

CHAPTER IV.

We took up our ground on the left bank of the Chippawa, in the hope that we would be attacked in that strong position ; but nothing was further from the intention of the enemy than such a flagrant absurdity. They, from time to time, sent small parties to look at us; and there was some very distant skirmishing, which proved very harmless amusement ; but they withdrew at last, and we were ordered into winter quarters.

Our regiment, with the Tooth, took up their quarters at Queenston, where we were soon strengthened by the recovered wounded and sick from the different hospitals. We were particularly happy in a commanding officer. The then young and handsome Marquis of Tweeddale, who was Lieutenant Colonel of the booth, commanded our brigade : he had been educated in a good school, under the "Great Duke;" and, like his master, with an unceasing regard to the essentials of the service, he had a most sovereign contempt for those adventitious parts of it, which weaker minds are apt to consider as of the highest importance. Should his lordship, in the present high and responsible situation which he occupies, have an opportunity of displaying his tal-

ents, **I** am much deceived if he will **not add one** more to the numerous band of soldiers who have raised their own and their country's name in the fields of Hindostan ; therefore, God send him a good war ! **I** have no great faith in him as a politician : he is too honest a man !

But whatever he may be, as a soldier or a statesman, he was a wretched bad patient; for he was wounded, in a way that I had every fear would result in a permanent lameness ; and nothing could save him but rest. I recommended him, therefore, to spend most of his time on a bed—for sofas were rather scarce in Queenston at that time ;—but he persisted in riding a pony, with a crutch over his shoulder. Whether his mode of management has induced lameness or not, **I** do **not** know, for **I** have never seen him since ; but if he is lame, it is no fault of mine.

Queenston, though in ruins, having, like all the rest of the frontier, been wantonly destroyed by the enemy, was then, as it is now, a very prettily-situated village ; and the rest our men obtained, after their severe fatigues, began to have a most salutary effect upon them. so , as my senior colleague had recovered to such an extent as to attend to the diminished duties of the regimental hospital there, **I** was despatched to York—now Toronto—to take charge of about thirty of my own men, who were in general hospital in that garrison.

Toronto was then a dirty straggling village, containing about sixty houses. The church—the
 only one—was converted into a general hospital,

and I formed my lodge in the wing of the Parliament buildings, which had escaped, when the Americans had burnt the rest of that fabric.

Our accommodations were comfortable, by comparison with what we had lately been obliged to put up with. At all events, we had a tight roof over our heads, a clean floor under our feet, and the means of fire enough to keep us warm ; and a soldier who is not content with this, on a campaign, deserves to want. My own regiment soon came down to form a part of the garrison of Toronto ; and there I remained till the month of December, 1814.

At this time, it was proposed to build a large ship on Lake Huron—we having then so many on Lake Erie—that would be able, from her size, and the weight of her metal, to cope with the small vessels that composed the American flotilla on Lake Erie. As there is a channel through Lake Saint Clair, and the Rivers Detroit and Saint Clair, by which she could pass from the one lake into the other, an inlet, called Penetanguishene, was selected as the proper site of a new dock-yard, and a better sight could hardly have been selected, in this, or any other, part of the world. It was a narrow-mouthed, deep bay, with plenty of water for any size of craft, and a fine bold shore, easily defensible against any ships that could approach ; but unluckily, at this time, Penetanguishene was in the woods, thirty miles from Lake Simcoe ; and before a ship of the line could be built, a road must be cut, and stones broke along it.

This, at mid-winter, in one of the northernmost points of Canada, was no easy matter. But when Government, in the time of war, determine on a measure, the word impossible, as we used to say in the army, is not to be found in Dundas—and done it must be.

Accordingly, in the early part of December, I volunteered my services, and, as nobody else envied the job, they were accepted ; and a company of the Canadian Fencibles, with about the same number of militia, under the direction of Colonel Cockburn, of the Quarter Master General's Department, was despatched up to the north, with instructions to have the road cut at all hazards.

When we arrived on the banks of Lake Simcoe, we found it just in such a state that it could not possibly be crossed ; for the ice was formed, so that a boat could not get through it, but not strong enough to bear a man's weight. But, as there was a keen frost, we knew that this obstacle would soon be overcome ; so we took up our quarters in farm-houses along the margin of the lake.

