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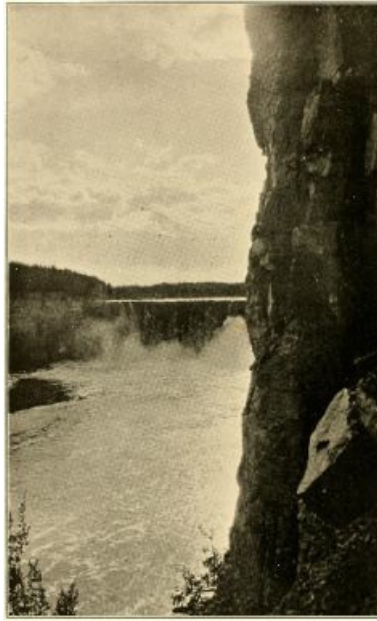
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# **New Rivers of the North**

**HULBERT FOOTNER**

## NEW RIVERS OF THE NORTH



**Alexandra Falls on the Hay River in late afternoon**

# **NEW RIVERS OF THE NORTH**

***THE YARN OF TWO AMATEUR EXPLORERS***

**BY**

# HULBERT FOOTNER

*WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY AUVILLE EAGER AND THE AUTHOR*

THE HEAD-WATERS OF THE FRASER:

THE PEACE RIVER:

THE HAY RIVER:

ALEXANDRA FALLS:

NEW YORK  
OUTING PUBLISHING COMPANY  
MCMXII

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To  
A. E.

"The intrepid partner of many voyages into trackless wilds."  
*Vide the Edmonton Journal.*

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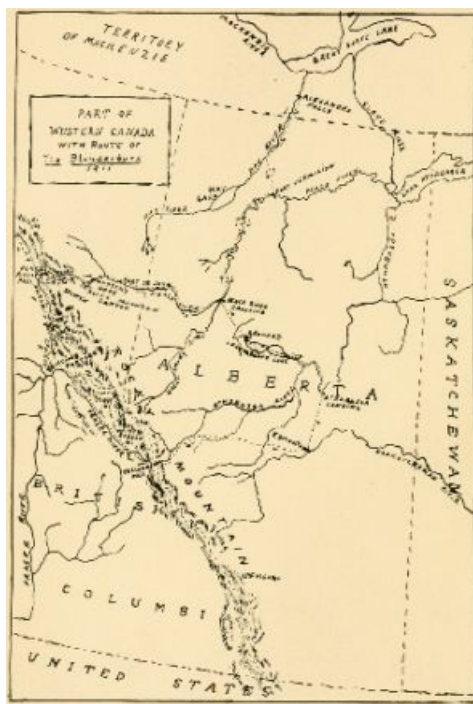
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**Mr. Footner's journey began and ended at Edmonton. The arrows show the direction he was traveling.**

# NEW RIVERS OF THE NORTH

## CHAPTER I

### THE START

When the North is mentioned it generally evokes a picture in the hearer's mind of the bleak, barren lands, or of the desolate, flat shores of Hudson Bay. There is another North, the smiling parklike land adjacent to the Rocky Mountains, that is warmed and refreshed by the moisture-laden winds from the Pacific. This is the country of our journey.

The rivers are not really "new" of course, but almost the oldest things there are; they have been pursuing their lovely courses since the immemorial nightmare when the mountains were pushed up, and the sea retreated. Calling them "new" is merely man's conceited way of putting it. It is we white men who are new to the rivers. I am conscious of my unfitness to be the first to describe the new parts of them. It needs a geologist, a botanist—and a poet to do them justice. I can only offer to share the delight of two amateurs in descending streams of which no man could say what lay around the next bend. I would like to convey a sense of the pleasure one feels in beholding sights that have not been published to the world at large. No normal transfer of the country for value received, et cetera, could give us half the opulent sense of proprietorship in it that we now enjoy.

Our plan was to start from the end of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway west of Edmonton, and have our outfit transported by wagon or pack pony through the Yellowhead Pass alongside the railway construction. We could not find out for certain if a wagon road had been completed through the pass, and we therefore took a collapsible boat, that could be rolled up and packed on a horse's back.

We expected to launch our craft in the headwaters of the Fraser River beyond the summit of the pass. For several hundred miles the Fraser flows in a northwesterly direction before making its great sweep to the south, and this was the portion of it that we meant to descend. At Giscomb Portage there is a six-mile carry over the height of land to Summit Lake, one of the sources of the Peace. We were then to descend its various tributaries in a northerly direction to the forks of the great river itself, and come back again through the mountains by the Peace River pass.

After that the grand objective of the trip was to reach the Hay River, the longest river in North America, I believe, that remains unexplored and unmapped. When I had been in the country five years before, I had heard vague stories of a great and beautiful cataract on the Hay River that only one or two white men had ever beheld, and I had dreamed of it o' nights ever since.

The Hay River is said to rise in three small lakes near the foothills of the Rockies, about a hundred miles north of the Peace at Fort St. John. It flows, roughly speaking, parallel with the Peace, that is to say, in a northeasterly direction, and empties into Great Slave Lake. It is probably six or seven hundred miles long. The stretch of country between the two rivers is likewise written down "unexplored" on the maps.

This trip offered particular attractions. In the first place, by starting at a high altitude on the Fraser we were enabled to travel continuously down-stream for thirteen or fifteen hundred miles. And every day of it promised to be interesting. There was the magnificent Yellowhead pass with Robson Peak, the highest known mountain in Canada, the turbulent Fraser, and the little-known headwaters of the Peace. There was the Peace River pass, where the river forces its way through the main chain of the Rockies, including the famous Rocky Mountain canyon, and the noble river itself for hundreds of miles beyond. Finally there was the chance of bringing home a river of our own, and one of the great waterfalls of the continent for a grand prize.

Though of course we were not by any means the pioneers of the entire route, which is a well-known one to the Indians and the traders, very little about it has ever been written, and our photographs are to a large extent the first of this country that have reached the outside world.

---

We left civilization behind us at Edmonton, the last town in this part of the world. I need say very little about it—not that there is nothing to be said; indeed, at present Edmonton is one of the most interesting places in the country; the romance of development is in the air, and no man can tell what the next day will bring forth. But this is a yarn of the woods and the waters, and it naturally begins where the town ends.

In Edmonton they are very keenly interested in the vast untouched country lying to the north and west of them; the future greatness of the town depends on its opening to settlement. They were therefore interested in our journey, and one of the newspapers gave us a long write-up couched in such glowing terms as to bring the blushes to our maiden cheeks.

This story appeared on the morning that we set forth, and we read it on the train. It was written in a high-falutin', boastful vein that made us want to crawl under the car-seats, especially my "intrepid partner," to whom the interview was ascribed. We expected that the story would precede us, queering us all along the line, but to our great relief no one seemed to take the slightest notice of it. I have chosen a quotation from it for the dedication to this book.

The railroad ended officially at Edson, one hundred and thirty-five miles west of Edmonton. To the eye it was an unpromising town of the packing-box school of architecture erected in a sad wilderness of oozing clay. It was filled with the unnatural bustle of a temporary terminus, that bustle which passes, leaving a no less unnatural stagnation. At the moment Edson was enjoying its day; we were informed that lots on the boggy main street were held at five thousand dollars each, and transfers had actually been made at twenty-five hundred. To give an idea of our geographical position I will mention that Edson is about two hundred miles northwest of the famous Kicking-Horse pass, where the Canadian Pacific Railway traverses the Rockies; say three hundred miles due north of the boundary of the State of Washington; or about four hundred miles north of the city of Spokane.

From Edson we were permitted to ride sixty-two miles further west on a construction train. I use "permitted" advisedly, for the contractors made it clear they considered they were doing us a favor in accepting our four cents a mile. For instance, the construction train waited negligently a quarter of a mile down the track at Edson, and we had to make four hasty, heartbreaking trips over the ties with our outfit on our backs, the train threatening to leave momentarily. We traveled at our own risk, of course, no slight one in a car rocking on the newly laid rails like a vessel in a cross sea; and we were further advised that it was incumbent on us to look after our own baggage. Part of someone else's stuff was spilled out en route, and it was only owing to the energy of my partner, who pursued the baggage car down the track with the box on his shoulder, that it was not left on the right of way.

We rode on the uncompromising wooden seats of an emigrant car, and the train averaged exactly seven miles an hour for nine hours, but it was impossible to be bored. Never was there a more interesting carfull, pioneers for the most part with their faces turned toward the frontier, and radiating an atmosphere of hopefulness. We were entranced by the scraps of conversation that reached our ears; how So-and-So had succeeded in establishing the old Indian trail to the headwaters of the Big Smoky; how somebody else had made a strike in the valley of the Grand Forks; how it was rumored that five thousand dollars' worth of marten fur had been brought out of the Cassiar country. I remember only one woman on the train, the wife of the storekeeper at Tête Jaune Cache, who had her baby with her, undoubtedly the youngest white man in the country. She had a drive of a hundred and twenty-five miles through the pass before her.

We were reminded anew of the advantages of rough clothes as a passport on the road. Good clothes cut the wearer off from his fellows like a wall. The more fashionably clad, the more of an outcast he becomes. But let him put on a cheap, ragged habit and go into the streets, and delightful adventures crowd on him. He will then learn what human fellowship is. The world will take him to its heart, initiate him into its mysteries, and provide him with inexhaustible entertainment.

We talked with a youthful sergeant of the mounted police, a splendid physical specimen with a capable air, and a steady eye that upheld the best traditions of the force. We admired his manner with the crowd, particularly toward the end of the day, when one or two passengers mysteriously became intoxicated. He got on smoothly with everybody, without descending from his own level—no easy task with these touchy pioneers. He must have led rather a lonely life, because the only times he could really relax were with his fellow-redcoats. When he met a comrade at one of the way-stations we would see the pair of them go apart, and laugh and joke with each other, as if they needed to let off steam.

There was a comic opera tenderfoot on board. It seemed incredible in these days of free libraries for the circulation of popular literature that anyone could be so green. He was clad in a brand-new canvas "sporting" suit, topped off with a huge hunting knife, that he confided to us was for cutting his "bully beef" with. We always referred to him thereafter as "Bully Beef." He was anxious and anæmic; he had worked in a bank for nine years, and was now on his way to carry the

chain for a surveying party in the mountains. His innocence was pathetic; one could not help but foresee the rich, cruel fun in store for that gang of surveyors.

The happiest man on the train was the little news-agent. He was driving a roaring trade in sandwiches at twenty cents each, not to speak of oranges, "pop," and tobacco at corresponding prices. The car was filled with his rollicking repartee, and the chink of the coin pouring in on him. Nature had intended him for a clown; but no doubt he was doing better as a news-agent. He had not only the train to draw from, for at every camp along the line, some of the laborers swarmed aboard to examine his stock. Loud were the lamentations of the foreigners when his "snooze" gave out, "snooze" being the local familiarity for snuff.

Bickerdike, or Mile 17, was the principal stop en route. Above the track stretched a row of log shacks calked with clay, and hanging out over the doors such rakish, home-made signs as: "Dad's Stopping-house"; "Short Order Resterant"; "Pool-room"; "The Old Man's Place," etc. Between the shacks and the train lounged a various and colorful crowd, every unit of which had character. It is the most striking feature of a new country that every man has a strong individuality—or affects one. Blanks are out of fashion. There were some ladies, too, at Bickerdike. Never will we forget the haughtiness of certain dames who, clad in sweaters reaching to the ground, and with innumerable puffs in their back hair, came languidly down to the cars to inquire if there were any packages.

Between stations the country for the most part showed the same dreary, scrubby waste, from which the timber had long ago been burned. This is not one of the famous agricultural districts of Alberta. Now and then a pretty lake relieved the monotony, and the occasional rivers were interesting, rushing down through the vast troughs they had cut for themselves in the clay. Toward the end of the afternoon the Rocky Mountains appeared off to the west, with Roche Miette, a splendid bold cliff marking the gateway for which we were bound.

At half-past ten in the gathering dusk we were put off at Mile 62. The day was June 26th. Why they wouldn't carry us three miles further to Hinton, where the stopping-houses were, is another mystery clear only to the railway contractors. As it was we had to stage it at ruinous rates. We slept at the Mountain View Hotel, the last bed we were to have for many a day to come.

## CHAPTER II

### ON THE TOTE ROAD

Next morning we found that Hinton, or, as it was more generally called, Mile 65, was rapidly taking on the air of a deserted village. The construction trains were now hauling the contractors' freight through to Mile 88, consequently everyone was moving on. We had seen several such abandoned towns en route, one of which, Wolf Creek, extended for upwards of a mile beside the track. The population had fallen from hundreds of souls to three. The "tote road," I need hardly explain, is built by the contractors for the purpose of hauling supplies to the various camps along the line of construction. We learned that it had been completed through the pass except for a ten-mile break at Moose Lake.

At Mile 65 the only wagon ready to start west was drawn by a double team of oxen. We looked askance at the slaving, heavy-footed beasts, which promised anything but rapid transit, but at least the driver was hitching them up, and there was nothing else in sight; it was a start. At ten o'clock we set our faces west on the tote road, snow-capped peaks beckoning us ahead. Our folding boat, and our grub outfit followed on top of the load.

The driver's name was Everitt. He was a mild young man with rosy cheeks and large, lusterless eyes like his oxen. We had not traveled far in his company before we discovered that an exclusive association with his slow beasts had sapped the springs of his energy. Men who spoke to us about him later would shake their heads and say: "Everitt, he used to be one of the smartest young fellers on the trail. But 'pears he must have slipped a cog somewheres. He can't get through no more!"

We could supply the explanation. Everitt was an impressionable youth, and he had taken the color of his "bulls." Like them he was slow almost to the point of paralysis, also timid and self-distrustful to a degree. Once stopped he required a goad to set him in motion again. We would see Everitt standing motionless for minutes at a time with a piece of harness in his hands, and his eyes fixed in a vacant stare. At such a moment all that he lacked to complete the resemblance was a cud to chew.

We traveled at about a mile and a half an hour, with frequent pauses to breathe the oxen—and Everitt. My partner and I walking ahead could stop for a swim, or an hour's fishing, or to climb a mountain without any danger of being left too far behind. Everitt had assured us he was in the habit of making fifteen or twenty miles a day, but we had not gone three before he sat down for a two-hour spell in a mosquito-ridden meadow. He made ten miles the first day, and he was greatly pleased with himself. Fortunately we were overtaken by a pedestrian philosopher called Jim Waters, who threw in his lot with us. He was an old acquaintance of Everitt's and his energy supplied a kind of goad.

We camped within the confines of Jasper Park, one of the Canadian national reservations, pitching our tent in a magnificent grove of spruce trees. There we lay for two whole days. It rained, and Everitt insisted with tears in his voice, that he would never, never be able to get his load through the four miles of timber that lay beyond. We pointed out that the more it rained, the worse the road would become, but without avail. On the third morning word was brought along the road that the mounted police were coming, and that they were "frisking" every load they overtook. I do not know if Everitt carried any contraband; but any rate he started.

It was in truth a very bad piece of road that followed, but nothing to what we had expected from Everitt's harrowing forecast. We got through without capsizing. It was amusing to hear the mild young driver bellowing to his steeds in an awful voice that issued from his boots.

Beyond the timber, the hills that hemmed us in became mountains. Roche Miette was now rearing its crude, bold steeple of rock close ahead. The first mountain on our left had no name that we could discover, and we christened it Mount Primus. We climbed it while our cavalcade crawled up the valley. The summit was perhaps twenty-five hundred feet above the river. We endured frequent cold squalls of rain, and hordes of mosquitoes for the sake of the view. The Athabasca issued from between the great mountains on our left in innumerable channels among spruce-clad islands. At our feet it spread out in a vast muddy lake. The effects of rain and mist among the heights were magnificent. We came down on the run in the track of a mountain goat, who considerately pointed out the easiest way, but the goat himself escaped our view.

The next day we came to an obstruction that almost broke Everitt's heart all over again. The bridge over Fiddle Creek

had been undermined by heavy rains, and there was no way to cross but by fording. Everitt swore he would never be able to do it, and had it not been for Jim Waters I have no doubt he would be there yet. We ourselves crawled across the broken bridge through a roaring cataract, at the imminent danger of being carried down. We desired to get pictures of the oxen fording. I lost my best pipe.

Everitt finally made a start, but the oxen went in up to their bellies, and he was seized with panic. For perhaps ten minutes he kept the hapless creatures standing there in the icy, rushing water while he debated what to do. Finally he unhitched them, and attaching them to the back of the wagon, pulled it back from the water's edge.

Then there was a long wait. From our side of the stream we could see Jim Waters vainly expostulating. Finally a half-breed driver came along with a load, and without so much as a glance at the torrent, nonchalantly drove through. Everitt followed in his wake. To hear him crow at the other side one would have thought he had dared the Rubicon unaided. Unfortunately the pictures we took of these operations are a trifle over-exposed. We made heavy allowances for the dazzling brilliance of the Alberta sunshine, but not sufficient, it appears.

At Mile 88 we decided we had had enough of Everitt and his bulls. In five days we had made twenty-three miles. At any rate Everitt was going but twenty miles farther, and Mile 88 offered the best chance of engaging a through passage. Unluckily the railroad bridge over Fiddle Creek was likewise down, and the freighters were standing about idle. For five more days we waited in camp. It was a comfortable camp in a grove of trees beside the Athabasca, with Roche Miette towering over our shoulder. They were delightful days of loafing, and quaffing deep of the champagne of the mountain tops, but we chafed at the delay.

Every day one of us walked into the "cache," as they call any place where goods are stored, for news of the freighters. One friend, Jim Waters, had his team there. On the way was a camp of Indians and breeds, a sadly mixed lot, the first natives we had seen on the journey. There was nothing of story-book Indian about them. Imagine the noble red-man with a patent washing machine at the door of his tent and a universal bread-mixer inside! They did not even live in tepees, but in dirty wall-tents with a rusty stove-pipe sticking out of one end. Nevertheless, dirty and degenerate as they were, the rags of romance still clung to them. They are so mysterious! They keep themselves to themselves and it is impossible for a white man to tell what is going on behind their smooth, dark, sullen faces.

On the sixth day my partner returned to inform me with a rather dubious joy that he had found a freighter going up light, who would carry our stuff to the summit of the pass. When the wagon presently hove in view, I understood his doubts. I never saw a more criminal-looking outfit. The driver was a little, one-armed man with a wicked, merry eye, and clad in deplorable rags. As he said himself: he "hadn't enough clothes to flag a freight with." His companion was a hulking young Irishman with an alcoholic flush, and a furtive glance, but one cannot be too particular on the trail; we cast in our lot with them.

We soon found that we were in the company of an honest enough pair. They were desperately hard up. They had scarcely any food, and their cooking outfit was limited to a battered lard pail for boiling their tea, and an axle-grease tin to drink it from. Yet the team that "Wingy" drove so cleverly was one of the best on the tote road, and we heard of other horses that he owned. We gathered later that he had been cleaned out in a poker game down the line.

Wingy was an Irishman too, a witty one, and madly improvident. He had an infinite command of picturesque metaphor, and I am sorry that owing to reasons of propriety I may not quote him more. He let fall many hints of strange adventures on the seven seas. As for the hulking Pat, he proved to be the soul of simplicity and good-nature. Wingy drew him out endlessly for our benefit.

We now made good time, and would have done better still had we not fallen in with a blacksmith emigrating westward with all his worldly goods. His horses were played out, and Wingy helped him up the hills, and even changed teams with him, when his own beasts could pull no farther. Wingy did all this largely out of pure good will (he had never seen the man before) but partly, we guessed, out of respect for the blacksmith's well-furnished grub-box. At any rate Wingy and Pat feasted upon tinned salmon and jam at every meal. Two passengers rode on top of the blacksmith's load; a middle-aged man nursing a broken leg, and his daughter, a pretty little girl who, poor child, had had no chance to take off her clothes or brush her hair since leaving Edmonton. We pitied them, frightfully jolted and thrown about as they were on their insecure perch.

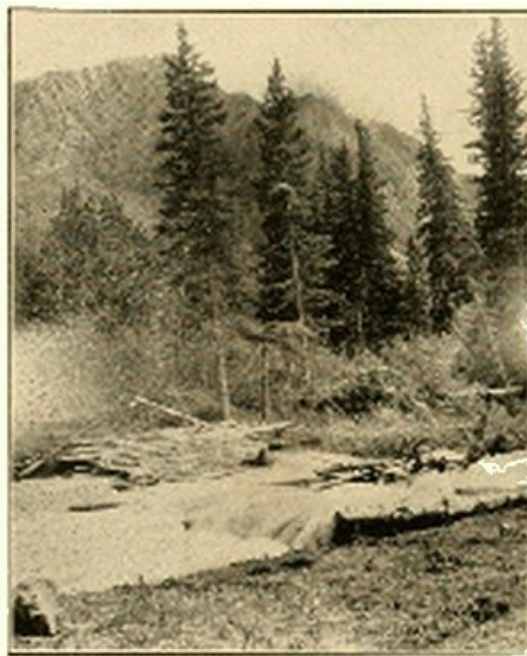
Another delay was caused by Pop Hopper. Pop Hopper was the Jonah of the tote road. The other freighters hated to get

behind him, knowing if they did they would be obliged to stop and help him out of all his troubles. He was a blustering old infant who, in the parlance of the road, "had money," and only freighted for the fun of it. Certainly he could not have made anything. Wingy opined that Pop Hopper "would make better time if he let one of the horses drive, and put his own neck in the collar."

We were unlucky enough to fall behind him one morning. We occupied ourselves picking up pails of jam, tins of corn, and so on, that had spilled off his load. After lunch we came upon him with his hind wheels locked to the hubs in the affectionate embrace of a muskeg. It was his custom when anything like this befell him to sit down and have a lunch while waiting for someone to come along. By the time we arrived he had already collected quite a crowd from the nearest construction camp. He was in his element, ordering his volunteer helpers about like the foreman of a gang of navvies.



**Claude and his Bulls**

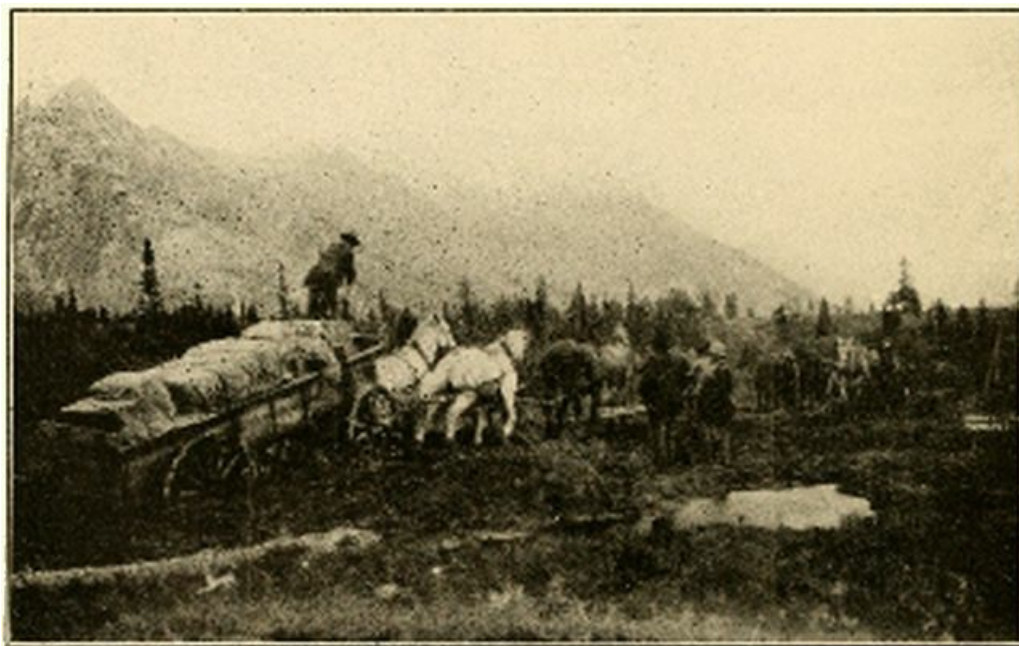


**The down bridge over Fiddle Creek**





**For ten minutes he left the helpless beasts standing in the icy water**



**Pop Hopper locked in the affectionate embrace of a muskeg**

We pitched in too, tearing up the corduroy of a neighboring bridge, and cheerfully miring ourselves to the hips in the endeavor to "prize" her up. Pop Hopper stood by yelling and cursing at us in his own way. At one time we had five horses and four mules straining at the chains, but all to no avail; she stuck. Finally we had to unload, and then we discovered that Pop Hopper had his own way of loading too. He was taking a load of "fancy stuff" to one of the stores at the summit. He had carefully put in all the lighter things first, such as boxes of macaroni, crates of cocoanuts, oranges, onions and eggs. On this he had piled bags of sugar, bales of hay, and great chests of tea. Consequently we uncovered a horrid scramble in the bottom of the wagon box; long strings of yellow egg ceaselessly dripped through the cracks.

We finally put him on his way, taking care, however, to gain the road ahead of him. The next day we heard the sequel. A few miles beyond where we left him he drove off the side of a steep bank, and his wagon capsized, "with all four wheels turning in the air." Our informant added that he had come across Pop Hopper after the accident comfortably lunching under a tree. The whole landscape was littered with fancy groceries, and the old man was eating pickles out of a bucket



that had burst against a stump beside him.

As soon as we left Mile 88 we entered among the real mountains, gigantic, naked sweeps of rock that took our breath away afresh every time we lifted our eyes. The pass is an easy one, and for the most part the valley was flat all the way through. Soon we were winding around the bases of the snow-capped mountains. Of all the works of nature surely no one could ever come to take snowy peaks for granted. To see them in the sunlight, flung up against an ocean of blue, is at once the most beautiful and the most disquieting sight of earth. For an entire day Pyramid Mountain dazzled and delighted our eyes with its regular snowy plains.

Meanwhile the tote road was as animated as a city street. All day the freighters came and went, and this is not to speak of other travelers, mounted or in wagons, and a small army afoot. It is a saying up there that there are always three construction gangs in the country, one coming, one going, and one at work on the grade. In addition, the tote road had this year for the first made the mountains accessible for prospecting, and we were continually meeting gold-hunters, those harmless madmen with their little hammers.

We walked into the camp at the Summit one Monday morning, Wingy and the blacksmith following soon after. Pat had mysteriously disappeared the day before. Wingy, with his wicked smile said we would find him at the Summit, but he was not there, nor did we ever learn what had become of him. I desire to give a plain unvarnished account of what we saw in this place. At first it seemed to us no different from the other camps we had passed through, but little by little the difference became apparent, and in the end we found ourselves looking on a little dazed, and scarcely comprehending what was happening.

I should explain that under the Canadian laws no liquor may be kept or sold along the line of construction of a railroad. East of the Summit the law was pretty well enforced by the mounted police. There were some "boot-leggers," but no "speak-easies." The province of British Columbia, however, administers its own internal affairs much the same as one of the sovereign states across the border. Consequently the mounted police had no jurisdiction, and the camp at the Summit had sprung up in their faces, not more than a hundred yards from the border of Alberta. It is true, protection by the province of British Columbia had been promised the law-abiding element, but the police had not materialized. I hope they are there by this time.

The camp consisted of perhaps fifteen log shacks roofed with canvas. There were three or four general stores, a Japanese restaurant, and four drinking places, the latter run without the slightest pretense of concealment. Before we realized what kind of a place we had struck, we were rash enough to accede to Wingy's request of five dollars on account, to enable him to buy feed for his horses. That explains our delay here.

The first thing that struck us as out of the common was the sight of several inanimate bodies sprawled in the mud of the trail. No one paid any attention. "Let 'em sleep it off," was the general sentiment. The instrument of havoc was "squirrel whiskey" at two bits a drink. One cynical traveler informed us that it was made out of gasoline: "two shots and you'll explode," said he.

Passing a little log shack we saw in the gloom within, a swollen figure like a spider sitting on a stump at the head of a rough table, idly shuffling a pack of cards with a wary eye on the open door. He had the hardest face I have ever seen, a compound of unmitigated sensuality and cunning. One would have thought the sight of it sufficient to warn an infant child to keep out of his den, but the next time we passed, each of the other three stumps around the table was occupied, and the game in full swing.

We were introduced to the mayor. This functionary we suspected had risen to his office by virtue of having the hardest head in the community. He accepted drinks from all, and betrayed no sign. His official duties so far as we observed consisted in ordering the bystanders to "roll them there corpses out of the trail so's the wagons kin pass." He also acted as a general safety deposit vault. A Swede lurched out of one of the bars, and collapsed on a bench outside. The mayor appropriated his watch, and held it up. "You see, fellers, I have his watch," he said. "I'll keep it till he comes to. Lay him out there to one side so's he won't git stepped on."

From bits of overheard conversation we learned that there had been what the newspapers call "a shooting affray" at the Summit the night before. An all-round bad man called "Baldy" on coming to town had given his roll to a lady to keep for him. On his demanding it back later, she claimed that he had drunk it up, whereupon Baldy proceeded to demolish her establishment. She shot at him and wounded a friend, who had been carried off to the hospital at Mile 116. This Baldy

had a bad reputation in the country. They still tell the story of how he hitched his team to the corner of "Dirty Mag's" speak-easy and threatened to pull the whole thing over if she didn't come across with the drinks.

Presently the redoubtable Baldy was pointed out to us, drinking squirrel whiskey in the Japanese restaurant. Anything less like the bad man hero of Western romance could not be imagined. He was obese, flabby, and unclean. His aspect was as unwholesome as a piece of over-ripe fruit preserved in wood alcohol. He lacked coat and hat; his shirt was torn, and his unhallowed bald pate was covered with abrasions. He had reached the crying stage of intoxication, and was hanging on men's necks, sobbing aloud, and protesting his honesty. Yet he was as active as a lynx; he seemed to be everywhere in the camp at once, and wherever he went followed trouble.

I cannot undertake to describe seriatim all that we saw at the Summit. It remains in my mind like the phantasmagoria of a bad dream, nor is my partner's note-book any less incoherent. It was not until afterwards that we realized the significance of the happenings there. I remember with the rest of the crowd we continually moved up and down the trail from one saloon to another so as not to miss any of the "doings." We made the interesting discovery that all the drinking-places were bespattered with unmistakable ugly, dark stains. We received many invitations to partake of squirrel whiskey, but seeing the results before our eyes, we would as soon have drunk bichloride of mercury.

In the lower saloon some wag persuaded Baldy to put on the gloves with one "Curly," who was a clever boxer. It was very funny to see the boozy old creature prancing about on his toes in the pugilistic style of 1880, while he invited the other to come on, and the cabin was filled with the Homeric laughter of the crowd. This was innocent enough, but afterwards in Baldy's absence, one known as "Frenchy," who already bore the marks of several recent encounters on his face, made a disparaging remark, which Wingy, our little driver, took upon himself to resent.

One thing led to another, and presently Wingy leapt upon Frenchy, bore him to the floor, and proceeded to beat him up more thoroughly and expeditiously than I ever saw it done before. He held him down with the stump of his maimed arm, and punched him with the other. It was pure bravado on the part of Wingy; we guessed that he was doing it just to impress us. A good deal more of Frenchy's blood was spilled. When he threatened to lapse into unconsciousness his assailant was pulled off, minus a further portion of his ragged shirt. When Baldy came in and heard of the affair, he instantly bought him a new one.

Some time after this the foreman of a construction gang near by came striding into camp in a towering passion. Brandishing a fist like a ham under Baldy's nose, he ordered him out of town. "This here shootin' has got to stop!" he stormed. "How kin I keep my men at work down there with the bullets whistlin' through the trees!" The upshot of the argument was that Baldy, tearfully protesting, was loaded on a democrat that was about to start westward, and deported.

All this while at the other end of camp there was fighting going on among a crowd of Swedes. Squirrel whiskey had reduced the unfortunate creatures to a state of utter bestiality. They were men of enormous physical strength. They fought like animals, silently, blindly, heedless of friend or foe. If there was no adversary within reach, in their madness they just as lief butted their heads with frightful force against the log walls. A crowd swayed outside the door of the saloon, and we only had a brief glimpse when it parted, of what was going on within. The onlookers forebore to interfere, unless two men picked on one.

One man thus rescued fell limply across the bar, and lay there in apparent unconsciousness. But presently his hand went stealing to his hip pocket, drew out an ugly knife and opened it. Someone shouted a warning, then the crowd closed in in front of us. Presently there was the sound of a heavy fall inside the shack, and everybody came stumbling out with scared faces. We had a fleeting glimpse of a figure lying on the floor, with livid, ghastly face. The bartender hustled everybody out, and closed the shop. I do not know if the man was dead. There was no information to be had. Months afterwards we heard on the trail that a murder had been committed at the Summit during the summer, but there was nothing to show whether it was this case or another.

Between whiles we were ceaselessly commanding, urging, cajoling Wingy into making a start. He invariably promised to go after one more drink. He was a merry, little devil in his cups; he made us laugh, and then we could do nothing with him. Finally he fell in with the lady who had wielded the pistol the night before. She was a strange apparition in a freshly-starched "negligè," with two black pig-tails hanging down her back, and a face as hard as a brick and the same color. She took him into her place to tell him how it happened. Her raucous voice came through the open windows to us waiting patiently with the team in the sunshine.

When Wingy at last appeared we made final plea with him to start.

"Go ahead!" he cried gaily. "Take the team boys, and drive it to H—!"

There really seemed to be nothing better to do. We started along the trail, and we never saw Wingy again.

## CHAPTER III

### OUR OUTFIT

"What did you eat?" "What did you take with you?" "How did you contrive for yourselves?" are the questions most commonly asked us. Our domestic arrangements on the trail are a never-failing mystery to those accustomed to a well-furnished house, a kitchen range, and a telephone to the store. On the other hand, those who have worked the trails themselves have the interest of a fellow-feeling in what we learned to do—and learned to avoid. So it seems that a chapter on the subject is called for. It may be skipped.

For the greater part of the four months the folding boat was at once our home, our companion, and our trusty steed. We grew to know its ways so well that it became almost like a third member of the party. Its actions under varying conditions are fully described in the narrative. On the whole it served us well. We could carry it anywhere, and yet its capacity was greater than we ever needed to use. Its beaminess was useful on a long voyage, for we could eat and sleep in it in comfort. Its lightness of draft and the flexibility of its sides were of the greatest service in descending swift and shallow streams. It simply bounced off the stones in the rapids, and its tough canvas skin was not once pierced during the voyage, except through the carelessness of the driver who carried it across Giscomb portage—and that hardly counts. On the other hand it must be borne in mind that we used it exclusively in down-stream work, and in slack water. Its lightness and its beaminess would count against it in working against the current.

There are several makes of folding boats on the market. We tried the two leading types, and we found the boat with wooden ribs much better suited to our purpose, being lighter, stiffer, and easier to take up and set down. For journeys where heavy winds and seas are occasionally to be expected the round-bottomed type of boat is the better.

These boats are usually supplied with oars and oarlocks, why I do not understand, because for two men under any circumstances paddles are infinitely better. You cannot descend rapids with oars, nor navigate tortuous or shallow streams, nor could the average man spend ten hours at the oars day after day as we did at the paddles without soon reaching the point of exhaustion. The paddles supplied with our boat were an insult to a riverman, and the little camp-stools on which we were supposed to sit were not only useless, but positively dangerous in broken water. In the foregoing are hints for the manufacturers of these boats if they care to take them. We built a little thwart over the stern for me to sit on, and my partner sat on the roll of blankets, never an altogether satisfactory seat.

Our tent was made after our own design. It was merely a little lean-to 9' × 10' 6", open in front to the fire. It could be slung in a few minutes between two trees, or anywhere on open ground with a couple of rough poles. It was lighter, more compact, and easier to put up than the A tents, but I confess that it left something to be desired when the wind changed at night. For a trip such as ours where every ounce of weight had to be considered as well as every cubic inch of bulk, it would be an almost perfect rig with the addition of a detachable flap to hang down in front. In the daytime this flap could be used for any of the purposes of an ordinary cover. We were unable to obtain any water-proof silk in Edmonton, but for small traveling tents that material is better in every respect, and is worth far more than the difference in cost. We had of course a cheesecloth mosquito bar cut to fit inside the tent. That was really the main purpose of the tent. After the mosquito season was over we rarely needed a shelter.

As to blankets, my first rule is to take more than enough. I would rather go to bed supperless than be cold at night. There are no blankets in America so good as Hudson's Bay blankets. The white ones are the best, and the Indians can rarely be persuaded to buy the colored ones. There are sound reasons for this. One pair is generally considered enough for a man, but I would always cheerfully shoulder the extra weight of two pair. They sometimes made remarks in the North as to the unnecessary amplitude of our beds, but just the same there were nights when we were the only ones in the crowd who got any comfortable sleep.

Hudson's Bay blankets are always of the same weight. They come in various sizes still called, as in ancient times, "four-point," "three-and-a-half point," "three-point," etc. The distinguishing lines are woven in black into the corner of the blanket, so that there can be no discussion as to what you are getting. The goodness of this article is instantly evident in the look and the feel of it. It is one of the worthy old things which has not deteriorated under modern methods of manufacture.

There are at least ten good reasons why blankets are better than sleeping-bags. I will mention only one of them, and that

is, if you prefer a sleeping-bag you can make one out of your blankets anyway. All that is needed are a few saddlers' pins.

For clothes, blue flannel shirts and overalls are the simple requirements of the North. Beware of the elaborate, bepocketed sporting-suits if you wish to make friends with the people. A coat of any kind is of small use on such a trip. Its warmth in relation to its weight is small, and it hampers the freedom of your arms. You will find that you never wear it; it is simply another thing to be looked after. We each carried two sweaters. After August fifteenth heavy underwear is essential. For footwear we started in with moccasins, and kept to them right through. They are comfortable, but expensive if there is any walking or climbing to be done. Some of ours wore out in a single day. In wet and cold weather there is nothing like shoe-packs. A good soft felt hat is a wise investment. We had cheap ones, and they soon collapsed under stress of weather.

Everybody wants to know what kind of a gun to take. It would be vain to enter into a discussion as to the different makes. We had the new Savage .303, a truly first-class weapon, but not the best for this country, because it was impossible to buy ammunition for it outside of the cities, and of course impossible to trade off our surplus. The Winchester .30-.30 is the gun of the country, and shells of this size are as good a means of exchange as money. As an experiment we took a long-barreled .22 revolver for small game, but it was not a success. It had not power enough to kill.

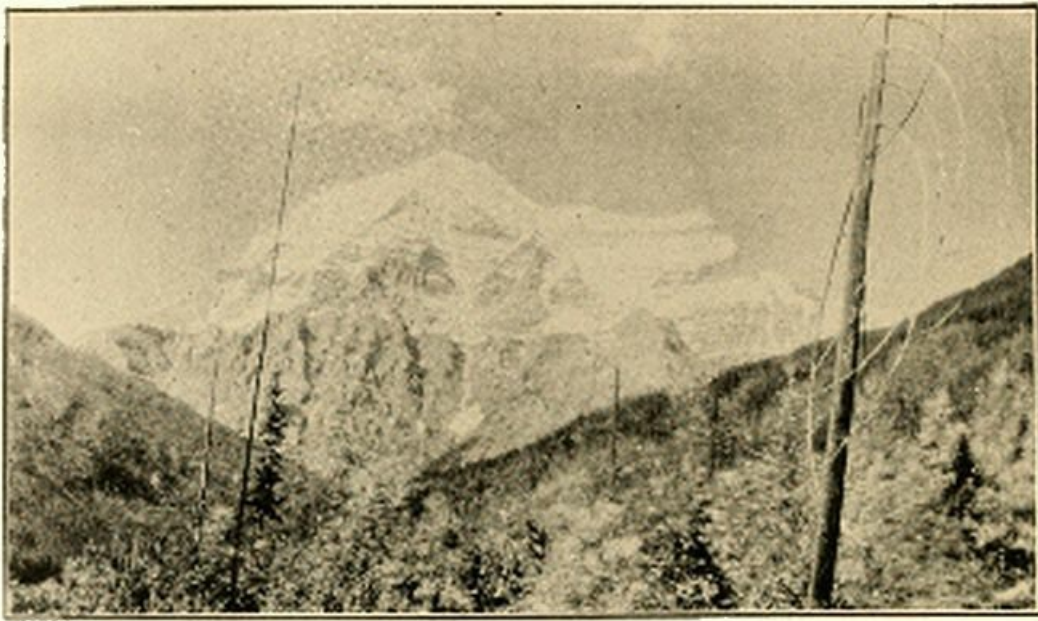
Where traveling is to be the main object with hunting merely incidental, a good .22 rifle is the best weapon, and it is arsenal enough. This is what the Indians carry while working the trails. Of course, if you are after bear or moose, you must have something heavier, though I have seen a bear brought down with a .22—but it took the greater part of a box of shells.

In most parts small game is plentiful; grouse in British Columbia, prairie chicken in Alberta, duck on all the sloughs, and rabbits, if you want them, everywhere. The Indians say that there is no nourishment in rabbits; a man can eat all he wants and still be "poor." Notwithstanding the temptation of small game everywhere, a shotgun is not very serviceable for long journeys on account of the great weight and bulk of the ammunition. But if you are to be more or less in touch with the trading-posts it is a different matter.

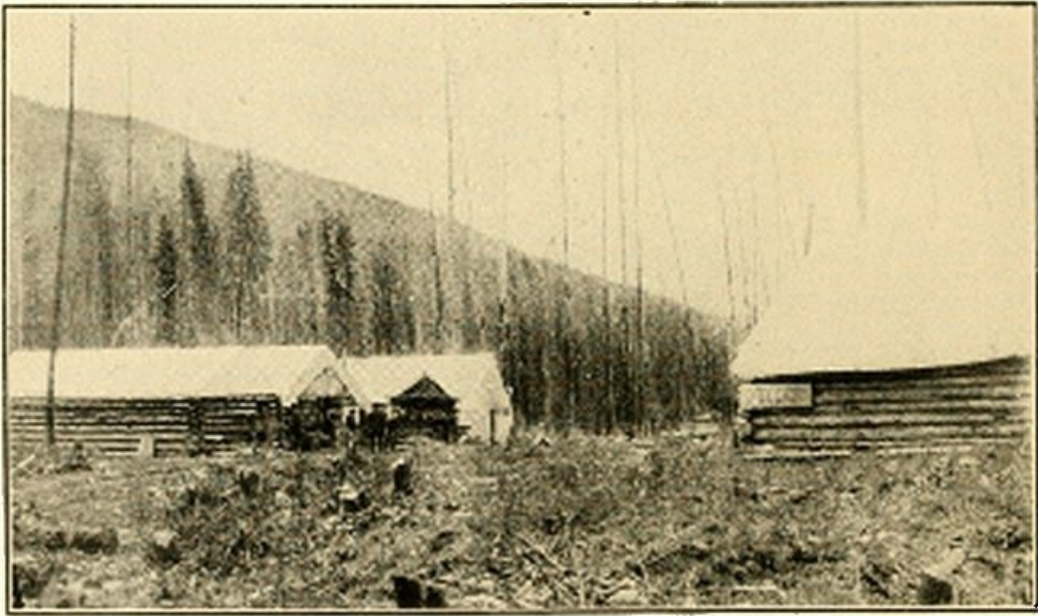


**Mount Robson—From the level of the Grand Forks River**





**A mass of gray rock, fantastically cleft and terraced and piled**



**A row of log shacks thatched with canvas**

"Grub" is the great concern of the North. In civilized communities we take our food for granted, there are always the stores; north of fifty-four it is different. Hand to mouth living is not long permitted in that rigorous climate. "Look ahead with your grub," is a favorite saying, and, "As long as we have grub enough for the winter nothing matters," is another. When a man gets his winter's supply of flour stacked behind the stove he sits back with an easy mind, like our friend Chase on Lesser Slave River.

