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SIMON FRASER

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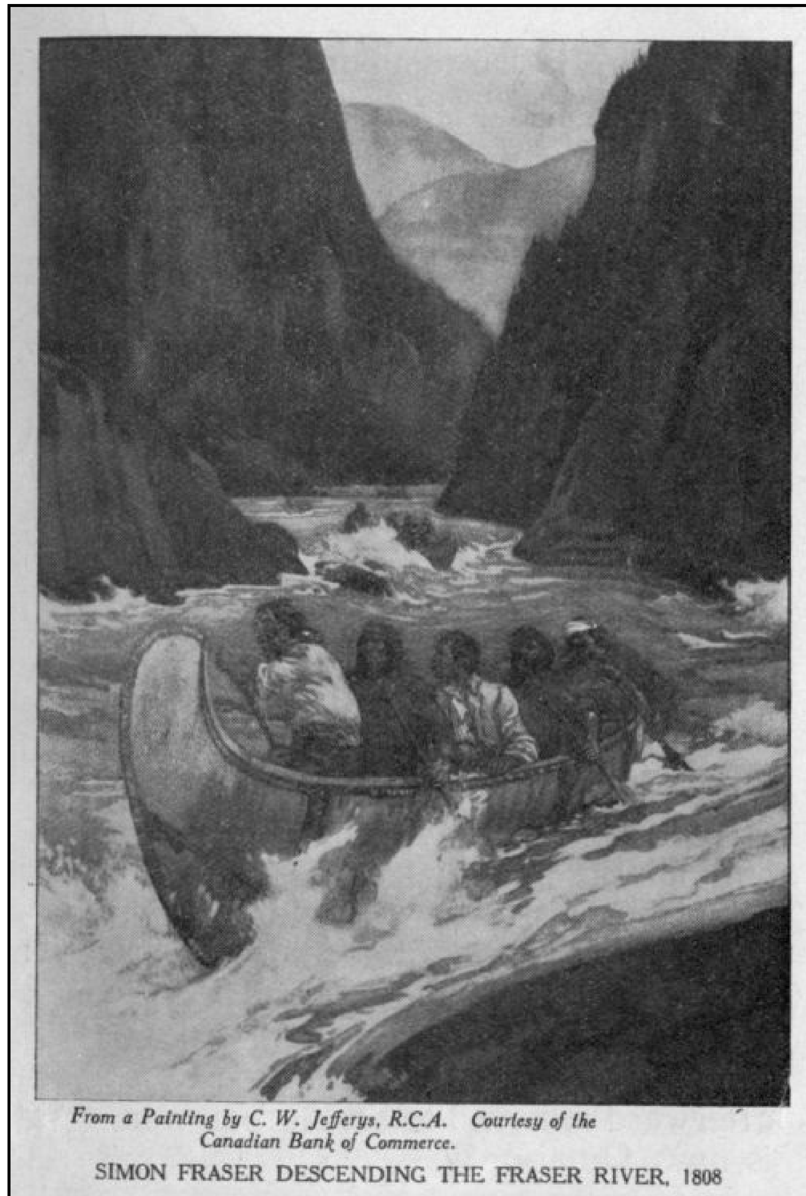
SIMON FRASER

In the year 1805 the partners of the recently enlarged North-West Company met at Fort William to discuss their affairs. Their great rival, the Hudson's Bay Company, had gradually extended its fur posts throughout the Saskatchewan lands and had for some years competed for the trade along the Athabasca and Mackenzie Rivers. Every vantage point had been secured and there was little prospect of increased returns in furs from that well-farmed territory. There still remained, however, a virgin and unoccupied field, the lands beyond the Rockies.