In two days it was considered practicable to cross, and I volunteered to try it. I equipped myself with a long pole, with a chisel at the end of it, to try the ice with, and an axe slung across my shoulder, and skated across, about twelve miles.

The ice, though not very thick, was good, and quite sufficient to bear men at extended order ; so, on my return, I reported it practicable. Next

morning the men were drawn out at the point at which it was considered the most eligible for getting on the ice ; but the moment we were ready to start, a noise, like that of very loud thunder, was heard, which ran round the lake, and across it ; and, in an inconceivably short time, the whole ice was broken into fragments, some of some acres in extent, others of only a few yards. What the cause of this phenomenon could be, I never could form even a probable conjecture of, for there was no visible rise or fall of the water ; but I was told, by the inhabitants of the neighborhood, that they had more than once seen the same thing before.

The question now arose what was to be done next? The country people recommended that we should wait till next day, when not only would the broken ice be re-united, but the water which had risen upon it would be frozen into one solid mass, rendering the whole twice as strong as on the day previous, when I had passed it.

All this was undeniable, but the season was so far advanced, and heavy snow storms might be expected, so that even one day was of consequence. After due deliberation, it was resolved, that having a coil of rope with us, it should be stretched along, and each take hold of it, and drag his hand sleigh., on which was his knapsack and provisions, as well as divers tools, implements, and stores, requisite for the expedition. In this guise we proceeded across the lake ; the disasters were numerous but none of them serious. A fellow in stepping on a fracture of ice in

the shape of the letter V, would plump in and then be dragged out again by his comrades, amidst shouts of laughter. In this mode we progressed for upwards of six hours, until we reached the opposite side, where a huge pile of logs was kindled ; a space swept clear of snow, and we sat down to a late dinner. As the night appeared clear, we scattered some hemlock boughs, and raised a few of them to keep us from the wind, but upon learning that the militia, who, being from the neighborhood, had got over three weeks before us, had left a regular shanty, within a mile, we broke up our camp, and, deep as the snow was, and late the hour, we proceeded till we arrived at the spot, where trees were cut down, a fire lighted, and we betook ourselves to rest ; our previous fatigue securing us from any apprehension of a sleepless night.

Next day we started along the road the militia had cut, and in two hours came up with them. As they were sufficiently numerous for one party, it was resolved that we should get on some miles in advance of them, and commence further up the line. The snow was about three feet deep, and made the marching, heavy-laden as we were, toilsome ; but like Columbus' *egg*, everything is comparatively easy when people know how to go about it. One mode of proceeding was this: six or seven men led on snow shoes in Indian file, taking care to tread down the snow equally; then followed the column, also in Indian file. At about every thirty yards, the leader of the column stepped aside, and letting the rest pass

him, fell into the rear. By this means, after the fatigue of first breaking the snow, he could march on a beaten path, and thus, alternating labor and rest, the thing was comparatively easy. By sun-set we had made about five miles beyond the militia camp, and it was counted, considering the road, a very fair day's journey.

It would be tiresome to detail (even if at this distance of time I was able to do so), the journal of a three months' residence in the woods, one day being an exact counterpart of another. I shall, therefore, only mention the mode in which we got on.

Our first care, on coming to our ground, was to shovel away the snow, which latterly was six feet deep; we then cut down as many bass-wood trees (a species of the pine), as we required, and then proceeded to erect our shanty, (*chantiê*). This was done by fixing four forked sticks in the ground, the higher in front, from which we constructed our roof. The bass-wood bark was peeled and placed upon the roof, one layer lying in the trough of the other, after the manner of a tile. The trees were then split into rough boards, which formed the back and sides of the mansion, the front being open. The snow was then shovelled up so as to render all secure. Hemlock boughs were then strewed on the frozen ground, and blankets and buffalo skins over that. In front was a long fire, composed of six large logs, three at the bottom, two upon these, and one on the top, on the principle on which shot is piled in a battery ; in front, and within a yard of the

fire, was placed a log to prevent our feet being scorched by the intense heat, and if, during the night, our feet got cold, we had only to place our heels on the top of the log, and in a few seconds they were often more than comfortably warm.