A careful calculation in advance is necessary. To one who has never thought of the subject the bulk of food that one ordinary-sized person can get outside of in, say, a month is surprising. Two pounds of flour per day per man is the Hudson's Bay Company allowance. We did not use quite as much as this, but we eked out our flour with rice. Man to man the Indians are not as big as we are, but they can eat circles around us,—when the food is forthcoming. When it is not, they do without much more gracefully than we do. Their lives are a constant succession of feasts and famines.

About six ounces of bacon each per day was enough for us, and we did with less when we had to. It must be remembered, though, that we often had as much game and fish as we could eat, and we nearly always had another animal

food in the shape of butter, that we set great store by. Good preserved butter is to be had at all the trading-posts (when they are not out of it) and fresh butter at the farming settlements at Peace River Crossing, and Fort Vermilion.

We found that we each consumed nearly six ounces of sugar a day. Incessant exertion in the open air creates a natural craving for sugar. Never be tempted by the great saving in weight to take saccharin to sweeten your tea and coffee. The sweetness of sugar is merely incidental; it is the heat and energy it supplies that make it indispensable.

Beans were not a success with us. We could rarely stop long enough to cook them properly. Rice, on the other hand, we learned to prize greatly. Too much cannot be said in praise of rice on such a journey; it is easy to cook in camp; it can be served in any number of ways; and the human stomach never seems to weary of it. Here is the method of cooking that we evolved after long practice:

Wash two scant cupfuls of rice in cold salted water. Wash it as much as you like. Meanwhile have your water boiling furiously over the fire, the larger the pot, and the more water the better; plenty of water is an essential. Drain off the cold water, and empty the rice into the pot rather slowly, so as not to chill the boiling water. Let it boil hard for twenty minutes or less. As the time approaches, taste it occasionally and remove it before it is quite done, that is while the grains still retain a faint suggestion of toughness in the middle. The proper moment to take it off can only be determined by practice. Every drop of the starchy water should now be drained off the rice, and the pot hung back over the fire, high up, for the grains to steam and swell and finish cooking. Meanwhile you are frying the bacon or what not.

This is good to eat with soup, or bacon fat, or stewed tomatoes, or raisins and sugar, or with almost anything you have. Our favorite dish was a stew de luxe of rice, tomatoes, onions, and bacon cut small. The quantity of rice I have mentioned sufficed for our dinner, with enough left over to fry for breakfast.

Another essential was dried fruit. We took both apricots and prunes. The former went farther, bulk for weight, but the latter wore better as a steady article of diet. In spite of the jokes at its expense after all there is nothing like the humble Prune. As to dried apples, like the little girl we all know, when they are good they are very, very good, and when they are bad, they are horrid. Great care should be taken in buying them.

Tea, salt, pepper, and baking-powder completed our list of necessities. Coffee and cocoa are very good, but they may be done without at a pinch. You do not find them often in the North. Our fondness for cocoa was quite a joke to our hardy friends of the trails, and there is a noted explorer who is known far and wide in the country as "Chocolate Harry." As to coffee it is hard to carry; for it soon loses its savor when ground. There is now, however, an excellent coffee powder on the market.

It is when you come to the luxuries, the little things that make meals worth eating, that the opportunity for discussion really arises. First on our list we put "Erbswurst mit speck." It really belongs in the list of necessities. If there is a camper or tripper who has not yet discovered Erbswurst, he is unworthy of the name. We have found it equally savory and nourishing on Lesser Slave Lake and on Lake Okeechobee. On long, damp trips such as ours it does not keep quite as well as one might wish. The proprietors would do well to put out a damp-proof package.

Another excellent thing is the de-hydrated vegetable, especially man's odorous friend, the onion. Our de-hydrated onions were worth their weight in gold. Potatoes, too, are good in countries where fresh ones are unobtainable. If you are going into a game country take some de-hydrated cranberries along. On the other hand, the soup powders were not satisfactory; in fact, all the patent soups we tried proved to be pretty poor living, except Erbswurst. Bouillon cubes, however, are useful. The milk and egg powders can be recommended too; indeed the camp bill of fare has endless possibilities nowadays.

For a good, quick camp soup take a can of corn, a cup of milk (condensed milk diluted, or milk powder dissolved), two bouillon cubes dissolved in a little warm water, and a tablespoonful of bacon dripping (or butter) rubbed smoothly into two tablespoonfuls of flour. Bring the milk and the corn to a boil together and add the bouillon and the flour paste. Let it boil for a minute or two, stirring well, and season with salt and pepper and a dash of Worcestershire sauce—if you have it. This mixture always made my partner groan with satisfaction. A can of tomatoes may be substituted for the corn, but they should be thoroughly stewed before the milk is put in, and a pinch of soda and a teaspoonful of sugar should be added. The milk must be stirred in slowly.

Canned vegetables and fruits are very bulky and heavy in proportion to their net food value—you cannot afford to pack a load of water on your back, and so we never stocked such things, but bought them occasionally when we could, at the

trading-posts. The price is by the can, the contents do not figure, and it ranges from forty to seventy-five cents according to the remoteness of the post. At one post we picked up a large can of apples for a dollar and a half that was one of the finest things we ever tasted.

I wonder how many beside ourselves have discovered the virtues of citric acid on the trail. We took a small package of the crystals for use in case we should need an anti-scorbutic, but a pinch of it in our tea in lieu of milk proved so good that we used it all the time, and the little package of "dope" became one of the most valued things in the grub-box. We put a little in stewed fruit, in apple sauce, or in anything where lemons would have served, and I'm sure it helped keep us fit during the weeks when we had no fresh food whatever. Ten cents worth lasted out the summer, though it was continually getting spilled.

Our kitchen outfit was simplicity itself; knives, forks, spoons, cups, and plates; two skillets and a nest of four tin pails; that was all, and it was ample. The only mistake was in having the pails of tin. Tin serves very well for a week or two, but after that one becomes a little weary of the incessant flavor of tin in the food, and in conjunction with acids the result is positively dangerous. Agate-ware is well worth its extra weight. Still better are the copper pots sold by the Hudson's Bay Company. Aluminum, generally speaking, is too fragile to stand the wear and tear of rough travel.

A sheath-knife with a razor edge is an indispensable adjunct to a camp kitchen. There is something attractive and devilish about it too. It is the first thing a tenderfoot always buys. The axe is really a kitchen utensil, also, and the most important article in the entire outfit. Watch it well therefore! If anybody follows our route they will find ours on the sand-bar at the left-hand side going down, immediately below the junction of the Parsnip and the Finlay. Fortunately we had a hatchet in reserve.

Axes bring us naturally to the subject of fire-building on which an entire chapter might be written. But I shall not write it. What would be the use? You cannot tell anybody anything about building fires. Camp-fire vanity is a form of egoism from which the most modest man in other respects is not exempt. Every man believes that he alone has discovered the true best way of building a fire, and his scorn of all other ways knows no bounds.

The tenderfoot is betrayed by his fire just as surely as the experienced tripper is made known by his. The Indians' fires are the sloppiest and the most successful. They seem to be able to make anything burn in any kind of weather, and they are gifted with a special instinct for finding dry wood. Fire-making is the grand discipline of the woods. During the summer I watched my young partner develop from a novice to an expert of no mean ability.

For cooking, to begin with we piled stones to the leeward when we had stones, or set up several green logs, driving pegs into the ground to keep them from rolling down. Against this we built the fire, and if there was bread to be baked, we dug a shallow hole in front for the pans, so that the heat was partly radiated down from above. The pots were hung in the classic way, from saplings sharpened at one end and thrust into the ground, inclining over the fire. Along the Fraser and the Crooked Rivers we used to come across regular fire-places, with uprights at each side and a stick across, from which hung bail-hooks of various sizes ready to our hands.

Bread-making was the cook's grand trial. Two days out of every three the ordeal had to be gone through with. I grew to hate the sight of flour. Under the best of conditions successful bread-making is the result of nicely-balanced conditions, and with only a frying-pan and an open fire the difficulties are multiplied. It is a mistake, though, to suppose that there is no good bread made under these conditions. On the contrary most of it was delicious.

In the jolly cooky of Summit Lake, and in Mac of the Peace River canyon I had the opportunity to study the technique of two of the cleverest dough-tossers in the North. Unfortunately they differed flatly as to method, and I was forced to the opinion that good bread is not a matter of methods but of men. As I never attained to any degree of proficiency myself, I have nothing of value to offer on the subject. Here is one suggestion, however, for cooks of the second class whose bread like mine sometimes reveals an unsuspected doughiness in the middle. Break it open and toast it thoroughly before the fire. Eaten crisp and hot it is as good in its way as the lightest biscuit.

It will be observed in the course of the narrative that we never hired guides, except on the one occasion where we had to have horses to take us over to the Hay River. It cannot be denied that there was an element of foolhardiness in this, but the temptation of running our own show was too great to be resisted. When the guide knows more of the country than you do, he is the boss, and you have to do what you are told. However, there is much to be said on both sides of the question. A capable guide is a treasure, and he adds a lot to the trip. But they are rare, and the ordinary Indian who offers his



services so freely is worse than useless. You soon find yourself guiding him like a child. Their sense of honor is different from ours too, and they have no scruples against quietly decamping in the night, if things are not to their liking.

I would not be understood as recommending inexperienced travelers to venture into the wilderness without a guide. There are so many quicker and more merciful methods of suicide! Traveling entirely by one's self is of course quite out of the question. Even the mounted police do not ride alone. Be very sure of yourself before venturing into new country without an experienced conductor. While it is true that we made our way through a country unknown to us without guides, it will be allowed, I hope, that we exercised due prudence, and it should be borne in mind that we were partly fitted for this journey by years of work on other rivers. As it was, the oldtimers like Max Hamilton berated us roundly for what they considered our foolishness. But that wouldn't keep us from doing it again!

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CHRISTENING OF THE "BLUNDERBUSS"

It has been related how Wingy Sullivan in an excess of enthusiasm induced by squirrel whisky presented us at the Summit with his wagon and team. During the rest of that day we were out-and-out freighters on the tote road. We joined forces with another team bound our way, and camped in company at Mile 10, B. C. In spite of our interesting adventures en route we were distressed at the slowness of our progress. Here we had been fourteen days on the road and had covered but seventy-five miles. Our plans called for a journey of nearly three thousand miles. On this night it was galling to be obliged to stop at six o'clock with four good hours of daylight ahead, and when we had turned the horses out to graze, we pushed down through the bush to have a look at the Fraser River.

The actual summit of the Yellowhead pass is so slightly defined that the Miette River which runs ordinarily to the east, at times of high water spills over the west side as well. Yellowhead Lake lies three miles west of the Summit. It has a small outlet into the Fraser, and it is about four miles farther west that the Fraser itself comes plunging down into the pass from its source among high glaciers to the south.

First to last the Fraser is a watercourse of strong individuality. It is a river of sharp rises and falls, of frightful descents, of impassable gorges—and of peaceful stretches of great loveliness. Every year it nonchalantly collects its heavy tribute of lives. The stretch of it that we purposed descending had already drowned nine that season. The men of the country regard it with a rueful respect as a creature that is insolently superior to their will. They have affectionate profane names for it. All the way from Edmonton we had been fed on the tales of its terrors, and I may confess that we were thoroughly scared.

At Mile 10 it was a smooth and rapid stream about a hundred yards wide, flowing between tall spruce trees, with fore-shortened snow-clad mountains sticking up above the spruces. We knew that Moose Lake lay some seven miles by road below, but we had no idea of what was comprised within the seven miles. However, after an anxious debate we decided to leave the team with the freighter in trust for Wingy and chance the river.

After supper we set up our folding boat on the bank. She had never known the touch of water. The freighter marveled to see the shapeless bundle of canvas and sticks grow into a boat before his eyes. When the last peg was driven in we surveyed our future home narrowly. She seemed stout enough, and very capacious, but absurdly tubby in her lines. We instantly christened her the *Blunderbuss*. She reminded us of a cross between a wash-tub and a Venetian blind, and sometimes we called her the "Walloping Window-Blind" after the well-beloved ballad.

By nine o'clock everything was stowed, and we pushed off on our unknown voyage with hearts in our mouths. The current instantly gripped us as in a gigantic hand, and around the very first bend we fell plump into a roaring rapid. The poor little *Blunderbuss* had an astonishing christening-party. She was engulfed in a smother of waves and spray, and the shores flew by at railway speed. At times it seemed as if she stood straight on end, and I expected my partner in the bow to come tumbling back on my head. Then she would somersault into a hollow which threatened to swallow us entire. For pure excitement there is nothing like shooting rapids.

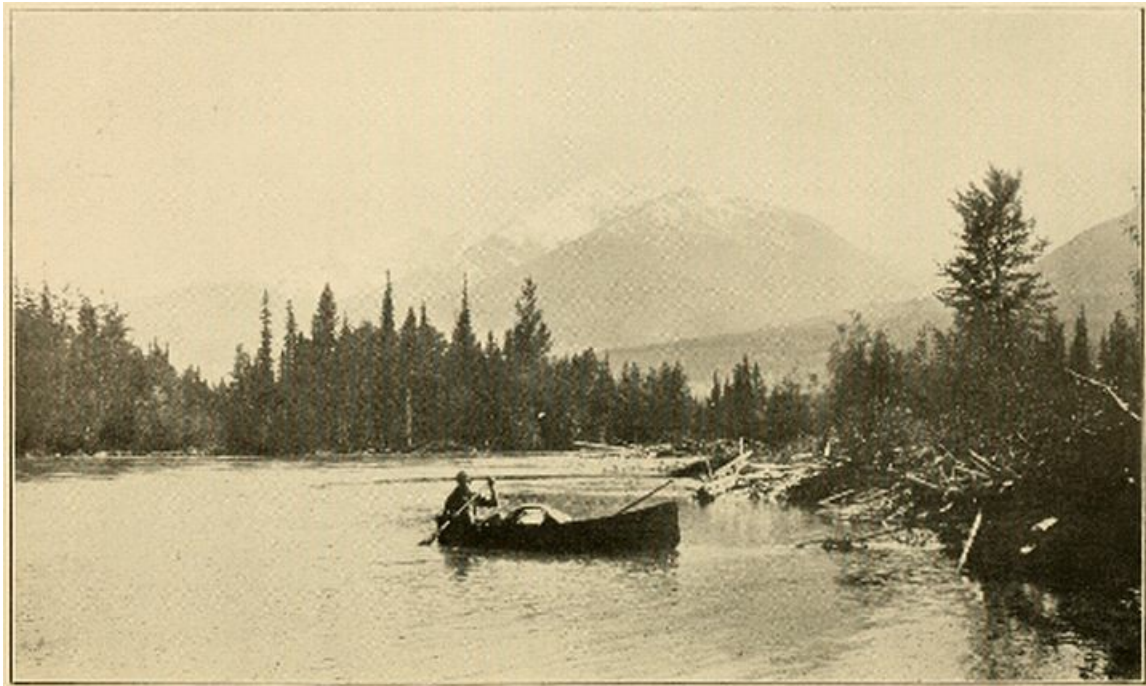
It was all over in a minute. We landed below to get our breaths, to bail out, and to discuss the revealed characteristics of our craft. Her first trial was disappointing; she was too short and too light for rough water. It was very hard to keep her straight on, and if she broached ever so slightly the water came pouring aboard. On the other hand she answered to the paddles admirably, and later, when we had learned to handle her (she had to be humored a little like all of the sex) we were satisfied that we could not have had anything better suited to our needs.

The hour that followed is written down in our note-book as the most exciting of our lives up to that time. The rapids followed in close succession, and each one offered a new set of problems. There was one time when we were hurled on the crest of a torrent straight at a spruce tree that had partly fallen out over the river. We thought we were gone then, but we paddled like maniacs, and in the act of resigning ourselves to the worst, somehow we got around the end of the tree. In another place the river was completely blocked by a fantastic jam of great trees brought down on the last freshet. We had to land here and carry all our stuff around through the forest.

One of the nastiest bits was at a place where the railroad had undertaken to build a jetty to divert the course of the river.

It was not quite finished, and the whole river poured through a fifteen foot opening to make a right-angle turn immediately beyond. Around the bend the situation was further complicated by a boom stretching all the way across the river to enable the workmen to pass back and forth. However, we made the plunge and the turn successfully, and the whole gang rushed to hold up the end log of the boom to enable us to pass beneath. We went our ways pursued by friendly cheers and jeers.

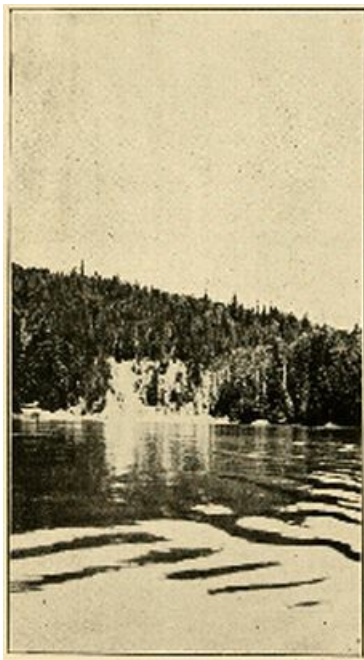
This stretch of the river was most beautiful, but we could hardly take it in since our eyes were glued to the capricious river ahead. It wound back and forth in its narrow valley like a wrong-headed person, launching itself vainly against the bases of the mountains on one side, and then straight back against the other. Where it was seven miles to Moose Lake by road, it must have been fifteen or more by the river. We had glimpses of dazzling cataracts falling over the sky-scrapers above our heads. We camped at the head of the worst rapid so far. The drop at the beginning was so great we could not see from the boat what lay beyond.



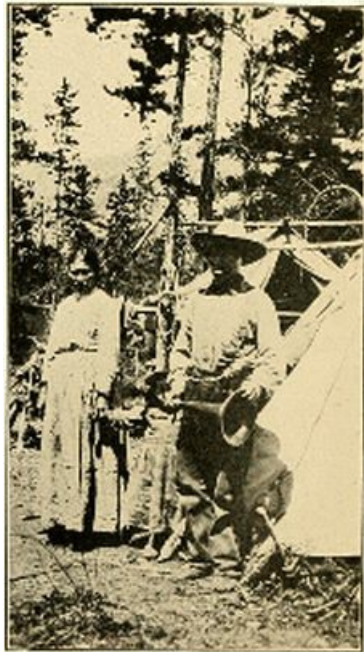
**The greater part of the way the terrible Fraser was a very lamb in its behavior**



**A surveyor, his assistant and three Indians**



**Entrance to the second canyon of the Fraser**



**Their greatest treasure in the world was a phonograph**

The greater part of the next day was spent in crossing Moose Lake. "Mile 17" at its head is the terminus of the tote road. It was reputed to be a much wickeder place than the Summit, but we did not stop to see. It is only ten miles across the lake, but we had a strong head wind, which kicked up a nasty sea and held back the clumsy *Blunderbuss* as if the giant hand which assisted us the day before was now turned against us. It was very discouraging. We finally landed and let the wind blow itself out.

Moose Lake offered another series of pictures that stagger description. The great snow-capped mountains press together, squeezing the lake between. The range to the north is known as the Rainbow mountains from the striking outcrop of red and yellow rocks near the summits. It was an awful beauty rather than pleasing, for the mountain-sides were burnt over long ago, and the forests are only of haggard gray sticks. Between stretches the cold green lake, making one feel that it is thousands of feet deep. But when we got to the westerly end of the lake and looked back, the towering ranges sweeping away into the distance all drenched in the late sunshine made a sight of unforgettable loveliness.

The tote road recommences at the foot of the lake—they traverse the gap in barges—and we inquired here as to the means of further transport. We knew that within the next twenty miles or so old Lady Fraser romped down a thousand foot flight of stairs. The result of our inquiries was discouraging. It appeared that at this end of the road there were no "Gyppos" or "wheel-barrow outfits," as they call the independent freighters, and the contractors, we were told, refused to carry a pound that was not of their own.

This night, July 11th, there was a heavy frost. We awoke in our camp at the "cache" covered with rime, and the tea we had left in our unwashed cups was frozen solid. At the same time in all the great cities of the country the people were dying from the heat by the score.

Under the circumstances we decided to push on down the river as far as we could, and then if nothing better turned up, carry our stuff on our backs the rest of the way to Tête Jaune cache. Hereafter we took the precaution to land at the head of each rapid to look it over, and it was well that we did so. We had gone about three miles when we were stopped by one of the usual swift places on a bend. We had to climb a bold promontory to get a look at the river beyond, and as we rounded it a hoarse roar smote our ears, and a gorge opened at our feet with a tumbling cascade in the bottom that made the worst rapids we had descended above look like ripples. We could see nearly half a mile of it, growing worse and worse as it descended, and then it roared out of sight away below. It was no place for the *Blunderbuss*.

The tote road proved to be half a mile from the river at this point, and we were obliged to put our stuff on our inexperienced backs and clamber up hill. It was cruel hard work, and the half mile effectually destroyed our enthusiasm for walking the rest of the twenty. We went into camp beside the road, and I walked back to the "cache" at Mile 27 to see what could be done. Two of "Foley's" teams were pulling out for the cache next morning, and I found it was possible with discretion to make a private arrangement with the drivers. They couldn't have taken us on at the cache, but down the road it was all right, so that our little trip down the river was not wasted.

These two carried out their bargain to the letter, and moreover proved to be highly entertaining companions. I regret that I cannot for obvious reasons sketch their portraits.

For the rest of the way the tote road followed the river more or less closely. We were never out of sound of its deep voice, and we had frequent glimpses of its wild, white plunges, its quiet, green pools, and its extraordinary barricades of drift-logs. But the great event of this part of the journey was the view of Mount Robson, 13,700 feet, the highest known peak in British North America.

To the traveler bound westward as we were its first appearance is arranged with matchless dramatic effect. It lies about eleven miles north of the Fraser, blocking the valley of the Grand Forks, and the whole mass of it is visible to its base. It bursts on the beholder as he rounds a hill, complete in its magnificence. Our freighters had prepared us for the sight, and our anticipation was keyed up to the highest pitch, nevertheless we were stunned with astonishment. There was no question of its supremacy. It dominated the whole world thereabouts, and the Heavens too, and the mountains that had been filling us with awe a moment before became pygmies. It opened up to us a brand new conception of nobility and loveliness. Its dazzling, far-flung peak of ice against the delicate blue of the sky was like a symbol of the highest aspirations in the breast of man.

We set off in a bee-line pell-mell through the down timber to gain some vantage point from which we might see still more of the beautiful monster and take his picture. It was very hard going, and we found that the higher we climbed and the nearer we approached, only the more obstructions rose between. Finally from a ridge about seven miles distant we got a couple of pictures. We then scrambled down to the level of the Grand Forks River where we got a completer view. We found a trail by the river and came within about three miles of the base of Mount Robson where we took our last picture. By this time the sun had swung away round to the west, and the valley was dark at our feet.

All the pictures of course are very disappointing. It is nothing less than sacrilege to attempt to reduce a king among mountain peaks to the limits of a three by five plate. Mount Robson cannot be conveyed by any means. You must go to it. It was a long time before we could tear ourselves away. We relinquished our supper rather. I understand we were particularly fortunate in our day. The mountain does not often choose to reveal itself fully to mortals, but on this afternoon the clouds were floating even higher than the peak, and every line of its face was revealed in the glory of the sunshine. We went back to camp with our heads over our shoulder watching the mountain turn rose-color in the failing light.



When one describes it as a mass of gray rock fantastically cleft and terraced and piled; every ledge heaped with snow, and the gorges choked with pale green ice, it conveys nothing. Our reason told us we were looking at staggering cliffs, at great gulfs of snow and ice, and at far-flung waterfalls, but the effect on the inner sense was of something tender and unreal. It was as far removed from our ken as the sky, against which it floated. The mountain was enwrapped in its own loveliness like a mantle. It seemed not like a real mountain, but a dream that was bound to recede as it was approached.

Early next day we came within striking distance of Tête Jaune cache, and we took to the water again, to save our friends the embarrassment of bringing us into camp. There were some rapids between, but nothing to put us about. Tête Jaune cache is at the western gateway to the Rocky Mountains, at the head of possible navigation on the Fraser. This was as far as the railway construction had been carried at that time. Tête Jaune has its history; the Indians of British Columbia and the Indians of the plains once met here annually to exchange salmon for leather. The pass and the cache get their name from an early trader here whose blonde locks made a great impression on the Indians, but while the name of the pass has been rendered into English, the cache keeps the old French form.

We were disappointed in the place we had heard so much about along the line. There was nothing to be seen but a wretched stopping-house in a tent, a small store which was closed in the absence of the proprietor on a berry-picking expedition, and a camp of degenerate Indians on the south bank. Try as we would, we were unable to acquire any definite information about the river below. A roving traveler who had arrived before us was anxious to join forces with our party, but the twelve-foot *Blunderbuss* would not stand the strain.

The Indians at Tête Jaune were a little less sophisticated than their cousins at Mile 88. This is a small community of the Beavers who have strayed from the main tribe along the Peace. There is a trail connecting the headwaters of the Big Smoky (the largest tributary of the Peace) with the Fraser. These Indians lived in tepees, and alongside they had built picturesque summer shelters of leaves. They are fishermen, and they reap their harvest when the salmon come up the Fraser in August.

We visited the tepees in search of moccasins. There were only women in evidence, and communications proved difficult. At our efforts to make ourselves understood they only squirmed and tittered in spasms of embarrassment. The great size of our feet was a bar for one thing, moreover there is a widespread joke about buying moccasins that we did not know then. It is not the kind of joke that is told in Sunday-school so I am unable to impart it generally. I will merely say that in buying moccasins it is more discreet to apply to the lady's husband.

We found a man at last, and he ordered his wife to make a pair of moccasins and to repair our old ones. This man had a few words of English, but it was vain to try to get any information about the river from him. He did tell us, however, what fish there were and how to catch them. We took a photograph of this family. Their greatest treasure in the world was a phonograph. It was "broke," but they were none the less proud of it. The man insisted on having the horn show in the picture, and here it is.

I had the advantage of overhearing a frank opinion of our outfit at Tête Jaune. It was very hot, and I was lying under the shade of some bushes on the bank. My partner was still among the tepees waiting for his moccasins. Two men sat down on the bank above my head; the *Blunderbuss* was drawn up on the beach below them, but they could not see me.

"Well, that's a H— of a lookin' boat!" said one voice. They both laughed uproariously.

"Looks like a piece of cheese-cloth and a few barrel-hoops!" the same voice went on. "And going to beard old Lady Fraser in a contraption like that! Gosh! the first time they hit a snag the whole outfit'll crumple up!" Again they laughed.

"Who are they?" asked the other voice.

"Oh, I dunno. Two smart young guys from the East. You can't tell them nothin'."

"Nine men drowned in the river this spring," remarked the second speaker. He went on to fill in the harrowing details, which I will omit.

"Well, take it from me, there's goin' to be two more!" said the other. At that they both roared with laughter again as if they would never stop.

I jumped up in great indignation—not because they had prognosticated our taking-off, but because they considered it such a rich joke. It was a white man and a breed. They looked rather foolish at the sight of me.

"Do you know anything about the river?" I demanded of the white man.

"No," he said, "nor I don't want to!"

"Do you?" I asked of the breed.

He shook his head. "Only forty mile down," he said.

I made a suitable rejoinder and walked with great dignity to the *Blunderbuss*. But the white man continued to laugh.

## CHAPTER V

### OLD LADY FRASER

We pushed off from Tête Jaune cache with the feeling that our journey was now beginning in earnest. The busy tote road and all the habitations of men were behind us, and the current swept us down at a rate that made the possibility of ever coming back that way in the *Blunderbuss* very doubtful. I cannot say that our minds were at ease in respect to what lay before us, still we knew that it had been an ancient trade route, and we said to ourselves if the Indians could get through we could.

Luck favored us again. Three miles down the river at a shack known thereabouts as "the Buster House" we found one of "the Latimer boys" making a dug-out, a man to whom we shall always feel grateful. Without any false alarms on the one hand, nor deceitful assurances of safety on the other, he told us exactly what we had to expect in the river. He gave us the distances correctly, and drew a rough map of the worst places in my partner's note-book. A man like this is a rare find in a new country; everyone volunteered information to us, but most of it proved to be grotesquely inaccurate, and we soon learned to distrust everything we heard. We learned from Latimer that it was nearly three hundred miles to Giscomb portage, or double what we had gauged from our map. There was one bad rapid to shoot and two dangerous canyons.

The days that followed were the loveliest and the most uneventful of the journey. The weather was glorious, and for the greater part of the way the terrible Fraser was a very lamb in its behavior. We loafed down on the current, soaking it all in as free, as lonely, and as happy as savages. The milky green river swinging round its invariable bends, the unbroken ranks of the noble spruces, and the mountains looking over their tops, it was all our own.

There was a fly in our ointment of course—millions of them in fact! Heaven help the poor souls who are obliged to travel overland in this country during the summer! Firstly there are the mosquitoes, secondly the black flies, and thirdly an infinitesimal variety that the Indians call "no-see-ums." On the whole we escaped very easily for our cheese-cloth "kibosh" kept them out at night, and they rarely followed us out into the middle of the stream. It was the cook who literally got it in the neck.

This part of the Fraser follows a broad, open valley tending northwestward. The country has not been burnt over, and the timber is primeval in its magnificence. Never will we forget the cathedral-like grandeur and gloom of our camping-places under the lofty boughs. For the most part the woods are carpeted with a showy plant locally called the devil's-club. It has huge, pale, three-fingered leaves armed with spikes, and it makes a highly-effective flooring to the vaulted aisles of the trees. Eagles, hawks, owls, kingfishers, and the ubiquitous chickadees were the principal disturbers of the peace. There was another bird we never saw, but nearly every evening we heard his wistful, long-drawn call in a haunting minor.

The mountains were of a more intimate character than the Rockies. Among the gray rocks and snow-fields of the summits appeared wide patches of dazzling green grass that made a feast to the eye. The lower slopes were all clothed in the soberer green of spruce, and all day long the whole was pied with changing cloud shadows. By sunset our enthusiasm became inarticulate. Long, dark vistas of the river hemmed in by the trees opened at the end in a veritable welter of gold. Every night the hills against the sinking sun took on a strange, rich purple dress shot with dull green. For several days running there was a forest fire far down the river, and the smoky atmosphere crimsoned the sun, and added the last touch of unearthly loveliness to the whole scene.

To us fresh from the world the great charm of this river was in its big lonesomeness. Strangely enough there are no Indians along its shores, though it is a good hunting-ground. We saw innumerable tracks of bear, moose, caribou, etc.; beavers plunged madly into the water as we approached, and the night we camped at Bear River a mountain lion padded round our tent and growled fretfully. On the fourth day after leaving Tête Jaune my partner fleshed his maiden bullet in a fine young male moose, shot from the moving boat. It was out of season, of course, but travelers in remote British Columbia may take out prospectors' licenses, which permit them to kill for meat. Had we not got the moose we should have gone hungry later, as the sequel will show.

Two days before that we had stopped at the only inhabited dwelling we saw on the whole way after leaving Buster House. This was the establishment of a modest pioneer, who was cultivating a pathetic little garden, while he patiently waited for the railroad to come through and repay him for his labor and his lonesomeness. He presented us with a

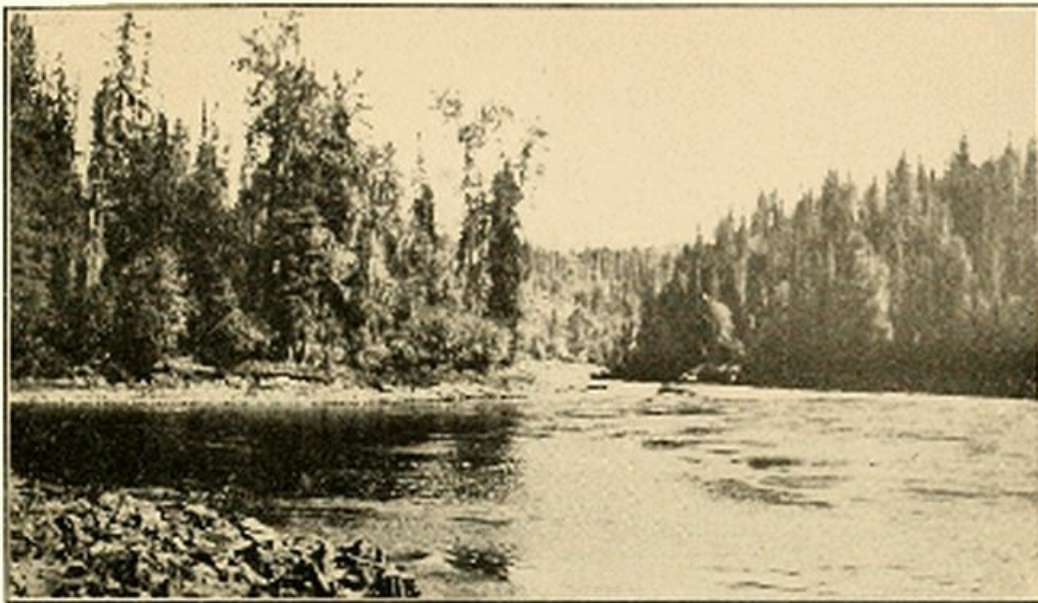


quantity of caribou meat, and we returned with a large bottle of prepared milk tablets that we were tired of carrying. I hope he does not hold it against us.

For three days after that we did not see a mortal soul. On the fourth morning our hearts bounded at the sight of a black spot at the end of a long reach and the flash of a wet paddle in the sun. At over a mile's distance we were greeted by the shrill hail of the country. It was one of the long, graceful dug-outs of the Fraser, containing a surveyor with his assistant and three Indians, bound up-stream for Bear River. We lay on our paddles and had a talk. The leader of the party was an exceedingly frank and likeable young man. It does not do to admire anything of a man's possessions in the North. He had a reflector oven lying on top of his load to which we casually referred. Instantly it was presented to us, and we could not refuse it without giving offense. All we had to offer in return was fresh moose meat. Before parting we took each other's photographs.

On the third day from Tête Jaune we successfully passed the long and dangerous Goat River rapids by hugging the northerly shore. On the fifth day we reached the famous Grand Canyon of which we had heard such terrifying tales. Most of the men who have been drowned in this place are supposed to have been carried into it unawares. We were fortunately provided with Latimer's directions, but even without them I do not see how any but a blind man could mistake what was before him here. However, a raft is hard to stop.

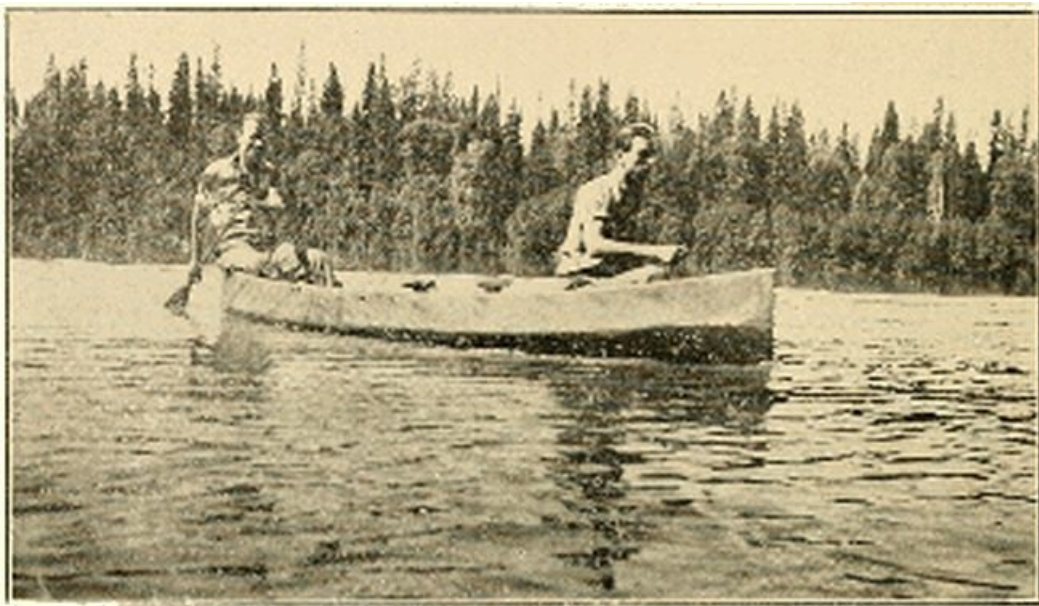
The level, forested valley that we had been descending for five days, was suddenly heaved up by transverse ridges of rock. A great ridge jutted out into the river, forcing the current through a narrow channel around the end. The whole look of the place was different from what had gone before. Once around that point of rock nothing could turn a boat back. The river dropped steeply and went roaring down between rocky banks and around a bend. Landing, we looked over the rapids as far as we could see them and decided to portage. We might have descended it safely; it was fearfully rough it is true, but the channel seemed to be clear. However, there was a stretch we could not see, and we were too far away from fresh supplies to risk our precious grub.



**Once around that point of rock, nothing could turn a boat back**

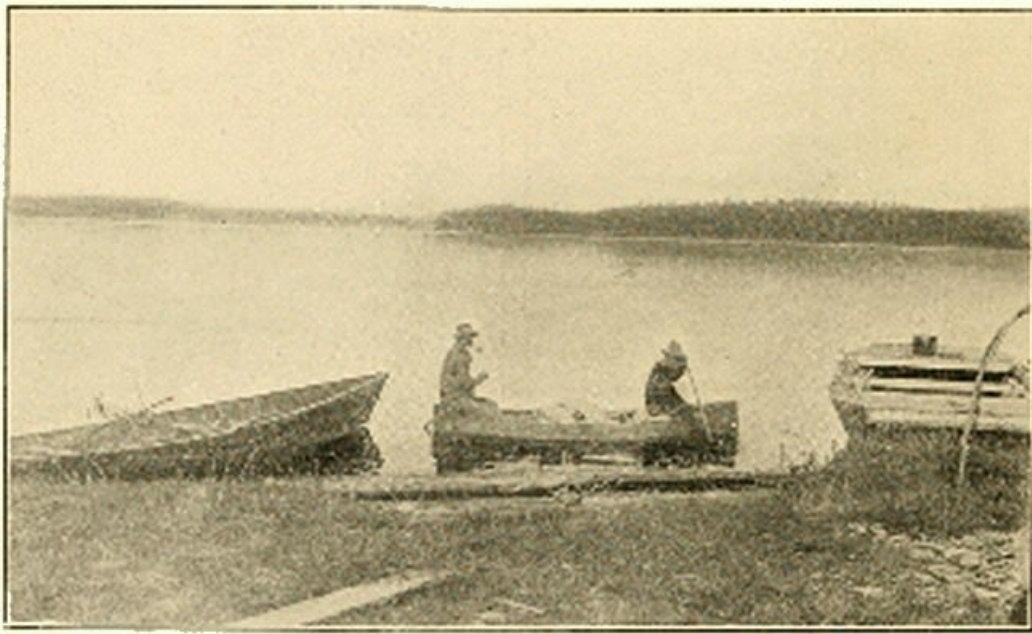


**The drift-pile at the mouth of the second canyon**



**Ourselves in the '*Blunderbuss*'—The surveyor's picture**





### **The start at Summit Lake**

On the south side of the river there is a well-beaten portage trail. It is about half a mile long; up a steep hill, along the top, and down the other side. We were obliged to make three trips back and forth, and it was a cruel job. In the bush the air was as hot and steamy as a Turkish bath, and the mosquitoes—ye gods! They say that mosquitoes go for several generations sometimes without tasting blood, and I am prepared to believe it of these. They and their forefathers had been saving up a long time for us. And our hands were full; they had us where they wanted us. It was at moments like this that my young partner showed the stuff that was in him. I remember we had a row there in the middle of the trail because he thought my end of the boat was more awkward to carry than his.

At the other end of the portage there was a charming little lake, hemmed in all around by steep and rocky walls. At the lower end of the lake the water found its way out through another canyon, which enjoys a no less sinister reputation than the first. It is neither so rough nor so long, but it is filled with mighty whirlpools. There is something supernatural in the fear inspired by a whirlpool.

We landed as before to make an investigation. Alas! the portage trail was much steeper than the other, and the mosquitoes, if that were possible, even more lustful for blood. We climbed to a projecting point of the wall of rock and looked over. The sight was not reassuring; there were the whirlpools in good sooth, but at least from this point we could see all the way through the canyon. It was about a quarter of a mile to the smooth water, with a double bend intervening. This was much more like the canyon one pictures, with walls of rock rising sheer and smooth out of the water. Where we stood the wall was about seventy-five feet high and considerably higher farther along.

At the head of the canyon the lake poured its waters into the hole in the rocky walls exactly as water comes out of a full barrel when the bung is withdrawn. There was a kind of long, smooth slide of water with a grand boil-up at the bottom. Within the canyon the water was flung from side to side of the rocky walls and agitated as by the stirring of a titanic spoon with a train of whirlpools in its wake. The worst whirlpool of them all lurked in a corner immediately below where we stood, the very spot that Latimer had indicated on his map. It was a mighty bad place on the whole—but ashore there were the mosquitoes! We finally decided to run it. The grand question was, how would the *Blunderbuss* behave in the whirlpool? I considered that her lightness would be in her favor here. We decided that the thing to do if she got caught was to let her spin.

We embarked, and paddled a good way back toward the middle of the lake in order to get her headed straight for the slide I have described. As we came about, my partner took a snap-shot of the entrance to the canyon. It is a bad picture, which is perhaps excusable. I cannot speak for him, but for myself I confess I was scared blue.

