

B. W. A. Sleigh

Introduction by *P. B. Waite*

CROSSING NORTHUMBERLAND STRAITS IN MARCH, 1852

Burrows Willcocks Arthur Sleigh (1821-1868) was born in Lower Canada. In 1823 he was taken to England by his parents; but some years later, perhaps about 1834, the family returned, and young Sleigh went to school in Lower Canada for four years. Nothing further is known of him until 1842 when, according to the *Army List*, he enrolled in the 2nd West Indian Regiment in Jamaica as an Ensign. In 1844 he was duly promoted to Lieutenant. In 1845 the 77th (East Middlesex) Regiment of Foot arrived in Jamaica from England, and to it Sleigh transferred. In the spring of 1846 the 77th was moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and, a few months later, in September, to Quebec. On June 25, 1848, it was gazetted as having returned to England. All connection between Sleigh and the permanent army appears to have ended in 1848, just at this time.¹ The probability is that when he arrived in England he sold his commission. A Lieutenant's commission was worth about £500; with the proceeds of this sale, and probably with other funds, he bought in England seven townships of Prince Edward Island—about 100,000 acres and some 1/14 of the whole Island. So, about 1850, and now an independent gentleman of some twenty-nine years of age, he returned to North America; he was thus a landed proprietor, and he shortly acquired some of the usual appurtenances, becoming a Justice of the Peace and a Lieutenant Colonel of one of the local militia regiments. But he did not, apparently, live much in Prince Edward Island; he preferred Halifax, which, as he described it, "from its resident gentry, the general tone of his society, the delightful environs, exquisite drives . . . is one of the pleasantest places of residence in the Lower Provinces."² And he had unhappy experiences with Prince Edward Island, as the pages of his book, *Pine Forests and Hacmatack Clearings* sufficiently attest. Charlottetown's legal luminaries he designated "the forty thieves."³ Responsible government there was a mockery: "when the Prime Minister is seen "emerging from his tavern, and the Councillors from their shops, the illusion vanishes . . . particularly where an Honourable Executive Councillor's *dray* 'stops the way', and he descends from his bundles of dried cod-fish, to sit at the 'Council Board' in the Province Building."⁴ Sleigh had equally caustic opinions about the Island tenants, who he believed were animated largely by general knavery and animal cunning, and who would vote for any unscrupulous politician who would join them in fighting the proprietors.

In 1852 Lt. Colonel Sleigh (as he was wont to call himself) began a steamship service from New York to Quebec, *viâ* Halifax, Charlottetown, and Miramichi, with the 1100-ton *Albatross*. She was a sound propellor-driven ship, carefully chosen, and the whole enterprise was greeted with some *éclat* by provincial newspapers and politicians; with help from the several provincial legislatures it even bid to become a commercial success. But owing to the lack of navigational aids in the Gulf and in the St. Lawrence River, the cost of marine insurance was ruinous—\$1950 for every trip—and the scheme was abandoned and the *Albatross* sold. Perhaps it was for these reasons, among others, that Sleigh was led to urge the legislative union of the British North American colonies under a vice-regal Governor General. At least it might overcome the commercial torpor that Sleigh believed to prevail; with this, and with a plea for more emigration from Great Britain, he closed his book.

Pine Forests and Hacmatack Clearings was published in London in 1853. It is now rather rare, and, outside of Nova Scotia, it has until recently been almost unknown.⁵ It is not a great work, but for a vivid and not unsympathetic account of life a century ago in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Lower Canada, it has few equals. One of the most interesting parts of it follows:⁶ a description of a journey from Halifax to Charlottetown and back in March, 1852, which Sleigh probably undertook because of urgent business connected with the "agrarian notions" of the tenants or the machinations of the "forty thieves" in the law offices of Charlottetown.

P. B. W.

1. The remark in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* that he rose to be Lt. Colonel in the 77th Regiment is incorrect.
2. [B.W.A.] Sleigh, *Pine Forests and Hacmatack Clearings; or, Travel, Life and Adventure in the British North American Provinces* (London, 1853), 396-7.
3. *Ibid.*, 171.
4. *Ibid.*, 174.
5. Gerald Craig's *Early Travellers in the Canadas* (Toronto, 1955) quotes an extract about French Canada and Montreal (pp. 185-91).
6. *Ibid.*, 112-145 (Chapter V).

