



SALMON LEAP ON THE BULKLEY RIVER (p. 258).

Salmon run up this river and attempt to jump the falls in such shoals that the Indians are able to spear them in large numbers from a rock approached by means of the platform here shown. An expert will land as many as ten or twelve in a minute.

The New Garden of Canada

**By Pack-Horse and Canoe through
Undeveloped New British
Columbia**

**BY
F. A. TALBOT**

**With 48 Full-page Plates and a Map
of the Author's Route**

**CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD.
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne
1911**

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PREFACE

WHEN some distinguished American visitors once inquired of the late Mr. Gladstone as to the best way of seeing the sights of London, the venerable statesman replied, "From the top of a 'bus, gentlemen." Similarly, if asked how best to see the grandeurs of an untouched corner of the Empire, such as New British Columbia, I would say, "From the back of a pack-horse." The ship of the bush may be slow, and the trail exasperating, but this method of travel has its advantages. It brings you face to face, not only with new wonders of Nature, but with enormous riches—agricultural, mineralogical, forestal, industrial—all lying dormant, and silently calling to the plucky and persevering.

I was one of a party of six which set out from the western fringe of civilisation in Alberta to make the "North-West Passage" by land, threading 1,200 miles of wonderful, practically unknown country—the interior of New Caledonia, or, as it is now officially called, New British Columbia. The party consisted of Harry R. Charlton, Montreal; Robert C. W. Lett, Winnipeg; H. D. Lowry, Washington, U.S.A.; G. Horne Russell, Montreal; a photographer, and myself. The first and third left the party at Tête Jaune Cache to return.

The object of my investigations was to form some notion of the economic and scenic value of the country traversed. This was no easy undertaking, for New British Columbia is a territory upon which Nature has

bestowed her wealth with so lavish a hand that it is difficult to form comparative estimates. All that I can hope to have done is to have afforded a faint idea of the possibilities of the country from the various stand-points—farming, mining, lumbering, stock- and fruit-raising, investing, sporting, sight-seeing. To do full justice to such a task would require volumes, but if the interest of the reader in what promises to become the most humming corner of British North America is only whetted, my efforts will not have been in vain.

My best thanks are due to the Grand Trunk and Grand Trunk Pacific Railways for their valuable assistance in regard to facilities for making the journey and their courteous provision of the photographer, and for placing at my service the copyright photographs that embellish this volume; also to the hardy, hospitable frontiersmen and sourdoughs who, having themselves got in on the "ground floor," readily afforded me all possible information for the guidance of those who are bent upon wooing Fortune in a country which is being unlocked and rendered more accessible every day.

F. A. T.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. THE "END-OF-STEEL TOWN"	1
2. AMONG THE MONEY-MAKERS IN THE BUSH	16
3. THROUGH THE MCLEOD RIVER VALLEY	35
4. CROSSING THE DIVIDE INTO THE ATHABASKA VALLEY	47
5. JASPER PARK TO THE FOOTHILLS OF THE ROCKIES	60
6. OUR CLIMB OVER THE ROCHE MLETTE	73
7. SWIFT, THE FRONTIERSMAN, AND HIS FAMOUS RANCH	84
8. THE LONELY TRAIL TO THE YELLOWHEAD PASS	91
9. PICKING UP THE SOURCE OF THE FRASER RIVER	99
10. MOUNT ROBSON	110
11. WHERE TRAIL AND RIVER MEET	119
12. DOWN THE UPPER FRASER IN A DUG-OUT	128
13. SHOOTING THE GRAND CAÑON	147
14. A METROPOLIS IN THE MAKING	160
15. ON THE SKIRTS OF A BUSH FIRE	179
16. THE NECHACO VALLEY, THE LAND OF PLENTY	189
17. THE DOMAIN OF THE RED INDIAN	198
18. THROUGH THE ENDAKO VALLEY	213
19. A FERTILE CORNER OF THE PROVINCE	226
20. THE BULKLEY VALLEY: THE FARMER'S TREASURELAND	236
21. THE MINERAL STOREHOUSE OF NEW BRITISH COLUMBIA	248
22. THE END OF THE TRAIL	257

