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ON A LABRADOR "COMMETICK."

By CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

Yes," said my friend Granger, "this is pretty good speed. But it seems very slow and commonplace, I can tell you, to one who has traveled over the Labrador ice behind a team of fifteen good dogs. That's what I call going."

"You don't really mean to tell me," said I, in a tone of grave incredulity, "that a dog-team can travel as fast as an express train?"

Granger took the little briar pipe from his mouth, and blew a long, deliberate smoke-jet before answering. Then he said:

"With due qualifications, yes. That is just what I mean to tell you."

Now, my friend Granger is a man whose word goes without question; he knew what he was talking about, moreover. He had been captain of a stanch schooner trading to the Newfoundland and Labrador coasts till a passion for helping his fellow-men had seized his sincere and eager heart, and driven him to become a lay missionary to the fishermen and Esquimaux. He knew the people among whom he worked. He understood their temptations; he was tender, but firm toward their weaknesses; he won their confidence, and the good he did was beyond calculation. I could not doubt either his knowledge or his accuracy of statement. And yet, here he was telling me that a team of little Esquimaux dogs traveled faster than an express train.

We were in the smoking-car of the Quebec express, of the Intercolonial Railway, about an hour out of Halifax, and making fine speed over a piece of straight well-ballasted road, toward Truro. The swift roar with which we had flashed past a little way-station had called forth an exclamation from me, and thus given rise to Granger's astonishing statements.

"I wish you would explain yourself, old man," said I, presently.

"What I said," replied Granger, "is not so extravagant as it may at first sound. We are going now but little over forty miles an hour, and this pace won't be kept up very long. Moreover, there is nothing exciting about this, is there? You don't at all get the sense of rapid and dangerous motion. But on first-class ice, and with a first-class team harnessed to my 'commetick,' as they call the dog-sled in Labrador, I've covered forty miles well inside of two hours, or at a rate of considerably over twenty miles an hour. There's many an express train that does not go more than thirty miles an hour. But the difference is that behind the flying team of dogs you seem yourself fairly to fly. You hold on for dear life to the commetick, and think you are going at least a mile a minute. There's excitement enough; and then there's lots of real danger, too, for the team is like a pack of famished wolves, and only to be managed just so."

"Dangerous!" I exclaimed, with a gesture of impatience. "Do you mean to say the men are so slack that the animals are not taught to obey?"

"Within certain limits, and after a fashion of their own," said my friend, "they obey their driver. They make no pretence of obeying anyone else. But let me tell you an experience of my own, which will serve to illustrate what I have said."

"By all means," I assented, heartily.

Then he told the following story:

It was three years ago last February, and I was starting out from Cape Chidleigh to visit Red Bay. I had never traveled by dog-team, and I looked forward to the journey as eagerly as a boy. The ice

was in splendid shape, and my driver was one Sandy McKee, a Scotch-Esquimaux half-breed, in whose skill and courage I had the fullest confidence. His team of fifteen dogs was said to be the fastest and fiercest on the coast. But as for dogs, it had never occurred to me to care whether dogs were fierce or not; and had I concerned myself at all on the subject, the look of Sandy's clear, gray eyes and strong jaw features would have satisfied me of his power to control any animals that might be put under his charge.

These dogs were bushy, sharp-nosed, long-fanged fellows having points of resemblance to both wolf and fox. They were of all colors, and seemed to be in a most savage temper as Sandy was harnessing them. But they were no uglier than usual, Sandy assured me, and when I learned that they had had no breakfast I was not surprised at their ill-humor. The dog-team, I was told, is fed only at the end of a journey. Thus every animal is kept eager to reach the goal and get his dinner of salt fish. After the dogs are fed they insist on lying down for an hour or two, and during that time nothing can persuade them to do good traveling.

The commetick on which I was to journey excited my deepest interest. It seemed to me the most rickety conveyance imaginable. There was not a nail, not a rigid joint in its whole anatomy. The two long runners were about six inches in height, but they could bend over on either side almost to the ground, if pressure enough were brought to bear upon them. They were held together by cross-bars, and every fastening was a thong of seal-hide, tough and pliable, well chewed by the Esquimaux women. Thus loosely-jointed, one runner could be thrust forward ahead of the other until the cross-bars all ran diagonally and the commetick looked like a gigantic music-rack. I was soon to appreciate the reasons for such a strange construction.