In another moment we were in the thick of it, and a mad five minutes succeeded. As soon as we hit the slide our fears departed and we became wildly exhilarated. My only regret was that I could not divide myself somehow, so that part of

me might stand on the shore and watch the little *Blunderbuss* take her header down the slide. We got a bit wet in the boil-up below, but scarcely noticed it in our pre-occupation with the whirlpools that were to follow. It was a strange piece of water, hurling us forward one moment, and the next thrusting us back.

I had laid out my course from above. We gave the biggest whirlpool a wide berth, but there were others. Suddenly one yawned right beside the boat, a horrible black hole without any bottom to it. I could have leaned over and dropped my hat into it. We looked at each other with a laugh and wondered casually if we were going in. For a moment it raced along beside us, then swept off to one side. I do not know if it was luck or hard paddling that saved us.

In the thickest of the turmoil we saw a squirrel swimming for his life, his shoe-button eyes almost starting out of his head, and his tiny paws making a thousand revolutions a minute. He looked at us as we swept by, and his paws scratched vainly on the canvas side of the *Blunderbuss*, but we were too busy to aid him.

In another minute we were in the quiet river again, laughing and joking a little shakily with each other, and feeling intensely pleased with ourselves. It was rather a barren triumph, though, because I do not think that any of the few we met who knew the place ever really believed that we had run it in the *Blunderbuss*.

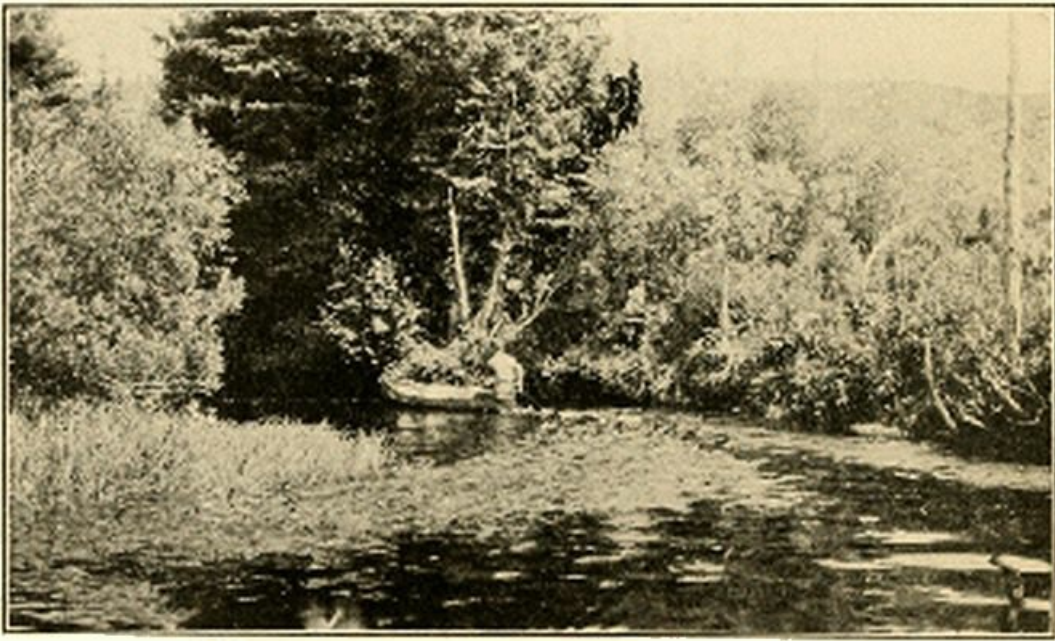


**Surely there never was so little a stream that served as a highway of commerce**





**Fort Macleod with its little white store and the invariable flagpole**



**Like the Fraser in miniature, with its little rapids, its sharp bends and its densely wooded banks**

# CHAPTER VI

## THE LILLIPUT RIVER

The special pleasure of traveling by one's own exertions without guides or foreknowledge of the route lies in the fact that everything by the way becomes charged with significance. It was so common for us to say to each other: "The character of the country is beginning to change" that it became quite a joke, but just the same we always felt a little thrill of anticipation, for when the banks flattened out or rose up, when out-croppings of rock appeared, or the current slyly increased its flow, we knew that Nature had something up her sleeve. Thus the sixth day on the Fraser when the hills began to close in on us we guessed that the river was preparing to face about on its long journey to the south and that the point of our departure was near.

After several false discoveries Giscomb portage finally stole into view around a bend. We had been told that there was nothing to mark the place but a couple of Chinamen's shacks that we might easily miss; however, we found that civilization had now reached a tentacle up the river. A store had been erected on the bank and two or three little dwellings with gardens at their sides. There were not less than a dozen souls about the place, giving us after our lonely voyage quite the effect of a metropolis.

Of the dozen, five were hardy young adventurers who had preceded us down the river on a raft. They had a tale to tell of the whirlpools in the second canyon, which had nearly put a period to their journey. When we modestly confessed to having run it, they looked at the *Blunderbuss* and smiled politely. They were bound for Fort George down the river, the Mecca of the real estate agents.

The next we ran into was a traveler who arrived from down-stream in an ancient dug-out and crawled out on the shore, soaking wet and cursing the rapids below that had held him in their grip for six days. He was a ragged, long-haired pioneer with the bizarre look of the solitary dweller. We christened him Fraser Crusoe. His business was mysterious. He built a fire on the bank and spread his meager grubstake in a score of dirty little canvas bags to dry beside it. His little dog crouched miserably beside the fire, lifting sad and reproachful eyes to all who passed.

Through the bush arrived still another white traveler in company with an Indian. This was Hugh Savage, a young newspaper man of Vancouver, bound like ourselves on a tour of observation. We hailed each other as became brothers of the pen. He had been pursued by the worst of luck. The hotel at Prince George had burned up with the greater part of his outfit. Then he and his partner had been led astray by a lying map and had suffered great hardships in the bush. Finally his partner had been taken sick, and Savage had been compelled to carry him back down the Fraser to the hospital at Quesnel. Alone when we met him and seriously crippled by the loss of his stuff, he was still bent on struggling through.

Savage, Crusoe Fraser, and my partner and I made our three camps in line on a bank where I suppose camp-fires have been built for hundreds of years, for this easy portage over to the headwaters of the Mackenzie River system is a travel route long ante-dating the advent of the white man. An easy six miles divides the waters that empty respectively into the Arctic and the Pacific oceans.

After supper from one of the cabins came a stout and dejected old woman waving a little branch of leaves around her head like a talisman to ward off the mosquitoes. She took up her stand in front of Crusoe Fraser's fire and heavily accused him of the theft of a suit of clothes. He readily defended himself with an air by turn deferential and insolent. It was more glib than convincing. Nothing came of the long wrangle that followed. This was the only charge of theft that we ever heard made in the North. We all felt personally outraged as if it were our suit of clothes that had been stolen, and it was easy to understand how men are tempted to take the law into their own hands.

It transpired that the storekeepers at Giscomb kept a team for the purpose of transporting outfits across the portage. They were outrageous brigands, the pair of them, and even now my choler rises hotly at the recollection of the twenty cents a pound they forced us to pay for sugar and the dollar and a half for a tin of cocoa that we coveted. Ten dollars was asked to carry our sixty-pound boat and two hundred pounds of baggage for six miles. As they carried a three-hundred pound bell at the same time, we compromised at seven. On the way over the driver somehow managed to pierce a hole in the canvas skin of the *Blunderbuss*, which he artfully plugged with a lump of tar, so that we did not discover it until it was too late to call him to account.

It is interesting to remark in regard to the big bell I speak of, that the Indians around Fort Macleod, who were reputed to be starving, had subscribed four hundred dollars for it. It had already been two years on the way and is quite likely still lying on the shore of Summit Lake. The priest could not reach the little church in which it was to be hung more than two or three times in the year.

Another white man joined us next morning. This was Bower, a fine, upstanding riverman who had undertaken the difficult contract of delivering a bargeload of supplies to a surveyor at work in the Rocky Mountain canyon. He had built his barge on the shore of Summit Lake, and now came over the portage looking for help to navigate it. This provided Savage with an opportunity to make his way through the country, and he gladly shipped with him. Bower likewise secured one of the young fellows off the raft. We all walked back over the portage together, exchanging yarns of the trails.

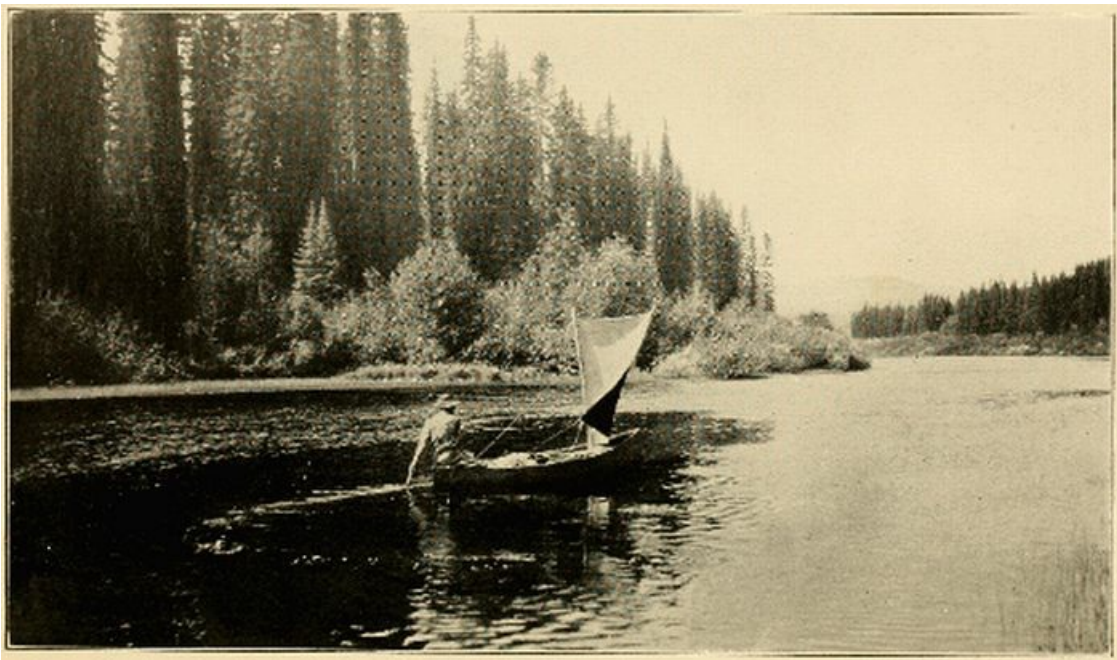
Arriving at the lake the weather became threatening, and my partner and I yielded to the warm invitation of our new friends to stay over in their camp. We were well entertained. Bower enjoyed the services of a first-rate cook. We often remarked that the camp-cooks of the North constitute a race apart. The consciousness of the effeminacy of their calling in the eyes of other men usually gives them an extra truculent air. They are hard to get along with as everybody knows. But the jolly cooky at Summit Lake was thoroughly human. He threw together the materials of his culinary successes with a delightful nonchalance, holding forth meanwhile as uninterruptedly as his pot of beans simmering over the fire. His bannock with raisins was something to dream about.

The remaining member of Bower's party was Bob, a Fraser Lake Indian who had incapacitated himself by laying open his knee with a misdirected stroke of his big knife. His remedy was balsam gum, which he applied to the wound after a thorough chewing. Bob, like all his tribe, was wonderfully clever with his hands. Out of a tin can, a bit of wire, a red feather, and a length of string he made us a trolling spoon which answered its purpose very well. The chief of the Fraser Lake Indians, having seen a steamboat for the first time, instantly contrived a pair of paddle wheels for his canoe, and thereafter forced his henchmen to turn him about the lake.

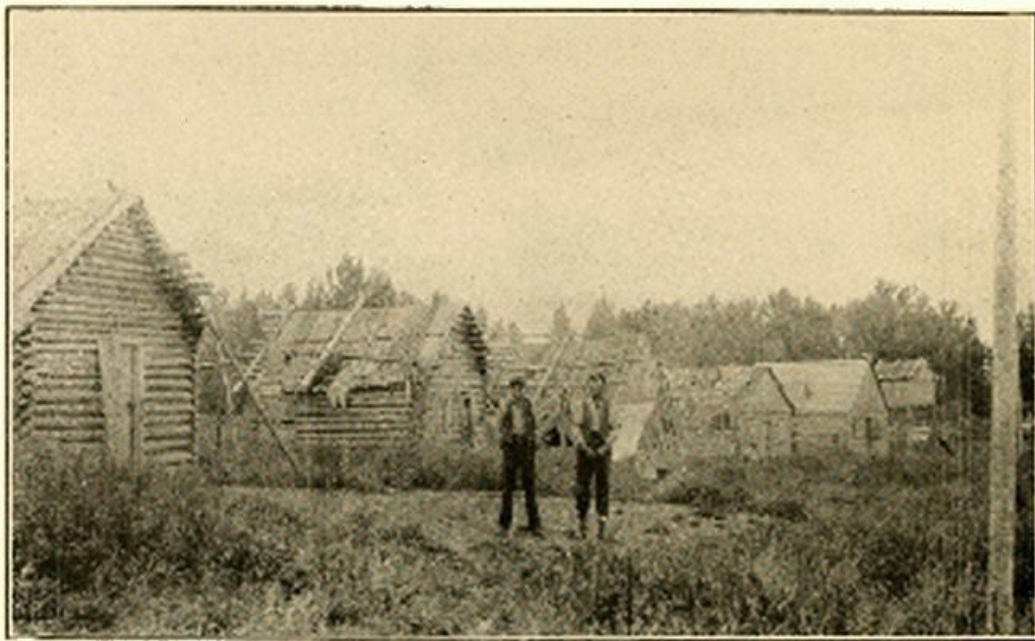
Summit Lake was a pretty little body of water bearing several islands on its bosom quaintly like spring millinery. The sandy beach served for a rim of straw, a circlet of willow bushes for a band of velvet around the crown, and a clump of jackpines sticking up in the middle for feathers. This was the beginning of the Peace River water that was to carry us down for a thousand miles. The Peace has much the same relation to the Mackenzie that the Missouri bears to the Mississippi. With its sister stream, the Liard, it has this distinction among the rivers of America, they rise west of the Rocky Mountains, and force their way back through the main chain. To see the Peace River pass was, as I have mentioned, one of the main objects of our expedition.

At noon on the following day, after bidding farewell to our friends with genuine regret on both sides, we embarked on the next stage of the journey. It is always astonishing to city-folk what intimacy of friendliness may be engendered by a single night in camp. After traversing the six miles of the lake we entered the Crooked River, which we immediately re-christened the Lilliput. As for ourselves, we were the Gullivers. Surely there never was so little a stream that served as a highway of commerce. In places it was no more than four feet wide, and the *Blunderbuss* was as much out of proportion in it, as the *Mauretania* might be in the Erie Canal. How Bower ever expected to bring his barge down after us we could not understand.

It was comically like the Fraser in miniature with its little rapids, its endless sharp bends, and its densely wooded overhanging banks—but here low willow bushes took the place of towering spruces. The branches whipped our faces as we snaked around the corkscrew turns. Generations of previous navigators have rolled the largest stones out of the bed, leaving a narrow channel that called for sharp work on the part of the pilot. Each bend called for an instantaneous decision. It was like playing a child's game of shooting the rapids. The water was never more than a foot or so deep, and when we got out of the track, we merely stepped out and floated her back. The boat that preceded us down the river was painted red as testified by the decorations on the largest stones. The *Blunderbuss* in passing left some green smudges by way of contrast.

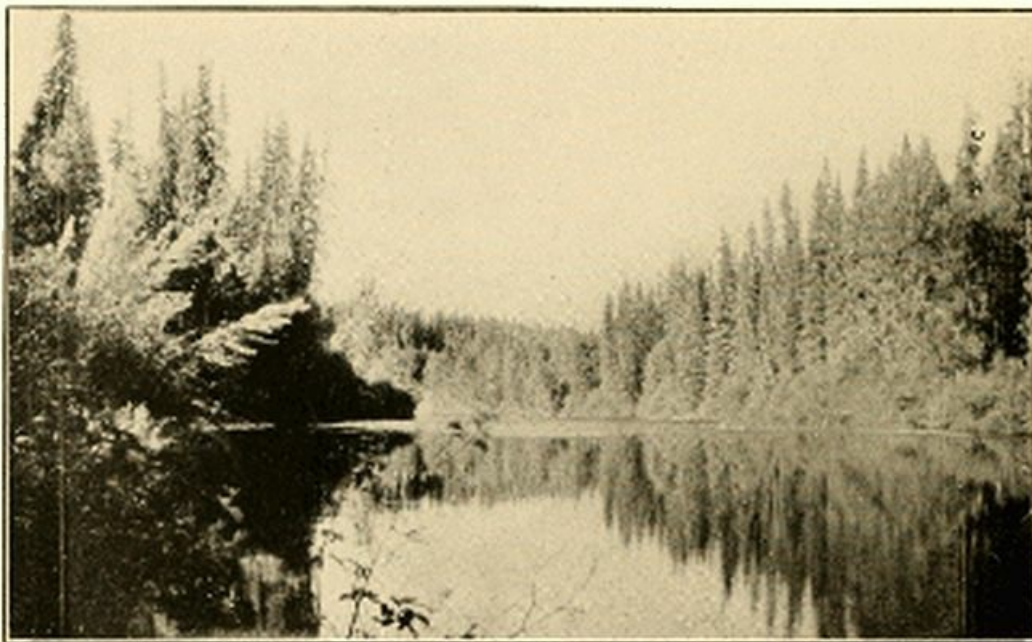


We rigged the *Blunderbuss* with a Poplar pole and a Tarpaulin



A row of log shacks crazily thatched with strips of bark





### **The still, black pools . . . crowded with fish**

It is difficult to convey the intimate charm of that lively little stream. We remember it as the sweetest part of the long journey. It always behaved unexpectedly. It had a thousand pretty tricks to play, with its brawling rapids, its still black pools, its steep wooded banks, and its sunny little meadows. The water was of a clear amber color and literally crowded with fish. When the Crooked River becomes accessible to the outside world, it cannot help but be pre-eminent among famous trout streams.

Near the point where the river leaves the lake stands a little eminence known as Tea-pot Mountain from its odd shape. Such is the crookedness of the Crooked River that the traveler in descending it views that mountain from every side and goes for a whole day without apparently distancing it. On the second day he loses it. On the third day it bobs up again, seemingly as near as ever. This gave rise to something of a mystery in this unsurveyed country, and indeed witchcraft was suspected, until Bower finally climbed another little height in the neighborhood, and discovered *two* Tea-pot mountains almost identical in contour. Since then they have changed the name of the second one to Coffee-pot Mountain.

The second day on the river, Sunday, July 22d, is written down in our notebook as a banner day. We had found a particularly fine site for our camp the night before. The tent was pitched under spruce trees on top of a steep little bank, and we awoke in the morning to look up the river, sparkling as it dimpled over the stones like strings of diamonds shaken in the sunshine. We breakfasted off fried trout. Later, while my partner was washing dishes below, he attracted my attention with a soft hist! and looking up-stream I saw a magnificent bull moose splashing unconcernedly down the middle of the stream.

We kept as still as mice, and he approached to within a few yards of our camp before making the discovery. Then he stopped and for a long second looked us over steadily, as we were looking at him. His antlers, half-grown at this season, were in velvet. He made a noble and fitting picture against the background of woods and water. Unfortunately the sun was squarely at his back, and a snap-shot was out of the question, even if I could have reached for the camera. We had plenty of meat and felt no murderous promptings. It was satisfaction enough just to see him there in the place where he belonged. When it broke upon him that we were alive, he swung about and dashed off up-stream.

Every foot of the river was a delight that day. We flew down the little rapids, dragging our paddles over the stones for a brake. Along the shores we picked out the tracks of nearly every wild animal that inhabits the North. We counted ten bald eagles sailing and joyously screaming in the sunny upper air. Anxious mother ducks hid their broods among the reeds as we approached, or wildly sought to distract our attention with an alleged broken wing. The puffball ducklings amused us greatly. Sometimes they got separated from mamma, and scattered on the face of the river. They had only one trick in their little bags, to dive, and they gamely played it over and over to the point of exhaustion.

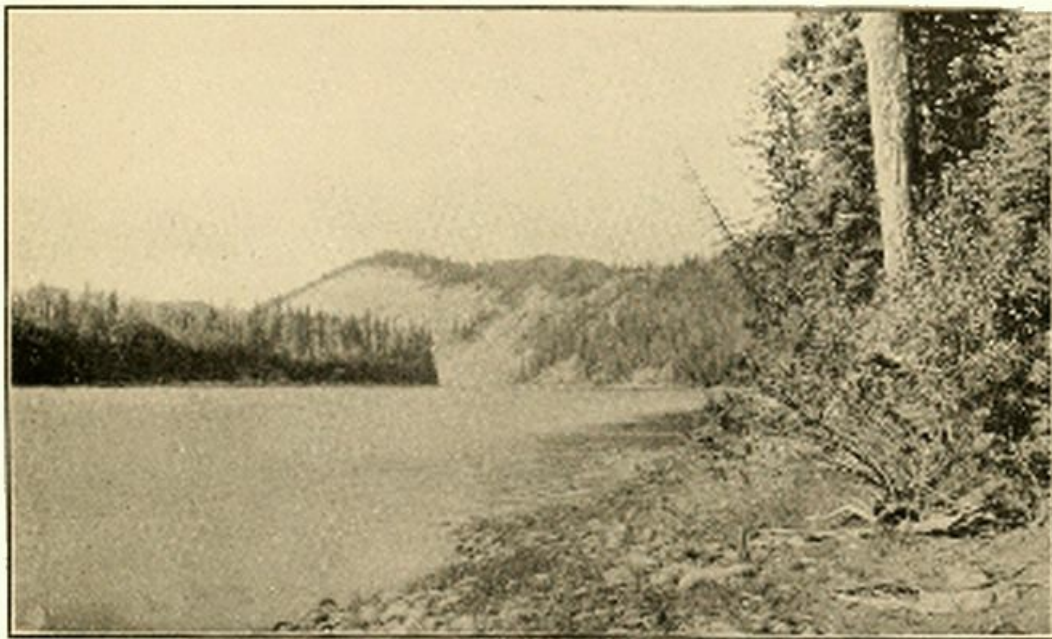
We were softly floating with the current when we heard a great puffing and grunting in the tall grass above our heads, as

it might be of a fat man unwillingly getting out of bed in the morning. We came about in the stream, and clung to some bushes below, praying that he might be inclined to come down for a drink. He sounded as if he had a dark brown taste in his mouth. I got the camera ready.

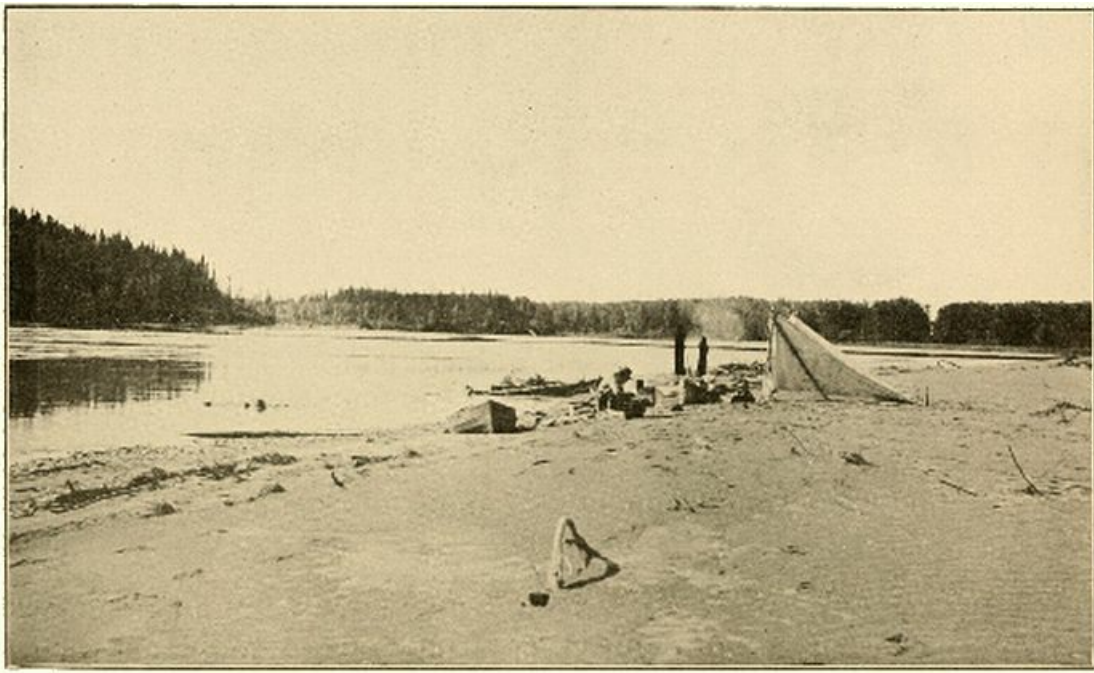
Suddenly through the grass not ten feet from my partner, so near he could have reached over and cracked him with his paddle, stuck the head of a big brown bear. It looked as big as a butter-tub to us. His breath was almost in our faces. He regarded us with the most comical expression of astonishment on his stupid, good-natured phiz, and then with a blast of indignant protest he was gone. I delayed a second too long with the camera. I hoped to get him entire, or even a shoulder with the head, and I got nothing at all. For minutes afterwards we heard him woofing and crashing away through the bushes. Indeed Mr. Bear must have received the shock of his life.



**We met three Indians and a dog coming up stream**



**A gaunt, raw-looking stream continually eating under its banks**



**Cooking and eating amidst a waste of fine sand has its disadvantages**



## CHAPTER VII

### THE SAPPHIRE CHAIN

This part of the journey is closely associated in our minds with our friend Mountjoy. I call him Mountjoy because it is not his name. I think it probable that he has now found other fields of endeavor, and I have no desire to injure him. He was a very agreeable man, and the joke is well worth the trifling sum it cost us.

We were introduced to Mountjoy in Edmonton. We thought that the man who did the introducing knew him well, but it subsequently transpired that Mountjoy was a mere chance acquaintance of the street. Mountjoy was an exceedingly handsome man, tall, slender, and blonde, and he had moreover a manly, modest, deprecating manner that was very engaging. He was one of those well-bred Englishmen so common in Canadian frontier towns whose means of livelihood is mysterious. But perhaps when this story is told it will not be so mysterious.

Mountjoy's attraction for us was his apparent knowledge of the country we were about to traverse, that is to say, the Crooked River part of the journey, which he said he had been over a dozen times. He spent the greatest part of a day with us in Edmonton, telling us all he knew and drawing several painstaking maps with full directions upon them.

He went on to confide in us that he was thinking of setting up a bureau of information for travelers and landseekers in the North, and in his modest way he asked our advice as to what he ought to charge. We agreed with him that a consultation fee of five dollars was not exorbitant.

Oh! we fell for it beautifully! Knowing the weaknesses of humankind in general and tenderfeet in particular, Mountjoy exaggerated the dangers of the journey, with many a side-glance at our nerve in undertaking it. The inference was that if we had not met him—etc., etc. He also introduced us to several randy old pioneers with whom he had a barroom acquaintance, the kind of sports that youngsters are always tickled to be seen with. And still I did not smell a rat!

I began to be concerned as to how we should repay him for all his trouble. He made no secret of how hard up he was, and I wanted to give him a five-spot, but I was afraid of insulting the decent, gentlemanly fellow. I blush now at the recollection of my innocence. I finally said in great embarrassment that I hoped he would allow us to be his first clients, etc. He almost jumped down my throat, and immediately pulled me into a doorway that the exchange might be effected. I began to be sore then to think of the anxious concern I had wasted on him.

Now, weeks afterward, when we began to consult Mountjoy's map the real point of the joke transpired. He had probably been into the country because he knew the names of the lakes, the rivers, the rapids, etc. But that was all. However, in the end the map was really of some service to us, because after it had led us astray on the lakes once or twice, and we had paddled into deep bays only to find that we had to paddle out again, we adopted the rule of doing the exact opposite to what the map directed and then we were all right!

To return to the account of the banner day: as if it feared of tiring us with river scenery, by and by the stream obligingly opened into a lovely little lake, the first of a series like sapphires set in a silver chain. Surely never shone anything so blue and so bright under the noon sun, or ruffled itself so prettily under a westerly breeze. By way of compensation I suppose, there is a Heavenly quality in the summer sunlight of the North, that by comparison makes the best efforts of a more torrid sun look dull. To us after the shadowy river it was veritably intoxicating. The water of these lakes was fairly warm, and we enjoyed several swims. We trolled for and caught the fine salmon trout that the Indians call sapi. Its pink flesh makes delicate feasting. There were large flocks of duck and geese, and many loons with their mocking laughter.

The first lake was McKay Lake. As we were nearing the other end, suddenly, with a strange, dull roar, a monster spruce tree on the shore behind us sprang complete into flame. It was a startling and magnificent sight, a pillar of scarlet fire in the broad daylight, wreathed in a pall of thick yellow smoke. We were thankful that we had built no fire in that neighborhood. We supposed that it was due to some neglected Indian camp-fire, that had perhaps been smoldering for days at the tree's root.

Another stretch of the river followed and we camped near Davies Lake, the second sheet of water large enough to have a name to itself. As we were baking bread and frying sapi steaks, our camp received two canoe-loads of visitors, who made them a fire of their own near ours, and sat themselves down as if to spend the night. We had been warned by Bower that the Indians of this neighborhood were apt to be of the "strong-arm" type, that is to say, saucy beggars, and we

continued about our work and to our supper with a rigidly non-committal air. They were a poor-looking lot in their ragged store clothes. They watched our every movement with eyes as hard and bright as sloe-berries. One pounced eagerly on the head of the fish that we had thrown away, but this was merely a beggar's trick, for he dropped it presently when he thought no one was looking.

The principal one among them had a few words of English that he employed in asking for things obliquely. "Wah! Bread, fish, meat, tea, you got everyt'ing," he said with a fawning air. "Me got not'ing. No kill, one, two, t'ree day. No catch some fish. All people ongrly and sick. You see anyt'ing on the river?"

"Plenty of geese," I said.

"Wah!" he said. "Me no see. Me bad luck. No get somet'ing never."

We could hardly sit there gorging ourselves while they squatted by the fire empty-handed, so we handed over what was left of the roast moose meat. They took it eagerly, thinking it was beef, which they prize above all other foods simply because it is hard to get.

Finally having exhausted everything else our friends concentrated on salt, of which we had a small part of a bag.

"You sell me?" he asked, pointing to it.

I shook my head.

"No salt," he said pathetically. "Grub taste bad. Make sick. You get plenty more at the Fort."

As I had a strong suspicion that the Indians ordinarily get along very well without salt, I hardened my heart, and it was well that I did.

The piping of a brood of goslings on the river threw the whole party into a state of excitement. They imitated the sound marvelously well, and the little birds drew near. Then, although it was practically dark, a great banging of guns took place. Finally the principal beggar snatched a gun and embarked in a canoe, as much as to say he would show us. More banging followed, interspersed with excited jabbering. At least a dollar's worth of ammunition was wasted on the fledglings, and then they didn't get any. Such is the noble red man of this generation! We were much relieved when they finally paddled away. Before leaving they extracted a promise from us to stop at their camp next day, a promise that we made with a mental reservation.

Crossing Davies Lake next day we had a breeze in our favor, and we rigged the *Blunderbuss* with a poplar pole and a tarpaulin. With all the trouble of putting it up and taking it down again, we probably lost time, but it kept us amused and has furnished a pretty picture. At dusk we made Macleod Lake, the largest of the series. The map we were using instead of Mountjoy's, gave it as twenty-two miles long, but sixteen would be nearer the mark. This map was made by a famous missionary among the Indians. He is a better missionary than a map-maker. The shores of this end of the lake were swampy, and we were hard put to it to find a dry sleeping-place. We decided finally to head for an island or point that we could barely distinguish through the gloom, some seven miles ahead.

It was a squally evening. Off to the southeast there was a thunderstorm and the piled masses of cloud in that quarter of the Heavens made sublime effects in the reflected light of the west, long after the lower world was in darkness. There is an invincible charm in paddling wide waters at night, with the wind on one's cheek and the waves slapping the bow. It became very dark, but there is always light enough between water and sky to steer by. Finally the stars came out overhead and we rejoiced. No lover ever watched his dear one's face for threatening signs more anxiously than we were accustomed to study the sky.

We reached the point at last to find that it provided but a stony bed for weary bones. We dug a hole and cast ourselves in it, defying the mosquitoes. It was of no avail, though, they routed us up in a bitter temper, half-dead with unsatisfied sleep. We slung the tent anyhow and crawled under the cheesecloth.

In the morning the wind was against us and the lake rough. Progress was very slow, and we decided to lay off for a couple of hours in the middle of the day. Stretched in soft grass on the shore, warmed by the generous sun, and blown upon by the piping breeze, we slept deliciously. Continuing later, around the very next bend we were astonished to discover Fort Macleod, with its little white store and the invariable flagpole. From the map we had supposed it still ten

miles away. Crossing the last rough reach of the lake, a paddle snapped short that we could ill afford to lose.

Our reception upon landing below the fort was not encouraging. Two Indians scowled at us and turned away. Under a tent we found a white man who was not much more hospitable. This poor wretch had been at the mercy of the black flies for weeks, and his face was not a pretty sight. The moral of which is; travel by water in the fly season. He was waiting, he told us, for his partner to join him. They were traveling with pack ponies overland to the Peace, by way of the Pine pass.

When we asked for the trader he shook his head. "Gone away," he said; whereat my partner and I looked at each other with falling faces. This was the place where we had counted on refilling our grub-box.

"There is not a pound of flour or bacon in the place," continued our informant gloomily. "The shelves of the store are empty. The Indians are starving. The trader has gone to Fort St. James, eighty-five miles west, to see if he can get anything. But they're out of grub too."

We anxiously debated what to do. We were reduced to a few pounds of flour, a little rice, and half a side of bacon. The trader might return any day, but it was hardly advisable to hang around eating up what little we had, on the very slim chance of his bringing something from Fort St. James. The next post on our route was Fort St. John, over three hundred miles away. There was a chance that we might get something from the surveyor at Rocky Mountain canyon, five days journey. On the whole there seemed to be nothing to do but pull in our belts and make a dash for it.

Before embarking we explored the Indian village at Macleod, a row of log shacks crazily thatched with wide strips of bark, and a tiny church with a belfry like a bird-house on stilts, waiting for that big bell. The Indians of this place are Sikannis, a tribe which has been given an unsavory reputation by the early travelers. There were but few men about. That the people were starving hardly appeared from their faces, and at least the lake and the river were swarming with fish, but the men consider fishing an occupation unworthy of them.

Of those who had scowled at us on landing, one was a good-looking young brave, quite a dandy in his new blue gingham shirt, red sash, silk-worked moccasins, and stiff-brimmed hat cocked rakishly askew. In response to our requests for information about the river below his invariable answer was: "Pack Liver plenty bad." He could not or he would not particularize the badness. No doubt he would have condescended to act as our guide down "Pack Liver" for two dollars a day and all he could eat, but we hardly saw it.

In front of one of the shacks we found a highly picturesque group of women and girls busily working, all having bright-colored kerchiefs bound round their heads. The favorite Indian color is a particularly raw shade of cerise. The moment the camera was produced from its case, they fled into the house of one accord, slamming the door after them. They took turns peeking at us through the crack, but not all our smiles or inviting words could draw them forth again. Finally two half-grown boys proved their manhood by marching up to within twenty feet of the terrible camera. Nearer they could not be tempted.

Fort Macleod with its empty store, its scowling savages, and its fly-bitten white man was a dreary place that we were glad to put behind us. We camped at the head of a rapid, three miles below. The Pack River, which empties into Lake Macleod, is the same stream as the Crooked River on a little larger scale. The dangerous rapids we had been warned of proved to be of no great account. There was another little lake to cross next day, Trout Lake, where we took a wrong turn and lost ourselves for about an hour in a beautiful, winding, shallow arm.

Late that afternoon the "character of the country began to change" again. The steep, pine-clad banks gave place to wide bottoms covered with great cotton-wood trees, and presently we were swept out on the bosom of another great river, the Parsnip, so-called from the familiar wild-flower that grows in great profusion along its banks.

We entered it on a wide, semi-circular bend. It was nearly as large as the Fraser and swifter. The *Blunderbuss* was carried down at a surprising speed, and we had not gone half a mile before we were well wetted in a rapid. It was a gaunt, raw-looking stream, continually eating under its banks and spreading great bare sand-bars between. Everywhere we saw the ugly scars of its rage in a freshet. The water was of a peculiar cloudy green color, and in the swifter places a soft, hissing sound rose from it. We had many a discussion as to the cause of this extraordinary sound, but I think my partner's explanation will be the correct one; that it was caused by the little stones rolling down the bed of the river under the water.

There was something intimidating about the Parsnip. Besides being an ugly-looking stream and of a headlong current, it was a part of the route about which we had no information, and the map was a blank. We had about a hundred and fifty miles of it to descend. There was not, of course, a habitation of any kind throughout the length of it, and what we could see of the country looked desolate. The comfortable world of our fellow-creatures began to seem very far away indeed, and for the first time a sense of loneliness bore upon us.

We saw several bears along the banks, but as the gun had to be kept tucked away to escape a wetting in the frequent small rapids, my partner did not get a shot. On the second day we met three Indians and a dog coming up-stream. Conversation was difficult. The thing about us that impressed them the most was our bare feet, in which they seemed to see something humorously indecent.

That night we made our camp in a dreary spot on top of a cut bank in the middle of a wide space that had been burned over. We chose the place hoping in the absence of underbrush to escape the mosquitoes, but they were never worse. Supper was cooked on the stones of the shore below. We were finally obliged to crawl up the bank with it, and thrusting it under the mosquito bar, to eat inside. We were glad to roll up in our blankets. The silence and the emptiness of this remote corner of the world oppressed our imaginations. As we lay waiting for sleep a strange bird regularly cleft the silence with a single, dull mournful note.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MOUNTAIN OF GOLD

The gloomy fancies of night on the Parsnip River were effectually dissipated by the morning sun. It was the first and last time that we were at all troubled by a sense of our solitariness. The third day on the river we made first-rate progress with the current. That day the uneasy stream lost itself in the net-work of channels it had dug, and we could never be sure if we were in the main stream or about to run dry in an abandoned "snye."

With the approach of the afternoon the mountains began to rise close and high on our right hand, and we knew that the forks of the Peace must be near. The Parsnip flows almost due north, and the Finlay comes down from the north in the same valley. They collide head on as it were, and swing off at right angles through the pass. That is the point where the Peace River officially starts.

We reached the meeting of the waters at sunset. The two streams were of nearly equal volume, and it appeared that they ceaselessly contended for the channel with varying success. On this day the Finlay was in flood and held possession. Its darker current shouldered the Parsnip out of the way and backed up its waters for several miles. The line of division was as clear cut as that between land and water. When the *Blunderbuss*, proceeding through the still water, poked her nose into the edge of the current, she spun about and almost rolled over under the impact.

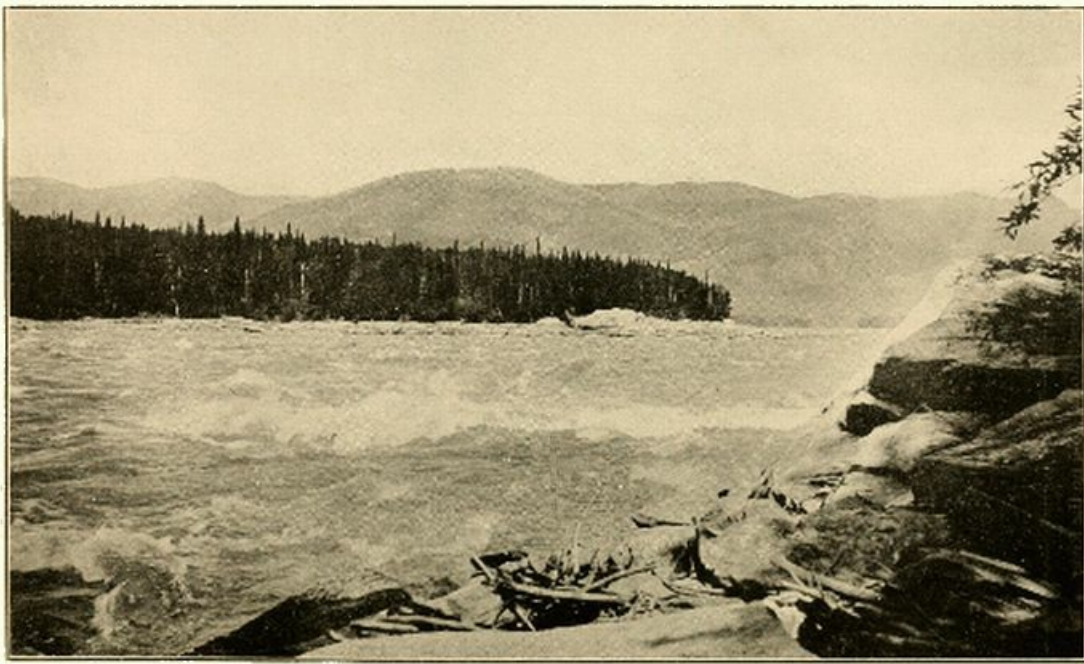
We camped on a wide sand-bar at the point of junction. Cooking and eating amidst a waste of fine sand has its disadvantages, but there was not a bush nor a tree within a quarter of a mile, hence, we hoped, no mosquitoes. It was a vain hope; they gathered from afar with a glad singing. Again we retreated under the cheesecloth with our supper, making occasional swift sorties for hot cocoa. Anybody within telephone communication of a store would have smiled at the way we measured out our cocoa, pinch by pinch, and turned up our eyes and smacked our lips as we drank it. Bread and bacon and rice were very good in their way, but cocoa was the only luxury we had.

Half a mile below our camp we could hear the dull roar of the Finlay rapids which filled us with a kind of pleasant foreboding for the next day. In the morning when we took to the current, we examined the approach anxiously. We had as usual collected a variety of information. Some had said we might easily shoot these rapids, others had foretold a watery grave if we tried it. Some had directed us to keep to the southerly bank, while others with equal assurance had recommended the other.

The course of the current indicated that the deepest water would be found close to the right hand or southern bank, and we accordingly hugged that shore. It fortunately proved to be the proper course. We landed at the head of the rapid to look it over. The photograph we took from this point shows the general outlook. We had descended places as bad in the Fraser, and could no doubt have safely weathered it, but when we considered our precious few pounds of grub and the hundreds of miles that separated us from a fresh supply, we chose the course of prudence and decided to carry around.

There was a well-worn portage trail, and the carry was short, inasmuch as an accommodating back-water swept up behind the point of rocks shown in the picture. We put the *Blunderbuss* in that and paddled down through smooth water to the foot of the rapids. The camera with all its literalness is frequently a liar in effect. However, in this case no word description of the Finlay rapids is necessary, because it is faithfully represented in the picture. It was a beautiful sight.

