

# Through the Mackenzie Basin eBook

## Through the Mackenzie Basin by Charles Mair

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## Introduction

The important events of A.D. 1857, and the negotiations which led to the Transfer of the Hudson's Bay Territories—Former Treaties and the Treaty Commission of 1899.

The terms upon which Canada obtained her great possessions in the West are generally known, and much has been written regarding the tentative steps by which, after long years of waiting, she acquired them. The distinctively prairie, or southern, portion of the country and its outliers, constituting "Prince Rupert's Land," had been claimed by the Hudson's Bay Company since May, 1670, as an absolute freehold. This and the North-West Territories, in which, under terminable lease from the Crown, the Company exercised, as in British Columbia, exclusive rights to trade only, were, as the reader knows, transferred to Canada by Imperial sanction at the same time. It is not the author's intention, therefore, to cumber his pages with trite or irrelevant matter; yet certain transactions which preceded this primordial and greatest treaty of all not unfittingly may be set forth, though in the briefest way, as a pardonable introduction to the following record.

The year 1857 was an eventful one in the annals of "The North-West," the name by which the Territories were generally known in Canada. [An important event in Red River was begot of the stirring incidents of this year, namely, the starting at Fort Garry, in December, 1859, by two gentlemen from Canada, Messrs. Buckingham and Caldwell, of the first newspaper printed in British territory east of British Columbia and west of Lake Superior. It was called the *Nor'-Wester*, but, having few advertisements, and only a limited circulation, the originators sold out to Dr. (afterwards Sir John) Schultz, who, at his own expense, published the paper, almost down to the Transfer, as an advocate of Canadian annexation, immigration and development.] In that year two expeditions were set afoot to explore the country; one in charge of Captain Palliser, [Strange to say, Captain Palliser reported that he considered a line of communication entirely through British territory, connecting the Eastern Provinces and British Columbia, out of the question, as the Astronomical Boundary adopted isolated the prairie country from Canada. Professor Hind, on the other hand, in the same year, standing on an eminence on the Qu'Appelle, beheld in imagination the smoke of the locomotive ascending from the train speeding over the prairies on its way through Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific.] equipped by the Imperial Government, and the other, under Professor Hind, at the expense of the Government of Canada. An influential body of Red River settlers, too, at this time petitioned the Canadian Parliament to extend to the North-West its government and protection; and in the same year the late Chief Justice Draper was sent to England to challenge the validity of the

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Hudson's Bay Company's charter; and to urge the opening up of the country for settlement. But, above all, a committee of the British House of Commons took evidence that year upon all sorts of questions concerning the North-West, and particularly its suitability for settlement, much of which was valueless owing to its untruth.

Nevertheless, the Imperial Committee, after weighing all the evidence, reported that the Territories were fit for settlement, and that it was desirable that Canada should annex them, and hoped that the Government would be enabled to bring in a bill to that end at the next session of Parliament. Five years later, the Duke of Newcastle, who became Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1859, and accompanied the Prince of Wales to Canada as official adviser in 1860, having in his possession the petition of the Red River settlers, as printed by order of the Canadian Legislature, brought the matter up in a vigorous speech in the House of Lords, in which he expressed his belief that the Hudson's Bay Company's charter was invalid, though, he added, "it would be a serious blow to the rights of property to meddle with a charter two hundred years old. But it might happen," he continued, "in the inevitable course of events, that Parliament would be asked to annul even such a charter as this, in order, as set forth in the Queen's Speech, that all obstacles to an unbroken chain of loyal settlements, stretching from ocean to ocean, should be removed." British Columbia, which had become a Province in 1858, has now urging the Imperial Government with might and main to furnish a waggon-road and telegraph line to connect her, not only with the Territories and Canada, but with the United Empire. She was met by the stiffest of opposition, the opposition of a very old corporation strongly entrenched in the governing circles of both parties. But the clamour of British Columbia was in the air, and her suggestions, hotly opposed by the Company, had been brought before the House of Lords by another peer. In the discussion which followed, the Duke of Newcastle declared that "it seemed monstrous that any body of gentlemen should exercise fee-simple rights which precluded the future colonization of that territory, as well as the opening of lines of communication through it." The Minister's idea at the time seemed to be to cancel the charter, and to concede proprietary rights around fur posts only, together with a certain money payment, considerably less, it appears, than what was ultimately agreed upon.

The Hudson's Bay Company, alarmed at the outlook and the attitude of the Colonial Secretary, offered their entire interests and belongings, trade and territorial, to the Imperial Government for a million and a half pounds sterling, an offer which the Duke was disposed to accept, but which was unfortunately declined by Mr. Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Duke, who had resigned his office in 1864, died in October following, and in the meantime a change



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of a startling character had come over the time-honoured company, which sold out to a new company in 1863, being merged into, or rather merging into itself, an organization known as "The Anglo-International Financial Association," which included several prominent American capitalists. The old name was retained, but everything else was to be changed. The policy of exclusion was to cease, immigration was to be encouraged, and a telegraph line built through the Territories to the Pacific coast. The wire for this was actually shipped, and lay in Rupert's Land for years, until made use of by the Mackenzie Administration in the building of the Government telegraph line, which followed the railway route defined by Sir Sandford Fleming. The old Hudson's Bay Company's shares, of a par value of half a million pounds sterling, were increased to a million and a half under the new adjustment, and were thrown upon the market in shares of twenty pounds sterling each. Sir Edmund Head, an old ex-Governor of Canada, was made Governor of the new company. The Stock Exchange was not altogether favourable, and the remaining shares were only sold in the Winnipeg land boom of 1881.

The alien element in the new company seemed to inspire the politicians of the United States with surpassing hopes and ideas. An offer to purchase its territorial interests was made in January, 1866, by American capitalists, which was not unfavourably glanced at by the directorate. It was capped later on. The corollary of the proposal was a bill, actually introduced into the United States Congress in July following, and read twice, "providing for the admission of the States of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Canada East and Canada West, and for the organization of the Territories of Selkirk, Saskatchewan and Columbia." The bill provided that "The United States would pay ten millions of dollars to the Hudson's Bay Company in full of all claims to territory or jurisdiction in North America, whether founded on the Charter of the Company, or any treaty, law, or usage." The grandiosity, to use a mild phrase, of such a measure needs no comment. But though it seems amusing to the Canadian of to-day, it was by no means a joke forty years ago. As a matter of fact, the then most uninhabited Territories, cut off from the centres of Canadian activity by a wilderness of over a thousand miles, would have been invaded by Fenians and filibusters but for the fact that they were a part of the British Empire. An attempt at this was indeed made at a later date. This possibility was afterwards formulated, evidently as a threat, by Senator Charles Sumner during the "Alabama Claims" discussion, in his astonishing memorandum to Secretary Fish. "The greatest trouble, if not peril," he said, "is from Fenianism, which is excited by the British flag in Canada. Therefore, the withdrawal of the British flag cannot be abandoned as a preliminary of such a settlement as is now proposed. To make the settlement complete the withdrawal should be from this hemisphere, including provinces and islands." A refreshing proposition, truly!

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It was the Imperial Government, of course, which figured most prominently throughout the "North-West" question. But, it may be reasonably asked, what was Canada doing, with her deeper interests still, to further them in those long years of discussion and delay. With the exception of the Hind Expedition, the Draper mission, the printing and discussion of the Red River settlers' petition and consequent Commission of Inquiry, certainly not much was done by Parliament. More was done outside than in the House to arouse public interest; for example, the two admirable lectures delivered in Montreal in 1858 by the late Lieutenant-Governor Morris, followed by the powerful advocacy of the Hon. William Macdougall and others, aided by the *Toronto Globe*, a small portion of the Canadian press, and the circulation, limited as it was, of the Red River newspaper, the *Nor'-Wester*, in Ontario.

An unseen, but adverse, parliamentary influence had all along hampered the Cabinet; an influence adverse not only to the acquisition of the Territories, but even to closer connection by railway with the Maritime Provinces. [*Vide* a series of articles contributed to the *Toronto Week*, in July, 1896, by Mr. Malcolm McLeod, Q.C., of Ottawa, Ont.] This sinister influence was only overcome by the great Conferences which resulted in the passage of the British North America Act in 1867, which contained a clause (Article 11, Sec. 146), inserted at the instance of Mr. Macdougall, providing for the inclusion of Rupert's Land and the North-West Territories upon terms to be defined in an address to the Queen, and subject to her approval. In pursuance of this clause, Mr. Macdougall in 1867 introduced into the first Parliament of the Dominion a series of eight resolutions, which, after much opposition, were at length passed, and were followed by the embodying address, drafted by a Special Committee of the House, and which was duly transmitted to the Imperial Government. This was followed by the mission of Messrs. Cartier and Macdougall to London, to treat for the transfer of the Territories, which, through the mediation of Lord Granville, was finally effected. The date fixed upon for the transfer was the first of December, 1869. Unfortunately for Lieutenant-Governor Macdougall, owing to the outbreak of armed rebellion at Red River, it was postponed without his knowledge, and it was not until the 15th of July, 1870, that the whole country finally became a part of the Dominion of Canada. With the latter date the annals of Prince Rupert's Land and the North-West Territory end, and the history of Western Canada begins.

But whilst the Hudson's Bay Company's territorial rights and those of Great Britain had been at last transferred to the Dominion, there remained inextinguished the most intrinsic of all, *viz.*, the rights of the Indians and their collaterals to their native and traditional soil. The adjustment of these rights was assumed by the Canadian Parliament in the last but one of the resolutions introduced by Mr. Macdougall, and no time was lost after the transfer in carrying out its terms, "in conformity with the equitable principles which have uniformly governed the Crown in its dealings with the aborigines."

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[In the foregoing brief sketch, the author, for lack of space, omits all reference to the Red River troubles, which preceded the actual transfer, as also to the military expedition under Col. Wolseley, the threatened recall of which from Prince Arthur's Landing, in July, 1870, was blocked by the bold and vigorous action of the Canada First Party in Toronto.]

Former Treaties.

Before passing on to my theme, a glance at the treaties made in Manitoba and the organized Territories may be of interest to the unfamiliar reader.

The first treaty, in what is now a part of Manitoba, was made in pursuance of a purchase of the old District of Assiniboia from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1811 by Lord Selkirk, who in that year sent out the first batch of colonists from the north of Scotland to Red River. The Indian title to the land, however, was not conveyed by the Crees and Saulteaux until 1817, when Peguis and others of their chiefs ceded a portion of their territory for a yearly payment of a quantity of tobacco. The ceded tract extended from the mouth of the Red River southward to Grand Forks, and, westward, along the Assiniboine River to Rat Creek, the depth of the reserve being the distance at which a white horse could be seen on the plains, though this matter is not very clear. The British boundary at that time ran south of Red Lake, and would still so run but for the indifference of bygone Commissioners. This purchase became the theatre of Lord Selkirk's far-seeing scheme of British settlement in the North-West, with whose varying fortunes and romantic history the average reader is familiar.

The first Canadian treaties were those effected by Mr. Weemys Simpson in 1871, first at Stone Fort, Man., covering the old purchase from Peguis and others, and a large extent of territory in addition, the stipulated terms of payment being afterwards greatly enlarged. These treaties are known as Nos. 1 and 2, and were followed by the North-West Angle Treaty, effected by Lieutenant-Governor Morris, in 1873, with the Ojibway Saulteaux. In 1874 the Qu'Appelle Treaty, after prolonged discussion and inter-tribal jealousy and disturbance, was concluded by Lieutenant-Governor Morris, the Hon. David Laird, then Minister of the Interior, and Mr. W. J. Christie, of the Hudson's Bay Company. Treaty No. 5 followed, with the cession of 100,000 square miles of territory, covering the Lake Winnipeg region, *etc.*, after which the Great Treaty (No.6), at Forts Carlton and Pitt, in 1876, covering almost all the country drained by the two Saskatchewan, was partly effected by Mr. Morris and his associates, the recalcitrants being afterwards induced by Mr. Laird to adhere to the treaty, with the exception of the notorious Big Bear, the insurgent chief who figured so prominently in the Rebellion of 1885. The final treaty, or No. 7, made with the Assiniboines and Blackfeet, the most powerful and predatory of all our Plain Indians, was concluded

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by Mr. Laird and the late Lieut.-Colonel McLeod in 1877. By this last treaty had now been ceded the whole country from Lake Winnipeg to the Rocky Mountains, and from the international boundary to the District of Athabasca. But there remained in native hands still that vast northern anticlinal, which differs almost entirely in its superficial features from the prairies and plains to the south; and it was this region, enormous in extent and rich in economic resources, which, it was decided by Government, should now be placed by treaty at the disposal of the Canadian people. To this end it was determined that at Lesser Slave Lake the first conference should be held, and the initial steps taken towards the cession of the whole western portion of the unceded territory up to the 60th parallel of north latitude.

The more immediate motive for treating with the Indians of Athabasca has been already referred to, *viz.*, the discovery of gold in the Klondike, and the astonishing rush of miners and prospectors, in consequence, to the Yukon, not only from the Pacific side, but, east of the mountains, by way of the Peace and Mackenzie rivers. Up to that date, excepting to the fur-traders and a few missionaries, settlers, explorers, geologists and sportsmen, the Peace River region was practically unknown; certainly as little known to the people of Ontario, for example, as was the Red River country thirty years before. It was thought to be a most difficult country to reach—a *terra incognita*—rude and dangerous, having no allurements for the average Canadian, whose notions about it, if he had any, were limited, as usual, to the awe-inspiring legend of “barbarous Indians and perpetual frost.”

There is a lust, however, the unquenchable lust for gold, which seems to arouse the dullest from their apathy. This is the *primum mobile*; from earliest days the sensational mover of civilized man, and not unlikely to remain so until our old planet capsizes again, and the poles become the equator with troglodites for inhabitants. No barriers seem insurmountable to this rampant spirit; and, urged by it, the gold-seekers, chiefly aliens from the United States, plunged into the wilderness of Athabasca without hesitation, and without as much as “by your leave” to the native. Some of these marauders, as was to be expected, exhibited on the way a congenital contempt for the Indian’s rights. At various places his horses were killed, his dogs shot, his bear-traps broken up. An outcry arose in consequence, which inevitably would have led to reprisals and bloodshed had not the Government stepped in and forestalled further trouble by a prompt recognition of the native’s title. Hitherto he had been content with his lot in these remote wildernesses, and well might he be! One of the vast river systems of the Continent, perhaps the greatest of them all, considering the area drained, teeming with fish, and alive with fur and antler, was his home—a region which furnished him in abundance with the means of life, not to speak of such surplus of luxuries as was brought to his doors by his old and paternal friend, “John Company.” His wants were simple, his life healthy, though full of toil, his appetite great—an appetite which throve

upon what it fed, and gave rise to fabulous feats of eating, recalling the exploits of the beloved and big-bellied Ben of nursery lore.

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But the spirit of change was brooding even here. The moose, the beaver and the bear had for years been decreasing, and other fur-bearing animals were slowly but surely lessening with them. The natives, aware of this, were now alive, as well, to concurrent changes foreign to their experience. Recent events had awakened them to a sense of the value the white man was beginning to place upon their country as a great storehouse of mineral and other wealth, enlivened otherwise by the sensible decrease of their once unfailing resources. These events were, of course, the Government borings for petroleum, the formation of parties to prospect, with a view to developing, the minerals of Great Slave Lake, but, above all, the inroad of gold-seekers by way of Edmonton. The latter was viewed with great mistrust by the Indians, the outrages referred to showing, like straws in the wind, the inevitable drift of things had the treaties been delayed. For, as a matter of fact, those now peaceable tribes, soured by lawless aggression, and sheltered by their vast forests, might easily have taken an Indian revenge, and hampered, if not hindered, the safe settlement of the country for years to come. The Government, therefore, decided to treat with them at once on equitable terms, and to satisfy their congeners, the half-breeds, as well, by an issue of scrip certificates such as their fellows had already received in Manitoba and the organized Territories. To this end adjustments were made by the Hon. Clifford Sifton, then Minister of the Interior and Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, during the winter of 1898-9, and a plan of procedure and basis of treatment adopted, the carrying out of which was placed in the hands of a double Commission, one to frame and effect the Treaty, and secure the adhesion of the various tribes, and the other to investigate and extinguish the half-breed title. At the head of the former was placed the Hon. David Laird, a gentleman of wide experience in the early days in the North-West Territories, whose successful treaty with the refractory Blackfeet and their allies is but one of many evidences of his tact and sagacity. [The Hon. David Laird is a native of Prince Edward Island. His father emigrated from Scotland to that Province early in the last century, and ultimately became a member of its Executive Council. After leaving college his son David began life as a journalist, but later on took to politics, and being called, like his father, to the Executive Council, was selected as one of the delegates to Ottawa to arrange for the entrance of the Island into the Canadian Confederation. He was subsequently elected to the Dominion House of Commons, and became Minister of the Interior in the Mackenzie Administration. After three years' occupancy of this department he was made Lieut.-Governor of the North-West Territories, an office which he filled without bias and to the satisfaction of both the foes and friends of his own party. He returned

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to the Island at the close of his official term, but was called thence by the Laurier Administration to take charge of Indian affairs in the West, with residence in Winnipeg, which is now his permanent home.] A nature in which fairness and firmness met was, of all dispositions, the most suited to handle such important negotiations with the Indians as parting with their blood-right. Fortunately these qualities were pre-eminent in Mr. Laird, who had administered the government of the organized Territories, at a primitive stage in their history, in the wisest manner, and, at the close of his official career, returned to his home in Prince Edward Island leaving not an enemy behind him.

The other Treaty Commissioners were the Hon. James Ross, Minister of Public Works in the Territorial Government, and Mr. J. A. McKenna, then private secretary to the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, and who had been for some years a valued officer of the Indian Department. With them was associated, in an advisory capacity, the Rev. Father Lacombe, O.M.I., Vicar-General of St. Albert, Alta., whose history had been identified for fifty years with the Canadian North-West, and whose career had touched the currents of primitive life at all points.

[Father Lacombe is by birth a French Canadian, his native parish being St. Sulpice, in the Island of Montreal, where he was born in the year 1827. On the mother's side he is said to draw his descent from the daughter of a habitant on the St. Lawrence River called Duhamel, who was stolen in girlhood by the Ojibway Indians, and subsequently taken to wife by their chief, to whom she bore two sons. By mere accident, her uncle, who was one of a North-West Company trading party on Lake Huron, met her at an Indian camp on one of the Manitoulin islands, and having identified her as his niece, restored her and her children to her family. Father Lacombe was ordained a priest by Bishop Bourget, of Montreal, and in 1849 set out for Red River, where he became intimately associated with the French half-breeds, accompanying them on their great buffalo hunts, and ministering not only to the spiritual but to the temporal welfare of them and their descendants down to the present day. In 1851 he took charge of the Lake Ste. Anne Mission, and subsequently of St. Albert, the first house in which he helped to build; and from these Missions he visited numbers of outlying regions, including Lesser Slave Lake. His principal missionary work, however, for twenty years was pursued amongst the Blackfoot Indians on the Great Plains, during which he witnessed many a perilous onslaught in the constant warfare between them and their traditional enemies, the Crees. Being now over eighty years of age, he has retired from active duty, and is spending the remainder of his days at Pincher Creek, Alta., where, it is understood, he is preparing his memoirs for publication at an early date.]



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Not associated with the Commission, but travelling with it as a guest, was the Right Rev. E. Grouard, O.M.I., the Roman Catholic Bishop of Athabasca and Mackenzie rivers, who was returning, after a visit to the East, to his headquarters at Fort Chipewyan, where his influence and knowledge of the language, it was believed, would be of great service when the treaty came under consideration there. The secretaries of the Commission were Mr. Harrison Young, a son-in-law of the Rev. George McDougall, the distinguished missionary who perished so unaccountably on the plains in the winter of 1876, and Mr. I. W. Martin, an agreeable young gentleman from Goderich, Ont. Connected with the party in an advisory capacity, like Father Lacombe, and as interpreter, was Mr. Pierre d'Eschambault, who had been for over thirty years an officer in the Hudson's Bay Company's service. The camp-manager was Mr. Henry McKay, of an old and highly esteemed North-West family. Such was the personnel, official and informal, of the Treaty Commission, to which was also attached Mr. H. A. Conroy, as accountant, robust and genial, and well fitted for the work.

The Half-breed Scrip Commission, whose duties began where the treaty work ended, was composed of Major Walker, a retired officer of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, who had seen much service in the Territories and was in command of the force present at the making of the Fort Carlton Treaty in 1876; and Mr. J. A. Cote, an experienced officer of the Land Department at Ottawa. The secretaries were Mr. J. F. Prudhomme, of St. Boniface, Man., and the writer.

Our transport arrangements, from start to finish, had been placed entirely in the hands of a competent officer of the Hudson's Bay Company, Mr. H. B. Round, an old resident of Athabasca; and to the Commission was also annexed a young medical man, Dr. West, a native of Devonshire, England, whose services were appreciated in a region where doctors were almost unknown. But not the least important and effective constituent of the party was the detachment of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, which joined us at Edmonton, minus their horses, of course; picked men from a picked force; sterling fellows, whose tenacity and hard work in the tracking-harness did yeoman service in many a serious emergency. This detachment consisted of Inspector Snyder, Sergeant Anderson, Corporals Fitzgerald and McClelland, and Constables McLaren, Lett, Burman, Lelonde, Burke, Vernon and Kerr. The conduct of these men, it is needless to say, was the admiration of all, and assisted materially, as will be seen hereafter, in the successful progress of the expedition.



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Whilst it had been decided that the proposed adjustments should be effected, if possible, upon the same terms as the previous treaties, it was known that certain changes will be necessary owing to the peculiar topographic features of the country itself. For example, in much of its arable reserves, such as many of the tribes retained in the south, were unavailable, and special stipulations were necessary, in such case, so that there should be no inequality of treatment. But where good land could be had, a novel choice was offered, by which individual Indians, if they wished, could take their inalienable shares in severalty, rather than be subject to the "band," whereby many industrious Indians elsewhere had been greatly hampered in their efforts to improve their condition. But, barring such departures as these, the proposed treaties were to be effected, as I have said, according to precedent. The Commission, then, resting its arguments on the good faith and honour of the Government and people of Canada in the past, looked forward with confidence to a successful treaty in Athabasca, the record of travel and intercourse, to that end, beginning with the following narrative.

## Through the Mackenzie Basin

### Chapter I

From Edmonton To Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Laird, with his staff, left Winnipeg for Edmonton by the Canadian Pacific express on the 22nd of May, two of the Commissioners having preceded him to that point. The train was crowded, as usual, with immigrants, tourists, globe-trotters and way-passengers. Parties for the Klondike, for California or Japan—once the far East, but now the far West to us—for anywhere and everywhere, a C.P.R. express train carrying the same variety of fortunates and unfortunates as the ocean-cleaving hull. Calgary was reached at one a.m. on the Queen's birthday, and the same morning we left for Edmonton by the C. & E. Railway. Every one was impressed favourably by the fine country lying between these two cities, its intermediate towns and villages, and fast-growing industries. But one thing especially was not overlooked, viz., the honour due to our venerable Queen, alas, so soon to be taken from us.

In the evening we arrived at Strathcona, and found it thronged with people celebrating the day. Crossing the river to Edmonton, we got rooms with some difficulty in one of its crowded hotels, but happily awoke next morning refreshed and ready to view the town. It is needless to describe what has been so often described. Enough to say Edmonton is one of the doors to the great North, an outfitter of its traders, an emporium of its furs. And there is something more to be said. It has an old fort, or, rather, portions of one, for the vandalism which has let disappear another, and still more historic, stronghold, is manifest here as well. And truly, what savage scenes have been enacted on this very

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spot! What strife in the days of the rival companies! Edmonton is a city still marked by the fine savour of the “Old-Timers,” who meet once a year to renew associations, and for some fleeting but glorious hours recall the past on the great river. Age is thinning them out, and by and by the remainder man will shake his “few, sad, last gray hairs,” and slip out, too. But the tradition of him, it is to be hoped, will live, and bind his memory forever to the soil he trod, when all this Western world was a wilderness, each primitive settlement a happy family, each unit an unsophisticated, hospitable soul.

To our mortification we found that our supplies, seasonably shipped at Winnipeg, would not arrive for several days; a delay, to begin with, which seemed to prefigure all our subsequent hindrances. Then rain set in, and it was the afternoon of the 29th before Mr. Round could get us off. Once under way, however, with our thirteen waggons, there was no trouble save from their heavy loads, which could not be moved faster than a walk. Our first camp was at Sturgeon River—the Namao Sepe of the Crees—a fine stream in a defile of hills clothed with poplar and spruce, the former not quite in leaf, for the spring was backward, though seeding and growth in the Edmonton District was much ahead of Manitoba. The river flat was dotted with clumps of russet-leaved willows, to the north of which our waggons were ranged, and soon the quickly pitched tents, fires and sizzling fry-pans filled even the tenderfoot with a sense of comfort.

Next morning our route lay through a line of low, broken hills, with scattered woods, largely burnt and blown down by the wind; a desolate tract, which enclosed, to our left, the Lily Lake—Ascutamo Sakaigon—a somewhat marshy-looking sheet of water. Some miles farther on we crossed Whiskey Creek, a white man’s name, of course, given by an illicit distiller, who thrived for a time, in the old “Permit days,” in this secluded spot. Beyond this the long line of the Vermilion Hills hove in sight, and presently we reached the Vermilion River, the Wyamun of the Crees, and, before nightfall, the Nasookamow, or Twin Lake, making our camp in an open besmirched pinery, a cattle shelter, with bleak and bare surroundings, neighboured by the shack of a solitary settler. He had, no doubt, good reasons for his choice; but it seemed a very much less inviting locality than Stony Creek, which we came to next morning, approaching it through rich and massive spruce woods, the ground strewn with anemones, harebells and violets, and interspersed with almost startlingly snow-white poplars, whose delicate buds had just opened into leaf.

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Stony Creek is a tributary of a larger stream, called the Tawutinaow, which means “a passage between hills.” This is an interesting spot, for here is the height of land, the “divide” between the Saskatchewan and the Athabasca, between Arctic and Hudson Bay waters, the stream before us flowing north, and carrying the yellowish-red tinge common to the waters on this slope. A great valley to the left of the trail runs parallel with it from the Sturgeon to the Tawutinaow, evidently the channel of an ancient river, whose course it would now be difficult to determine without close examination. At all events, it stretches almost from the Saskatchewan to the Athabasca, and indicates some great watershed in times past. Hay was abundant here, and much stock, it was evident, might be raised in the district.

Towards evening we reached the Tawutinaow bridge, some eighteen miles from the Landing, our finest camp, dry and pleasant, with sward and copse and a fine stream close by. Here is an extensive peat bed, which was once on fire and burnt for years—a great peril to freighters’ ponies, which sometimes grazed into its unseen but smouldering depths. The seat of the fire was now an immense grassy circle, with a low wall of blackened peat all around it.