Alexander Mackenzie had made one memorable dash across these mountain lands and down to the sea in 1793. With the exception of Finlay's venture four years later, no one had attempted to follow up the route which Mackenzie had opened. But now the time was opportune. The North-West Company was in a strong financial position through its recent amalgamation with the X Y Company. Mackenzie's presence radiated new force and abounding energy. The mountain lands should be invaded by the Nor'-Westers, and the exclusive trade of those lands secured if possible. As an added spur came news of the American Lewis and Clark expedition, which even then crawled laboriously yet steadily along the Missouri toward the passes of the Montana Rockies.

In the summer, then, of 1805, the partners who had assembled at Fort William, chose Simon Fraser to lead an expedition up the Peace, over the divide, and down to the valleys of the Great River, the Tacoutche Tesse, the upper waters, as they thought, of the Columbia.



From a Painting by C. W. Jefferys, R.C.A. Courtesy of the Canadian Bank of Commerce.

SIMON FRASER DESCENDING THE FRASER RIVER, 1808

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1808.
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Courtesy of the Canadian Bank of Commerce.

Who was Fraser that he should be selected for this important and difficult undertaking? It is easy to surmise that he was no ordinary fur trader and that he had already made himself a partner of importance in the North-West Company. Of his early life up to the time of this expedition we know but little. There are flashes here and there which give us a dim and unsatisfying picture of his early struggles, of days at school, and of fur trading. In those hard-fisted times of give and take, Fraser rose from the ranks, a self-made man, with all the natural reticence of one whose very success in life is based upon his own sturdy self-reliance.

Simon Fraser came of good highland Scottish parentage. His father, Captain Simon Fraser, had received a good education and was known for his understanding of Gaelic poetry and music. The new world called, as it has done to many another of Scotland's sons, and Captain Fraser emigrated with his wife and children about the year 1773. He purchased land near Bennington, Vermont, and there three years later, a son was born, also named Simon, after his father. When the War of Independence broke out, Captain Fraser joined a band of Loyalists and supported the British cause. He was taken prisoner in a small skirmish, and lodged in Albany jail where he died, some thirteen months later. His house was broken into and wrecked, and all the family records which he had brought with him to America were destroyed. The widowed mother and her nine children removed to Canada as soon as it was possible, in or about the year 1783. The family settled first at Three Rivers, but afterward removed to St. Andrew's in, what is now, Ontario.

About this time Simon was sent to school at Montreal, where he resided with his uncle, John Fraser, then Chief Justice of that district. At the age of sixteen the boy left school and entered the service of the North-West Company. Interest in the fur trade was keen, fortunes were being made, the life was one of adventure and appealed to a fearless, healthy lad. That very year (1792) Alexander Mackenzie was leading his men up the Peace, in preparation for his great dash over the mountains to the sea.

In the winter of 1795-6 we find Fraser at Lac la Ronge, probably a clerk at the North-West Company fur post. He was acting as agent for the Company at Grand Portage during 1797. In 1802 he became a partner, at the age of twenty-six, after but ten years of service. He was then sent to the Athabasca and we hear of him at Fort Liard in 1804. This was rapid rise and promotion, due no doubt to his energy, foresight and general ability in handling the Indians and in furthering the interests of the trade. Fraser came back to Fort William in 1805 to attend the annual meeting of the traders. It was there that he received his instructions to open up and pre-empt the western lands across the Rockies. He was thoroughly conversant with the Athabasca district, he had been inured to hardship and danger from early childhood, he was the man on the spot, and, naturally, secured this position.

It would be no sinecure. He would be well over a thousand miles from Fort William; he would be many hundred miles from Fort Chipewyan, the last considerable base of supply in Athabasca territory. Despite these vast distances he was expected to make the venture pay its way. Furs must be found in sufficient quantities to make the occupancy of the new region worth while. Otherwise it would be abandoned and failure would be written across an adverse balance sheet.

So, in the fall of 1805, Fraser ascended the Peace River with twenty men in well-loaded canoes. At the foot of the Rockies he built an encampment which he named Rocky Mountain Portage. While his winter quarters were under construction, Fraser took six men and ascended the Peace River, and then went up the Pack River to its source, a beautiful lake seventeen miles in length, which he named McLeod, in honour of a friend. There, "on a peninsula formed by a tributary and its outlet," he built a trading post. Fort McLeod is still occupied, and is known as the first permanent fur post to be erected on the mainland of British Columbia west of the Rocky Mountains.

