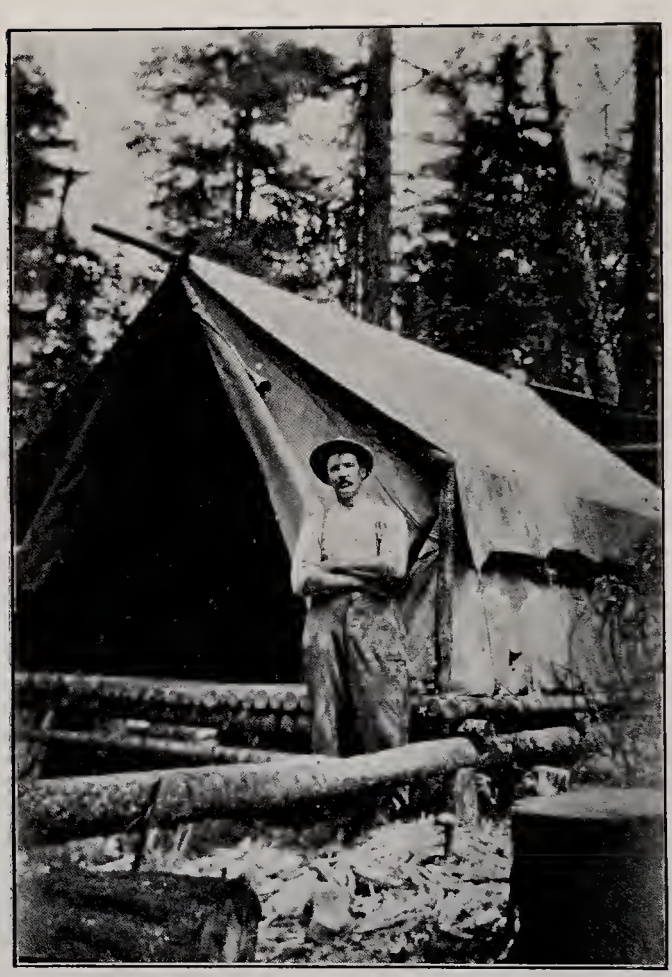

OUR COOK BESIDE THE DINING TENT AT SMOKY LAKE.

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IN THE CANADIAN BUSH

BY

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Illustrated with Sixteen Photographs

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER I.

"DON'T take anything but what you absolutely need" had been the chief engineer's parting instructions to me, in the year 1909, at the head office of the Canadian Northern Railway in Toronto. This advice appeared to be well grounded as I stepped out of the comfortable train on to the siding, where there were only a few wooden shanties and some railway cars used as huts. This was the camp, Selwood Junction, whence a railroad was being constructed to Gowganda Junction (of silver mine fame), and from there to Port Arthur on Lake Superior.

I had travelled up north-west from

Toronto by the Canadian Northern Ontario Railway, along the shore of the Georgian Bay as far as Sudbury, the greatest nickel-mining centre in the world. From the station I had wended my way, late in the evening, along the badly lighted streets, deep in mud, to the wooden hotel where I spent the night, and next morning had caught the Selwood train.

Meanwhile the train steamed across the West Vermilion River towards Selwood, the terminus, where the great Moose Mountain iron mine is situated. It might be interesting to make a digression here, and to quote from the *Toronto World*. The tendency in a Canadian newspaper towards American spelling should be noted :—

"Whoever has traveled thru the northlands of Ontario will doubtless remember the Vermilion River. It is a tributary of the Vermilion Lake, and is one of the main waterways of that region. This river is noted for its broad expanse of water. It is also one of the beauty spots in that wild land. Both banks rise to magnificent heights, and when seen in all their glory of the autumn hues the scenery might be favorably compared to a fairyland of azure and gold.

But stately and impressive as these mountains are, their glory is even overshadowed by a noble peak near Selwood, which rises to a lofty height and lords over the surrounding country. This peak is of great antiquity, and has

for many years been a favorite haunt of tourists and hunters. It should not, however, be noted as a landmark. It is also rich in legendary lore; but odly enough, the wild and pathetic tradition that is woven around it is not widely known even among the northern folk. The few who are conversant with its history are reticent people who cast apprehensive glances as they swiftly paddle by this rock and withold its history from the stranger."

The legend relates to the doings of a mythical wolf. But to return to my story. On inquiring, I was directed to one of the wooden shanties where the divisional engineer had his office. The divisional engineer was a "dour" Scotsman, who had anything but a

friendly greeting for the new arrival in a strange country. On reading the letter presented to him he remarked that he had no use for any further assistant engineers, and did not know what to do with me. This was not a very encouraging start, and it rather damped the enthusiasm contracted when I was first engaged as assistant engineer. However, the rest of the camp were friendly, and, moreover, there I was, and there I had to stay. The first meal was rather a shock to one unaccustomed to roughing it ; but then, perhaps, I was over-fastidious in those days. Greasy soup, tough meat with beans, and prunes or some tinned fruit, all off the same tin platter—not all at once, of course, but, even so,

quite disagreeable enough. Sleeping accommodation was found for me in a small compartment off the office, where I had an upper berth; this had a straw mattress and black blankets, but of course no sheets or pillow. My bunk took some getting used to, and I remember having some needless qualms as to the cleanliness of the blankets. There were a lot of pools round about the camp, and the night air was full of the ceaseless croaking of the frogs.

CHAPTER II.

I kicked my heels for several weeks at Selwood Junction, the divisional engineer trying to make some work for me ; but really I had very little to do. I went for many walks, and also watched the contractors at work building the concrete piers of a bridge and blasting the rock on the "right-of-way" (the strip of land granted for the railroad). Only a few days after my arrival several of us were watching a big blast, with the sun in our eyes, when a boulder, which no one had noticed, crashed on to the ground only 2 ft. away from me ; the boulder was heavy enough to have crushed in my

head, and I remember having experienced an uncomfortable feeling at the time. The contractor's officials had quite a well-made wooden building, with separate rooms for each of them, and this party was much more comfortable than were the engineers. We were often invited in to listen to the gramophone, which was a very good one, with records galore.