The period was the first week in March [1852] and I was desirous of proceeding from Halifax to the Island without further delay; for to wait for the usual mode of transit by steamer from Pictou to Charlottetown, would entail the probable detention of a couple of months, as the navigation was not generally open, or free from ice, until the middle or latter end of May. Having obtained all necessary information from friends in Halifax, and notwithstanding urgent recommendations that I would not risk a winter passage over the icebergs of the Straits, which was described as an undertaking of imminent peril and hazard to life and limb, which I

did not heed, as in this instance I was obliged to proceed at once, and obey the adage "Necessitas non habet leges", I booked myself a seat in Hyde's six-horse sleigh for Truro, Amherst, and New Brunswick.

The morning of my departure arrived, and at eight I crossed over to Dartmouth, opposite Halifax, and, taking my seat, was soon speeding onwards in a clear frosty atmosphere, with an exhilaration of spirits known only to those who have inhaled the bracing breeze of our matchless northern clime. The horses became frisky, and playfully throwing their pretty heads in the air, the sleigh-bells chimed in pleasing tinkling chorus. We passed along the great chain of Lakes, stretching further than the eye could see along our left, now silent, and frozen over with a dazzling mantle of snow, sparkling in the early sun's rays

At three [P.M.] we arrived at Truro, where the mails were transferred into another sleigh; and after partaking of a well-provided dinner at the table d'hote of the hotel, we resumed our seat, and under the guidance of a natty, shrewd little fellow, a native of Scotland, we soon left the village far behind, and ere long commenced our ascent of the Cumberland Mountains. The path, in many places, bordered upon deep ravines, and it was wonderful, considering the rate we went at, that at some sharp turn, our light conveyance did not go over the brink of some yawning precipice, where, if we escaped from a broken neck, the chances were favourable of being smothered in the deep snow-drifts resting in the gullies. About ten at night we arrived at Sutherlands, a mountain inn, where to my delight I found a most comfortable cottage, with a snug well-furnished room, in which a large wood fire merrily blazed on the hearth, imparting renewed life to my almost benumbed limbs. The landlady, a young woman of very genteel, prepossessing exterior, soon attended to our wants, and before long a well-spread supper allayed the wolfishness of our appetites. . . .

After many narrow escapes, and several haltings to rearrange and "fix up" the harness of our mettled steeds, at two in the morning we pulled up at the post-office of the village of Amherst, which is situated some half-mile out of the town, in a desolate log-hut. . . .

The following morning I got up early, and the Island mail not having arrived during the night, I determined to push on for Cape Tormentine, a distance of forty miles, without further delay. A small sleigh was provided, well furnished with buffalo robes, and driven by a young American from Maine, whose sister kept the hotel. The outskirts of the town were soon passed, and making a detour from the road, in consequence of the heavy snowdrift of the preceding night, which rendered it impassable, a fence was removed, to allow of our getting into some cornfields,

where we floundered over half-bare hollows and ridges, in a manner sufficiently rough to set your teeth on edge. A couple of miles off the road was regained, and, more at ease, we went at a glorious rate towards Bay Verte, where we arrived in less than two hours, without stoppage. The Bay was frozen over, and the outlines on the stocks of some half-built ships, covered with snow, presented a melancholy appearance. After an hour's delay, to rest our steed, with "Allez!" from the driver—for your real Canadian horse scorns to exert his speed for the English vernacular—we again resumed our journey.

About eighteen miles off we met a sleigh approaching at full speed, while a little crazy-looking individual was wildly blowing a horn, and on our nearing him, he shouted out, "Make way there, you fellows, for Her Majesty's mails." We had just time, in moving to one side, to glean from the excited driver and his two equally excited companions, that the "ice-boat had got over: such an awful passage! nearly lost; sixteen hours in crossing: if the weather was fine, the ice-boat would go over again tomorrow." This pleasant information was wound up by a piece of advice: "Let the gentleman go to Allan's, the best house in New Brunswick."