Soon, the leader of the team, a little white female of evil temper and wonderful authority over the other dogs, was hitched in her place. Then Sandy told me to get aboard and hold on for all I was worth. The instant that he himself was in his place the little white leader yelped shrilly, the whole pack leaped forward, and the commetick sprang after them with a jerk that almost threw me overboard, in spite of Sandy's warning.

Then began such a journey as makes the fast express seem tame to me. The ice, as I have said, was generally smooth, though with rough spots and cracks here and there. The dogs ran at top speed, stretching themselves in their long, mad gallop till their bellies seemed to sweep the ice. The commetick really appeared to be flying through the air, and the rush of the wind took my breath away. Fortunately it was not a cold day, or I should have been unable to face it. Every here and there came a roughness in the track, over which the sledge would writhe in a most thrilling and discomfiting fashion. I felt as if everything, including my own limbs, must immediately fly apart, and my heart appeared to have taken up its permanent abode in my throat. I confess that I wanted very much to get off that interesting commetick. It was a good half-hour before I could quite control my uneasiness. Then, finding that no catastrophe took place, I began to tingle with fine excitement. At every bump in the road I realized keenly that on such a journey as this an ordinary sled would be hammered to bits in 20 time. At every turn I understood how a sled that would not yield in its joints would inevitably be bowled over and over—while the commetick, in some marvelous way, managed to keep always on an even keel. The gray and purple rocks on our right, and the clumps, of stunted dark-green spruce scattered among them, fled past in swift procession. I felt as if we were a snow-wraith blown by a wild wind across the desolate Arctic world.

Sandy, meanwhile, sat upon the front of the commetick as if he had been glued there. He seemed to hold on by the mere force of cohesion. From his right hand trailed out behind the sledge the mighty lash of his dog-whip—sixty feet of lithe, plaited seal-hide, on a handle not over a foot in length. With the biting end of this terrific lash Sandy could pick out any dog of the team for instant castigation. The dexterous art with which he handled this strange weapon was something marvelous to me. It filled me with delighted admiration, after I had learned to feel quite confident that it would not catch my own neck by mistake.

We had been traveling for nearly an hour, and the dogs had shown no sign of relaxing their pace, when suddenly the leader swerved sharply aside, and with a chorus of eager yelpings the whole team dashed in the direction of a tiny gray object lying at some distance on the ice.

Sandy muttered angrily, but made no attempt to stop them. "What is it?" I asked. "Just a dead gull!" said Sandy, in a tone of vexation. "But why do you let them go off that way?" I inquired. "When a dog-team sees anything ahead on the ice," replied Sandy, "there ain't no such thing as stoppin' 'em, or turnin' 'em, till they git there an' tear it all to bits."

This revelation of the driver's comparative powerlessness irritated me somewhat, and made me want to take the team in hand forthwith and train it. But I said nothing for a few minutes, and meanwhile the leader had snatched up the body of the dead bird. It furnished a mouthful of feathers to her and her nearest followers and then the journey was resumed at full speed.

Presently I said:

"If it were a man ahead on the ice, instead of a mere dead animal, would these brutes act the same way?"

"Exactly!" said Sandy, with great nonchalance.

"That's a pleasant idea!" said I. "Why they're no better than so many wolves. And do you acknowledge that you, their own driver and master, could not save their victim from their fangs?"

"There's jist one thing to do in them cases," replied Sandy. "I blind the leader, an' then I can make her do as I like. An' the team, of course, goes where she goes!"

"Blind her!" I exclaimed. "And how do you do that?"

"Flick out her eyes, one or both, with this here whip!" said Sandy.

"Hit a dog's eye at a distance of fifty feet! that's rather a slim chance, isn't it?" I asked, incredulously. "When a man's life is depending on it, I wouldn't like to take the risk of you missing your mark. Why not carry a gun with you, and just shoot the leader in case of such an emergency arising?"

"That wouldn't do no good whatever," replied Sandy, "for the dogs would go right ahead to avenge her; they'd be savager than ever. But as for hittin' her eye, why the man as can't do that every time he tries has no business behind a dog-team. With this here whip I can pick off a fly at sixty feet, an' never miss."