Some of the men were extremely careless with the dynamite used for blasting. One of them had a stick of dynamite in his pocket, and, forgetting about this, put his lighted pipe into the same pocket. Dynamite will burn without exploding, but it is not advisable to try the experiment on one's person. It was in the early Spring at

this time, and very chilly in the morning and evening. The rivers were still very cold, owing to the carrying down of broken ice, so I took some credit for an early dip in the West Vermilion River one morning in May. I had induced the divisional engineer's assistant, also a Scotsman, to accompany me on the expedition. To tell the truth, I wanted a bath, and this was the only way of getting one.

I was now becoming rather tired of this easy-going life, and wanted to have some proper work to do. Towards the end of the month the divisional engineer said that there was a job for me at the furthest away camp. He gave me elaborate directions about finding the way, and

where to make detours, etc.; but finally said that he could not risk letting me go by myself, and that I had better accompany the mail-carrier. I am sure that this was a wise decision, because most of the right-of-way was uncleared, and it is the easiest thing in the world for anyone unacquainted with the bush to lose his way.

Accordingly I made my preparations by procuring one of the strong rough khaki suits sold at the contractor's store, and also a sack in which to carry a selection of my goods and chattels for an indefinite period; for what one wanted one had to carry on one's back. I already possessed a good pair of high boots, bought in Toronto. The mail-

A TYPICAL BIT OF THE RIGHT-OF-WAY.

carrier was a thick-set, sturdy young fellow, a typical Canadian, with an innate hatred for everything English. Fortunately, being Scottish by birth, I passed muster in his eyes. Canadians, that is to say the descendants of English or Scottish settlers, seem to imbibe even in the first generation a jealousy, hatred and scorn for anybody or anything English. This deplorable state of mind is doubtless greatly due to the shipment to Canada in the early days of conceited ne'er-do-wells from the Old Country. The Canadians, however, are really very American in their tastes and ways; but perhaps this is hardly surprising with such near neighbours, who flood the country with their foods, goods and literature.

CHAPTER III.

We started one morning at the end of May for the second camp, a distance of about ten miles, but the difficulties of the way must not be measured by the mileage. Scrambling over cut-down trees along the right-of-way, wading through streams, and picking one's way through the uncleared bush, made the walk an arduous one. To add to this, it was very hot, and the mosquitoes were beginning. It was a long time before I got accustomed to balancing myself when walking along a fallen tree, especially when carrying a heavy pack which made me top-heavy. My companion certainly offered to take my

pack as well as his mail-bag, but I had my pride, and refused his well-meant offers. We eventually arrived at the second engineers' camp in the evening, and I felt that I had done a good day's work. The camp consisted of the usual Canadian log-hut or shack, built up out of tree trunks. The shack was divided up by partitions into a living-room, a kitchen, an office, the sectional engineer's room, and a common sleeping-room for the rest of the party. The head of the party was a Swede, one of the others was an Englishman who hailed from the same engineering college as myself, while the others were, I believe, Canadians. As there was no berth to spare, I was provided with a mattress and blankets on the floor,

and soon fell asleep; but presently woke up with a terrible feeling of vertigo and my head in a whirl. This continued most of the night, and, what with the mice running over me, I had an unpleasant time of it.

Next day I discarded my cap and procured a Canadian slouch hat, since I had evidently had a slight touch of sunstroke on the previous day. The walk to the third camp was practically a repetition of that of the day before, though rather worse. I found the parts where there had been a fire especially trying, because the smoke and the dust stirred up in walking were stifling. I was glad when we arrived at the third engineers' camp—a shack like the last one, built close to Post

EVENING AT POST LAKE.

Lake ; the name is due to there having been originally a post of the Hudson Bay Company at the head of the lake. After supper we sat on a pier which the party had constructed and watched the sunset. The sunsets here as viewed across the lake were the most beautiful that I had ever seen : the wooded islands and the interminable forest showing black against the horizon ; the glowing sky, with colours changing in a wonderful kaleidoscopic way ; and the whole picture reflected in the still and peaceful lake below. I was reminded of Wordsworth's beautiful lines :—

" And now the whole wide lake in deep repose
Is hushed, and like a burnished mirror glows."

I do not know whether the Vermilion

River owes its name to the vivid sunrises and sunsets, but, anyway, this would be a good reason. Edward Fairfax has written :—

"The purple morning left her crimson bed,
And donned her robes of pure vermilion hue."

The next day saw us on our way to the last camp, accompanied part of the distance by our hosts. We met some of the engineers of Camp 4 at work on the right-of-way, and we all got a partial lift to the camp in a contractor's boat. The distance traversed in these last three days had been over thirty miles of hard walking. With the addition of myself, the party at the camp now consisted of six. There were the sectional engineer, a cheery Nova Scotian, two young fellows from

OUR PARTY AT SMOKY LAKE, WITH THE SLEEPING TENT IN THE BACKGROUND.

college, together with another Canadian, and Bill the cook, who was an Englishman of the right sort. The camp consisted of three tents—the sectional engineer's office and tent, the dining and kitchen tent, and the common sleeping tent. These were pitched close to Smoky Lake, and there was hardly any clearing done round about the camp. The lake derives its name from the frequent smoke-like mists.

A couple of days after my arrival I was despatched in the morning to the nearest contractor's camp to procure some salt butter and some kerosene oil. I started along the trail leading from the camp to the right-of-way, but somehow got off the trail, which was not very well blazed. Blazing, by

the way, means the stripping off with an axe of a small piece of bark on the trees to be followed. However, I managed to strike the right-of-way, and had a hot walk to the contractor's camp. En route I came across a man who was nearly overcome with the heat, but he managed to reach the camp. After doing my "marketing" I started home in the afternoon, and all went well until reaching the spot where I thought the camp trail should be. However, I could not find it, and not wishing to spend the night on the right-of-way, I very foolishly struck through the bush in the direction where I thought our camp lay. The going got worse and worse, with very thick undergrowth as I got near Smoky

Lake; but the camp was nowhere to be seen, so it was evident that I had misjudged the position. Of course by following the lake shore the camp would eventually be struck; this I attempted to do, but found the going too difficult, and besides I was tired out.

It was now dark, and so there was nothing to do but make a night of it. In these parts the nights are always chilly, so I collected some dry wood, and with the help of the kerosene lit a fire. I could have done with some supper, but had perforce to content myself with the salt butter, which was not at all palatable, even when eked out with water from a spring. The butter had to be eaten in lumps, as

there was no bread to accompany it. In fact, as the Carpenter said to the Walrus :—

"The butter's spread too thick!"