Fraser left three men at the new post and returned in November to his base at Rocky Mountain Portage. His little band consisted of John Stuart, James McDougall and fifteen voyageurs. Their quarters proved to be none too comfortable and the men employed their time chinking the seams of the log houses, cutting firewood, making snowshoes and hunting deer. They not only lived "off" the country but also provided a store of dried meat in preparation for their expedition across the mountains the next spring. Small bands of Slave Indians visited the fort during the winter, trading beaver skins and meat for powder and ball.

But things were not going smoothly at the little post on McLeod Lake, and early in 1806, McDougall, with three men, was sent on to take charge and spy out the country. Fraser left on the 20th of May, and within eight days covered the fifteen-mile portage, loaded his three canoes and arrived at the forks of the Parsnip and Finlay. But the Parsnip was already in flood, with its banks inundated beyond the willow fringe, and running like a mill race. It took eight more days to reach the Pack River, days of unremitting toil in torn and leaky canoes.

They reached Fort McLeod on June 7 to the joy of McDougall, who had been anxiously awaiting them. New canoes were made and two Sekanais Indians were engaged to act as guides. Descending the Pack River on the twenty-third, Fraser continued his voyage up the Parsnip to a small lake, then over the divide of "817 paces" to the Bad River. Overcoming all difficulties, July 10 brought the canoes to the Fraser. Floating out upon its comparatively placid current, the voyageurs made good time and reached the mouth of the Nechako the next day.

Fraser had been following in Mackenzie's track to this point. But in view of the information gained by McDougall in his trips out of Fort McLeod, he decided to paddle up the Nechako in order to reach the land of the Carrier Indians. The branching riverways finally led him to the broad expanse of a beautiful, mountain-rimmed lake, which Fraser promptly named Stuart Lake, in honour of his chief clerk. Rounding the shore of the lake for a short distance, Fraser soon came to a large Carrier encampment at the mouth of Beaver Creek. The scene which followed has been most vividly portrayed by Father Morice and we quote:

"On landing, Fraser's men, to impress the natives with a proper idea of their wonderful resources, fired a volley with their guns, whereupon the whole crowd of Carriers fell prostrate upon the ground. To allay their fears and make friends, tobacco was offered them, which, on being tasted, was found too bitter and thrown away. Then, to show its use, the crew lighted their pipes and, at the sight of the smoke issuing from their mouths, the people began to whisper that they must come from the land of ghosts, since they were still full of the fire wherewith they had been cremated. Pieces of soap were given the women, who thinking them to be cakes of fat, set upon crunching them, thereby causing foam and bubbles in the mouth, which puzzled both actors and bystanders. All these phenomena, however, were soon explained away, leaving no suspicion in the native mind, but a most pronounced admiration for the foreigners and their wares."

Introductions over, Fraser at once set his men to work clearing land for a new fort on the shore of a shallow bay about a mile from the outlet of the lake. This post became known as Fort St. James, and has a most entrancing situation. The lake itself is about fifty miles in length and four to six miles in breadth. So charmed was Fraser with this pleasing prospect that he could not but recall his mother's description of her highland home, and, thinking to give honour to the birthplace of his ancestors, he called the whole district New Caledonia.

The construction of the new post went on apace, but supplies began to run low and soon all were upon short rations. Berries, a few carp when they could be caught, and now and then a beaver, provided a scanty living. The salmon for some reason were late in coming up the rivers to their spawning grounds. The Indians were also starving. In this predicament Fraser thought it wise to divide his forces and at the same time examine more of the country. So, toward the end of August, Stuart and two men set out over an old Indian trail in a southerly direction to find another lake which the Indians reported to be about forty miles distant and the centre of a numerous Indian population. A week later Fraser set out in a canoe to meet Stuart, whose report was so encouraging that a post was at once constructed near the outlet of what we know to-day as Fraser Lake.