"Well, Sandy," I said, "I don't want you to hit the dog in the eye just at present; but when we stop, I'll get you to show me your skill with something about the size of a dog's eye, at a distance of sixty feet."

"All right!" said Sandy.

For a long time I meditated on the thrilling and horrible possibilities opened up by what Sandy had just told me. All at once, in the distance, and far to one side of our track, I marked a dark object lying on the ice. I rubbed my eyes, imagining that the horrors which I had pictured to my mind had begun to play tricks with my vision. But no, that was surely a man's form. I began to tremble and pray that the dogs might overlook it; and even at that same instant they swerved and dashed towards it with blood-thirsty yelpings.

"Stop them! Stop them!" I cried to Sandy.

Sandy's face had paled somewhat but he hesitated.

"Whitey's a good dog!" said he. "She's the best leader in Labrador. An' the man yonder's dead, anyways!"

"Is a live dog of more importance than a dead man?" I wondered to myself. But the next moment the supposed dead man, roused by the fierce yelping, raised his head. When he saw the approaching doom he glanced wildly behind him, and staggered to his feet. Then, appearing to realize that escape was hopeless, he crouched like a panther at bay, drew his knife, and waited. I was shaking now with terrible excitement; and the distance between the dogs and their prey diminished with appalling swiftness.

"Stop them, Sandy! Blind the brute, quick!" I cried.

But Sandy only growled in a fierce voice:

"He's a bad Injun, that! My worst enemy! Ten of him's not worth a dog like Whitey!"

For an instant I was dumb with astonishment. Then my veins ran hot with ungovernable fury to think that my driver should contemplate sacrificing the life of a fellow man to that blood-thirsty and vicious little white dog at the head of his team.

"You murderer!" I hissed, as soon as I could find my voice. "Stop her, I tell you! Blind her! or I'll—"

Just what threat I was going to make I hardly know; but I was reaching forward toward Sandy's neck—and I know my face could not have been pleasant to look at—when Sandy turned quickly around,

Something in my voice or my expression seemed to surprise him. He had probably been laboring under the idea that all missionaries were a gentle race, to be loved, perhaps, but hardly to be feared. But now he sat up sharply, and as far away from me as possible.

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir!" he exclaimed, in haste. And the next moment that long lash, coiling and darting through the air like the ghost of a terrible snake, flicked lightly over the little yelping white leader's nose.

There was an instant sharp howl, and the vicious beast swerved to one side, forgetting her fell purpose in her sudden pain. Sandy bore gently and steadily on the line, and swung her about in a wide circle, the team following with prompt obedience, though doubtless wondering at their leader's change of tactics. The brute had suddenly grown submissive, probably because she was bewildered by the pain and semi-blindness, and in a minute or two Sandy had brought the pack to a standstill. The leader lay down at once, and licking her paw, began rubbing her eye with it, while Sandy sprang forward to examine the injury.

"Shall we kill her, and put her out of her misery?" I asked.

"No, sir!" said Sandy, quickly. "It's only one eye I hit. She'll still be better than other dogs with two!"

While Sandy, with some rough medications from his pack (probably seal fat in some form, the Labrador cure-all), was doctoring the wound, I went over to the Indian, who had again fallen on the ice in a swoon. He was emaciated to the last degree. A few drops of brandy between his lips revived him; and the moment he could sit up he looked anxiously around toward a little hillock of ice, ten or twelve feet away. To this he waved me eagerly. I went at once; and there behind it I found a bundle of furs on a tiny hand-sled. Within the bundle lay a sick child, as thin as a skeleton, but still alive and mute and uncomplaining, like his race. I drew the sled around to where the Indian sat, thinking to myself:

"This poor baby, too, would have been torn to pieces, if I had not forced Sandy to blind the fiend that leads his team."

I felt no compassion for the beast's eye, I can assure you!

I at once gave the Indian a morsel of meat; and then he told me how he had started in from the mountains a week before to bring his sick child to me, because he had heard that I was a great medicine man. But he had himself fallen sick by the way, and so had been unable to travel as fast as he expected. He had found himself a last with just enough food to keep the child alive, without leaving anything for himself. Then starvation had conquered him. The yelping of the dogs had roused him from his stupor; but when he perceived that it was the team of an enemy that was rushing down upon him, he gave both the child and himself up for lost.