I trusted that there were no black bears about, for some had lately been seen on the right-of-way, but expected that my fire would keep them off. After a time I heard the very welcome sound of someone hailing, and on answering a boat came along with some of the fellows from our camp; they happened to have borrowed a boat, and returning to camp this way had noticed my fire, and came to investigate. I was very thankful to be taken off and to get back to camp.

Our section of the line was a long one, and much walking had to be done

on most days. The mosquitoes were increasing rapidly in number, and when one was occupied with the transit or level they made good use of their opportunity. We afterwards tied netting round our ears and the back of our heads, but this did not keep out the black-flies. We had at first no mosquito-netting in our sleeping tent, so at intervals we used to burn paper and leaves in order to drive out the pests with the smoke; it was an effectual process, though somewhat painful to ourselves. Later on we got some netting and cheesecloth, and we then proceeded to rig up little tents above our beds. We had brushwood down on the ground under the sleeping tent, with our mattresses on the top. I dis-

covered one day that one of my companions had several dynamite sticks and detonators under his mattress; though probably perfectly safe, this seemed to be a somewhat unsuitable place for a storehouse, so I confess to having gladly fallen in with a suggestion for disposing of the explosive.

The idea was to dynamite the fish, and incidentally to break the law of the land. Accordingly fuses and detonators were attached, the fuses lighted, and the sticks thrown out into the lake. As soon as the explosions took place we manned our home-made raft and picked up a number of killed or stunned salmon trout; these proved a welcome addition to our larder, for our daily menu was ham, beans, por-

ridge, bread, tinned or dried fruits, and tea. I might mention here that all the equipment and stores for the camps had been dragged over the snow and frozen lakes during the preceding Winter, which is the only time when Nature provides roads, and the only time when heavy transport is possible. Of course things could come up by the Vermilion River and the connecting chain of lakes, but canoes cannot carry much and the portages were frequent.

A good deal of labour was required in getting firewood for the cook, who seemed to get through a lot. The cook was an Englishman, and a very good cook in the bargain. He had originally owned a pastrycook's shop, and so he knew his business and was

an adept at making cakes; the favourite Canadian one is the johnny-cake, made of cornmeal. Very often in camps the cook is a man who has taken on the job as he has nothing better to do. Unfortunately, there were not any suitable dry trees near the camp, so I gave the cook a hand one day. We paddled across the lake on our raft, and with a two-handed saw cut down some dry trees; these we cut into convenient lengths, and then towed them back to camp. We then set to work cutting up logs and splitting them into suitable sizes with an axe, in the handling of which I was as yet unversed. Those who have never tried cannot realise what a wonderfully efficient tool an axe becomes in the hands of an expert.

CHAPTER IV.

As we were soon going to have a canoe, I set to work one day building a short pier, for convenience in embarking and as a platform for our frequent bathes. There was an island close to our camp, at just a nice distance for a swim; I always thought that our camp ought to have been on this island. For the construction of the pier I cut two substantial tree trunks, embedding their ends in the ground and supporting the far ends on two piles braced together. The top of the pier consisted of planking formed of cedar trees split in halves.

Some of the party went down to

Selwood to fetch up our canoe, and they had a hard time of it, for the canoe had to be carried for a considerable part of the way and dragged up the rapids. It was a very heavy and cumbersome canoe, chosen by the misguided authorities at Toronto, who wanted a boat which would be quite safe, oblivious of the work for which it was to be used. However, the canoe was better than the boat borrowed from the contractors, and was of considerable assistance; the camp was near one end of our section, and we had sometimes to go right up Thor Lake, a lake which could be quite rough, as its name implies. Paddling is tiring work at first, especially owing to the cramped position that one has

to adopt; but it is wonderful what distances can be accomplished when one gets used to the work. Managing a long canoe by oneself in a high wind is very awkward, because the bow is apt to get blown round. A heavy stone placed in the bow keeps the canoe more in the water, and greatly facilitates the holding of a straight course.

It was now the middle of June, and mosquitoes and black-flies were a perfect torment. I suffered severely, because they always take to a newcomer, and my face and neck were all swollen up. It was little consolation to be told that it was only the females which bit. If it had been a few years later the speaker might have quoted from

Rudyard Kipling in the *Morning Post* :—

> "For the female of the species is more deadly than the male."

While on the water, in the day time, one was fairly free from their attentions, but the mosquitoes had a provoking habit of lying in wait at the portages and attacking the defenceless. When carrying the canoe both men had their hands occupied in steadying it on their shoulders, while the rest of the crew had their hands full carrying apparatus, etc. The black-flies had a worse bite than the mosquitoes, and, being so small, managed to get underneath one's clothes. A third plague that came later on were the sand-flies, another small species of bloodsucker.

A temporary, though harmless, pest in the tents were the large winged ants, which had an aggravating habit of shedding their wings all over the place. While writing of insects, mention might be made of some of the animals, the most numerous of which were the field mice and the chipmunks (a species of squirrel); the latter were very bold, and were always stealing things from the kitchen. I did not see any moose or bears, with the exception of a young cub which had been trapped by the contractors.

CHAPTER V.

One day a bush fire started, the wind bringing it near our camp. One of the fire-rangers came along and got the fire put out with the help of some of the contractor's men, whom he had the power to impress. Fire-rangers are appointed for the Summer months from among university students who are having their holidays. These are much-sought-after posts, and influence is necessary to procure them. At night, unluckily, the fire broke out again, burning fiercely close to our camp. We had therefore to get out of bed and turn to as firemen. The method employed was to throw earth over the

flames and to dig trenches round the camp to check the fire. It was a weird experience in the night: the darkness rendered darker by some burning tree, one stumbled and groped one's way towards the flames, and endeavoured to dig up some earth in the stony and root-embedded ground. When one outbreak had been smothered, one stood sentry in the choking gloom, ready to move to the attack of some fresh outburst. Meanwhile, listening to the occasional crash as some badly burnt tree came toppling to the ground, one sincerely hoped that those in the immediate neighbourhood would stand. Others of the party had carried up water from the lake, and had poured it over the tents in order to prevent

them from being ignited by the falling sparks. At last everything died down, but each of us took turns during the remainder of the night in watching the smouldering stumps.

