and hazy, and the sky was very black and lowering. Large flakes of snow soon began to fall languidly and perpendicularly through the air; and after a little time, these were accompanied by a thick shower of sleet rain, which gradually became so dense, that I could not discern the shore. I strained my eyes to catch a glance of some living object, but a dreary and motionless expanse stretched around me on every side, and the appalling silence that prevailed was sometimes interrupted by the receding cries of the wounded bird. All nature seemed to be awaiting some terrible event. I listened in fearful suspense, though I knew not what I expected to hear. I soon distinguished a distant thundering noise, which gradually became stronger, and appeared to approach the place where I stood. Repeated explosions, and hollow murmurings of irregular loudness, were succeeded by a tremendous sound, like that of rocks bursting asunder. The ice trembled beneath my feet, and the next moment it was disunited by a vast chasm, which opened itself within a few yards of me. The water of the lake rushed upwards through the gap with foaming fury, and began to flood the surface all around.

I started backwards, and ran, as I conceived, towards the shore; but my progress was soon stopped by one of those weak parts of the ice called *air-*