With this, away flew the curricule, and the woods re-echoed with the shouts of "Wild Tom," or "Poor Tom," as the driver of Her Majesty's mail was designated. We were soon crossing the brittle sheet of ice which formed the surface of a salt-marsh abutting upon Cape Tormentine. A few hay-ricks were dotted here and there, and on a slight eminence, with a belt of pine-wood in the background, stood the log-building of those respectable New Brunswickers, the Messrs. Allan,—lonely, desolate, and forlorn,—while before me I saw the Straits, covered further than the eye could scan with vast confused masses of ice, of every distorted shape and size; the field-ice, which is that which stretches from either shore for about a mile out, with a smooth glittering surface, was fringed with misshapen masses, with sharp conical points thrown together, as if by some mighty convulsion of nature, some twenty, some ten feet high, their peaks forming a *chevaux-de-frise* which appeared to bid defiance to human progress. Further out again, more mighty blocks rolled and thundered down the Straits, while the distant roar, of awful import, told of the rude internecine strife and mad headlong passage of those icy masses.

A vast bank, apparently a couple of hundred feet high, white, shrouded with snow to the summit, with a few glistening angles presented to the setting sun, which sank angry, red, and sullen in the west behind Bay Verte, stretched beyond the intervening gulf. "This then," I said, "is the Island?" "Island!" interrupted my informant, "what you see is not more than four miles off; Cape Traverse is nigh upon ten: that is a mass of bergs which have come down this afternoon with the tide from

the north." "Heavens!" I muttered, "have I to cross this hideous Rubicon?" . . .

I now entered Allan's hospitable abode, and was ushered into an apartment grandiloquently designated the "Governor's room," from the reminiscence of a few days' sojourn of the Governor of Prince Edward, who, the previous year, had waited a week at Cape Tormentine, for favourable omens, to warrant his attempting the passage over. This apartment was carpetless; two rickety chairs, an old deal table, and an American cooking-stove, which smoked most painfully, formed the unique and unostentatious embellishment of the regal room. A small door to the rear opened upon a recess, in which a bed monopolized the entire space, except half a foot, behind which the toilet was performed. The walls were planked, the floor and ceiling rivalling each other with al-fresco diversities of dirt.

I passed from this chamber into the public kitchen, where I found Arthur Irving, the conductor or captain of the ice-boat, and his crew, warming and drying themselves at the fire. To judge from their wearied appearance, they had had a hard time of it. Arthur looked particularly sad; for his narrow escape had caused reflective thoughts. When Irving learnt who I was, he expressed great pleasure at seeing me, having been on the look-out for me ever since the ice set in. After gleaning information regarding my Island purchase, I requested Mother Allan to produce her best viands. These in time appeared, and consisted of slices of fried fat pork, with a large bowl of boiling grease by way of sauce, and some watery potatoes, with a plate of brown doughy bread, rather inclined to a sourish flavour. A cup of whisky was also added, to tempt me the more; while that everlasting accompaniment to every Provincial dinner, a teapot, completed the spread. I was hungry when I entered, but the peculiar fragrance of the pork acted as the herring in the "White Horse of the Peppers," and I soon rose from the table, after a very frugal repast.

I sauntered about until nightfall, and then was only too glad to seek rest, and in sleep forget the dulness which surrounded me, for it was wretchedly melancholy—that lonely log-hut perched on Cape Tormentine, with the wind howling round it, and the snow pattering at the windows.

In the morning at six I was roused by Irving; the wind had gone down overnight, and he reported the appearance of the Straits as favourable for a passage over. I was soon dressed. I put on my pair of American India-rubber jack boots, extending to the thighs; my fur cap with its lappets covered the ears; while gauntlet gloves of Astracan fur protected me to the elbows. Besides my portmanteau, I had a small carpet-bag, in which was a flask of pale brandy, a bundle of cigars, a box of lucifer-matches, and some slices of bread and pork. Thus provided, I bade fare-well to old

Allan and his wife, not forgetting "Poor Tom," who had arrived at four in the morning, with the mails from Amherst, and who accompanied us as far as the shore-ice, to assist in starting the ice-boat, which we found keel upwards under a snow-drift.

On turning over the boat, underneath lay some oars, a couple of boat-hooks, a pole with a three-pronged iron head, two Indian paddles, a hatchet, a small hammer, an old tin pot to bale with, a water-keg, a few old rusty nails in a bag, and one or two other unimportant etceteras. The boat was about fifteen feet long, built of very slight planking, and sheeted outside with tin, while on each side of the keel, which was but a nominal one—for the boat was nearly flat-bottomed—were wooden runners placed parallel to each other, upon which the boat passed along the ice like a sledge.