Next day we took the precaution of moving most of our property away in the canoe to a safer spot. A wider clearing was also made round the camp, and the following day we brought our things back, as the fire seemed to be quite out. Shortly after this episode I was moved to the next camp, because they were short-handed there and had much work to do. This was Camp 3, which I had passed on my way up, and it was a much more comfortable one than my last. Excepting the cook, all the party were Canadians, two of them

RETURNING WITH OUR BAGGAGE AFTER THE FIRE.

brothers, and all hailing from Parry Sound, on the Georgian Bay.

The sequel to the fire has now to be told. One morning, five days after I had arrived, we were surprised to see my former party approaching in their own canoe and a borrowed one, together with a quantity of luggage. The tale was soon told : they had been burnt out, as also had been the neighbouring contractor's camp. They had made a fine fight of it, and had saved the instruments and much property, but had lost all their private possessions, and finally had had to swim to the canoe, they having been cut off by the fire. I should mention that all private losses were reimbursed by the railway company. We put the party

up for the night, and next day they went on to Selwood Junction, to make arrangements for fresh supplies, and to wait while a shack was being built in a more central position for the work of the section. I suppose I was lucky in having left just before the catastrophe, but I had certainly missed a lot of excitement.

At my new camp there was already a pier ; but this had been built in the early Spring, when the lake level was high, and the pier was now inconveniently far above the water ; so I proposed building a 10-ft. extension at a lower level, and this plan was soon carried out, with but a slight delay while the sledge-hammer was being retrieved from the bottom of the lake,

OUR SHACK AT POST LAKE, WITH THE GARDEN IN THE FOREGROUND.

where it had fallen. This pier proved a great convenience, as well as being quite an imposing structure about 40 ft. long. Another feature of the camp was the cook's garden, the position of which was marked by stakes in front of the shack. Woebetide anyone who walked over the garden ! for cook Henry was an excitable little French Canadian. He cooked fairly well, though the only real cooking to be done was the baking of bread and pies (shallow pies baked in a plate).

At this time we were hiring a birch-bark canoe from some Indians who were camping in the neighbourhood. They made their living by trapping and fishing, while the women made embroidered articles in deer-skin. There

were a number of bear-skins hung out to dry at their camp, so bears were evidently to be had by those who knew where to get them. We used sometimes to see the lines which the Indians left overnight in the lake, and we generally found the hooks baited with frogs' legs. There were a number of funny little Indian children, even the smallest one smoking. As the Indians were wanting to have their canoe back, four of our party set off to fetch a canoe which was waiting for us at Selwood, leaving behind the two others—the sectional engineer and the cook.

CHAPTER VI.

We made an early start at 4 a.m., walking all the way to Selwood, which we reached at midday, the others being rather ahead of me; a pretty good performance, however, considering that it had taken me two days when I walked up from the Junction. But we were now travelling light, and the route was considerably easier than on the previous occasion; besides I had grown much tougher. We went to the depôt and got out the canoe, which proved to be an 18-ft. "Ditchburn." Two of us carried it together upside-down on our shoulders, and exchanged at intervals with the other

two. It was not so bad just at first, but walking over rough ground with the thermometer in the 90's, and with a boat over one's head, grew most wearisome. In addition, the mosquitoes attacked fiercely meanwhile, and as one's arms were occupied, one had to suffer the torment. We had provided ourselves with some evil-smelling "dope," with which we smeared our hands and faces; but the effect was very temporary, since perspiration soon washed everything off. We had a five-mile tramp over an old Indian "tote" road before we reached the Vermilion River, and we were very thankful to get there. We embarked and paddled off, portaging many times where the river was rocky and shallow,

and finally reaching Camp 2 in the evening. We then had a welcome bathe : .the bathing here was rather fun, for there were rapids just above, and one could get carried along by the current where the rapids joined the still water of the lake.

After sleeping the night at this camp, the scene of my former discomfort, we started back in the morning for our own camp. We stopped on the way at a contractor's camp to take on board some stores, which were to add to our labour on the portages and when dragging the canoe up the rapids. On the rapids we waded in the water, sometimes up to our waists, and keeping a foothold as best we could, pulled and pushed our canoe along. My high

boots used to retain the water, and I had to lie on my back with my legs in the air to empty out the water. However, I soon adopted the device of making a hole in each boot, so as to dispense with the necessity of these acrobatic feats.

One of the party was not feeling well, so we called at a contractor's camp and got some of the medicine called "pain-killer," which is always to be found in construction camps. It is, of course, a quack medicine and a cure-all, but it proved efficacious on this occasion, and we got safely home. Writing of medicine reminds me of the tale about a doctor who went to and fro between construction camps attending the "dagos," the generic name

ONE OF THE DAGOS' ITALIAN OVENS FOR BAKING BREAD.

by which navvies are known in Canada. He was in the employ of the contractors for a railroad, and I believe that the dagos were debited 75 cents a month for his services. Well, the story goes—it is probably a libel—that he was formerly a "vet.," and always gave the sufferer horse balls whatever the complaint, even for toothache. On a patient complaining of the treatment, one of his comrades always remarked, "He must have mistaken you for a horse!"

The dagos were a very mixed lot, but they worked hard for the most part, and were paid by piecework. The majority of them were Swedes and Italians, with the inevitable concertina, but there was a sprinkling of every

nationality, and it was said of every social rank. One of the men was pointed out to me as having once been the editor of a well-known London illustrated weekly. In the hot weather the dagos must have suffered severely, particularly when working in the rock cuttings, which were like ovens. One man, indeed, did go mad owing to the heat and the mosquitoes.