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
23. THE HEAD OF NAVIGATION ON THE SKEENA . . .	268
24. DOWN THE TREACHEROUS SKEENA . . .	277
25. THROUGH THE CASCADES TO THE SEA . . .	286
26. THE "LIVERPOOL OF THE PACIFIC" . . .	294
INDEX	305

LIST OF PLATES

SALMON LEAP ON THE BULKLEY RIVER ..	<i>Frontispiece</i>
TEMPORARY WOODEN TREESTLE OVER WOLF CREEK ..	<i>Facing page</i> 6
CONSTRUCTION CAMPS AND FERRY AT THE CONFLUENCE OF THE MCLEOD RIVER AND WOLF CREEK	10
"BRIDGE FLIES" AT WORK	12
THROWING THE DIAMOND HITCH	16
THE TOWN OF EDSON AS WE FOUND IT	32
CANADA'S LATEST ACQUISITION IN THE FAR WEST ..	60
THE EASTERN GATEWAY THROUGH THE ROCKIES ..	66
THE TRAIL TO THE FIDDLE CREEK HOT SPRINGS..	70
IN THE SWAMP NEAR JASPER LAKE	80
HOW THE ATHABASKA HAD TO BE CROSSED AT SWIFT'S ..	82
TOASTING UNDER DIFFICULTIES	96
PACK-TRAIN RETURNING ACROSS THE BACK CHANNEL OF THE MOOSE RIVER	104
HOW WE CROSSED THE MOOSE RIVER	106
PACK-TRAIN COMING INTO CAMP	108
THE MOST MAJESTIC OF CANADIAN MOUNTAINS ..	112
THE EAST SIDE OF MOUNT ROBSON.. .. .	114
EXPLORING LAKE HELENA	116
WHERE MOUNTAIN TRAIL AND RIVER MEET	118
NATIVES AT TÊTE JAUNE CACHE	120
CATCH OF TROUT AT TÊTE JAUNE CACHE	124
HOW ONE HAS TO TRAVEL UP THE FRASER RIVER ..	130
PITCHING CAMP ON THE UPPER FRASER	136
THE ETERNAL QUEST	138
A TROPHY FROM THE FOREST	140

	<i>Facing page</i>
OUR SIWASH INDIANS SHOOTING THE GRAND CAÑON ..	148
THE ROMANY OF THE RIVER	152
FORT GEORGE	160
A SETTLER'S CABIN NEAR TSINKUT LAKE, IN THE NECHACO VALLEY	200
"QU'APPELLE ?" (WHO CALLS ?)	202
MR. J. W. MILLAN'S RANCH AT STONEY CREEK	206
THE AUTHOR AS PACK-TRAIN DRIVER	232
THE BULKLEY VALLEY	236
TURNIPS WEIGHING FIFTEEN POUNDS A-PIECE	240
HARVESTING IN THE NORTH-WEST	242
OATS THRIVING WHERE FOREST FORMERLY HELD SWAY ..	244
TEL-KWA	248
LAKE KATHLYN (CHICKEN'S LAKE) AT THE FOOT OF HUDSON'S BAY MOUNTAIN	254
QUAINT CANTILEVER BRIDGE OF TIMBER	266
HAZELTON	272
A HUDSON'S BAY STEAMER AT HAZELTON	278
A SHACK AMONG THE TREES ON THE SKEENA RIVER ..	280
INDIAN VILLAGE AND TOTEM POLES AT HAZELTON ..	282
KITSELAS	284
GAP IN THE CASCADE MOUNTAINS	288
ALERT BAY	290
ONE METHOD OF FISHING FOR SALMON NEAR PRINCE RUPERT	292
A GLIMPSE OF PRINCE RUPERT	294



THE NEW GARDEN OF CANADA

CHAPTER I

The "End-of-Steel Town"

At the End of the Railway: Wolf Creek—A Motley Throng—Freighters and Packers—Prohibition of Alcohol—Pernicious Substitutes—Illicit Stills—A Talk with an Engine-driver—Gambling in Land—Bridge-building—A Splendid Panorama.