Then the salmon arrived in their thousands. Everybody ate salmon. They had salmon "meal after meal, and day after day." But this very surfeit of long-looked for food turned the men's stomachs, and Fraser writes, "I assure you I am tired of living on fish."

And now, with four trading stations in running order, Fraser looked forward to the next part of his adventure, the following of the Tacoutche Tesse to the sea. But no goods had arrived from Chipewyan, and there were barely enough even to supply the forts on Stuart and Fraser Lakes. So Fraser spent the winter at Fort St. James and bent his energies to the fur trade. Thus passed the summer of 1807, with still no word from the east. At length, in August, two loaded canoes arrived in charge of Jules Quesnel and Hugh Fairies.

These men brought Fraser further instructions from Fort William. The company wished Fraser to undertake, at his earliest convenience, the complete and thorough exploration of the great river which flowed turbidly south into the

unknown. Word had reached Fort William of the success of the Lewis and Clark expedition in reaching the mouth of the Columbia. It was known that John Jacob Astor proposed to establish posts at the mouth of that river. It behooved the Nor'-Westers to move quickly if they wished to secure the advantages of a possible outlet to the sea by way of that river. In view of this intelligence and with a number of men available, Fraser built one more fur post that fall. This was Fort George, built at the mouth of the Nechako near the present city of Prince George. During the fall dried salmon was laid by in large quantities in preparation for the forthcoming venture in the spring of 1808. Canoes were built and everything was made ready for an early start in the spring.

On May 28 four canoes shoved off from Fort George on an epochmaking voyage down the most dangerous of all the Canadian rivers. Fraser had John Stuart and Jules Quesnel as lieutenants, while nineteen voyageurs and two Indians completed the party. Eighteen miles below the fort the canoes raced through the Fort George Canyon, where one of the flotilla almost struck against the precipice which forms the right bank. The journal of the voyage tells us that after running down several considerable rapids Fraser "put ashore at 11 a.m. to breakfast." There had been no time to eat that morning, there had been too many things to do, too many last-minute articles to pack, too much excitement to think of food. The voyage continued during the afternoon and we learn that the party "encamped at six—put our arms in order—gave ammunition to all hands, and established a regular watch. We gathered some wild onions for sauce." So ended the first day's journey.

On the 29th they ran the Cottonwood Canyon with partially loaded canoes. At the foot of the rapids three bales of salmon were put in cache. This act was repeated at intervals until the canoes were stored under shelters at Pavilion Creek. Fraser was providing food reserves for his return. That evening camp was made at Quesnel River.

The next day the strong current carried the canoes swiftly down past Soda Creek. The country all along was charming. It was apparently well inhabited, a number of houses having been seen. At length the canoes drew near to an Indian camp.

These Indians warned Fraser of the river below. They assured him that he would find it but a succession of falls and rapids, which it would be impossible to pass. But Fraser was not to be daunted. He quietly remarked that his determination to go on "was fixed." Then the clamour ceased, and the Indians paid silent tribute to the bold purpose of the white leader.

Fraser tells us that these Indians had heard of firearms but that they had never yet seen one. They soon became most curious as to the manner in which they were used. Several shots were fired and the astonished Indians dropped to the ground in fright. Nor did the marks on the trees reassure them and they hastened to tell Fraser that all the Indians of that tribe were good and peaceable. "Here," wrote Fraser, "we lost our swivel—it had a flaw before, and firing it at this time, perhaps with an overcharge, broke it into pieces, and wounded our gunner." For the moment they were children together, the Indians lost in admiration, the voyageur showing off the white man's might.