In the morning an endless succession of small creeks was passed, screened by deep valleys which fell in from hills and muskegs to the south, and at noon, jaded with slow travel, we reached Athabasca Landing. A long hill leads down to the flat, and from its brow we had a striking view of the village below and of the noble river, which much resembles the Saskatchewan, minus its prairies. We were now fairly within the bewildering forest of the north, which spreads, with some intervals of plain, to the 69th parallel of north latitude; an endless jungle of shaggy spruce, black and white poplar, birch, tamarack and Banksian pine. At the Landing we pitched our tents in front of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s post, where had stood, the previous year, a big canvas town of “Klondikers.” Here they made preparation for their melancholy journey, setting out on the great stream in every species of craft, from rafts and coracles to steam barges. Here was begun an episode of that world-wide craze, which has run through all time, and almost every country, in which were enacted deeds of daring and suffering which add a new chapter to the history of human fearlessness and folly.

The Landing was a considerable hamlet for such a wilderness, being the shipping point to Mackenzie River, and, via the Lesser Slave Lake, to the Upper Peace. It consisted of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s establishment, with large storehouses, a sawmill, the residence and church of a Church of England bishop, and a Roman Catholic station, with a variety of shelters in the shape of boarding-houses, shacks and tepees all around. From the number of scows and barges in all stages of construction, and the high timber

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canting-tackles, it had quite a shipyard-like look, the population being mainly mechanics, who constructed scows, small barges, called “sturgesons,” and the old “York,” or inland boat, carrying from four to five tons. Here, hauled up on the bank, was the Hudson’s Bay Company’s steamer, the *Athabasca*, a well-built vessel about 160 feet long by 28 feet beam. This vessel, it was found, drew too much water for the channel; so there she lay, rotting upon her skids. It was a tantalizing sight to ourselves, who would have been spared many a heart-break had she been fit for service. A more interesting feature of the Landing, however, was the well sunk by the Government borer, Mr. Fraser, for oil, but which sent up gas instead. The latter was struck at a considerable depth, and, when we were there, was led from the shaft under the river bank by a pipe, from which it issued aflame, burning constantly, we were told, summer and winter. Standing at the gateway of the unknown North, and looking at this interesting feature, doubly so from its place and promise, one could not but forecast an industrial future, and “dream on things to come.”

Shortly after our arrival at the Landing, news, true or false, reached us that the ice was still fast on Lesser Slave Lake. At any rate, the boat’s crew expected from there did not turn up, and a couple of days were spent in anxious waiting. Some freight was delayed as well, and a thunderstorm and a night of rain set the camp in a swim. The non-arrival of our trackers was serious, as we had two scows and a York boat, with a party all told of some fifty souls, and only thirteen available trackers to start with. It seemed more than doubtful whether we could reach Lesser Slave Lake on treaty-schedule time, and the anxiety to push on was great. It was decided to set out as we were and trust to the chapter of accidents. We did not foresee the trials before us, the struggle up a great and swift river, with contrary winds, rainy weather, weak tracking lines and a weaker crew. The chapter of accidents opened, but not in the expected manner.

The York boat and one of the scows were fitted up amidships with an awning, which could be run down on all sides when required, but were otherwise open to the weather, and much encumbered with lading; but all things being in readiness, on the 3rd of June we took to the water, and, a photograph of the scene having been taken, shoved off from the Landing. The boats were furnished with long, cumbrous sweeps, yet not a whit too heavy, since numbers of them snapped with the vigorous strokes of the rowers during the trip. A small sweep, passed through a ring at the stern, served as a rudder, by far the best steering gear for the “sturgesons,” but not for a York boat, which is built with a keel and can sail pretty close to the wind. Ordinarily the only sail in use is a lug, which has a great spread, and moves a boat quickly in a fair wind. In a calm, of course, sweeps have to be used, and our first step

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in departure was to cross the river with them, the boatmen rising with the oars and falling back simultaneously to their seats with perfect precision, and handling the great blades with practised ease. When the opposite shore was reached, the four trackers of each boat leaped into the water, and, splashing up the bank, got into harness at once, and began, with changes to the oars, the unflagging pull which lasted for two weeks. This harness is called by the trackers “otapanapi”—a Cree word—and it must be borne in mind that scarcely any language was spoken throughout this region other than Cree. A little English or French was occasionally heard; but the tongue, domestic, diplomatic, universal, was Cree, into which every half-breed in common talk lapsed, sooner or later, with undisguised delight. It was his mother tongue, copious enough to express his every thought and emotion, and its soft accents, particularly in the mouth of woman, are certainly very musical. Emerson’s phrase, “fossil poetry,” might be applied to our Indian languages, in which a single stretched-out word does duty for a sentence.

But to the harness. This is simply an adjustment of leather breast-straps for each man, tied to a very long tracking line, which, in turn, is tied to the bow of the boat. The trackers, once in it, walk off smartly along the bank, the men on board keeping the boats clear of it, and, on a fair path, with good water, make very good time. Indeed, the pull seems to give an impetus to the trackers as well as to the boat, so that a loose man has to lope to keep up with them. But on bad paths and bad water the speed is sadly pulled down, and, if rapids occur, sinks to the zero of a few miles a day. The “spells” vary according to these circumstances, but half an hour is the ordinary pull between “pipes,” and there being no shifts in our case, the stoppages for rest and tobacco were frequent. At this rate we calculated that it would take eight or ten days to reach the mouth of Lesser Slave River. Mr. d’Eschambault and myself, having experienced the crowded state of the first and second boats, and foregathered during the trip, decided to take up our quarters on the scow, which had no awning, but which offered some elbow room and a tolerably cozy nook amongst the cases, bales and baggage with which it was encumbered.

We had a study on board, as well, in our steersman, Pierre Cyr, which partly attracted me—a bronzed man, with long, thin, yet fine weather-beaten features, frosty moustache and keenly-gazing, dry, gray eyes—a tall, slim and sinewy man, over seventy years of age, yet agile and firm of step as a man of thirty. Add the semi-silent, inward laugh which Cooper ascribes to his Leather-Stocking, and you have Pierre Cyr, who might have stood for that immortal’s portrait. That he had a history I felt sure when I first saw him seated amongst his boatmen at the Landing, and, on seeking his acquaintance, was not surprised to learn that he had accompanied Sir John Richardson on his last journey in Prince Rupert’s Land, and Dr. Rae on his eventful expedition to Repulse Bay, in 1853, in search of Franklin. He looked as if he could do it again—a vigorous, alert man, ready and able to track or pole with the best—a survivor, in fact, of the old race of Red River voyageurs, whose record is one of the romances of history.

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Another attraction was my companion, Mr. d'E. himself—a man stout in person, quiet by disposition, and of few words; a man, too, with a lineage which connected him with many of the oldest pioneer families of French Canada. His ancestor, Jacques Alexis d'Eschambault, originally of St. Jean de Montaign, in Poictou, came to New France in the 17th century, where, in 1667, he married Marguerite Rene Denys, a relative of the devoted Madame de la Peltrie, and thus became brother-in-law to M. de Ramezay, the owner of the famous old mansion in Montreal, now a museum. Jacques d'Eschambault's son married a daughter of Louis Joliet, the discoverer of the Mississippi, and became a prominent merchant in Quebec, distinguishing himself, it is said, by having the largest family ever known in Canada, viz., thirty-two children. Under the new *regime* my companion's grandfather, like many another French Canadian gentleman, entered the British army, but died in Canada, leaving as heir to his seigneurie a young man whose friendship for Lord Selkirk led him to Red River as a companion, where he subsequently entered the Hudson's Bay Company's service, and died, a chief-factor, at St. Boniface, Man. His son, my companion, also entered the service, in 1857, at his father's post of Isle a la Crosse, served seven years at Cumberland, nine at other distant points, and, finally, fifteen years as trader at Reindeer Lake, a far northern post bordering on the Barren Lands, and famous for its breed of dogs. My friend had some strange virtues, or defects, as the ungodly might call them; he had never used tobacco or intoxicants in his life, a marvellous thing considering his environment. He possessed, besides, a fine simplicity which pleased one. Doubled up in the Edmonton hotel with a waggish companion, he was seen, so the latter affirmed, to attempt to blow out the electric light, a thing which, greatly to his discomfiture, was done by his bed-fellow with apparent ease. Being a man of scant speech, I enjoyed with him betimes the luxury of it. But we had much discourse for all that, and I learnt many interesting things from this old trader, who seemed taciturn in our little crowd, but was, in reality, a tower of intelligent silence beat about by a flood of good-humoured chaff and loquacity.

At our first night's camp we were still in sight of the Landing, which looked absurdly near, considering the men's hard pull; and from there messengers were sent to Baptiste Lake, the source of Baptiste Creek, which joins the Athabasca a few miles up, and where there was a settlement of half-breed fishermen and hunters, to procure additional trackers if possible. On their unsuccessful return, at eleven a.m., we started again—newo pishawuk, as they call it, “four trackers to the line,” as before and early in the afternoon were opposite Baptiste Creek, and, weather compelling, rowed across, and camped there that evening. It rained dismally all night, and morning opened with



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a strong head wind and every symptom of bad weather. A survey party from the Rocky Mountains, in a York boat, tarried at our camp, bringing word that the ice-jam was clear in Lesser Slave Lake, which was cheering, but that we need scarcely look for the expected assistance. They also gave a vague account of the murder of a squaw by her husband for cannibalism, which afterwards proved to be groundless, and, with this comforting information, sped on.

It is ridiculously easy to go down the Athabasca compared with ascending it. The previous evening a Baptiste Lake hunter, bound for the Landing, set on from our camp at a great rate astride of a couple of logs, which he held together with his legs, and disappeared round the bend below in a twinkling. A priest, too, with a companion, arrived about dusk in a canoe, and set off again, intending to beach at the Landing before dark.

Of course, several surmises were current regarding the non-arrival of our trackers, the most likely being Bishop Grouard's, that, as the R. C. Mission boats and men had not come down either, the Indians and half-breeds were too intent upon discussing the forthcoming treaty to stir.

So far it had been the rain and consequent bad tracking which had delayed us; but still we were too weak-handed to make headway without help, and it was at this juncture that the Police contingent stepped manfully into the breach, and volunteered to track one of the boats to the lake. This was no light matter for men unaccustomed to such beastly toil and in such abominable weather; but, having once put their hands to the rope, they were not the men to back down. With unfaltering "go" they pulled on day after day, landing their boat at its destination at last, having worked in the harness and at the sweeps, without relief, from the start almost to the finish.

Meanwhile all enjoyed good health and spirits in spite of the weather. There were fair grounds for the belief that Mr. Ross, who had set out by trail from Edmonton, would reach the lake in time to distribute to the congregated Indians and half-breeds the Government rations stored there for that purpose, and, therefore, our anxiety was not so great as it would otherwise have been.

Our trackers being thus reinforced, the outlook was more satisfactory, not so much in increased speed as in the certainty of progress. The rain had ceased, and though the sky was still lowering, the temperature was higher. Tents were struck, and the boats got under way at once, taking chances on the weather, which, instead of breaking up in another deluge, improved. Eight men were now put to each line, Peokus, a remarkable old Blackfoot Indian, captured and adopted in boyhood by the Crees, and who afterwards attracted the attention of us all, being detailed to lead the Police gang, who, raw and unused to the work, required an experienced tracker at their head.

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The country passed through hitherto was rolling, hilly, and densely forested, but, alas, with prostrate trunks and fire-blasted “rampikes,” which ranged in all directions in desolate profusion. The timber was Banksian pine, spruce, poplar and birch, much of it merchantable, but not of large size. It was pitiful to see so much wealth destroyed by recent fires, and that, too, at the possible opening of an era of real value in the near future. The greatest destruction was evidently on the north side of the river, but the south had not escaped.

As regards the soil in these parts, it was, so far, impossible to speak favourably. The hunters described the inland country as a wilderness of sand-hills, surrounded by quaking-bogs, muskegs and soft meadows. Judging by exposures on the river bank, there are, here and there, fertile areas which may yet be utilized; but probably the best thing that could happen to that part of the country would be a great clearing fire to complete the destruction of its dead timber and convert its best parts into prairie and a summer range for cattle.

We were now approaching a portion of the river where the difficulties of getting on were great. The men had to cope with the swift current, bordered by a series of steep gumbo slides, where the tracking was hazardous; where great trees slanted over the water, tottering to their fall, or deep pits and fissures gaped in the festering clay, into which the men often plunged to their arm-pits. It was horrible to look upon. The chain-gang, the galley-slaves, how often the idea of them was recalled by that horrid pull! Yet onward they went, with teeth set and hands bruised by the rope, surmounting difficulty after difficulty with the pith of lions.

At last a better region was reached, with occasionally a better path. Here the destruction by fire had been stayed, the country improved, and the forest outlines became bold and noble. Hour by hour we crept along a like succession of majestic bends of the river, not yet flushed by the summer freshet, but flowing with superb volume and force. Fully ten miles were made that day, the men tracking like Trojans through water and over difficult ground, but fortunately free from mosquitoes, the constant head winds keeping these effectually down. The cool weather in like manner kept the water down, for it is in this month that the freshet from the Rocky Mountains generally begins, filling the channel bank-high, submerging the tracking paths, and bearing upon its foaming surface such a mass of uprooted trees and river trash that it is almost impossible to make head against it.

The next morning opened dry and pleasant, but with a milky and foreboding sky. Again the boats were in motion, passing the Pusquatenao, or Naked Hill, beyond which is the Echo Lake—Katoo Sakaigon—where a good many Indians lived, having a pack-trail thereto from the river.

The afternoon proved to be hot, the clouds cumulose against a clear, blue sky, with occasional sun-showers. The tracking became better for a time, the lofty benches



decreasing in height as we ascended. Innumerable ice-cold creeks poured in from the forest, all of a reddish-yellow cast, and the frequent marks on trees, informing passing hunters of the success of their friends, and the number of stages along the shore for drying meat, indicated a fine moose country.

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The next day was treaty day, and we were still a long way from the treaty post. The Police, not yet hardened to the work, felt fagged, but would not own up, a nephew of Sir William Vernon Harcourt bringing up the rear, and all slithering, but hanging to it with dogged perseverance. Nothing, indeed, can be imagined more arduous than this tracking up a swift river, against constant head winds in bad weather. Much of it is in the water, wading up “snies,” or tortuous shallow channels, plunging into numberless creeks, clambering up slimy banks, creeping under or passing the line over fallen trees, wading out in the stream to round long spits of sand or boulders, floundering in gumbo slides, tripping, crawling, plunging, and, finally, tottering to the camping-place sweating like horses, and mud to the eyes—but never grumbling. After a whole day of this slavish work, no sooner was the bath taken, supper stowed, and pipes filled, than laughter began, and jokes and merriment ran round the camp-fires as if such things as mud and toil had never existed.

The old Indian, Peokus, heading the Police line, was a study. His garb was a pair of pants toned down to the colour of the grime they daily sank in, a shirt and corduroy vest to match, a faded kerchief tied around his head, an Assomption sash, and a begrimed body inside of all—a short, squarely built frame, clad with rounded muscles—nothing angular about *him!*—but the nerves within tireless as the stream he pulled against. On the lead, in harness, his long arms swung like pendulums, his whole body leant forward at an acute angle, the gait steady, and the step solid as the tramp of a gorilla. Some coarse black hairs clung here and there to his upper lip; his fine brown eyes were embedded in wrinkles, and his swarthy features, though clumsy, were kindly—a good-humoured face, which, at a cheerful word or glance, lit up at once with the grotesque grin of an animated gargoyle. This was the typical old-time tracker of the North; the toiler who brought in the products of man’s art in the East, and took out Nature’s returns—the Indian’s output—ever since the trade first penetrated these endless solitudes.

The forest scenery now became very striking; primeval masses of poplar and birch foliage, which spread away and upward in smoothest slopes, like vast lawns, studded with the sombre green of the pine tops which towered above them. Here and there the bends of the river crossed at such angles as to enclose a lake-like expanse of water. The river also took a fine colouring from its tributaries, a sort of greenish-yellow tinge, and now became flecked with bubbles and thin foam, so that we feared the freshet, which would have been disastrous.

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At mid-day we reached Shoal Island—Pakwao Ministic—and here the poles were got out and the trackers took the middle of the river for nearly a mile, until deep water was reached. Placer miners had evidently been at work here, but with poor results, we were told. Below Baptiste Creek, however, the yield had been satisfactory, and several miners had made from \$2.00 to \$2.50 a day over their living expenses. Above the Baptiste there was nothing doing; indeed, we did not pass a single miner at work on the whole route, and it was the best time for their work. The gold is flocculent, its source as mysterious as that of the Saskatchewan, if the theory that the latter was washed out of the Selkirks before the upheaval of the Rockies is astray.

A fresh moose head, seen lying on the bank, indicated a hunting party, but no human life was seen aside from our own people. Indeed, the absence of life of any kind along the river, excepting the song-birds, which were in some places numerous, was surprising. No deer, no bears, not even a fox or a timber wolf made one's fingers itch for the trigger. A few brent, which took wing afar off, and a high-flying duck or two, were the sole wildings observed, save a big humble-bee which droned around our boat for an instant, then darted off again. Even fish seemed to be anything but plentiful.

That night's camp was hurriedly made in a hummocky fastness of pine and birch, where we found few comfortable bedding-places. In the morning we passed several ice-edges along shore, the survivals of the severe winter, and, presently, met a canoe with two men from Peace River, crestfallen "Klondikers," who had "struck it rich," they said, with a laugh, and who reported good water. Next morning a very early start was made, and after some long, strong pulls, and a vigorous spurt, the mouth of the Lesser Slave River opened at last on our sight.

We had latterly passed along what appeared to be fertile soil, a sandy clay country, which improved to the west and south-west at every turn. It had an inviting look, and the "lie," as well, of a region foreordained for settlement. It was irritating not to be able to explore the inner land, but our urgency was too great for that. From what we saw, however, it was easy to predict that thither would flow, in time, the stream of pioneer life and the bustle of attending enterprise and trade.

## Chapter II

### **Lesser Slave River And Lesser Slave Lake.**

It is unnecessary to inform the average reader that the Lesser Slave River connects the Lesser Slave Lake with the Athabasca; any atlas will satisfy him upon that point. But its peculiar colouring he will not find there, and it is this which gives the river its most distinctive character. Once seen, it is easy to account for the hue of the Athabasca below the Lesser Slave River; for the water of the latter, though of a pale yellow colour in a glass, is of a

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rich burnt umber in the stream, and when blown upon by the wind turns its sparkling facets to the sun like the smile upon the cheek of a brunette. Its upward course is like a continuous letter S with occasional S's side by side, so that a point can be crossed on foot in a few minutes which would cost much time to go around. Its proper name, too, is not to be found in the atlases, either English or French. There it is called the Lesser Slave River, but in the classic Cree its name is *Iyaghchi Eennu Sepe*, or the River of the Blackfeet, literally the "River of the Strange People." The lake itself bears the same name, and even now is never called Slave Lake by the Indians in their own tongue. This fact, to my mind, casts additional light upon an obscure prehistoric question, namely, the migration of the great Algonquin, or Algonquin, race. Its early home was, perhaps, in the far south, or south-west, whence it migrated around the Gulf of Florida, and eastward along the Atlantic coast, spreading up its bays and inlets, and along its great tributary rivers, finally penetrating by the Upper Ottawa to James's, and ultimately to the shores of Hudson Bay. I know there is strong adverse opinion as to the starting-point of this migration, and I only offer my own as a suggestion based upon the facts stated, and as, therefore, worthy of consideration. Sir Alexander Mackenzie speaks of the Blackfeet "travelling north-westward," and that the Crees were "invaders of the Saskatchewan from the eastward." Indeed, he says the latter were called by the Hudson's Bay Company's officers at York Factory "their home-guards." One thing seems certain, *viz.*, that the Crees got their firearms from the English at Hudson Bay in the 17th century. Thence that great tribe, called by themselves the *Naheowuk*, but by the Ojibway *Saulteaux* the *Kinistineaux*, and by the voyageurs *Christineaux*, or, more commonly, the Crees—a word derived, some think, from the first syllable of the latter name, or perhaps from the French *crier*, to shout—descended upon the Blackfeet, who probably at that time occupied this region, and undoubtedly the Saskatchewan, and drove them south along a line stretching to the Rocky Mountains.

The tradition of this expulsion is still extant, as also of the great raids made by the Blackfeet and their kindred in times past into their ancient domain. I remember visiting, with my old friend Attakacoo—Star-Blanket—the deceased Cree chief, twenty years ago, the triumphal pile of red deer horns raised by the Blackfeet north of Shell River, a tributary of the North Saskatchewan. It is called by the Crees *Ooskunaka Assustakee*, and the chief described its great size in former days, and the tradition of its origin as told to him in his boyhood. Be all this as it may, and this is not the place to pursue the inquiry, the stream in question is, to the Crees who live upon it, not the River of the Slaves, but the "River of the Blackfeet." How it came by its white name

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is another question. Possibly some captured Indians of the tribe called the Slaves to this day, reduced to servitude by the Crees, were seen by the early voyageurs, and gave rise to the French name, of which ours is a translation. Slavery was common enough amongst the Indians everywhere. A thriving trade was done at the Detroit in the 18th century in Pawnees, or Panis, as they were called, captured by Indian raiders on the western prairies and sold to the white settlers along the river. I have seen in Windsor, Ont., an old bill of sale of one of these Pani slaves, the consideration being, if I recollect aright, a certain quantity of Indian corn.

To return to the river. The distance from Athabasca Landing to the Lesser Slave is called sixty-five miles, but this must have been ascertained by measuring from point to point, for, following the shore up stream, as boats must, it is certainly more. To the head of the river is an additional sixty miles, and thence to the head of the lake seventy-five more. The Hudson's Bay Company had a storehouse at the Forks, and an island was forming where the waters meet, the finest feature of the place being an echo, which reverberated the bugler's call at *veille* very grandly.

A spurt was made in the early morning, the trackers first following a bank overgrown with alders and willows, all of a size, which looked exactly like a well-kept hedge, but soon gave way to the usual dense line of poplar and spruce, rooted to the very edges of the banks, which are low compared with those of the Athabasca. After ascending it for some distance, it being Sunday, we camped for the day upon an open grassy point, around which the river swept in a perfect semi-circle, the dense forest opposite towering in one equally perfect, and glorious in light and shade and harmonious tints of green, from sombre olive to the lightest pea. The point itself was covered with strawberry vines and dotted with clumps of saskatoons all in bloom.

It was a lovely and lonely spot, which was soon converted into a scene of eating and laughter, and a drying ground for wet clothes. Towards evening Bishop Grouard and Father Lacombe held a well-attended service, which in this profound wilderness was peculiarly impressive. Listening, one thought how often the same service, these same chants and canticles, had awakened the sylvan echoes in like solitudes on the St. Lawrence and Mississippi in the old days of exploration and trade, and of missionary zeal and suffering. It recalled, too, the thought of man's evanescence and the apparent fixedness of his institutions.

Shortly after our tents were pitched a boat drifted past with five jaded-looking men aboard—more baffled Klondikers returning from Peace River. We had heard of numbers in the interior who could neither go on nor return, and expected to meet more castaways before we reached the lake. In this we were not astray, and several days after in the upper river we met a York boat loaded with them, alert and unmistakable Americans, but with the worn features of disappointed men.

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We were now constantly encountering the rapids, which extended for about twenty-five miles, and very difficult and troublesome they proved to be to our heavily-loaded craft. Most of them were got over slowly by combined poling and tracking, the line often breaking with the strain, and the boats being kept in the channel only by the most strenuous efforts of the experienced men on board. If a monias (a greenhorn) took the bow pole, as was sometimes the case, the orders of our steersman, Cyr, were amusing to listen to. "Tughkenay asswayegh tamook!" (Be on your guard!) "Turn de oder way! Turn yourself! Turn your pole—Hell!" Then, of course, came the customary rasp on the rocks, but, if not, the cheery cry followed to the trackers ashore, "Ahchipitamook!" (Haul away!) and on we would go for a few yards more. Once, towards the end of this dreary business, when we were all crowded into the Commissioner's boat, where we took our meals, in the first really stiff rapid the keel grated as usual upon the rocks. With a better line we might have pulled through, but it broke, and the boat at once swung broadside to the current and listed on the rocks immovably, though the men struggling in the water did their best to heavy her off. The third boat then came up, and shortly afterwards the Police boat. But getting their steering sweeps fouled and lines entangled, it was nearly an hour before Cyr's boat, being first lightened, could swing to starboard of the York, and take off the passengers. The York boat was then shouldered off the rocks by main force, and all got under way again. At this juncture our old Indian, Peokus—or Pehayokusk, to give him his right name, to wit, "The giblets of a bird"—met with a serious accident, which, much to our regret, laid him up for several days. In his eagerness to help he slipped from a sunken log, and the bruise knocked the wind out of him completely. We took off his wet clothes and rubbed him, and laid him by the fire, where the doctor's care and a liberal dram of spirits soon fetched him to rights. A look of pleased wonder passed over his clumsy features as the latter did its work. Caliban himself could not have been more curiously surprised.

This was not our last stick: there were other awkward rapids near by; but by dint of wading, shouldering, pulling and tracking, we got over the last of them and into a deep channel for good, having advanced only five miles after a day of incessant toil, most of it in the water.

Our camp that night was a memorable one. The day was the fiftieth anniversary of Father Lacombe's ministration as a missionary in the North-West, and all joined in presenting him with a suitable address, handsomely engrossed by Mr. Prudhomme on birch bark, and signed by the whole party. A poem, too, composed by Mr. Cote, a gentleman of literary gifts and taste, also written on bark, was read and presented at the same time. [The poem, the text of which was secured from the author too late for insertion here, will

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be found in the Appendix, p. 490.] Pere Lacombe made a touching impromptu reply, which was greatly appreciated. Many of us were not of the worthy Father's communion, yet there was but one feeling, that of deep respect for the labours of this celebrated missionary, whose life had been a continuous effort to help the unbefriended Indian into the new but inevitable paths of self-support, and to shield him from the rapacity of the cold incoming world now surging around him. After the presentation, over a good cigar, the Father told some inimitable stories of Indian life on the plains in the old days, which to my great regret are too lengthy for inclusion here. One incident, however, being *apropos* of himself, must find place. Turning the conversation from materialism, idealism, and the other "isms" into which it had drifted, he spoke of the fears so many have of ghosts, and even of a corpse, and confessed that, from early training, he had shared this fear until he got rid of it in an incident one winter at Lac Ste. Anne. He had been sent for during the night to administer extreme unction to a dying half-breed girl thirteen miles away. Hitching his dogs to their sled he sped on, but too late, for he was met on the trail by the girl's relatives, bringing her dead body wrapped in a buffalo skin, and which they asked him to take back with him and place in his chapel pending service. He tremblingly assented, and the body was duly tied to his sled, the relatives returning to their homes. He was alone with the corpse in the dense and dark forest, and felt the old dread, but reflecting on his office and its duties, he ran for a long distance behind the sled until, thoroughly tired, he stepped on it to rest. In doing this he slipped and fell upon the corpse in a spasm of fear, which, strange to say, when he recovered from it, he felt no more. The shock cured him, and, reaching home, he placed the girl's body in the chapel with his own hands. It reminded him, he said, of a Community at Marseilles whose Superior had died, but whose money was missing. The new Superior sent a young priest who had a great dread of ghosts down to the crypt below the church to open the coffin and search the pockets of the dead. He did so, and found the money; but in nailing on the coffin lid again, a part of his soutane was fastened down with it. The priest turned to go, advanced a step, and, being suddenly held, dropped dead with fright. These gruesome stories were happily followed by an hour or two of song and pleasantries in Mr. McKenna's tent, ending in "Auld Lang Syne" and "God Save the Queen." It was a unique occasion in which to wind up so laborious a day; and our camp itself was unique—on a lofty bluff overlooking the confluence of the Sauteau River with the Lesser Slave—a bold and beautiful spot, the woods at the angle of the two rivers, down to the water's edge, showing like a gigantic V, as clean-cut as if done by a pair of colossal shears.