WOLF CREEK! The end of steel! We tumbled out of the Pullman car which had been courteously attached, for our special comfort, to the "Wolf Creek Flier," which in thirty-six hours speeds over the one hundred and twenty-six miles between Edmonton and the point we had just gained! And we were not sorry to detrain. In our railway ride across the Dominion we had experienced the two extremes in railway travel. Nothing could have been more comfortable and luxurious than our gallop over the billiard-table-like track of the Grand Trunk Pacific from Winnipeg to Edmonton; nothing could have been more exasperating than our crawl from Edmonton to Wolf Creek over a skeleton line. The former rested every muscle and bone in the body; the latter brought every one of them into vivid consciousness. But with the accommodation train you can scarcely expect anything else. It is not provided for querulous passengers. It is there to suit the convenience of the railway builders by hauling workmen and material to the rail-head, and to meet the demand of those hardy pioneers who persist in settling on the land in advance of the railway—getting in on the "ground floor" they call it—and who

do not mind experiencing considerable hardship in gratifying their ambition.

Our railway ride, then, was ended. We had come as far west as the iron horse could bring us, for Wolf Creek at the time of our arrival was the most westerly point to which the Grand Trunk Pacific—that stupendous undertaking whereby young Canada has undertaken to fasten itself more firmly to the Empire with a band of steel, 3,556 miles in length, stretching from Atlantic to Pacific—had thrust its steel nose. Our path was through the “great beyond,” through a practically unknown country, a vast wilderness untouched as yet by the handmaids of civilisation, where the click of the telegraph needle was unknown, and the beat of a locomotive piston had never been heard.

A cosmopolitan crowd greeted us as we rattled into the “end-of-steel town” in the misty dawn of the bright June Sunday. Though it was but three o’clock, the whole settlement was astir, brushed and furbished for the Sabbath, for even in the wilds they respect the law of one day’s rest a week. There were furrow-eyed Italians, fair-complexioned Scandinavians, sullen-looking Russians, stolid Germans, raw-boned Americans, husky Canadians, big-built Irishmen, brawny Scots, and devil-may-care English, all rubbing shoulders with one another, throwing salutations saturated with spicy badinage to compatriots on our train—for we carried a motley throng.

A train pulls into Wolf Creek only twice a week, and brings with it the sole news of the outside world which the isolated community can obtain. There was a wild scramble for remnants of newspapers. The postmaster was hard put to it to keep unceremonious hands off His Majesty’s mails, for the townsfolk swarmed round this representative of officialdom like jackals round a carcass. With much effort he pushed his way through the crowd and strode rapidly to the post office, with a

bevy of anxious people in his train. This establishment was merely a rude "shack" fashioned of logs, only a few feet square, and the majority of the people had to kick their heels outside until the operation of sorting was completed, springing joyously into life when the postmaster raucously called out names, signifying a letter, postcard, parcel, or what not. In the course of ten minutes the task was finished; the waiting throng melted away, and the postmaster was left alone in solitary state, busily tying up the outgoing mail-bag, for the train turns round and starts back to Edmonton immediately. The excitement provoked by the arrival of the "express" only lasted a few hours, and then the people resumed their usual occupations.

Wolf Creek is a queer kind of town, and queer also are its people. You may search the latest map, but though you may find the creek, you will not find the town. It does not exist. It is like its population—nomadic. It belongs to the end-of-steel, and just goes along hand-in-hand with it. It never gets left far behind; it never ventures far ahead. The end-of-steelers, as the inhabitants of this curious colony are called, are a strange race. They seem to delight in clinging to the fringe of civilisation and hovering on the border of the unknown country beyond; to revel in roughing it; to make light of privation, living on those who are carrying the bond of steel forward. They have just as restless a disposition as the mechanical box of tricks which lays the metals at the rate of four miles or more a day. They pitch their tents here to-night; in the dawn of the following day they steal away, and pass the night some miles farther on.