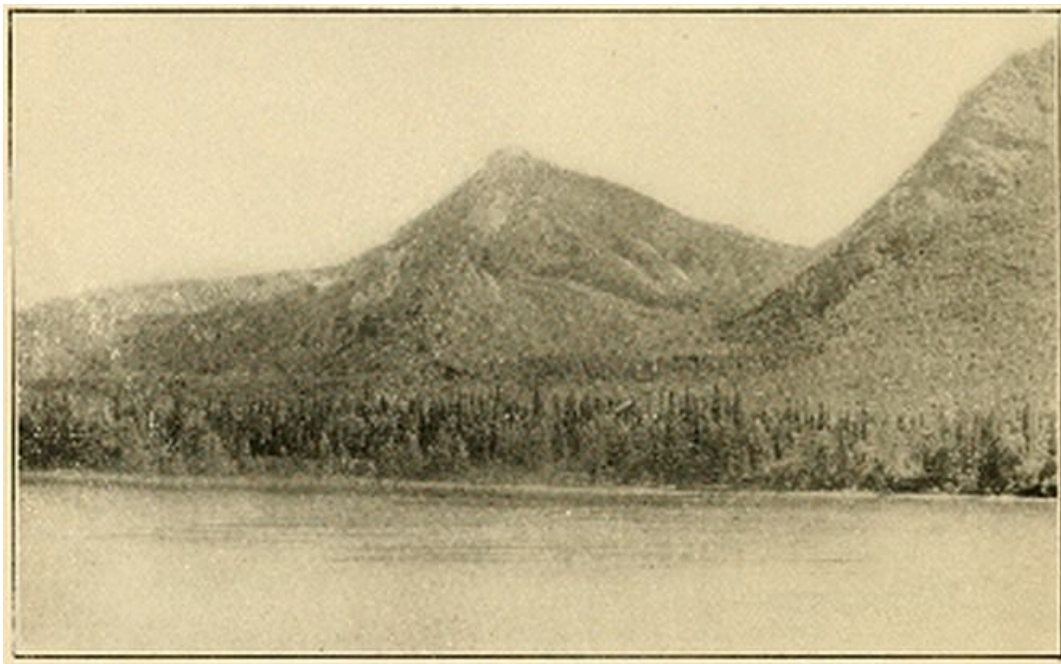




**No word description of the Finlay Rapids is necessary because it is faithfully represented in the picture**



**A strange, troubled sea of mountain peaks . . . like a fantastic papier mache decoration**



**Mount Selwyn—The Mountain of Gold—from up the River**

Below the rapids the river widened into the majestic proportions we expected of the Peace. We swept around a great bend, and the gateway of the Rockies lay immediately before us. We welcomed the mountains like old friends. It was a superb sight, and our exclamations of wonder and delight sounded feeble in our own ears. There was nothing of the terrible in it, as of a dark cleft or gorge; the mountains seemed to draw courteously back on either hand, and through the royal avenue they opened, the river moved graciously and unhurried. "Noble" was the word that continually recurred to us. The wide green river fringed with pines had an unspeakably noble air; the mighty, flung-up rock masses were no less noble.

The first great eminence on the right is Mount Selwyn. We had eagerly looked forward to the sight of it, first on account of its reputed magnificence which caused the matter-of-fact report of the original survey to burst into eloquence; secondly because of the romantic name it has since acquired. Throughout the north, Selwyn is known as the mountain of gold. The lesser height that buttresses its base so far as it has been explored is entirely composed of metal-bearing quartz.

Mount Selwyn is 6,200 feet high, which in figures is nothing to speak of in comparison with the monarchs of the Yellowhead pass that we had doffed our hats to. But the pass itself here is fifteen hundred feet lower. Selwyn is of a very distinguished and beautiful contour, and it rises sheer from the water, revealing itself wholly to the view with an effect of grandeur equal to peaks of twice its size. We photographed it from up the river as it first comes into view, and again from the other side. Neither picture does it justice.

From the beginning of the trip we had been promising ourselves a try for the summit of Mount Selwyn, and now even though we had such need to hurry we could not bear to give up the plan. So we decided to devote the next day to it. Without difficulty we found the regular camping-place with poles and bail-hooks ready to our hand. It was one of the best-chosen spots on the river. A brawling mountain stream, fed by the snows of Selwyn and famous for its arctic trout, emptied into the Peace beside us.

From our camp an old trail led inland and this we followed next day. It presently brought us to an interesting and melancholy memento of a former expedition to Mount Selwyn. This was a log shack with the roof fallen in and the contents rotting and rusted with the damp. There was the bed on which they had slept fifteen years before, with the remains of the spruce boughs that had been their mattresses. There were the little furnaces falling to pieces, the melting pots, and the porcelain molds, and there were many moldy sticks of dynamite that we handled gingerly. It looked like the erbswurst, out of which we made soup on high days and holidays.

Beyond the hut the trail began to climb, and it brought us in turn to all the little excavations they had made in the mountain side. The clean splintered rock lay about as if the blasts had been set off but the day before, and we saw more than one

hammer that had been carelessly dropped at the end of the day's work, never to be picked up again. At intervals we came to square posts driven into the earth, with inscriptions in lead pencil to the effect that so-and-so hereby gave notice of his intention to file a claim, etc., etc., with dates thirteen years old and upwards. Many of the pencil marks were astonishingly fresh. It is said that every foot of the lower slopes of Selwyn has been claimed and reclaimed. Some day when transportation becomes feasible, no doubt there will be a great battle fought for possession of the mountain of gold.

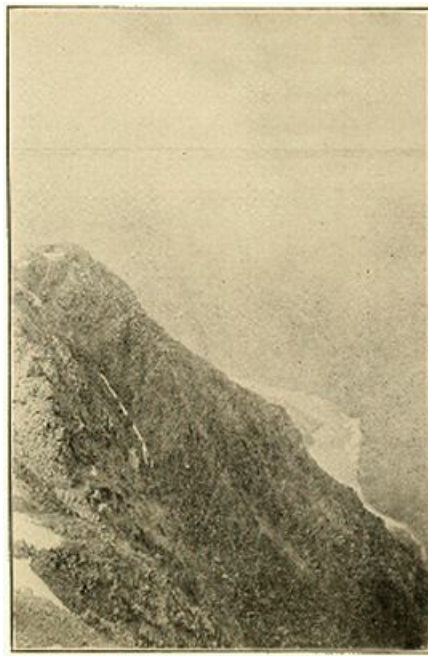
The trail ended at the last excavation, and thereafter we had to push our own way through a dense poplar coppice. But it is easy to climb a mountain; all you have to do is to plant each step higher than the one before, and you're bound to arrive at the summit at last. We were looking for the mountain goat trail described in the report of the first surveyor, and in the end we found it. It led us, except for a few places where not having the prehensile front hoofs of *haploceros montanus*, or his nerve, we had to go round, direct to the summit.

To an experienced Alpinist no doubt Selwyn would have been mere child's play, but we whose first adventure it was above the snow-line found it sufficiently exciting. We dug our fingers and toes into the face of little precipices, not daring to look behind us. We crawled carefully over steep rock slides, wondering casually what we would look like at the bottom if a slide happened to take place just then. We crept around the edge of an awful gorge with our internal organs slowly rising into our throats.

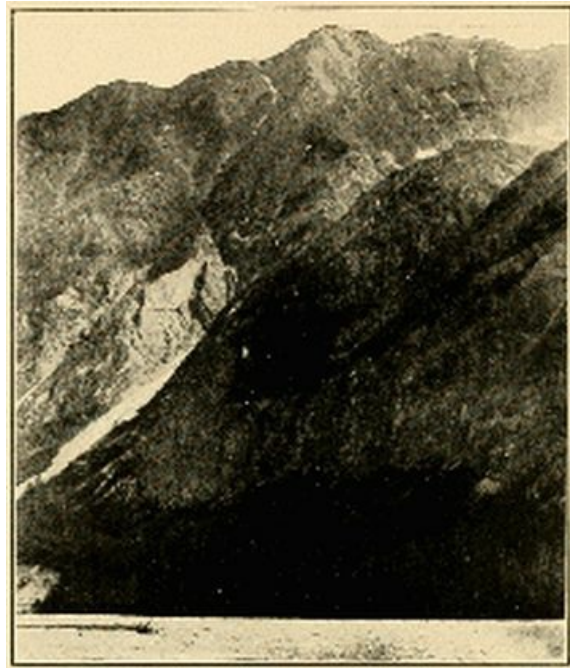


**We quenched our thirst with snow**

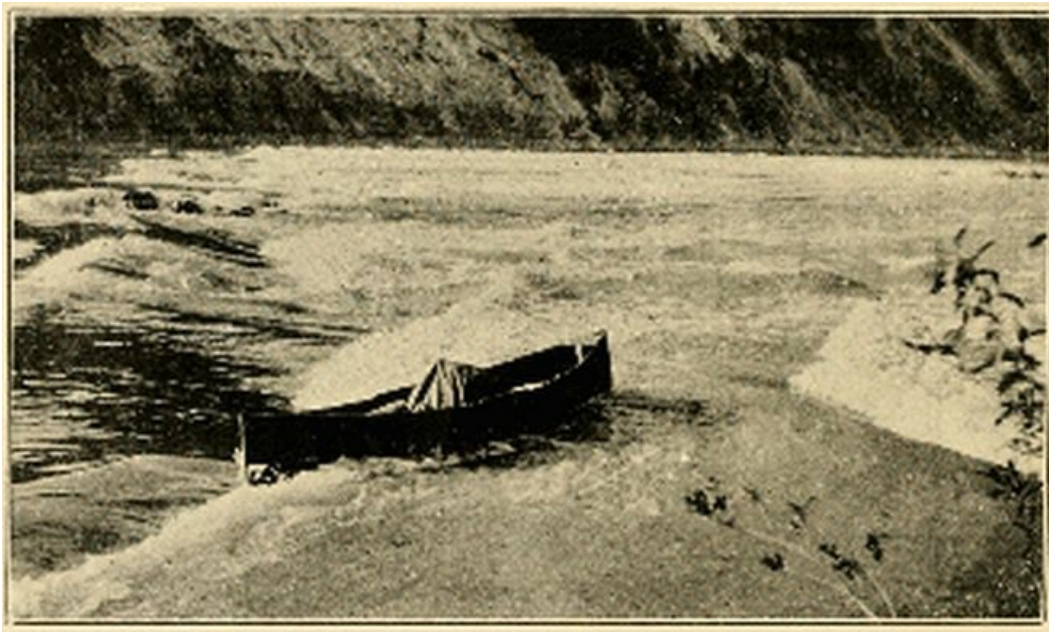




**At our feet lay the Peace River, nearly a mile below**



**Mt. Selwyn from the Down River side**



### **We had no idea how she would behave on the end of a string**

The upper slopes have been largely burned over long ago, and getting over the bleached, fallen trunks was like climbing hundreds of tangled fences. By and by we got above the timber. The side of the mountain we went up, which is the side shown in the first picture, consists of about six little peaks, one above the other. Toiling up, we hailed each one of these as the actual summit, only to find an ever higher point behind it. The whole mountain was starred with flowers, many of them strange to us, and all delicately beautiful. As we approached the summit a pair of ptarmigan in black and white dresses hovered in front of us, positively refusing to be driven away by stones. We quenched our thirst by eating snow.

The apparent summit is the overhanging cliff of dentated rocks that shows clearly in the second picture. The actual summit is a blunt rounded cone lying behind it. It was like the roof of a medieval castle with two turrets connected by a battlement. We reached it at one o'clock. The view took our breath away. It was as if the whole world was spread before us, an empty world without a human sign.

At our feet lay the Peace River, nearly a mile below. To the left was the wide, misty valley of the Finlay, bounded far away by the snow-capped Omineca range. Beginning at that point and turning three quarters of the way round the horizon, there lay below us a strange, troubled sea of mountain peaks. Peaks, peaks, peaks thrust up in reckless disorder. It was like a fantastic papier mache decoration. Deep between some of the nearer heights we had glimpses of wild and beautiful valleys probably never trodden by man. Hidden in a bowl behind Mount Selwyn was a jewel of a lake that was neither sapphire or emerald, but more vivid than either.

I confess that on the summit of Mount Selwyn I felt more comfortable sitting down. I had not the impulse to cast myself over the brink that I believe is usual with inexperienced climbers, but I had the no less uncomfortable impression that the mountain itself was unsteady on its base and likely to topple over before we could get down. It was too airy a perch to be compatible with any feeling of security. If a good strong gust of wind happened to come along, there was nothing to grab hold of but each other.

However, we found comfortable hollows for our backs out of the wind, and there we lay eating our lunch. Beautiful red, yellow, and green mosses filled the interstices. Moss made a grateful footing to moccasined feet after the sharp stones. The lunch consisted of a few lumps of stale bannock that we had stuffed in our pockets and some pieces of chocolate fudge that my partner was adept in making. I had lost most of my pieces to him on the way up, in bets as to the summit, but he magnanimously returned them to be repaid out of the next lot to be made.

Then we took our pictures and started down. We anticipated a swift and easy descent, but Destiny ordered otherwise. Where there is only one way to go up a mountain, and that is up, there is the whole compass to choose from coming down. As long as we were on the bare upper slopes with the world spread beneath us the way was clear, though too much speed was slowest in the end as we found when I twisted a leg between a boulder and a fallen tree trunk. Coming

down it was amusing to roll big stones out of their niches and watch them leap and plunge like mad elves down the steep into the river. We could not help thinking with a catch in the breath, of how we would go down ourselves if we got a good start.

It was upon reaching the growing timber that we became confused. We lost the faintly-marked trail, found it, and lost it again. It appeared there were a score of aimless tracks crossing and recrossing on the mountain side. Finally we went hopelessly astray in a primeval forest without tracks of any kind. None but those who have tried to make their way through ancient timber on a steep slope can picture the difficulties. Gigantic fallen trunks barred the way in every direction, or made precarious bridges that landed us nowhere. Often the apparently sound logs collapsed into powder under our feet. Lovely green mosses concealed treacherous crevices into which we dropped thigh deep. And I had a rapidly stiffening leg.

The only thing we had to guide us was the sound of the brawling stream that we knew emptied beside our camp. In the course of time we reached its banks. Here was a tremendous tangle of drift logs brought down by the freshets. We made our slow way by the course of the stream, expecting to find camp nearby, but to our astonishment the journey lengthened into hours without any sign of the river appearing. It seemed as if there must be bad medicine in it. How we could ever have strayed so far up that valley is still a mystery. We must have been six miles out of our way. It was half past nine before we made camp. Except for half an hour at the summit we had been on the go since eight that morning.

# CHAPTER IX

## THE BIG CANYON

During the whole of the following day we were traveling through magnificent mountain scenery. Unhappily the finest peaks lay to the south of the river, where the sun shone directly in the camera's eye. For the most part the river was smooth, and to one traveling with it the current was deceptive. We were astonished when we had occasion to land at the rate at which the green flood came sweeping down. There were narrow places where she carried the *Blunderbuss* through like an automobile. We looked over our shoulders and lo! the place we had just passed was a quarter of a mile astern. There were some ugly-looking reefs and rapids, but none that extended all the way across the river.

The current must have averaged seven miles an hour, for our ordinary paddling rate with the clumsy *Blunderbuss* in slack water was only three, yet after four hours work we hove in sight of the *Parlez Pas* rapids, which are said to be forty miles from Selwyn. These are considered worse than the Finlay rapids. The name is misapplied, for while we were yet two miles away the "speak" of the rapids was sufficient to accelerate the beating of our hearts. We had the same confusion of directions here as to the channel. After the usual agony of indecision the pilot chose the right hand bank to land on. This rapid was in the middle of a long straight reach, and one side looked as good as the other. This was probably the wrong side; it was an ugly-looking place, broken with rocks and shallows. However, rather than go to the trouble of pulling up-stream and crossing over, we decided to make the best of it.

Descending it ourselves was out of the question, so we decided to let the *Blunderbuss* over the first drop on a line, then to land her and carry over a wide projecting reef to the back-water below. To this end we tied together all the odd pieces of rope we possessed. We had no idea how she would behave on the end of a string. A great tree had partly fallen into the water right in our path, and we much feared for the conjunction of branches and knots in the rope.

The camera has caught the *Blunderbuss* as she floated over the first drop. It was an anxious moment. When she struck the white comber that appears to the right of the picture, there was not enough of her under water to carry her through it. Consequently the wave held her there, and swinging broadside, she almost rolled under before we succeeded in hauling her ashore. We had taken the precaution to keep out the few pounds of grub that remained to us.

These operations, together with landing, unloading, portaging and loading again all consumed a lot of time, and we made but ten miles farther that day. During the afternoon there were frequent cold squalls of rain that seemed to single us out for their malice. The sun was shining everywhere but where we were.

On the next day the mountains began to flatten out and the valley to spread. The river pursued a tedious, roundabout course among wide, exposed bars. There is a fable in the country that any of these bars will pay a man's wages in gold.

We had now passed through the main chain of the Rockies, though the great canyon still lay before us. Ever since the first white man saw it, it has been called Rocky Mountain canyon, though the Rockies are fifty miles away. We looked for it eagerly. Like every great work of nature it has surrounded itself with an awful reputation. "For God's sake, don't get carried down!" everybody had said who knew the place, and we were prepared to drive the canoe into the bank at the slightest warning.

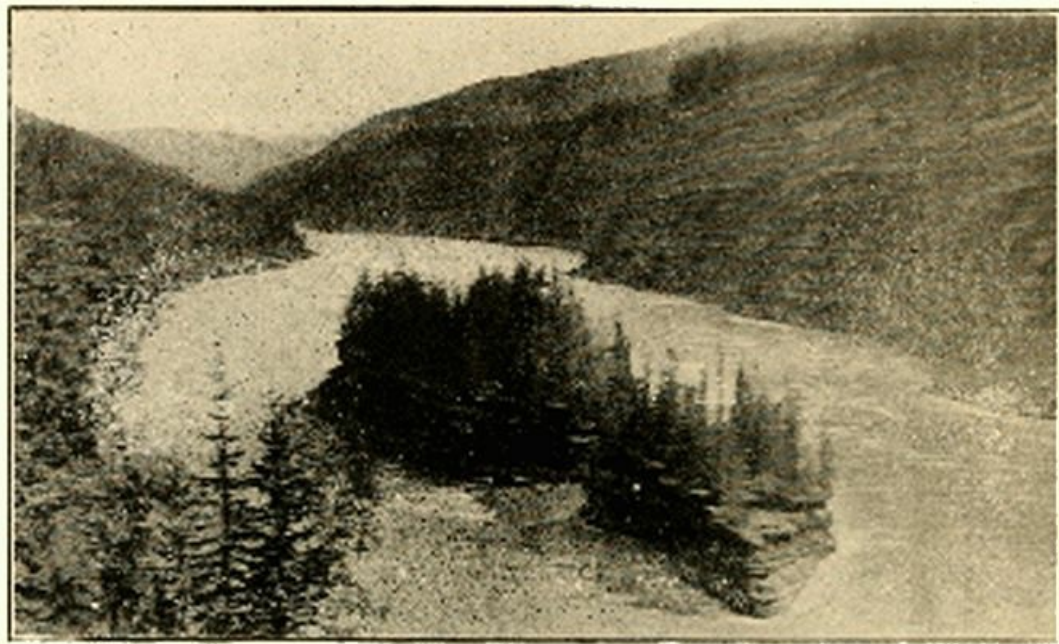
As it turned out, however, there was no danger of mistaking the canyon. Long before we reached it, we saw a significant wall of rock blocking the river's course, and from under it issued an ominous hoarse roar none but the deaf could ignore. A little flag fluttering from a pole drew us to a landing a few hundred yards above the opening. It was the first sign of human occupancy we had seen in many days. Behind it was a cache of poplar logs. This we guessed to be the surveyor's store and the flag a signal to guide our friend Bower who was somewhere behind us.

We hastened over the rocks to look into the fearful hole that swallowed the river entire. The sight provided us our keenest thrill hitherto. The mighty river that filled a whole valley above here disappeared through an opening not more than seventy yards wide, and roared down out of sight between the walls below. It is an incredible sight. They say the water has a rise and fall of fifty feet within the canyon, and certainly we saw great trees cast up on the rocks at least thirty feet above the present water level. Unfortunately we put off taking a picture of the opening for more favorable light, and in the end it never was taken. The best picture we secured shows the canyon a short distance below the opening.



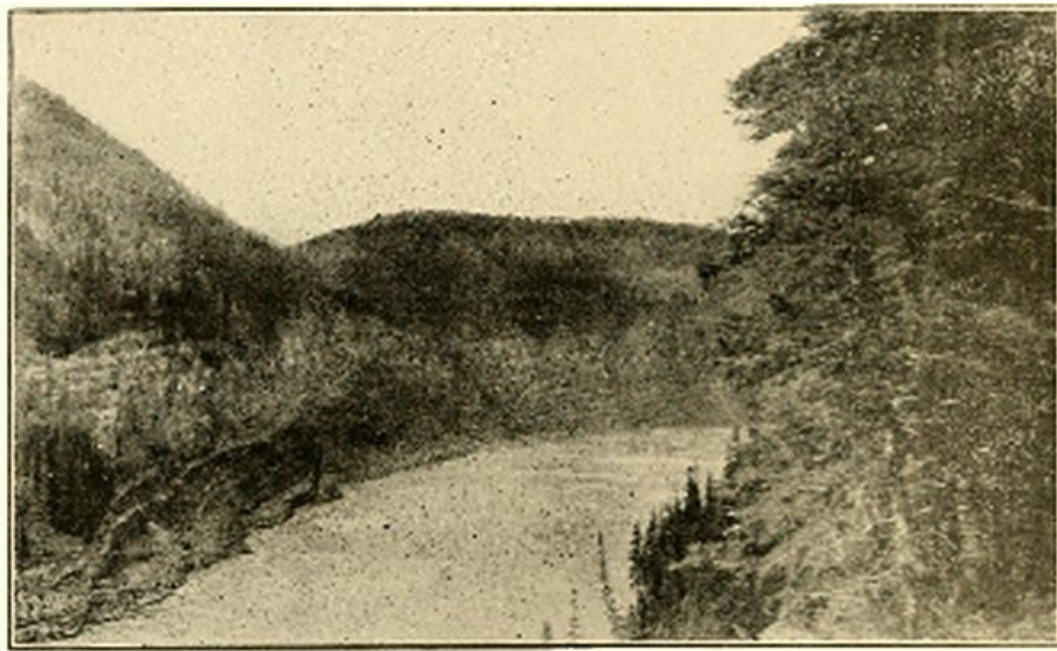


**The river roared down out of sight between the walls below**



**Breasting the current like a pair of battleships**





### **No boat could have lived long in those torn waters**

The impressive feature is not the height of the walls, but the frightful force and volume of the torrent that sweeps through. In this respect the Peace River canyon suggests only the Whirlpool rapids below Niagara. We cast the biggest tree trunk we could move over the brink. It fell into a whirlpool, stood straight on end, and slowly disappeared. It did not reappear while we watched. Across the gorge there was a fissure in the rock into which another tree trunk had been horizontally driven up to the butt by the force of the current. The water had since gone down, and there it stuck like a nail driven into a board.

The canyon is twenty-two miles long. No one has ever descended it alive, but there is a tradition that a party of Iroquois Indians in the "company's" employ once lined a boat up. The water must have been at a lower stage than we saw it. There was no footing then on the polished walls of the canyon, even for an Iroquois. A few days before we saw it the surveyor had sent down an empty boat strongly braced with logs. Four hours later the watchers at the other end secured a small splintered piece of one side.

Having satisfied our first curiosity concerning the canyon, we looked about for the fellow-creatures we expected to find in the vicinity. Besides the surveyor's party we had been told we would find Indians here from whom we might surely obtain horses for the portage. There were horse tracks around the cache no more than a day old, and we soon came upon the site of the surveyor's camp, but it was abandoned. Dividing forces then, we explored the river meadows and the bench far and wide. We found many tepee poles and the ashes of burnt-out fires, but the Indians had likewise moved on.

We made camp on the site of the surveyor's establishment and debated what to do. The situation was not without its serious aspect. We were reduced to two pounds of flour and a few slices of bacon. We had a few cupfuls of rice besides, but the little bag of salt had been lost. Whereas the canyon is twenty-two miles long, the portage trail which cuts across a wide bend is only twelve, but even twelve miles loomed big before us. With the most strenuous endeavors it would take us three days to carry all our stuff across—and on two pounds of flour! The sum was hard to do. However, we recollected that luck had always been with us so far, and we felt sure we would find the surveyor at the other end of the trail. We decided to take about forty pounds each and cross next morning; beg a little flour, and then come back for the rest of our stuff.

The forty pounds seemed like nothing at all when we first hoisted it on our backs, and we set off gaily. But on the steep hills it became more like four hundred. I was further discommoded by my game leg, which did not trouble me much on the level, but set up a most convincing pain on every ascent. It was a hot and steamy day, and we perspired by the quart. However, the trail was first rate and in spite of our hindrances we made good time.

We had gone about four miles when we were suddenly brought up all standing by the tinkle of a horse bell from ahead. It sounded too good to be true. Then we heard a voice, and presently a pack train swung into view, lumping along at the

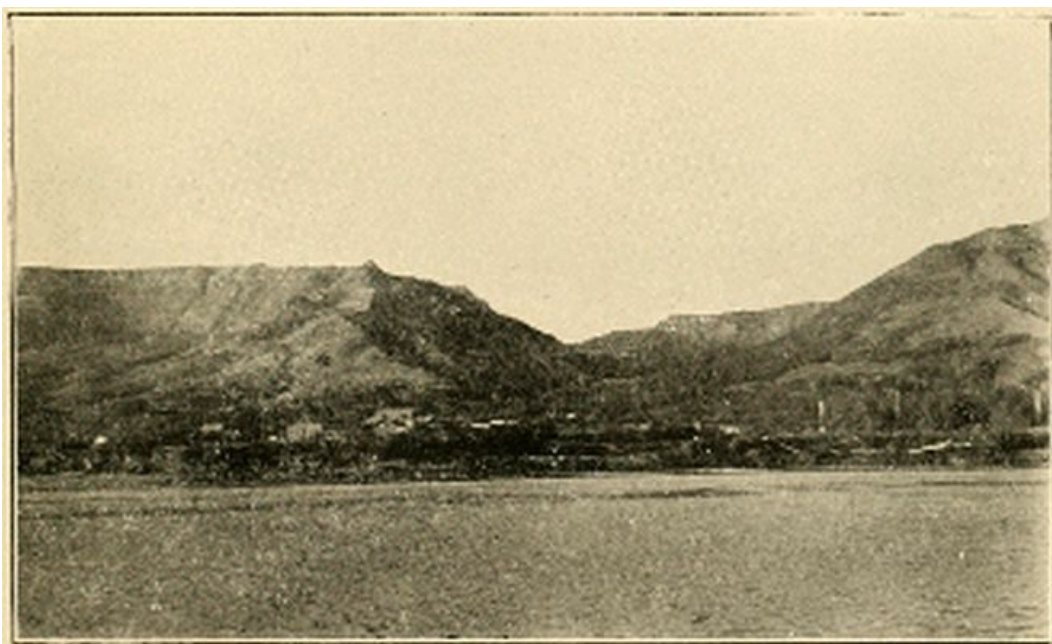
half dead rate characteristic of pack ponies. But the sight of us electrified them. Of one accord they turned tail and stampeded madly into the bush. Their conductor, an odd-looking figure with a bandanna tied over its head pursued them, cursing roundly. We waited rather foolishly in the trail. It was not an auspicious beginning to an acquaintance.

A second party made its appearance on the trail. These horses were better broken. The driver rode up, and we surveyed each other curiously. He with his sombrero, neck handkerchief, chaps, and big six-shooter might have stepped directly out of the pages of a western romance, and he had a large, devil-may-care manner to suit. He was in charge of the outfit. The horses belonged to the surveyor, and they were engaged in transporting his supplies. When we stated our predicament he readily agreed to carry us across if we would wait over a day to let him collect his load. There was grub in the cache for all.

By this time the other man had succeeded in rounding up his horses. He proved to be a curly-headed young fellow with the face of a boy of eighteen. It was only after we had listened to his wise talk by the fire that we realized his maturity. This was Mac. The bold cow-puncher was George. Mac we found had twice as good a headpiece as George, but he lacked the other's assurance and was content with a subordinate position. Such is life!

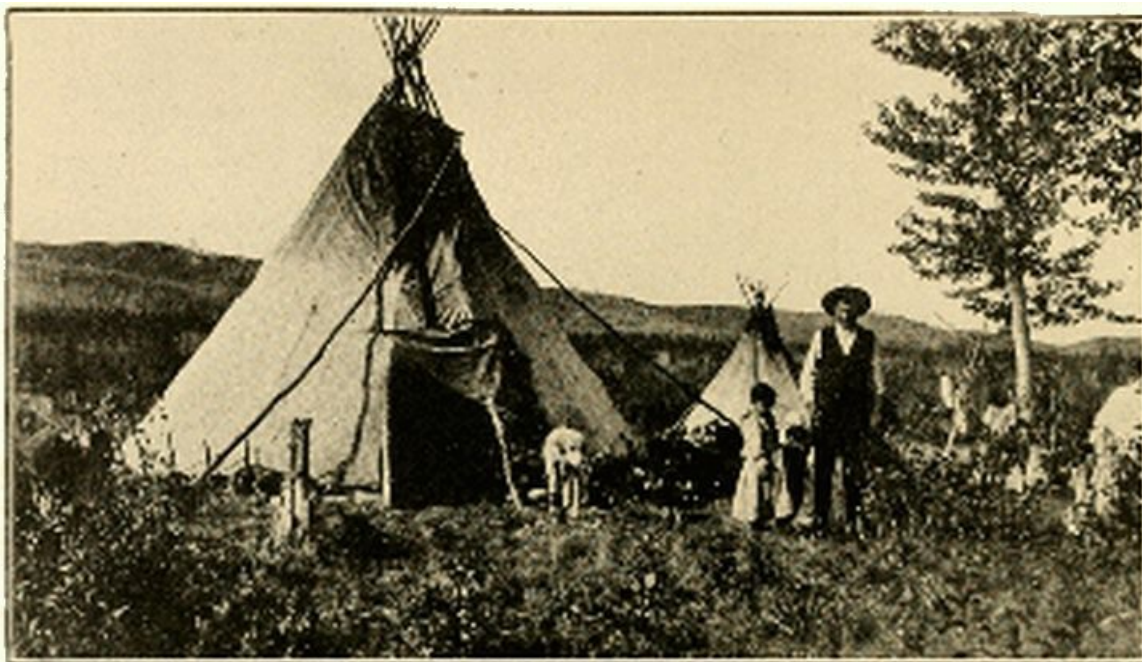


**Sitting on a bag of flour, paddle in hand and pipe in mouth, he made a unique figure**





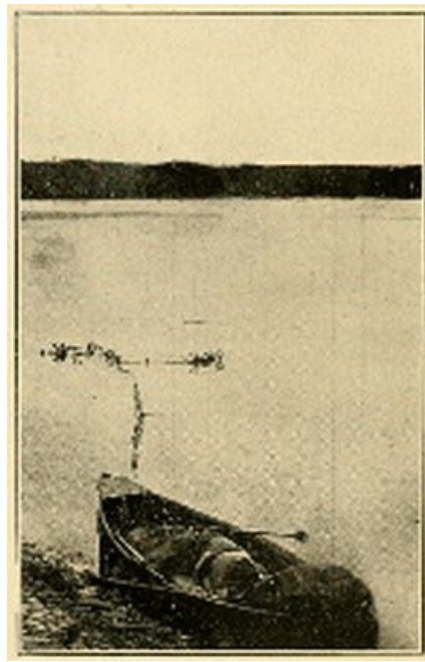
**Fort St. John in the late afternoon**



**Beaver Indians near Fort St. John**



**St. John Peace in his "winter garb"**



**The *Blunderbuss* arranged for the night**

We slung our bags on the poles of an abandoned Indian camp, out of reach of inquisitive bears, and followed our friends back to the river. We lunched together in the highest spirits. There was a youthful recklessness about George and Mac that delighted us. Moreover, it was the first meal in many days at which my partner and I had not felt obliged to count the mouthfuls, and they had jam! How we did lay in to be sure. Mac's bannock was even better than the cooky's of Summit Lake, though his method was the exact reverse. Among such diverse authorities I despaired of ever attaining any proficiency myself.

They had been ordered to pick up some stuff at an old camp ten miles down the canyon, and my partner and I eagerly seized at the chance to see the canyon in the middle, where but few white men have been. We turned half the horses out and started on the others. The trail was of the roughest and we could never proceed above a walk, but it was a great ride, leading us for the most part through virgin forest.

While we rode we improved our new acquaintances. George did the talking for both of them. He could not be induced to tell of his experiences in the country. His heart was outside, and he preferred to dwell on how, when he last visited Seattle, he had obliged the best tailor in town to come to his room and take his measure. He was hungry to talk about theaters and restaurants, and whenever "New York" was mentioned, his face became wistful. He particularly inquired as to the prevailing fashions for young men, and when we told him that wide shoulders and voluminous trousers were going out his face fell.

"What's a fellow goin' to do if Nature ain't been kind to him in that respect," he said dejectedly. Then his face cleared, and he gave his pony a cut. "I don't care," he said firmly, "when I go to town I'll have the widest shoulders and the peg-topped pants that money can buy. It's all right for a business man to dress quiet, but when a chap like me blows in for a bit of a time, he had ought to look sporty."

It proved that we had been sent on a fool's errand to the old camp. However, we camped cheerfully in the rain and had a jolly supper of bacon, fried hard-tack, and jam, lashings of jam! We opened a new tin at nearly every meal. Next day we rode back through the strangely beautiful, but now dripping forest. Midway we paused at another camp, and here my partner and I had our chance to see more of the canyon and to photograph it.

At this point the walls of rock were about a hundred and twenty-five feet high. It is hard, brown rock built up in many sharply-defined transverse layers, that strikingly exhibit the action of the water. Below where we stood the canyon widened out for a little way, and two high islands of rock covered with pine trees breasted the current like a pair of battle-ships. No boat could have lived long in those torn waters. Had we had time—and the grub, we would dearly have liked to explore the canyon from end to end. Judging from what little we saw, there must be some wild spots in it.

On the following day when we made ready to cross the portage, the horses we had left behind us were not to be found. Everything in the Northwest is planned contingent upon catching the horses. The four of us spread out and scoured the country. In the afternoon I finally came upon their tracks and followed them for several miles along the Fort Grahame trail, but had to turn back without them. Gloom prevailed in our camp. It rained intermittently.

Next morning Mac, my partner, and I set off, leading three horses, leaving George with the fourth to round up the missing beasts. It was supposed that a wolf or a bear had stampeded them. I trust he had not to pursue them all the way to Fort Grahame. That was a hundred and fifty miles or more. One of the horses we took was packed with sugar and flour for the surveyor, while the other two carried our outfit. Such was the slowness of their pace that we were six hours on the way, and reached Hudson's Hope as weary as though we had walked twice the distance at our ordinary rate.

On top of the bank at the Hope a young man was waiting for us with a very grave face. This was the surveyor. Across the river he had eighteen men under his care, and the grub had given out. He had sent George on a hurry call for more, and now after four days we were returning with one load! Under the circumstances it would not have been surprising had he greeted my partner and me worse than coolly. On the contrary he was exceedingly polite. When we learned the state of affairs we expressed regret for our share in holding up his supplies, but he waved it aside. A man's first duty was to help travelers in distress, he said, which was handsome of him.

# CHAPTER X

## A PEACEFUL INTERLUDE

The trading-post at Hudson's Hope is opened only in the winters for the convenience of the fur-trade. When we were there the little store was boarded up and a sign gave notice that trespassers would be "persecuted." All the old company posts throughout the North were erected with an unerring eye for a romantic and impressive effect, and this one was no exception. It stands in a wide, grassy esplanade on top of the bank, which is here some two hundred feet high. Save for the canyon itself it is the narrowest point on the river, and one of the few spots where a railway crossing is feasible. The view down stream is very fine.

From Hudson's Hope to Vermilion rapids, a distance of nearly six hundred miles, the river pursues its serene course without a break. This is the "Peace River country" of rising agricultural fame. On both sides for practically the whole way the land is of great richness, particularly to the north and west where the prairies roll back farther than any white man has been to see. At long intervals down the river one or two little communities are beginning to break ground. It is the "Last West."

While we were supping with Mac at Hudson's Hope we were joined by one Joe White, a true dilettante of the North country. One of the questions we are asked most frequently is: "What do those fellows do up there?" To which the answer is: "A little of everything!" A little prospecting, a little freighting, a little work by the day, and a great deal of "tripping." Joe White commenced by telling us that he hadn't been hungry for twenty years and only ate from a sense of duty. He added that the weather was rotten, he had rotten luck, and the country was rotten anyway. He was bound down the river, and offered to come with us to show the way. Not wishing to have our innocent delight in the journey poisoned by his superior knowledge, we declined the offer as delicately as possible, whereupon he announced with gloomy positiveness that we would go to the bottom in the "chutes" below. I am afraid that we only smiled at the terrible prophecy; our deaths had been foretold so many times!

At five o'clock next morning we saw him from afar building a raft out of dead logs on a bar below. Two hours later we started ourselves and overtook him at midday borne upon the broad bosom of the river like a doll on a shingle. Sitting on his bag of flour, clad in garments patched out of all likeness to their first forms, paddle in hand and pipe in mouth, he made a highly original figure, as the photograph shows. When we remarked upon the smallness of his craft he retorted that he would "sooner have a couple of sound, dry logs under him any day than one of them pesky boats that would roll you out if you so much as spit crooked!" Considering the matronly amplitude of the *Blunderbuss*, this struck us as humorous.

Joe White the pessimist was none the less hospitably inclined. When he learned of our shortage he pressed bread and bacon on us that we had much ado to refuse. Long after we passed him we kept looking over our shoulders to see him sitting in the river as it seemed, waltzing idly in the eddies, and no doubt darkly deliberating on the rottenness of things in general. When we landed for lunch, he caught up with us; later in the day we again overtook him. The terrible "chutes" he had warned us of gave no trouble, indeed we never knew just when we passed them.

The Peace River like every great river possesses a strong individuality. It has its own look, its own characteristic forms and color effects. In the six hundred miles from the Hope to Vermilion the character of the banks changes only in degree; the bordering hills very gradually scale down from a thousand feet to a hundred. These hills are the feature of the river. They are not really hills for the country is flat on top, and it is a kind of gigantic trough in the prairie that the river has dug for itself. But hills they appear from the river, of an infinite variety in contour and color. On the northerly side where the sun beats directly they are for the most part covered with grass; on the other side timbered. It is the steep, grassy hills in the late afternoons with the sun gilding the high places, and casting rich shadows athwart the hollows, that remains in our minds as the most characteristic impression of the Peace.

At five o'clock we hove in view of Fort St. John, sixty miles from the Hope, and landed with less than enough grub on hand for our supper. It was Sunday (August sixth) and we feared lest the trader might have scruples against selling us anything, but on the contrary he hastened to open the store. We ordered something of everything he had, which was not very much, ending for a treat with the can of apples that has been mentioned. We enjoyed still another treat for the trader, good man, dug us a mess of potatoes out of his own garden. One needs to do without potatoes for two months in order to appreciate what they mean to humankind.

The trader, Mr. Beaton, was one of the old order of Hudson's Bay men. He has been thirty years "in the service." He was not the grim tyrant we meet with in popular fiction, but a single-minded, unassuming Scotchman, with a straight look and a hand-grip that inspired confidence. This summer for the first time the outside world was beginning to break in on him; there was a party of surveyors encamped across the river and another to the North. Settlers were beginning to straggle in. Mr. Beaton contemplated this irruption with a shake of the head and spoke wistfully of other days. He guessed he was too old to change, he said. Later we heard that he had resigned his commission, with the idea of retiring farther into the wilderness to raise horses.

Fort St. John is the headquarters of the main body of the Beaver Indians. They were all "pitching about" to the north when we passed through. The Beavers are said to be of the same stock as the Sarcees, who are now on a reservation near Calgary, five hundred miles southwest, and the story is still told of how the division occurred. It cannot be so long ago because a gun figures in it. It is related that when they were all one tribe, during one of their annual gatherings near the Rocky Mountain canyon, a dog belonging to one family fouled the gun of a neighbor. A woman laughed, and a terrible battle resulted in which many were killed. Everybody took sides with the result that the tribe split in two, and the one part went south.

Mr. Beaton deserves to be known as the father of the Beavers. All these years he has been their mentor and their guide. He was warm in his praise of their good qualities, their scrupulous honesty in trade, their skill in the chase, but he confessed with a shake of the head that physically they were sadly degenerate. Their isolation as a tribe has probably forced them into too close inter-marriage. Such is now their lack of stamina that the mildest disease rages among them like a pestilence. During the winter of 1910 they were attacked by the measles, and of a hundred and eighty members of the tribe, sixty died. Mr. Beaton, who fed, and doctored and cheered them as best he could, said that their demoralization was pitiful. They simply laid down and died.

To Fort St. John belongs the story of St. John Peace, four years old. This infant was the son of "the Wolf," who had four wives and thirty-four children besides this one. One day in the fall St. John strayed away from the tepees. Among so many brothers and sisters his absence was not noticed, and while he was gone all his relatives migrated to the fur-camps far to the north. The rest of the story seems hard to believe, but it was given me on good authority. During the entire winter the baby fended for himself, contending with the dogs for the scraps which are none too plentiful at any time, and sleeping in little shelters that he contrived. The epidemic was raging at the time, and no one thought of him; he did not even have a name then.

All he possessed in the world was a cotton shirt, a ragged little pair of trousers, and one moccasin that he changed from foot to foot. Later someone gave him a rag of a blanket about as big as a door-mat. And this was one of the coldest winters on record; the thermometer dropped to 78 below zero. Nevertheless he came through well-nourished and healthy. Here is his picture, shirt, trousers, one moccasin, and all. When the surveyors came in in the summer they adopted him and eventually sent him down to the mission school at Fort Vermilion. He was christened St. John Peace on the way.

An hour or two after we made the fort, Joe White arrived on his little raft. He allowed that he would lay off at St. John for a couple of days to buy him some clothes. This seemed like an excessive time allowance, but Joe had no intention of skimping the pleasure attendant upon the display of new raiment. He immediately bought a hat from Mr. Beaton and walked about under it during the rest of the evening. In the morning he went back for a pair of trousers, and got the full satisfaction out of them before returning at noon for a pair of "outside" shoes, that I am sure pinched him cruelly. In the afternoon, shortly before we left, he came out in a new shirt, and by this time he was so proud he scarcely deigned to notice us in passing.