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Next morning rowing took the place of poling and tracking for a time, and, presently, the great range of lofty hills called, to our right, the Moose Watchi, and to our left, the Tuskanatchi—the Moose and Raspberry Mountains—loomed in the distance. Here, and when only a few miles from the lake, a York boat came tearing down stream full of lithe, young half-breed trackers—our long-expected assistants from the Hudson's Bay Company's post, as we would have welcomed much more warmly had they come sooner, for we had little but the lake now to ascend, up which a fair breeze would carry us in a single night.

Doubtless it would have done so if it had come; but the same head-winds and storms which had thwarted us from the first dogged us still. We had camped near the mouth of Muskeg Creek, a good-sized stream, and evidently the cause hitherto of the Lesser Slave's rich chocolate colour; for, above the forks, the latter took its hue from the lake, but with a yellowish tinge still. From this point the river was very crooked, and lined by great hay meadows of luxuriant growth. Skirting these, reinforced as we were, we soon pulled up to the foot of the lake, where stood a Hudson's Bay Company's solitary storehouse. There some change of lading was made, in order to reach "the Island," some seven miles up, and the only one in the lake, sails being hoisted for the first time to an almost imperceptible wind.

The island, where we were to camp simply for the night—as we fondly thought—was found to be a sprawling jumble of water-worn pebbles, boulders and sand, with a long narrow spit projecting to the east, much frequented by gulls, of whose eggs a large number were gathered. To the south, on the mainland, is the site of the old North-West Company's post, near to which stood that of the Hudson's Bay Company, for they always planted themselves cheek by jowl in those days of rivalry, so that there should be no lack of provocation. A dozen half-breed families had now their habitat there, and subsisted by fishing and trapping. On the island our Cree half-breeds enjoyed the first evening's camp by playing the universal button-hiding game called Pugasawin, and which is always accompanied by a monotonous chant and the tom-tom, anything serving for that hideous instrument if a drum is not at hand. They are all inveterate gamblers in that country, and lose or win with equal indifference. Others played a peculiar game of cards called Natwawaquawin, or "Marriage," the loser's penalty being droll, but unmentionable. These amusements, which often spun out till morning, were broken up by another rattling storm, which lasted all night and all the next day. We had lost all count of storms by this time, and were stolidly resigned. The day following, however, the wind was fresh and fair, and we made great headway, reaching the mouth of Swan River—Naposeo Sepe—about mid-day.

This stream is almost choked at its discharge by a conglomeration of slimy roots, weeds and floatwood, and the banks are "a melancholy waste of putrid marshes." It is a forbidding entrance to a river which, farther up, waters a good farming country, including coal in abundance.



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The wind being strong and fair, we spun along at a great rate, and expected to reach the treaty point before dark, reckoning, as usual, without our host. The wind suddenly wheeled to the south-west, and a dangerous squall sprang up, which forced us to run back for shelter fully five miles. There was barely time to camp before the gale became furious, raging all night, and throwing down tents like nine-pins. About one a.m. a cry arose from the night-watch that the boats were swamping. All hands turned out, lading was removed, and the scows hauled up on the shingle, the rollers piling on shore with a height and fury perfectly astonishing for such a lake. By morning the tempest was at its height, continuing all day and into the night. The sunset that evening exhibited some of the grandest and wildest sky scenery we had ever beheld. In the west a vast bank of luminous orange cloud, edged by torn fringes of green and gray; in the south a sea of amethyst, and stretching from north to east masses of steel gray and pearl, shot with brilliant shafts and tufts of golden vapour. The whole sky streamed with rich colouring in the fierce wind, as if possessed at once by the genii of beauty and storm. The boatmen, noting its aspect, predicted worse weather; but, fortunately, morning belied the omens—our trials were over.

We were now nearing Shaw's Point, a long willowed spit of land, called after a whimsical old chief-factor of the Hudson's Bay Company who had charge of this district over sixty years before. He appears to have been a man of many eccentricities, one of which was the cultivation *a la Chinois* of a very long finger-nail, which he used as a spoon to eat his egg. But of him anon. By four p.m. we had rounded his Point, and come into view of Wyawweekamon—"The Outlet"—a rudimentary street with several trading stores, a billiard saloon and other accessories of a brand-new village in a very old wilderness.

Here we were at the treaty point at last, safe and sound, with new interests and excitements before us; with wild man instead of wild weather to encounter; with discords to harmonize and suspicions to allay by human kindness, perhaps by human firmness, but mainly by the just and generous terms proffered by Government to an isolated but highly interesting and deserving people.

## Chapter III

### Treaty At Lesser Slave Lake.

On the 19th of June our little fleet landed at Willow Point. There was a rude jetty, or wharf, at this place, below the little trading village referred to, at which loaded boats discharged. Formerly they could ascend the sluggish and shallow channel connecting the expansion of the Heart River, called Buffalo Lake, with the head of Lesser Slave Lake, a distance of about three miles, and as far as the Hudson's Bay Company's post, around which another trading village had gathered. This temporary fall in the water level partly accounted for the growth of

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the village at Willow Point, where sufficient interests had arisen to cause a jealousy between the two hamlets. Once upon a time Atawaywe Kamick was supreme. This is the name the Crees give to the Hudson's Bay Company, meaning literally "the Buying House." But now there were many stores, and "free trade" was rather in the ascendant. In the middle was safety, and therefore the Commissioners decided to pitch camp on a beautiful flat facing the south and fronting the channel, and midway between the two opposing points of trade. A *feu de joie* by the white residents of the region, of whom there were some seventy or eighty, welcomed the arrival of the boats at the wharf, and after a short stay here, simply to collect baggage, a start was made for the camping ground, where our numerous tents soon gave the place the appearance of a village of our own.

Tepees were to be seen in all directions from our camp—the lodges of the Indians and half-breeds. But no sooner was the treaty site apparent than a general concentration took place, and we were speedily surrounded by a bustling crowd, putting up trading tents and shacks, dancing booths, eating-places, *etc.*, so that with the motley crowd, including a large number of women and children, and a swarm of dogs such as we never dreamt of, amounting in a short space by constant accessions to over a thousand, we were in the heart of life and movement and noise.

Mr. Ross, as already stated, had gone on by trail from Edmonton, partly in order to inspect it, and managed to reach the lake before us, which was fortunate, since Indians and half-breeds had collected in large numbers, and women thus able to allay their irritation and to distribute rations pending the arrival of the other members of the Commission. During the previous winter, upon the circulation in the North of the news of the coming treaty, discussion was rife, and every cabin and tepee rang with argument. The wiseacre was not absent, of course, and agitators had been at work for some time endeavouring to jaundice the minds of the people—half-breeds, it was said, from Edmonton, who had been vitiated by contact with a low class of white men there—and, therefore, nothing was as yet positively known as to the temper and views of the Indians. But whatever evil effect these tamperings might have had upon them, it was felt that a plain statement of the proposals of the Government would speedily dissipate it, and that, when placed before them in Mr. Laird's customary kind and lucid manner, they would be accepted by both Indians and half-breeds as the best obtainable, and as conducing in all respects to their truest and most permanent interests.

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On the 20th the eventful morning had come, and, for a wonder, the weather proved to be calm, clear and pleasant. The hour fixed upon for the beginning of negotiations was two p.m., up to which time much hand-shaking had, of course, to be undergone with the constant new arrivals of natives from the forest and lakes around. The Church of England and Roman Catholic clergy, the only missionary bodies in the country, met and dined with our party, after which all adjourned to the treaty ground, where the people had already assembled, and where all soon seated themselves on the grass in front of the treaty tent—a large marquee—the Indians being separated by a small space from the half-breeds, who ranged themselves behind them, all conducting themselves in the most sedate and orderly manner.

Mr. Laird and the other Commissioners were seated along the open front of the tent, and one could not but be impressed by the scene, set as it was in a most beautiful environment of distant mountains, waters, forests and meadows, all sweet and primeval, and almost untouched by civilized man. The whites of The region had also turned out to witness the scene, which, though lacking the wild aspect of the old assemblages on the plains in the early 'seventies, had yet a character of its own of great interest, and of the most hopeful promise.

The crowd of Indians ranged before the marquee had lost all semblance of wildness of the true type. Wild men they were, in a sense, living as they did in the forest and on their great waters. But it was plain that these people had achieved, without any treaty at all, a stage of civilization distinctly in advance of many of our treaty Indians to the south after twenty-five years of education. Instead of paint and feathers, the scalp-lock, the breech-clout, and the buffalo-robe, there presented itself a body of respectable-looking men, as well dressed and evidently quite as independent in their feelings as any like number of average pioneers in the East. Indeed, I had seen there, in my youth, many a time, crowds of white settlers inferior to these in sedateness and self-possession. One was prepared, in this wild region of forest, to behold some savage types of men; indeed, I craved to renew the vanished scenes of old. But, alas! one beheld, instead, men with well-washed, unpainted faces, and combed and common hair; men in suits of ordinary "store-clothes," and some even with "boiled" if not laundered shirts. One felt disappointed, almost defrauded. It was not what was expected, what we believed we had a right to expect, after so much waggoning and tracking and drenching, and river turmoil and trouble. This woeful shortcoming from bygone days attended other aspects of the scene. Instead of fiery oratory and pipes of peace—the stone calumets of old—the vigorous arguments, the outbursts of passion, and close calls from threatened violence, here was a gathering of commonplace men smoking briar-roots,

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with treaty tobacco instead of “weed,” and whose chiefs replied to Mr. Laird’s explanations and offers in a few brief and sensible statements, varied by vigorous appeals to the common sense and judgment, rather than the passions, of their people. It was a disappointing, yet, looked at aright, a gratifying spectacle. Here were men disciplined by good handling and native force out of barbarism—of which there was little to be seen—and plainly on the high road to comfort; men who led inoffensive and honest lives, yet who expressed their sense of freedom and self-support in their speech, and had in their courteous demeanour the unmistakable air and bearing of independence. If provoked by injustice, a very dangerous people this; but self-respecting, diligent and prosperous in their own primitive calling, and able to adopt agriculture, or any other pursuit, with a fair hope of success when the still distant hour for it should arrive.

The proceedings began with the customary distribution of tobacco, and by a reference to the competent interpreters who had been appointed by the Commission, men who were residents, and well known to the Indians themselves, and who possessed their confidence. The Indians had previously appointed as spokesman their Chief and headman, Keenooshayo and Moostoos, a worthy pair of brothers, who speedily exhibited their qualities of good sense and judgment, and, Keenooshayo in particular, a fine order of Indian eloquence, which was addressed almost entirely to his own people, and which is lost, I am sorry to say, in the account here set down.

Mr. Laird then rose, and having unrolled his Commission, and that of his colleagues, from the Queen, proceeded with his proposals. He spoke as follows:

“Red Brothers! we have come here to-day, sent by the Great Mother to treat with you, and this is the paper she has given to us, and is her Commission to us signed with her Seal, to show we have authority to treat with you. The other Commissioners, who are associated with me, and who are sitting here, are Mr. McKenna and Mr. Ross and the Rev. Father Lacombe, who is with us to act as counsellor and adviser. I have to say, on behalf of the Queen and the Government of Canada, that we have come to make you an offer. We have made treaties in former years with all the Indians of the prairie, and from there to Lake Superior. As white people are coming into your country, we have thought it well to tell you what is required of you. The Queen wants all the whites, half-breeds and Indians to be at peace with one another, and to shake hands when they meet. The Queen’s laws must be obeyed all over the country, both by the whites and the Indians. It is not alone that we wish to prevent Indians from molesting the whites, it is also to prevent the whites from molesting or doing harm to the Indians. The Queen’s soldiers are just as much for the protection of the Indians as for the white man. The Commissioners made an appointment to meet you at a certain time, but on account of bad weather on river and lake, we are late, which we are sorry for, but are glad to meet so many of you here to-day.

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“We understand stories have been told you, that if you made a treaty with us you would become servants and slaves; but we wish you to understand that such is not the case, but that you will be just as free after signing a treaty as you are now. The treaty is a free offer; take it or not, just as you please. If you refuse it there is no harm done; we will not be bad friends on that account. One thing Indians must understand, that if they do not make a treaty they must obey the laws of the land—that will be just the same whether you make a treaty or not; the laws must be obeyed. The Queen’s Government wishes to give the Indians here the same terms as it has given all the Indians all over the country, from the prairies to Lake Superior. Indians in other places, who took treaty years ago, are now better off than they were before. They grow grain and raise cattle like the white people. Their children have learned to read and write.

“Now, I will give you an outline of the terms we offer you. If you agree to take treaty, every one this year gets a present of \$12.00. A family of five, man, wife and three children, will thus get \$60.00; a family of eight, \$96.00; and after this year, and for every year afterwards, \$5.00 for each person forever. To such chiefs as you may select, and that the Government approves of, we will give \$25.00 each year, and the counsellors \$15.00 each. The chiefs also get a silver medal and a flag, such as you see now at our tent, right now as soon as the treaty is signed. Next year, as soon as we know how many chiefs there are, and every three years thereafter, each chief will get a suit of clothes, and every counsellor a suit, only not quite so good as that of the chief. Then, as the white men are coming in and settling in the country, and as the Queen wishes the Indians to have lands of their own, we will give one square mile, or 640 acres, to each family of five; but there will be no compulsion to force Indians to go into a reserve. He who does not wish to go into a band can get 160 acres of land for himself, and the same for each member of his family. These reserves are holdings you can select when you please, subject to the approval of the Government, for you might select lands which might interfere with the rights or lands of settlers. The Government must be sure that the land which you select is in the right place. Then, again, as some of you may want to sow grain or potatoes, the Government will give you ploughs or harrows, hoes, *etc.*, to enable you to do so, and every spring will furnish you with provisions to enable you to work and put in your crop. Again, if you do not wish to grow grain, but want to raise cattle, the Government will give you bulls and cows, so that you may raise stock. If you do not wish to grow grain or raise cattle, the Government will furnish you with ammunition for your hunt, and with twine to catch fish. The Government will also provide schools to teach your

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children to read and write, and do other things like white men and their children. Schools will be established where there is a sufficient number of children. The Government will give the chiefs axes and tools to make houses to live in and be comfortable. Indians have been told that if they make a treaty they will not be allowed to hunt and fish as they do now. This is not true. Indians who take treaty will be just as free to hunt and fish all over as they now are.

“In return for this the Government expects that the Indians will not interfere with or molest any miner, traveller or settler. We expect you to be good friends with every-one, and shake hands with all you meet. If any whites molest you in any way, shoot your dogs or horses, or do you any harm, you have only to report the matter to the police, and they will see that justice is done to you. There may be some things we have not mentioned, but these can be mentioned later on. Commissioners Walker and Cote are here for the half-breeds, who later on, if treaty is made with you, will take down the names of half-breeds and their children, and find out if they are entitled to scrip. The reason the Government does this is because the half-breeds have Indian blood in their veins, and have claims on that account. The Government does not make treaty with them, as they live as white men do, so it gives them scrip to settle their claims at once and forever. Half-breeds living like Indians have the chance to take the treaty instead, if they wish to do so. They have their choice, but only after the treaty is signed. If there is no treaty made, scrip cannot be given. After the treaty is signed, the Commissioners will take up half-breed claims. The first thing they will do is to give half-breed settlers living on land 160 acres, if there is room to do so; but if several are settled close together, the land will be divided between them as fairly as possible. All, whether settled or not, will be given scrip for land to the value of \$240.00, that is, all born up to the date of signing the treaty. They can sell that scrip, that is, all of you can do so. They can take, if they like, instead of this scrip for 240 acres, lands where they like. After they have located their land, and got their title, they can live on it, or sell part, or the whole of it, as they please, but cannot sell the scrip. They must locate their land, and get their title before selling.

“These are the principal points in the offer we have to make to you. The Queen owns the country, but is willing to acknowledge the Indians’ claims, and offers them terms as an offset to all of them. We shall be glad to answer any questions, and make clear any points not understood. We shall meet you again to-morrow, after you have considered our offer, say about two o’clock, or later if you wish. We have other Indians to meet at other places, but we do not wish to hurry you. After this meeting you can go to the Hudson’s Bay fort, where our provisions are stored, and rations will be issued to you of flour, bacon, tea and tobacco, so that you can have a good meal and a good time. This is a free gift, given with goodwill, and given to you whether you make a treaty or not. It is a present the Queen is glad to make to you. I am now done, and shall be glad to hear what any one has to say.”



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KEENOOSHAYO (The Fish): "You say we are brothers. I cannot understand how we are so. I live differently from you. I can only understand that Indians will benefit in a very small degree from your offer. You have told us you come in the Queen's name. We surely have also a right to say a little as far as that goes. I do not understand what you say about every third year."

MR. MCKENNA: "The third year was only mentioned in connection with clothing."

KEENOOSHAYO: "Do you not allow the Indians to make their own conditions, so that they may benefit as much as possible? Why I say this is that we to-day make arrangements that are to last as long as the sun shines and the water runs. Up to the present I have earned my own living and worked in my own way for the Queen. It is good. The Indian loves his way of living and his free life. When I understand you thoroughly I will know better what I shall do. Up to the present I have never seen the time when I could not work for the Queen, and also make my own living. I will consider carefully what you have said."

MOOSTOOS (The Bull): "Often before now I have said I would carefully consider what you might say. You have called us brothers. Truly I am the younger, you the elder brother. Being the younger, if the younger ask the elder for something, he will grant his request the same as our mother the Queen. I am glad to hear what you have to say. Our country is getting broken up. I see the white man coming in, and I want to be friends. I see what he does, but it is best that we should be friends. I will not speak any more. There are many people here who may wish to speak."

WAHPEEHAYO (White Partridge): "I stand behind this man's back" (pointing to Keenooshayo). "I want to tell the Commissioners there are two ways, the long and the short. I want to take the way that will last longest."

NEESNETASIS (The Twin): "I follow these two brothers, Moostoos and Keenooshayo. When I understand better I shall be able to say more."

MR. LAIRD: "We shall be glad to hear from some of the Sturgeon Lake people."

THE CAPTAIN (an old man): "I accept your offer. I am old and miserable now. I have not my family with me here, but I accept your offer."

MR. LAIRD: "You will get the money for all your children under age, and not married, just the same as if they were here."

THE CAPTAIN: "I speak for all those in my part of the country."

MR. LAIRD: "I am sorry the rest of your people are not here. If here next year their claims will not be overlooked."

THE CAPTAIN: "I am old now. It is indirectly through the Queen that we have lived. She has supplied in a manner the sale shops through which we have lived. Others may think I am foolish for speaking as I do now. Let them think as they like. I accept. When I was young I was an able man and made my living independently. But now I am old and feeble and not able to do much."



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MR. ROSS: "I will just answer a few questions that have been put. Keenooshayo has said that he cannot see how it will benefit you to take treaty. As all the rights you now have will not be interfered with, therefore anything you get in addition must be a clear gain. The white man is bound to come in and open up the country, and we come before him to explain the relations that must exist between you, and thus prevent any trouble. You say you have heard what the Commissioners have said, and how you wish to live. We believe that men who have lived without help heretofore can do it better when the country is opened up. Any fur they catch is worth more. That comes about from competition. You will notice that it takes more boats to bring in goods to buy your furs than it did formerly. We think that as the rivers and lakes of this country will be the principal highways, good boatmen, like yourselves, cannot fail to make a good living, and profit from the increase in traffic. We are much pleased that you have some cattle. It will be the duty of the Commissioners to recommend the Government, through the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, to give you cattle of a better breed. You say that you consider that you have a right to say something about the terms we offer you. We offer you certain terms, but you are not forced to take them. You ask if Indians are not allowed to make a bargain. You must understand there are always two to a bargain. We are glad you understand the treaty is forever. If the Indians do as they are asked we shall certainly keep all our promises. We are glad to know that you have got on without any one's help, but you must know times are hard, and furs scarcer than they used to be. Indians are fond of a free life, and we do not wish to interfere with it. When reserves are offered you there is no intention to make you live on them if you do not want to, but, in years to come, you may change your minds, and want these lands to live on. The half-breeds of Athabasca are being more liberally dealt with than in any other part of Canada. We hope you will discuss our offer and arrive at a decision as soon as possible. Others are now waiting for our arrival, and you, by deciding quickly, will assist us to get to them."

KEENOOSHAYO: "Have you all heard? Do you wish to accept? All who wish to accept, stand up!"

WENDIGO: "I have heard, and accept with a glad heart all I have heard."

KEENOOSHAYO: "Are the terms good forever? As long as the sun shines on us? Because there are orphans we must consider, so that there will be nothing to be thrown up to us by our people afterwards. We want a written treaty, one copy to be given to us, so we shall know what we sign for. Are you willing to give means to instruct children as long as the sun shines and water runs, so that our children will grow up ever increasing in knowledge?"

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MR. LAIRD: "The Government will choose teachers according to the religion of the band. If the band are pagans the Government will appoint teachers who, if not acceptable, will be replaced by others. About treaties lasting forever, I will just say that some Indians have got to live so like the whites that they have sold their lands and divided the money. But this only happens when the Indians ask for it. Treaties last forever, as signed, unless the Indians wish to make a change. I understand you all agree to the terms of the Treaty. Am I right? If so, I will have the Treaty drawn up, and to-morrow we will sign it. Speak, all those who do not agree!"

MOOSTOOS: "I agree."

KEENOOSHAYO: "My children, all who agree, stand up!"

The Reverend Father Lacombe then addressed the Indians in substance as follows: He reminded them that he was an old friend, and came amongst them seven years ago, and, being now old, he came again to fulfil another duty, and to assist the Commission to make a treaty. "Knowing you as I do, your manners, your customs and language, I have been officially attached to the Commission as adviser. To-day is a great day for you, a day of long remembrance, and your children hereafter will learn from your lips the events of to-day. I consented to come here because I thought it was a good thing for you to take the Treaty. Were it not in your interest I would not take part in it. I have been long familiar with the Government's methods of making treaties with the Saulteaux of Manitoba, the Crees of Saskatchewan, and the Blackfeet, Bloods and Piegiens of the Plains, and advised these tribes to accept the offers of the Government. Therefore, to-day, I urge you to accept the words of the Big Chief who comes here in the name of the Queen. I have known him for many years, and, I can assure you, he is just and sincere in all his statements, besides being vested with authority to deal with you. Your forest and river life will not be changed by the Treaty, and you will have your annuities, as well, year by year, as long as the sun shines and the earth remains. Therefore I finish my speaking by saying, Accept!"

The chiefs and counsellors stood up, and requested all the Indians to do so also as a mark of acceptance of the Government's conditions. Father Lacombe was thanked by several for having come so far, though so very old, to visit them and speak to them, after which the meeting adjourned until the following day.

At three p.m. on Wednesday, the 21st, the discussion was resumed by Mr. Laird, who, after a few preliminary remarks read the Treaty, which had been drafted by the Commissioners the previous evening. Chief Keenooshayo arose and made a speech, followed by Moostoos, both assenting to the terms, when suddenly, and to the surprise of all, the chief, who had again begin to address the Indians, perceiving gestures of dissent from his people, suddenly stopped and sat down.

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This looked critical; but, after a somewhat lengthy discussion, everything was smoothed over, and the chief and head men entered the tent and signed the Treaty after the Commissioners, thus confirming, for this portion of the country, the great Treaty which is intended to cover the whole northern region up to the sixtieth parallel of north latitude. The satisfactory turn of the Lesser Slave Lake Treaty, it was felt, would have a good effect elsewhere, and that, upon hearing of it at the various treaty points to the west and north, the Indians would be more inclined to expedite matters, and to close with the Commissioner's proposals. [The foregoing report of the Treaty discussions is necessarily much abridged, being simply a transcript of brief notes taken at the time. The utterances particularly of Keenooshayo, but also of his brother, were not mere harangues addressed to the "groundlings," but were grave statements marked by self-restraint, good sense and courtesy, such as would have done no discredit to a well-bred white man. They furthered affairs greatly, and in two days the Treaty was discussed and signed, in singular contrast with treaty-making on the plains in former years.]

The text of the Treaty itself, which may be of interest to the reader, will be found in full in the Appendix, page 471.

The first and most important step having been taken, the other essential adhesions had now to be effected. To save time and wintering in the country, the Treaty Commission separated, Messrs. Ross and McKenna leaving on the 22nd for Fort Dunvegan and St. John, whilst Mr. Laird set out shortly afterwards for Vermilion and Fond du Lac, on Lake Athabasca. He reached Peace River Crossing on the 30th, and met there, next day, a few Beaver Indians and the Crees of the region. The Beaver chief, who was present, did not adhere, saying that his band was at Fort Dunvegan, and that he could not get there in time. The date of the St. John Treaty had been fixed for the 21st of June, but, owing to the detentions described, the appointment could not be kept, and word was therefore sent to the Indians to stay where they were until they could be met. But when the Commissioners were within twenty-five miles of the Fort they got a letter from the Hudson's Bay Company's agent telling them that the Indians had eaten up all the provisions there, and had left for their hunting-grounds, with no hope of their coming together again that season. They therefore returned to Fort Dunvegan, and took the adhesion of some Beaver Indians, and then left for Lower Peace River. On the 8th July, Mr. Laird secured the adhesion of the Crees and Beavers at Fort Vermilion, and Messrs. Ross and McKenna of those at Little Red River, the headman there refusing to sign at first because, he said, "he had a divine inspiration to the contrary"! This was followed by adhesions taken by the latter Commissioners, on the 13th, from the Crees and Chipewyans at Fort Chipewyan.

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“Here it was,” Mr. McKenna writes me, “that the chief asked for a railway—the first time in the history of Canada that the red man demanded as a condition of cession that steel should be laid into his country. He evidently understood the transportation question, for a railway, he said, by bringing them into closer connection with the market, would enhance the value of what they had to sell, and decrease the cost of what they had to buy. He had a striking object-lesson in the fact that flour was \$12 a sack at the Fort. These Chipewyans lost no time in flowery oratory, but came at once to business, and kept us, myself in particular, on tenterhooks for two hours. I never felt so relieved as when the rain of questions ended, and, satisfied by our answers, they acquiesced in the cession.”

Next morning these Commissioners left for Smith's Landing, and, on the 17th, made treaty with the Indians of Great Slave Lake. Meanwhile Mr. Laird had proceeded to Fond du Lac, at the eastern end of Lake Athabasca, and there, on the 27th, the Chipewyans adhered, whilst Messrs. Ross and McKenna, in order to treat with the Indians at Fort McMurray and Wahpooskow, separated. The latter secured the Chipewyans and Crees at the former post, and Mr. Ross the Crees at Wahpooskow, both adjustments, by a coincidence, being made on the same day.