We were not altogether devoid of excitement at our camp, for bush fires were frequent in the Summer. There were two fire-rangers near us, and they were kept pretty busy on their beat. The two had chosen for their head-quarters an island which was used for the storage of dynamite ; there is no accounting for tastes. A fire came

AT WORK ON THE RIGHT-OF-WAY FIGHTING A BUSH FIRE.

very near us one day, and we had some hard work in keeping it away from the camp, which was situated between the lake and the right-of-way, where the trees had been felled. We therefore bent our efforts to prevent the flames from crossing the right-of-way by digging up the ground. The fire was a fine sight, for everything was dry, and the flames went hissing and crackling up the trees, bursting into a roar at the tops, and giving off volumes of dense smoke. A few deer and rabbits were to be seen flying before the fire, but in the neighbourhood of the rail-road there was not much game, for it had migrated to more secluded parts. We were hard pressed at one time, so we packed up most of our goods and

collected them on the pier, with the canoe in readiness to make a hurried departure. Fortunately, this proved unnecessary, and by the evening we were able to unpack and to settle down once more.

CHAPTER VII.

ONE Sunday in July we made a pleasure expedition down Post Creek. This creek had been the scene of an adventure in the early Spring, when the then mail-carrier, with a friend, had essayed in a canoe the passage of the stream running out of Post Lake. They thought they would do a little exploration while saving the portage between the two lakes, and while shooting the rapids the canoe struck a rock and was upset. The intrepid "voyageurs" luckily escaped drowning, but their long absence gave rise to great anxiety. Portions of the canoe were afterwards picked up, but the mail bag was lost

altogether, with the outgoing mail. Had it been the incoming letters it would have been worse, for mail day was always eagerly looked forward to in the wilds. We had no adventures this time, and the stream gave no indication of its fury in the earlier part of the year. On this and on other expeditions we saw signs of prospecting work, but we ourselves never found more than the traces of minerals.

The sectional engineer conceived the idea of making a sail for our canoe. So having procured some material, he cut out a lateen sail about 7 ft. by 6 ft. in size. The next thing was to make some leeboards to steady the canoe; these were formed out of two strips of packing case, each fastened

OUR CANOE SAILING PAST THE PIER AT POST LAKE.

at the top end to a horizontal board of just the right width to lie athwart the canoe and to hold the leeboards in position. The result was a great success, and the canoe was not the least inclined to topple over. When running straight before the wind she scudded along at a fine pace, and under these conditions we found it possible to dispense with the leeboards safely.

Our chief amusement was bathing, often several times a day. We had a raft moored a little way out from the pier, so as to have somewhere to which we could swim. As I wanted to have a resting-place further off from the pier, I built another raft, and then proceeded to collect hay-wire from the various contractors' camps. I managed to

collect 135 ft. in lengths, which I fastened together and wound on to a roughly-made windlass. The windlass was fixed to the raft, and an anchor, consisting of a sack filled with boulders, was attached to my wire mooring-line. I then had the raft and myself towed out a good distance, and I proceeded to lower the anchor, taking very good care not to get myself entangled in the stiff wire; nearly all the wire had been uncoiled before the anchor touched bottom. I continued my bathing in the lake, though with shorter and shorter immersions, until the water was icy cold. The other members of the party were not so hardy, and it was not until someone caught vermin that indoor baths were started.

Hay-wire also came in handy for another purpose. We were much bothered with mice, so I made two traps of the catch-them-alive pattern, using a coiled up piece of hay-wire for the door spring. Practically anything that was eatable formed a sufficient bait, a piece of dried fig being generally used. At one time we found that a family of mice had taken up their residence in a box under one of the bunks. The bunks were merely shelves provided with straw mattresses and the usual heavy black blankets. I possessed no pillow, so I made a bag (we had to be handy with the needle from necessity) and filled it with soft pine-ends; this formed a fragrant and comfortable head-rest. We each had a mosquito-

net rigged up over our bunks, and we had also replaced the windows with cheesecloth. During the daytime we kept the front door open and had a skeleton door covered with cheesecloth in its place. As well as having to do our own mending and darning, we had also to do our own washing, which was worse; until it became too cold we used to do our washing by the lake shore, somewhat after the style of the Indian "dhobie."

THE INTERIOR OF OUR SHACK, SHOWING THE LIVING ROOM WITH THE KITCHEN BEYOND

CHAPTER VIII.

About the middle of July we had to go down and fetch up some stores which we heard were lying on the river bank ; they were being brought up in a flat-bottomed boat, which was unfortunately smashed on one of the rapids, but most of the stores were landed. We had been very short of provisions, and had been living for some time chiefly on beans and bread. We set off in our canoe, and found the stores dumped down on the bank. As the worst rapids were here, we had to transport the things up in three trips, and even then it was hard work wading and pulling the laden canoe up the

rapids; the return journeys did not take long. Shooting the rapids is a delightfully exhilarating experience: one man in the stern steers the rushing canoe, keeping it well in the main current, while another man squats in the bow with a pole, ready with a deft touch to ward the canoe off the rocks as it sweeps round a corner perilously close to cliff or tree. The third journey up the rapids completed, we put the rest of the stores back on board and made our way homewards. Our canoe had suffered somewhat on this and on other expeditions, causing the bottom to leak slightly. Repairs were done at our leisure, when, like Hiawatha, we

"Took the resin of the Fir-Tree,
Smeared therewith each seam and fissure."

While we were unloading the stores at the end of our pier a box broke and sixteen tins of condensed milk fell into the water. This was a loss which we could ill afford; so during the next week, while bathing, I dived for the sunken treasure, or rather I should say that I had to pull myself down by the pier supports, because diving would have taken me too far away from the spot. The water was 9 ft. deep, and the tins were scattered and partly embedded in the mud; nevertheless, I eventually recovered the lot.

In order to preserve the hams from the effects of the heat and the houseflies, the sectional engineer decided on constructing an underground storehouse. We therefore dug a pit, roofing

in the top with trees, which were in turn covered with tarred paper and earth ; there was a sloping entrance-way with a door to give access to the storehouse. This cold storage did not seem to suit the hams' welfare, for owing to the dampness they began to get mouldy. The designer, not to be beaten, then planned and built an out-door larder in a shady spot. Four living trees were selected as supports for the larder, which was then built round them at some distance above the ground ; the top and bottom of the larder were formed out of boxes and the sides out of cheesecloth. This larder proved to be a perfect success.

The house-flies were a great nuisance, though without a doubt their numbers

were greatly due to the insanitary practice of throwing the refuse out at the kitchen door—a custom which prevailed at all the camps. The mosquitoes were now diminishing in number, and by August they had nearly all disappeared ; we still, however, had the sand-flies to worry us. There were also the pine-bugs and the " borers " ; the latter were a kind of white maggot which bored under the bark into the logs forming the shack. The activities of these animals seemed to commence at night, and the boring made a disagreeable rasping noise. Other disturbers of the night were the chipmunks, who took pleasure in dashing across the tarred paper roof of our shack.