It had been our intention, could we have secured horses and a guide, to leave the Peace at Fort St. John and look for the source of the Hay River, which is said to lie about a hundred and twenty-five miles to the north. We then hoped to descend that unexplored stream to its mouth in Great Slave Lake. However, everything was against this plan. There was no guide to be had and Beaton said such trail as there was was used by the Indians only in winter; that now it would be impassable by reason of the muskegs which were rap full. It had been an unexampled season for rain—and mosquitoes. We therefore decided to continue by the Peace to Fort Vermilion and try to strike over to the Hay River from there.

The steamboat was hourly expected in St. John, and everybody around the post waited on the *qui vive* with eyes fixed down the river. We lingered throughout Monday, hoping to share in the excitement attendant upon her arrival and to hear news of the world. This boat which visits them four times a year provides St. John with its only regular communication

with the outside world. While we waited my partner and I climbed the hills behind the post and feasted royally upon Saskatoon berries, a kind of sublimated huckleberry.

She did not appear, however, and at the end of the day we resumed our voyage with the intention of floating all night. But as yet, after what we had seen above, we could not wholly trust the peacefulness of the Peace. Every little riffle caused us to start up and seize a paddle, and it became necessary to go ashore for undisturbed sleep. It was a still, fair night. The moon behaved very oddly. She rose in full splendor, shone in our faces for an hour or more, and then set only a few degrees from the place where she had risen. I must leave the explanation to an astronomer, as well as the fact that the moon rose within a few minutes of the same hour and remained full for nearly two weeks.

At noon next day as we were making leisurely progress we were suddenly hailed from the distant shore. We paddled in to investigate and upon invitation landed to lunch with a sportive party of surveyors, waiting there to be picked up by the steamboat. We do not know their names, nor they ours, nor is it likely we will ever meet again, but we will remember their hospitality. There is something in mutual camp life that brings out the best in man—the irredeemable ones do not camp long in company. We particularly admired the manner of these fellows toward each other; under the merciless chaffing that spared the boss no more than the chainman, they had an unobtrusive consideration for each other. Anyway chaff is an admirable corrective in a community; not for a fraction of a minute will it allow an individual to inflict himself on the company.

The river had by now settled into a steady, unbroken sweep of about four miles an hour, and when night came around again, we decided that we could trust it. The *Blunderbuss* was about as wide amidships as a Pullman berth, and if we piled all our stuff in one end there was just room enough for the two of us to lie down side by side. After supping on shore we heaped balsam boughs in the bottom, and spreading our blankets, crawled between and cast off.

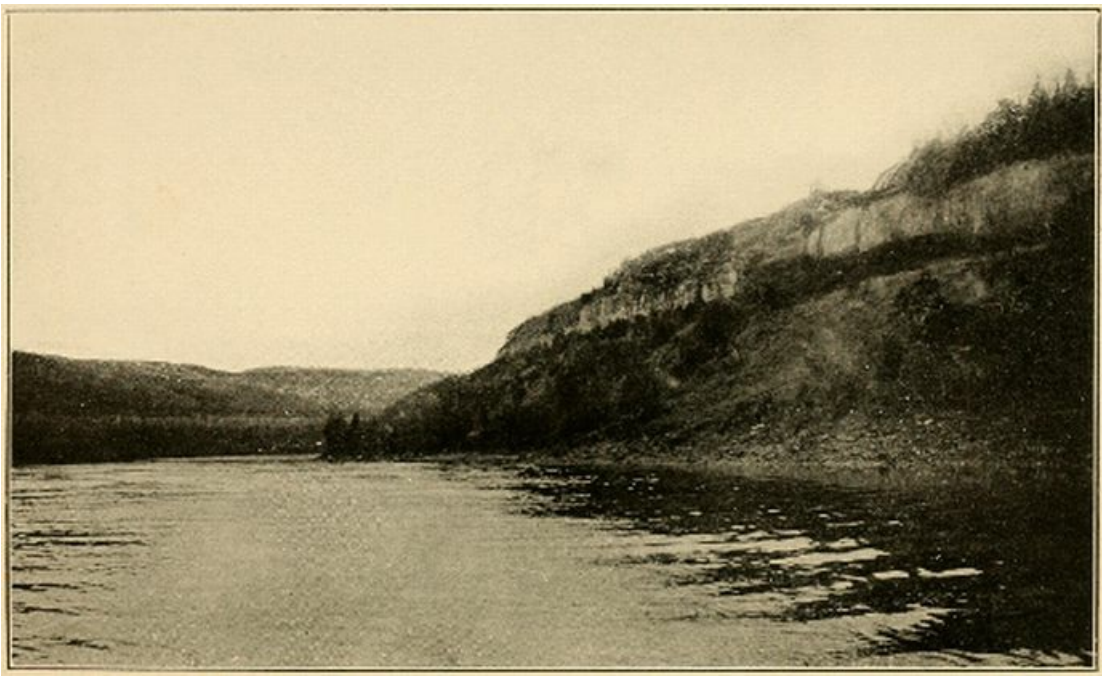
It was an odd and delightful experience. There we were tucked warmly in our frail cradle, not only rocked gently in the current, but soothingly waltzed round and round in the eddies. It was deliciously comfortable; the canvas sides of the *Blunderbuss* accommodated themselves to all the angles of our anatomies. Only a single thickness of water-proofed canvas separated us from "Davy Jones's locker." A pin-prick might have proved our undoing.

It was too beautiful to allow us to sleep; we lay watching the stars swing round our heads and listening to the murmur of the current over the stones inshore. When we drifted under one bank or the other we could see the tops of the dark trees gravely marching past the stars, and we realized that we were still on the way. Long before the moon rose to us, it was painting the hills of the northerly shore in a panorama of delicate, silvery tones that caught at the breast in its loveliness. How strange it was later in the night to wake and wonder where we were, and while wondering, to drop off again.

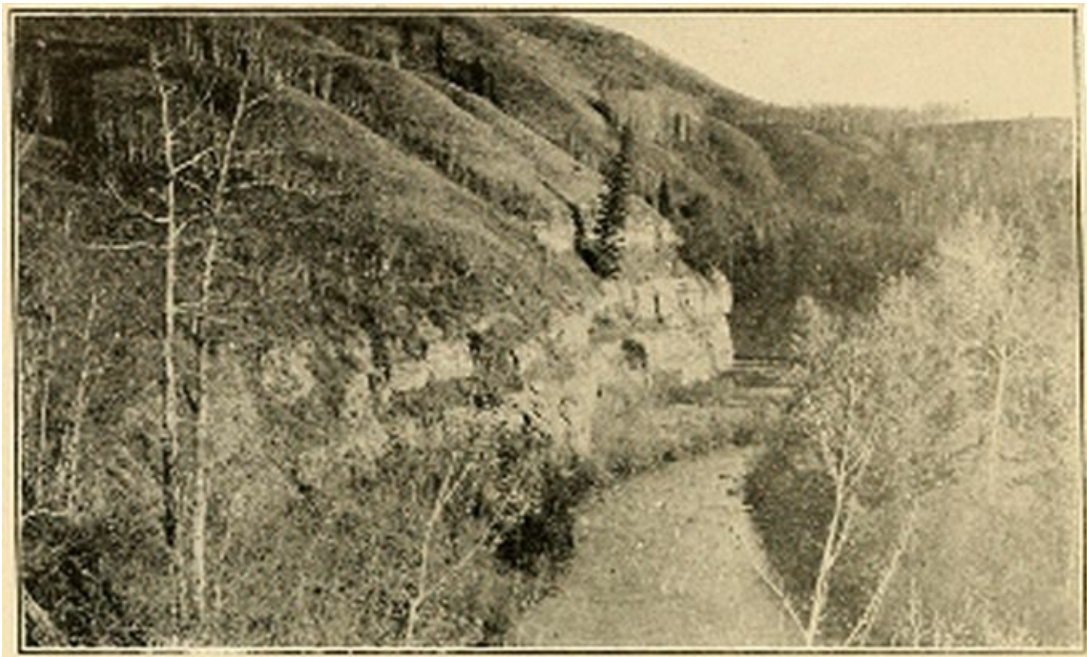
When we finally awoke in the full light of day, we were too comfortable and happy to get up immediately. We had drifted close to the right-hand bank, and as we lay on our backs idly watching the sunny hillside above our heads, there, just a little way up, we saw a big black bear grubbing around the tree-trunks. It was so natural a sight I do not think we even moved. We looked at him, and he looked at us with no less interest. Then we waved good-morning to him, and he ran away. It was not until the current threatened to mix us up with the branches of a fallen tree that we roused ourselves to the paddles.

We had no idea how far we had traveled while we slept, but as we measured the hundred and twenty miles to Dunvegan, the next post by half-past four, we judged that it had been about forty miles. Dunvegan is an ancient post, long the headquarters of the Peace River district. At present it is of minor importance, though the coming of the settlers bids fair to restore its ancient trade in a new channel. Meanwhile it is famous up and down the river for the trader's garden. For many years Mr. Betson has been raising astonishing vegetables here, including corn and tomatoes, as well as the hardier kinds. He gave us a turnip as big as either of our heads and the finest heads of lettuce I ever saw.

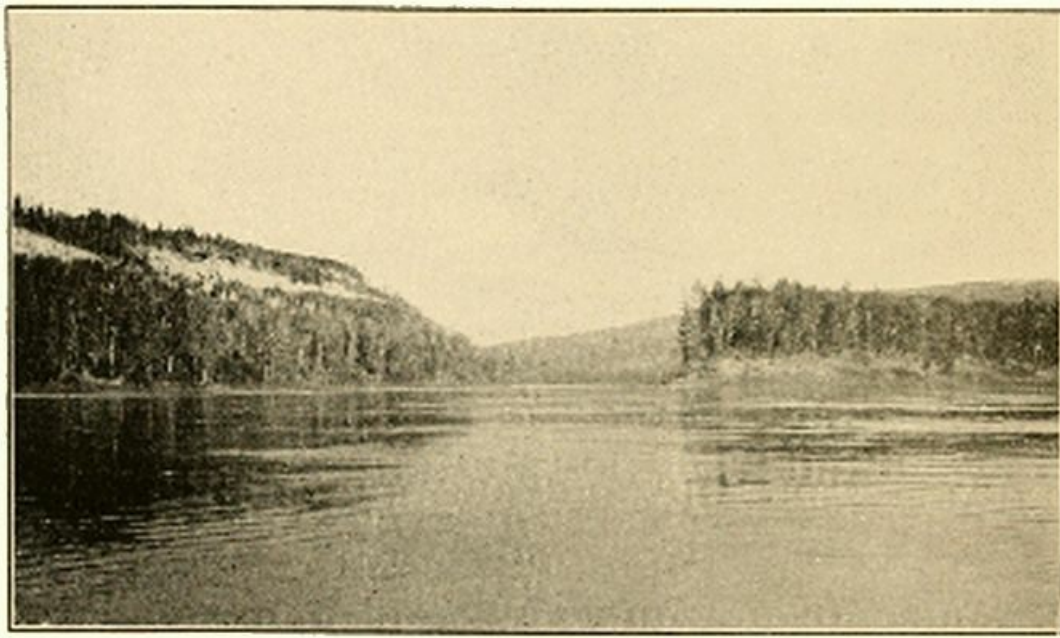




**They are not really hills for the country is flat on top and it is a kind of gigantic trough that the river has dug for itself**



**It is the steep, grassy hills in the late afternoon that remain as the most characteristic impression of the Peace**



**The Peace River swinging widely and superbly among the hills**

At Dunvegan we ran into another egregious tenderfoot; I suppose as long as there is a West this type will continue unchanged. He was a spindle-shanked little fellow with the invariable "sporting suit" and a hunting knife of the largest size. He had two miserable cayuses that he bragged about as if they were thoroughbreds. His ignorance was only equaled by his self-sufficiency. In cities this kind of man is quite inoffensive, but in the wilds "to keep his end up" he thinks it necessary to puff and brag and blow. This specimen was a journalist, God save the mark!

At bedtime we pushed off for Peace River Crossing, and once more floated down, sweetly lulled asleep by the rocking of our collapsible cradle. Toward morning, alas! a change came over the spirit of our dream; it started to rain. We pulled the tarpaulins over us as best we could, but the water collected in pools on top, coming through finally in unexpected icy cascades. When we became thoroughly wet we went ashore and built a roaring fire to dry out by while breakfasting.

Afterwards the fine, cold rain came driving up the river in white sheets that blotted out all the landscape. It promised to be an all-day affair, so we made everything snug in the boat and started to paddle down. Again we had no idea where we were. We were looking for Carson's, which we knew was the first house of the settlement. We had met Mr. Carson in Edmonton and had been invited to stop should we pass that way.

We had a bad half hour. We could not wrap up and let her go, because the wind blew us back faster than the current carried us down. The wet cold penetrated to the very marrow of our bones, and our hands became too numb to wield the paddles effectively. The wind seemed to be actuated by a personal spite against us. We were dejectedly discussing whether we had ten or thirty miles of this ordeal before us, when we happened to look up, and there stood Carson's above us. Five minutes later we were deliciously steaming in a warm kitchen, beside a range with nickel-plated trimmings!

# CHAPTER XI

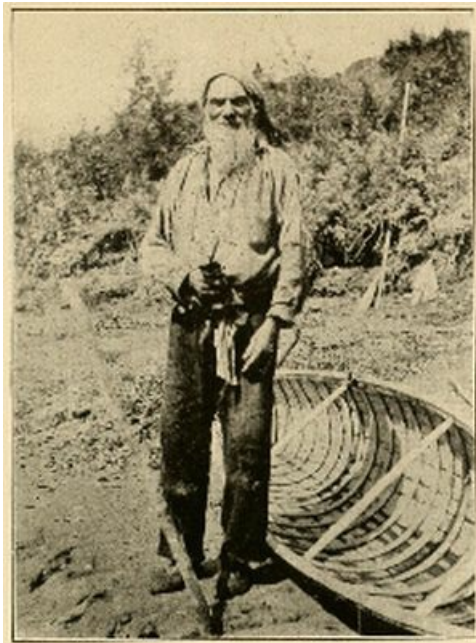
## THE MAJESTY OF THE PEACE

In the settlement at Peace River Crossing we made our nearest approach to civilization en route. Our wide swing around had brought us within four hundred miles of Edmonton again. Here we reached the first post-office of the journey, and in addition we found to our satisfaction that the government had constructed a telegraph line from the outside world. We sent lettergrams home and went into camp to await the answers. Among its other social advantages the Crossing supported a hotel of sorts and a baker. The only practicable route into the country as yet strikes the river here, and the occasional immigrant families toiled through in wagons, just as they crossed the United States prairies in our grandfathers' day.

Among others we made friends here with Sergeant Anderson of the mounted police. He is the hero of the King murder case, the story of which has been often told. The sergeant was a storehouse of useful information. He advised us when making ready to float at night, to cut down a spruce tree, tow it into the middle of the stream, and tie up to it. The submerged branches of the tree obtained such a hold on the water, said he, that no slant of wind could blow us out of the channel while we slept.

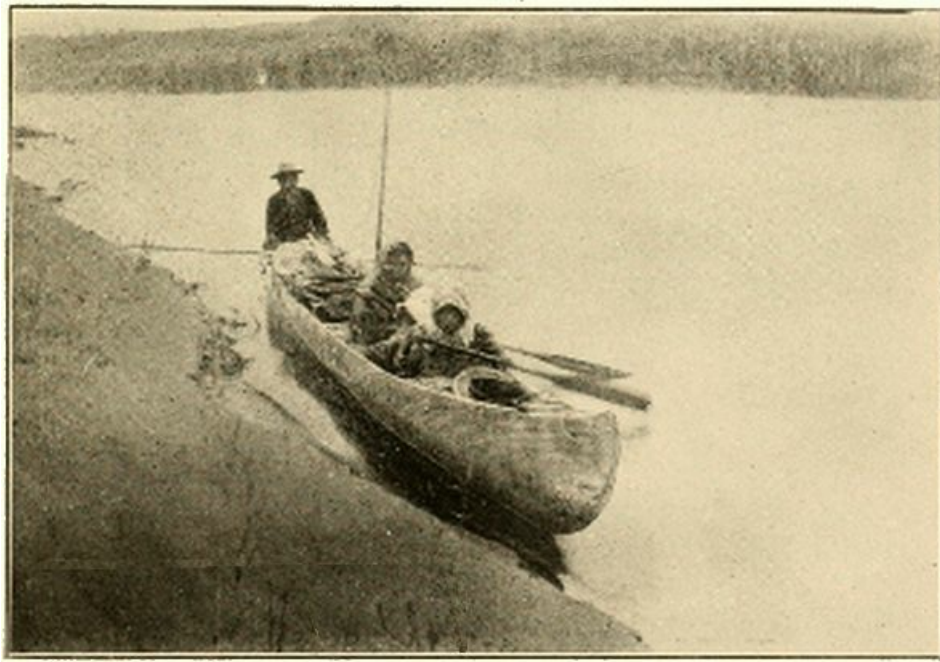
Having received reassuring messages from "outside," we resumed our journey northward at noon on August twelfth. Just above the Crossing the Peace receives its largest tributary, the Big Smoky River, and henceforward it moves down with an increased grandeur. In the course of the miles the current gradually slackens, and the stream becomes more tortuous, swinging widely and superbly, right and left among its hills. There are many islands, all standing high out of the water, and magnificently timbered. Viewed head on they are strikingly like great ships of the line mounting the stream. Fort Vermilion, the next post, lay three hundred miles down stream; the distance between was empty as yet of any white men.

In the course of the first afternoon we idly observed what we thought was a log drifting down the river ahead of us. Two black spots showed above the water, swinging slowly in the eddies. We paid no particular attention until it was suddenly borne in on us that the supposed log was edging toward the shore on our right. We then made to investigate in earnest. Unfortunately we had by this time come almost abreast of the object and had therefore to fight the current in order to make shore. We presently perceived that one black spot was the head and the other the rump of a big bear.



**The most dignified figure was Benjamin Cardinal ninety years old**





**Father, mother and three babies in a dugout with all their worldly goods**



**On the way to the Hay River—An engaging, parklike country, gay with wild asters and golden rod**

He climbed out on the shore without having discovered us. We exclaimed in soft astonishment at the hugeness of him. Neither of us had ever seen his equal in a zoological garden. He looked as big as a bull. The big head, the powerful shoulders, the straight back were all significant; we were looking at our first grizzly. We nearly broke the paddles in the endeavor to get well within range.

At three hundred yards my partner picked up his gun and fired, but the bullet went into the water. The bear turned, presenting a full broadside, and looked us over with calm inquiry. Another shot tore up the ground beneath him, bombarding him with pebbles and sand. He broke for cover, and when we landed we could still hear him panting up the hill above our heads. My partner still mourns his escape, bitterly accusing his own lack of skill. But after putting every ounce of strength into the paddle for a quarter of a mile, it is not so easy to quiet the muscles instantaneously and take aim from a moving boat.

We were living high these few days. The gardens at the Crossing had contributed to our store, and our lunches eaten while we floated in the stream consisted of bread and butter with lettuce, radishes, and young onions, and honey for dessert. It was for dinner this day, which we cooked on the shore below the mouth of the Whitemud River, that the stew of bacon, onions, tomatoes, and rice was evolved. After the shortage of our first days on the river, all this seemed almost too good to be true.

After dinner, according to the sergeant's directions, my partner chopped down a spruce tree so that it would fall in the water. But in his enthusiasm he chose a young monarch of the forest, and we nearly broke our backs trying to tow it out into the main current. Tying up to it at last, we lay down, but not to sleep, for the *Blunderbuss* insisted on playing tag with the tree, and it was hardly soothing just as you were crossing the borderland of consciousness, to hear a sudden scraping like claws on the canvas side of your bed. We finally cast off the tree with heartfelt condemnation and went down without it.

The second day was charming and uneventful. On the third day we had frequent cold squalls of wind and rain, but the accompanying sky-pictures were beautiful enough to distract our attention from the discomfort. The yellowy-gray rain-clouds poked their heads successively over the hills on our left. By and by we became expert in judging whether or not they were disposed to spit on us, and by paddling hard or hanging back sometimes we could dodge. There was an hour in the afternoon when it began to clear that neither of us will ever forget. Overhead the sky was as blue as a turquoise bowl, while around the horizon rose a mass of wildly tumbled and swelling cloud masses shining in the sun like the mountains and plains of a fairer world than ours.

We met an Indian family bound up-stream for the fall hunting; father, mother, and three babies in a dug-out with all their worldly goods, and four canine retainers accompanying them sedately along the shore. The elders only giggled self-consciously when we tried to open conversation and refused to help us out; as for the babies in their gay bonnets, they merely sucked their thumbs and stared.

At midday we came in view of the Cree community on Carcajou point. The people were all on the beach, making and mending canoes for a general migration in search of game. These Indians are of sadly mixed blood, and the result is a striking collection of hybrids. Some are of a strong French cast, while their own brothers may look just as Scotch, or maybe pure savage, and there was one portly gentleman with a goatee who was cast in a Dutch mold. One of the most comic figures was that of an undersized young man clad in a fashionable rain-coat several sizes too big for him. The most dignified person was Benjamin Cardinal, ninety years old, whose picture, together with the canoe he was making appears herewith.

That night, there being no spruce trees convenient when we wanted one, we cut down a poplar, and lashed the *Blunderbuss* alongside its slender stem. It did not serve very well, for we awoke in the night to find ourselves aground. Next day the wind still held strong from the west, and when the river tended in that direction, we had a hard fight against wind and waves. But we actually enjoyed the change, for truth to tell we were a little weary of the ever-smoothly flowing river. We yearned for some rapids to stir the blood.

The fourth night of the journey stands out as one of the most perfect of all the summer. We supped at sunset on the shore of a beautiful long reach of the river. The hills had flattened down thus far north, and across from where we sat a long line of jack-pines made a fantastic silhouette against the sea of pale amber light in which the sun had foundered. High above the trees stretched a line of little clouds like a golden chain, and below hung a single extraordinary star like a pendant. All this was repeated with subtle soft blurrings in the burnished face of the river. The western light lingered endlessly with lovely slow changes. By the time we pushed off and went to bed it had changed from amber to a bowl of jade supported in the curiously carved ebony cup of the jack-pines.

There was not a breath of wind, hence no need of a tree. Again it was beautiful enough to keep us awake long after our time. All the wonders of Heaven were shown to us; rich showers of meteors and a delicate display of Northern Lights. In my partner's notebook I find the entry: "It was so still that it hurt the ears." Later in the night I was awakened by the moon shining in my face, whereupon I sat up and enjoyed it all over again. But I could not for the life of me decide which was up-stream and which down.

In the morning we simultaneously sat up in the boat, conscious of having been disturbed by an uncommon sound. We looked about us and listened for it to repeat itself. The early sunlight on the river was highly exhilarating. We speculated on how far we might be from Fort Vermilion. At last we heard the sound again, a most significant sound in the



wilderness, the tinkle of a horse bell. Then from far off we heard the barking of a dog and made out the end of a fence coming down to the river. We had arrived while we slept.

The first inhabitant of the settlement that we came upon was a very old man fishing from the shore. He did not see us until we were close on him, but with the incuriousness of age he betrayed no surprise at our sudden appearance, or at our odd-looking craft. He was disposed to be affable. His name, he informed us with a particular emphasis, was Robert Henry Smith, *senior*, and all the people that lived as far as we could see up and down the river were his descendants. He then enumerated them in detail. "And me," he concluded with a shake of the head, "me the father of them all, Robert Henry Smith, *senior*, seventy years old, has nothing better to do than hunt fish!"

It transpired that we had landed at the Dominion experimental station at Vermilion, of which one of Mr. Smith's sons-in-law, Robert Jones, was in charge. Upon his invitation we climbed the bank to see what could be grown so far North. The display was astonishing; we saw currant bushes laden with ripe fruit and nearly every kind of vegetable, including asparagus, corn, and tomatoes, as well as the hardier kinds. The corn and the tomatoes do not always ripen fully, but the experiment station is only three years old and the superintendent is confident of getting them yet. The cereals and the leguminous plants are the finest I ever saw; in fact, anything that can be made to grow at all in the North reaches a greater perfection here than elsewhere. This is true, as well, of flowers. The flower-garden of the station was a wonderful blaze of color. The star attraction was a rose-bush in full bloom—and this north of latitude fifty-eight! Mr. Jones presented us with a basket of fresh eggs which were as strange to us as rare and valuable curiosities.

As we proceeded down the river, we passed the large buildings of the Roman Catholic mission and finally hove in view of the Hudson's Bay establishment. This is said to be one of the best-conducted and most profitable posts of the North, which is undoubtedly true, but we were very disappointed with our first view of it.

The trader lived in a big, yellow, clap-boarded house with turning-lathe trimmings, that might have been transported entire from Paterson, N. J., and the big store and warehouse were covered with gaudy signs worthy of a bargain store in the same town. What has become of the dignity of the ancient company! Instead of that noble old mouthful: "The Governor and Company of Gentlemen Adventurers Trading into Hudson's Bay," they now call themselves pertly: "The Great Traders of the Great West!" What a falling off is here!

We were very kindly received at the Fort, and I trust that our friends will not take it amiss that we disapprove of the innovations. Progress is progress, and the Spirit of Romance is always retreating anyway. But fancy the shock of coming upon an electric light plant and mission furniture in the heart of the fur country!

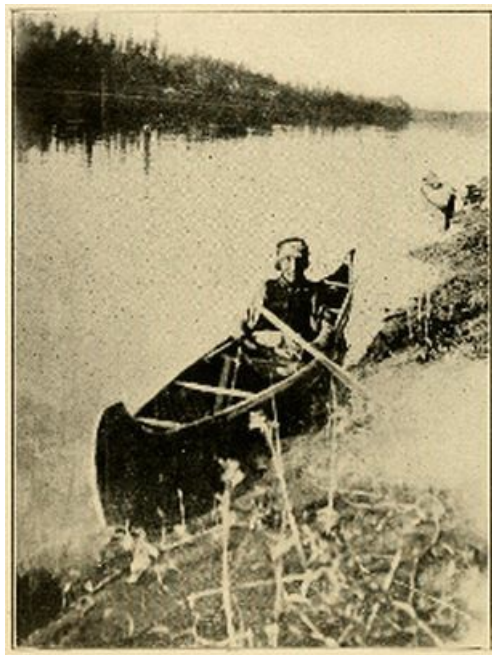
The farming settlement at Vermilion extends for about fifteen miles along both sides of the river. A peculiar interest has long attached to it as the most northerly agricultural community in America. It is true that their fine crops are sometimes touched by early frosts—this happened while we were there, but Mr. Jones said that they had never been completely frozen out during the seventeen years that regular farming has been carried on there. The danger from frost will lessen as a larger territory is opened to cultivation. The land is exceedingly rich. At present the little community is hampered by its isolation. There is no communication except by the steamboat I have mentioned, four trips to the Crossing every summer, or by driving in over the ice in the winter, a trifle of seven hundred miles or so.



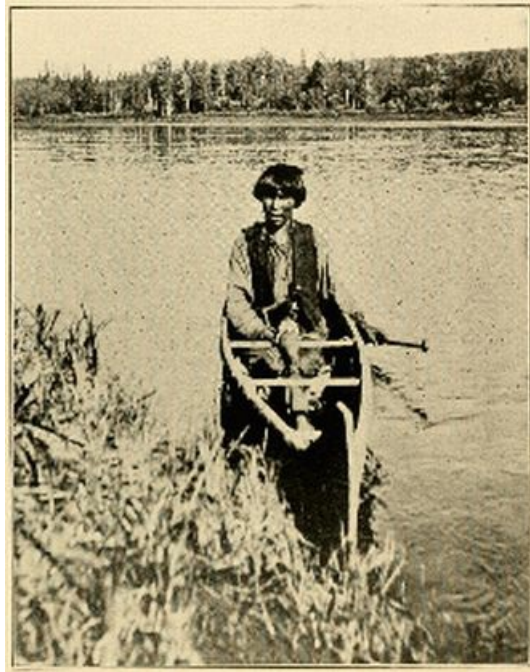
**The Author and Mahtsonza on the Hay River**



**Indians on the Hay River Trail—Aleck on the right**



**Our disreputable friend, Le Convert**



**A Slavi Brave**

The Hudson's Bay Company has established a roller process mill to take care of the grain, and the surplus flour is shipped to the posts still farther north. The mill and the fine modern steamboat are largely due to the energy and enterprise of the trader, Mr. Wilson. In addition to "the Company" establishment, Revillon Freres, "the French outfit," maintain a store across the river, and this year a third outfit came in to compete. At last accounts (January, 1912) a merry fur war was in progress, and the Indians were profiting greatly. All three stores were buying fur at a loss.

Our principal concern at Fort Vermilion was to arrange for a trip to the unexplored Hay River. We learned that the company maintained an outpost at the nearest point on the Hay River during the winters, and there was consequently a good trail. As to the river beyond, or the great falls that we were so anxious to find we could collect only vague and conflicting reports. As far as was known only one party of white men had descended the river before us; this was a three-man outfit bound for the Klondike in 1898. I have since found that Bishop Bompas descended the river in 1872. It was he who discovered and named the Alexandra Falls.

It was now too late in the season to descend right through to Great Slave Lake and return by the Athabasca River. Our only chance of getting home before winter set in was to return to Fort Vermilion after visiting the Falls, always providing that we found them, and take passage on the little Hudson's Bay launch that makes the last trip on the river every fall. Mr. Wilson promised to hold it for us until September 15th.

Everybody tried to dissuade us from the trip and prophesied a catastrophe if we persisted. Grim tales were told us of the animals that had been carried over the Falls unaware, and whose bones were piled beneath. It was said that the Falls gave no warning until it was too late to turn back. Gus Clark, the man who had been out to the Hay River to trade for the Company, was the only one from whom we obtained any real information, and he was more encouraging. He told us all that the Indians had told him, much of which proved to be incorrect, but that was not his fault. We declined to take an Indian down the river with us and never regretted the decision. Mr. Wilson found a man with horses to carry us across the portage, and after duly replenishing our supplies, we left Fort Vermilion on August 21st.



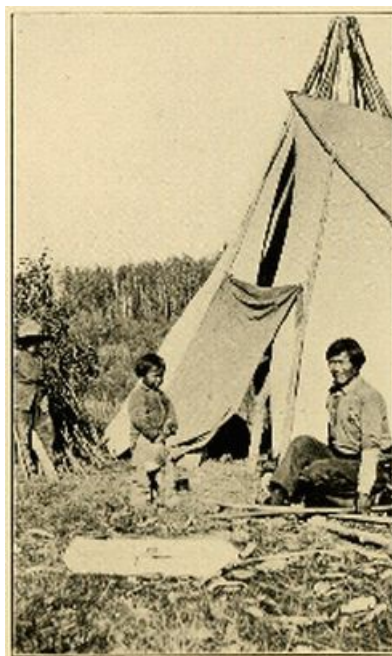
## CHAPTER XII

### THE "BLUNDERBUSS" ON HORSEBACK

Our conductor across the portage to the Hay River was Aleck Ascota, a Beaver Indian. We were not highly impressed by our first sight of him. He was a little fellow of uncertain age, as meager and ill-favored as a gutter snipe, and his ragged clothes would have held two of him. Among the white men at the Fort he moved with a whipped air, but on the trail when he discovered that we had no disposition to browbeat him, he plucked up a small spirit. All our conversation had to be carried on in signs, which came more natural to him than to us; we could never quite rid ourselves of the feeling that if we said a thing often enough and loud enough he must comprehend at last. He was accustomed to having white men do the lordly, and we who had never had anybody to wait on us had some difficulty at first in living up to his ideals.

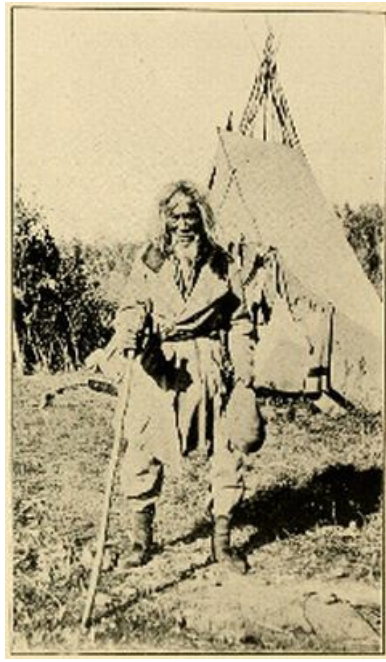


The Hay River and the *Serpent*





## He brought in a rabbit while we were there



**Tatateecha Cadetloon, the patriarch of the tribe**

He had three horses. The gelding he rode was an animal of no particular character, but the other two who carried packs kept us amused with their canny ways. We christened them Entero and Lizzie. The latter was the clown of the troupe; when her pack became loosened she would sit down in the trail like a dog until it was fixed, and we swore that she used to go to sleep en route. At any rate she would fall behind a mile or more, and then suddenly come tearing along the trail, whinnying wildly for her beloved companion. Ordinarily she lumped along as if half dead, but it was a shallow pretense; twice for no reason at all she ran away, scattering our belongings widely over the landscape.

We walked ahead, making the pace. After our long confinement in the *Blunderbuss* it was delightful to travel afoot. Water views necessarily deal only in large effects, but the fields are painted in ever-varying detail. In the boat, moreover, our eyes were always unconsciously fixed on our course ahead, while here they were free to roam at will. After leaving behind the last log hut with its field of grain, we struck through an engaging parklike country, stretches of prairie alternating with groves of white-stemmed poplars. The meadows were gay with the purple of wild aster, the gold of golden-rod, and the lovely pinks of painter's brush. Everywhere was a rank growth of pea-vine, indicative of a rich soil. This was supposed to be a wagon road, but for the most part it showed only the single track of a pack-trail.

A pack-trail makes an appeal to something very deep in us; who can stumble on one without a strong desire to follow to the end? These narrow paths, beaten into the earth like a shallow furrow, wandering widely over the prairies and stealing through the forests, are among the most truly American things we have left, and the oldest. Having once been marked by use, years of neglect will not efface them; they last until the earth is plowed. They never run quite straight, even on the flattest plains, yet the breadth of them, three and a half hands, is as unvarying as a piece of woven ribbon.

After "spelling" twice during the day, we made camp beside a little river across from an Indian village, Aleck's village. This was a disorderly, picturesque quadrangle of teepees filled with galloping horses, barking dogs, and screaming children. All the winter goods, snowshoes, dog-sledges, and furs were slung up on vertical poles out of harm's way. After supper Aleck's children came splashing unconcernedly across the river—it was all one to them whether they were wet or dry—to pay us a visit. The eldest boy carried the baby in a sling on his back. It was a deplorable little party; dirty, diseased, and hideously ugly; they had not had even half a show in the world.

At sunrise when Aleck turned up we were still asleep. We traveled thirty miles this day and camped in a pretty meadow higher up on the same stream. In the long twilight we sat over the fire talking sign language with Aleck. He asked us where we had come from. That was easy; down the big river from the high mountains. We asked him how far we were from the Hay River. He closed his eyes, let his head fall, and then held up two fingers. Two sleeps! He evinced great

interest in my partner's note-book. By indicating the route over which we had come and pointing to the book, we tried to convey that it was a record of the journey. He shook his head. We then gave him a spirited pantomime of Lizzie's running away and made it clear it was written in the book. He got that. Taking a great swallow of tea, he wanted to know if we were going to write that down.

The country was uniformly flat except for a single hill running north and south that was in view nearly the whole way. On the third day we crossed the imperceptible divide, and thereafter the streams flowed westward. The ground was stonier and less fertile on this side. We passed two pretty lakes drained by a smoothly flowing river that wound its crooked way through meadows of grass waist high. We christened it the Meander. A party of Indians bound for the Hay River rode with us a while, our combined cavalcades making a picturesque sight on the trail.

This was a much more laborious method of travel than by water. Three times a day the horses had to be unladen and turned out to graze; and three times a day they had to be caught again, saddled, and packed. All this of course in addition to the usual routine of getting wood, building the fire, cooking, and cleaning up. Aleck had but little science in packing, and the rolled-up *Blunderbuss* was his despair. It continually worked loose, and much of the time poor Entero was painfully trying to maintain his equilibrium with his pack over one ear. Moreover the long end of the bundle hit him over the crupper at every step, finally producing a lump that caused his master great anxiety.

To my chagrin I developed a case of *mal de raquette*, or snowshoe sickness, on the trail. True, I had not been wearing snowshoes, but the long tramp in moccasins produced the same result. It is an affection of the tendons that run up beside the shin-bone. The leg swells above the ankle and becomes hotly inflamed. It gives no trouble when the leg is in rest, but in walking! And I had to maintain my three miles and a half an hour. I found I did best at the head of the procession where I was obliged to step out smartly.

At the end of the fourth day after a weary march, we suddenly commenced to descend, and presently the trees opening up, we saw the sun going down over the river of our desires. The sight repaid us for all our labor. It was a deep and smoothly flowing brown stream, say three hundred yards wide. It swung around a wide bend below us and disappeared with an alluring promise. The banks were green and charming. It was a real river worthy of any man's journey, and we were satisfied.

At our feet there was an extensive flat through which the Meander made its way to join the larger stream. On either side of the Meander was a line of tepees, each with a curl of smoke issuing from the peak into the still evening air. Our passage through the village had all the effect of a circus. We camped a little way beyond, and throughout the evening received the natives in relays. They squatted silently beside our fire taking note of all our household arrangements with an earnestness that was embarrassing until we became accustomed to it.

These Indians were much better physical specimens than those we had seen nearer the Fort. There were many beautiful children among them. They are of the Etchareottine tribe, "people dwelling in the shelter," a name referring to their ancient custom of building their lodges behind the dense willows that line their rivers. They are of a mild and unwarlike disposition, good hunters and scrupulously honest. They have adopted the white man's dress, which spoils their picturesqueness, but in other respects they still lead the life of their forefathers with very little change. The stock is rapidly running out, largely on account of inter-marriage. By the hardier tribes they have always been called the Slave Indians, or Slavis.

As one travels north the Indians approach more and more to the Mongol type. Thus the Slavis are shorter than the Crees, with broader, flatter faces, and eyes tending to obliquity. Their original habitat was around Lesser Slave Lake, but the Crees, a stronger race, have little by little shouldered them westward, as the white men are in turn shouldering the Crees. Very little is known about the Etchareottine or Slavis, their language is difficult for us, but they retain their ancient ways to a considerable degree, and a study of this rapidly disappearing tribe would repay an anthropologist.

As to popular literature on the redskins in general, as everybody knows, it is rather misleading. This is principally because the writers (including some famous names) insist on applying our thoughts and feelings to them, whereas their fascination for us lies, not in their likeness to us, but in their differences. For instance, love between the sexes which occupies such an overwhelming place in our literature is very much less important to the Indian. His overmastering passion is a love of the chase, together with, in the case of most tribes, a love of warfare. His susceptibility to feeling of any kind is less than the white man's, and he requires a stronger stimulus. Hence his love of gambling, his fanatic dances, and his cruelty.

His very simplicity of nature is baffling to us. Occasional individuals of the Indian type are to be found in our race. They are easily recognizable as such, and they afford us our best standards of measuring the real thing. We all know the man. He is of course of a lean, hard, active habit of body and a temperament inclining to the Saturnine. He is the reverse of what you would call a man of feeling, and he sedulously conceals the display of what feelings he has. He is above all liberty-loving, and restraint and discipline of any kind are intolerable to him. He is stubborn in his ways, that is to say, instinctively resistant to outside influences, but he is keenly sensitive to ridicule. Such a man will nearly always be found to possess a genuinely poetic appreciation of nature and natural phenomena. On the other hand, his mental processes are simple to the point of childishness.

Such is the Indian. It may sound like an unfavorable portrait, but it is not intended as such. It is an admirable character with its qualities of strength, hardness, resolution, and courage, but it is *not* a sentimental one. The reason why the Indians are so attractive to the young males of our race is really very easy to understand.

A good deal of nonsense has also been written about their woodcraft. The Indians have no special senses. It is true that the five that we possess in common are generally in better working order with them, but that is because we have dulled ours with artificial ways of living. There is no respect in which a white man with the same training may not equal an Indian. They have no faculty of generalization and but small powers of deduction. Their surprising sureness in the woods is due simply to an acquired knowledge of the place.

It should be borne in mind that the Indian's radius is small, and he becomes passionately attached to his own little country. He learns to know every mound and every tree like the words of an often-read book. It is his sole concern in life. Imagine a man who had but one book to read and who did nothing but read and re-read it all his life long, and the Indian's familiarity with his own woods and plains can be comprehended.

In a strange country, however, though it may adjoin his own, he is more helpless than a white man. Their ability to follow tracks through the bush, and more especially over a grassy plain, and all that they can read in the tracks is truly astonishing to a man from the pavements, but I have seen white men become as expert.

In the Meander we found a dug-out belonging to the French outfit, that we had been told we might use if it was there. A dug-out was more suitable for poling or tracking up-stream than the clumsy *Blunderbuss*, and I therefore made it clear to Aleck that our boat was to go back. Aleck among his own people was very different from Aleck alone among the whites. He pointed to the lump it had raised on Entero's back and sullenly refused. Here was a quandary. We meant to walk back ourselves, and if he did not take the boat it must be abandoned. It is difficult to deal with insubordination in the sign language. I strove to maintain a firm air and said no more.

In the morning he brought up a dozen of his friends to assist in the argument. They squatted beside the fire and in turn undertook to demonstrate the impossibility of using the dugout. One said with his fingers that we could reach the Falls in two days with our boat, whereas the dugout would take six. Another showed us in vivid pantomime how rotten the dug-out was and how it would go to pieces in the rapids. This was our first intimation that there were any rapids. Aleck himself essayed to prove the rottenness by jabbing his pen-knife through the bottom, but we stopped that.

We discussed the matter between ourselves, taking care to conceal our state of indecision from the camp-fire group. The dug-out was an old one and half-full of water, but my partner said Aleck had filled it on the sly. It was indeed rotten; the bottom was like a sponge, and one could pick off large slices of the soft wood. On the other hand we were loathe to abandon our corpulent little friend, the *Blunderbuss*, in the wilderness, and we hated to be bluffed by a parcel of redskins. There seemed to be a thin skin of sound wood on the outside of the dugout, and in the end we decided to take it.

Dumping out the water, we started to load up, disregarding the exclamations and the darkly prophetic shakes of the head from the party above. We afterwards rolled the *Blunderbuss* in a more convenient bundle and showed Aleck a better way to pack it. He preserved a sullen, walled expression and refused to look. I then bethought me of the effect of writing a letter. To these simple souls there is a kind of magic in conveying your thoughts by a few marks upon paper.