This completed the Treaty of 1899, known as No. 8, the most important of all since the Great Treaty of 1876.

The work of the Commission being now over, its members prepared to leave the country. Messrs. Ross and McKenna set out for Athabasca Landing, whilst Mr. Laird accompanied us to Pelican Rapids, but left us there and pushed on, like the others, for home.

There were, of course, many Indians who did not or could not turn up at the various treaty points that year, *viz.*, the Beavers of St. John, the Crees of Sturgeon Lake, the Slaves of Hay River, who should have come to Vermilion, and the Dog-Ribs, Yellow-Knives, Slaves, and Chipewyans, who should have been treated with at Fort Resolution, on Great Slave Lake.

Accordingly, a special commission was issued to Mr. J. A. Macrae, of the Indian Office in Ottawa, who met the Indians the following year at the points named, and in May, June, and July, secured the adhesion of over 1,200 souls, making, with subsequent adhesions, a total of 3,568 souls to the 30th June, 1906.

The largest numbers were at Forts Resolution, Vermilion, Fond du Lac, and Lesser Slave Lake, the latter ranking fourth in the list. Of course, there are still to be treated with the Indians of the Mackenzie River and the Esquimaux of the Arctic coast. But Treaty Eight covers the most valuable portions of the Northern Anticline, though this is a conjecture, as the resources of the lower Mackenzie Basin, and even of the Barren

Lands, are only now becoming known, and may yet prove to be of great value. Bishop Grouard told me that at their Mission at Fort Providence, potatoes,

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turnips and barley ripened, and also wheat when tried, though this, he thought, was uncertain. I have also heard Chief-factor Camsell speak quite boastfully of his tomatoes at Fort Simpson. As a matter of fact, little is known practically as to the bearing of the climate and long summer sunshine on agriculture in the Mackenzie District. But be that region what it may, there has been already ceded an empire in itself, extending, roughly speaking, from the 54th to the 60th parallel of north latitude, and from the 106th to the 130th degree of west longitude. In this domain there is ample room for millions of people; and, as I must now return to the Half-breed Commission on Lesser Slave Lake, I shall give, as we go, as fair a picture as I can of its superficial features and the inducements it offers to the immigrant.

## Chapter IV

### **The Half-Breed Scrip Commission.**

The adjustment with the half-breeds depended, of course, upon a successful treaty with the Indians, and, this having been concluded, the latter at once, upon receipt of their payments, left for their forests and fisheries, leaving the half-breeds in full possession of the field.

It was estimated that over a hundred families were encamped around us, some in tepees, some in tents, and some in the open air, the willow copses to the north affording shelter, as well, to a few doubtful members of Slave Lake society, and to at least a thousand dogs. The "scrip tent," as it was called, a large marquee fitted up as an office, had been pitched with the other tents when the camp was made, and in this the half-breeds held a crowded meeting to talk over the terms, and to collate their own opinions as to the form of scrip issue they most desired. In this they were singularly unanimous, and, in spite of advice to the contrary urged upon them in the strongest manner by Father Lacombe, they agreed upon "the bird in the hand"—viz., upon cash scrip or nothing. This could be readily turned into money, for in the train of traders, *etc.*, who followed up the treaty payments, there were also buyers from Winnipeg and Edmonton, well supplied with cash, to purchase all the scrip that offered, at a great reduction, of course, from face value. Whether the half-breeds were wise or foolish it is needless to say. One thing was plain, they had made up their minds. Under the circumstances it was impossible to gainsay their assertion that they were the best judges of their own needs. All preliminaries having at last been settled, the taking of declarations and evidence began on the 23rd of June, and, shortly afterwards, the issue of convertible scrip certificates, or scrip certificates for land as required, took place to the parties who had proved their title.

This was a slow process, involving in every case a careful search of the five elephant folios containing the records of the bygone issues of scrip in Manitoba and the organized Territories.



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It was necessary in order to prevent the issue of scrip to parties who had already received it elsewhere. But to the credit of the Lesser Slave Lake community, few efforts were made to “come in” again, not one in fact which was a clear attempt at fraud, or which could not be accounted for by false agency. Indeed, a high tribute might well be paid here to the honesty, not only of this but of all the communities, both Indian and half-breed, throughout these remote territories. We found valuable property exposed, everywhere, evidently without fear of theft. There was a looser feeling regarding debts to traders, which we were told were sometimes ignored, partly, perhaps, owing to the traders’ heavy profits, but mainly through failure in the hunt and a lack of means. But theft such as white men practice was a puzzle to these people, amongst whom it was unknown.

The most noticeable feature of the scrip issue was the never-ending stream of applicants, a surprising evidence of the growth of population in this remote wilderness. Its most interesting feature lay in the peculiarities and manners of the people themselves. They were unquestionably half-breeds, and had received Christian names, and most of them had houses of their own, and, though hunters, fishermen and trippers, their families lived comparatively settled lives. Yet the glorious instinct of the Indian haunted them. As a rule they had been born on the “pitching-track,” in the forest, or on the prairies—in all sorts of places, they could not say exactly where—and when they were born was often a matter of doubt as well. [With reference to these nondescript birthplaces, the wonderful ease of parturition among Indian women may be referred to here. This is common, probably, to all primitive races, but is perhaps more marked amongst Indian mothers than any other. The event may happen in a canoe, on the trail, at any place, or at any moment, without hindering the ordinary progress of a travelling party, which is generally overtaken by the mother in a few hours. But nothing I heard here equalled in grotesque circumstances occurrences, whose truth I can vouch for, many years ago on the Saskatchewan River. In 1874, if I remember aright, a great spring freshet in the North Branch was accompanied by a tremendous ice-jam, which backed the water up, and flooded the river bank so suddenly that many Indians were drowned. On an island below Prince Albert, a woman, to save her life, had to climb a neighbouring tree, and gave birth to a child amongst the branches. The jam broke, and, wonderful to say, both mother and child got down to firm ground alive. Another case, even more gruesome, happened on the Lower Saskatchewan not so many years ago. A woman and her husband were hastening on snowshoes from their winter camp to the river, in order to share in the usual Christmas bounty and festivities at the Hudson’s Bay Company’s post. The woman was seized with incipient labour, and darting from her husband, with whom she had been

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quarrelling on the way, pushed on, and, in a frozen marsh, amongst bulrushes, on a bitterly cold night, was delivered of a child. Grumous as she was, she picked herself up, and, with incredible nerve, walked ten miles to the Pas, carrying her live infant with her, wrapped in a rabbit-skin robe.] It was not in February, but in *Meeksuo pesim*, "The month when the eagles return"; not in August, but in *Oghpaho pesim*, "The month when birds begin to fly." When called upon they could give their Christian names and answer to William or Magloire, to Mary or Madaline, but, in spite of priest or parson, their home name was a Cree one. In many cases the white forefather's name had been dropped or forgotten, and a Cree surname had taken its place, as, for example, in the name Louis Maskegosis, or Madeline Nooskeyah. Some of the Cree names were in their meaning simply grotesque. Mishoostiquan meant "The man who stands with the red hair"; Waupunekapow, "He who stands till morning." One of the applicants was Kanawatchaguayo, or "The ghost-keeper."

[It may be mentioned here that this half-breed's "inner" name, so to speak, meant "The Ghost-Keeper," for the name he gave, following an Indian usage, was not the real one. Kanawatchaguayo was the one given by the interpreter, but accompanied by the translation of the inner name, to wit, "The Ghost-Keeper." This curious custom is more fully referred to in a forthcoming work on Indian folk-lore, traditions, legends, usages, methods and manner of life, *etc.*, by Mrs. F. H. Paget, of Ottawa. This lady is an expert Cree scholar, and her work, which I have had the pleasure of hearing her read, is the result of diligent research and of ample knowledge of Indian life and character.]

But others were strikingly poetical, particularly the female names. Payucko geesigo, "One in the Skies"; Pesawakoona kapesisk, "The silent snow in falling forming signs or symbols"; Matyatse wunoguayo, or rather, for this is a doubtful name, Powastia ka nunaghquanetungh, "Listener to the unseen rapids"; Kese koo apeoo, "She sits in heaven," were all the names of applicants for scrips, and many others could be added of like tenor. In a word, the Christian or baptismal names have not displaced the native ones, as they did in Wales and elsewhere, and amongst some of our far Eastern Indians. But there were terrifying and repulsive names as well, such as Sese kenapik kaow apeoo, "She sits like a rattle-snake"; and one individual rejoiced in the appalling surname of "Grand Bastard." These instances serve to illustrate the tendency of half-breed nomenclature at the lake towards the mother's side. Here, too, there was no reserve in giving the family name; it was given at once when asked for, and there was no shyness otherwise in demeanour. There was a readiness, for example, to be photographed which was quite distinctive. In this connection it may interest the reader to recall some of the names of girls given by the same race thousands of miles

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away in the East. Take those recorded by Mrs. Jameson ["Winter Studies and Summer Rambles," 1835.] during her visit to Mrs. McMurray and the Schoolcrafts, on the Island of Mackinac, over seventy years ago: Oba baumwawa geezegoquay, "The Sounds which the stars make rushing through the skies"; Zaga see goquay, "Sunbeams breaking through a cloud"; Wahsagewanoquay, "Woman of the bright foam." The people so far apart, yet their home names so similarly figurative! The education of the Red Indian lies in his intimate contact with nature in all her phases—a good education truly, which serves him well. But, awe-struck always by the mysterious beauty of the world around him, his mind reflects it instinctively in his Nature-worship and his system of names.

In speaking of the "Lakers" I refer, of course, to the primitive people of the region, and not to half-breed incomers from Manitoba or elsewhere. There were a few patriarchal families into which all the others seemed to dovetail in some shape or form. The Nooskeyah family was one of these, also the Gladu, the Cowitoreille, [A corruption, no doubt, of "Courtoreille."] and the Calahaisen. The collateral branches of these families constituted the main portion of the native population, and yet inbreeding did not seem to have deteriorated the stock, for a healthier-looking lot of young men, women and children it would be hard to find, or one more free from scrofula. There were instances, too, among these people, of extreme old age; one in particular which from confirmatory evidence, particularly the declarations of descendants, seemed quite authentic. This was a woman called Catherine Bisson—the daughter of Baptiste Bisson and an Indian woman called Iskwao—who was born on New Year's Day, 1793, at Lesser Slave Lake, and had spent all her life there since. She had a numerous progeny which she bore to Kisiskakapo, "The man who stands still." She was now blind, and was partly led, partly carried into our tent—a small, thin, wizened woman, with keen features and a tongue as keen, which cackled and joked at a great rate with the crowd around her. It was almost awesome to look at this weird piece of antiquity, who was born in the Reign of Terror, and was a young woman before the war of 1812. She was quite lively yet, so far as her wits went, and seemed likely to go on living. [This very old woman died, I believe, at Lesser Slave Lake only last spring (1908). The date of her birth was correct, and we had good reason to believe it, she must have been far over 100 years old when she died.]

There were many good points in the disposition of the "Lakers" generally, both young and old. Their kindness and courtesy to strangers and to each other was marked, and profanity was unknown. Indeed, if one heard bad language at all it was from the lips of some Yankee or Canadian teamster, airing his superior knowledge of the world amongst the natives.

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The place, in fact, surprised one—no end of buggies, buckboards and saddles, and brightly dressed women, after a not altogether antique fashion; the men, too, orderly, civil, and obliging. Infants were generally tucked into the comfortable moss-bag, but boys three or four years old were seen tugging at their mothers' breasts, and all fat and generally good-looking. The whole community seemed well fed, and were certainly well clad—some girls extravagantly so, the love of finery being the ruling trait here as elsewhere. One lost, indeed, all sense of remoteness, there was such a well-to-do, familiar air about the scene, and such a bustle of clean-looking people. How all this could be supported by fur it was difficult to see, but it must have been so, for there was, as yet, little or no farming amongst the old "Lakers." It was, of course, a great fur country, and though the fur-bearing animals were sensibly diminishing, yet the prices of peltries had risen by competition, whilst supplies had been correspondingly cheapened. It was a good marten country, and, as this fur was the fad of fashion, and brought an extravagant price, the animal, like the beaver, was threatened with extinction, the more so as the rabbits were then in their period of scarcity.

There were other aspects of Lake life which there is neither space nor inclination to describe. If some features of "advanced civilization" had been anticipated there, it was simply another proof that extremes meet.

Whatever else was hidden, however, there was one thing omnipresent, namely, the mongrel dog. It was hopeless to explore the origin of an animal which seemed to draw from all sources, including the wolf and fox, and whose appetite stopped at nothing, but attacked old shirts, trousers, dunnage-bags, fry-pans, and even the outfit of a geologist, to appease the sacred rage of hunger.

It was believed that over a thousand of these dogs, mainly used in winter to haul fish, surrounded our tent, and when it is said that an ordinary half-breed family harboured from fifteen to twenty of the tribe, there is no exaggeration in the estimate. They were of all shapes, sizes and colours, and, though very civil to man, from whom they got nothing but kicks and stones, they kept up a constant row amongst themselves.

To see a scrimmage of fifty or sixty of them on land or in the water, where they went daily to fish, was a scene to be remembered. They did not bark, but loped through the woods, which were the camp's latrines, as scavengers by day, and howled in unison at regular intervals by night; for there was a sort of horrible harmony in the performance, and when the tom-toms of the gamblers accompanied it on all sides, and the pounding of dancers' feet—for in this enchanted land nobody ever seemed to go to bed—the saturnalia was complete.

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It was indeed a gala time for the happy-go-lucky Lakers, and the effects of the issue and sale of scrip certificates were soon manifest in our neighbourhood. The traders' booths were thronged with purchasers, also the refreshment tents where cigars and ginger ale were sold; and, in tepees improvised from aspen saplings, the sporting element passed the night at some interesting but easy way of losing money, illuminating their game with guttering candles, minus candlesticks, and presenting a picture worthy of an impressionist's pencil.

But the two dancing floors were the chief attraction. These also had been walled and roofed with leafy saplings, their fronts open to the air, and, thronged as they generally were, well repaid a visit. Here the comely brunettes, in moccasins or slippers, their luxuriant hair falling in a braided queue behind their backs, served not only as tireless partners, but as foils to the young men, who were one and all consummate masters of step-dancing, an art which, I am glad to say, was still in vogue in these remote parts. "French-fours" and the immortal "Red River Jig" were repeated again and again, and, though a tall and handsome young half-breed, who had learned in Edmonton, probably, the airs and graces of the polite world, introduced cotillions and gave "the calls" with vigorous precision, yet his efforts were not thoroughly successful. Snarls arose, and knots and confusion, which he did his best to undo. But it was evident that the hearts of the dancers were not in it. No sooner was the fiddler heard lowering his strings for the time-honoured "Jig" than eyes brightened, and feet began to beat the floor, including, of course, those of the fiddler himself, who put his whole soul into that weird and wonderful melody, whose fantastic glee is so strangely blended with an indescribable master-note of sadness. The dance itself is nothing; it might as well be called a Rigadoon or a Sailor's Hornpipe, so far as the steps go. The tune is everything; it is amongst the immortals. Who composed it? Did it come from Normandy, the ancestral home of so many French Canadians and of French Canadian song? Or did some lonely but inspired voyageur, on the banks of Red River, sighing for Detroit or Trois Rivières—for the joys and sorrows of home—give birth to its mingled chords in the far, wild past?

As I looked on, many memories recurred to me of scenes like this in which I had myself taken part in bygone days—*Eheu! fugaces*—in old Red River and the Saskatchewan; and, with these in my heart, I retired to my tent, and gradually fell asleep to the monotonous sound of the familiar yet inexplicable air.

## Chapter V

### Resources Of Lesser Slave Lake Region.

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It was expected that the sergeant of the Mounted Police stationed at the Lake would have set out by boat on the 3rd for Athabasca Landing, taking with him the witnesses in the Weeghteko case—a case not common amongst the Lesser Slave Lake Indians, but which was said to be on the increase. One Pahayo—“The Pheasant”—had gone mad and threatened to kill and eat people. Of course, this was attributed by his tribe to the Weeghteko, by which he was believed to be possessed, a cannibal spirit who inhabits the human heart in the form of a lump of ice, which must be got rid of by immersion of the victim in boiling water, or by pouring boiling fat down his throat. This failing, they destroy the man-eater, rip him up to let out the evil spirit, cut off his head, and then pin his four quarters to the ground, all of which was done by his tribe in the case of Pahayo. Napesosus—“The Little Man”—struck the first blow, Moostoos followed, and the poor lunatic was soon dispatched. Arrests were ultimately made, and a boatload of witnesses was about to leave for Athabasca Landing, *en route* to attend the trial at Edmonton, the first of its kind, I think, on record.

There can be no doubt that such slayings are effected to safeguard the tribe. Indians have no asylums, and, in order to get a dangerous lunatic out of the way, can only kill him. There would therefore be no hangings. But, now that the Indians and ourselves were coming under treaty obligations, it was necessary that an end should be put to such proceedings.

Yet the reader must not be too severe upon the Indian for his treatment of the Weeghteko. He attributes the disease to the evil spirit, acts accordingly, and slays the victim. But an old author, Mrs. Jameson, tells us that in her day in Upper Canada lunatics were allowed to stray into the forest to roam uncared for, and perish there, or were thrust into common jails. One at Niagara, she says, was chained up for four years.

Aside from such cases of madness, which have often resulted in the killing and eating of children, *etc.*, and which arouse the most superstitious horror in the minds of all Indians, the “savages” of this region are the most inoffensive imaginable. They have always made a good living by hunting and trapping and fishing, and I believe when the time comes they will adapt themselves much more readily and intelligently to farming and stock-raising than did the Indians to the south. The region is well suited to both industries, and will undoubtedly attract white settlers in due time.

The fisheries in Lesser Slave Lake have always been counted the best in all Athabasca. The whitefish, to be sure, are diminishing towards the head of the lake, but it is possible that this is owing to some deficiency in their usual supply of food in that quarter. Just as birds and wild-fowl return, if not disturbed, to their accustomed breeding-places, so, it is said, the fishes, year by year, drop and impregnate their



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spawn upon the same gravelly shallows. The food of the whitefish in the lake is partly the worms bred from the eggs of a large fly resembling the May-fly of the East. This worm has probably decreased in the upper part of the lake, and therefore the fish go farther down for food. There they are exceedingly numerous, an evidence of which is the fact that the Roman Catholic Mission alone secured 17,000 fine whitefish the previous fall. Properly protected this lake will be a permanent source of supply to natives and incomers for many years to come.

Stock-raising was already becoming a feature of the region. Some three miles above the Heart River is Buffalo Lake, an enlargement of that stream, and around and above this, as also along the Wyawekamon, or "Passage between the Lakes," are immense hay meadows, capable of winter feeding thousands of cattle. The view of these vast meadows from the Hudson's Bay post, or from the Roman Catholic Mission close by, is magnificent.

These buildings are situated above Buffalo Lake, upon a lofty bank, with the Heart River in the foreground; and the great meadows, threaded by creeks and inlets, stretching for miles to the south of them, are one of the finest sights of the kind in the country.

In the far south was the line of forest, and to the eastward a flat-topped mountain, called by the Crees Waskahekum Kahassastakee—"The House Butte." Near this mountain is the Swan River, which joins the Lesser Slave Lake below the Narrows, and upon which, we were told, were rich and extensive prairies, and abundance of coal of a good quality. To the west were the prairies of the Salt River, well watered by creeks, with a large extent of good land now being settled on, and where wheat ripens perfectly.

There are other available areas of open country on Prairie River, which enters Buffalo Lake at its south-western end, and on which also there is coal, so that prairie land is not entirely lacking.

Though emphatically *now* a region of forest, there is reason to believe that vast areas at present under timber were once prairies, fed over by innumerable herds of buffalo, whose paths and wallows can still be traced in the woods. Indeed, very large trees are found growing right across those paths, and this fact, not to speak of the recollections, or traditions, of very old people, points to extensive prairies at one time rather than to an entirely wooded country.

Much of the forest soil is excellent, and the land has only to be cleared to furnish good farms. Indeed, it needs no stretch of imagination to foresee in future years a continuous line of them from Edmonton to the lake, along the three hundred miles of country intersected by the trail laid out by the Territorial Government.



As for the wheat problem, it is not at all likely that the Roman Catholic Mission would put up a flour mill, as they were then doing, if it was not a wheat country. Bishop Clut assured me that potatoes in their garden reached three and a half pounds' weight in some instances, and turnips twenty-five pounds.

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The kind people of both this and the Church of England Mission generously supplied our table with vegetables and salads, and we craved no better. Chives, lettuce, radishes, cress and onions were full flavoured, fresh and delicious, and quite as early as in Manitoba. Being a timber country, lumber was, of course, plentiful, there being two sawmills at work cutting lumber, which sold, undressed, at \$25 to \$30 a thousand.

The whole country has a fresh and attractive look, and one could not desire a finer location than can be had almost anywhere along its streams and within its delightful and healthy borders. And yet this region is but a portal to the vaster one beyond, to the Unjigah, the mighty Peace River, to be described hereafter.

The make-weight against settlement may be almost summed up in the words transport and markets. The country is there, and far beyond it, too; but so long as there is abundance of prairie land to the south, and no railway facilities, it would be unwise for any large body of settlers, especially with limited means, to venture so far. The small local demand for beef and grain might soon be overtaken, and though stock can be driven, yet three hundred miles of forest trail is a long way to drive. Still, pioneers take little thought of such conditions, and already they were dropping in in twos and threes as they used to do in the old days in Red River Settlement, lured by the wilderness perhaps to privation, but entering a country much of which is suited by nature for the support of man.

The best reflection is that there is a really good country to fall back upon when the prairies to the south are taken up. Swamps and muskegs abound, but good land also abounds, and the time will come when the ring of the Canadian axe will be heard throughout these forests, and when multitudes of comfortable homes will be hewn out of what are the almost inaccessible wildernesses of to-day.

By the end of the first week in July the issue of scrip certificates began to fall off, though the declarations were still numerous. But land was in sight; that is to say, our release and departure for Peace River, which we were all very anxious, in fact burning, to see.

By this time there was, of course, much money afloat amongst the people, which was rapidly finding its way into the traders' pockets. There was a "blind pig," too, doing business in the locality, though we could not discover where, as everybody professed entire ignorance of anything of the kind. The fragrant breath and hilarity of so many, however, betrayed its existence, and, as a crowning evidence, before sunrise on the 6th, we were all awakened by an uproarious row amongst a tipsy crowd on the common.

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The disturbance, of course, awakened the dogs, if, indeed, those wonderful creatures ever slept, and soon a prolonged howl, issuing from a thousand throats, made the racket complete. It seemed to our listening ears, for we stuck to our beds, to be a promiscuous fight, larded with imprecations in broken English, the phrase “goddam” being repeated in the most comical way. We expected to see a lot of badly bruised men in the morning, but nothing of the kind! Nobody was hurt. It proved to be a very bloodless affair, like the scrimmages of the dogs themselves, full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

## Chapter VI

### On The Trail To Peace River.

By the afternoon of the 12th we had finished our work at the lake, and in the evening left the scene of so much amusement, and its lively and intelligent people, not without regret. Having said good-bye to Bishop Clut and his clergy, and to the Hudson’s Bay Company’s people, and others, we passed on to Salt Creek, which we crossed at dusk, and then to the South Heart River—Otaye Sepe—where we camped for the night. This affluent of the lake has a broad but sluggish current, its grassy banks sloping gently to the water’s edge, like some Ontario river—the beau ideal of a pike stream. The Church of England mission was established here in charge of the Reverend Mr. Holmes, who had shown us every kindness during our long stay. As boats can ascend in high water to this point, the Hudson’s Bay Company had a couple of large warehouses close by, standing alone, and filled with all kinds of goods. The trail led for many miles up a long, easy ascent, through a timber country, to an upper plateau, with, after passing the Heart River, occasional small patches of prairie on the wayside. The plateau itself is the anticlinal down which the North Heart flows to Peace River, which it joins at the crossing.

The trail so far had been good, but after crossing Slippery Creek it proved to be almost a continuous mud-hole, due to its extreme narrowness and the wet weather, closely bordered, as much of it was, by dense forests. It revealed a good farming country, however, free from stones, and the soil a rich, loamy clay throughout. It was well timbered, in some places, with the finest white poplar I had yet seen. The grass was luxuriant, and the region teemed with tiger-lilies, yarrow, and the wild rose.

The Little Prairie, as it is called, is really a lovely region, in appearance resembling the Saskatchewan country. There was an old Hudson’s Bay cattle station here, at that time deserted, and here, too, we were charmed with a mirage of indescribable beauty, an enchanting portal to the mighty Peace, which we reached about mid-day on the 15th of July.

The view up the Peace River from the high prairie level is singularly beautiful, the river disclosing a series of reaches, like inland lakes, far to the west, whilst from the south comes the immense valley of the Heart, and, farther up, the Smoky River, a great tributary which drains a large extent of prairie country mixed with timber.

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To the north spreads upward, and backward to its summit, the vast bank of the river, varied as to surface by rounded bare hills and valleys and flats sprinkled with aspens, cherries, and saskatoons, the latter loaded with ripe fruit.

The banks of the Peace River are a country in themselves, in which, particularly on the north side, numerous homesteads might be, and indeed have been, carved out. Descending to the river, we found a Hudson's Bay Company and Police post. The river here is about a third of a mile wide, and was in freshet, with a current, we thought, of about six miles an hour.

At Smoky River we met a couple of prospectors, Mr. Tryon, a nephew of the ill-fated Admiral, and Mr. Cooper Blachford, down from the Poker Flat mining-camp, this side the Finlay Rapids, in the Selwyn Mountains. They reached that camp by way of Ashcroft, B.C., in twenty-two days, the Peace River route being very much longer and more difficult. They described the camp there as a promising one, with much gold-bearing quartz in sight, but the cost of provisions and the extreme difficulty of development under the circumstances held it back.

There being but a few half-breeds here, we crossed the river, and decided to go on to Fort Dunvegan, and on our return complete our scrip issue at the Landing; so, partly on horseback and partly by waggon, we made our way to our first camp. The trail lay along and up and down the immense bank of the river, debouching at one place at the site of old Fort McLeod, and passing the fine St. Germain farm, with as beautiful fields of yellowing wheat as one would wish to see.

Here we got an abundant supply of vegetables, and in this ride our first taste of the Peace River mosquito—or, rather, that animal got its first taste of us. It is needless to dwell upon this pest. Like the fleas in Italy, it has been overdone in description, and yet beggars it.

All along the trail were old buffalo paths and willows. Indeed, we saw them everywhere we went on land, showing how numerous those animals were in times past. In 1793 Sir Alexander Mackenzie describes them as grazing in great numbers along these very banks, the calves frisking about their dams, and moose and red deer were equally numerous. In 1828 Sir George Simpson made a canoe journey to the Coast by way of this river, and they were still very numerous. The existing tradition is that, some sixty years ago, a winter occurred of unexampled severity and depth of snow, in which nearly all the herds perished, and never recovered their footing on the upper river. The wood buffalo still exists on Great Slave River, but, where we were, the only memorials of the animal were its paths and wallows, and its bones half-buried in the fertile earth.