We had to make another expedition in order to get up a large supply of stores, too much for a canoe to carry. The stores had been brought up as far as a contractor's camp, to which we walked one afternoon, staying the night in the foremen's shack and sleeping in our clothes. Next day we loaded the stores into a pointer (a flat pointed barge), which we rowed as far as the river allowed. Then we transferred the stores on to what might be termed sledges, which were hauled by horses along the right-of-way as far as it had been cleared of felled trees. The remainder of the distance to our camp had to be done in our canoe, involving, of course, repeated journeys.

These sledges, which have been men-

tioned, were drawn by horses, and were used for removing the spoil from a cutting ; the load of spoil was drawn along and dumped down so as to make the neighbouring embankment. Two parallel lines, consisting of smooth lengths of tree trunks, were laid down, and when well greased they formed a primitive yet efficient track for the sledges. Horses were also often used for dragging the tree stumps out of the ground, in lieu of blasting. By the way, it was surprising how soon after the trees had been felled that the stumps started sprouting and bearing leaves.

CHAPTER IX.

We were now in clover at our camp with a large and varied supply of provisions. Perhaps the only things which we lacked were fresh meat, fruit and vegetables, though we did later on have some radishes and other delicacies out of our garden. Among the things which we had brought up were two cases of preserved eggs; but a large proportion of the eggs were bad. These latter were thrown into the lake in order to provide targets for our amusement. The hams this time were green and wet, but this was only a little detail, and I ought not to complain.

Post Lake was now looking very

A MOONLIGHT SAIL ON POST LAKE.

pretty: dotted near the shores with irises and with white and yellow water-lilies, while numbers of large and brilliant dragon-flies flashed about. In the evenings we watched the glow of the "Northern Lights," while round about us were the shining fireflies. With the easy access afforded by the rail-road these lakes are doubtless destined to become eventually a second Muskoka region and the haunt of tourists. With the beginning of August we caught our first sight of the kingfishers and the swift-flying lunes, but we did not see any duck or snipe till the end of the month.

The oldest man among the Indians encamped near us died about this time, and we saw the funeral procession pass

down the lake. The conveyance consisted of a not very large birch-bark canoe; in this were packed the coffin and the thirteen Indian mourners—men, women and children. We feared that there was likely to be another funeral very shortly, and this for a better reason than that the number thirteen was unlucky. As a matter of fact, one of the Indians did meet a watery death towards the end of the month; his empty canoe was found, it having evidently been upset through hitting a snag. A fatal ending would hardly have resulted had he not been returning the worse for drink, supplied by some unscrupulous white man. At the request of the Indians some dynamite was exploded under water to

make the body rise ; but it had eventually to be recovered by dragging, the dead man having clasped hold of something on the river bed.

One day we were visited by a travelling pedlar, who carried a varied assortment of jewellery, watches, pipes, etc. Some of his diamond rings were priced at $350, which would appear to be rather out of the reach of those engaged on railroad construction. However, as the men have practically nothing on which to spend their money, with the exception of tobacco and gambling (the sale of intoxicants in construction camps is prohibited), they have plenty of cash in hand, with which they readily part. We had great difficulty in keeping ourselves

provided with tobacco, and when it ran out we had to content ourselves with the stuff sold at the contractors' camps ; this tobacco was in plug form, very hard and dry, and even when cut up quite small was very difficult to keep alight. While on this subject I should mention the ineradicable Canadian habit of chewing. Plugs of compressed tobacco leaves and treacle were always to be had, and I used to object strongly to the consequent spitting on the floors. In the towns chewing-gum takes the place of tobacco, with dire results in either case to the Canadian digestions, as witness the advertisements of innumerable quack medicines for indigestion. I fear having often given offence by speaking of the

common or garden adhesive as "gum," but I was always corrected, and asked whether "mucilage" was meant.

Canadians have, perhaps on account of the cold climate, a very sweet tooth; is not maple syrup the national dainty? As a matter of interest, it is very difficult to obtain any article in a pure form, though the law forbids untruthful labelling; thus one sees tins bearing the legend "pure something or other compound," which sounds somewhat illogical. The Canadian lumbermen think far more of cakes and pies than they do of meat; this taste must prove very economical to the employers. A bad cook leads to the men going out; the cause of domestic harmony is the same the world over. One fellow in an

engineering party was much chaffed on account of his having been mistaken for a dago by some fresh arrivals, who had called out to him as he passed : "Hullo, going out ; food not good enough ?"

We often spent the August evenings in fishing, either from the end of our pier or else from the canoe in deeper water on the other side of the lake ; the fishing-rod was the branch of a tree and the bait generally either minnow or crayfish. Pickerel and trout were the fish most often caught, and they made a welcome change in diet. In September a Government party of seventeen, who were making a traverse survey, crossed over Post Lake. The axemen of the party cut a swarth 3 ft.

wide as the expedition passed through the bush.

Typhoid broke out at most of the contractors' camps this month, doubtless due to the insanitary conditions prevailing. The engineers' camps were mostly unaffected, though I was laid up for a time with an attack of dysentery. The fire-rangers also had their troubles : one of the pair slipped while splitting logs, and the axe cut his foot badly. He had to be taken away by canoe, getting a train to Sudbury hospital from the point where the steel had now reached. Serious accidents or illness would have been very awkward, considering that medical attendance was not to be had and no one knew anything about "first aid." By

the time the canoe journey, with its long and frequent portages, had been accomplished a doctor might have been too late.

CHAPTER X.

TOWARDS the end of September we first saw partridges. One member of the party having a small-bore rifle, he was at once hurried to the spot, and he succeeded in bagging a brace. The Canadian partridges are anything but wild, and one can get quite close up to them ; when pursued, they fly up into a tree, and one can shoot off their heads with a small rifle. This game was very much appreciated at our table, and we got several more birds afterwards. I had only a .38 automatic pistol, but I managed to shoot some partridges with this weapon. We used sometimes to come across snakes,

generally the harmless garter snakes; these were about 2 ft. in length, and they moved off like lightning when disturbed. Fortunately, in these parts there were no rattlesnakes, the only really dangerous snake among the large variety that are found in Canada.