It is probable that this friendliness carried its own reward, for the next day Fraser secured the services of a well-known chief as guide and interpreter. A long rapid was encountered the next afternoon, and upon examination it was decided to encamp for the night and to make a careful reconnaisance in the morning. It was found to be a dangerous place with high, steep banks which contracted the channel in many places to a breadth of forty or fifty yards. The water rushing through the narrow defiles formed hollows, waves and cascades, "and making a tremendous noise, had an awful and forbidding appearance. Nevertheless, since it was considered as next to impossible to carry the canoes across the land, on account of the height and steepness of hills, it was resolved to venture them down this dangerous pass."

Fraser ordered five of his most expert canoe-men to try the descent in a lightly-loaded canoe. After passing the first cascade the little craft was seen to lose her course and was drawn into an eddy or whirl where the men were helpless. After a time the canoe was led into the stream once more, where, flying from one danger to another, and when near the last cascade the whirlpools forced her against a projecting rock despite the desperate efforts of the men. It was fortunately a low point and the men clambered up, managing at the same time to save the canoe.

Fraser had watched from the bank, powerless to aid his comrades struggling in the stream below. Seeing the poor fellows safe for the moment he hastened to their assistance. Even the rescue was "perilous and difficult." The bank was high and steep and the rescuers had to plunge their daggers at intervals into the bank to check their descent, lest they slide

into the boiling torrent below. Steps were cut into the steep slope, a line was lowered and fastened to the front of the canoe, and while those above pulled, those below supported the canoe upon their arms and in this way all were saved.

It was then decided to carry the other canoes and goods over the steep hills and broken country which lined the river for two miles. This took two days of heart-breaking and back-breaking exertion. During that time the river rose another eight feet. It had become a raging torrent, which still further increased the danger of attempting to continue down the stream by canoe.

Day followed day, each with its own dangers, its narrow canyons, and its mile-long portages. On June 8 the water had fallen three feet. This made for safer going and encouraged the men. The next day, near Kelly Creek, Fraser led his men through a canyon which once more tested their nerve and utmost skill. At that point the channel contracts to about forty yards, and is enclosed by high, steep walls which bend toward each other making it narrower above than below. The vivid impression of that passage is given below as Fraser inscribed it in his journal:

"The water which rolls down this extraordinary passage in tumultuous waves and with great velocity had a frightful appearance; however, it being absolutely impossible to carry the canoes by land, all hands without hesitation embarked upon the mercy of this awful tide. Once engaged the die was cast, and the great difficulty consisted in keeping the canoes clear of the precipice on one side, and of the gulphs formed by the waves on the other, then skimming along as fast as lightning, the crew, notwithstanding, cool and determined, followed each other in awful silence—and when we arrived at the end we stood, as it were, gazing congratulation at each other upon our narrow escape."

That was enough. The next day, when near Pavilion Creek, Fraser gave orders to erect a scaffold for the canoes in a shady place and to cover them with branches. The articles which could not be carried were buried nearby. Then the whole party set off along Indian trails, high up the river bank. Each man carried an eighty-pound pack of indispensable necessaries. It was dragging work, down one ravine side, up the other, then over a sloping hillside among loose gravel and sharp stones. The men grew tired and sullen. Far below the river wound and thrashed its way among the rocks and cliffs which lined its banks for many a mile. The Indian guide and the interpreter both disappeared.

At length, on the 14th, Fraser came to a large Indian village near the present Lillooet. It was a welcome sight. There a small canoe was purchased and by this means some of the loads which the men were carrying could be transported. The following day a second canoe was secured, and in this manner the party proceeded, part by land, part by water. The river is navigable for some distance below Lillooet and Fraser would gladly have purchased more canoes but the Indians refused to part with them.

On the 19th Fraser arrived at a large river flowing in from the left. This he named Thompson River in honour of his friend David Thompson. Across the river on the left bank they found the large Indian village of Camchin. The little town of Lytton now occupies the place where Fraser, in 1808, shook hands with twelve hundred Thompson Indians. They were kindly and courteous, their oratory "notable" and the manner of delivery "extremely handsome." Salmon, berries, oil and roots in abundance were supplied to Fraser and his lieutenants, while the voyageurs were made happy with six nice fat dogs.