I unconcernedly sat down with paper and pencil, and they all became sharply attentive. I wrote Mr. Wilson, briefly setting forth the circumstances and requesting him not to pay Aleck unless he brought the boat back. I then folded the sheet in the form of an envelope and sealed it with a wafer of adhesive tape. Soft exclamations of astonishment traveled around the attentive circle. I gave the note to Aleck, making him understand who it was for. He took it as if it were red hot, and I knew from his changed expression that he would take the boat. And he did.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE UNEXPLORED RIVER

Immediately afterwards we pushed off full of fearful and delightful anticipations of our unknown journey. Here we had no maps and no reliable information; some had said it was but one day's journey to the Falls, while others had placed it as high as six. Knowing the position of Great Slave Lake into which the Hay River empties and the distance from the lake back to the Falls, and allowing for the windings of the river, we guessed that we had about one hundred and eighty miles to go, and this or a little more proved to be right.

The dug-out was more than twice as long as the *Blunderbuss* and less than one-half her width. We christened our new craft the *Serpent*. We had to learn to steer all over again, for whereas the *Blunderbuss* spun blithely on her center under a twist of the paddle, the *Serpent* obstinately held her course. The problem was further complicated by the *Serpent's* warped disposition; her bow pointed to starboard while her stern was making port. It was several days before we could tease her into going straight, and we never got over the feeling that she would dump us out if we spoke too loud.

The river was very beautiful in its rich summer dress. It was just the right size for a voyage such as ours, big enough to command respect, small enough to draw us into intimacy with the shores. During the first day it opened out before us in successive smooth reaches, with banks of a uniform height of twenty feet or so. The bordering country was densely wooded with jack-pine and poplar, and graceful willows decorated the inside of every bend. Like all the prairie rivers the Hay is subject to a considerable rise and fall during the season, but here there are no unsightly stretches of mud, for as fast as the water goes down the banks are mantled with the tender green of goose-grass.

Thus the characteristic picture that met our eyes as we looked around a bend was of a smooth, brown current moving between these velvety green slopes, while along the edge of the bank above, as if set out by a gardener, stretched a line of berry bushes already crimsoned by the first frosts, and the rich, dark green of the pines enframed the whole. Here and there in the river where the composition seemed to require it, a perfect island was planted to satisfy the eye.

We landed for lunch on a convenient bar of stones beneath the bank. The pretty green banks I should explain were rather mushy to step out on. While we were stewing dried apples and frying flap-jacks, a birch bark canoe unexpectedly appeared around the bushes. At the sight of us the solitary occupant almost collapsed with astonishment, and sat staring with saucer eyes, muttering to himself in his own lingo. There is something very flattering in making such a strong impression wherever you appear; by the time we had met a few more Hay River Indians we began to feel very superior.

It was a young fellow of twenty or thereabout. He finally found the courage to land, and approaching us held out his hand to be shaken. He brought wood for the fire and sat down beside it, eyeing us sidewise meanwhile, like a child that is forming its own conclusions. Suddenly he laid his hand on his stomach and a heavy groan broke from him. We asked if he were hungry, and he replied by pointing to his mouth, shaking his head, then closing his eyes, and holding up three fingers.

Nothing to eat for three days! Our hearts were touched. We had no bread baked, but we gave him what scraps of hard-tack we had left and filled a little bag of flour for him, so that he could bake some for himself. He didn't appear to care for the hard-tack, so we fried some bacon for him to eat with it. He nibbled a little and put it aside. We had heard how men became so hungry that their stomachs refused food, and we became more and more concerned for him. We tempted him with flap-jacks and apple-sauce, which he accepted, but put aside on his plate with what else we had given him.

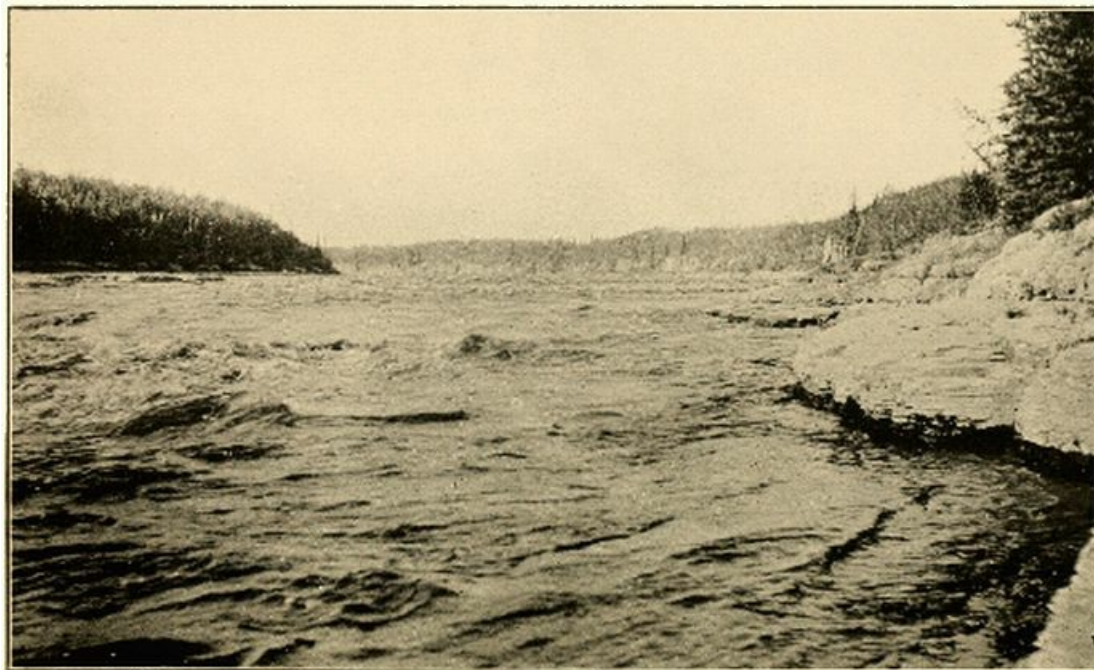
Suddenly he got up and, hastily embarking without a look toward us, set off down-stream. This was strange, because we had understood him to say that he was trying to struggle up to the cache, but we decided that he must have a starving companion, perhaps a wife or a child, below that must be fed before he would eat himself. Such was his hurry that he left his axe behind. We shouted after him and held it up. He motioned to us to bring it along when we came.

When we had finished our own flap-jacks, which were never a complete success, we followed. Hidden among the willows below we found three graceful canoes, each with a solitary paddler waiting for us as still as mice and with eyes full of strained expectancy like children at the circus. It was no great wonder, for the last time white men had been seen on their river the young men of this day were little boys. Our starving man was on the outside of the three, and alas! for our faith in human nature, they all had moose meat, rabbits, and fresh caught fish, much better food than we. The beggar



stared at us as wondering and unashamed as a baby and never so much as offered us a fish. We laughed at the joke on ourselves, shook hands all round, and went on.

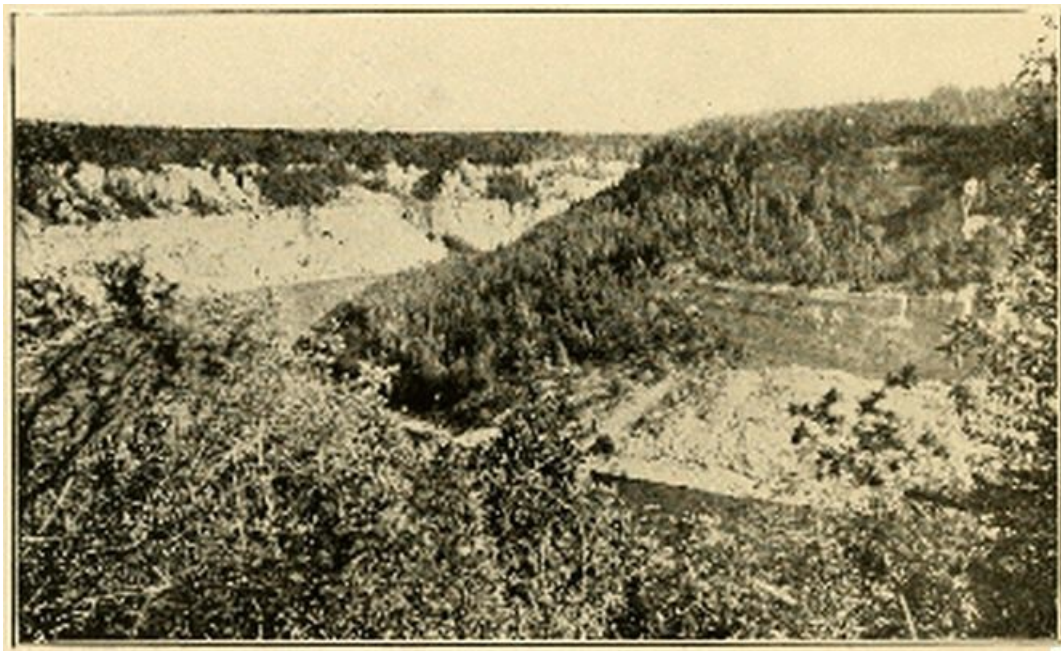
Farther down we saw an old canoeist pursuing a musk-rat under the willows. Seeing us, he abandoned the chase and hailed us with shouts of laughter. When we reached him he laughed and exclaimed and laughed again, pawing us all over, and refusing to let go our canoe. His face was as wrinkled and dirty as a floorcloth and very much the same color; around his head he had twisted a strip of cotton in the style lately so popular among our ladies, sometimes called a "headache band." He jabbered away, telling us all his hopes and fears no doubt, of which we were not the wiser by a single word. The Slavis talk a most uncouth dialect that for the pronunciation seems to require a deal of saliva. We made out that our friend was called Le Couvert, or the Blanket. When we tried him with our talk, he violently shook his head and pulled at his ears, exactly like a dog when he gets water in his head. We had literally to tear ourselves away.



**Looking up one of the Rapids in the Hay**



**It opened up before us in successive, smooth reaches**



**The opposite wall rose out into a bold promontory around which the river swung**

We made about fifty miles on the first day and camped under some tepee poles on a fine site in a sharp elbow of the stream. On this night (August 25th) descended the first hard frost of the season. We awoke covered with rime and found our shoe-packs frozen solid. A thick white mist rose from the river, through which the rays of the sun struggled faintly; the branches of the trees crackled like musketry as the air began to stir. We stole down, hugging the shore and imagining that we heard the roar of the Falls at every bend. We were ready to leap ashore at the slightest warning.

This part of the river pursued a course as crooked as Archimedes' screw. Within a few hours we counted twenty-five right and left bends, all so much alike that I would defy anyone, even after long experience on the river, to tell them apart. On the outside of each bend the current cut under the high bank until the pine trees along the edge fell in and lay with their branches tangled in the water, waiting for a freshet to sweep them down, whereupon a new lot would fall in their places. Meanwhile on the other side of each bend the busy river threw up the sand that it had dug out above in wide bars. These bends were all uniform, half way round to the right, then back to the left, like the grand chain figure of the lancers. This will go on I suppose, the river becoming crookeder and crookeder until the fine day arrives when it breaks through to the other side of all the bends, and has to start all over.

We met several Indians in the course of the day, none of whom is worthy of especial mention except Jimmie. At sunset he came paddling out from behind an island, with his little boy sitting in the canoe behind him. Jimmie had a magnificent head of hair cut a la Buster Brown, and an open and intelligent countenance that attracted us strongly. He was a gentleman and kept his astonishment well in hand. We conversed in polite signs. We told him we were bound for the great Falls, and were afterward coming back. He volunteered his services as a guide and quietly let the matter drop when we regretfully declined. He told us we were still two sleeps from the Falls and that he would show us the best camping-place for the coming night. Of all we met, Jimmie was the only Indian who asked us for nothing.

During all this we were paddling side by side, Jimmy glancing sidewise at our outfit and we at his. It was beneath our dignity to appear to race with a redskin, but as he slyly hit up the pace, we could hardly let him run away from us. Soon we were fairly flying down the river, all smiling unconcernedly and making believe it was just our ordinary rate. All these Indians sit flat in the center of their canoes, using a short paddle, which they swing continually from hand to hand in order to keep a straight course. We had criticized this style among ourselves, but we had to take it back after meeting Jimmie. He walked away from us. It is true, our boat was about ten times as heavy as his, but there were two of us.

We liked the keen and business-like way of Jimmie's searching the bank as he went. Clearly he was a good hunter, and the little boy who sat behind him so quietly was receiving no mean education. Although it was a chill night this child had nothing on but a cotton shirt opening over his bare chest, a pair of overalls, and moccasins. Yet he did not appear to be sensible of the cold.

Jimmie met a friend down-stream and the two of them waited for us to come up. Jimmie indicated that this was the place to camp, and he made the little boy get out and cut willow branches to lay in the mud for us to step out on. Then he and his friend bade us good-night, as we thought, and pushed off. However, they only turned around in the stream and hung concealed under the willows just below, whence they watched us sharply.

When we had landed all our stuff and made the dug-out secure for the night, they paddled up and joined us again. At the time we were unable to comprehend this maneuver, but it has occurred to me since that they did not consider it polite to land until we had gone ashore. We noticed of all of them when we camped in company, that even though their food was ready before ours was cooked, they would not begin to eat until we had first taken a mouthful.

We camped beside a generous fire in a grove of magnificent and fragrant pines. The little boy skinned and cleaned a rabbit, and impaling it on a sharpened stick, stuck the stick in the ground inclining toward the fire. Half of it was charred black and the rest nearly raw. Though it was all the supper they had, Jimmie pressed it on us warmly. The other man devoured a great piece of unwholesome looking flesh, after allowing it to toast for a few minutes as a mere formality.

Afterwards the silent child rolled up in a tiny blanket and lay down with his little moccasins protruding toward the fire. Jimmie patted him kindly. He was delighted when we noticed the boy. We sat around the fire smoking and pursuing a somewhat difficult conversation. After several false starts amid much laughter, Jimmie understood that we were trying to find out his name, and he told us: Jimmie Etchoogah. The other man as near as we could get it was Charlbogin Etzeeah. The name of the little boy has escaped me. When we awoke in the morning they had already gone.

On the third day in the middle of the afternoon the current increased its pace, and the invariable dirt banks suddenly gave place to low walls of a curious conglomerate rock, full of fossils. Our hearts began to beat, for we thought we were upon the Falls. We came to the first rapid, and after making sure that there was quiet water below, shot it without trouble. We called it the Grumbler, from the curious sound it made as of an angry man muttering under his breath. Below it, despite our hopes, the river widened out and proceeded as smoothly as ever. We figured that we covered close on seventy miles to-day.

The day that followed was a strenuous one. We now met a little rapid on nearly every bend, and six miles after breaking camp we were stopped by a bad one, so bad that we were afraid to risk the rotten dug-out in its big billows. Instead, we laboriously let her down on a line close to the shore. I should say that the *Serpent* was made out of the trunk of a giant cotton-wood, and we could scarcely lift her between us. The rocks ran out into innumerable reefs, and such was the damage to her bottom we decided it would be safer thereafter, as well as a world less trouble, to run whatever we came to.

One rapid followed another all day. Sometimes our pulses would quicken at the sight of the waves leaping in the sun a mile ahead, but more often we came upon them suddenly around a bend. We no sooner got through one than the roar of the next smote on our ears. Each rapid offered its own set of difficult and fascinating problems; each one scared us thoroughly in the prospect and exhilarated us in the descent. We landed at the top in each case, walking down the shore to pick our channel and to make sure of quiet water below. It was always our endeavor to steer a middle course between the big waves of the main channel and the rocks at either side. We had many a close shave.

As this went on we became anxious. It was easy enough to go down, but how about the coming back? We had to return to the Fort by the fifteenth or stay in until mid-winter. Moreover we had had bad luck as to fish and game and were already upon short rations of bacon. At lunch-time at the head of a rapid we debated whether it would be better to leave the dug-out and make a dash down the shore with light packs. But we knew not what obstacles might lie in the way of a land journey. We finally decided to continue down the river to the end of that day, come what might, and then, if there was no sign of the Falls, to turn back next morning.

At the head of each rapid there was a moment of painful indecision while we were deciding which side to land on. Of course if we landed on the wrong side it meant a long pull back against the current and crossing to the other side. Shortly after making our decision to go on we came to something worse than any we had passed. It roared away down out of sight around a bend. We delayed a second too long in choosing a landing and got nipped in the current. Then we had to come about and paddle like fiends for the shore. We made it, but the instant she touched, the force of the current overturned her. However, we sprang out and saved everything dry except a paddle that was swept away.

My partner stayed with the boat while I made my way down the shore. I was very depressed for I could see nearly a mile

of it ahead, and there was no channel on either side or in the middle; the rocks stuck up everywhere, tearing the water to tatters. My own way was none too easy, for in places the current washed the smooth base of the rocky walls, and I had to wade up to my middle, clawing at the rock, until I rounded the point. The farther I went the worse the rapids became. Even if we did get down, there remained the problem of getting up again.

It was bitter to have to confess defeat at this late day. Over and over without success I tried to contrive some scheme to spin out our scanty grub. All this time I was rounding the outside of a wide bend, and the view ahead was consequently opening up yard by yard. Presently I became aware that there was something new there. The river was blocked by a rock wall sliced off as by a knife. Only in one other place had I ever seen such a smooth, straight face of rock—in the gorge below Niagara. My heart gave a great jump, and game leg and all, I started to run.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE GRAND GOAL OF OUR LABORS

As I ran over the stones and the bend opened up, soon there was no further room for doubt; before me there was no more river; it stepped off into space; it ceased to be. I moderated my pace to enjoy the thing in anticipation. The river here was bordered by a flat terrace of rock, manifestly overflowed at certain seasons, and pitted all over by the action of the water. Approaching the brink, the rapid smoothed its wild tumbling a little, as if gathering its forces for the great leap, and over the edge itself it slipped smoothly.

In the midst of our discouragement we had been upon the very goal! But it was worth the anxiety to be surprised like that. In describing how we were caught in the current above I do not mean to convey that we were almost carried over the falls, for as a matter of fact there were several back-waters alongshore in which we could have landed. Indeed, out of one of these eddies I rescued the paddle we had lost overboard.

I stopped a few feet from the brink to enjoy the superb prospect of the gorge below. It was true that the cataract muffled its own voice; even here I could scarcely hear it. After the invariable flatness and tameness of all the country above, this sudden cleft in the world impressed one stunningly. It had the same dramatic effect as the passion of a quiet man. Again, I can only compare it to Niagara on a smaller scale, but Niagara as it must have burst on La Salle's eyes, sans tourist-hotels, power-houses, and railway bridges. Its charm was in its insolent wildness.

As at Niagara the bordering cliffs rose perpendicularly, as if hewn by a single mighty stroke, but here they were of cream-colored stone instead of gray. Fragments fallen from above in the course of ages buttressed each cliff along its base, making a steep and narrow shore, which supported a line of spruces. These spruces, protected from the winds of the world and ceaselessly watered by the spray of the Falls, grew to a superb height and perfection of outline. The dark, rich green of the branches made a striking and harmonious combination with the creamy-yellow rock behind. Between the walls the brown river went down, embossed with a rococo design in soapy foam.

Then I went to the extreme edge and looked over. A deep, dull roar smote on my ears, and I became aware of the trembling of the rock. What can I say of what I saw? I was bewildered and satisfied. All the way we had feared perhaps that only a cascade wilder than any above would be our reward, or perhaps a wide, straggling series of falls. It was neither. The entire river gathered itself up, and made a single plunge into deep water below. The river narrowed down to less than five hundred feet, and the volume of water was tremendous. The drop was about one hundred feet. The water was of the color of strong tea, and as it descended it drew over its brown sheen a lovely, creamy fleece of foam.

After my first look I remembered my partner remorsefully. He should have been there beside me. But after looking for the Falls at every bend above, this was the one place we had not expected to find them, for we had been told positively that there was no rapid immediately above the big drop. I hastened back as I had come, but it was a long way, and I must have been gone an hour and a half in all. He was sitting beside the *Serpent* nursing his knees disconsolately. I could not resist the temptation to draw a long face, and shake my head.

"No go, old man," I said lugubriously. "There's more than a mile of it, and no channel!"

His face became gloomier and gloomier.

"Besides," I added, "at the foot of it, there's a hundred foot drop."

The reaction was comical to see. His jaw dropped, and then seeing that I was laughing at him, he threw up his cap and shouted. We shook hands on it and foolishly clapped each other on the back. Then stopping only long enough to pull the *Serpent* out of harm's way, we hastened back to have another look.

Upon looking around us, we discovered that by great good luck we had landed at the end of the regular Indian portage. A trail through the bush began only a few yards from where our boat was lying. It gave evidence of not having been used for several years, and amidst the down timber we lost it more than once. Nevertheless it was better than wading around the promontories alongshore. As we went we broke branches to show the way back. The trail passed around the Falls, most of its travelers apparently not having been interested in the wonders of nature. When we came opposite the deep, dull voice of the place, we broke through the trees, and slid down the bank to the terrace of rock overhanging the brink.



There we sat prepared to gaze our fill.

The second sight of the Falls struck no less hard than the first. You have the feeling in approaching again that it cannot possibly be as fine as you expect, and behold! when you look it is even more wonderful. Imagine, if you can, millions upon millions of gallons of root beer with its rich creamy foam forever pouring into that great hole in the world without filling it. Had we had the time we could have sat for hours merely watching the tight little curls of spray that puffed up like jets of smoke out of the face of the falling water, and then spreading and descending, slowly merged into the white cloud that rolled about the foot of the Falls. This cloud itself billowed up in successive undulations like full draperies, only to spread out and vanish in the sunshine. We launched a log in the current, and watched it precipitate itself over the brink, imagining for the moment that it was the *Serpent* with us in it.

Though grub was so short, we quickly made up our minds to lay over the next day at the Falls and photograph it from every possible point of view. We examined the gorge to see the possibilities of approach from below, and found that the rocky shores I have spoken of would bring us within a hundred feet of the cataract. Nearer than that the walls of rock rose sheer and smooth out of the deep water. The Indians have a fable of a cave behind the wall of water that is heaped with whitening bones. That may be, but at least at this stage of water there was no human possibility of finding out.

The Alexandra Falls were discovered by Bishop Bompas on a tour of evangelization among the Indians in 1872 and named by him in honor of the then Princess of Wales. He estimated the height at a hundred and fifty feet. In 1887 Mr. R. G. McConnell of the Canadian Geological Survey, surveyed the Hay River from its mouth back to the Falls. He gives the height at only eighty-five feet, as measured from a single reading of the aneroid barometer. Knowing of Mr. McConnell's visit we made no attempt to measure the drop, but after reading his report I wish that we had, because the height appeared greater to us than he gives. On the other hand it is not unlikely that the thought is fathered by the wish.

Of the formation of the Falls, Mr. McConnell says: "They owe their origin to precisely the same cause as that which produces the famous falls at Niagara, viz., the superposition of hard limestone on soft shales, and the consequent undermining and destruction of the former effected by the rapid erosion and removal of the supporting beds. I was surprised to find that the rate of retrocession, dating both falls from the same period, has been almost identical. The Niagara Falls are generally regarded as having receded six miles since they were brought into existence by the elevation of the country at the end of the glacial period, and on Hay River the distance between the point at which the limestone band makes its first appearance and the lower falls is almost exactly five miles, and between the same point and the upper falls six miles. The equality of work done by the two streams is, however, a mere coincidence, as the factors in the two cases are entirely different. The volume of water which falls over the precipice at Niagara is many times greater than that carried by Hay River, while its erosive power is somewhat less on account of its somewhat greater purity."

We camped that night on top of the bank above where our boat lay. We found a small clearing there, that from the difference in the size of the trees that had been cut and those immediately surrounding, we judged to be between twelve and fifteen years old. The little trees had been cut with strokes from one side only as white men chop, and we guessed that we were upon the spot where our last white predecessors had made camp in the year of the Klondike rush. Clearing the underbrush for our fire, in the center of this open space we found half buried in the earth the rotting, half-burned logs of the last fire that had been made there.

In searching for wood near camp we stumbled on a grim human memento in the form of a grave. Heavy logs had been laid across it to keep the coyotes from digging, and a circle of rough-hewn palings planted all around, most of which had rotted through and fallen over. I examined all the palings for a mark either carved or written, and since there was none we judged it an Indian grave. Long ago the Indians from the south met their northern brethren at this portage to trade meat for furs.

Bright and early next morning we were back at the Falls. They face north by east, and the sun rising over the edge of the gorge shone on the falling water with its fleece of foam in dazzling splendor. There was now a vivid rainbow athwart the white cloud below. I have not in the least succeeded in conveying a just impression of the beauty of the place. I have not mentioned that all the second growth poplar which thickly bordered the stream above the Falls was now dressed in gorgeous orange and red. The falling water, the sky, the vivid shores, all this wealth of color bathed in the exquisite delicacy of morning light in the North added another to the gallery of pictures that we will return to in delighted spirit until we die.

For the first hour or so after the sun mounted the Heavens the conditions were ideal for photography, but to the west a

heavy bank of cloud threatened the afternoon, and after making a few snap-shots at the Falls, the rapids above, and the gorge below, we hastened to explore a way to descend into the gorge.

Regaining the portage trail we had not traveled far upon it, when we were astonished to come upon a ruinous log shack. After a cabin in the woods has been abandoned to a few winters it is hard to tell whether it is fifteen or fifty years old. I do not know if this shack was built by our Klondikers; it looked much older, but it had been used by them. The roughly-hewn door was comparatively new and unweathered, and on the inside as fresh as if it had been written earlier that very day were two notes in pencil. Evidently the party had divided forces, and this was their rendezvous. The notes were unaddressed, undated, and unsigned. The first note as I remember it ran,

"The mice got in the flour. Be sure to spring-pole the bags hereafter. Waited for you two days. J—— but you're slow!"

Beneath was written the answer.

"C—— but you're quick! Had a hell of a time with the canoe. She broke in every rapid, and we had to stop and fix her."

These light-hearted and profane speeches came with a queer effect down the lapse of years there in the howling wilderness.

As we made along the trail we could not resist the temptation every now and then of pushing through the bush to the edge of the gorge for another look at the Falls. All along the edge were ominous fissures, where great pieces of the cliff had detached themselves preparatory to plunging down. From the look of the gorge one would think it a matter of daily change instead of the slow work of ages. We could not help but step very gingerly on these dangerous islands, though there was small likelihood of our pygmy weight disturbing the balance of such masses. From one of the apparently teetering monoliths we obtained our most complete picture of the cataract.

The trail cut across a wide bend of the gorge, and as we proceeded, it became ever farther to the edge. The way led over a flat, wooded plain, marshy in spots, and elsewhere carpeted with delicious wild cranberries. We held to the trail for a mile or more, forbearing any excursions, but then we began to wonder if it was necessary to go so far in order to come back again, and once more we struck through the trees to see if we could not find a break in the cliff that would let us down to the bottom. As we approached the edge a renewed great roaring of water struck on our ears. We looked at each other, speculating on what was saving for us now.

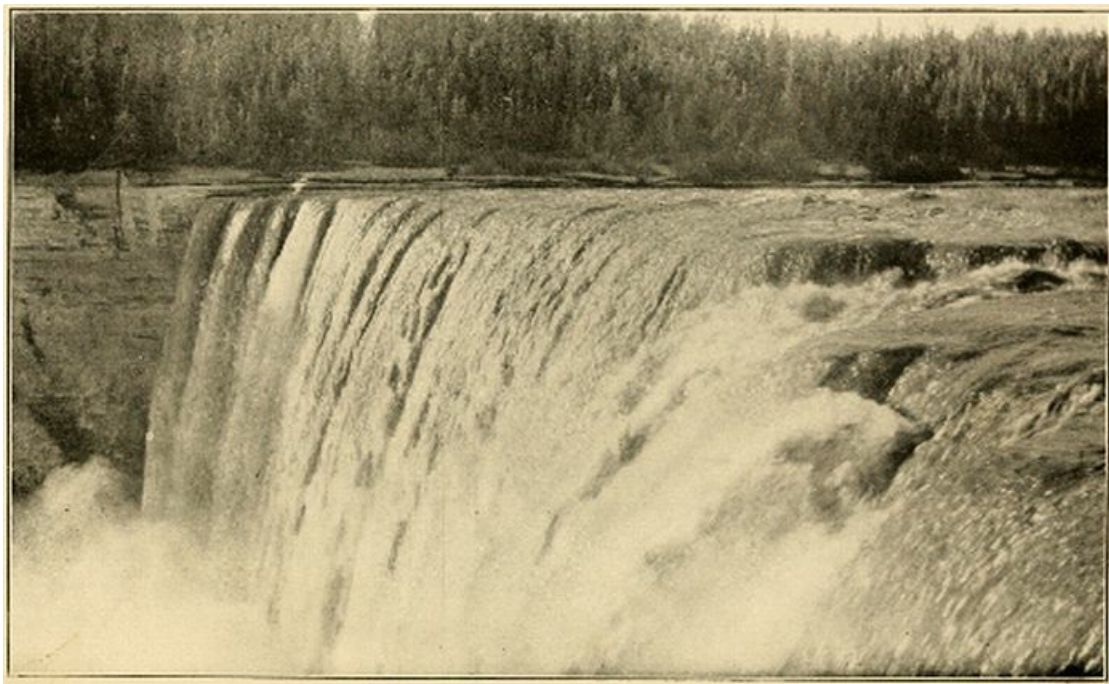
As we came on the edge, and looked down, there below us lay another waterfall! Verily, Fortune was generous to us! We had almost despaired of finding the one, and here was another thrown in for good measure. It was of lesser height than the one above, exceedingly beautiful nevertheless, and worth coming a long way to see on its own account. It burst on us as a complete surprise. It is true, someone had told us the Indians reported that there were two falls, but we had put it aside with all the misinformation from the same source. The second fall lies so far off the trail that I doubt if many even of the Indians have seen it. Bishop Bompas apparently missed it on his journey for he makes no mention of it.

From the point where we first saw it, we obtained an excellent picture of the second falls, and in that its striking and unusual formation can be made out. In the center is a convex horseshoe over which the water falls prettily all around, while at either side the precipice has partly broken down, and the white water dashes over the successive ledges with wild effect. It makes a louder noise than the upper fall, if not so deep. The drop is about fifty feet. It is a mile below the first fall, and hidden by the intervening bend.

There was no possible way of scrambling down the cliffs visible from this point, and there was nothing for it but to return to the portage trail. It carried us still a mile and a half down the river before coming to the edge to descend. There was a very fine view of the gorge from here. It was narrower, and the opposite wall ran out into a bold promontory, around which the river swung and disappeared. On this side the cliff has been worn into a sloping attitude, making a natural and easy descent for the portage. The bottom of the gorge here, with its clean cut walls and steep slopes of neatly-broken stone, has a fresh new look, as of something just turned out.



**The entire river gathered itself and made a single plunge into deep water below**



**As it descended it drew over its brown sheen a lovely, creamy fleece of foam**

It was a long, hard scramble back over the heaped stones to the foot of the second fall. My partner and I were about equally disabled, for while I was still enduring the pain of *mal de raquette* his shoe-packs had worn through and his feet were imperfectly tied up in pieces of canvas. Harder than the stones to cross was a great drift of saturated clay that had slid down from a fault in the cliffs and that threatened to engulf us to the knees at every step. We found bear and wolf tracks in the gorge and assumed that the animals were attracted by the fish, which were cast up dead and injured in the eddies.

By the time we reached the lower fall the sky had become completely overcast, and our pictures are somewhat blurred. Beside the fall there was a ledge on which we sat and could have dangled our feet in the wildest of the torrent, had we been so minded. In the picture taken from that point the water appears to be tumbling down on the beholder's head. One must make liberal allowances for the feeble literalness of the camera in general, and the imperfections of this picture in

particular, to gain any idea of the magnificence of the real effect of the spectacle.

Across the river the wall of rock at this point had been hollowed out, making an alcove as round and as regular as a room in a round tower. The whole history of the double falls was written on the smooth face of the rock. On top was the wide belt of lime-stone with a sub-stratum of shale through which the main fall had worn its way, while beneath lay another hard layer presumably superposed in turn on more shale through which the second was eating.

Arriving at last at the foot of the principal cataract, we made our last stand with the camera about fifty yards from the falling column of water. There deafened by the roar and blinded by the spray, we experienced our first just sense of the awful might of it and our own pitiful insignificance. Everything definite was lost in the mist, and we seemed to be surrounded and overwhelmed by a great presence. The canyon reverberated and shook with the continuous roar of its voice until our brains seemed to reel under the pressure.

There seemed to be small chance of getting a picture from this point, nevertheless we patiently essayed it, waiting for a moment when the mist blew to the other side in the capricious gusts that swooped on us from nowhere, and holding a handkerchief over the lens until the moment of exposure. We were soon drenched ourselves by surely the largest, coldest drops that the skin ever shrank from. One of the pictures is a success. The original gives a better impression of the majesty of the falls than any we took, though unfortunately it is in too low a key to reproduce satisfactorily.

It was now, I suppose, after two o'clock and we suddenly became conscious of the fact that we were famishing. Our lunch was cached at the brink of the falls not two hundred feet from where we stood, but six miles away by the route we had come, half of it the hardest kind of going. It was a painful situation. We gazed up at the cliffs wishing for wings, or adhesive feet, a friend to let down a rope ladder, or some other little accommodation of that nature. But nothing happened, and we set about searching the walls of the gorge, determined to skin up the bare face of it rather than go back and climb around by the longer way.

Again Fortune displayed a most flattering partiality to the Explorers, as we now referred to ourselves (capital E, if you please). About a furlong from the falls we saw a hole in the wall, half way up. A huge slice of the yellow rock had started to fall outwards from the cliff, but changed its mind and hung there, looking from below like a gigantic coffin resting on a catafalque, the whole placed sidewise against the wall of the gorge. The hole was a narrow, vertical crack extending all the way up to the top of the gorge. There was a stiff climb required to reach the bottom of it, and in order to save my bad leg as much as possible, my partner volunteered to have a look while I waited below. Presently he hailed me, and I joined him.

It proved to be a real cavern. Red raspberries grew profusely about the entrance; a fairly well-beaten path of bear tracks led directly into the hole. Within it was an extraordinary place. The path dipped down almost into the bowels of the earth it seemed and then rose beyond as by an easy pair of stairs directly to the summit of the cliff. All this was revealed in a mysterious half light that filtered down from far above. Within the door grew wild black currant bushes, laden with the delicious fruit. The bottom of the hole was full of solid ice, which had been there very likely as long as the hole itself. Most extraordinary of all, half way through our passage a great piece of rock had fallen out of the outside wall, leaving an oriel window to light the place, through which we gazed at the river below. What a place to appeal to a boy's imagination! Thinking of this we christened it the Secret Stair.

In a few minutes we were back on the little terrace of rock beside the falls that we considered our own. While I prepared lunch, my indefatigable partner made a flying trip back to the camp for another roll of films. In moving about the fire, putting on the pot, and toasting the bread in regular camp routine, I would momentarily forget where I was, and it gave me a fine start to find myself suddenly looking over the hundred-foot cliff. On the extreme edge grew a bush, to the branches of which clung the rotting remains of bits of string and pieces of cloth, relics of the tobacco bags, handkerchiefs, and other trifles left by the Indians as propitiatory offerings to the Spirit of the Falls.

I took my partner's picture while he ate his lunch under this sacred bush, and he took mine gazing pensively at the cataract. Afterwards the sun came out full again, and he went back for some pictures of the Secret Stair. While I waited for him, I cut our initials in the face of the rock some four feet above the water line, and fifteen feet or so from the brink. It was the only time we were guilty of this weakness, but Explorers always do it, we had heard.

H. F.  
A. E.





## CHAPTER XV

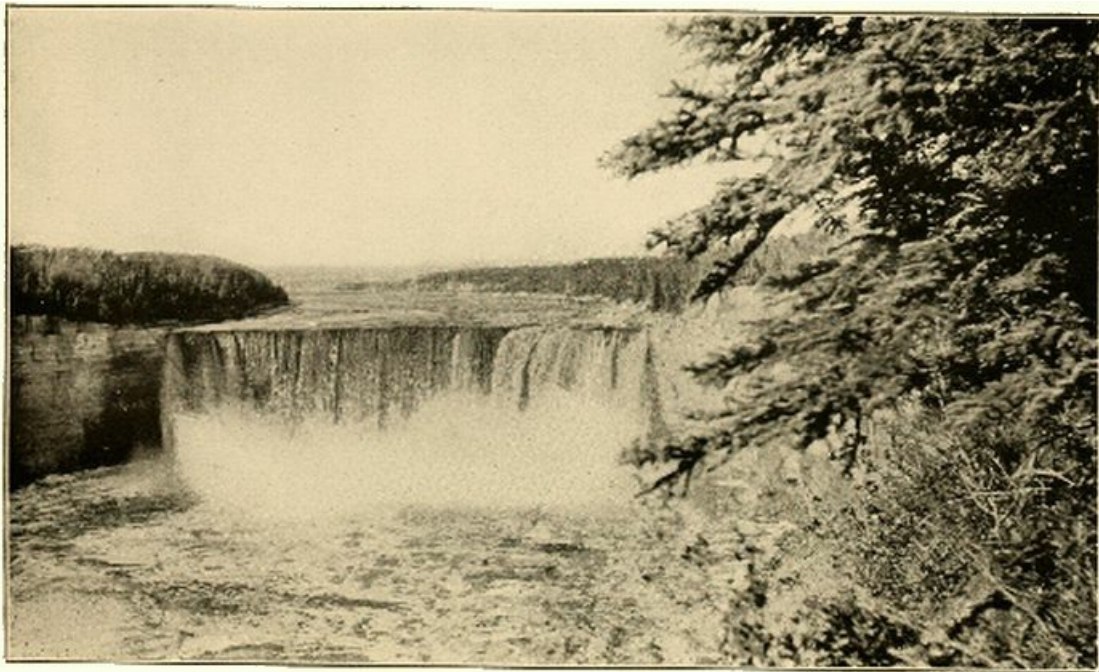
### HOMeward BOUND

This was the night of August 29th. It will be remembered that the trader at Fort Vermilion had promised to hold the launch for us until September 15th. We had therefore sixteen days in which to make the return journey. It had taken us eight to come down, but going back was different. The current which was plus before would now be minus, and instead of Aleck's assistance over the portage we would have to return with our outfit on our backs.

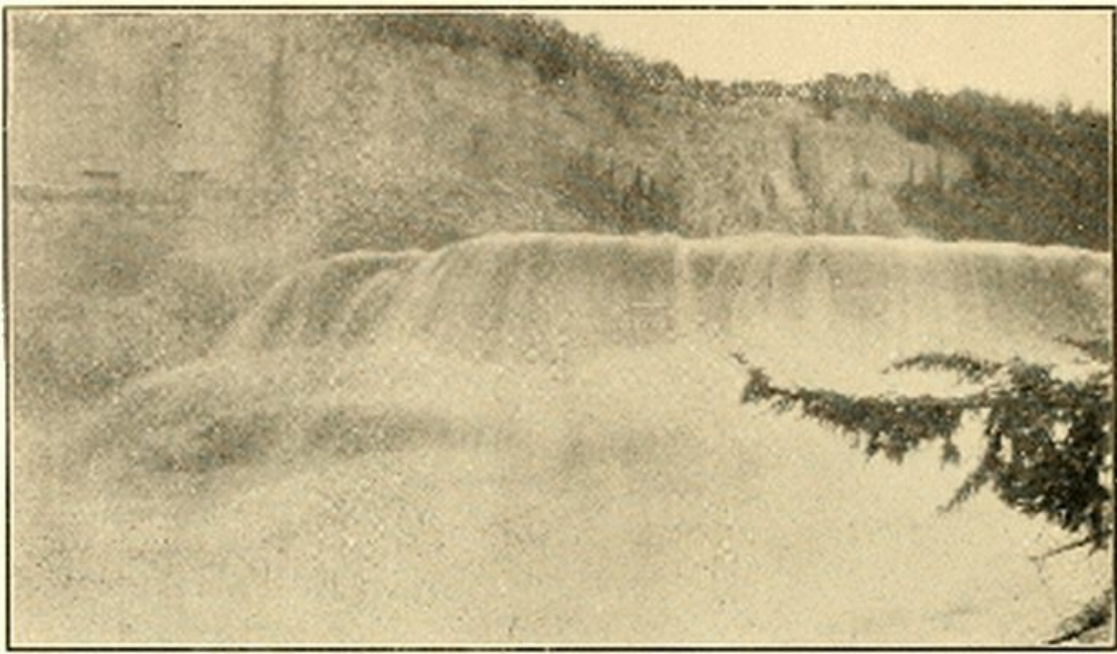
It rained dismally all night, but we were snug enough under a shelter of poplar boughs, eked out by the one tarpaulin we had brought. Every unnecessary article had been sent back from the Hay River by Aleck, including the tent. The Hudson's Bay blankets themselves will shed a deal of water, and it is customary to stretch an extra blanket, if you have one, as a roof in rainy weather. Once wet, of course, the blankets are equally hard to dry. When the wet finally penetrates through all the layers to the traveler's skin, he begins to be discouraged. This had not happened to us yet.

In the morning we turned our faces up river saying, "Homeward bound!" to each other in the same sentimental tones, I suppose, that all travelers use under the circumstances. It was with a queer, mixed feeling of pleasure and regret that we started. The thought of everything that awaited us outside was delightful, but we hadn't had enough of the other thing yet. We were loath to turn our backs on the North. It was over two months now since we had slept between sheets or eaten off a tablecloth. However, though it was "Homeward bound," we still had something to do. A thousand miles, more or less, separated us from Edmonton and the busy world.