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On the morning of the 17th we topped the crest of the bank, and found ourselves at once in a magnificent prairie country, which swept northward, varied by beautiful belts of timber, as far as Bear Lake, to which we made a detour, then westerly to Old Wives Lake—Nootooquay Sakaigon—and on to our night camp at Burnt River, twenty-two miles from Dunvegan. The great prairie is as flat as a table, and is the exact counterpart of Portage Plains, in Manitoba, or a number of them, with the addition of belts and beautiful islands of timber, the soil being a loamy clay, unmistakably fertile. Nothing could excel the beauty of this region, not even the fairest portions of Manitoba or Saskatchewan.

On the 18th we finished our drive over a like beautiful prairie, slightly rolling, dotted with similar clumps of timber like a great park, and carpeted with ripe strawberries and flowers, including the wild mignonette, the lupin, and the phlox.

Descending a very long and crooked ravine, we reached the river flat at last, upon which is situated Fort Dunvegan, called after the stronghold of the McLeods of Skye, but alas! with no McCrimmon to welcome us with his echoing pipes! Chief-factor McDonald, in his scanty journal of Sir George Simpson's canoe voyage in 1828 from Hudson's Bay to the Pacific, does not give the date at which this post was established, but mentions its abandonment in 1823, owing to the murder of a Mr. Hughes and four men at Fort St. John by the Beaver Indians. It had been re-established by Chief-trader Campbell. Simpson, Mr. McDonald, and Mr. McGillivray, who had embarked at Fort Chipewyan, where Sir George himself had served his clerkship, spent a day at Dunvegan in August, resting and getting fresh supplies. The warring traders had united in 1821, and this voyage was undertaken in order to harmonize the Indians, who, from the bay to the coast, particularly across the mountains, had become fierce partisans of one or other of the great companies.

Sir George had his McCrimmon with him in the shape of his piper, Colin Fraser, who played and paraded before the Indians most impressively in full Highland costume. Deer and buffalo were numerous in the region, and, during the day, thirteen sacks of pemmican were made for the party from materials stored at the fort. Simpson was famous in those days for his swift journeys with his celebrated Iroquois canoemen. They were made by *Canot du Maitre* as it was called, the largest bark canoe made by the Indians, carrying about six tons and a crew of sixteen paddlers, and which ascended as far as Fort William. Thence further progress was made in the much smaller "North Canoes" to all points west of Lake Superior. This particular journey of nearly 3,200 miles, made almost entirely by canoe, was completed from York Factory to Fort Langley, near the mouth of Fraser River, in sixty-five days of actual paddling, an average of about fifty miles a day, nearly all up stream.

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Only two buildings of the old fort remained at the time of our visit, both in a ruinous condition. The old fireplaces and the roofs of spruce bark, a covering much used in the country, were still sound, and several cellars indicated where the other buildings had stood. The later post is about a gunshot to the east of them, and the whole site had certainly been well chosen, being completely sheltered by the immensely high banks of the great and deep river, whose bends “shouldered” and seemed to shut in the place east and west, also by the “Caps,” two very high hills forming the bank on each side of the river, so called from their fancied resemblance to a skull-cap. The river here is over four hundred yards in width, and its banks, from the water’s edge to the upper prairie level are some six hundred feet or more in height; but, as the trail leads, the ascent of the great slope is about a mile in length.

A number of townships had been blocked here, at one time, by Mr. Ogilvie, D.L.S., but not subdivided, Fort Dunvegan being situated, if I mistake not, in the south-west corner of Township 80, Range 4, west of the Sixth Meridian.

The Roman Catholic Mission east of the fort was found to be beautifully sheltered, and neighboured by fine fields of wheat and a garden full of green peas and new potatoes. But this was on the flat. There was no farming whatever on the north side, on the upper and beautiful prairies described. A Mr. Milton had tried, it was said, about ten miles east of Dunvegan, but did not make a success of it.

Near the fort a raft was moored, on which had descended a party of four Americans. They were from the State of Wyoming, and had made their way the previous summer, by way of St. John and the Pine River, to the Nelson, a tributary of the Liard. They had had poor luck, in fact no luck at all; and this was the story of every returning party we met which had been prospecting on the various tributaries of the Peace and Liard towards the mountains. The cost of supplies, the varying and uncertain yield, but, above all, the brief season in which it is possible to work, barely six weeks—had dissipated by sad experience the bright dreams of wealth which had lured them from comfortable homes. Between seven and eight hundred people had gone up to those regions via Edmonton, bound for the Yukon, many of whom, after a tale of suffering which might have filled its boomsters’ souls with remorse, had found solitary graves, and the remainder were slowly toiling out of the country, having sunk what means they possessed in the vain pursuit of gold. They brought a rumour with them that some whites who had robbed the Indians on the Upper Liard had been murdered. It was not known what white men had penetrated to that desolate region, and the rumour was discredited; at all events, it was never verified.



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The treaty had been effected at Dunvegan, on the 6th, with a few Beaver Indians, who still lingered by their tepees, pitched to the west on the opposite shore. The half-breeds had camped near the fort pending our arrival, and we found them a very intelligent people, indeed, with some interesting relics of the old regime still amongst them. One, in particular, had canoed from Lachine with Simpson sixty years before. He was still lively and active, and a patriarch of the half-breed community. Large families we found to be the rule here, some parents boasting of twelve or thirteen children *under age*. This, and their healthy looks, spoke well for the climate, and their condition otherwise was promising, being comfortably clad, all speaking more or less English or French, whilst many could read and write.

Our work being completed here, we set out for the Crossing by waggon, our route lying over the same majestic prairies, and reached the Landing the second night, passing the Roman Catholic and Church of England Missions on the way. The former Mission is an extensive establishment, with a fine farm and garden. Indeed, with the exception of primitive outlying stations, all the principal Roman Catholic Missions, by their extent and completeness, put our own more meagrely endowed establishments into rather painful contrast.

A great concourse of natives was at the Landing awaiting our arrival. The place was covered with tepees and tents, and no less than four trading marquees had been pitched pending the scrip issue, which it took some time to complete.

Near the Landing were the mill and farm of a namesake of Sir Alexander Mackenzie. His father, indeed, was a cousin of the renowned explorer who gave his name to the great river of the North. This father, under whom, Mr. Mackenzie said, Lord Strathcona had spent his first year as a clerk in the Hudson's Bay Company's service, was drowned, with nine Iroquois, whilst running the Lachine Rapids in a bark canoe. His son came to Peace River in 1863, and his career, as he told it to me, will bear repeating. He was born at Three Rivers, in Lower Canada, in 1843, and was sent to Scotland to be educated, remaining there until he was eighteen years of age. In 1861 he joined the Hudson's Bay Company's service, wintering first at Norway House under Chief factor William Sinclair, but removed to Peace River, became a chief-trader there in 1872, and, after some years of service, retired, and has lived at the Crossing ever since.

The Landing, he told me, used to be known as "The Forks," it being here that the Smoky River joins the Peace; and here were concentrated, in bygone days, the posts and rivalries of the great fur companies. The remains of the North-West Company's fort are still visible on the north bank, a few miles above the Landing. On the south shore, in the angle of the two rivers, stood the Hudson's Bay Company's fort, whilst the old X. Y. Company's post, at that time the best equipped on the river, stood on the north bank opposite the Smoky.

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In a delightful afternoon spent in rambling over this interesting neighbourhood, Mr. Mackenzie made out for me the site of the latter establishment, now in the midst of a dense thicket of nettles, shrubs, and saplings. In this locality the antagonisms of old had full play—not only those of the traders, but of the Indians—and the river exhibited much more life and movement than at the time of our visit.

In remote days a constant warfare had been kept up by the Crees on the river, who, just as they invaded the Blackfeet on the Saskatchewan, encroached here upon the Beavers—at that time a brave, numerous and warlike tribe, but now decayed almost to extinction, the victims, it is said, of incestuous intercourse. The Beavers had also an enemy in their congeners, the Chipewyans, the three nations seemingly dividing the great river between them. But neither succeeded in giving a permanent name to it. The Unjigah, its majestic and proper name, or the Tsa-hoo-dene-desay—"The Beaver Indian River"—or the Amiskoo eennu Sepe of the Crees, which has the same meaning, has not taken root in our maps. The traditional peace made between its warring tribes gave it its name, the Riviere la Paix of the French, which we have adopted, and by this name the river will doubtless be known when the Indians, whose home it has been for ages, have disappeared.

On the 24th our work here was completed, and we took to our boats, which were to float us down to Vermilion and Athabasca Lake. During our stay, however, I had noted all the information that could be gained respecting the Upper Peace as an agricultural region, some of which I have already given. The knowledge obtainable about the fertile areas of the hinterlands of a vast unsurveyed country like this, though not very ample, was no doubt trustworthy as far as it went.

Trappers and traders are confined to the water, as a rule, and see little land away from the shores of streams and lakes. The only people who, through their employments, knew the interior well were the Indians and half-breed hunters. It was the statements of these, therefore, and of the few prosperous farmers and stockmen scattered here and there, which afforded us our only reliable knowledge.

The most extensive prairies adjacent to the Upper Peace River are those to the north already described. The nearest on the south side are the prairies of Spirit River, a small stream which divides several townships of first-class black, loamy soil, well wooded in parts, but with considerable prairie. The nearest farmer and rancher to Dunvegan, Mr. C. Brymner, who had lived for ten years on Spirit River, told me that during seven of these, though frost had touched his grain, particularly in June, it had done little serious harm. It was a fine hay country, he said, even the ridge hay being good, and therefore a good region for cattle, he himself having at the time over a hundred head, which fed out late in the fall and very early in the spring, owing to the Chinook winds, which enter the region and temper its climate. Southeast of Fort St. John there is a considerable area known as Pooscapee's Prairie, getting its name from an old Indian chief, and which was well spoken of, but which we did not see.

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A much more extensive open country, however, is the Grand Prairie, to the south-west of the Crossing, which connects with the Spirit River country, and is drained by the Smoky River and its branches, and by its tributary, the Wapiti. There is no dispute as to whether this should or should not be called a prairie country. As a matter of fact, it is an extensive district suitable for immediate cultivation, and containing, as well, valuable timber for lumber, fencing and building.

The first inquiry the intending immigrant makes is about frost. At the Dunvegan and St. Augustine Mission farms, on the river bank above the Landing, Father Busson told me that White Russian and Red Fyfe wheat had been raised since 1881, and during all these years it had never been seriously injured, whilst the yield has reached as high as thirty-five bushels to the acre. Seeding began about the middle of April, and harvesting about the middle of August. He was of opinion that along the rim of the upper prairie level wheat would ripen, but farther back he thought it unsafe, and so no doubt it is for the present. Mr. Brick's fine farm, opposite the Six Islands, and other farms also, were a success, but, of course, all these were along the river. With regard to the upper level, I heard opinions adverse to Father Busson's, though, like his, conjectural. The inconsiderable height above the sea (Lefroy, I think, puts the upper level at about 1,600 feet), the prolonged sunlight, the whole night being penetrated with it though the sun has set, together with good methods of farming, will no doubt get rid of frost, which strikes here just as it has in every new settlement in Manitoba, and in fact throughout a great portion of the continent.

There were complaints, however, of a worse enemy than frost, namely, drought, which we were told was a characteristic feature of those magnificent prairies to the north. The wiry grass is very short there, something like the Milk River grass in Southern Alberta, and hay is scarce. This drawback will doubtless be got over hereafter by dry farming, or better still by irrigation, should the lakes to the north prove to be available.

I have pointed out disadvantages which in all likelihood will disappear with time and settlement by good farmers. It is a region, I believe, predestined to agriculture; but, in some localities, the rainfall, as has been said, is rather scant for good husbandry, and, therefore, farming to the north of the river, on the upper level, is not as yet an assured success. To the south better conditions prevail, and thither no doubt the stream of immigration will first trend.

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Altogether we estimated the prairie areas of the upper river at about half a million acres, with much country, in addition, which resembles the Dauphin District in Manitoba, covered with willows and the like, which, if they can be pulled out by horse-power, as is done there, will not be very expensive to clear. There is, of course, any quantity of timber for building and fencing, though much has been destroyed by fire, the varieties being those common to the whole country. To the south, in the Yellowhead, and on the Upper Athabasca and its tributaries, there is considerable prairie also, more easily reached than Peace River; but this is apart from my subject. I may say, in conclusion, that the Upper Peace River country is a very fine one, drained by a vast and navigable river, compared with which the Saskatchewan must yield the palm, and, beyond doubt, this will be the first region to attract settlement and railway development.

Aside from settlers and a railway, the chief needs of the country are a good waggon-road to Edmonton and mail facilities, which were almost non-existent when we were there, but which have recently been to some extent supplied. Nearly three months had elapsed since we entered the country, and not a letter or paper had reached us from the outer world at any point. The imports into the country were increasing very fast, and, through competition and fashion, its principal furs were immensely more valuable than in the past.

As for the natives of the region, we found them a very worthy people, whose progress in the forms of civilized life, and to a certain extent in its elegances, was a constant surprise to us. As for the country, it was plain that all we met were making a good living in it, not by fur alone, but by successful farming, and that its settlement was but a question of time.

## Chapter VII

### Down The Peace River.

We had now to descend the river, and our first night in the boats was a bad one. A small but exceedingly diligent variety of mosquito attacked us unprepared; but no ordinary net could have kept them out, anyway. It was a case of heroic endurance, for Beelzebub reigned. The immediate bank of the river was now somewhat low in places, and along it ran a continuous wall, or layer, of sandstone of a uniform height. The stream was vast, with many islands in its course, and whole forests of burnt timber were passed before we reached Battle River, 170 miles down, and which, on the 25th, we left behind us towards evening. Next morning we reached Wolverine Point, a dismal hamlet of six or seven cabins, with a graveyard in their midst. The majority of the half-breeds of the locality had collected here, the others being out hunting. This is a good farming country. Eighteen miles north-west of Paddle River there is a prairie, we were told, of rich black soil, twenty-five miles long and from one to five miles wide, and another south-west of Wolverine, about nine miles in diameter and thirty-six in circumference—

clean prairie and good soil, and covered with luxuriant grass and pea-vine. The latter, I think, is watered by a stream called "The Keg," or "Keg of Rum." Wolverine is also a region of heavy spruce timber, and fish are abundant in the various streams which join the Peace River, though not in the Peace itself.

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We were now approaching Vermilion, the banks of the river constantly decreasing in height as we descended, until they became quite low. Beneath a waning moon in the south, and an exquisite array of gold and scarlet clouds in the east, which dyed the whole river a delicate red, we floated down to the hamlet of Vermilion. The place proved to be a rather extensive settlement, with yellow wheat-fields and much cattle, for it is a fine hay country. The pioneer Canadians at Vermilion were the Lawrence family, which has been settled there for over twenty years. They were original residents of Shefford County, Eastern Townships, and set out from Montreal for Peace River in April, 1879, making the journey to Vermilion, by way of Fort Carlton, Isle a la Crosse and Fort McMurray, in four months and some ten days. The elder Mr. Lawrence had been engaged under Bishop Bompas to conduct a mission school at Chipewyan, but after a time removed to Vermilion, where he organized another school, which he conducted until 1891. He then resigned, and began farming on his own account, and, by and by, with great pains and expense, brought in a flour mill, whose operation stimulated settlement, and speedily reduced the price of flour from \$25 to \$8 a sack. Unfortunately, this useful mill was burnt in April preceding our visit. The yield of grain, moreover, most of it wheat, was estimated at 10,000 bushels, and the turning of the mill was therefore not only a great loss to Mr. Lawrence, but a severe blow to the place. The population interested in farming was estimated at about three hundred souls, thus forming the nucleus of a very promising settlement, now, of course, at its wits' end for gristing. Vermilion seemed to be a very favourable supply point in starting other settlements, being in touch by water with Loon River, Hay River, and other points east and north, where there is abundance of excellent land. For the present, and pending railway development, it was plain that the great and pressing requirement of the region was a good waggon road by way of Wahpooskow to Athabasca Landing, a distance of three hundred miles, thus avoiding the dangerous rapids of the Athabasca, or the long detour by way of Lesser Slave Lake, and making communication easy in winter time.

From Mr. Erastus Lawrence, the head of the family, we got definite information regarding the region and its prospects for agriculture. We spent Sunday at his comfortable home, and examined his farm carefully. In front of the house was a field of wheat, 110 acres in extent, as fine a field as we had ever seen anywhere, and of this they had not had a failure, he said, during all their farming experience, the return never falling below fourteen bushels to the acre, in the worst of years, twenty-five being about the average yield. They sowed late in April, but reaped generally about the 15th of August. They had never, he said, been seriously injured by frost since 1884, and in fact no frost had occurred to injure wheat since 1887. There was abundance of hay, and 10,000 head of stock, he believed, could be raised at that very point. Many hogs were raised, with great profit, bacon and pork being, of course, high-priced. One of the sons, Mr. E. H. Lawrence, said he had raised sixteen pigs, which at eighteen months dressed 370 pounds apiece. At that time there were about 500 head of cattle, 250 horses, and 200 pigs in the settlement.

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After service at the Reverend Mr. Scott's neat little church, we returned to Mr. Lawrence's, and enjoyed an excellent dinner, including home-cured ham, fresh eggs, butter and cream. That was a notable Sunday for us in the wilds, and seldom to be repeated.

Strange to say, we found the true locust here, our old Red River pest, which had quartered itself on the settlement more than once. I examined numbers of them, and found the scarlet egg of the ichneumon fly under many of the shards. No one seemed to know exactly how they came, whether in flight or otherwise; but there they were, devouring some barley, but living mainly upon grass, which they seemed to prefer to grain. They had appeared nine years before our coming, and disappeared, and then, three years before, had come again.

We found quarters in a large building at the fort, which was in charge of Mr. Wilson, whose wife was a daughter of my old friend, Chief-factor Clarke, of Prince Albert, her brother having charge of the trading store. The post is a substantial one, and the store large, well stocked, and evidently the headquarters of an extensive trade. At such posts, which have generally a fringe of settlement, the Company's officers and their families, though, of course, cut off from the outer world, lead, if somewhat monotonous, by no means irksome lives. Books, music, cards and dances serve to while away spare time, and an occasional wedding, lasting, as it generally does, for several days, stirs the little community to its core. But sport, in a region abounding with game of all kinds, is the great time-killer, giving the longed-for excitement, and contributing as well to the daily bill of fare the very choicest of human food. Such a life is indeed to be envied rather than commiserated, and we met with few, if any, who cared to leave it. But such posts are the "plums" of the service, and are few and far between. At many of the solitary outposts life has a very different colour. ["At an outpost," says Mr. Bleasdel Cameron, "where a clerk is alone with his Indian servant, the life is wearisome to a degree, and privation not infrequently adds to the hardship of it. Supplies may run short, and in any case he is expected to stock himself with fish, taken in nets from the lake, near which his post is situated, for his table and his dogs, as well as to augment his larder by the expert and diligent use of his gun. Rare instances have occurred where, through accident, supplies had not reached the far-out posts for which they were intended, and the men had literally died of starvation. Out of a York boat's crew, which was taking up the annual supplies for a post far up among the Rocky Mountains, on a branch of the Mackenzie River, two or three men were drowned, and the ice beginning to take, the boat was obliged to put back to the district headquarters. The three men at the outpost were left for some weeks without the supplies, and when, after winter had set in, and it became possible to



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reach them with dog trains, and provisions were at length sent them, two were found dead in the post, while the third man was living by himself in a small hut some distance from the fort buildings. The explanation he gave was that he had removed to where there was a chance of keeping himself alive by snaring rabbits, which were more plentiful than at the post. But a suggestion of cannibalism surrounded the affair, for only the bones of his companions were found, and they were in the open chimney-place. Nothing was done, however, and I myself saw the survivor many times in after years.”]

At dinner Mr. Wilson told us of a very curious circumstance the previous fall, at the Loon River, some eighty miles south of Vermilion—something, indeed, that very much resembled volcanic action. Indians hunting there were surprised by a great shower of ashes all over the country, thick enough to track moose by, whilst others in canoes were bewildered in dense clouds of smoke. Dr. Wade, a traveller who had just come in from Loon River, said he had discovered three orifices, or “wells,” as he called them, out of which he thought the ashes might have been ejected. As there were no forest fires to account for the phenomena, they were rather puzzling.

We had begun taking depositions almost as soon as we arrived, and had a very busy time, working late and early in order to get away by the first of August. There were some interesting people here, “Old Lizotte” and his wife in particular. He was another of the “Ancient Mariners” who had left Lachine fifty-five years before with Governor Simpson—a man still of unshaken nerve and muscles as hard as iron. One by one these old voyageurs are passing away, and with them and their immediate successors the tradition perishes.

There was another character on the Vermilion stage, namely, old King Beaulieu. His father was a half-breed who had been brought up amongst the Dog Ribs and Copper Indians, and some eighty years back had served as an interpreter at Fort Chipewyan. It was he who at Fort Wedderburne sketched for Franklin with charcoal on the floor the route to the Coppermine River, the sketch being completed to and along the coast by Black Meat, an old Chipewyan Indian. King Beaulieu himself was Warburton Pike’s right-hand man in his trip to the Barren Lands. He had his own story, of course, about the sportsman, which we utterly discredited. He had joined the Indian Treaty here, but repented, almost flinging his payment in our face, and demanding scrip instead. One of his sons asked me if the law against killing buffalo had not come to an end. I said, “No! the law is stricter than ever—very dangerous now to kill buffalo.” Asking him what he thought the band numbered, he said, “About six hundred,” and added, “What are we poor half-breeds to do if we cannot shoot them?” Pointing out the abundance of moose in the country, and that if they shot the buffalo they would soon be exterminated, he still grumbled, and repeated, “What are we poor half-breeds to do?” I have no doubt whatever that they do shoot them, since the band is reported to have diminished to

about 250 head. Immediate steps should certainly be taken to punish and prevent poaching, or this band, the only really wild one on the continent, will soon be extinct.

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We were now on our boats again, and heading for the Chutes, as they are called, the one obstruction to the navigation of Peace River for over six hundred miles. We debarked at the head of the rapids above the Grand Fall, and walked to their foot along a shelving and slippery portage, skirting the very edge of the torrent. The Crees call this Meatina Powistik—"The Real Rapid"—the cataract farther on being the Nepegabaketik—"Where the Water Falls."

Returning to the "Decharge," I ran the rapids with Cyr and Baptiste in one of the boats, a glorious sensation, reminding one, though shorter, of the Grand Rapids of the Saskatchewan, the waves being great, and the danger spiced by the tremendous vortex ahead. The rapids are about four hundred yards in length, and extend quite across the river, which is here of an immense width. A heavy but brief rainstorm had set in, and it was some time before we could reload and drop down to the head of the "Chaudiere," if I may call it so, for the vortex much resembles the "Big Kettle" at Ottawa. That night we spent in the York boat, its keel on the rocks and painter tied to a tree, and, lulled by the roar of the cataract, slept soundly until morning.

These falls cut somewhat diagonally across the river, the vortex being at the right bank, and close in-shore, concentrated by a limestone shelf extending to the bank, flanked on the left, and at an acute angle, by a deeply-indented reef of rock. Looking up the river, the view to the west seems inclosed by a long line of trees, which, in the distance, appear to stand in the water. Thence the vast stream sweeps boldly into the south, and with a rush discharges down the rapids, and straight over the line of precipice, in a vast tumultuous greyish-drab torrent which speedily emerges into comparatively still water below. The rock here is an exceedingly hard, mottled limestone, resembling the stone at St. Andrew's Rapids on Red River. Where exposed it is pitted or bitten into by the endless action of wind and water, and lies in thick layers, forming an irregular dyke all along the shore, over the surface of which passes the portage, some forty yards in length. Though short, it is a nasty one, running along a shelf of rock into which great gaps have been gored by the torrent. Large quantities of driftwood were stuck in the rapids above, and a big pile of it had lodged at the south angle of the cataract, over which our boats had to be drawn, and dropped down, with great care and difficulty. A rounded, tall island lies, or rather stands, below the falls, towards the north shore, whose sheer escarpments and densely wooded top are very curious and striking. Two sister islands and another above the falls, all four being about a mile apart, stand in line with each other, as if they had once formed parts of an ancient marge, and, below the falls, the torrent has wrought out a sort of bay from the rock, the bank, which is high here, giving that night upon its grassy slope, overhung

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with dense pine woods, a picturesque camp to our boatmen. The vast river, the rapids and the falls form a majestic picture, not only of material grandeur, but of power to be utilized some day in the service of man. Though formidable, they will yet be surmounted by modern locks; and should Smith's Rapids, on the Great Slave River, be overcome by canalling, there would then be developed one of the longest lines of inland navigation on the continent.

The Red River, which joins the Peace about twenty-five miles below the Chutes, flows from the south with a course, it was said, of about two hundred miles, and up this beautiful stream there are extensive prairies. The soil is very rich at the confluence, and we noticed that in the garden at the little Hudson's Bay Company's post, where we transacted our business, vegetables and potatoes were further advanced than at Vermilion, and some ears of wheat were almost ripe. From statements made we judged this to be a region well worth special investigation; it was, in fact, one of the most inviting points for settlement we had seen on our journey.

Following down the Peace, some shoaly places were met with in the afternoon, the banks being low, sandy and uniform, with open woods to the south. The current was stately, but so slow that oars had often to be used. A chilly sunset was followed by an exceedingly brilliant display of Northern Lights, called by the Crees Pahkugh ka Neematchik—"The Dance of the Spirits." This generally presages change; but the day was fine, and next morning we passed what are called the Lower Rapids, below which the banks are lined by precipitous walls of limestone, the river narrowing to less than half of its previous width.

Landing at Peace Point, the traditional scene of the peace between the Beavers and the Chipewyans, or between the Beavers and the Crees, as Mackenzie says, or all three, we found it to be a wide and beautiful table-like prairie, begirt with aspens, on which we flushed a pack of prairie chickens. Below it, and looking upward beyond an island, a line of timber, fringed along the water's edge with willows, sweeps across the view, met half-way by a wall of Devonian rock, whose alternate glitter and shade, in the strong sunshine streaming from the east, seemed almost spectral.

The heavily timbered island added to the effect, and, with a patch of limestone on its cheek, formed a strikingly beautiful foreground.

The only exciting incident of the day was the vigorous chase, by some of the party, of an old pair of moulting gray geese with their young, all, of course, unable to fly. It was pitiful to watch the clever and fearless actions of the old birds as decoys, falling victims, at last, to parental love. Indeed, they were not worth eating, and to kill them was a sin. But when were there ever scruples over food on Peace River, that theatre of mighty feats of gormandism?