We were not to be free from domestic worries, for our cook left towards the end of the month, and we were not able to replace him until a fortnight had elapsed. Meanwhile we took turns at cooking; personally I did not get beyond frying bacon and eggs, but some of the other members made simple cakes with fair success. We now had bacon freshly cooked instead of a week's supply being done at a time. I also took care that my tea did not simmer

for half an hour on the stove ; but my companions did not appreciate " tasteless " tea. The chief of our party was the best " chef," surpassing himself with the production of a very appetising custard pudding. The washing-up was the worst part, especially as we had no soda ; this omission was not for the sake of saving the plates.

It was now the commencement of October, and as the bush-fire season was at an end the remaining fire-ranger went out ; he did not have far to paddle, for the steel was laid up to the beginning of our section. Before the middle of the month our new cook arrived, together with a further supply of provisions ; both were welcomed, and he was just in time to cook some

partridges and ducks which we had shot. Partridges had soon become very scarce, for most of the dagos possessed shot-guns of sorts, and with these they pretty well cleared the country round. This district did not happen to be one of the preserved parts of Canada where no barrels of over a certain length are allowed.

The steel was gradually drawing nearer, and by the middle of the month it was close to our camp. There was then a halt for nine days while a trestle bridge was being built over an arm of Post Lake. With the arrival of the steam pile-driver and materials a start was at once made. While erecting the wooden tower of the pile-driver one of the men fell off the top on to the ground

THE PILE-DRIVER AT WORK ON THE BRIDGE.

THE 200-FT. SPAN TRESTLE BRIDGE AT POST LAKE.

and had a marvellous escape, he being only bruised. The tamarac piles were placed in rows of six, at 15-ft. spacing between the rows. The piles were then driven by an eighteen hundred pound hammer with a 40-ft. drop. The piles were driven until they would drive no more, being afterwards cut off at the required height and a cross-beam spiked on to the top of each row; these beams carried the six main girders, on to which the ties (sleepers) were spiked. The total span of the bridge was 200 ft. These timber bridges last some ten or fifteen years, and are replaced towards the end of their life by steel bridges or by embankments. Barrels of water are always kept on these timber bridges in case of fire.

The ties used on this railroad were generally cut on the spot, if suitable timber was at hand, and they were faced solely with an axe by men wonderfully expert in the use of this tool. The rails, weighing 40 lb. per yard, I believe, were of the ordinary American type, and were spiked to the ties. Before the track was ballasted and lined-up locomotives frequently went off the rails. This calls to mind the story of a resident engineer on whose section derailments were frequent. He used to send in lengthy reports, but on being reprimanded for this voluminousness sent the following telegram on the next occasion :

" Off again ; on again.—Finnigan."

There was being made near us a

deep rock cutting, where the work was rather behindhand. It had therefore been decided to waste the material and to blow the remaining section into the lake. The drillers had been at work for a long time making holes for the charge, and they had also made a small tunnel at the base of the section. All the drilling had to be done by hand, one man supporting the drill in the hole while another man struck the end of the drill with a sledge-hammer. The drills constantly required to be resharpened, so a smithy was rigged up at each rock cut. Before blasting takes place on construction work the foreman shouts out "Fire!" a number of times; when in the vicinity one runs for shelter, and if there is no cover

near one has to hurry. The men on the spot have shelters formed of heavy tree-trunks. When the explosions are over one hears the cry " All ove'," and one then knows that it is safe to come out. The charge in this instance was a heavy one, consisting of sixty-five 50-lb. cans of gunpowder and ten 50-lb. boxes of dynamite. Everyone in the neighbourhood had been warned, and on the explosion taking place the whole earth seemed to shake and the surface of the lake grew rough with the falling stones. The shot was quite successful, and there only remained some debris to be cleared out of the cutting.

CHAPTER XI.

It had been getting colder during October, and we had a snowstorm on the 12th; but the snow did not lie for long. We had a short Indian Summer after this preliminary flurry, and the snow did not come in earnest until the next month. The last days of the month showed us the geese migrating towards the south. With the steel now laid along most of our section, our canoe was generally discarded in favour of a hand car; this was a little four-wheel truck, propelled by "pumping" the long fore-and-aft handles which drove the wheels through gearing. As this craft was a very ancient one—

much worn, and with all the bearings rattling—driving it was excellent exercise. On a down gradient, however, with a good party on board, we could make the car fly. This was the cause of our undoing. One day our car jumped the track, and we were all pitched out, being sent flying head-over-heels. It was just as well that we were not on a high embankment or in a rock cutting, and except for bruises no one was any the worse for the accident. Going round curves was rather anxious work, for we were never quite sure whether a train might be met; in this event we had to stop hastily and lift our heavy handcar off the track.

There was one earth cut and its corresponding fill which were now holding

TRAIN PASSING THROUGH A ROCK CUTTING BEFORE THE TRACK WAS BALLASTED OR LINED-UP.

back the steel, so a large steam-shovel was brought up, and this machine made short work of the business. The spoil from the cut was dropped on to flat cars drawn up alongside the shovel, and the train when loaded was run along to the fill. The patent plough was then drawn along the tops of the flat cars by a winding-engine in the front part of the train, and the dirt shot off down the side of the growing embankment. When the material was all required at one spot the locomotive steamed backwards at the same rate as that at which the plough was being hauled forwards. The plough thus remained virtually at rest, while the material to be disposed of ame towards the plough.

The telegraph gang now came along, digging holes for the poles with their long-handled scoops. The telegraph line gave a homely look to the bleak white landscape, and seemed to bring civilisation perceptibly nearer. We had the inspector staying with us for a few weeks, and, especially as he possessed a pair of skates, he was a welcome visitor. Post Lake froze over one night, this was the 23rd of November, and we found next morning that the ice was a good inch thick. This thickness continually increased, the ice making loud sharp creakings at night. Latterly we had been obliged to go some distance to get dry timber, dragging it back through the snow; but there was plenty of fuel across the lake,

OUR SHACK AT POST LAKE IN THE WINTER.

so we now found it much easier to drag the trees over the ice. Our stove was quite sufficient to keep the shack warm in the coldest weather, and, in fact, when one went to bed the heat at the height of an upper berth was oppressive. Notwithstanding, one woke up in the morning feeling frozen, and one had to jump out and get the stove going. Outside the shack there was a fringe of long pendant icicles, making, as Tennyson puts it,

"Daggers at the sharpen'd eaves."