I could see that the poor wretch still watched Sandy with alarm. But Sandy had realized once for all that I was master and he paid no attention to his ancient enemy. To make room on the commetick for my patients, I now ordered Sandy to unload and cache the greater part of his stuff, and come back for it after carrying me to the end of my journey.

Then we again got under way. We made no such time, as we made before the stop. The little white leader would still lead, but she was in no mood for lively travelling. Early in the afternoon we halted at a lonely Esquimaux settlement, where I placed the Indian and child in the care of a Moravian pastor, to await my return from Red Bay.

The rest of the journey was accomplished without any remarkable incident. It astonished me to observe how quickly the dog's eye healed up under Sandy's treatment. Of course that eye was stone blind; but the indomitable little animal was as active and lawless as ever in a couple of days, and for Sandy's sake I was glad that no occasion arose to demand the sacrifice of the other eye. It amused me to watch the extremely careful deference, quite unlike his former indulgent semi-familiarity, with which Sandy never ceased to treat me after my outburst on the commetick.

"Well!" said I, as Granger concluded and felt in his pocket for a match, "you have quite convinced me that it is more exciting to travel on a Labrador commetick than on an express train. Nevertheless, anyone but a wild missionary would, I think continue to prefer the express."

A joint memorial signed by all the Protestant clergy men of Montreal has been received by the Star expressing approval and support of the Relief Fund movement.

Every subscription to the Star's Famine Fund, great or small, will be publicly acknowledged.

WITNESSES.

"I am working alone and so one heeds!" Who says so does not know; There are clear eyes watching on every side,

And wh-rever our feet may go, We are "compassed about with so great a cloud,"

That if we could only see, We could never think that our life is small, Or that we may unnoticed be!

We seem to suffer and bear alone Life's burdens and all its care; And the sighs and prayers of the heavy heart

Vanish into the air; But we do not suffer or work alone, And after a victory won, Who knows how happy the hosts may be Who whisper a soft "Well done!"

Oh, do not deem that it matters not How you live your life below; It matters much to the heedless crowd That you see go to and fro, For all that is noble and high and good Has an influence on the rest, And the world is better for every one Who is living at his best.

But even if human eyes see not, No one is unobserved, There are censures deep and plaudits high As each may be deserved;

Shall we live in a secret place, There are watchers always by, For Heaven and earth are full of life, And God is ever nigh.

Oh, for a life without reproach, For a heart of earnestness! For self forgotten, for meanness' ain, For hands well used to bless!

God, raise us far from the little things, And make us meet to be Skilled workers in the place we fill, And servants unto Thee!

—Marrienne Farningham.

A TRAIN WITHOUT END.

"Whether we sleep or wake there is an unbroken train of perceptions passing through the mind"

So at least the Professor of Moral and Mental Philosophy used to teach our class in college. In our modern lingo we should say he meant that the mind never shuts up and takes a day off. It is always open and doing business—often business better left undone, absurd business, wild and crazy business, in which it sometimes breaks itself up so as not to be able to distinguish between the gold coin of common sense and the worthless paper of speculation.

But the mind will act, must act; and rather than lie quiet it will mislead and torment its owner. Glorious faculty! Dangerous power!

Still—mark this now!—the mind is not self-suggestive. The things that keep it going are outside of it, for good or for bad.

That being so, whence arose those frightful dreams with which Mrs. Rebecca Wilkin says she was troubled? Perhaps we can guess after reading her letter.

"In October, 1891," she says, "my health began to give way. I felt exhausted and tired with little exertion. My appetite was poor, and after every meal I had weight and pain at the chest, and was much swollen around the waist."

"I had a severe pain at the heart, as if a knife was cutting me. I had a sickening pain at the pit of the stomach, and would often be doubled up with spasms."

"I lost a good deal of sleep at night, and was troubled with frightful dreams."

"As time went on I got so weak that I could barely get about. In this distressing state I continued for over two years. I saw a doctor from time to time, who said I was suffering from windy spasms and indigestion, but his medicines did me no good."

"In November, 1893, a shopmate told my husband about Mother Seigel's Syrup and recommended me to try it. I got a bottle from Mr. C. Sanderson, chemist, South Eston, and after taking this medicine for a week I began to improve. The pain at the heart was easier, and I had no pain after meals."