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I have already hinted at those masterpieces of voracity for which the region is renowned; yet the undoubted facts related around our camp-fires, and otherwise, a few of which follow, almost beggar belief. Mr. Young, of our party, an old Hudson's Bay officer, knew of sixteen trackers who, in a few days, consumed eight bears, two moose, two bags of pemmican, two sacks of flour, and three sacks of potatoes. Bishop Grouard vouched for four men eating a reindeer at a sitting. Our friend, Mr. d'Eschambault, once gave Oskinnequ—"The Young Man"—six pounds of pemmican, who ate it all at a meal, washing it down with a gallon of tea, and then complained that he had not had enough. Sir George Simpson states that at Athabasca Lake, in 1820, he was one of a party of twelve who ate twenty-two geese and three ducks at a single meal. But, as he says, they had been three whole days without food. The Saskatchewan folk, however, known of old as the Gens de Blaireaux—"The People of the Badger Holes"—were not behind their congeners. That man of weight and might, our old friend, Chief-factor Belanger—drowned, alas, many years ago with young Simpson at Sea Falls—once served out to thirteen men a sack of pemmican weighing ninety pounds. It was enough for three days; but, there and then, they sat down and consumed it all at a single meal, not, it must be added, without some subsequent and just pangs of indigestion. Mr. B. having occasion to pass the place of eating, and finding the sack of pemmican, as he supposed, in his path, gave it a kick; but, to his amazement, it bounded aloft several yards, and then lit. It was empty! When it is remembered that, in the old buffalo days, the daily ration per head at the Company's prairie posts was eight pounds of fresh meat, which was all eaten, its equivalent being two pounds of pemmican, the enormity of this Gargantuan feast may be imagined. But we ourselves were not bad hands at the trencher. In fact, we were always hungry. So I do not reproduce the foregoing facts as a reproach, but rather as a meagre tribute to the prowess of the great of old—the men of unbounded stomach!

On the afternoon of the 4th we rounded Point Providence, the soil exposures sandy, the timber dense but slender, and early next morning reached the Quatre Fourches, which was at that time flowing into Lake Athabasca. It is simply a waterway of some thirty miles in length, which connects Peace River with the lake, and resembles, in size and colour, Red River in Manitoba. It is one of "the rivers that turn"—so called from their reversing their current at different stages of water. A small stream of this kind connects the South Saskatchewan with the Qu'Appelle, and another, a navigable river, the Lower Saskatchewan with Cumberland Lake. The Quatre Fourches is thus both an inlet and an outlet, but not of the lake in a right sense. The real outlet is the Rocher River, which joins the Peace River at the intersection of latitude 59 with the 111.30th degree of longitude, beyond which the united streams are called the Great Slave River.

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The Quatre Fourches—"The Four Forks"—gets its name from the junction of a channel which connects a small lake called the Mamawee with the south-west angle of Lake Athabasca, Fort Chipewyan being situated on an opposite shore upon an arm of the lake, here about six miles wide. The stream is sluggish, and is thickly wooded to the water's edge, with here and there an exposure of red granite. It is a very beautiful stream, and it was a pleasure to get out of the great river and its oppressive vastness into the familiar-looking, homely water, its eastern rocks and exquisite curves and bends. Rounding a point, we came upon a camp of Chipewyans drying fish and making birch-bark canoes, all of them fat, dirty, like ourselves, and happy; and, passing on, at dusk we reached the outlet and the lake.

It was blowing hard, but we decided to cross to the fort, where a light had been run up for our guidance, and which, by vigorous rowing, we reached by midnight. Here Mr. Laird was waiting to receive us, the other Commissioners having departed for Fort McMurray and Wahpooskow.

Next morning we saw the lake to better advantage. It is called by the Chipewyans Kaytaylaytooway, namely, "The Lake of the Marsh," corresponding to the Athapuskow of the Crees, corrupted into the Rabasca of the French voyageurs, and meaning "The Lake of the Reeds." At one time, it may be mentioned, it was also known as "The Lake of the Hills," and its great tributary, the Athabasca, was the Elk River; but these names have not survived.

## Chapter VIII

### Fort Chipewyan To Fort McMurray.

Chipewyan, it may be remarked, is not a Dene word. It is the name which was given by the Crees to that branch of the race when they first came in contact with them, owing to their wearing a peculiar coat, or tunic, which was pointed both before and behind; now disused by them, but still worn by the Esquimaux, and, until recent years, by the Yukon Indians. Though somewhat similar in sound, it has no connection, it is asserted, with the word Chippeway, or Ojibway. For all that, the words are perhaps closely akin. The writer for the accurate use in this narrative of words in the Cree tongue is under obligation to experts. When preparing his notes to his drama of "Tecumseh" he was indebted to his friend, Mr. Thomas McKay, of Prince Albert, Sask., a master of the Cree language, for the exact origin and derivation of the words Chippeway and Ojibway. Both are corruptions of O-cheepo-way, *cheepo* meaning "tapering," and *way* "sound," or "voice." The name was begot of the Ojibway's peculiar manner of lowering the voice at the end of a sentence. As "*wyan*" means a skin, it is not improbable that the word Chipewyan means tapering or "pointed" skin, referring, of course, to the peculiar garb of the Athapuskow Indians when the Crees first met with them.

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The sites of old posts are to be found all over this region; but Chipewyan in the beginning of the last century was the great supply and trading-post of the North-West Company. From Sir John Franklin's Journal (1820) it would appear that the Hudson's Bay Company had begun, and, for some reason not given, had ceased trading on Lake Athabasca, as he says "Fort Wedderburne was a small post built on Coal Island—now called Potato Island—about A.D. 1815, when the Hudson's Bay Company recommenced trading in this part of the country." He often visited this island post, then in charge of a Mr. Robertson, and, in June, engaged there for his memorable journey his bowmen, steersmen and middlemen, and an interpreter, his other men being furnished by the rival company. Fort Chipewyan was in charge at that time of Messrs. Keith and Black, of the North-West Company, a noticeable feature of the post being a tower built, Franklin says, about the year 1812, "to watch Indians who had evil designs."

The site was well chosen, being sheltered from storms from the lake side by a great bulwark of wooded and rocky islands. The largest is Potato Island, just opposite, its outliers being the Calf and English Islands—the Lapeta, Echeranaway and Theyaodene of the Chipewyans; the Petac, Moostoos and Akayasoo of the Crees.

Fort Chipewyan stands upon a rising ground fronting a sort of bay formed by these islands, and at the time of our visit consisted of a trading-store, several large warehouses and the master's residence, *etc.*, all of solid timber, erected in the days of Chief-factor MacFarlane, who ruled here for many years.

[Mr. MacFarlane's career in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company is typical of the varied life and movements of its old-time adventurous traders. He entered the service in 1852, his first winter being spent as a clerk at Pembina (now Emerson), and also as trader in charge at the Long Creek outpost. From here he was transferred to Fort Rae, and afterwards to Fort Good Hope, Mackenzie River, where he remained six years. His next post was Fort Anderson, on the Begh-ula, or Anderson River, in the Barren Grounds, which he held for five years, much of his scientific work being done during excursions from this point. Afterwards he became trader and accountant at Fort Simpson, and was for two years in charge of the Mackenzie River district. This was succeeded by a six months' residence at Fort Chipewyan, where, subsequently, for fifteen years he had charge of the district. For two years he had control of the Caledonia district, in British Columbia, but removed to Fort Cumberland, Sask., where he remained for five years. Other removals followed until he finally retired from the service, and, returning to Winnipeg, has lived there ever since.]

But old as the fort is, it has no relics—not even a venerable cabin. In the store were a couple of not very ancient flint-locks, and, upstairs, rummaging through some dusty shelves, I came across one volume of the Edinburgh, or second, edition of Burns in gray paper boards—a terrible temptation, which was nobly resisted. Though there was once a valuable library here, with many books now rare and costly, yet all had disappeared.



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East of the fort are shelving masses of red granite, completely covered by a dark orange lichen, which gives them an added warmth and richness; and on the highest part stood a square lead sun-dial, which, at first sight, I thought had surely been set up by Franklin or Richardson, but which I was told was very modern indeed, and put up, if I am not mistaken, by Mr. Ogilvie, D.L.S. To the west of the fort is the Church of England Mission, and, farther up, the Roman Catholic establishment, the headquarters of our esteemed fellow-voyager, Bishop Grouard. [The first Roman Catholic Mission in Athabasca was formed by Bishop Farrand the year after Bishop Tache's visit to Fort Chipewyan, about A.D. 1849, he being then a missionary priest. Bishop Farrand established other missions on Peace River, and went as far north as Fort Resolution, on Great Slave Lake. He died in 1890, and was succeeded by our guest, Bishop Grouard, O.M.I., *Eveque d'Ibora*, the present occupant of the See of Athabasca and Mackenzie River. This prelate was born at Le Mans, in France, and was educated there, but finished his education in Quebec. He was ordained by Bishop Tache, near Montreal, in 1862, and was sent at once to Chipewyan, where he learnt the difficult language of the natives in a year. He has worked at many points, and perhaps no man in all the North, with the exception of Archdeacon Macdonald, or the late Anglican Bishop Bompas, has or had as accurate a knowledge of the great Dene race, with its numerous subdivisions of Chipewyans, Beavers, Yellow Knives, Dog Ribs, Slaves, Nahanies, Rabbit Skins, Loucheaux, or Squint Eyes (so named from the prevalence of strabismus amongst them), and of other tribes. All these were at one time not only at war with the Crees, but with each other, with the exception of the Slaves, who were always a tame and meek-spirited race, and were often subjected to and treated like dogs by the others. Indeed they were called by the Crees, Awughkanuk, meaning "cattle."] In line with the fort buildings, and facing the lake, stood a row of whitewashed cottages, all giving the place, with its environs, deeply indented shore and rugged spits of red granite, the quaint appearance of some secluded fishing village on the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

In sight, but above the bay, was the trading-post of Colin Fraser, whose father, the McCrimmon of the North-West, was Sir George Simpson's piper. The late Chief-factor Camsell, of Fort Simpson, and myself paddled up to it, and were most hospitably entertained by Mr. Fraser and his agreeable family. His father's bagpipes, still in excellent order, were speedily brought out, and it was interesting to handle them, for they had heralded the approach of the autocratic little Governor to many an inland post from Hudson's Bay to Fraser River, over seventy years before.



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Several days were spent at the fort taking declarations, but, unlike Vermilion or Dunvegan, there were few large families here, the applicants being mainly young people. The agricultural resources of this region of rocks are certainly meagre compared with those of Peace River. Potatoes, where there is any available soil, grow to a good size; barley was nearly ripe when we were there, and wheat ripens, too. But, of course, it is not a farming region, nor are fish plentiful at the west end of the lake, the Athabasca River, which enters there, giving for over twenty miles eastward a muddy hue to the water. The rest of the lake is crystal clear, and whitefish are plentiful, also lake trout, which are caught up to thirty, and even forty, pounds' weight.

The distance from Fort Chipewyan to Fond du Lac is about 185 miles, but the lake extends over 75 miles farther eastward in a narrow arm, giving a total length of about 300 miles, the greatest width being about 50 miles. The whole eastern portion of the lake is a desolate scene of primitive rock and scrub pine, with many quartz exposures, which are probably mineralized, but with no land, not even for a garden. The scenery, however, from Black Bay to Fond du Lac is very beautiful, consisting largely of islands as diversified and as numerous as the Thousand Islands in the St. Lawrence. These extremely solitary spots should be, one would think, the breeding-grounds of the pelican, though it is said this bird really breeds on islands in the Great Slave River. If disturbed by man it is reputed to destroy its young and desert the place at once.

The Barren Ground reindeer migrate to the east end of this lake in October, and return in March or April, but this is not certain. Sometimes they unaccountably forsake their old migratory routes, causing great suffering, in consequence, to the Indians. Moose frequent the region, too, but are not numerous, whilst land game, such as prairie chickens, ptarmigan, and a grouse resembling the "fool-hen," is rather plentiful.

The Indians of Fond du Lac are healthy, though somewhat uncleanly in their habits, and fond of dress, which is that of the white man, their women being particularly well dressed.

As an agricultural country the region has no value whatever; but its mineral resources, when developed, may prove to be rich and profitable. Mining projects were already afoot in the country, but far to the north on Great Slave Lake.

What was known as the "Helpman Party" was formed in England by Captain Alene, who died of pneumonia in December, 1898, three days after his arrival at Edmonton. The party consisted of a number of retired army officers, including Viscount Avonmore, with a considerable capital, \$50,000 of which was expended. They brought some of their outfit from England, but completed it at Edmonton, and thence went overland late in the spring. But sleighing being about over, they got to Lesser Slave Lake with great difficulty, and there the party broke up, Mr. Helpman and others returning to England, whilst Messrs. Jeffries and Hall Wright, Captain Hall, and Mr. Simpson went on to Peace

River Crossing. From there they descended to Smith's Portage, on the Great Slave River, and wintered at Fort Resolution, on Great Slave Lake.

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In the following spring they were joined by Mr. McKinlay, the Hudson's Bay Company's agent at the Portage, and he, accompanied by Messrs. Holroyd and Holt, who had joined the party at Smith's Landing, and by Mr. Simpson, went off on a prospecting tour through the north-east portion of Great Slave Lake, staking, *en route*, a number of claims, some of which were valuable, others worthless. The untruthful statements, however, of one of the party, who represented even the worst of the claims as of fabulous value, brought the whole enterprise into disrepute. The members of the party mentioned returned to England ostensibly to raise capital to develop their claims, but nothing came of it, not because minerals of great value do not exist there, but on account of remoteness and the difficulties of transport.

In 1898 another party was formed in Chicago, called "The Yukon Valley Prospecting and Mining Company," its chief promoters being a Mr. Willis and a Mr. Wollums of that city. The capital stock was put at a quarter of a million dollars, twenty-five thousand dollars being paid up. These organizers interested thirty-three other men in the enterprise, the agreement being that these should go to Dawson at the expense of the stockholders, and locate mining claims there, a half-interest in all of which was to be transferred to the company. These men proceeded to Calgary, and outfitted for Dawson, which they wished to reach by ascending the Peace River. At Calgary they were fortunate in procuring as leader a gentleman of large experience in the North, W. J. McLean, Esq., a retired Chief-factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, who pointed out the difficulties of such a route, and recommended, instead, a possible one via Great Slave Lake and the Mackenzie River to Fort Simpson, and thence up the Liard River to the height of land at or near Francis Lake, and so down the Pelly River and on to Dawson.

In February the party, led by him, left Edmonton with 160 ponies, sleds and sleighs, loaded with supplies, and proceeded, by an extremely difficult forest trail, to Lesser Slave Lake. They had no feed for the horses, save what they drew, and, of course, they reached the lake completely exhausted. Here, by Mr. McLean's advice, they sold the horses, and with the proceeds hired local freighters to carry them and their supplies to Peace River Crossing, where boats were built in which the party, with the exception of one of the organizers, Mr. Willis, who had returned in high dudgeon to Chicago, set out for Great Slave Lake. Before getting to Fort Resolution, Mr. McLean got private information from a former servant of his at that post, which led to an expedition to the north-east end of the lake, where he made valuable finds of copper and other minerals. Another trip was made, and additional claims were taken, and on Mr. McLean's return with a lot of samples of ore, he with another prospector, came out, and proceeded to Chicago. His samples were tested there and in Winnipeg, and yielded in copper from 11 to 32 per cent.; and the galena 60 ozs. of silver to the ton. Other minerals, such as sulphur, coal, asphalt, petroleum, iron and salt were discovered, all of great promise, and his opinion is that when transport is extended to that region, it will prove to be a great storehouse of mineral wealth.

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The other members of the party had at various times and places separated, some going here and some there; but all eventually left the country, and the company died a natural death. But Mr. McLean is not only a firm believer in the mineral wealth of the North, but in its resources otherwise. There are extensive areas of large timber, and the lakes swarm with fish. The soil on the Liard River is excellent, and he tells me that not only wheat but Indian corn will ripen there, as he himself grew both successfully when in charge of that district.

The mining enterprises referred to fell through, but I have described them at some length since they are very interesting as being the first attempts at prospecting with a view to development in those remote regions. Failure, of course, at such a distance from transport and supplies, was inevitable. But some of the prospectors, Captain Hall and others who came out with ourselves, seemed to have no doubt that much of the country they explored is rich in minerals. Indeed, should the ancient repute of the Coppermine River be justified by exploration, perhaps the most extensive lodes on the continent will yet be discovered there.

If the Hudson's Bay route were developed, a short line of rail from the western end of Chesterfield Inlet would tap the mining regions prospected, and develop many great resources at present dormant. The very moss of the Barren Lands may yet prove to be of value, and be shipped to England as a fertilizer. I have been told by a gentleman who has travelled in Alaska that an enterprising American there is preparing to collect and ship moss to Oregon, where it will be fermented and used as a fertilizer in the dairy industry.

To return to Lake Athabasca. It seemed at one time to have been the rallying-place of the great Tine or Dene race, to which, with the exception of the Crees, the Loucheaux, perhaps, and the Esquimaux, all the Indians of the entire country belong. It is said to have been a traditional and central point, such as Onondaga Lake was to the Iroquois.

It is noticeable that, in the nomenclature of the various Indians of the continent, the names by which they were known amongst themselves generally meant men, "original men," or people; e.g., the Lenni Lenape of the Delawares, with its equivalent, the Anishinape of the Saukteaux, and the Naheowuk of the Crees. It is also the meaning of the word Dene, the generic name of a race as widely sundered, if not as widely spread, as the Algonquin itself.

The Chipewyan of Lake Athabasca speaks the same tongue as the Apache of Arizona, the Navajo of Sonora, the Hoopa of Oregon, and the Sarcee of Alberta. The word Apache has the same root-meaning as the word Dene though that fierce race was also called locally the Shisindins, namely, "The Forest People," doubtless from its original habitat in this region.

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Owing to the agglutinative character of the aboriginal languages, numbering over four hundred, some philologists are inclined to attribute them all to a common origin, the Basque tongue being one of the two or three in Europe which have a like peculiarity. In the languages of the American Indians one syllable is piled upon another, each with a distinct root-significance, so that a single word will often contain the meaning of an ordinary English sentence. This polysynthetic character undoubtedly does point to a common origin, just as the Indo-European tongues trace back to Sanskrit. But whether this is indicative of the ancient unity of the American races, whose languages differed in so many other respects, and whose characteristics were so divergent, is another question.

One interesting impression, begot of our environment, was that we were now emphatically in what might be called "Mackenzie's country." In his "General History of the Fur-Trade," published in London in 1801, Sir Alexander tells us that, after spending five years in Mr. Gregory's office in Montreal, he went to Detroit to trade, and afterwards, in 1785, to the Grand Portage (Fort William).

The first traders, he tells us, had penetrated to the Athabasca, via Methy Portage, as early as 1791, and in 1783-4 the merchants of Lower Canada united under the name of The North-West Company, the two Frobishers—Joseph Frobisher had traded on the Churchill River as early as 1775 and Simon McTavish being managers. The Company, he says, "was consolidated in July, 1787," and became very powerful in more ways than one, employing, at the time he wrote, over 1,400 men, including 1,120 canoemen. "It took four years from the time the goods were ordered until the furs were sold;" but, of course, the profits, compared with the capital invested, were very great, until the strife deepened between the Montrealers and the Hudson's Bay Company, whose first inland post was only established at Sturgeon River, Cumberland Lake, in 1774, by the adventurous, if not over-valiant, Samuel Hearne. The rivalries of these two companies nearly ruined both, until they got rid of them by uniting in 1821, when the Nor'-Westers became as vigorous defenders of King Charles's Charter as they had before been its defiers and defamers.

Fort Chipewyan was established, Mackenzie says, by Mr. Pond, in 1788, the year after his own arrival at the Athabasca, where, by the way, in the fall of 1787, he describes Mr. Pond's garden at his post on that river as being "as fine a kitchen garden as he ever saw in Canada." Fort Chipewyan, however, though not established by Mackenzie, was his headquarters for eight years. From here he set out in June, 1789, on his canoe voyage to the Arctic Ocean, and from here in October, 1792, he started on his voyage up the Peace River on his way to the Pacific coast, which he reached the following year.

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In his history he states: "When the white traders first ventured into this country both tribes were numerous, but smallpox destroyed them." And, speaking of the region at large, he, perhaps, throws an incidental side-light upon the Blackfoot question. "Who the original people were," he says, "that were driven from it when conquered by the Kinisteneaux (the Crees) is not now known, as not a single vestige remains of them. The latter and the Chipewyans are the only people that have been known here, and it is evident that the last mentioned consider themselves as strangers, and seldom remain longer than three or four years without visiting their friends and relatives in the Barren Grounds, which they term their native country."

[It is a reasonable conjecture that these "original people," driven from Athabasca in remote days, were the Blackfeet Indians and their kindred, who possibly had their base at that time, as in subsequent days, at the forks and on both branches of the Saskatchewan. The tradition was authentic in Dr. (afterwards Sir John) Richardson's time. Writing on the Saskatchewan eighty-eight years ago he places the Eascabs, "called by the Crees the Assinipoytuk, or Stone Indians, west of the Crees, between them and the Blackfeet." The Assiniboines are an offshoot of the great Sioux, or Dakota, race called by their congeners the Hohas, or "Rebels." They separated from their nation at a remote period owing to a quarrel, so the tradition runs, between children, and which was taken up by their parents. Migrating northward the Eascabs, as the Assiniboines called themselves, were gladly received and welcomed as allies by the Crees, with whom, as Dr. Richardson says, "they attacked and drove to the westward the former inhabitants of the banks of the Saskatchewan." "The nations," he continues, "driven westward by the Eascabs and Crees are termed by the latter Yatchee-thinyoowuc, translated Slave Indians, but properly 'Strangers.'" This word Yatchee is, of course, the *lyaghchi* of the Crees in their name for Lesser Slave River and Lake. Richardson describes them as inhabiting the country round Fort Augustus and the foot of the Rockies, and "so numerous now as to be a terror to the Assiniboines themselves." They are divided, he says, into five nations, of whom the Fall Indians, so called from their former residence at Cole's Falls, near the Forks of the Saskatchewan, were the most numerous, consisting of 500 tents, the Piegans of 400, the Blackfeet of 350, the Bloods of 300, and the Sarcees of 150, the latter tribe being a branch of the Chipewyans which, having migrated like their congeners, the Apaches, from the north, joined the Crees as allies, just as the Assiniboines did from the south.]

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Besides Mackenzie's, another name, renowned in the tragic annals of science, is inseparably connected with this region, viz., that of Franklin, who has already been incidentally referred to. Others recur to one, but these two great names are engrained, so to speak, in the North, and cannot be lightly passed over in any descriptive work. The two explorers were friends, or, at any rate, acquaintances; and, before leaving England, Franklin had a long conversation in London with Mackenzie, who died shortly afterwards. The record of his "Journey to the Shores of the Polar Ocean," accompanied by Doctor Richardson and Midshipmen Back and Hood, in the years 1819-20-21 and '22, practically began at York Factory in August of the former year. The rival companies were still at war, and in making the portage at the Grand Rapids of the Saskatchewan, with a party of Hudson's Bay Company traders, "they advanced," he says, "armed, and with great caution." When he returned on the 14th July, 1822, to York, the warring companies had united, and he and his friends were met there by Governor Simpson, Mr. McTavish, and all the united partners, after a voyage by water and land of over 5,500 miles. Franklin spent part of the winter at Cumberland post, which had been founded to counteract the rivalry of Montreal. "Before that time," he says, "the natives took their furs to Hudson's Bay, or sold to the French Canadian traders, who," he adds, "visited this part of the country as early as 1697." If so, the credit for the discovery of the Saskatchewan has been wrongly given to the Chevalier, as he was called, a son of Varenne, Sieur de la Varendrye.

Franklin left Cumberland in January, 1820, by dog train for Chipewyan, via Fort Carlton and Green Lake. Fort Carlton was the great food supply post, then and long afterwards, of the Hudson's Bay Company, buffalo and wapiti being very abundant. The North-West Company's fort, called La Montee, was three miles beyond Carlton, and harbored seventy French Canadians and sixty women and children, who consumed seven hundred pounds of meat daily, the ration being eight pounds. This post was at that time in charge of Mr. Hallett, a forebear, if I mistake not, of my old friend, William Hallett, leader of the English Plain Hunt, and a distinguished loyalist in the rebellion of 1869.

Franklin and Back left Fort Carlton on the 8th February, and reached Green Lake on the 17th. The North-West Company's post at the lake was managed by Dugald Cameron, and that of the Hudson's Bay Company by a Mr. MacFarlane, and, having been equipped at both posts with carioles, sledges and provisions, they left "under a fusillade from the half-breed women." From the end of the lake they followed for a short distance a small river, then "crossed the woods to Beaver River, and proceeding along it, passed the mouths of two rivers, the latter of which, they were told, was a channel by which the Indians go to Lesser Slave Lake." On the 11th of



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March they reached Methy Lake—so called from an unwholesome fish of the burbot species found there, only the liver of which is fit to eat—crossed the Methy portage on the 13th, and, amidst a chaos of vast ravines and the wildest of scenery, descended the next day to the Clearwater River. Thence they followed the Indian trail on the north bank, passing a noted scene, “a romantic defile of limestone rocks like Gothic ruins,” and, crossing a small stream, found pure sulphur deposited by springs and smelling very strongly. On the 17th they got to the junction of the Clearwater with the Athabasca, where Port McMurray now stands, and next day reached the Pierre an Calumet post, in charge of a Mr. Stewart, who had twice crossed the mountains to the Pacific coast. The place got its name from a soft stone found there, of which the Indians made their pipes.

Franklin notes the “sulphurous springs” and “bituminous salt” in this region, also the statement of Mr. Stewart, who had a good thermometer, “that the lowest temperature he had ever witnessed in many years, either at the Athabasca or Great Slave Lake, was 45 degrees below zero,” a statement worth recording here.

On the 26th of March the party arrived at Fort Chipewyan, the distance travelled from Cumberland House being 857 miles. He notes that at the time of his arrival the fort was very bare of both buffalo and moose meat, owing, it was said, to the trade rivalry, and that where some eight hundred packs of fur used to be shipped from that point, only one-half of that number was now sent. Liquor was largely used by both companies in trade, and scenes of riot and violence ensued upon the arrival of the Indians at the fort in spring, and whom he describes otherwise as “reserved and selfish, inhospitable and beggars, but honest and affectionate to children.” They painted round the eyes, the cheek-bones and the forehead, and all the race, except the Dog Ribs and the Beavers, believed that their forefathers came from the East. The Northern Indians, Franklin says, suppose that they originally sprang from a dog, and about A.D. 1815 they destroyed all their dogs, and compelled their women to take their place. Their chiefs seemed to have no power save over their own families, and their conjurers were supported by voluntary contributions of provisions. These are some of the chief characteristics Franklin notes of the Indians who frequented Fort Chipewyan, at which point he spent several months. One extraordinary circumstance, however, remains to be mentioned. It is that of a young Chipewyan who lost his wife in her first pregnancy. He applied the child to his left breast, from which a flow of milk took place. “The breast,” he adds, “became of an unusual size.” Here he and Back, afterwards Admiral Back, were joined by Dr. Richardson and Mr. Hood, who had come from Cumberland House by the difficult Churchill River route, and on July 18th, at noon, the whole party left the fort on their tragic expedition, the party, aside



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from those named, consisting of John Hepburn, seaman, an interpreter and fifteen voyageurs, including, unfortunately, an Iroquois Indian, called Michel Teroahante. At two p.m. they entered Great Slave River, here three-quarters of a mile wide, and, passing Red Deer Islands and Dog River, encountered the rapids, overcome by seven or eight portages, from the Casette to the Portage of the Drowned, all varying in length from seventy to eight hundred yards.