A few miles below Lytton the Fraser begins its wild plunge through the ribs of the Coast Range. Dangerous box canyons and rapids mark its course. When the Fraser is in full flood it is impossible for boat or canoe to run down the surging stream. To-day the traveller glides smoothly and quickly along over rock-hewn road bed, over bridge and through dark tunnel. Seen from a height the danger of the seething waters is not apparent.

Within an hour after leaving Lytton, Fraser was forced to land and portage around the Cisco Rapids. The Indians informed Fraser that some years since several of their people "having lost their balance from the steps giving way, rolled down to the river and perished."

The next day the going was equally difficult. The canoes would proceed a few miles, then a portage would be made. In trying to run down a short rapid one canoe was swamped and overturned. Two of the men saved themselves by swimming through a quiet eddy. Then the canoe split on a rock and the third man was carried three miles holding to a portion of the canoe, until a friendly wave threw him upon a sloping bank more dead than alive. Four days of labour brought them but thirty miles, as far as Boston Bar, near Anderson Creek.

On the 25th Fraser approached the entrance to the Black Canyon. The canoes were unloaded, the men shouldered their packs, and the whole company set out along the rude Indian trail over the steep hills and precipices which enclose the river for nearly ten miles. This proved to be the most dangerous trail of all, and Fraser tells us at some length of his trials at this time. Some of the Indians from the village at Boston Bar had followed the white men down the river and now were of the greatest help. Near the top of one ascent where the rock was perpendicular, "an Indian climbed to the summit, and by means of a long pole drew us up, one after another. This work took three hours. Then we continued our course up and down, among hills, and along steep declivities of mountains, where hanging rocks and projecting cliffs at the edge of the bank of the river made the passage so small as to render it difficult at times, even for one person to pass.... In places where we were obliged to hand our guns from one to another, and where the greatest precaution was required to pass singly and free of incumbrance, the Indians went boldly with heavy loads....

"We had to pass where no human being should venture. Yet in those places there is a regular foot path impressed, or rather indented, by frequent travelling upon the very rocks. Besides this, steps which are formed like a ladder or the shrouds of a ship, by poles hanging to one another, crossed at certain distances with twigs, suspended from the top to the foot of immense precipices, and fastened at both extremities to stones and trees, furnished a safe and convenient passage for the natives, but we, who have not had the advantages of their education and experience, were often in imminent danger when obliged to follow their example."

It is doubtful if Fraser could have got through the canyons between Lytton and Yale without the aid of the Indians. They were constantly kind, they provided food willingly, and they carried many a pack over the rough places.

From Yale to the sea the river is navigable. Now their dangers from cascade and rapid were over for the time. The mountain walls were seen to spread apart and the river became a sluggish, wide-flowing stream winding between low banks. The primeval forest stretched back from the river a dense, dark green, feathery mass of fir, cedar and hemlock, while in the distance great mountains shone in the sun, their snow-covered summits alternately clear or wrapped in fleecy cloud blankets. Along these low shores Indian villages were to be seen from time to time. These were not the friendly Indians of the canyons but the true Coast Indians, strong in number, suspicious of visitors, at war with the Cowichans of the Gulf and altogether more formidable than the up-river types. Here were seen large cedar canoes, hollowed by fire and neatly polished. The houses were immense structures of upright cedar logs, sheathed with wide plank split from the cedar tree. The Coast Indians are as truly Indians of the Cedar Tree, as the plains Indians were dependent upon the buffalo and the Eastern or Algonquin tribes upon the matchless birch.