The crew consisted of Irving the captain, and three strong Islanders. There was one passenger, the master of a coasting craft which had been frozen in the Gut of Canse, and myself,—six in all. Our preparations were soon made for starting. The bags containing the mails were placed in the bottom of the boat, and my portmanteau in the centre, while the carpet-bag was tied under one of the seats. Limited to freightage, these boats carry only what cannot possibly be avoided, as it is all-important, for passage on the surface of the ice, that it be light. We were now placed in order: three stood on either side of the boat, a leather strap was passed over the right shoulder of those on the larboard, and left shoulder of those on the starboard side, meeting under the opposite armpit. To each of these was attached an iron chain, which was fastened inside the gunwale of the boat. We were thus harnessed, with our faces to the bows, one hand firmly holding the gunwale, the body stretched slightly forward; and, at the word "Start!" each man equally drew the boat, and thus, from a walking pace we got into a trot, then a canter, and, the speed once up, away we ran over the slippery surface of the ice, with the cheering "Pull hearty, my boys!" of our conductor, the boat gliding on the runners.

In crossing, a passenger must work the same as one of the crew, as it is impossible to give him an idle seat in the boat, from the increased weight which would be thus caused, and consequently thrown upon those through whose muscular exertions the light craft is propelled; and, as will be seen further on, when casualties occur, extra weight might lead to the swamping of the boat.

We had proceeded about a mile on the shore-ice, when we halted for a few moments to enable us to remove our outer garments, which had become unbearable from the warmth the rapid exercise had created. Away went coats, wrappers, and gautlets, into the boat, and with only my shooting-jacket on, after a drink of water

all round, away we started again. We had soon reached the extent of the shore-ice, and now commenced our labours. All unfastened the straps from off the shoulder, as a long ridge of sharp boulders had to be escaladed. Irving sprang forward with a line, and clambered up a mass of ice some fifteen feet high; he got on the other side, and all hands applying full strength, we pushed the boat upwards after him; a couple of the crew now mounted on the top of the ice, and getting the bows of the boat well poised, they overbalanced her, and down she glided on the other side.

I found it a most difficult task to follow these nimble fellows; my India-rubber boots caused me continually to slip on those portions of the ice where no snow lay; but having gone head-over-heels half-a-dozen times, I soon became familiar with the ups and downs of my journey. After clambering up a boulder, I found the easiest way to gain the other side was to slide down on my back; this in some instances became a dangerous experiment, as in the gullies between two masses of ice snow had generally collected to the depth of several feet; and, on going down a rather steep declivity, I found myself up to the armpits in broken ice, snow, and water, and Irving being near, he snatched at me, otherwise I ran a fair chance of disappearing. This rendered me more cautious in my sliding experiments, for the masses of ice thus thrown together in confusion were unconnected at the base, floating independently of the others around. More than two hours were occupied in crossing a quarter of a mile of this barrier. The wind the previous night was from the north-ward and eastward, which drove over the bergs towards the New Brunswick shore, and, having blown a gale, the masses were thrown with violence one on another, assuming every fantastic shape the imagination can conceive.

On reaching the last ridge, we had an opportunity of again looking out upon the Straits. Further than the eye could see were enormous fields of ice, with black patches and streaks here and there, appearing like ink from the contrast with the whiteness around: this was the water. A snowdrift soon obscured the horizon, but passing away to the south, we lost no time in launching the boat into a surging mass of broken drift-ice. The pilotage through this was most difficult: all hands were engaged with boat-hooks, paddles, and oars, in shoving away one block, drawing on towards another, or with united strength pushing some larger obstruction to one side. Then we would come to a patch of field-ice about a hundred feet broad: each man stepped from the stern towards the bows, and, assisted by those who had first jumped on the ice, one by one we stepped on the frozen surface. A long line was laid hold of, and thus we would drag the boat on the field, and again harnessing ourselves to the gunwales, drag it towards another opening. The boat