Two shanties were always placed opposite each other, and this had a double advantage ; they sheltered the wind from each other, and one fire did for both. In the case of the officers of the party, their servants occupied the opposite one, so they were always within call.

labor cutting the road in deep snow was great, and the expense of provisions had been carried on men's backs, for snow had not broken in enough to admit of horses or even oxen, that one half of our men were employed in carrying, or, as it is technically termed, *packing* provisions for the other. The want of oxen produced another enormous source of expenditure ; when a log was cut it had to be drawn by drag ropes out of the way, and thirty men could not perform, in the deep snow, what a yoke of oxen could easily have performed in light snow or none at all. When the snow got very deep, too, we had, before felling a tree, to dig a pit round it of sufficient diameter to allow a man to stand in it and swing his axe. The expense of a war surprises John Bull, and he only grumbles; were he to enquire into the causes, it is to be hoped he would be shy of so expensive an amusement, where after all he does not get his fun for his

money. I would undertake to-morrow to cut a better road than we could possibly do, for forty pounds a mile, and make money by it,—give me timely warning and a proper season of the year, whereas I am convinced that 42,500 to 3,000 did not pay for the one we cut.

Our amusements consisted in shooting partridges and snaring the Canadian hare, which, as it comes out of its hiding place chiefly at night, can only be apprehended, as the game laws style it, in that manner. The mode of so doing, being caused by the necessities of the country, is worthy of remark. These animals inhabit the swamps, and make roads through the snow for the purpose of coming out to where they can browse. In these roads a spring is set, by bending down a young sapling, and two pegs are driven into the ground on each side of the path, and notches are cut, in which a yoke is neatly set, from which the noose hangs down, much on the principle of a mole trap. The hare jerking the wire, relieves the yoke, and the sapling resumes its erect position, carrying the hare eight or ten feet above the surface of the snow, and this secures him from becoming the prey of the wolf or the fox, who, if he was within their reach, would inevitably secure him before his legitimate captor arrived in the morning.

In this manner passed the winter, monotonously enough it must be owned, but as we had full employment we had no time to weary. When we were about six or seven miles from the end of our task, I started along the line to view the

harbour. In Canada, the line is marked through the forest by what is termed a Surveyor's *blaze*, (a corruption of the French *balise*,) seeing that boughs are stuck in the snow to guide travellers. The blaze consists in marking the trees on the line of the road with an axe, and except to a practised eye, it is easily lost. I had proceeded along it some miles, when a covey of partridges crossed my path ; I immediately followed them, and after shooting several and losing sight of the rest, I took off in the direction in which I thought I should again cross the blaze. All my efforts to find it, however, were unavailing, and as the sun was fast declining, I had no other shift than to go back on my own steps in the snow. I had every motive to exertion, and about sun-set I found myself about a mile and a quarter from the camp ; but it soon grew so dark that I could trace my way no further. I therefore halted, and having beat a path of about twenty yards in length in the snow, I walked backward and forward, determined to keep moving all night. This resolution I kept for some hours, I believe, but at last I got so sleepy that I could persevere no longer, besides I felt that stupor coming over me which makes men indifferent as to their fate. I therefore determined to use my remaining energies in giving myself every chance of life that circumstances would admit of.

I took off my snow shoes, and poured a quantity of rum into my moccasins ; I buttoned my jacket, secured my fur cap about my ears, drew on my fur gloves, and calling a little dog I had

with me, and laying my hands over my face, I made him lie on the top of all.

I slept most intensely sound, nor did I awake till the morning sun was at least an hour high. After two or three attempts I managed to rise ; my feet were frozen, and one of my hands slightly so, but both were so benumbed that I could not fasten on my snow shoes ; I therefore had to stick my toes in the holes of them, and shuffle along as best I could. It had snowed about four inches during the night, which was all in my favor. I managed to scramble on towards the camp, but could not manage more than quarter of a mile an hour. On my arrival there, some old French Canadians undertook the medical treatment of my case. They stripped off my moccasins and stockings, and commenced rubbing my feet with snow. If there was any pain in being frozen I was insensible to it, but of all the tortures this world can devise, the resuscitation was the worst I ever experienced. It was that abominable sensation called tingling, in an extreme degree, to such an extent, indeed, that it more than once produced fainting, which unpleasant symptom they combated by pouring down my throat a tin cup full of rum. When the pain abated, they enveloped my feet in poultices of boiled beech leaves, which they conceive "the sovereignest thing in life" in such cases.