About noon, July 2, Fraser landed at a village which was probably near the present Coquitlam. The Indians were friendly and pressed food upon the weary, hungry party. But, when Fraser prepared to embark the Indians became noisy and vociferous. They clustered around the Chief and embraced him "with so much emotion and tenderness, as if he was never to return." They were afraid, they said, of the Cowichans, or Indians of the Sea. The Chief refused to go further and demanded his canoe. Fraser was in a quandary, presents were refused, they would not sell a canoe. There was no way open but to use force. While the Indians stood in doubt, the voyageurs boldly launched the big canoe and clambering in proceeded without their Indian host.

Within a few miles Fraser came to the present site of New Westminster where he noted that the river divided into several channels. He took the north channel and after several hours' paddling came in sight of the long-sought sea, the Gulf of Georgia. On the right shore a large village was seen, called by the natives, "Misguiame," and to this Fraser directed his course. On that very situation there still stands a small Indian village known as Musqueam. Motors rush by on the highway above the village and a golf links in the vicinity speaks eloquently of the peace and security of the white man's occupation. Two miles farther west, at the tip end of Point Grey, the visitor of 1928 will find grey stone buildings and the campus of the University of British Columbia.

On the afternoon of July 2, 1808, the scene was far different. A giant forest of cedar and fir covered the highway, the intervening lands, and the University site. Musqueam was then a large village with wide cedar houses in rows, while in the centre stood an immense communal hall or fort, ninety feet wide and one thousand five hundred feet long. At least five or six hundred Indians must have had their home at this favoured spot for fishing and fur trade. Fraser and his men were much surprised upon landing to find but a few old men and women, the others having fled into the woods upon his approach. The white men wandered through the village, viewing with interest the houses, their compartments, the Indian utensils and furnishings. An hour passed in this fashion with no sign of danger, until they returned to their canoe to

embark. There lay the forty-foot canoe high and dry. The tide had ebbed and a soft, muddy expanse separated them from the stream. It was necessary, therefore, to drag the canoe for some distance to the water.

The natives, who had been watching from their concealment in the forest, now found their courage and began to make their appearance from every direction, dressed in their coats of mail, brandishing their war clubs, and howling like so many wolves. It was a close call. The men tumbled into the canoe and shoved off just as the foremost savages neared the water's edge. Fraser and his men were fortunate to escape with their lives. After some moments of indecision Fraser turned the canoe up-stream. He desired to explore further along the Gulf shore, but the larder was empty and he saw no prospect of securing food from the hostile Cowichans. Then too the Musqueams had launched canoes and were slipping along the bank keeping their quarry in view. It was decided to return at once, and with all speed, to the more friendly Indian village at Coquitlam. Then, "if thought proper and expedient to return," they could prosecute their design of visiting part of the sea coast.

Fraser remarks in his journal of his "great disappointment in not seeing the main ocean, having gone so near it as to be almost within view." So keen was his disappointment that he completely overlooked the fact that he had discovered a new river to which his name might be given. Or, if you like, this new river, his river, was so beset with canyon and rapid, so enclosed by sheer rock mountain walls as to be of no value for a trading route. From a merchantile viewpoint his exploration had ended in expense and failure. In fact the value of the Fraser as a through artery of trade had to await the building of the Cariboo Waggon Road (1862-64) and the advent of the railroad (1883-85). To-day the Fraser water-gap through the Coast Range provides access to the Gulf of Georgia for Canada's two continental railway systems. And we are interested in Fraser, the man, because of the heroic fight he and his brave men waged against turbulent waters and, in some instances, equally dangerous aborigines.