was shoved, bows into the water, and then drawn alongside the ice. In we all stepped; by renewed exertions similar to the last we succeeded in making a few hundred yards of distance, but frequently not in our right course, as the noon tide, which set in with a strong southerly force, had carried up a couple of miles too far to that quarter, as our direction was east by north. To regain our lost ground, we had to make for larger fields of ice, and hauling the boat on it, head up at a rapid canter. It was a strange feeling, when drawing the ice-boat along on the runners, and proceeding at the rate of three miles an hour, to know that the field upon which we stood was passing with the current away to the south at the rate of five miles an hour. Thus we were propelling the boat north-east, while the tide was carrying us towards the south-west. The experience of the conductors of the boat is here called into active requisition, as what with snowdrifts and the banks of icebergs on either side, the horizon is frequently obscured to a circle of perhaps a quarter of a mile in extent. The compass will show the position and course, but the travelling masses of ice put all calculation out of the question; and the knowledge of the tide's tremendous power on the floating fields, upon whose treacherous surface the traveller entrusts himself, confuses, perplexes, and frequently causes serious doubts as to the real position of the boat. One great danger in going too far to the southward, arises from the difficulty of getting back to the shore from whence you started, as a half-mile below Cape Tormentine, Bay Verte opens, and if you are five miles out in the Straits, and to the southward of the Cape, then, to regain the shore, you have before you the twenty miles of Bay Verte, or twenty-five miles in all to traverse before you are in safety. Benumbed with cold, fatigued beyond expression with some eight or ten hours' labour, a snow-storm may set in, and resting for awhile, all run a fair chance of being carried direct south-east, and once past Cape Bear, the north-east influence of the tide would carry you out into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, between Prince Edward and Cape Breton. It is true the return of the tide would, if there was no wind, again propel the masses of ice up Northumberland Straits; but thus exposed, and driven from "Scylla to Charybdis," the chance of life would be but small. Many have been thus lost and frozen to death on the passage. . . .

During the previous winter, one boat's crew, commanded by our friend "poor crazy Tom Allan," got into this difficulty, and were for thirty-six hours out in the Straits, lost and bewildered. At sunset they turned the boat over in a sheltered position in the recess of an iceberg, well to the lee of the wind; snow fell and covered them in, and with the assistance of the oars, paddles, and seats, cut into chips with a knife, and frugally and carefully piled, a slight fire was kept burning all that dreary night, and the smoke from it assisted in keeping warmth and life in the

bodies of the little forlorn band. Their escape from death and destruction was a marvel which no one can explain, save by referring it to the interposition of a merciful Providence. Tom Allan had several of his fingers and toes frozen off, and on reaching the shore three out of five of the survivors shortly afterwards died from the effects of the exposure.

To resume my narrative. We at last succeeded in reaching an extensive field of ice, upon which we again propelled the ice-boat. While running at full speed, I felt the surface beneath me give way, and with a loud shout from all, the boat sank, and in an instant we were struggling up to our shoulders in the water and broken ice. Now the utility of the strap and chain was manifest: it kept us tied to the boat, and the hand on the gunwale, still firmly grasped, saved our being plunged into the foaming mass of broken ice, and sucked under by the current. Irving in an instant manfully disengaged himself, and clambered into the boat; then cautioning all to remain still, he drew us, one by one, out of the water, drenched to the skin. The intensity of the cold I shall never forget: it chilled me to the very heart: my clothes became in an instant stiff and frozen, and had it not been for a glass of raw brandy, twice repeated, all round, nothing, I verily believe, could have caused our congealed blood to circulate again through our torpid veins. We hastened to drag the boat again on the ice, out of the flaw we had fallen into, and, succeeding in this effort, the exertion once more gave renewed life to the system. We were not so fortunate however as to proceed many hundred yards before we again broke in, though, from the caution our last accident taught us, in this instance we clung with both hands to the gunwale, and only got up to our thighs in water. Our career now became one continued series of breaking down and floundering, which only terminated upon reaching open water, which we did after being eight hours out |

Irving was of opinion that the water before us would be bounded on the other side by the shore-ice, and, if so, that we should get over to the Island without further difficulty. He calculated the distance at about four miles. We all got into the boat, the oars were out, and with a hearty pull all together, we flew over the water, hoping to reach our destination in another hour or two. But human calculations are destined to disappointment, for we had not rowed above a mile, when a breeze suddenly sprang up, which it frequently does in these northern regions in a few moments; it increased to half a gale, and the boat began to ship an icy spray over her bows. The build of our craft, flat-bottomed, rendered her dangerous in an open sea; indeed Irving said he durst not proceed, or we should be all swamped. At my request we continued on for another quarter of an hour; but the boat shipping

waves, she half-filled with water, and we were obliged to put her head about for the ice-field we had left, I baling out as fast as my hands were able, bucketful after bucketful

Our return towards New Brunswick was resolved upon by Irving, in consequence of the gale which had sprung up, and with sundown not more than an hour and a half off, it would have been dangerous to have remained out any longer Once more I found myself in old Mother Allan's kitchen, and the fat pork which was the day before treated by me with disgust, was now eagerly devoured with a wolfish appetite. Before this repast, however, I had changed my saturated habiliments, and enjoyed the comfort more than I can express.