"I continued taking the medicine, and gained strength daily. When I had taken five bottles I was completely cured, and have been in good health ever since. I wish I had known of the medicine sooner it would have saved me much suffering. You can publish this statement as you like. Yours truly, (Signed) (Mrs.) Rebecca Wilkin, 35, Cabriola, South Eston, near Middleborough, November 15, 1895"

These articles must in no case exceed their usual length. There are plenty of reasons for that, besides the money reason. People often write us and say: "Your essays on disease and its allied phenomena are the best things in the papers. Give us more of them and make them longer."

But we say no. And that is why I don't quote you, here and now, three other letters—two from women, one from a man—all telling of experiences very much like Mrs. Wilkin's, and all speaking of bad dreams that made night a time of terror to them. I say "made" (using the past tense) for they are all over now, having been cured by Mother Seigel's Syrup, just as she was.

One moment now. Bad dreams, frightful dreams, are more than an annoyance; they are both a mental and a bodily evil. They exhaust vitality almost like blood letting; and, when habitual, they tend to induce mania. Commonly they are caused by the poisons of indigestion (food fermentation in the stomach) acting through the blood on the nerves; and then on the mind. From this tank full of corruption, horrible suggestions are conveyed to the fancy in sleep, as foul bats sweep through the darkness of country graveyards.

The cure may be inferred from the disease. Cure the indigestion, as these people

pedil, with Mother Seigel's Syrup, and mind in sleep will have only those harmless perceptions which neither break rest nor leave any memory to the waking hour.

BRITISH SUBJECTS STARVING BY THE MILLION.

India needs our help; the famine is upon her, and according to the estimate of the highest authorities, the lives of six millions of people are in danger—a British population greater than that of all Canada. Both the Imperial and Indian Governments are moving in the work of relief; but this is a case that can not be left to governments alone. It appeals to humanity generally. The people of Britain have taken up the work of relief, and their example is being followed in other lands. Even the Russians are sending money and food to India.

Canadians cannot turn a deaf ear to the cry of their fellow British subjects in the far East, and the means of sending effectual assistance has now been provided. A Relief Fund—the first to be started in Canada—has been opened by the Montreal Star newspaper, and its publisher has headed the subscription list with a donation of five hundred dollars. Premier Laurier has written the Star a letter, in which he expresses hearty approval of the relief movement, and he contributes a handsome cheque to the fund.

Greater Than Ever.

January Victories Over Disease and Death.

THE GRANDEST RECORD EVER ATTAINED IN ONE MONTH.

Paine's Celery Compound the acknowledged King of Medicines.

The Kind the People Need in Order to Restore and Preserve Health.

The acknowledged king of medicines in the world to-day is Paine's Celery Compound.

Its marvellous cures during the month of January made up a record far surpassing the work of any previous month in past years. Hundreds of letters were sent in by saved men and women who were truly plucked from the grave and saved to anxious relatives and friends. In thankful, burning words the young and old admitted that without Paine's Celery Compound their cases would have been quite hopeless.

Surely, poor sufferer, this is sufficient proof that Paine's Celery Compound is able to meet your case, even though it be serious and desperate—able to give you the new life you so much desire. Try it once; a bottle or two will work wonders.

Prominent Business Man of Peterboro Cured of Eczema.

Mr. Thos. Gladman, bookkeeper for Adam Hall, Esq., stove and unware dealer, Peterboro, writes the following facts:—"Have been troubled for nine years with Eczema on my leg, and at times the itching was something terrible; tried many eminent doctors and was pronounced incurable. I had given up hopes of ever being cured when I was recommended by Mr. Madril, druggist, to try a box of Dr. Chas. B. Ointment, and I am happy to testify that after using two boxes I am completely cured."

Rheumatism is caused by lactic acid in the blood. Hood's Sarsaparilla neutralizes the acid and cures rheumatism.

The Whole Story

Of the great sales attained and great cures accomplished by Hood's Sarsaparilla is quickly told. It purifies and enriches the blood, tones the stomach and gives strength and vigor. Disease cannot enter the system fortified by the rich, red blood which comes by taking Hood's Sarsaparilla.

Hood's Pills cure nausea, sick headache, indigestion, biliousness. All druggists, 25c.

Sour stomachs sweetened by the use of K D C. Take K D C for sour stomach and sick headache.