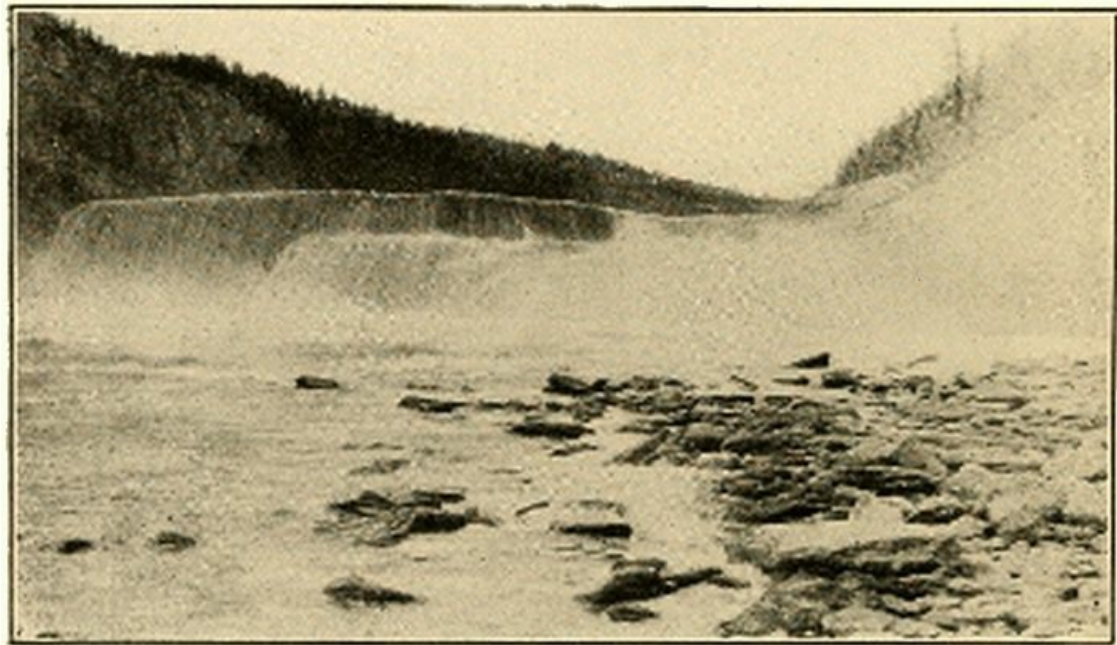
We had brought a tracking line for up-stream work, a thin, stout cord a hundred yards in length. As long as the shores were hard, the way presented no special difficulties, though my partner was greatly handicapped by the lack of footwear. We sacrificed a canvas dunnage bag to make wrappings for his feet, but it was surprising how quick he wore through even half a dozen thicknesses. The wonder is, how the skin of the sole lasts as well as it does.



**Our most complete picture of the cataract**



**We could have dangled our feet in the wildest of the torrents**



**The second falls from below**

One of us traveled ahead with the line, while the other remained with a pole to prod the *Serpent* when she drifted too close in. The rapids, too, were easier to ascend than we expected, though of course it was very slow work. Then it was a case of wading for both of us, one pulling, one pushing. The *Serpent* had a playful little trick when she got the current under her quarter of shooting out into midstream and hanging there while she made up her mind whether to capsize herself, or pull over the man who was desperately clinging to the rope. He, meanwhile, was trying to keep his footing on slippery round stones in two feet or so of rushing water, but there were no accidents.

In the smooth stretches we discovered later that one of us could sit in the boat and steer, while the other went ahead with the line over his shoulder, but this only applied when the shores were moderately good.

On one occasion when I had the line, coming around a point I was startled to find a corpulent little gentleman blocking my path immediately in front of me. I stopped. He looked me over with a cold and scornful eye, and coolly turning, waddled off with insolent deliberation through the willows, rattling his quills like castanets as a gentle hint to me not to



follow. It was the first porcupine I ever met face to face. The gun, of course, was back in the boat. We would have relished a little fresh meat.

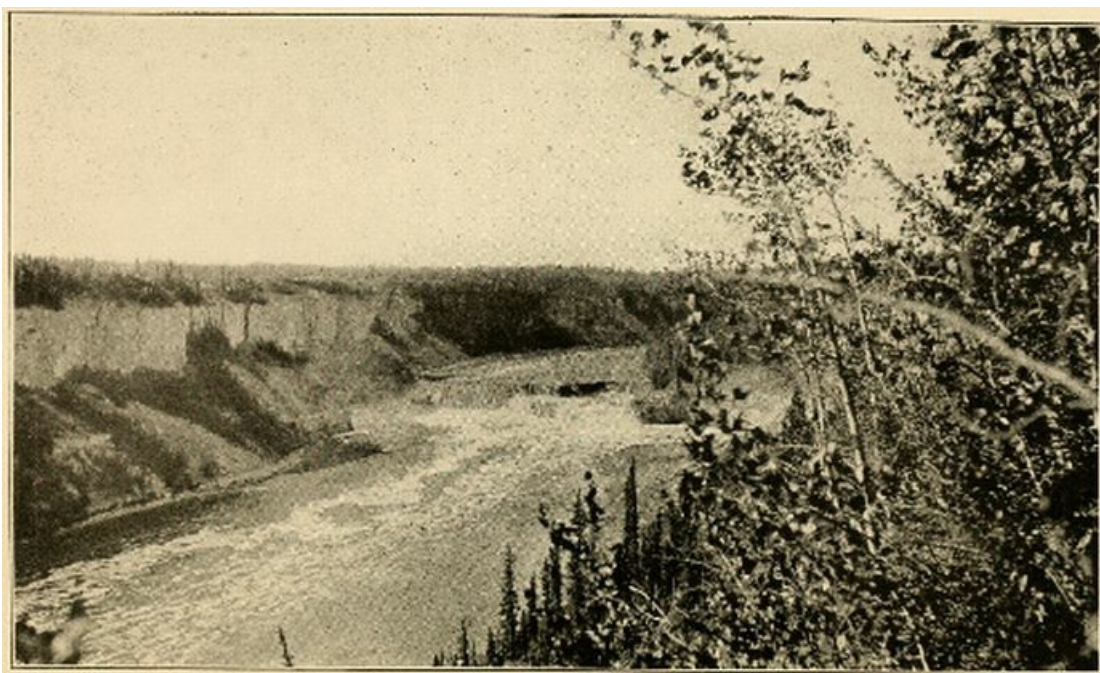
It must not be supposed that tracking a boat up-stream is any gentle promenade. That tracking line was like a living creature inspired with malice against us. We swore that it entered into a conspiracy with all the jutting rocks and snags in our path to defeat us. The *Serpent* was in the combine, too; whenever the line caught, she turned and stuck her nose stupidly into the bank. The tow-man was kept busy shaking the line free and keeping it taut. He had to keep going at all costs, sliding, scrambling, floundering through the oozy mud and over the stones and the fallen trees. The man in the canoe had no easy time either; hard and unrelenting paddling was his portion, and when she made up her mind to run into the bank, run into it she generally did, though he broke his arms to keep her out.

On the second day as we left the stony country behind, the problem was further complicated by the willow bushes that grew thickly along the shores. It seemed to us that they had been placed there solely for the purpose of hindering us. In turn we tried crawling around the outside, and plunging through the middle, and climbing above them, but in the end some insignificant twig would be sure to get a strangle hold on the rope. The willow wands were all bent inclining down-stream by the current, and as we were bound in the other direction, each stalk was like a hook to catch the rope on.

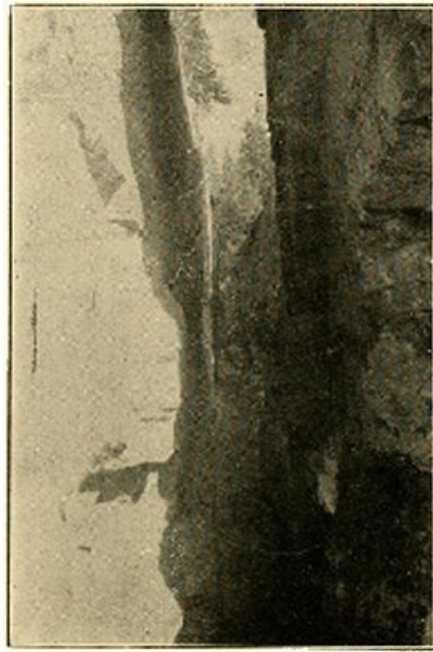
These were the low shores that have been mentioned; along the high shores, it will be remembered, the pine trees lay half-fallen into the water, offering an insurmountable series of obstacles. I should not care to state how many hundred times we were obliged to cross the river and try the other side. Finally we gave up the line and tried poling, but the bottom was soft in spots, the poles went in up to the hilts, and we nearly cast ourselves overboard. In the end we were reduced to paddling against the current, which was very slow, but at least steady and much less trying on the temper.

On the afternoon of this day we played hide and seek with a bear behind an island, but he won. The bears with their queer, half-human foot-prints had made a regular beaten track along the banks. It was the plentiful moose-berries and currants that attracted them. We treated ourselves to black currant jam. The moose-berry, sometimes called the "high-bush" cranberry, is something like a red currant, but it grows singly or in twos upon its stem, and it has a seed like a tomato, but larger. It is not highly regarded as an article of human diet, but we found its acrid tartness very refreshing, when there were no currants or gooseberries to be had along the trail.

On the third morning we ascended the last rapid, the one we had called the "Grumbler." The next four days are blank in the notebook. As a matter of fact we were working too hard to make notes. From dawn to dark we pushed against the tireless current, crossing from side to side to get the advantage of any slack water, which was not much, below the points. I do not suppose the current was ever more than two miles an hour, but whereas the two miles had been added to our own four going down, it was now subtracted from it, and it seemed more. The long stretches of the river were the worst, we seemed to overhaul the distant points with such a discouraging slowness. There were days when it seemed to us as if we had made scarcely ten miles.



**There below us lay another waterfall**



**Looking up the Secret Stair**



**The window on the Secret Stair**

We "spelled" twice a day to eat, making four meals in all, a general rule on the trail. Dinner was in the middle of the afternoon, so that the cook should not be obliged to work in the dark. Afterwards we paddled as long as we could see, and this was always our strongest stretch. We topped off the day with cocoa and buttered toast by the fire, and then to sleep—such sleep! We will never forget those fine evenings, particularly an hour at the end of the seventh day.

The river was like a noble corridor carpeted with brown velvet, and its walls hung with rich tapestries of foliage. An indescribable dreamy loveliness enveloped the whole, most like the quality with which Corot has invested the rivers of his pictures. But even Corot never conveys the exquisite quality of the light of our own Northern evenings, because he never saw one. It is as brilliant as it is tender. And the world was as still as sleep. The greatest charm as ever was that we shared it with none.

On the second day of the down voyage we had caught sight of a log shack on the river bank, which strongly excited our curiosity, but we had left the investigation of it to our return. We reached it now. Odd it was to see the door with a white porcelain knob and a keyhole! The key hung beside the door-jamb, and we took the liberty of peeping inside. We judged that it was a white man's house, or at least a breed's, because there was a bedstead inside, made in imitation of ours, and a certain order and convenience in all the arrangements. It contained all the owner's winter gear. There were four pairs of child's snow-shoes in graduated sizes and a tiny fur-coat. We learned from Gus Clark, however, that this was the winter residence of a Slavi with more advanced notions than the rest of the tribe.

As we ascended the river we began to meet the Indians again. We saluted our friend Jimmy Etchoogah in passing, but could not stop to hob-nob with him again. Later we met the Blanket, our jolly, disreputable friend, but alas! how changed. He let us know by the most frightful grimaces and contortions that he was desperately sick. We suspected, however, that he had taken counsel with the young redskin who had taken us in before, and our hearts were hardened. I gave the Blanket a pill for his pain, and we went our way. It occurred to us more than once on this voyage that our last white predecessors on the river, the jolly Klondikers, must have carried well-filled flasks with them, and for thirteen years the Slavics have been telling the rising generation about the wonderful stomach-warming qualities of the white man's medicine.

The Hay River is like the Slavi Indians' Main Street. All day long they paddle up and down searching the shores, like show-windows, for bargains in feathers and fur. Every point of vantage along the river is decorated with their tepee poles, that they use as they come and go, and we were continually coming across their "caches" elevated on poles, or hung from the branches in bags made of birch-bark.

In connection with their caches there is a story told of the Slavi Indians. The Canadian government is carefully guarding the last herd of wild buffalo who range west of Great Slave Lake. To this end it is anxious to keep down the wolves, but in spite of the bounties it offered, the Indians would not bestir themselves to kill the wolves. The commissioner who was sent to investigate the matter after endless trouble elicited this story from the head man:

"A long time ago the wolf was the man's dog, and they hunted the moose together and shared the meat equally. But the man began to take more than his share, and the wolf was angry. He began to hunt for himself and he found he did not need the man's help. Ever since then the man and the wolf have hunted the moose separately. But before they parted they made a treaty. The man agreed never to kill the wolf, and the wolf agreed never to break into the man's caches."

The eighth day was one of ups and downs. We had a strong head wind to add to our hindrances, nevertheless we seemed to be making good time at first. With a view to drawing a rough map we had made notes of the river going down, and by these we measured our progress on the return. But something went wrong that eighth day; we paddled all day without being able to raise an island that should have been only six miles from "the barked trees." By nightfall we were very much cast down. All our calculations were out, and at this rate we might still be two or three days' journey from the "horse-track."

It must be remembered that the river had fallen nearly two feet since we went down, and the look of the shores had therefore changed a good deal. At dark we landed on a stony beach that suggested nothing to us until we suddenly stumbled on the remains of a fire—built against a pile of stones, as we built fires. Hope sprang up again, and my partner scrambled up the steep bank. He found what he was looking for, the tree he had blazed on the way down. It was our first spelling-place on the river, only eighteen miles from the horse-track. We went to bed rejoicing.

"Horse-track" refers, of course, to the trail over to the Peace. If a settlement ever springs up on the site of the Indian village that will be its name. We arrived about two o'clock. The village was greatly reduced in size, for the fall hunting had begun, and instead of twenty tepees there were only six or so. Our arrival created a veritable sensation. The children, crying and pointing, ran along the bank, and every man left in the place came to witness our disembarkation. A great deal was said to us, presumably in congratulation, but we could only smile amiably and shake our heads.

It was not that they were especially glad to see us, they were merely astonished that we came back at all. The lower river with its rapids and falls seems to have a superstitious terror for them. Some of them had been over to the Fort in the meantime and had told Gus Clark that he need never expect to see us again. No white man had ever come up their river. Gus merely told them that they didn't know yet what white men could do.

Our stay in the village was short. Our first care was to get moccasins for our suffering feet. Afterwards we spread



everything we owned out on the grass to decide what we could do without and to apportion the loads we were to carry. A kind of Christmas tree party succeeded. To the astonished Indians we handed out veritable riches: there was thirty pounds of flour, small bags of rice, beans and sugar, besides clothing, cooking utensils, and cartridges. One man seemed disposed to drink the oil of citronella, so we thought it better to throw away the medicines. The gill of whiskey that remained we drank ourselves, to avoid creating any hard feeling. An Indian secured the empty flask and sat smelling it with a look of faraway longing in his eyes.

We did our best to make an equable distribution, handing out to one then another, and I hope no one was overlooked. The flour went to the wife of a man who had crippled himself by a bullet wound. A boy of eight was their sole support while the father was incapacitated; he brought in a rabbit while we were there. Tatateecha Cadetloon, the patriarch of the tribe, got the last of my tobacco. What we regretted most to part with were our good paddles, especially the one my partner had made out of a birch slab, the best paddle ever seen in that country—but with what else we had, we could not carry them.

The Indians received these gifts from Heaven exactly as a small child takes a penny from a stranger, snatching at it with a look of strong suspicion. They were well-mannered though, they asked for nothing, but each waited until he was called up to receive his share. They are a strange mixture of the man and the child. One man received our gifts with rather a shamed air as if it was beneath him to accept favors from a pair of white vagabonds.

They are so like us and so different, they afford an endless and amusing study. It was interesting to watch the men among themselves, their suave dignity, their good-humor, their considerate politeness. We could never quite make out if these fine qualities were genuine, or if it was a bit of play-acting for our benefit. When we addressed these fine gentlemen they instantly became as shy and sullen as children.

After the distribution we made ready for our long walk. We had reduced the cooking outfit to one pail, a frying pan, two cups, and two spoons. Food was restricted to flour, bacon, tea, sugar, and prunes sufficient for five days. But with our three pairs of blankets, besides guns, ammunition, camera, films, and miscellanies, we still had a good load apiece. The most scientific way to pack this was a problem. The Indians found our efforts highly amusing. They are rarely tickled when they see a white man at a loss. We finally bundled the things up roughly and started, intending to consider the problem at our leisure on the trail. We left the village to the tune of laughter, I am sorry to say. Such is the fate of philanthropists!

We had between thirty-five and forty pounds each. That is nothing of a pack in the North, but it seemed a lot to our unaccustomed backs. We made twelve miles before turning in that night, and reached our last spelling-place of the way over. It was necessary for us to camp in the same places we had used before, as these were the only water-holes we knew. Bed was grateful to us that night, though it was a particularly hard one.

We improved our packs before starting out again. After several experiments we adopted the army style of rolling the blankets in the shape of a horse collar through which we stuck our heads. The weight hung from one shoulder, and into the narrow end which hung down under the other arm we each tied a bundle containing the rest of the stuff. This could be shifted from side to side as we tired. We kept well ahead of our schedule on the second day and camped at the east end of the larger lake.

With this night our troubles began. It rained steadily on our defenseless heads, and by morning everything was drenched, and the blankets Heaven knows how many pounds heavier to carry! That was a cheerless morning. We could scarcely decide whether it was worse to lie between wet blankets with the rain running down our necks, or get up to wet clothes, a wet breakfast, and a wet world.

Our way led through the willow bushes bordering the Meander, each of which favored us with a separate cold shower in addition to what was falling direct from Heaven. Our wet hands became stiff and numb with the cold, and we vowed that our first purchases at the Fort should be gloves—if we ever got there. Just then it seemed very far off. This afternoon to our astonishment we met a wagon bound for Hay River. We tried to make a bargain with the Indian to pick us up. Communication was difficult, but he made it clear, however, that he declined to turn around.

In the afternoon we passed the Meander for the last time. Our notebook said two hours' march to the next camping-place across the divide, or say, six miles. It proved to be the longest six miles we ever walked. The way led across seemingly endless meadows without a drop of water or a tree. The two hours lengthened into three, and then four, and our

shoulders began to feel as if they were telescoped together under the weight of the wet blankets. We were perishing with hunger and thirst besides. We made the place at sunset as weary a pair I expect as ever cast their bundles to the ground. Even then we couldn't eat until the unfortunate cook had baked bread.

We made our beds under the bare poles of an abandoned tepee, which afforded rather an imperfect shelter from the rain. For it rained again in the night; we were becoming hardened to it now. In the morning we went over our loads again and threw away a towel, a bottle of tooth-powder, and a little book of philosophy that I was always meaning to read. But abstract philosophy was hardly able to cope with the cold, hard facts we were up against now.

We took to the trail still stiff and weary from our exertions of the day before. After we had been plodding for a couple of hours, conceive of our excitement when we heard, or thought we heard, a horse bell approaching from the rear. We cast down our packs and bent strained ears in the direction of the sound. We heard it and we didn't hear it, and our spirits went up and down. Finally the Indian and his wagon on the way back did actually heave into view.

We held another parley. For two dollars he finally agreed to carry us as far as the Indian village where we had camped the first night out from the Fort. There his way divided from ours. We threw our loads into the wagon and climbed after them. Under other conditions riding in a springless wagon over what was really no more than a pack trail would scarcely be considered a joy, but to our weary bones it was as good as a sixty-horse motor on asphalt. Again luck was with the Explorers! Our driver presented us with the towel, the bottle of tooth-powder, and the book of philosophy.

He was named Ahcunazie. He had a slender, half-clad boy with him, who said never a word but looked us over well. There were also three rangy, mangy huskies who amused us by their resemblance to disreputable human philosophers. No amount of kicks could discourage their thievish propensities; they merely yelped and waited for another chance.

Conversation en route was impossible, but when we stopped for lunch we found that Ahcunazie was above the average intelligence. He was a Beaver Indian and he could also speak Cree. We were able to carry on quite an elaborate conversation in signs. Ahcunazie knew all about us, of course, and our journey over, and he graphically described Aleck's return journey with the sick horse. We learned what we were so anxious to know; Aleck had brought back the *Blunderbuss*. Ahcunazie suggested that we should have hired his wagon and saved all the trouble.

We reached the parting of the trails about five. This village was now wholly abandoned. Upon paying Ahcunazie, when he saw that I had more money, he suddenly offered to take us the remaining twenty-two miles. Five dollars clinched the bargain. The boy was put off and sent on the other trail with a gun and the three dogs. Heaven knows how far the little shaver had to walk that night!

Ahcunazie with great assurance announced that he would land us at the Fort before we slept. The idea was grateful to us, for our blankets were wet and we were heartily sick of bannock and bacon. We set off at a mad gallop over the prairie, Ahcunazie standing up and yelling at his horses like a true red-skin. Somewhere in the course of this stampede he lost the grimy little pillow that was his chief treasure on earth. The endurance of the little grass-fed beasts is wonderful. They had already done forty miles since dawn. But it has its limits, and mile by mile they visibly failed. We spelled to rest and feed them, but the benefit was transitory. Up to the last moment Ahcunazie insisted that we could get there before he stopped again, but as it became dark and cold, with true savage volatility he suddenly changed his mind and camped. It was the place where we had made our first spell, about twelve miles from the settlement.

It turned bitterly cold, and though my tireless partner cut down a big tree and dragged it section by section across an intervening bog, the biggest fire could not warm both sides of us at once. Ahcunazie dragged his bed so close that he caught fire and almost ruined his single blanket. All he had beside was a deer-skin that he spread beneath him.

None of us got much sleep. In the course of the night we discovered an interesting fact that I have not seen remarked elsewhere: viz: Indians have nightmares just as we do. Ahcunazie's groans and cries and mutterings while he slept were dreadful to hear.

We were all glad to get up before dawn. We had no sooner started than the rain commenced to fall, and it descended in a steady down-pour all the way. My partner and I crawled between our blankets in the body of the wagon. There we lay perfectly comfortable and in the highest spirits. Ahcunazie whipped up his horses and the mud flew. My face and my luxuriant beard were completely covered with mud when we arrived, and my partner could not look at me without a shout of laughter, much to my annoyance.

It was strange to see fences and grain-fields again. Ahcunazie landed us at the store of the French outfit; the company establishment is as I have described, across the river. We had not seen much of Kenneth Birley, the trader here, before starting, but we ventured on the traveler's privilege in the North to rout him out of bed and demand a breakfast. Wet and dirty and hungry as we were, the welcome we received warmed the cockles of our hearts. And that breakfast!—sausages, and fried potatoes, and bread and butter, and savory coffee, stands out as one of the notable meals of our lives. Birley was the first white man we had seen and talked to in twenty-two days.

## CHAPTER XVI

### TRAVELING IN COMPANY

Upon leaving Fort Vermilion for the Hay River trip without knowing anything of what lay before us, we had told the Hudson's Bay men as a joke that they could expect us back on September eleventh, and this was the morning of the eleventh! We were very proud of this fact though it was only an accident. At any rate when we crossed the river everybody was astonished to see us, and I expect the Explorers strutted around with chests slightly expanded. The thing that pleased us most was Gus Clark's quiet commendation. More than the others he knew what we had been up against. The launch was there waiting for us, though the company inspector himself was waiting to go up in her.

The trader's wife, Mrs. Wilson, asked us to dinner that night, which necessitated the agonizing operation of shaving. Gus Clark among his manifold accomplishments knew how to cut hair, and he attended to that. We had to beg various additions to our wardrobe from the good-natured clerks, for we did not possess so much as a coat between us. Even then the result was hardly all that could be desired, but at least the worst discrepancies of our costumes were hidden under the table!

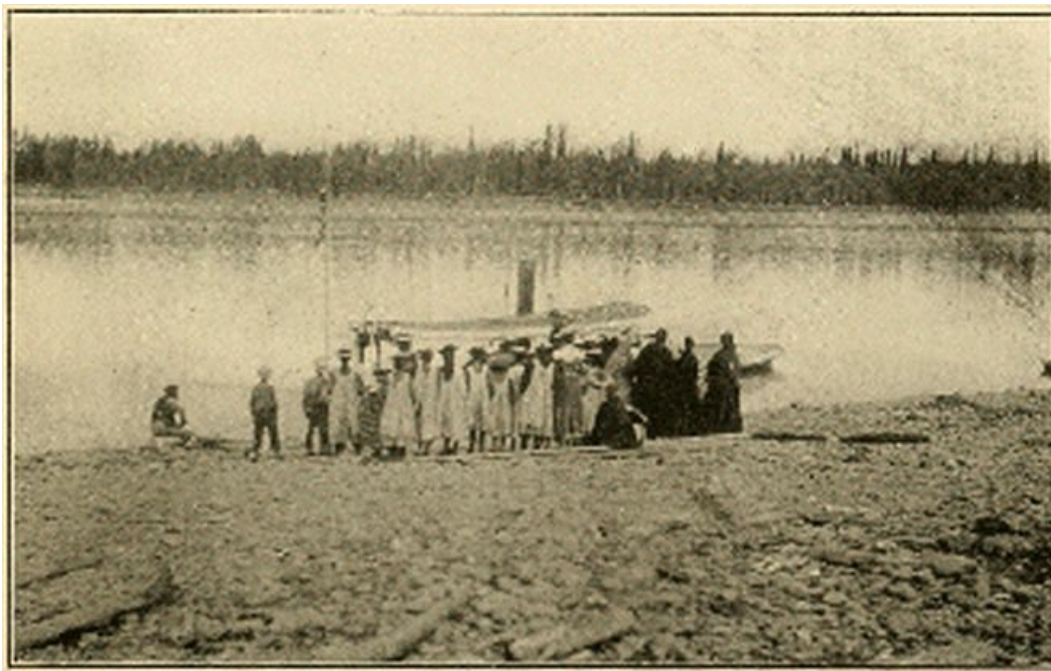
The dinner-party was like a dream. The white table-cloth under the softly-shaded lamp, the flowers, the silver, and the china!—after that morning we could scarcely believe it was us! There was actually a silver pepper mill, and somebody in his nervousness dropped it in the soup. The taste of pudding and pie was strange and delightful to us, and the most novel and the pleasantest thing of all was the jolly talk around the table, for there were charming ladies present such as we had not spoken to since leaving Edmonton at the beginning of our journey.

That night we spread our blankets in the loft of one of the company buildings and slept under a roof once more. I half awoke in the middle of the night, and in my daze was startled to observe the windows of the room looking at me like great pale eyes. I put out my hand in a panic and met the strange feel of the board floor all around, whereupon I violently shook my partner. "Wake up! Wake up!" I cried. "We're aground!" He jumped up all ready to help me push off. Then we woke up.

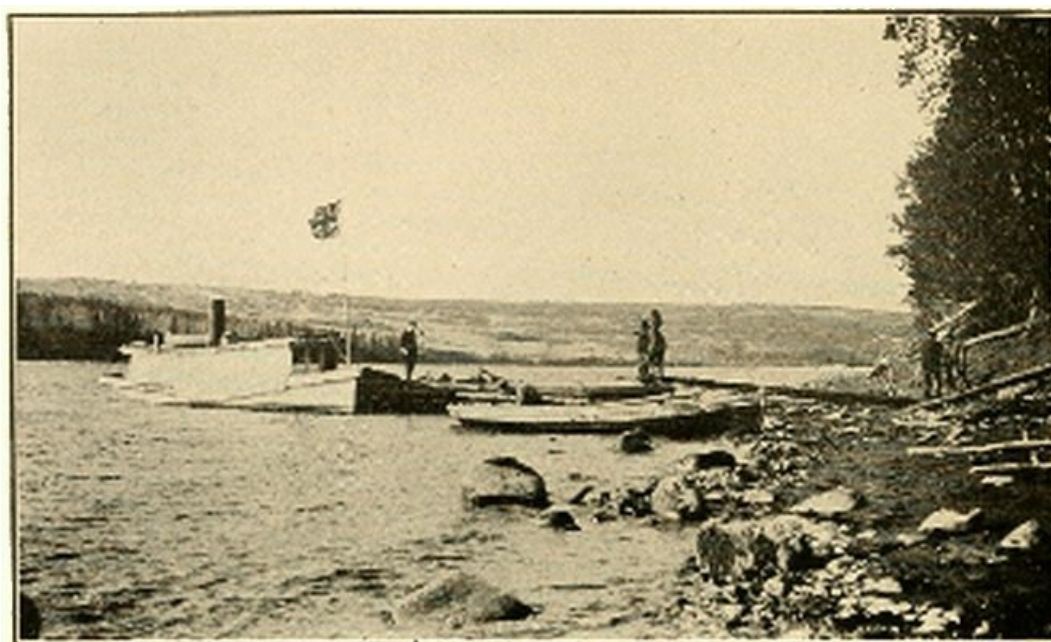


Once a day we went ashore to chop wood





**All the children came down to bid her God-speed**



**The *Messenger* at Peace River crossing**





### **We had a huddled lunch in the wet snow**

The next day according to my partner's note-book we "hung around the Fort all day and enjoyed a good loaf." It rained almost incessantly, and how grateful we were for shelter! In the evening we were again well entertained by the doctor across the river. The departure of the launch was announced for the following morning.

The last thing necessary before leaving was to square accounts with the Hudson's Bay Company, who had financed the Hay River trip. I had left my letter of credit with the trader. The bill was a stiff one, and when I made some facetious remark to this effect the clerk said quickly: "What are you kicking about! We have left you enough to get home on!" He couldn't understand why I laughed. I mention this without any hard feelings. "The Great Traders of the Great West" are naturally not in business for the fun of it.

The superior of the little convent at Fort Vermilion was going up on the launch with us, and the entire establishment including all the schoolchildren came down to bid her God-speed. Their pictures appear herewith.

After all the good-byes were said and the little boat poked her nose into the current, we made the alarming discovery that we were thirteen on board, and it was the thirteenth of September. This may have accounted for the rain, which continued to fall with very little intermission for thirteen days more or less. We expected to be seven days ascending the three hundred miles in the little steamboat. It had taken us less than four to come down in the *Blunderbuss*, and this will give an idea of the strength of the current of the Peace.

Of the thirteen, nine were white men, three natives, and one was the Mother Superior. The principal man aboard was of course Max Hamilton, the Hudson's Bay Inspector. He was of the true physical type of the North, tall, lean, broad, and youthful-looking. We were astonished when he told his age. He is of the seventh generation of his family in "the service." He is one of the few white men who really know the Crees. Not only does he know their language like his own, but he is able to assume their curious oblique manner in speaking. The Crees appear never to say anything directly. They are a laughter-loving race, and Hamilton knew how to keep them convulsed. Anything less like the autocratic Hudson's Bay magnate of fiction could not well be imagined.

We went ashore to camp every night; the natives generally had their fire and we had ours. It made a picturesque scene under the pine trees. Over the fire we listened to tales of the North. Most interesting were the accounts of conjuring and second-sight among the Indians. There is no doubt but that their simple and solitary way of living makes them peculiarly susceptible to telepathic influences. It is strange, too, to hear of the barbarous beliefs that are still current in our own land in this the twentieth century.

For instance; the ideas of insanity and cannibalism are associated in the minds of the Crees. They believe that the only cure for insanity is to eat human flesh, and that a madman instinctively seeks this remedy. As they put it: "When a man's

head turns to ice inside, only blood will melt it." Near Fort Vermilion not so long ago two sons took turns night after night with their guns across their knees, watching their aged mother while she slept.

Another passenger was a quaint old fellow that we christened Natty Bumpus. He had been working for the company at Fort Vermilion, and he had saved up the great sum of ninety dollars. He was like a gray-headed little boy that had forgotten to grow up. His simplicity was amazing; he would swallow anything and retail these yarns again with a serious air. Indians and bears and guns were his passion, but he had never discovered his land of romance though he was living in the middle of it. Once he had heard a bear growl, and he never stopped running till he got back to the Fort. Natty Bumpus wore a dashing broad-brimmed hat, a buckskin shirt, a huge cartridge belt, and leather leggings.

The Mother Superior was a handsome woman and a capable one. She accepted no concessions on account of her sex or her habit, but was always ready to turn in and lend a hand like a man. Her *savoir faire* was remarkable. I will never forget the picture she made blandly knitting her stocking, with a red-hot poker game going on about six inches away. We were rather cramped, you understand. She divided her time between her devotions and knitting stockings for very long-legged children, but she was human too, and occasionally I saw her dip into a book of a lighter style.

Of the others on board I need only say that we ended the voyage feeling that they were real friends of ours. They were a mighty decent crowd, full of unobtrusive consideration for each other. Of them all there was only one who had failed to profit by the lessons of good temper and self-effacement that are taught in the North. He was one of the "haw-haw" variety of Englishmen that we get so much of in the colonies. There was another Englishman on board, the exact reverse, and a prime favorite.

Of these seven rainy days one was very like another. We steamed from daylight to dark, and at night we camped on the shore. Once a day in addition we went ashore to cut wood. There was not room enough for us and all our belongings on the little *Messenger*, so we towed a barge alongside that afforded us a little room to straighten out in, when it was not raining too hard. Everybody grumbled at the weather except my partner and me, who thinking of our unprotected days and nights on the trail were well content to be where we were. The game of bridge was a great resource. It was only interrupted when George shooed us off the table. We took off our hats to George. He was the cook, and a good one.

There was one thing that never palled during the seven days, the scenery. Some day the Peace River will be as famous as the Rhine and September will be the fashionable month to "do" it in. Not only were the effects supremely beautiful, but they were quite different from the corresponding efforts of other rivers. The high rounded hills that line the shores, burned by the sun and drenched with rain, had taken on a somber tone that verged from a dark chocolate to black. On this striking background the delicate poplar foliage was painted with a daring brush. The prevailing color was the purest shade of yellow. Pale yellow on black!—close to, the effect was startling, but it receded, softening into the distances as if successive curtains of gauze had been dropped between. For variety there were splashes of scarlet and pale green. Looking up from reading or playing cards a hundred times a day one received the same shock of surprise and pleasure.

There was one moment just before sunset when the whole cloud of mist that hung about the hilltops became the color of blood. The sun broke through a rift setting all the poplar trees on the sky-line behind us on fire as it were, and over our heads stretched a double rainbow as bright and palpable as emeralds and rubies. This was Nature's grand masterpiece of coloring for the season.

We arrived at Peace River Crossing on the morning of the eighth day amidst flurries of snow. This as I have mentioned is the point of departure from the river of the direct route to Edmonton. We had before us a ninety mile portage to Lesser Slave Lake, then the lake, the Lesser Slave and the Athabasca rivers to Athabasca Landing, and a final hundred miles overland to town.

The fall exodus from the North had begun, and obtaining transportation across the portage was something of a question. The road was reported to be almost impassable after the rains, but that is always the cry when it comes to engaging a freighter. As a matter of fact it is always much the same. I have crossed it in the dryest weather. I do not suppose it is quite the worst road in America, but it is well down in the list.

We were able to join forces with a party due to leave the following day, but we had to pay through the nose; twenty dollars for the ninety miles. In reality this was all for freight on our slender baggage, because we both footed it across. We were now saddled with the *Blunderbuss*, so that we could not take up our beds and walk as before.

The day we left the Crossing was election day throughout Canada. The poll was held in the store of the French outfit, a

low, rambling log shack, outside and in, the most picturesque post in the North. Unfortunately the trader would not let us photograph it. He was ashamed of it and looked forward to the day when he would have a clap-boarded store painted yellow with a show-window on either side of the door. Such is progress!

It would be just as well perhaps not to inquire too strictly into the electioneering methods of the North. Informal is the kindest word to use; it was all between friends. Never had the humble natives found themselves of so much importance. They were met from afar off and escorted to the store. They appeared to be perfectly agreeable to whatever suggestion they received first. One friend of ours informed us gleefully that he had turned over nine votes. He then remembered that he was talking to a journalist and in the next breath he piously disclaimed any interference with the progress of the election.

Our driver across the portage was a breed called "Charlie." He drove a hard bargain, but once we were off he became entirely good-natured. The party consisted beside ourselves of Langdon a local capitalist, "the Captain," and Alfred. Poor old Natty Bumpus was to have come too, but he had an enormous trunk that Charlie refused to take, and we left him disconsolately sitting on it on the river bank. We had the satisfaction of departing from the Crossing before even the Hudson's Bay outfit could get away.

While the wagon went on, we dined at our leisure in the "Peace Hotel." I have mentioned this hostelry; it had unfortunately not proved a paying venture, and the meal we partook of was the last served there. Setting out afterwards, we climbed the nine hundred foot hill behind the settlement. The road was inches deep in the slippery prairie mud, and it must have been a gruelling pull on the horses. This was why Charlie had refused Natty Bumpus's trunk. Most of the freight of course comes down this hill. Nothing is sent out of this country but a few bales of fur whose value is out of all proportion to its bulk.

The view from the top is famous throughout the North. From a projecting point you look up the river to the forks of the Big Smoky, and far beyond the Peace itself seems to come rolling up over the horizon from the nether world. After our mountain experiences we found the famous view a little tame. The photographs are particularly disappointing. The camera has ironed it all out flat.

This height as I have explained, is not really a hill, but the river bank proper. From the edge of it the country stretches back as flat as a board. The great reputation this view has acquired may be better understood when one imagines its effect on those, who after traveling four days over a flat country, suddenly find the world open at their feet.

As we plodded along the road we met two pedestrians in city clothes that had suffered on the trails. They asked us how far it was to "town." I am afraid we laughed. The way they were headed there weren't any more towns. These were two more of the misfits that so often stray into the North. They were walking in without a thing but what they stood in. They must have eaten with the Indians and sat up shivering throughout the nights. Heaven knows what they thought they were going to do throughout the Northern winter that was approaching with long steps.

They had the brisk, know-it-all air that they always have. It is fatal in the country. "God help them!" we said to ourselves. You can't tell such men anything. They are usually attracted by the rising fame of the Peace River country as a land where "money is to be made." To all such it cannot be said too strongly that there is no money in the North. There is plenty of work to be done, and there is independence and a competency for all workers; there is a touch of romance, too, in spite of the storekeepers. But the country requires sterner stuff than these two.

We made "Gladier's" for the night. None of the stopping-houses along this trail have progressed beyond the most primitive stage. They put up your horses for a small consideration, and you shift for yourself. They provide a floor for you to sleep on and a fire-place, in some cases a stove for you to cook your food on; that is all. They are all kept by natives, that is to say breeds.

Not until we reached the stopping-house had we any real opportunity to make the acquaintance of our fellow-travelers. Langdon occupied the center of the stage. He loved to play the great man, and the other two, with side glances at his well filled grub-box, were only too willing to play up to him. Of these two I will merely say that the Captain was a burly, grizzled, freshwater seaman who was a mush of concession, and Alfred was a sturdy little Cockney with beefy cheeks and innocent china blue eyes.

Langdon announced grandly that he had enough grub for ten men and we must all eat on him. We accepted his invitation, but at the same time we quietly added our own store to his, and under this admirable arrangement he had all the

satisfaction of playing the host, while we were not hampered by any of the obligations of guests. Thus we lived together in perfect amity throughout the journey.

Langdon was a character in his way. He was an incorrigible braggart, but an odd one in this respect, that he bragged of his catastrophies. Apparently everything he had undertaken in life had gone to smash and he was proud of it. He exaggerated his failures, as other men heighten their successes. When he built a bridge it fell down; when he superintended a mine it blew up; when he went to sea the ship was wrecked. We looked for a new tale of horror at every meal.

We declined to sleep on the doubtful floor at Gladier's, and carried our blankets outside. The others thought we were fools, and we thought they were. The night was very cold, the air as still and clear and crisp as it only becomes in the North. We found a patch of clean, soft grass to lie on, we had plenty of blankets, and it was delightful to lie and watch the stars with the breath ascending from our nostrils like smoke. In the morning we awoke tingling, while our fellow-travelers came out of the filthy shack shivering and groaning. This morning all the little sloughs were frozen from shore to shore and the water in our pail was solid.

As long as the ground was frozen the walking was much easier, but it soon began to thaw; meanwhile the road was growing steadily worse. Through the stretches of forest it was not a road at all properly speaking, but a morass full of dark water holes through which the horses plunged sometimes belly-deep. Generally speaking the ditches were the driest places. The Captain was a good enough walker, but poor Alfred had a time of it. Nature had treated Alfred capriciously in giving him the torso of Hercules upon the legs of Cupid. Alfred hopped frantically from clod to clod, and always fell short in the mud.

On this night we made "the old woman's place." Here there was a separate shack for travelers, so that at least we were not obliged to share in the domestic scenes of the natives. We did our cooking over a little mud fireplace in one corner, so narrow that the sticks had to be stood upright within it. The old woman's chickens came in to share our meal. That night we slept indoors, since it threatened to snow, but we took care to secure a double armful of hay to spread on the unsavory floor under our blankets.

On the following day we started in a real snow-storm, the first of the season. The day was September twenty-third. We met the mail-man en route who shouted the result of the election as he passed. Reciprocity was defeated and Laurier overthrown. We also met more than one family of settlers struggling in. They were leaving themselves but a short time to make a home before the onset of winter in earnest. We had a huddled lunch beside the trail in the falling, wet snow.

It cleared before night, and since there was no stopping-house we could conveniently make, we camped in the open on Pea-vine Prairie, which is no more than a pretty meadow stretching down to a brook. In that brook we had our last open air bath of the season. It was a hurried one. The ground was still covered with snow.

We built ourselves a huge fire on Pea-vine Prairie. It grew colder hourly, and it was so still that the sparks mounted straight upwards like a fountain of liquid fire. The smoke hung motionless low down over the little valley, like filmy veils arrested in mid-air, and every star there is came out to shine. The others suffered greatly from the cold, and the Captain who indiscreetly moved too close to the source of heat, caught fire in his bed. As for us we had on heavy underwear and two sweaters apiece, and we slept between three pairs of Hudson's Bay blankets, not to speak of a lighter pair. There is nothing that can convey such a sense of luxurious well-being as lying well-wrapped under a frosty sky.

The next day broke gloriously, the first really fine day we had had in several weeks. Our last meal in company was luncheon in the freighters' shack at Pete Leduc's. It was a noble meal and it just about finished the grub-boxes. The *piece de resistance* I remember was a stew made out of tinned corn beef, tomatoes, corn, bacon, onions, besides what little odds and ends we had left. Such are the recollections that stick in the mind!

At two o'clock we reached Heart River, a tributary of the lake. The sight of the flowing water excited the desire in our hearts to be afloat on our own again. When the wagon came up, therefore, we unloaded our stuff, and the *Blunderbuss* was unrolled and set up once more. It was delightful to feel it under us again. As we pushed off from the shore the smart Hudson's Bay turnout came bowling along the road, and we exchanged salutes with our friend the inspector.

A short distance below where we embarked the river widens out into Buffalo Bay, a widespreading, shallow body of water lined with reeds and grasses. Just then it was dazzling under the afternoon sun, and it strongly brought to mind the sandy, marshy inlets of the Atlantic sea-board. The wagons had to go all the way around this bay, and we followed them

afar with our eyes. We had a strong head wind to fight, and they beat us into the settlement by half an hour or so.



## CHAPTER XVII

### ON OUR OWN AGAIN

It used to be merely "the Settlement," but now it has a proper post-office name, Grouard. Five years have made a striking change. The hand of civilization has descended, and the happy old unregenerate days are gone forever. It was on Sunday afternoon that we arrived, and a respectable Sabbath hush brooded over the long street. Church came out, and the congregation walked decorously home, clad in the latest fashions out of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Last of all came the spruce young parson, who looked at our rags and our unshaven chins with eyes of grave reproof.