It was dark, the wind howled in fearful gusts, the crew sat around the fire silently smoking their pipes, Arthur Irving and myself discussed a cigar, while Mrs. Allan, to enliven the scene, cruelly thrashed a poor idiot boy of a grandson of hers, whose mournful wailings and lamentation by no means soothed my spirits . . .

I was up early in the morning, and found Irving scanning the horizon; to my extreme satisfaction he reported the appearance of the Straits as favourable for a passage. The previous tempest had pretty well cleared the Gulf of ice, and nought but shore-ice leading to open water was to be found on this side. By seven in the morning we were down by the boat, and harnessing on without loss of time, we hurried along the ice, so as to cross over the open water before the wind might spring up again. Our little craft was soon afloat; and on a surface not presenting a ripple, we pulled away for about an hour and a half, when we approached white streaks of loose ice, which we easily pushed through. But every mile the ice increased in density: the wind of the previous night had driven it all over from the New Brunswick shore to those of Prince Edward Island, and the storm must have been one of considerable force, from the mass of "lolly" afloat.

"Lolly" is the term applied to a conglomeration of minute particles of ice, which is found some four feet deep in extensive patches, and which is most difficult to push through; as the oars cannot be out, and the boat-hooks are useless: nothing but the paddle employed with great strength could move us along. Then the surface frequently freezes over, and the danger of being caught by a nip is carefully guarded against. The lolly, which now boils and bubbles, will before night become a congealed consistency, and form field-ice.

At ten in the morning we had approached to within three miles of the Island, which could be now seen, the shores fringed with pine-forests, dark and impervious, while a long red streak stretched along the coast. This arose from the colour of the

soil, which is most peculiar, and we had often seen bergs, the tops covered with red dust, blown from the shores: they had a singular appearance.

We had our renewed struggles of yesterday over blocks of ice and sharp boulders, which were heaped, if possible, in more inextricable confusion. When we had neared the shore-ice, we were cheered by seeing, on an eminence in the distance, some human forms, who by gestures pointed out a favourable course to steer by over the ice. These silent directions we followed, and in another hour we had clambered over the last ridge, and were met by Philip Irving, elder brother of Arthur, who was one of the conductors of the ice-boat Mail service. He had brought down a sledge, upon which all were glad to mount, the ice-boat being previously lifted on to it.

We had landed at Carleton Point,* which was about three and a half miles from Cape Traverse, our destination. We were thus drawn along the ice over Guy Cove, past Amherst Point; and once over the cove of the same name, we posted inland, after depositing the ice-boat, keel up, in a sheltered spot. Our passage across was thus performed in about six hours, and was considered an excellent one. We drove to Clarke's farm, where a substantial repast was soon provided, in a nicely furnished parlour, bespeaking comfort and taste. The distance to Charlottetown was forty miles, which I accomplished in a sleigh in less than four hours.

I again crossed over the Straits the same spring, in the ice-boat. I arrived at Clarke's on a Thursday afternoon. On the following morning, at seven, we were down at the boat . . . Having harnessed to the ice-boat, we proceeded on our course, and, after about four hours' labour, reached open water. But here again a heavy wind blew, and to venture out would be impracticable. We drew up the boat upon a small berg, to see if any change would take place during the morning, hoping that the wind would go down. While smoking a cigar, seated on the snow, we felt a tremulous motion beneath, accompanied by a loud, cracking noise. In an instant, at Irving's command, we jumped to our feet, seized the boat by the gunwale, and ran her on an adjoining field, which we had scarcely done, before the ice, upon which we had been sitting, rent in twain, separated out, and a heavy mass toppled over, and fell into the Gulf, covering us with spray.