I was confined to my bed for three weeks, and then was only able to go abroad by swathing my feet in numerous folds of blanket. In a few weeks more I was as well as ever. The poor little dog,

Moses, the companion of my sufferings, was not so fortunate. He reached the camp with difficulty, and died the next day.

I thought at the time and since, that this was the only instance of a white man sleeping out in a Canadian winter night, without fire or covering of any kind, but whatever it might have been then, we have had an instance here of a Canadian French woman, who slept out under similar circumstances two consecutive nights this winter. She, however, did not get off so cheap as I did, for she has been confined to bed for four months and lost both her feet, and from the extent of the injury it is probable she will be some months yet before she is out of the doctor's hands.

It might be supposed that this kind of life would generate disease, but the very reverse was the case. In this, as well as all my other doings in the woods, I have always found that where it is possible to take proper care of the man, and not expose them to wet, they are more healthy than in quarters. It is only on military duty, or with men who cannot or will not take care of themselves, that disease takes place. I have slept in the woods more than a year, at one time and another, in the course of my life, and with the foregoing provisos, never was better in health or spirits under any circumstances. Except casualties such as cutting feet, (a very common accident, even among experienced choppers,) and bruises from falling trees, I had not a single case worth noticing on this expedition. I ascribe this mainly to the beneficial effects of the open

air on the constitution, a cause which, however much has been said about it, seems yet not to be practically understood by the generality of mankind. Things went on pretty much the same till we had nearly completed our business ; no labour had been spared in perfecting our work. Bridges had been thrown across streams in the depth of winter, when officers and men had to stand for hours up the middle in ice-cold water : ravines had to be bridged when the logs had to be dragged out of swamps through four feet of snow. The month of March was far advanced when we promised ourselves a pleasant summer in the comfortable quarters that we meant to build for ourselves at Penetanguishene, when all our anticipations were set aside by the arrival of the appalling intelligence that peace had been concluded between His Majesty and the United States. This showed us half pay staring us in the face ; however, soldiers have nothing to do but obey—we were withdrawn—all the expenditure incurred went for nothing ; we were marched to Toronto, (then York,) and sent to join our respective regiments.

My regiment had marched down the country on its way to embark for England ; I followed it, and after remaining for two months at Sorel, embarked in June, 1815, to go to Waterloo, but so many unnecessary delays had taken place, that though we did not sail till the sixth of June, we might quite as well have left Quebec on the sixth May, in which case we should unquestionably have figured in the greatest action of mod-

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ern times, and his grace, the great Duke, would have been none the worse of from 15,000 to 20,000 of his veteran troops on whom he could depend. It was fated otherwise, however ; thank God he managed to do without us. We heard of his victory at sea, and a frigate was sent out to order us to Portsmouth instead of Antwerp. We were some of its sent to augment the Army of Occupation in France, others to various quarters at home, where, after spending eighteen months to my own great satisfaction, but of which a narration might not interest my readers, I was placed on half-pay, and as I only propose to treat of Canada, I shall leave in oblivion the memorabilia of the next eleven and a half years, and in my next chapter take up Canada as I found it in 1826.

* The Highlander is no equestrian—he can trot on his feet fifty or sixty miles a day, with much greater ease to himself, and in a shorter space of time, than he could ride the same distance. A gentleman once sent his Highland servant a message on urgent business, and to enable him to execute it sooner, gave him a horse. Donald did not return at the time expected, nor for long after it ; at last his master, who was watching anxiously for him, discerned him at a long distance on the road on foot, creeping at a snail's pace, and *towing* the reluctant quadruped by the bridle. On being objurgated for his tardiness, he replied "he could have been here twa three hours, but he has taignt wi' to yeast," *i.e.* delayed, or impeded by the horse.

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