In the old days the French Outfit's store under the direction of "Smitty" and the valiant Maroney was the center of life. What a jolly, devil-may-care crowd hung out there then! As a store it left a good deal to be desired because they were generally out of everything, but you did not soon forget the welcome you received. And now!—a completely appointed emporium, by your leave, with shelves upon shelves of everything under the sun, and a fresh young clerk with slick hair and a white apron to wait on you.

All this was very discomfoting to the shaggy Explorers. We decided that Grouard was no place for us, and after supping at the hotel (another innovation) we set off down Lesser Slave Lake in the *Blunderbuss*.

There is a regular weekly steamboat service on Lesser Slave Lake nowadays. The boat leaves Grouard on Wednesdays, and all our friends were to follow us down on this. We cherished a hope that we might beat them in, and we almost did as the sequel will show.

Buffalo Bay is connected with the lake proper by another stretch of the Heart River, three or four miles long. Down this we paddled in search of a camping-place for the night outside the pale of civilization. Coming out in the lake we headed across a wide bay to a point. Darkness overtook us midway, and such darkness! It was the only night I can remember when there was not light enough on the water to steer by.

For fear of missing the point altogether we headed into the bay, and presently lost ourselves in a wilderness of reeds, that surrounded us like regiments of pale little skeletons who rattled their tiny bones at us as we pushed through. When we were beginning to feel as if we must have traversed the whole length of the lake, we finally broke clear of them, and to our great satisfaction found a real sandy beach. It ran steeply up for ten yards or so, ending in an almost impenetrable little wood. It was not the best place in the world to make a camp, but we searched until we found an opening, and there we cosily ensconced ourselves under the low branches, beside a roaring fire that made a little glory of light in the black void.

Lesser Slave Lake is seventy-five miles long and from five to fifteen miles wide. Its shores, except on the points, are generally marshy, and good landing-places are therefore far between. The lower end with Marten Mountain rising on one side and the Swan mountains on the other bears a strong resemblance to Lake Champlain. At this season the water is filled with an infinitesimal green weed in such quantities that a drop of water splashed on the clothing leaves a green stain. Upon boiling the water the green matter disappears. The water is perfectly sweet and clear, however, for it supports quantities of whitefish, the choicest of the finny tribe.

In the morning when we awoke the lake was spread before us in all its placid beauty. There was a gentle westerly breeze, and we made haste to cut a couple of poles and rig a sail out of the tarpaulin. We had visions of descending the lake in a single day and night. Raising the sail, however, had a fatal effect upon the wind, as it had had when we tried it the last time, and after drifting a mile, we were obliged to take it down and return to the paddles. The course for small boats is from point to point of the north shore to a strait half-way, known as the Narrows. Here you cross over to the south shore and continue. When the wind blows, as it nearly always does, a sea rolls through the Narrows like the billows of the Atlantic. Hence the place has a bad name.

It became very hot as the day wore on, and we progressed down the shore with a discouraging slowness. The rapid streams we had been descending had spoiled us for slack water, and after the slender *Serpent* our old *Blunderbuss* was as hard to push as a washtub. Late in the afternoon we went ashore for dinner at the mouth of a creek, that we were compelled to identify from the map as Shaw's Creek, only eighteen miles from our starting-place. Eighteen goes into seventy-five four times with something over. This was disheartening.

While I was preparing the dinner, a serious anxiety attacked me. In spite of all our experience during three months, I had made an error in the commissariat. For breadstuff we had only five pounds of biscuit and no flour. Five pounds of biscuit looks a lot in the bag, but at our rate of consumption it was scarcely enough for two days. There is no one living on the shores of Lesser Slave Lake except a few wretched Indians who do not eat flour. And in the summer even these are generally off pitching in the hills.

As we were finishing dinner we were astonished to see a little cavalcade come riding briskly alongshore from the direction of the Settlement. It consisted of two priests with their cassocks tucked around their waists and a native servant. The leader of the party was a handsome, bearded man with a bright, benevolent eye, and him I accosted. His cassock had red buttons on it, which should have warned me of his rank, but I did not think of it.

He was a jolly, friendly, courteous soul. In answer to my inquiry he said, excusing himself for his English, though it was very good English, that there were Indians at Big Point, four miles farther down the lake, and they might have a little flour, though he doubted it. At any rate he was going to camp there for the night and we had better paddle down and join him.

With courteous salutes, they splashed through the creek and on their way, and we re-embarked. It became dark before we got to Big Point and a strong breeze sprang up. The waves were breaking on the stones of the point, and landing promised to be a difficult matter in the dark. But our good friend hailed us cheerily from the shore and made a lighthouse of himself by striking matches to show us the way in.

They had arrived only a few minutes before us. There was a little group of log shacks on top of the bank, but the tenants had flown, and we had the Point to ourselves. We camped in company on the grass. It threatened to rain, and we put our two canvases together to make one long shelter.

The Indian boy had shot several ducks en route, and they were soon cooking in the native way, which is to thrust a pointed wand through the bird and stick it in the ground inclining over the fire. They made a very small, neat fire for cooking. One of the ducks was presented to us, together with a great loaf of delicious rolls, fresh from the convent kitchen. We had the greatest difficulty in getting them to accept a small tin of marmalade in exchange.

Later we talked by the fire. Our friend had been stationed at Fort Vermilion for many years, and that supplied a subject of conversation. The younger priest, who I assume had no English, said never a word, but sat and smiled at us agreeably. He was very young; he had a face like a full moon surrounded by a boyish fringe of whisker.

Like most of their co-religionists that we met in the North, these men instantly won our respect by their efficiency. They knew just what to do on the trail, and they did it quickly and without fuss. There is a serious difference of opinion in the country as to the results of their work among the Indians, but there can be none as to the conduct of their own lives. Novel and admirable it was to see our friend kneel by the camp-fire in his cassock and offer up his evening prayers.

In the morning he must still have been worrying about the state of our commissariat, for upon going to the grub-box for something, I found that he had slyly put in half a side of delicious-looking bacon. This I would not accept, for we had meat enough, but not as good as this. Not until he was mounting his horse did I think to ask him his name.

"Bishop Goussard," he said.

All unaware, we had been hob-nobbing with one of the great men of the North!

This was a cool, gray day. It opened with a calm, but there were ominous signs of something to do later on, and my anxiety about the bread was no sooner relieved than I began to worry about how we were going to cross the dangerous Narrows in our cockle-shell. We finally decided to head across while we were still some miles short of the narrowest place, in the hope that we might gain the other shore before it began to blow.

It was an eight- or ten-mile cut the way we went, and at the *Blunderbuss's* slow rate, an endless voyage. A whole hour's hard paddling made no difference in the look of the far-away shore; indeed it seemed to recede from us as we struggled to reach it. All the way over my anxious eye was cocked for squalls. The high canvas sides of the *Blunderbuss* offered a good hold to the wind, and if it did blow a gale, it was bound to blow us pretty much where it listed. However, our astonishing luck was still with us. It held off until just as we reached the other shore. Half an hour later the lake was roaring under the lash of an easterly gale.

The low shores of Lesser Slave Lake rise up out of the water before you in a peculiar way. First you see a dot or two hanging suspended above the horizon; the dots spread, and finally join hands and come down to the water. We found that we had gone a mile or so too far and were within a reedy point that reached out farther and farther as we approached it. This afforded us shelter from the wind and waves, but there was no dry land to go ashore on without rounding it, and off the point the surface of the lake was rent into white tatters. We wished to make the mouth of a small river that we knew emptied on the other side, and putting everything ship-shape aboard the *Blunderbuss*, we pushed out into the turmoil.

It was an exciting little journey. The stumpy *Blunderbuss* reared and kicked on the short high waves like a spirited horse. We were driving right into it, and our progress was a matter of hard-fought inches. In the middle of it I happened to notice that one of the two eye-bolts on which the entire structure of our little boat depended was working through its hole. It would have been a very ill-chosen moment for our collapsible boat to collapse. While my partner kept her headed into the wind as best he could, I loosened the bolt, turned it, and screwed it tight, the *Blunderbuss* meanwhile bucking like a broncho with a burr under its saddle-cloth.

We finally succeeded in rounding the point. We then had to come about in the sea and run for the mouth of the river. Anybody who has ever navigated a small boat over a bar under these circumstances will understand how the breaking waves were like herculean arms striving to pull her broadside and roll her over. However, it was all over in a minute. We shot in as if discharged from a catapult and floated in quiet security under the river bank.

Once inside we were neatly corked up until the wind moderated. We made ourselves a comfortable camp under some willow bushes, in lush grass that reached almost to our waists, and as usual when we were at a pause, we had a meal. We were always ready for another meal. All the rest of the day and all night the wind whistled through the willows and the waves roared on the bar.

At dawn it went down somewhat, though it was still blowing hard, and after breakfast we decided to make an attempt. We got out over the bar with a little wetting, but no serious damage. That entire day was a long struggle against a head wind and a heavy sea. Nevertheless we enjoyed bucking it, and we were surprised at the distance we made. According to the map we covered about twenty-two miles, and we camped on a point well within sight of the lower end of the lake. Had we had even a decent day we would have beaten the steamboat hands down. As it was we saw her lights pass down the lake after dark.

The next morning broke brilliantly clear. Presently to our high satisfaction a breeze sprang up from the west, and we hastened to contrive the sail again. I left the rigging of it to my partner, and I desire to say that it is entirely due to the workmanlike job he made of it that this story is now being written.

In the course of this narrative I have remarked several moments as the most exciting up to that time. This is the last time I shall say it, because the hour that followed for sheer excitement marked the culminating point of the journey. We set out in the highest spirits under a moderate breeze. Immediately beyond our point the shore made away in, and as we headed straight across for the settlement at the foot of the lake, we were, so to speak, out in the middle as soon as we started, with the wind coming down a clear stretch of sixty miles or more behind us.

When it blows on Lesser Slave Lake it blows. We had scarcely started when she came roaring down the lake, just as she had gone roaring up two days before, with this difference that to-day the sun shone brilliantly throughout. Well, there we were! A glance at the picture is sufficient to show the weaknesses of our clumsy rig. We couldn't turn back and we couldn't run for shelter. We couldn't take a reef, and if we had furled the sail altogether, she would have swamped in the sea. There was nothing to do but let her scud before it and trust in Heaven.

I was steering with a paddle. I soon found I couldn't manage the sheet too, and I handed it over to my partner. He turned it round his hand and lay on his back in the bottom of the boat with his feet against the base of the mast for an additional brace. In ten minutes the whole surface of the lake was white and dazzling in the sunshine, and the snub-nosed *Blunderbuss* was plowing up a bow wave that rose higher than the gunwale amidships. The top-heavy sail seemed to pull her head right under.

This was something of an ordeal for a collapsible boat. The *Blunderbuss* was really no more than a kind of canvas bag, stiffened with a few half-hoops of ash, and we had of course neither center-board nor rudder. Our mast was a poplar sapling erected with a couple of nails and a bit of rope. How it all hung together is still a mystery.

The wind came down the lake in blasts, each blast seemingly a little harder and longer than the one before. Each blast

pulled her head round farther and farther into the yawning trough of the sea, and a hundred times I thought it was all over. Fortunately I had a clumsy Indian paddle, the same thickness all the way down. It was no use as a paddle, but it proved our salvation now; an ordinary paddle would have snapped short under the first blast.

It is interesting to look back on the psychology of such moments. It was tremendously exhilarating of course, and we were not worrying about possible consequences, although I knew very well that she could not stand much more. As each blast followed a little harder on the one before, I wondered quite casually whether my arm or the paddle would break first, or whether the mast would carry away; and as the wind pulled her farther and farther around, I would say to myself calmly that if the blast lasted one more second we would be in the drink. I think if the mast had carried away we would both have burst out laughing. Yet after a while when I began to realize that the wind was no longer increasing and that we were holding our own with what we had, a delicious sense of relief stole through me, so I must have been frightened after all.

Nothing did give way, and always just as the pursuing wave was about to leap over her quarter, the blast moderated a little, and she slowly answered to her helm. We came through without shipping a drop. I am not hazarding any guesses as to the rate of speed at which we traveled. It is enough to say that the distant shore rose right out of the water before us.

As we drew near this shore another problem confronted us. The morning sun was shining directly in our eyes, and we could not see just where along that willow-fringed shore the river made in. Up and down the sand the waves were piling up in ugly parallel white lines. From the lake we could see two little houses, and it occurred to us as likely that one would be on each bank of the river, so we steered between.

There was an anxious moment or two as we came close in and there was still no sign of any opening. The roar of the surf was deafening. At the rate she was traveling, if she had struck anything, the *Blunderbuss* would simply have folded up like a fan. The oddest part of it is that we never did find the mouth of the river. While we were still looking for it, the low sand bars flew by on either side of us and we were in it. We roared over the bar, dragging a wave after us like that turned up by a steamboat. An instant later we rounded a bend and floated in smooth water, a little dazed, a little stiff in the arms, and very proud of ourselves.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE LITTLE RIVER AND THE BIG RIVER

The settlement at the lower end of the lake is afflicted with the name of Saw Ridge, pronounced of course to rhyme with porridge. The change here was even more striking than at Grouard. Five years ago Tom Lilac's two little log shacks crouched alone among the sand dunes. Now there are three modern stores, a telegraph office, and a cable ferry. We had a sad sense that civilization was getting an inexorable grip on us, and we lingered no longer than was necessary to buy grub and to inquire about the steamboat. We learned that she had lain at Saw Ridge all night, and our friends were only an hour or two ahead of us on the river.

The Lesser Slave, or the "little" river, as it is known hereabouts in contradistinction to the Athabasca, is a jolly little stream. Not since we had left the Crooked River had we enjoyed the same feeling of intimacy with the banks we were passing. For forty-odd miles from the lake it flows with a gentle current back and forth in innumerable hair-pin bends through widespreading meadows of rank grass.

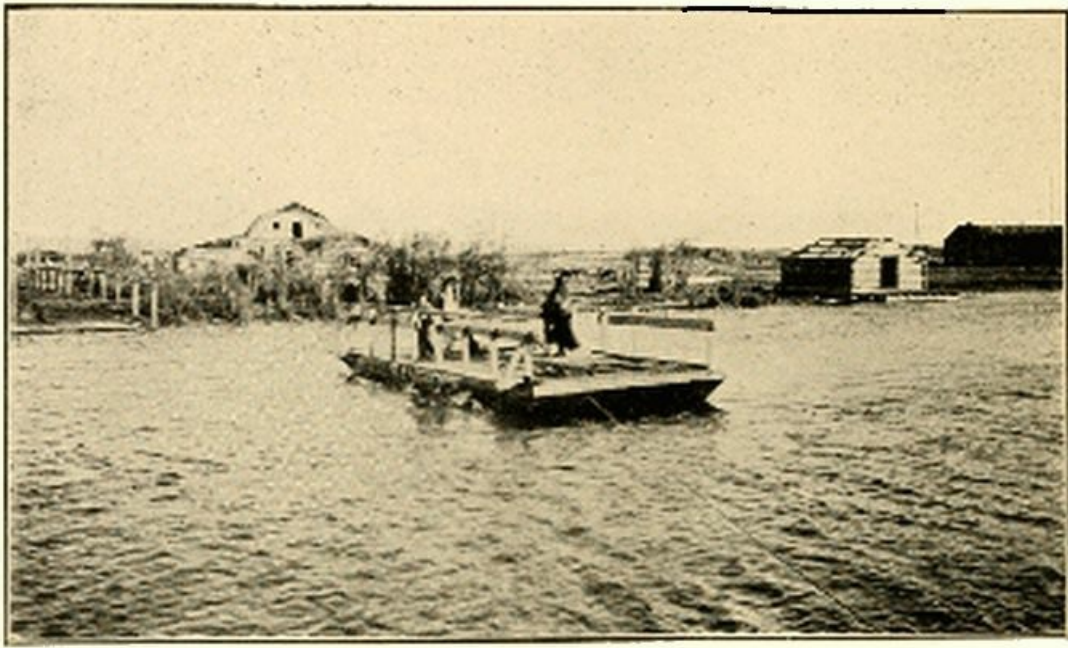


**The game of bridge was a great resource**

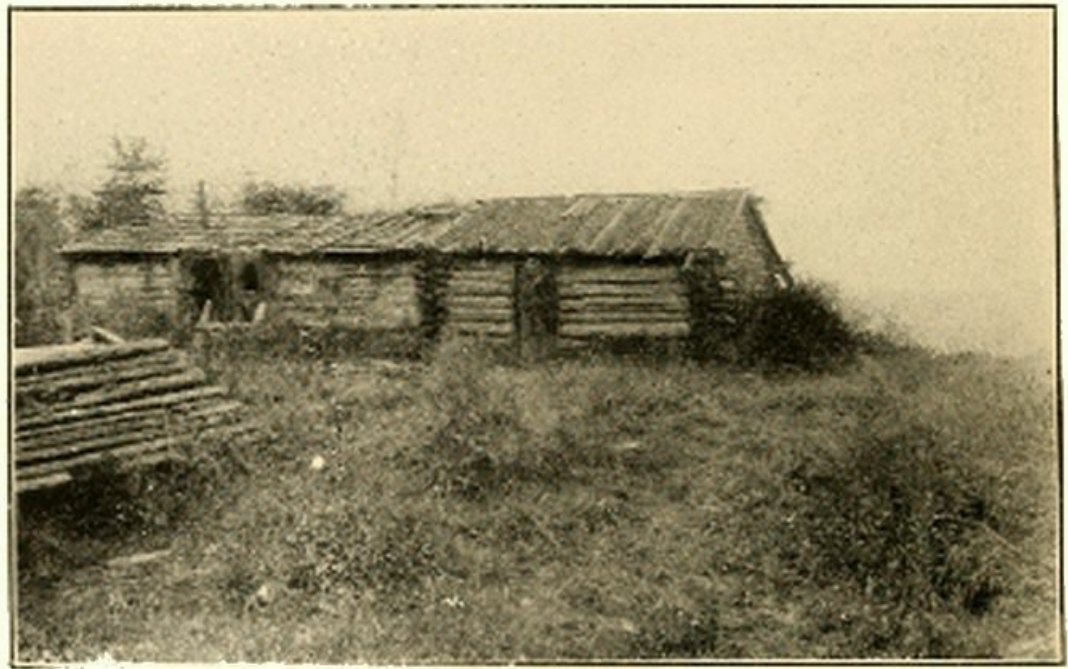




### Along the ninety mile trail



**The ferry at Saw Ridge**



**Jack Slavin's outfit on Lesser Slave Lake**

We had seen just such meadows along the Crooked River, and indeed they are common throughout the North. Though the surface is elevated from six to ten feet above the level of the stream, it has the spongy characteristics of wet land. The grass is said to be the true blue-joint; it grows with a surprising luxuriance and makes excellent hay.

We went down fast enough, but such were the capricious excursions of the stream that progress in a given direction was slow indeed. In one spot near the lake, with a few days' digging some years ago, they broke through to the next bend and saved going round half mile. The wind was still blowing hard, and it played tag with us on the river, swooping on us from a new quarter at every bend. Marten Mountain was still with us, now on our right hand, now on the left. I have not mentioned the exceptional beauty of these distant hills in the clear, bright air of the North. They bask in the sunlight like

yellow and blue gardens.

A few miles down the river we saw an oldish man making hay in the bordering meadow, who reminded me of an old friend in the country and we landed to investigate. He proved to be a stranger, but not for long; we left him our friend. I say an oldish man because his hair was white, but he bubbled over with the energy and enthusiasm of a boy. He was an incoming settler, and things were going well with him; he was delighted with the country and with life in general.

He was a man of average physique, but of superabundant vitality. He had a perfectly round head thatched with closely cropped white hair, a face like a rosy apple, and incessantly twinkling eyes. His name was Ed Chase.

Eighteen months before he had started out from Dakota with his little family in a prairie schooner and four dollars in his pocket, all he possessed in the world. Before they had gone fifty miles they nearly perished in a May blizzard. Now, he informed us with justifiable pride, they had traveled three thousand miles, and on the way he had earned a better team than he started with, besides a cow and an ample supply of grub for the winter. Moreover he was making five dollars a day putting up hay for the company and an equal amount trapping musk-rats on the river.

For his winter quarters he had hired a shack on the river, two miles below, and he invited us to come and meet his wife. He rode down with us in the *Blunderbuss*, entertaining us with his incessant talk all the way. His wife proved to be a handsome, dark, silent girl, who plainly adored him, while she affected to make light of his crazy enthusiasms. Chase told us she was writing the story of their long trip. It ought to make good reading. There were three sturdy youngsters to make future citizens of Canada.

Chase was a born trapper, and trapping was his trade and his passion. He scorned the local methods in vogue and showed us how he would improve on them. For stretching his musk-rat pelts, instead of the solid forms that the Indians laboriously shape, he used little spring frames of willow that he could make by the hundred. The whole cabin was lined with the unfortunate musk-rats' little winter overcoats turned inside out and hung up to dry.

Chase wanted to know all about our trip. As soon as he heard of the Hay River and the unexplored country his enthusiasm blazed up afresh.

"Not a white man in hundreds of miles!" he cried. "That's the place for us, then! Pack up, my girl! We'll start to-morrow!"

Mrs. Chase merely smiled. We felt a serious responsibility in starting him off on such a journey, and we both brought up all the objections we could think of. The more we told him of the distance and the difficulties the more determined he became. He had the solution pat for every problem we suggested.

So it may be that they are destined to become the first settlers on the Hay River. Here's success to them in whatever they undertake! It is the right kind of timber for a new country.

Toward the end of the afternoon we left the meadows behind us. The banks became steeper and stonier, and the woods closed in, first in scattered clumps of trees, then in a continuous growth. From this point on it was like the conventional pretty river of anywhere in the temperate zone, where one instinctively looks for picnic parties in the glades and skiffs tied to overhanging branches in the back-waters. But here there was nothing but ourselves and the musk-rats, those peevish, little, old gentlemen, who sat up under the bushes as we passed, with their paws folded on their fat tummies, and frowned and hoped that we wouldn't notice them.

Though this sort of thing is to be found everywhere, it is none the less beautiful. The light died away very slowly, and the brown stream flowed serenely between the graceful, still trees; the grasses dipped in the water alongshore, and the musk-rats as they swam back and forth made arrowy paths of ripples that caught the light. We went ashore at dark, warned by the voice of the first little rapid below, and camped and feasted in one of the glassy glades. The *Blunderbuss* lay in deep water at the edge of the grass as if moored to a wharf, but the musk-rats had a high old time jumping in and out, until we pulled her out high and dry.

The rapid we had heard proved to be nothing more than a riffle where the Sauteaux comes into the Lesser Slave. We reached Sauteaux landing at ten o'clock, where we found the little steamboat tied up to the bank at the end of her run. There are twenty-five miles of rapids below, around which the passengers are transferred by stage to the larger boat, which runs on the Athabasca. We learned that our friends had gone on by stage that morning, so they were still but an

hour or two in advance of us.

The rapids followed. As usual we had been warned against them, but they proved to be mere child's play after what we had been through. Since the last time I descended these rapids the government has built many wing dams to assist navigation. These are breakwaters extending out from the shore to force the current into a narrow, deep channel. The water cascades through like a gigantic mill-race, but it is perfectly simple to run them; you simply let her go down the channel marked out for you. Building these dams has had the effect of backing up the water between the rapids, and there were long slack stretches that made tedious paddling. The rapids could not come often enough to please our impatient souls.

About three o'clock we rounded the last bend of the Lesser Slave, and the "Big" River lay before us. This is Mirror landing, the end of the other boat's run, and to our surprise we found her still tucked in a hollow of the bank. It was the maiden trip of a new boat, and she made a gay sight crowded with passengers and guests of the line as she was. It had an incongruous effect there in the midst of the undisturbed woods, as of a picnic party that had dropped from the skies. Hamilton, Langdon, Alfred, the Captain, and Natty Bumpus were all on deck.

There were also several white girls in light summer dresses, with ribbons in their hair, a strange and delightful sight to our unaccustomed eyes. It is needless to say, however, that they cast never a glance at the ragged Explorers in their absurd-looking tub. Which suggests Stevenson's query: "At what point in the descent of the social scale does a lady cease to notice a man?" I think Stevenson said it was when he left off his waistcoat, but that was before the days of shirt-waist men. However, we lacked more than waistcoats, so we couldn't blame the girls.

Pausing only long enough to exchange bulletins with our friends on deck, we hastened on down. We had a great desire to beat them to the Landing, and we thought we might do it by floating all night, for they would have to tie up during the hours of darkness. Five minutes later we were out on the muddy bosom of the big river, the same turbid, hurrying Athabasca that we had camped beside months before under the shadow of Roche Miette, but greatly increased in size.

It is a wide, shallow, swift stream full of shoals, and at this season of low water, showing wide, bare stretches of stony shores. It has the look of a "big" river; there are beautiful long vistas and noble bluffs, but it lacks the serene majesty of its sister, the Peace. The banks are much lower for one thing, and it betrays the unquiet nature of a shallow stream—or a person. We had seventy-five miles of it to descend. At intervals along the banks there are stopping-houses for the freighters in the winter, but at this season not many of them are inhabited.

We made ten miles or more before the steamer overtook us, and we had high hopes of beating it out. I had a pleasant recollection of another night that I had floated down this river by the light of the Aurora. Unfortunately a thunderous cloud came rolling up, and we were compelled to go ashore and pitch the tent for shelter. We ate our supper while it rained and thundered a little, but it was one of those abortive squalls that hang fire. The rain stopped, but the clouds refused to clear. After waiting a while, we decided to chance it, and making our beds in the boat, we pushed off in the current. My partner turned in, while I sat up to take the first watch. We couldn't both sleep, because there are rapids in the Athabasca.

Then it began to rain in earnest. The Heavens were fully opened and the water descended in a still, heavy pressure of drops that hissed on the surface of the river like thousands of little serpents. It was a thorough, steady, patient down-pour, the kind of rain a farmer loves, that leaves no cranny unsoaked. I joined my partner under the blankets and we pulled our tarpaulins over us as best we could, but they only made matters worse, by collecting the water and letting it through bucketfuls at a time. We were soon lying in a pool. Finally we both sat up in our soaking bed and stoically watched it rain. I will never forget the picture of that black river, with the ghostly film of hissing drops over its surface, and the inky shadows of the islands and the shores.

Since we did not seem to be making any progress to speak of, we decided to go ashore. It was too dark to pick a proper landing-place, and we were cast up on a steep declivity of oozy mud. There was no possible place to pitch the tent, so we sat ourselves down under a spruce tree that afforded a partial shelter and waited in the gloomy silence of perfect discomfort. There was nothing to say.

By and by, in an hour maybe, it stopped raining, and we miserably re-embarked. It turned cold, and sleep in our drenched condition was out of the question. There was nothing for it but to make up our minds to paddle all night, hardly an alluring prospect, tired as we were already. We wearily set to work. At this dark moment a bright shaft of yellow

light struck athwart the black river, surely the welcomest light that ever gladdened the eyes!

We had reached Moose Portage, fifteen miles from the mouth of the little river. I knew there were a couple of log shacks here, but in former years they were only occupied by the natives in the winter. Even a breed shack was welcome at this juncture, and landing, we made our way up the bank. What was our astonishment to see through the window as we approached the fair hair of a white woman bending over a cradle.

We received a hearty welcome. It turned out that the present proprietor at Moose Portage was a young white man, a newcomer in the country, with his youthful wife and their two babies. This couple was likewise of the best stuff of which pioneers are made, hardy, energetic, and resourceful. We sat and listened to their brave plans for the future. There was something fine in the spectacle of the two youngsters hewing a home for their babies out of the wilderness. It was like the picture on the five-dollar treasury notes.

They had two shacks close together. They had been asleep in the principal one when the rain started to come through, and fearing for the babies, they had made a hasty move to the other. Now that the rain had stopped they offered us the shack they had vacated, and presently there we were in a bed with fresh sheets on it, a hot fire in the air-tight stove, and everything we owned spread out to dry. After the hour that had just passed, it seemed too good to be true.

Next morning we were on our way before our kind hosts were astir. We felt the usual embarrassment about offering pay for our entertainment, but in this case we got around it by leaving some shells which fitted the young man's rifle. The day broke clear and cold. We made famous speed with the current, and pricked off our progress on the map at a highly encouraging rate. What I have already said of the river applies to this day too. We rounded innumerable pine-clad points, and traversed one long reach after another. The glory of the autumn tints was fast departing, for the poplars were shedding their leaves. There were several so-called rapids en route, but some of them were scarcely discernible.

In two hours we made fifteen miles; at noon we passed Sugar Loaf hill, only twenty-five miles from the Landing. We had cold lunches at frequent intervals en route, and we each enjoyed a little snooze while we floated. There is a large scale map of this part of the river, which I kept open before me and measured almost every paddle-stroke on it. It was interesting to follow our course, but it made the time pass slowly. We averaged seven miles an hour.

We met a gang of lumbermen building a raft. They were out of tobacco. I was sorry for them, but I had none. We saw an Indian under the farther shore painfully toiling up-stream. We were glad we were going the other way. Finally we overtook two young fellows apparently standing in the middle of the river. A closer investigation showed that they had a tiny raft beneath them. This was Saturday, and they were on their way down to the Landing for a "time." All day long they had been standing on their flimsy craft. They couldn't sit down for fear of getting their Sunday clothes wet.

They pointed to an island a little way ahead and told us when we reached it we would be able to see the Landing. It was true; there, lying in a bend of the river were the white buildings that marked the end of the *Blunderbuss's* voyage. And it was only three o'clock, and we had made sixty miles since daybreak.

# CHAPTER XIX

## THE LAST STAGE

Athabasca Landing is a hundred miles by wagon road north of Edmonton. This is one of the nearest points of approach between the great river-systems of the Saskatchewan and the Mackenzie, consequently from the earliest times it has been a main portage trail of the country, and ever since Edmonton became the outpost of civilization, "the Landing" has been the gateway to the hinterland. The routes divide here; you go down-stream to Lake Athabasca, the Mackenzie, and the Arctic, or you go up-stream to the Peace River country, whence we had come.

For many years the government telegraph ended here, and all the fascinating stories of the North that occasionally broke into the newspapers, of Indians and the fur-trade, of strange crimes and the vigilance of the Mounted Police, were dated Athabasca Landing. "Gagnon's" was then the great meeting-place of the North, and appointments to meet here were made a whole year in advance. The searcher for copy had only to tip his chair back in the row along the river-front of the hotel and open his ears to hear stranger tales of the North than ever were written as fiction.

All this is much changed. For a long time while booms boomed to the southward, the Landing continued to sleep unaware. Finally the Northern Transportation Company started its steamers on the river, and the Canadian Northern Railway commenced to build from Edmonton. Now the town was just entering on the plate-glass-front, cement-sidewalk, moving-picture-show stage of progress. And everywhere we were greeted by the familiar signs of "Sub-divisions," "Additions," and "Lots! Lots! Lots!" There is more reason for this here than in such towns as Edson. The Landing has a real excuse for being and will survive even the activities of the real estate speculators.

We stopped a mile or so short of town and went into camp in a secluded spot under the lee of a saw-mill. I walked in to reconnoiter. It had a novel look, the haberdasher's shop, the cigar-stand, and the white babies in baby-carriages. Town has its advantages, though; I never had to bake bread again, and we finally dropped bacon as an every-day article of diet.

I found that the steamboat had arrived about four hours before us, and most of the passengers were still in town, looking for a means of transport south. I met Natty Bumpus in his buckskin shirt and leggings, who clung to me as to a fellow-stranger in this strange confusion of a town. There were no freighters in evidence, and as the next day was Sunday, there was nothing to do but wait patiently in camp.

We spent part of Sunday exploring the village and the surroundings hills. Our costumes provoked mirth in the street-corner loiterers, particularly our lack of coats on a Sunday afternoon. Here was a significant change. North of the Landing men are not judged by their rags. One could write a chapter on the difference in the point of view that this one fact suggests.

Natty Bumpus visited us in camp and diverted us with his simple conversation. He described in detail the thrilling drama of Western life that he had witnessed in the "move 'em pitcher" show the night before. Western drama was just his line. It supplied what he found lacking in the real border-land. "Ain't it wonderful!" he said. "How them fellas can make it all out so if 'twas true!" Most of the steamboat passengers were at the show, but one lady was missing. "I can't understand why she wasn't there," said Natty. "They have money."

Natty and another man had engaged passage with a freighter who was to leave at six next morning, and it was therefore up to my partner and myself to rise at dawn if we wished to go too. It rained all night, and we got up and packed in the rain, and the *Blunderbuss* made her last little journey in a downpour. The shore in front of the town presented a wide expanse of the stickiest, slipperiest mud anybody ever had to wade through with packs on their backs. We found shelter in the "Great Northern" restaurant.

This was strictly a male establishment. You will find its counterpart in every large city, generally with a dingy illuminated sign over the door: "Beds 15 cents." But a man's tastes take color from his outward habit. It seemed a more suitable place for us than the "Northland Hotel" down the street. In the office there were three chairs, three newspapers, and a hot stove. Most of the guests, therefore, were obliged to sit around on their personal effects watching like dogs under the table for one of the said chairs and newspapers to be vacated. Some of the newspapers were only three days old.





The *Blunderbuss* after the storm



They couldn't sit down for fear of getting their Sunday clothes wet



### **The last stage—Our observation car**

We breakfasted at a long oilcloth-covered table in the rear, amidst a decidedly interesting company. Opposite me sat a bearded Hercules who had made a journey out of the far North for the sole purpose of getting a "white man's dawg" to bear him company throughout the winter. He was on his way back with her, a fine Airedale with an interesting family of three. The waiter was a tall, embittered, and rather elegant individual, who looked like a cotillon leader fallen upon evil days. The cook was a happy-go-lucky boy, and as always in the North a person to be propitiated.

Time is nothing in the North. All morning we waited for our freighter. Between showers we looked for him, but in vain. It finally transpired that he had engaged himself to carry a party to the end of the railway and would be back for us the next day, or the day after! It cleared at noon, and I proposed setting out on foot. The roads would be bad after the rain, but anything was preferable to hanging around town. We had developed a sudden longing for hot baths and clean clothes and the other amenities of civilization.

The reports about the railway were conflicting. It was said to be completed within forty miles of the Landing; some said trains were running and some said work was abandoned for the season. Keeping out only a few necessities and the precious films which never left us, we shipped our baggage in care of the Hudson's Bay transport and set out in search of the rails. Natty Bumpus came with us. He allowed that he was a considerable walker when he got started. The fourth member of the party was a young fellow named Monteith, a settler near Fort St. John, who was on his way out to spend the winter.

Natty Bumpus was in trouble from the start. Anyone could tell by the look of him that he was no walker. On the long hill out of the Landing his wind gave out, and we paused at the top to breathe him. It was three when we started, and in order to do the twelve miles to Smith's stopping-house by supper-time a smart pace was required. It was hard going, too, through the slippery mud. Poor old Natty Bumpus fell farther and farther behind, and we finally lost sight of him altogether.

At Smith's we received a disappointment. There wasn't anything much to eat, we were informed, and they had no blankets, and they were busy, and they weren't taking anybody in any more anyway. To us, just out of the hospitable wilderness, this was something of a shock. There was nothing for it but to pull in our belts and foot it to the next place, Whitely's, ten miles farther. As we issued out of the gate at Smith's Natty Bumpus came limping along the road. We called to him that it was no use trying there, but he went on in, making believe not to hear us. Natty's feelings were hurt. We never saw him again.

Fortunately we had bread and cheese and raisins and tea, and we supped beside a little stream. It was the last time that the copper kettle was hung over the fire, and we sat in the grass eschewing forks and spoons.

It was a warm, steamy night after the rain, and as black as lamp-black. The trail divided more than once, and we were none too sure of the way. Monteith was our guide, and when he admitted that he was anxious, we were discouraged. Walking at night has its charms, just the same. Across the open spaces, the sandy track stretched ahead of us like a pale ribbon. In the fragrant piney woods we had literally to feel for the trail with our feet. How cheering it was on issuing from such a patch of woods to be greeted by a welcoming yellow eye in the distance. We fairly ran the rest of the way for fear they would go to bed before we got there.

But these were Christian people; they did not go to bed at nine o'clock. Monteith was known to them, and his welcome was extended to us. Though we were desperately hungry, to avoid giving them trouble at that hour we said we had supped, and no more was said about it. We were waiting to be shown to our beds when the daughter of the house appeared from the next room and invited us to enter. There we found a feast spread. In my partner's notebook is this brief entry: "Out-o'-sight supper! Best since leaving Edmonton except Mrs. Wilson's."

Next morning we learned that the railroad had actually been built to within sixteen miles of Whitely's, but no regular trains were running. We were told, however, that the construction trains occasionally took passengers in, and if we were lucky we might board one. Accordingly we turned off the trail at Stoney Creek, and after traversing a couple of fields struck the railway grade. After following this for a mile or so, we came to the end of the steel, but there was no construction work going on, and indeed no sign of life anywhere about.

We followed the track, and after a while we heard the puffing of a bona-fide locomotive around a bend. We heard it arrive from afar and shunt its cars, and then there followed a period of painful suspense, while we waited for it to start back again. We expected to arrive just in time to see it pull out. But luck was still with the Explorers. We got the train. It was a long string of flat cars loading sand for construction work down the line. The conductor said after discharging his load at St. Albert that he was going right into the Edmonton yards. This was pretty soft! He invited us to climb aboard the caboose.

When I was a little boy the great desire of my life was to ride in the "cupalow" of a caboose. It was never gratified until this day. As I climbed up over the lockers, and sat down in the "windsor" chair, which is always up in the lookout, the old feeling came back. This journey had an added advantage in that the train was pointed in the wrong direction, and we traveled toward Edmonton caboose first.

It was a fearful and wonderful road-bed, and six miles an hour was a dangerous speed. The engineer of course was upwards of a quarter of a mile away, and they let her go blindly, trusting in Heaven. The conductor expressed surprise whenever we negotiated a curve without leaving the rails. There were stretches of muskeg over which the long train undulated like old-fashioned pictures of the sea-serpent. Under the circumstances riding in the "cupalow" was not without its thrills. The conductor mildly objected to my sitting up there, because, he said, when the train "broke" my head would go through the window. When I said I was willing to take the risk, he made it clear that it was not my head he was concerned about, but the glass.

They were a queer, devil-may-care lot, the train crew, who traveled with their lives in their hands and a profane joke on their lips. Every one of them momentarily expected the caboose to capsize in the ditch with half a hundred flat cars piling up on top of her. They lived in a world of their own and spoke a strange tongue. We listened to dire tales of death and disaster on the rails. Their nerves were stretched like fiddle-strings, and we gathered that there had been a grand fracas among them at St. Albert the night before. The fireman was in the hospital there with his scalp laid open by a lantern. Their pay extended into the hundreds per month for overtime, and the engineer had been on duty for thirty-six hours continuously.

As we proceeded, one brakeman hunted ducks from the platform. When he brought one down, the hunter dropped off, secured the game, and swung himself on the engine when it came up. At a crossing we saw a youth waiting with a bicycle. As we approached, he held up a finger as one signals a trolley-car. The conductor negligently leaned out from the platform, and seizing the bicycle, swung it aboard. The youth jumped on the other end of the caboose. He was a pale, anxious-looking youth, who never opened his lips during the whole journey.

We had supper in the "boarding-car" of a construction train alongside the track, and a surprisingly good supper it was. Afterwards my partner disappeared, to my considerable anxiety, but he was subsequently discovered relieving the over-worked fireman in the engine-cab. His childish ambition had been to ride on an engine, and so that was gratified too. At first they were going to have us in by nine o'clock, then eleven, then one, but the hours passed, and we were still far

away. At midnight we reached Morinville, the terminus of the operated part of the line. Here the engineer struck, and all hands knocked off and went to the local hotel for a sleep.

We were warned to be up at five, and I had no sleep at all for fear of being left. As a matter of fact we did not pull out until nearly nine. An hour later we reached St. Albert, nine miles from town. Here we learned that the road was blocked by a wreck. It was very uncertain when we could get through, so the pale youth rode off on his bicycle, and we three took to shanks' mare once more.

It was a long nine miles over a villainous road, but at last the neat little painted houses began to spring up thickly and the advertising signs multiplied. We hit a trolley line, and we actually rode into the center of the city on a trolley-car, with our bundles in our laps, sitting as quiet as mice, a little dazed by the multitude of people that surrounded us. It was an odd thought that these good souls had been eating three meals a day, and going to business, and pushing the perambulator on Sunday afternoons all the time we had been away. The thing that struck us hardest was the hideousness of towns and the sickly color of townsfolk.

We had long ago decided that the first thing we would do would be to walk around the principal streets of town ragged and dirty as we were, just to see how it felt to be disreputable in a civilized community. We tried it, and now we know what it is like to be utterly ignored by the well-dressed passers-by, like tramps or homeless dogs. Especially noticeable was the bland scorn of the fine ladies. We saw a man we knew, a bank manager, dignified and distinguished, and we were strongly tempted to fasten on him, one on each side, and accompany him up Jasper Avenue. But we spared him.

Then washing, shaving, and arraying ourselves, we began to pick up the complicated threads of a life of respectability—how complicated it is you cannot realize until you have been a care-free savage for months at a time. Straightaway the other life became slightly unreal like a dream in the morning. But this dream will never fade while we live.

## THE END

### Transcriber's Notes:

hyphenation, spelling and grammar have been preserved as in the original

Page 15, between the two river ==> between the two rivers

Page 36, pretence of concealment ==> pretense of concealment

Page 43, What did you eat?" ==> "What did you eat?"

Page 43, How did you contrive ==> "How did you contrive

Page 60, at Mile 10 B. C. ==> at Mile 10, B. C.

Page 68, to the highest pitch ==> to the highest pitch

Page 71, The indians at Tête Jaune ==> The Indians at Tête Jaune

Page 76, double what we had guaged ==> double what we had gauged

Page 86, found that civiliiization ==> found that civilization

Page 93, Since when they have ==> Since then they have

Page 99, the rapids., etc. ==> the rapids, etc.

Page 106, good-looking young bravo ==> good-looking young brave

Page 110, gloomy fancies of might ==> gloomy fancies of night

Page 122, same comfution of directions ==> same confusion of directions

Page 194, I remember it ran. ==> I remember it ran,

Page 220, Achunazie suggested that ==> Ahcunazie suggested that

Page 225, all day and enoyed ==> all day and enjoyed

Page 258, muskrats on the river ==> musk-rats on the river

Page 260, such a journew ==> such a journey

Page 264, rained and thundred ==> rained and thundered

Page 280, a bank mananger ==> a bank manager

[The end of *New Rivers of the North* by Hulbert Footner]