On the 21st they landed at the mouth of Salt River to lay in a supply of salt for their journey, the deposits lying twenty-two miles up by stream. These natural pans, or salt plains, he describes—and the description answers for to-day—as “bounded on the north and west by a ridge between six and seven hundred feet high.” Several salt springs issue at its foot, and spread over the plain, which is of tenacious clay, and, evaporating in summer, crystallize in the form of cubes. The poisson inconnu, a species of salmon which ascends from the Arctic Ocean, is not found, he says, above this stream. A few miles below it, however, a buffalo plunged into the river before them, which they killed, and those animals still frequent the region.

On the 25th of July they passed through the channel of the Scaffold to Great Slave Lake, and, landing at Moose Deer Island, found thereon the rival forts, of course, within striking distance of each other, and in charge, as usual, of rival Scotsmen. At Great Slave Lake I must part company with Franklin’s Journal, since our own negotiations only extended to its south shores. But who that has read it can ever forget the awful return journey of the party from the Arctic coast, through the Barren Lands, to their own winter quarters, which they so aptly named Fort Resolution? In the tales of human suffering from hunger there are few more terrible than this. All the gruesome features of prolonged starvation were present; the murder of Mr. Hood and two of the voyageurs by the Iroquois; his bringing to the camp a portion of human flesh, which he declared to be that of a wolf; his death at the Doctor’s hands; the dog-like diet of old skins, bones, leather pants, moccasins, *tripe de roche*; the death of Peltier and Semandre from want, and the final relief of the party by Akaitcho’s Indians, and their admirable conduct. And all those horrors experienced over five hundred miles beyond Fort Chipewyan, itself thousands of miles beyond civilization! Did the noble Franklin’s last sufferings exceed even these? Perhaps; but they are unrecorded.

To return to our muttons. Some marked changes had taken place, and for the better, in Chipewyan characteristics since Franklin’s day; not surprising, indeed, after eighty years of contact with educated, or reputable, white men; for miscreants, like the old American frontiersmen, were not known in the country, and if they had been, would soon have been run out. There was now no paint or “strouds” to

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be seen, and the blanket was confined to the bed. In fact, the Indians and half-breeds of Athabasca Lake did not seem to differ in any way from those of the Middle and Upper Peace River, save that the former were all hunters and fishermen, pure and simple, there being little or no agriculture. It was impossible to study the manners and customs of the aborigines, since we had no time to observe them closely. They have their legends and traditions and remnants of ceremonies, much of which is upon record, and they cherish, especially, some very curious beliefs. One, in particular, we were told, obtained amongst them, namely, that the mastodon still exists in the fastnesses of the Upper Mackenzie. They describe it as a monster many times larger than the buffalo, and they dread going into the parts it is supposed to haunt. This singular opinion may be the survival of a very old tradition regarding that animal, but is more likely due to the presence of its remains in the shape of tusks and bones found here and there throughout the Mackenzie River district and the Yukon.

[A similar belief, it is said, exists amongst the Indians of the Yukon. The remains of the primeval elephant are exceedingly abundant in the tundras of Siberia, and a considerable trade in mammoth ivory has been carried on between that region and England for many years. It is supposed that the Asian elephant advanced far to the North during the interglacial period and perished in the recurrent glacial epoch. Its American congener, the mastodon, found its way from Asia to this continent during the Drift period, when, it is believed, land communication existed in what is now Bering's Strait, and perished in a like manner. It was not a sudden but a gradual extinction in their native habitats, due to natural causes, such as encroaching ice and other material changes in the animals' environment. This, I believe, is the accepted scientific opinion of to-day. But the fact that these animals are at times exposed entire by the falling away of ice-cliffs or ledges, their flesh being quite fresh and fit food for dogs, and even men, opens up a very interesting field of inquiry and conjecture. In the bowels of a mammoth recently revealed in North-Eastern Siberia vegetable food was found, probably tropical, at all events unknown to the botany of to-day. The foregoing facts seem to be at variance with the doctrine of Uniformity, or with anything like a slow process. The entombment of these animals must have been very sudden, and due, one would naturally think, to a tremendous cataclysm followed by immediate freezing, else their flesh would have become tainted. A recent English writer predicts another deluge owing to the constant accumulation of ice at the Antarctic Pole, which for untold ages has been attracting and freezing the waters of the Northern Hemisphere. A lowering process, he says, has thus been going on in the ocean levels to the north through immeasurable time, its record being the

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ancient water-marks now high up on the mountain sides of British Columbia and elsewhere. It is certainly not unthinkable that, if subject to such a displacement of its centre of gravity, our planet at some inconceivably remote period capsized, so that what were before the Tropics became the Poles, and that such a catastrophe is not only possible but is certain to happen again. As a conjecture it may be unscientific; but how many of the accepted theories of science have ceased to be! As a matter of fact, she has been very busy burying her dead, particularly of late years, and her theory of the extinction of the primeval elephant may yet prove to be one of them.]

On the 9th the steamer *Grahame* arrived from Smith's Landing, bringing with her about 120 baffled Klondikers, returning to the United States, there being still some sixty more, they said, down the Mackenzie River, who intended to make their way out, if possible, before winter. They had a solitary woman with them who had discarded a duffer husband, and who looked very self-reliant, indeed, being girt about with bowie-knife and revolver, but otherwise not alarming.

It was certainly a motley crowd, and some of its members by no means honest. Chief-factor Camsell, who had just come from Fort Simpson, told me they had stolen from every house where they had a chance, and mentioned, amongst other things, a particularly ungrateful theft of a whip-saw from a native's cabin shortly after an Indian had, with much pains, overtaken them with a similar one, which they had lost on the trail. Their departure, therefore, was not lamented, and the natives were glad to get rid of them.

We ourselves boarded the steamer for Fort McMurray on the 11th, but, owing to bad weather, did not get off till midday, and even then the lake was so rough that we had to anchor for a while in the lee of an island. Colin Fraser had started ahead of us with his big scow and cargo of furs, valued at \$15,000, and kept ahead with his fine crew of ten expert trackers. When the weather calmed we steamed across to the entrance of one of the various channels connecting the Athabasca River with the lake, and soon found ourselves skirting the most extensive marshes and feeding-grounds for game in all Canada; a delta renowned throughout the North for its abundance of waterfowl, far surpassing the St. Clair flats, or any other region in the East.

Next morning, upon rounding a point, three full-grown moose were seen ahead, swimming across the river. An exciting, and even hazardous, scene ensued on board, the whole Klondike crowd firing, almost at random, hundreds of shots without effect. Two of the noble brutes kept on, and reached the shore, disappearing in the woods; but the third, a three year-old bull moose, foolishly turned, and lost its life in consequence. It was hauled on deck, bled and flayed, and was a welcome addition to the steamer's table.

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That night a concert was improvised on deck, in which the music-hall element came to the front. But one speedily tired of the “Banks of the Wabash,” and other ditties; in fact, we were burning to get to Fort McMurray, where we expected letters and papers from the outer world and home, and nothing else could satisfy us. By evening we had passed Burnt Point, also Poplar Point, where the body of an unfortunate, called Patterson, who had been drowned in one of the rapids above, was recovered in spring by some Indians, the body being completely enclosed in a transparent coffin of ice. On the following day we passed Little Red River, and next morning reached the fort, where, to our infinite joy, we received the longed-for letters and papers—our first correspondence from the far East.

Fort McMurray consisted of a tumble-down cabin and trading-store on the top of a high and steep bank, which had yet been flooded at times, the people seeking shelter on an immense hill which overlooked it. Above an island close by is the discharge of the Clearwater River, the old canoe route by which the supplies for the district used to come, via Isle a la Crosse. At McMurray we left the steamer and took to our own boats, our Commission occupying one, and Mr. Laird and party the other. The trackers got into harness at once, and made very good time for some miles, the current not being too swift just here for fast traveling.

## Chapter IX

### **The Athabasca River Region.**

We were now traversing perhaps the most interesting region in all the North. In the neighbourhood of McMurray there are several tar-wells, so called, and there, if a hole is scraped in the bank, it slowly fills in with tar mingled with sand. This is separated by boiling, and is used, in its native state, for gumming canoes and boats. Farther up are immense towering banks, the tar oozing at every pore, and underlaid by great overlapping dykes of disintegrated limestone, alternating with lofty clay exposures, crowned with poplar, spruce and pine. On the 15th we were still following the right bank, and, anon, past giant clay escarpments along it, everywhere streaked with oozing tar, and smelling like an old ship.

These tar cliffs are here hundreds of feet high, of a bold and impressive grandeur, and crowned with firs which seem dwarfed to the passer-by. The impregnated clay appears to be constantly falling off the almost sheer face of the slate-brown cliffs, in great sheets, which plunge into the river's edge in broken masses. The opposite river bank is much more depressed, and is clothed with dense forest.

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The tar, whatever it may be otherwise, is a fuel, and burned in our camp-fires like coal. That this region is stored with a substance of great economic value is beyond all doubt, and, when the hour of development comes, it will, I believe, prove to be one of the wonders of Northern Canada. We were all deeply impressed by this scene of Nature's chemistry, and realized what a vast storehouse of not only hidden but exposed resources we possess in this enormous country. What is unseen can only be conjectured; but what is seen would make any region famous. We now came once more to outcrops of limestone in regular layers, with disintegrated masses overlying them, or sandwiched between their solid courses. A lovely niche, at one point, was scooped out of the rock, over the coping of which poured a thin sheet of water, evidently impregnated with mineral, and staining the rock down which it poured with variegated tints of bronze, beautified by the morning sun.

With characteristic grandeur the bends of the river "shouldered" into each other, giving the expanses the appearance of lakelets; and after a succession of these we came to the first rapid, "The Mountain"—Watchikwe Powistic—so called from a peak at its head, which towered to a great height above the neighbouring banks. The rapid extends diagonally across the river in a low cascade, with a curve inward towards the left shore. It was decided to unload and make the portage, and a very ticklish one it was. The boats, of course, had to be hauled up stream by the trackers, and grasping their line I got safely over, and was thankful. How the trackers managed to hold on was to me a mystery; but the steep and slippery bank was mere child's play to them. The right bank, from its break and downward, bears a very thick growth of alders, and here we found the wild onion, and a plant resembling spearmint.

In the evening we reached the next rapid, called the Cascades—Nepe Kabatekik—"Where the water falls," and camping there, we had a symposium in our tent, which I could not enjoy, having headache and heartburn, a nasty combination. The 16th was the hottest day of the season—a hard one on the trackers, who now pulled along walls of solid limestone, perpendicular or stepped, or wrought into elaborate cornices, as if by the art of some giant stonecutter. At one place we came to a lovely little *rideau*, and on the opposite shore were two curious caves, scooped out of the rock, and supported by Egyptian-like columns wrought by the age-action of water.

Towards evening we reached the Crooked Rapid—Kahwakak o Powestik—and here the portage path followed on the summit of the limestone rampart, which the viscous gumbo-slides made almost impassable in rainy weather, and indeed very dangerous, forming, at the time we passed, pits of mud and broken masses of half-hard clay, along the very verge of the wall of rock, likely at any moment to give way and precipitate one into

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the raging torrent below. At other parts the path was jammed out to the wall-edge, to be stepped round with a gulp in the throat. But these and other features of a like interesting character, though a lively experience to the tenderfoot, were of no account whatever to those wonderful trackers. At one of the worst spots I was hesitating as to how and where I should step next, when a carrier, returning for his load, seeing my fix, humped his back with a laugh and gave me a lift over.

We camped for the night below a point where the river makes a sharp bend, parallel with its course. This we surmounted in the morning, following a rounded wall of limestone, for all the world like a decayed rampart of some ancient city. A wide floor of rock at its base made beautiful walking to a place where the lofty escarpment showed exposures of limestone underlying an enormous mass of dark sandstone, topped by tar-clay. It is a portentous cliff, bearing a curiously Eastern look, as if some great pyramid had been riven vertically, and the exposed surface scarred and scooped by the weather into a multitude of antic hollows, grotesque projections, and unimaginable shapes. Here, also, the knives of passers-by had carved numerous autographs, marring the majestic cliff with their ludicrous incongruity. Are we not all sinners in this way? "John Jones," cut into a fantastic buttress which would fittingly adorn a wizard's temple, may be a poor exhibit of human vanity; but, after all, the real John Jones is more imperishable than the rock, which seems scaling, anyway, from the top, and may, by and by, carry the inscriptions with it. It was hard to tear one's self away from such a wonderful structure as this, the most striking feature of its kind on the whole river.

Farther on, escarped banks, consisting of boulders and pebbles imbedded in tenacious clay, rose to a great height, their tops clothed with rich moss, and wooded with a close growth of pine, the hollows being full of delicious raspberries, now dead ripe.

By and by we encountered the Long Rapids—Kaukinwauk Powestik—and, some hours afterwards, entered the Middle Rapid—Tuwao Powestik—the worst we had yet come to, full of boulders and sharp rocks, with a strong current. Very dexterous management was required here on the part of steersman and bowman; a snapt line or a moment's neglect, and a swing to broadside would have followed, and spelled ruin.

It was evening before this rapid was surmounted, and all hands, dog-tired with the long day's pull, were glad to camp at the foot of the Boiler Rapid, the next in our ascent, and so called from the wrecking of a scow containing a boiler for one of the Hudson's Bay Company's steamers. It was the most uncomfortable of camps, the night being close, and filled with the small and bloodthirsty Athabasca mosquito, by all odds the most vicious of its kind. This rapid is strewn with boulders which show above water, making it a very "nice" and toilsome thing



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to steer and track a boat safely over it, but the tracking path itself is stony and firm, a fortunate thing at such a place. There are no exposures of rock at the foot of this rapid; but along its upper part runs a ledge of asphalt-like rock as smooth as a street pavement, with an outer edge as neatly rounded as if done with a chisel. This was the finest bit of tracking path on the river, excepting, perhaps, the great pavement beneath the cliff at the Long Rapids.

In this region the river scenery changes to a succession of cut-banks, exposed in all directions, and in almost all situations. Immense towering hills of sand, or clay, are cut down vertically, some facing the river, others at right angles to it, and others inland, and almost inclosed by projecting shoulders of the wooded heights. These cut-banks carry layers of stone here and there, and are specked with boulders, and in some places massed into projecting crests, which threaten destruction to the passer-by. Otherwise the scenery is desolate, mountainous always, and wooded, but with much burnt timber, which gives a dreary look to the region. The cut-banks are unique, however, and would make the fortune of an Eastern river, though here little noticed on account of their number.

It was now the 18th, and the weather was intensely hot, foreboding change and the August freshet. We had camped about eight miles below the Burnt Rapid, and the men were very tired, having been in the water pretty much since morning. Directly opposite our camp was a colossal cliff of clay, around which, looking upward, the river bent sharply to the south-west, very striking as seen beneath an almost full moon breaking from a pile of snowy clouds, whilst dark and threatening masses gathered to the north. The early, foggy morning revealed the freshet. The river, which had risen during the night, and had forced the trackers from their beds to higher ground, was littered from bank to bank with floating trees, logs and stumps, lifted from many a drift up stream, and borne down by the furious current. At one of the short breathing spells the water rose two inches in twenty minutes, and the tracking became exceedingly bad, the men floundering to their waists in water, or footing it insecurely on steep and slippery ledges along the water's marge. About mid-day the anticipated change took place in the weather. Thick clouds closed in with a driving rain and a high raw wind, presaging the end of summer.

It was now, of course, very bad going, and camp was made, in the heavy rain, on a high flat about two miles below the Burnt Rapid. Though a tough spot to get up to, the flat proved to be a prime place for our camp, with plenty of dead fallen and standing timber, and soon four or five "long fires" were blazing, a substantial supper discussed, and comfort succeeded misery. The next day (Sunday) was much enjoyed as a day of rest, the half-breeds at their beloved games, the officials writing letters. The weather was variable; the clouds broke and gathered by turns, with slight rain towards evening, and



then it cleared. As a night camp it was picturesque, the full moon in the south gleaming over the turbid water, and the boatmen lounging around the fires like so many brigands.

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Next morning we surmounted the Brule Rapid—Pusitao Powestik—short but powerful, with a sharp pointed rock at its head, very troublesome to get around. Above this rapid the bank consists of a solid, vertical rampart of red sandstone, its base and top and every crack and crevice clothed with a rich vegetation—a most beautiful and striking scene, forming a gigantic amphitheatre, centred by the seeming closing-in of the left bank at Point Brule upon the long straight line of sandstone wall on the right. Nothing finer, indeed, could be imagined in all this remarkable river's remarkable scenery than this impressive view, not from jutting peaks, for the sky-line of the banks runs parallel with the water, but from the antique grandeur of their sweep and apparent junction.

That afternoon we rounded Point Brule, a high, bold cliff of sandstone with three “lop-sticks” upon its top. The Indian's lop-stick, called by the Cree piskootenusk, is a sort of living talisman which he connects in some mysterious way with his own fate, and which he will often go many miles out of his direct course to visit. Even white men fall in with the fetish, and one of the three we saw was called “Lambert's lop-stick.” I myself had one made for me by Gros Oeilles, the Saulteau Chief, nearly forty years ago, in the forest east of Pointe du Chene, in what is now Manitoba. They are made by stripping a tall spruce tree of a deep ring of branches, leaving the top and bottom ones intact. The tree seems to thrive all the same, and is a very noticeable, and not infrequent, object throughout the whole Thickwood Indian country.

Just opposite the cliff referred to, the Little Buffalo, a swift creek, enters between two bold shoulders of hills, and on its western side are the wonderful gas springs. The “amphitheatre,” sweeps around to, and is cloven by, that stream, its elevation on the west side being lofty, and deeply grooved from its summit downward, the whole locality at the time of our visit being covered with raspberry bushes loaded with fruit.

The gas escapes from a hole in the ground near the water's edge in a pillar of flame about thirty inches high, and which has been burning time out of mind. It also bubbles, or, rather, foams up, for several yards in the river, rising at low water even as far out as mid-stream. There is a level plateau at the springs, several acres in extent, backed by a range of hills, and if a stake is driven anywhere into this, and withdrawn, the gas, it is said, follows at once. They are but another unique feature of this astonishing stream.

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For a long distance the upper prairie level exposes good soil, always clay loam, and there can be little doubt that there is much fertile land in this district. That night we slept, or tried to sleep, in the boat, and made a very early start on a raw, cloudy morning, the tracking being mainly in the water. We now passed great cliffs of sandstone, some almost shrouded in the woods, and came upon many peculiar circular stones, as large as, and much resembling, mill-stones. Towards evening we passed Pointe la Biche, and met Mr. Connor, a trader, with two loaded York boats, going north, and whom we silently blessed, for he brought additional mail for ourselves. What can equal the delight in the wilderness of hearing from home! It was impossible to make Grand Rapids, and we camped where we were, the night cold and raw, but enlivened by the reading and re-reading of letters and newspapers.

Next morning, crossing the right bank of the river, and leaving the boat, we walked to the foot of Grand Rapids. Our path, if it could be called such, lay over a toilsome jumble of huge, sharp-edged rocks, overhung by a beetling cliff of reddish-yellow sandstone, much of which seemed on the point of falling. This whole bank, like so much of this part of the river, is planted, almost at regular intervals, with the great circular rocks already referred to. These globular or circular masses are a curious feature of this region. They have been shaped, no doubt, by the action of eddying water, yet are so numerous, and so much alike, as to bespeak some abnormally uniform conditions in the past.

The Grand Rapids—Kitchi Powestik—the most formidable on the river, are divided by a narrow, wooded island, over a quarter of a mile in length, upon which the Hudson's Bay Company have a wooden tramway, the cars being pushed along by hand. Towards the foot of the island is a smaller one near the left shore, and here is the larger cascade, a very violent rapid, with a fall from the crest to the foot of the island of thirty feet, more or less. The narrower passage is to the right of the island, and is called the "Free Traders' Channel." The river, in full freshet, was very muddy-looking, detracting much from the beauty of the rapids.

The Hudson's Bay Company have storehouses at each end of the tramway, but for their own use only. Free traders have to portage their supplies over a very rough path beneath the cliffs. Both banks of the river are of sandstone, capped on the left by a wall of cream-coloured rock, seventy or eighty feet in height, at a guess. A creek comes in from the west which has cloven the sandstone bank almost to the water's edge; and running along the top of these sandstone formations are, everywhere, thick layers of coal, which is also found, in a great bed, on the opposite shore, and about three miles back from the river. The coal had been used by a trapper there, and is a good burner and heater, leaving little

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ash or clinker. These coal beds seem to extend in all directions, on both sides of the river, and underlie a very large extent of country. The inland country for some eight or ten miles had been examined by Sergeant Anderson, of the Mounted Police post here, who described it as consisting of wide ridges, or tables, of first-rate soil, divided by shallow muskegs; a good farming locality, with abundance of large, merchantable spruce timber. Moose were plentiful in the region, and it was a capital one for marten, one white trapper, the winter before our visit, having secured over a hundred skins.

On the 25th we left our comfortable spruce beds and “long fires,” and tracked on to House River, which we reached at nine a.m. Here there is a low-lying, desolate-looking, but memorable, “Point,” neighboured by a concave sweep of bank. The House is a small tributary from the east, but very long, rising far inland; and here begins the pack-trail to Fort McMurray, about one hundred miles in length, and which might easily be converted into a waggon-road, as also another which runs to Lac la Biche. Both trails run through a good farming country, and the former waggon-road would avoid all the dangers and laborious rapids whose wearisome ascent has been described.

The Point itself is tragic ground, showing now but a few deserted cabins and some Indian graves—one of which had a white paling around it, the others being covered with gray cotton—which looked like little tents in the distance. These were the graves of an Indian and his wife and four children, who had pitched through from Lac la Biche to hunt, and who all died together of diphtheria in this lonely spot. But here, too, many years ago, a priest was murdered and eaten by a weeghteko, an Iroquois from Caughnawaga. The lunatic afterwards took an Indian girl into the depths of the forest, and, after cohabiting with her for some time, killed and devoured her. Upon the fact becoming known, and being pursued by her tribe, he fled to the scene of his horrible banquet, and there took his own life. Having rowed across the river for better tracking, as we crawled painfully along, the melancholy Point with its lonely graves, deserted cabins and cannibal legend receded into eerie distance and wrapped itself once more in congenial solitude.

The men continued tracking until ten a.m. much of the time wading along banks heavily overhung with alders, or along high, sheer walls of rock, up to the armpits in the swift current. The country passed through was one giant mass of forest, pine and poplar, resting generally upon loamy clay—a good agricultural country in the main, similar to many parts of Ontario when a wilderness.

We camped at the Joli Fou Rapids, having only made about fifteen miles. It was a beautiful spot, a pebbly shore, with fine open forest behind, evidently a favourite camping-place in winter. Next morning the trackers, having recrossed for better footing, got into a swale of the worst kind, which hampered them greatly, as the swift river was now at its height and covered with gnarled driftwood.

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The foliage here and there showed signs of change, some poplars yellowing already along the immediate banks, and the familiar scent of autumn was in the air. In a word, the change so familiar in Manitoba in August had taken place here, to be followed by a balmy September and the fine fall weather of the North, said to surpass that of the East in mildness by day, though perhaps sharper by night. We were now but a few miles from the last obstruction, the Pelican Rapids, and pushed on in the morning along banks of a coal-like blackness, loose and friable, with thin cracks and fissures running in all directions, the forest behind being the usual mixture of spruce and poplar. By midday we were at the rapids, by no means formidable, but with a ticklish place or two, and got to Pelican Portage in the evening, where were several shanties and a Hudson's Bay freighting station. Here, too, is a well which was sunk for petroleum, but which struck gas instead, blowing up the borer. It was then spouting with a great noise like the blowing-off of steam, and, situated at such a distance from the shaft at the Landing and from the Point Brule spiracle described, indicated, throughout the district, available resources of light, heat and power so vast as almost to beggar imagining.

Mr. Ross having obtained on the 14th the adhesion of the Crees to the Treaty at Wahpooskow, it was now decided that the Scrip Commission should make the canoe trip to that lake, whilst Mr. Laird and party would go on to Athabasca Landing on their way home. Accordingly Matcheese—"The Teaser"—a noted Indian runner, was dispatched with our letters to the Landing, 120 miles up the river. This Indian, it was said, had once run from the Landing to Edmonton, ninety-five miles, in a single day, and had been known to carry 500 pounds over a portage in one load. I myself saw him shoulder 350 pounds of our outfit and start off with it over a rough path. He was slightly built, and could not have weighed much over nine stone, but was what he looked to be, a bundle of iron muscles and nerves.

On the 29th Mr. Laird and party bade us good-bye, and an hour later we set out on our interesting canoe trip to the Wahpooskow, a journey which led us into the heart of the interior, and proved to be one of the most agreeable of our experiences.

## Chapter X

### The Trip To Wahpooskow.

Our route lay first up the Pelican River, the Chachakew of the Crees, and then from the "divide" down the Wahpooskow watershed to the lake. We had six canoemen, and our journey began by "packing" our outfit over a four-mile portage, commencing with a tremendously long and steep hill, and ending on a beautiful bank of the Pelican, a fine brown stream about one hundred feet wide, where we found our canoes awaiting us, capital "Peterboroughs," in good order. Here also were a number of bark canoes, carrying the outfit of Mr. Ladoucere, a half-breed trader going up to Wahpooskow. Mr.

Prudhomme and myself occupied one canoe, and with two experienced canoemen, Auger at the stern and Cardinal at the bow, we kept well up with the procession.

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Where the channels are shallow, poles are used, which the men handled very dexterously, nicking in and out amongst the rocks and rapids in the neatest way; but in the main the propulsion was by our paddles, a delight to me, having been bred to canoeing from boyhood. We stopped for luncheon at a lovely “place of trees” overhanging a deep, dark, alluring pool, where we knew there were fish, but had no time to make a cast. So far the banks of the Pelican were of a moderate height, and the adjacent country evidently dry—a good soil, and berries very plentiful. Presently, between banks overhung with long grass, birch and alder, we entered a succession of the sweetest little rapids and riffles imaginable, the brown water dancing amongst the stones and boulders to its own music, and the rich rose-pink, cone-like tops of the water-vervain, now in bloom, dancing with it.

Our camp that night was a delightful one, amongst slender birch and spruce and pine, the ground covered with blueberries, partridge berries, and cranberries in abundance. The berries of the wolf-willow were also red-ripe, alluring, but bitter to the taste. It was really a romantic scene. Ladoucere had made his camp in a small glade opposite our own, the bend of the river being in front of us. The tall pines cast their long reflections on the water, our great fires gleamed athwart them, illuminating the under foliage of the birches with magical light, whilst the half-breeds, grouped around and silhouetted by the fires, formed a unique picture which lingers in the memory. We slept like tops that night beneath the stars, on a soft bed of berry bushes, and never woke until a thin morning rain sprinkling in our faces fetched us to our feet.