This was a narrow escape to commence with. [Some six hours later they were obliged to return.] . . . Once more Mrs. Clarke's hospitality was called into requisition, and, retiring early, I slept soundly on a comfortable feather-bed. The Saturday, we could not venture out; for it snowed all day, while the wind continued blowing

*Near the present Port Borden.

in fearful blasts. The roar, from the contention in the Straits of rival bergs, resembled that of a distant heavy cannonade; at other times a sound would be heard, not unlike the hum and traffic of a great city. There appeared an awful, life-like struggle going on, which rose and fell at appalling intervals; and on looking upon the distant masses with an eye-glass, the confused scene was not unlike a battle raging in fury and desperation [It was Tuesday before they managed to get away] When we had reached about the centre of the Gulf, one of the most stupendous and magnificent icebergs I had ever seen loomed in the distance. Its approach was announced by a heavy cannonade of smaller masses, crushed and broken up before it. In appearance it very much resembled Windsor Castle; its turrets and battlements, scarps and counter-scarps, salient points, esplanades, and other varieties of fortification, all here assumed the appearance of man's labour rather than the simple effects of nature in God's wonderful works. The sun glistened on the glacis of many an obtuse point, and thus sparkling, snow-clad, vast, and superb, the mighty mass passed onward at a rate which was astonishing, driven by the double action of the gale pressing upon its extended surface, and the influence of the tide or current, which was running out to the southward at five miles an hour.

We put back some quarter of a mile, to avoid the inevitable destruction which must follow a collision with our frail craft. Drawing the boat upon a high boulder, I mounted, with Irving, to the top, and from thence had a view of this crystalline castle in its awful progress. On its approach, before it were seen vast heaps of the *débris* of crushed bergs and boulders, while each field that it came in contact with was driven upward on the masses before, and thus ridge upon ridge was irresistibly propelled. I should estimate the berg as nearly half a mile long, and about the same breadth, with an altitude of from three to four hundred feet. The moment it had passed, we launched our boat, and were soon pulling with the oars in its wake, as for a time the water in its rear was open and unobstructed; but other masses soon came down, and we had to take to field-ice again.

It was now four in the afternoon. We had been out eleven hours, and only two remained of daylight. We had approached to within three miles of Cape Tormentine. The distance made by us in our direct course was but seven miles in the space of time I have mentioned, although we had probably gone over above twenty during our circuitous navigation. The shore-ice, which is safe, appeared to stretch about a mile and a half out, consequently not more than the same distance had to be traversed to place us beyond the danger by which we were now imminently surrounded. The tide had turned, and accordingly many masses which had passed us a couple of hours before were again receding to their old stations, while the

wind, acting upon the larger bergs, still drove them down the Straits against the current. We were thus placed between an artillery of boulders, passing and repassing in either direction, and hence arose the extreme difficulty of our situation.

In many instances, two great masses would meet, and the roar was appalling, as the larger of the two would crush its antagonist, and drive it, shattered and split up, into the boiling Straits. Let a boat but get between two rival boulders, one maintaining the supremacy of wind *versus* tide, and the other the contrary, and the fragile atom would be crushed to splinters. We had several times, when we saw a collision inevitable, and there was not time to get out of the way, to hasten to the larger bully berg of the two, draw up the boat into some cleft valley, and dragging it as far as possible from the point of attack, await the shock, which came with such an astounding force that the breath was well-nigh driven out of the body. We were not long in leaving our victorious haven, and seeking, on less pugilistic masses, that quietude which the warrior bergs disdained to offer.

In one of our last trips we had just bridged over two masses of ice, and the last man, in stepping into the stern, sprang with an impetus from an elevated mass. In a second, a piece of ice, about two tons' weight, broke off, and rolling down, struck us on the broadside, smashing the gunwale in for above a foot. The mass, if it had fallen direct into the boat, would have swamped it in a second; our escape from destruction would have been impossible. It however struck it on the side; and the force of the blow drove the boat across, half-filled with water, to opposite ice. We sprang out, up to our middle in water, and clambered up the inviting field: we had regained our legs; the boat was drawn up; the water and a collection of broken pieces of ice poured over the stern; we had reached the shore-ice, and were saved. If we had had one hundred yards further to proceed, our destruction would have been certain. Philip Irving said it was the narrowest escape he had ever experienced. I thought so too; and as I stood on the shore-ice, looking upon the boiling masses which swept past our feet, I offered up a mental prayer for our deliverance.