The return up the river to Yale was as full of peril as fickle Indian tribes could well make it. Fraser and his men drove their heavy cedar canoe against the current until eleven that night. They had nothing to eat and rested on the shore till daybreak. Starting shortly after daybreak they arrived at the Chief's village (Coquitlam) at five o'clock. The Chief gave the hungry men food to eat but demanded the return of his canoe. This being refused he became angry and the Indians crowded around with loud and noisy protests. Fraser offered payment; a blanket was spurned; a knife, an axe, all were refused. The Chief would neither sell nor rent. Then Fraser cut the knot, and by a show of boldness ordered his men into the canoe, shoved off, and set out up the river. The Indians, led by their Chief, followed in lighter and swifter craft. Growing bolder they attempted to surround Fraser's canoe and upset it, and were only driven off by a row of levelled muskets and by "threats and vehemence" on Fraser's part. The Indians then dropped behind but continued to follow at a distance. So the long afternoon wore away and as the shadows of evening spread over the land and across the broad expanse of the river the pursuing Indians were seen to haul their canoes on shore. Fraser and his men continued on through the night in order to get to the next village in time to secure provisions before the arrival of the Chief and his band. It was dreary work, "the night was dark and the current strong." Yet, by eight in the morning they hauled out at the village.

In the midst of friendly clamour, the pursuing party arrived, still bent upon mischief. The Chief "began to testify his hostile disposition by brandishing his horn club and making a violent harangue to the people of the village.... He claimed his canoe." Hoping to quell the rising storm and if possible rid himself of this pestiferous trouble-maker, Fraser returned the canoe, offering further payment which was angrily refused. It would be useless to attempt to enumerate the trials of the following days. Only a brave man, a born leader of men, could have weathered the gale of suspicion and resentment which the pestiferous Chief spread among the once friendly natives. Their villages under the spur of his resentment became points of menace rather than havens of succour and refreshment.

All this had a depressing effect upon the men. On Wednesday, July 5, encircling, hostile Indians forced Fraser to land at a spot some miles below Yale. There was discouragement and near mutiny among the voyageurs. They declared their intention to abandon the canoe and proceed overland through the mountains on foot rather than to risk the passage of the river. It took all of Fraser's persuasion to rehearten the men. Stuart and Quesnel stood solidly behind their leader. At last all took an oath, "sooner to perish than forsake in distress any of the crew during the present voyage." Then the men dressed in their best clothes, returned to the canoe full of spirit, "singing and making a great noise."

The effect upon the Indians was no less remarkable. Instead of closing in they kept their distance, amazed at such show of spirit and afraid to attack. Gradually one by one their canoes dropped down the far side of the river and the way

ahead was clear to Fraser and his lusty voyageurs. It proved to be the turning point in the retreat. The day had been won.

Fraser passed the Chilkotin on the 25th, and the next day he was in the vicinity of Soda Creek. From there to Fort George the "going" is comparatively easy and the last entry in the journal is under date of August 6, 1808, "Set out early and at noon arrived at the Fort where we found Mr. Fairies with his two men." With these simple words the vivid and arresting tale from the pen of Simon Fraser comes to an abrupt end.

We wish there had been an epilogue, something or someone to tell us how Fraser crossed the mountains and presented his report to the partners at Fort William. We do not know when he made his report or how the partners received it. We can only surmise. It is probable that there was disappointment at Fort William because the Tacoutche Tesse had been found to be other than the Columbia. And Fraser's account of his river showed conclusively its uselessness as a fur trading route to the sea. It is probably due to these factors that so little note was made of this heroic venture at that time. This may probably have hindered Fraser from publishing his account as did Alexander Mackenzie in 1801.

The events which remain to be chronicled are meagre enough. In 1811 Fraser was rewarded for his services in establishing the fur trade of New Caledonia, by an appointment to the important Red River Department. In 1816 he was present at the affair of Seven Oaks near Fort Garry when Governor Semple was killed. Fraser retired from the North-West Company in 1821, and married Miss McDonnell, of Matilda, Ontario. He made his home at St. Andrew's, on the Ottawa, where he engaged in business, but with indifferent success. He died April 19, 1862, at the advanced age of eighty-six.

Simon Fraser rose from a humble home to a position of influence in the affairs of the powerful North-West Company. The great river of British Columbia proudly bears his name, a lasting tribute to his strength of purpose, and his devotion to duty. Fraser was a faithful man, strong and steadfast as are the mountains of the New Caledonia he loved so well.

[End of *Simon Fraser* by V. L. Denton]