The chief indoor amusement was card-playing, but stakes were not high among our particular party. However, we heard stories of some people who had gambled away their pay for months ahead. Cards seemed to have

a perfect fascination for all but myself, and when there was no work to do the others played night and day, almost grudging the intervals for meals. Whiskey was occasionally procured, generally the Canadian rye whiskey, which was drunk neat, with the water following afterwards. We had visitors now and then, and I was sometimes requisitioned to collect an incapable person and put him to bed.

Another amusement was a phonograph, quite a good one of its type. I remember that my favourite record was one entitled "In Old Madrid." There was another record, called "The Hands of Fate"; this was a very exaggerated melodramatic piece, with the customary hero, heroine and villain.

This record met a sudden death at the hands of one whose nerves could no longer stand the strain (in both senses). Reading matter was always eagerly welcomed, and we all received newspapers and magazines by mail. My *Blackwood's Magazine* was not much appreciated, only Ian Hay's serial, "A Man's Man," being read by my companions. The very trashy American and Canadian magazines were more favoured. I think that the best of the American periodicals which we received was the *Saturday Evening Post*. With the railroad now at our door, we took the opportunity of getting a number of novels sent up from Eaton's, the Harrod's of Canada.

At about this period one of the newly-

made embankments slipped while a ballast train was passing over it; the locomotive kept the track, but four flat cars were precipitated into the lake, and were afterwards only recovered with difficulty. We also had trouble with subsidences where embankments were formed over "muskegs" (bogs), in spite of a mattress of branches being underneath the filling. A more serious event that occurred this month was the death of a dago, who was run over while jumping on to a dump car. We always had to jump off a moving train when returning to camp in the "caboose" (guard's van), for the engine-driver would not do more than slow down slightly.

By December our work was nearly

finished : the cuttings and the embankments had been finally measured up, also the track ballasted and lined-up. The railroad was declared open for regular traffic on the 4th of January. About the last work was counting the ties ; this was a very wearisome task and involved much walking. Of course the snow was not deep on the track, because it was kept clear by the locomotives, but in other parts there were about 4 ft. of snow. The snow was dry and powdery, and while in this condition the footgear worn was the " moccasin," which is practically a soft leather bag for the foot. When wearing two pairs of stockings one's feet keep quite warm, for they have free play in the moccasins and the snow is

not wetting. We did not have occasion to use the snowshoes, which were hung up outside our shack; the snowshoe is a kind of large string racquet which is fastened to the foot, and is used for walking over deep snow. The cold was intense, very many degrees below zero Fahrenheit, but owing to the dryness of the climate heavy clothing was unnecessary when walking. One's ears and nose were the most difficult parts to keep warm. When a wind was blowing it was necessary to wear a cap with earflaps unless one wished to risk being frostbitten.

It was in this wintry weather that we had a visit from a blind man, escorted by his boy. We gave them food and put them up for the night.

The couple were going from camp to camp living in this way ; it seemed to be rather a miserable existence for a blind man, but as he could not work what was he to do except to live on charity ? In Canada they have neither workhouse nor poor-rates. There is supposed to be work for all that want it, at least that is what the people in England are told. There are many in Canada, nevertheless, lured out by enticing pamphlets, who would gladly return home had they the requisite passage money.

CHAPTER XII.

DURING this month our drinking water developed a curious taste, but none of us suffered any ill effects; both the water from our well and the lake water had this taste, and we could not account for it. However, we were soon to move out for good, and it was arranged that we should quit our shack one evening shortly before Christmas. The train in the morning left a flat car standing on the track close to our shack, and during the course of the day we packed up all our things and put them on board the car. We then had a dreary wait until nearly midnight before the train returned. We had not

moved our stove, for we should have been very cold; but we kept it going in the shack until the last moment, which was heralded by the whistle of the locomotive. Then, quickly raking out the burning wood, we hung the nearly red-hot stove on two poles; four of us stumbling our way with this burden across the snow to the flat car.

It was with mixed feelings that we entered the caboose, having looked our last on the shack where we had spent so many months. Meanwhile we pondered on the great changes to be effected by this railroad, a portion of the Sudbury-Port Arthur section, which has since been completed; this forms part of the great new transcontinental route from Quebec, on the Atlantic

tide-water, to Vancouver, on the Pacific Ocean. Besides the opening up of a large traffic-producing territory, the complete system will result in the Canadian Northern Railway being able to retain a large part of the traffic from the east and west which formerly had to be passed over to other railroads.

We steamed slowly to Selwood Junction, with a brief halt on the way to remove a tree which had fallen across the track. The rest of the night was spent at the Junction on improvised couches, and in the morning we caught the Selwood train to Sudbury. The streets were this time hard with packed-down snow, and there were sledges drawn by tinkling horses. When a halt is made the horse is anchored after

A CANADIAN NORTHERN RAILWAY LOCOMOTIVE AT SELWOOD JUNCTION.

the Canadian fashion—by throwing overboard a heavy weight attached by a thong to the horse's bit. After a night at the hotel we joined the train for Toronto, my companions getting out at Parry Sound, while I continued on to the Ontario capital. I had spent altogether about eight months roughing it in the bush, and the comforts of civilisation now seemed very acceptable.

I cannot end this sketch better than by quoting from one of the pamphlets of the Canadian Northern Ontario Railway:—

"To the dusky and silent forests of the country north of Sudbury, the steel-banded line is but a trail cut through the uncleared wilderness, barred by the

shadows of pine and spruce. From a spruce-reflecting lake the goblin call of the lune answers the shout of the locomotive's whistle. Moose and deer, drinking on the shores of wild rivers, lift their heads when they hear the roar and rattle of the flying train.

"All this uncoasted sea of spruce and pine, muskeg and burnt plains, from Sparrow Lake to the unmapped and but half-explored Vermilion River country, with its half-mythical lakes, inhabited by half-legendary square-headed speckled trout, is plentifully populous with game."

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