A good bacon breakfast and then to our paddles, the river-bends as graceful as ever, but with fewer rapids. At every turn we came upon luxuriant hay meadows, with generally heavy woods opposite them, the river showing the same easy and accessible shore, whilst now and then giant hoof-prints, a broken marge, and miry grass showed where a moose had recently sprawled up the bank. Nothing, indeed, could surpass the rich colour-tone of this delightful stream—an exquisite opaqueness even under the clouds; but, interfused with sunshine, like that rare and translucent brown spread by the pencil of a master.

As we were paddling along, the willows on shore suddenly parted, and an Indian runner appeared on the bank, who hailed us and, handing over a sack of mail with letters and papers for us all, sped off as suddenly as he came.

It was now the last day of August, raw and drizzly, and having paddled about ten miles through a like country, we came in sight of the Pelican Mountains to the west, and, later on, to a fork of the river called Muskeg Creek, above which our stream narrowed to about eighteen feet, but still deep and fringed with the same extensive hay meadows, and covered here and there with pond lilies, a few yellow ones still



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in bloom. By and by we reached Muskeg Portage, nearly a mile in length. The path lay at first through dry muskegs covered with blueberries, Labrador tea, and a dwarfed growth of birch, spruce, tamarac, and jackpine, but presently entered and ended in a fine upland wood, full of pea-vines, vetches and wild rose. This is characteristic of the country, muskegs and areas of rich soil alternating in all directions. The portage completed, we took to our canoes again, the stream of the same width, but very crooked, and still bordered by extensive and exceedingly rich hay meadows, which we were satisfied would yield four or five tons to the acre. Small haystacks were scattered along the route, being put up for ponies which haul supplies in winter from Pelican Landing to Wahpooskow.

The country passed through showed good soil wherever we penetrated the hay margin, with, of course, here and there the customary muskegs. The stream now narrowed into a passage deep but barely wide enough for our canoes, our course lying always through tall and luxuriant hay. At last we reached Pelican Lake, a pretty large sheet of water, about three miles across, the body of the lake extending to the south-west and north-east. We crossed it under sail and, landing at the "three mile portage," found a half-breed there with a cart and ponies, which took our outfit over in a couple of trips to Sandy Lake. A very strong headwind blowing, we camped there for the night.

This lake is the height of land, its waters discharging by the Wahpooskow River, whose northern part, miscalled the Loon, falls into the Peace River below Fort Vermilion. The lake is an almost perfect circle, ten or twelve miles in diameter, the water full of fibrous growths, with patches of green scum afloat all over it. Nevertheless, it abounds in pike, dory, and tullabees, the latter a close congener of the whitefish, but finer in flavour and very fat. Indeed, the best fed dogs we had seen were those summering here. The lake, where we struck it, was literally covered with pin-tail ducks and teal; but it is not a good moose country, and consequently the food supply of the natives is mainly fish.

We descried a few half-breed cabins and clearings on the opposite shore, carved out of the dense forest which girdles the lake, and topographically the country seemed to be of a moderate elevation, and well suited for settlement. The wind having gone down, we crossed the lake on the 2nd of September to what is here called Sandy Creek, a very crooked stream, its thick, sluggish current bordered by willows and encumbered with reeds and flags, and, farther on, made a two-mile portage, where at a very bad landing we were joined by the boats, and presently paddled into a great circular pond, covered with float-weed, a very paradise of ducks, which were here in myriads.

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Its continuation, called "The Narrows," now flowed in a troubled channel, crossed in all directions by jutting boulders, full of tortuous snies, to be groped along dexterously with the poles, but dropped at last into better water, ending at a portage, where we dined. This portage led to the farmhouse of a Mr. Houle, a native of Red River, who had left St. Vital fifty-eight years before, and was now settled at a beautiful spot on the right bank of the river, and had horses, cows and other cattle, a garden, and raised wheat and other grain, which he said did well, and was evidently prosperous. After a regale of milk we embarked for the first Wahpooskow lake, which we reached in the afternoon.

This is a fine and comparatively clear sheet of water, much frequented by the natives. The day was beautiful, and with a fair wind and sails up we passed point after point sprinkled with the cabins and tepees of the Indians and half-breeds. It was perfectly charming to sweep up to and past these primitive lodgings, with a spanking breeze, and the dancing waves seething around our bows. Small patches of potatoes met the eye at every house, making our mouths water with expectation, for we had now been a long time without them, and it is only then that one realizes their value. In the far distance we discerned the Roman Catholic Mission church, the primitive building showing up boldly in the offing, whilst our canoemen, now nearing their own home, broke into an Indian chant, and were in high spirits. They expected a big feast that night, and so did we! I had been a bit under the weather, with flagging appetite, but felt again the grip of healthy hunger.

We were now in close contact with the most innocently wild, secluded, and apparently happy state of things imaginable—a real Utopia, such as Sir Thomas More dreamt not of, being actually here, with no trace of abortive politics or irritating ordinance. Here was contentment in the savage wilderness—communion with Nature in all her unstained purity and beauty. One thought of the many men of mind who had moralized on this primitive life, and, tired of towns, of "the weariness, the fever and the fret" of civilization, had abandoned all and found rest and peace in the bosom of Mother Nature.

The lake now narrowed into a deep but crooked stream, fringed, as usual, by tall reeds and rushes and clumps of flowering water-lilies. A four-mile paddle brought us to a long stretch of deep lake, the second Wahpooskow, lined on the north by a lovely shore, dotted with cabins, the central tall buildings upon the summit of the rising ground being those of the English "Church Mission Society," in charge of the Reverend Charles R. Weaver. Here we were at last at the inland end of our journey, at Wahpooskow—this, not the "Wabiscow" of the maps, being the right spelling and pronunciation of the word, which means in English "The Grassy Narrows."

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The other Missions of this venerable Society in Athabasca, it may be mentioned, were at the time as follows: Athabasca Landing, the residence of Bishop Young; Lesser Slave Lake, White Fish Lake, Smoky River, Spirit River, Fort Vermilion, and Fort Chipewyan, in charge, respectively, of the Reverend Messrs. Holmes, White, Currie, Robinson, Scott, and Warwick. The Roman Catholic Mission, already mentioned, had been established three years before our coming by the Reverend J. B. Giroux, at Stony Point, near the outlet of the first lake, the other Oblat Missions in Athabasca—I do not vouch for my accuracy—being Athabasca Landing, Lesser Slave Lake, the residence of Bishop Clut and clergy and of the Sisters of Providence; White Fish Lake, Smoky River, Dunvegan, and St. John, served, respectively, by Fathers Leferriere, Lesserec, and Letreste; Fort Vermilion by Father Jousard, and Fort Chipewyan by Bishop Grouard and the Grey Nuns.

Mr. Weaver, the missionary at Wahpooskow, is an Englishman, his wife being a Canadian from London, Ontario. By untiring labour he had got his mission into very creditable shape. When it is remembered that everything had to be brought in by bark canoes or dog-train, and that all lumber had to be cut by hand, it seemed to be a monument of industry. Before qualifying himself for missionary work he had studied farming in Ontario, and the results of his knowledge were manifest in his poultry, pigs and cows; in his garden, full of all the most useful vegetables, including Indian corn, and his wheat, which was then in stock, perfectly ripe and untouched by frost. This he fed, of course, to his pigs and poultry, as it could not be ground; but it ripened, he told me, as surely as in Manitoba. Some of the natives roundabout had begun raising stock and doing a little grain growing, and it was pleasant to hear the lowing of cattle and the music of the cow-bells, recalling home and the kindly neighbourhood of husbandry and farm.

The settlement was then some twenty years old, and numbered about sixty souls. The total number of Indians and half-breeds in the locality was unknown, but nearly two hundred Indians received head-money, and all were not paid, and the half-breeds seemed quite as numerous. About a quarter of the whole number of Indians were said to be pagans, and the remainder Protestants and Roman Catholics in fair proportion. In the latter denomination, Father Giroux told me, the proportion of Indians and half-breeds, including those of the first lake, was about equal. The latter, he said, raised potatoes, but little else, and lived like the Indians, by fishing and hunting, especially by the former, as they had to go far now for fur and large game.

The Hudson's Bay Company had built a post near Mr. Weaver's Mission, and there was a free-trader also close by, named Johnston, whose brother, a fine-looking native missionary, assisted at an interesting service we attended in the Mission church, conducted in Cree and English, the voices in the Cree hymns being very soft and sweet. Mr. Ladoucere was also near with his trading-stock, so that business, it was feared, would be overdone. But we issued an unexpectedly large number of scrip

certificates here, and the price being run up by competition, a great deal of trade followed.

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Wahpooskow is certainly a wonderful region for fish, particularly the whitefish and its cousin-german, the tullabee. They are not got freely in winter in the first lake, but are taken in large numbers in the second, where they throng at that season. But in the fall the take is very great in both lakes, and stages were seen in all directions where the fish are hung up by their tails, very tempting to the hungry dogs, but beyond their reach until the crows attack them. The former keep a watchful eye on this process, and when the crows have eaten off the tails, which they invariably attack first, the dogs seize the fish as they drop. When this performance becomes serious, however, the fish are generally removed to stores.

One night, after an excellent dinner at Mr. Weaver's, that grateful rarity with us, we adjourned to a ball or "break-down," given in our honour by the local community. It took place in a building put up by a Mr. George, an English catechist of the Mission; a solid structure of logs of some length, the roof poles being visible above the peeled beams. On one of these five or six candles were alight, fastened to it by simply sticking them into some melted tallow. There were two fiddlers and a crowd of half-breeds, of elders, youths, girls and matrons, the latter squatting on the floor with their babes in moss-bags, dividing the delights of the evening between nursing and dancing, both of which were conducted with the utmost propriety. Indeed, it was interesting to see so many pretty women and well-behaved men brought together in this out-of-the-world place. The dances were the customary reels, and, of course, the Red River Jig. I was sorry, however, to notice a so-called improvement upon this historic dance; that is to say, they doubled the numbers engaged in it, and called it "The Wahpooskow Jig." It seemed a dangerous innovation; and the introduction later on of a cotillon with the usual dreary and mechanical calls filled one with additional forebodings. We almost heard "the first low wash of waves where soon shall flow a human sea." But aside from such newfangled features, there was nothing to criticise. The fiddling was good, and the dancing was good, showing the usual expertness, in which performance the women stooped their shoulders gracefully, and bent their brows modestly upon the floor, whilst the men vied with each other in the admirable and complicated variety of their steps. In fact, it was an evening very agreeably spent, and not the less so from its primitive environment. After joining in a reel of eight, we left the scene with reluctance, the memorable Jig suddenly striking on our ears as we wended our way in the darkness to our camp.

As regards farming land in the region, for a long way inland Mr. Weaver and others described it as of the like good quality as at the Mission, but with much muskeg. It is difficult to estimate the extent of the latter, for, being more noticeable than good land, the tendency is to overestimate. Its proportion to arable land is generally put at about 50 per cent., which may be over or under the truth, for only actual township or topographic surveys can determine it.

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The country drained by the lower river, the Loon, as it is improperly called in our maps, navigable for canoes all the way to where it enters the Peace, was described as an extensive and very uniform plateau, sloping gently to the north. To the south the Pelican Mountains formed a noble background to the view from the Mission, which is indeed charming in all directions.

At the mouth of the river, and facing the Mission, a long point stretches out, dividing the lake into two deep arms, the Mission being situated upon another point around which the lake sweeps to the north. The scene recalls the view from the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Lesser Slave Lake, but excels it in the larger extent of water, broken into by scores of bayous, or pools, bordered by an intensely green water-weed of uniform height, and smooth-topt as a well-clipt lawn. Behind these are hay meadows, a continuation of the long line of them we had passed coming up.

Upon the whole, we considered this an inviting region for any farmer who is not afraid to tackle the forest. But whether a railway would pass this way at first seemed to us doubtful. The head of Lesser Slave Lake lies far to the south-west, and there it is most likely to pass on its way to the Peace. What could be supplied, however, is a waggon-road from Wahpooskow to Athabasca Landing, instead of the present dog-trail, which passes many deep ravines, and makes a long detour by Sandy Lake. Such a road should pass by the east end of the first Wahpooskow Lake, thence to Rock Island Lake, and on by Calling Lake to the Landing, a distance of about one hundred miles. Such a road, whilst saving 125 miles of travel by the present route, would cut down the cost of transport by fully one-half.

Wahpooskow had its superstitions and some doubtful customs. For instance, an Indian called Nepapinase—"A Wandering Bolt of Night-Lightning"—lost his son when Mr. Ross was there taking adhesion to the Treaty, and spread the report that he had brought "bad medicine." Polygamy was practised, and even polyandry was said to exist; but we had no time to verify this gossip, and no right to interfere if we had.

On the 6th, a lovely fall morning, we bade good-bye to Wahpooskow, its primitive people, and its simple but ample pleasures. Autumn was upon us. Foliage, excepting in the deep woods, was changing fast, the hues largely copper and russet; hard body-tints, yet beautiful. There were no maples here, as in the East, to add a glorious crimson to the scene; this was given by shrubs, not by trees. The tints were certainly, in the larger growths, less delicate here than there; the poplar's chrome was darker, the willow's mottled chrome more sere. But there was the exquisite pale canary of the birch, the blood-red and yellow of the wild rose, which glows in both hues, the rich crimson of the red willow, with its foil of ivory berries, and the ruddy copper of the high-bush cranberry. These, with many other of the berry bearers and the wild-flowers, yielded their rich hues; so that the great pigments of autumn, crimson, brown and yellow, were everywhere to be seen, beneath a deep blue sky strewn with snowy clouds.

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We were now on the return to Pelican Landing, with but few incidents to note by the way, aside from those already recorded. But having occasion to take a declaration at a cabin on our passage along the first lake, we had an opportunity of visiting a hitherto unobserved stratum of Wahpooskow's society.

The path to the cabin and its tepees led up a steep bank, beaten as hard as nails and as slippery as glass; nevertheless, by clutching the weeds which bordered it, mainly nettles, we got on top at last, where an interesting scene met the eye.

This was a half-breed family, the head of which, a shrivelled old fellow, was busy making a paddle with his crooked knife, the materials of a birch-bark canoe lying beside him—and most beautifully they make the canoe in this region. His wife was standing close by, a smudged hag of most sinister aspect; also a son and his wife. On stages, and on the shrubs around, were strewn nets, ragged blankets, frowsy shawls, and a huddle of other shreds and patches; and, everywhere else, a horde of hungry dogs snarling and pouncing upon each other like wolves. Filth here was supreme, and the *mise en scene* characteristic of a very low and very rare type of Wahpooskow life indeed—a type butted and bounded by the word “fish.” An attempt was made to photograph the group, but the old fellow turned aside, and the old woman hobbled into the recesses of a tepee, where we heard her muttering such execrations in Cree as were possible to that innocent tongue. The hands of the woman at the cabin door were a miracle of grime and scrofula. Her sluttish locks, together with two children, hung around her; one of the latter chewing a muddy carrot up into the leaves, an ungainly little imp; the other was a girl of singularly beautiful features and of perfect form, her large luminous eyes of richest brown reflecting the sunlight from their depths like mirrors—a little angel clad in dirt. Why other wild things should be delicately clean, the birds, the fishes she lived on, and she be bred amidst running sores and vermin, was one of the mysteries I pondered over when we took to our canoes. For such a pair of eyes, for those exquisite features, some scraggy denizen of Vanity Fair would have given a king's ransom. Yet here was a thing of beauty, dropped by a vile freak of Nature into an appalling environment of filth and ignorance; a creature destined, no doubt, to spring into mature womanhood, and lapse, in time, into a counterpart of the bleared Hecate who mumbled her Cree philippics in the neighbouring wigwam.

On our return trip some detours were made, one of which was to the habitation of another half-breed family at the foot of Sandy Lake, themselves and everything about them orderly, clean and neat; the very opposites of the curious household we had visited the day before. They had a great kettle of fish on the fire, which we bought, and had our dinner there; being especially pleased to note that their dogs were not starved,



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but were fat and well handled. At the east side of the lake we were delayed trying to catch ponies to make the portage, failing which we got over otherwise by dark, and camped again on the Pelican River. That night there was a keen frost, and ice formed along shore, but the weather was delightfully crisp and clear, and we reached Pelican Landing on the 9th, finding there our old scow and the trackers, with our friend Cyr in command, and Marchand, our congenial cook, awaiting us.

On the 11th we set off for Athabasca Landing, accompanied by a little fleet of trippers' and traders' canoes, and passed during the day immense banks of shale, the tracking being very bad and the water still high. We noted much good timber standing on heavy soil, and on the 14th passed a curious hump-like hill, cut-faced, with a reddish and yellow cinder-like look, as if it had been calcined by underlying fires. Near it was an exposure of deep coloured ochre, and, farther on, enormous black cut-banks, also suggestive of coal.

The Calling River—"Kitoosepe"—was one of our points of distribution, and upon reaching it we found the river benches covered with tepees, and a crowd of half-breeds from Calling Lake awaiting us. After the declarations and scrip payments were concluded, we took stock of the surroundings, which consisted, so far as numbers went, mainly of dogs. Nearly all of them looked very miserable, and one starveling bitch, with a litter of pups, seemed to live upon air. It was pitiful to see the forlorn brutes so cruelly abused; but it has been the fate of this poor mongrel friend of humanity from the first. The canine gentry fare better than many a man, but the outcasts of the slums and camps feel the stroke of bitter fortune, yet, with prodigious heart, never cease to love the oppressor.

There was an adjunct of the half-breed camp, however, more interesting than the dogs, namely, Marie Rose Gladu, a half-sister of the Catherine Bisson we met at Lesser Slave Lake, but who declared herself to be older than she by five years. From evidence received she proved to be very old, certainly over a hundred, and perhaps the oldest woman in Northern Canada. She was born at Lesser Slave Lake, and remembered the wars of her people with the Blackfeet, and the "dancing" of captured scalps. She remembered the buffalo as plentiful at Calling Lake; that it was then a mixed country, and that their supplies in those old days were brought in by way of Isle a la Cross, Beaver River, and Lac la Biche, as well as by Methy Portage, a statement which I have heard disputed, but which is quite credible for all that. She remembered the old fort at the south-east end of Lesser Slave Lake, and Waupistagwon, "The White Head," as she called him, namely, Mr. Shaw of the famous finger-nail. Her father, whose name was Nekehwapiskun—"My wigwam is white"—was a fur company's Chief, and, in his youth, a noted hunter of Rabisca (Chipewyan), whence he came to Lesser Slave Lake.

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Her own Cree name, unmusical for a wonder, was Ochenaskumagan— “Having passed many Birthdays.” Her hair was gray and black rather than iron-gray, her eyes sunken but bright, her nose well formed, her mouth unshrunk but rather projecting, her cheeks and brow a mass of wrinkles, and her hands, strange to say, not shrivelled, but soft and delicate as a girl’s. The body, however, was nothing but bones and integument; but, unlike her half-sister, she could walk without assistance. After our long talk through an interpreter she readily consented to be photographed with me, and, seating ourselves on the grass together, she grasped my hand and disposed herself in a jaunty way so as to look her very best. Indeed, she must have been a pretty girl in her youth, and, old as she was, had some of the arts of girlhood in her yet.

At this point the issue of certificates for scrip practically ended, the total number distributed being 1,843, only 48 of which were for land.

Leaving Calling River before noon, we passed Riviere la Biche towards evening, and camped about four miles above it on the same side of the river. We were not far from the Landing, and therefore near the end of our long and toilsome yet delightful journey. It was pleasant and unexpected, too, to find our last camp but one amongst the best. The ground was a flat lying against the river, wooded with stately spruce and birch, and perfectly clear of underbrush. It was covered with a plentiful growth of a curious fern-like plant which fell at a touch. The great river flowed in front, and an almost full moon shone divinely across it, and sent shafts of sidelong light into the forest. The huge camp-fires of the trackers and canoemen, the roughly garbed groups around them, the canoes themselves, the whole scene, in fact, recalled some genre sketch by our half-forgotten colourist, Jacobi. Our own fire was made at the foot of a giant spruce, and must have been a surprise to that beautiful creature, evidently brimful of life. Indeed, I watched the flames busy at its base with a feeling of pain, for it is difficult not to believe that those grand productions of Nature, highly organized after their kind, have their own sensations, and enjoy life.

The 17th fell on a Sunday, a delicious morning of mist and sunshine and calm, befitting the day. But we were eager for letters from home, and therefore determined to push on. Perhaps it was less desecrating to travel on such a morning than to lie in camp. One felt the penetrating power of Nature more deeply than in the apathy or indolent ease of a Sunday lounge. Still there were those who had to smart for it—the trackers. But the Mecca of the Landing being so near, and its stimulating delights looming largely in the haze of their imagination, they were as eager to go on as ourselves.

The left bank of the river now exhibited, for a long distance, a wilderness swept by fire, but covered with “rampikes” and fallen timber. The other side seemed to have partially escaped destruction. The tracking was good, and we passed the “Twenty Mile Rock” before dinner, camping about fifteen miles from the Landing. Next morning we passed

through a like burnt country on both sides, giving the region a desolate and forlorn look, which placed it in sinister contrast with the same river to the north.

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Farther up, the right bank rose bare to the sky-line with a mere sprinkling of small aspens, indicating what the appearance of the "rampike" country would be if again set ablaze, and converted from a burnt-wood region to a bare one. The banks revealed a clay soil, in some places mixed boulders, but evidently there was good land lying back from the river.

In the morning bets were made as to the hour of arrival at the Landing. Mr. P. said four p.m., the writer five, the Major six, and Mr. C. eight. At three p.m. we rounded the last point but one, and reached the wharf at six-thirty, the Major taking the pool.

We had now nothing before us but the journey to Edmonton. At night a couple of dances took place in adjacent boarding-houses, which banished sleep until a great uproar arose, ending in the partisans of one house cleaning out the occupants of the other, thus reducing things to silence. We knew then that we had returned to earth. We had dropped, as it were, from another planet, and would soon, too soon, be treading the flinty city streets, and, divorced from Nature, become once more the bond-slaves of civilization.

Conclusion.

I have thought it most convenient to the reader to unite with the text, as it passes in description from place to place, what knowledge of the agricultural and other resources of the country was obtainable at the time. The reader is probably weary of description by this time; but, should he make a similar journey, I am convinced he would not weary of the reality. Travellers, however, differ strangely in perception. Some are observers, with imagination to brighten and judgment to weigh, and, if need be, correct, first impressions; whilst others, with vacant eye, or out of harmony with novel and perhaps irksome surroundings, see, or profess to see, nothing. The readiness, for instance, of the Eastern "fling" at Western Canada thirty years ago is still remembered, and it is easy to transfer it to the North.

Those who lament the meagreness of our records of the fur-trade and primitive social life in Ontario, for example, before the advent of the U. E. Loyalists, can find their almost exact counterpart in Athabasca to-day. For what that Province was then, viz., a wilderness, Athabasca is now; and it is safe to predict that what Ontario is to-day Athabasca will become in time. Indeed, Northern Canada is the analogue of Eastern Canada in more likenesses than one.

That the country is great and possessed of almost unique resources is beyond doubt; but that it has serious drawbacks, particularly in its lack of railway connection with the outer world, is also true. And one thing must be borne in mind, namely, that, when the limited areas of prairie within its borders are taken up, the settler must face the forest with the axe.

Perhaps he will be none the worse for this. It bred in the pioneers of our old provinces some of the highest qualities: courage, iron endurance, self-denial, homely and upright life, and, above all, for it includes all, true and ennobling patriotism. The survival of such qualities has been manifest in multitudes of their sons, who, remembering the record, have borne themselves manfully wherever they have gone.

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But modern conditions are breeding methods new and strange, and keen observers profess to discern in our swift development the decay of certain things essential to our welfare. We seem, they think, to be borrowing from others—for they are not ours by inheritance—their boastful spirit, extravagance, and love of luxury, fatal to any State through the consequent decline of morality. The picture is over-drawn. True womanhood and clean life are still the keynotes of the great majority of Canadian homes.

Yet very striking is the contrast with the old days of household economies, the days of the ox-chain, the sickle, and the leach-tub. All of these, some happily and some unhappily, have been swept away by the besom of Progress. But in any case life was too serious in those days for effeminate luxury, or for aught but proper pride in defending the country, and in work well done. And it is just this stern life which must be lived, sooner or later, not only in the wilds of Athabasca, but in facing everywhere the great problems of race-stability—the spectres of retribution—which are rapidly rising upon the white man's horizon.

For the rest, and granting the manhood, the future of Athabasca is more assured than that of Manitoba seemed to be to the doubters of thirty years ago. In a word, there is fruitful land there, and a bracing climate fit for industrial man, and therefore its settlement is certain. It will take time. Vast forests must be cleared, and not, perhaps, until railways are built will that day dawn upon Athabasca. Yet it will come; and it is well to know that, when it does, there is ample room for the immigrant in the regions described.

The generation is already born, perhaps grown, which will recast a famous journalist's emphatic phrase, and cry, "Go North!" Well, we came thence! Our savage ancestors, peradventure, migrated from the immemorial East, and, in skins and breech-clouts, rocked the cradle of a supreme race in Scandinavian snows. It has travelled far to the enervating South since then; and, to preserve its hardihood and sway on this continent, must be recreated in the high latitudes which gave it birth.

### MR. COTE'S POEM.

Sortez de vos tombeaux, peuplades endormies  
A l'ombre des grands pins de vos forets benies!  
Venez, fils de guerriers, qui jadis sous ces bois  
Bruliez vos tomahawks, vos armes et vos carquois!  
Que sur vos pales fronts l'aureole immortelle  
Pour votre bienfaiteur s'illumine plus belle.  
Neophytes, venez en ce jour de bonheur  
Proclamer les vertus de l'illustre pasteur,  
Qui pour vous ses agneaux, ses brebis les plus cheres.

Consacra sa jeunesse et ses annees entieres.  
Venez, fleurs qui brillez au jardin de Bon Dieu.  
Repandre les parfums qu'exhale le saint lieu  
Sur l'illustre vieillard qui de sa voix benie  
Vous fit epanouir dans l'hoieuse



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patrie!

Tendre et venere pere, apotre magnanime,  
Grand pretre du Seigneur, votre oeuvre fut sublime.  
Des bords du Missouri jusqu'aux glances du nord,  
Voyez, semeur beni, cinquante sillons d'or;  
Voyez sur le versant de la montagne sainte  
De votre charite l'imperissable empreinte;  
Voyez cette legion d'ames regenerees  
Portant par votre main les celestes livrees.  
Quoi, muse profane, indigne chalumeau,  
Oserais-tu planer sur un theme si haut?  
Pour chanter du heros les fetes jubilaires  
Descends de ces hauteurs a demi-seculaires!  
Muse prosterne-toi. Hosanna! Hosanna!  
Au ciel gloire au Tres-Haut. Jube, alleluia!  
Hommage sur la terre a l'Oblat de Marie,  
Qui dans son cycle d'or brille sur la patrie!