



## 52 BELOW

### (Singleness of Solidarity)

For two weeks straight the cold had been below the zero line; glad days indeed, for beast and men—down in the land of pine. The gleaming snow cracked underfeet as if by pressure rolled—each day a perfect frozen treat—too cold to catch a cold.

And then it came, a sort o' chill, a morning purple-blue, that froze the pine-nog's after-quill and broke its heart in two.

But down the swamp the decking gang had revelled in the snow; unconscious of the snippy-tang of "fifty-two below."

And in each soul there welled a joy of "thankfulness," devout; and in each hand a tool, a toy, and on each lip, a shout. And on each face of bearded grace were lines of merry strife; emotions drab or commonplace, untutored by a wife. But every nose, a blushing rose, its colors did conceal—for oh, each radiant beak's repose was destined soon to peel.

Then stood the boss in pleased review (an honor to his sire) and indicated to the crew that they "might" start a fire; that he himself, the "only roar," sole-mighty bull and judge, had hearkened to the redskin-lore: "That there should be a smudge."

The crew was flattered by his word; uplifted by his gaze—each man concurred (in what they heard) and soon "there was a blaze."

On came the logs (like solemn ships) dry windfalls (one end sound) onto the skids, with sun-dry dips—and balanced "to the pound."

The artists of the crooked steel then sunk the cant dogs in and, on my soul—How logs do roll! ? Indeed they all most spin. And it is well that fools may sweat that knaves may take their ease and it is well the "pace is set" when one must work or freeze.

Log after log went up the "face" without a let or check and lo, the spot was now a place; the skidway now, a deck.

No time was found, not e'en a pause, to give their hands a rub; nor warm their paws; or wag their jaws to praise the blazing stub. For such is life in DeHorn camps. (No courage in their wraps), as each one strives and thinks he "vamps" the boss for "ginger" snaps.

From o'er the way a sound there came—a note by sorrow wrung—and there were those who did declaim its author should be hung.

Again it rose—a mournful groan; a note of beauty shorn and, I'm convinced, it could be shown it was a dinner horn. For every man-Jack straight-way sought to answer the appeal—each man with but a single thought; and that poor thought, a heel.

The stub alone showed no concern in matters, meals or cooks and did industriously burn down to its very roots.—Ill-bred in manner, bad at heart, reared up in trackless bogs, it quivered once—then made a start—fell burning cross the logs.

The dinner o'er the crew returned in time to save the chains.—The jammer, tools and logs were burned along with all the gains. (Sighs).

Now, it appears the bull, himself was made of royal stuff and used some language off the shelf; and words still in the rough. "Blue diamond Christ and Makinaw and Speckled Manitou; and by the Saints of Saginaw—by Bunyans Scotch Chapeau! We're ketching hell, boys, hear me shout—this is a one blue shame—and if the "walker" finds this out—we'll find him not so tame.—But still he knew it wouldn't do to blame so fine a gang; so boys, he says, twixt me and you we'll let the matter hang."

It happened so the walking-boss got wind of it (in time) for there are those who double cross—who stoop to any crime.

The foreman grew most deadly grim—albeit he did his bit and no one cared to question him for fear the "bull she quit."

And so it was, the walker knew "no wires he could pull"—'twas no use talking with the crew and useless with the bull. But one day, where the ice was "sowed," he brought up with a jerk—"longside the "monkey of the road" bent kindly o'er his work.

"The man is dull, in half a trance; no longer in his youth," the walker thought—and hence, a chance "to get the simple truth." "My man, he says, have you a line on how the fire broke; that burnt the skidway full of pine and sent it up in smoke?"

"Well sir," says Pat. "and by the way," (his honest eyes a-brightening) "I do be hearing some one say that it was 'shtruck' by lightning."

Giddap!—the walker harshly spoke—giddap, my gallant steed—for truth is but a wicked joke when lying is a creed."

We'll add, that each and all may know the things we're talking of, the cold was fifty-two below and Pat, that much above.

T-BONE SLIM.