At first one wonders how these two or three hundred people live. They seem to lead an aimless existence; to be devoid of all ambition or enterprise. You see them on Sunday lounging about, killing time in gossip or indulging in games of chance. There is no apparent

4 THE NEW GARDEN OF CANADA

sign of activity about them. Yet on Monday morning you will see scarcely a dozen men in the place. They have all vanished as if swallowed up in the night. The truth is, these men are born hustlers. There is always a considerable amount of outside work to be obtained round the railhead, and it is here that these roaming spirits carve out their fortunes. For instance, although the end-of-steel may be here, the preparation of the permanent way is proceeding for fifty or a hundred miles ahead. The men engaged on this work must be tended, must be kept supplied with provisions, constructional material, and a thousand and one other things. All the traffic has to be maintained over a rude highway, cut and hacked through the wilderness, and the end-of-stealers are those who engage in this service. The colony is built up for the most part of freighters who have advanced right across the Dominion with the iron road. Before the advent of this means of transportation the freighter plied a thriving trade. Less than forty years ago he used to toil over three thousand miles to carry provisions and so forth from Montreal to Vancouver. They were the good old days, and many a pioneer shakes his head sadly when you recall them to his mind. Then the freighter's calling was worth following; no matter if it did entail considerable hardship and peril, the pay was high. Now, the competition is so keen that he has to lead a dog's life, to toil from misty morn to dewy eve to earn a miserable pittance.

The packer is a consort of the freighter in the end-of-steel town. When a railway is being pushed through a new country such as the great North-West, commerce follows hard on the heels of the track-layer, and is continually endeavouring to get ahead. Mining surveyors, land agents, railway engineers, and such-like, crowd to the end-of-steel, and thence make lengthy excursions into the country on either side. As travel

in such districts is only possible with a pack-horse, the demand for animals accustomed to the bush is continuous and heavy. A young fellow of a roving disposition, with a little capital which he can invest in horseflesh of the right kind, can always make a good thing round the railhead. He lets his horses out on hire at four shillings per day, the hirers taking all risk, and if he is a sharp fellow he can be sure of earning a dollar a day per head for the whole of his stock for the best part of the year. The feeding bill during this period is eliminated, as the animals are merely turned loose to graze. His only out-of-pocket expenses are feeding during the winter, which comes out at about ten dollars, or a couple of pounds, per head for the whole period of enforced idleness.

A youth to whom the open air appeals, who delights in the atmosphere of adventure, even if blessed with no capital can get a good start when he has mastered the art of packing a horse and throwing the diamond hitch, more especially if he is at all good at cooking. He can make his eight shillings a day accompanying the pack train in the rôle of cook and packer, and as he is put to no expense during the time he is out on the trail, being fed by the party engaging the horses, he soon finds himself with a comfortable little nest-egg.

The packer's calling, with all its hard work and rough life, is not to be despised by any means, as is evidenced by the calibre of the men I met. One was the son of a well-known bishop; another was the heir to a British earldom; the father of a third was a commercial magnate in London, but this youth despised the city life and office routine, so here he was in the wilderness of the West. Such men make money easily, and it must be confessed that the majority spend it easily; thrift to them is an unknown attribute. When they come in from a long journey, and draw their "wad," they make quick tracks for Edmonton for a

6 THE NEW GARDEN OF CANADA

"high old time," run through their resources, and then come back with an empty pocket to make another excursion into the wilds.

When the track-layer is arrested in its advance by some untoward obstacle, then the end-of-steel town shakes down for a while in one spot. It was so at this point. The broad, tumultuous McLeod River, and its turbulent tributary Wolf Creek, disputed the progress of the bands of steel. Two heavy bridges were necessary; and you cannot set a few hundred tons of steel in position in one day. Consequently the track-layer was pushed unceremoniously into a siding, and the work of spanning the two waterways taken firmly in hand. When this task would be finished only the engineers could guess, but the little community hanging on the track-layer's flanks realised that a delay of some months was inevitable. So they curbed their roving spirits as best they could for a time, and sat down expectant.

When I reached Wolf Creek it had been waiting some months, and as a result had assumed some semblance of permanency. Log shacks had been run up in all directions, just how and where their owners felt disposed to erect a more comfortable domicile than a tent could offer, though there were many white canvas homes still in existence. There was no attempt at symmetrical or methodical town-planning. It was as if a jumble of odd-shaped shacks had been thrown into a sieve and had fallen through the meshes, sticking just where they fell. There was a livery stable, there were two or three restaurants where you could get a plainly-cooked square meal for a couple of shillings, a pool room, a brace of stores, and other evidences of commercial and social activity. I had come through towns on the prairie which were neither so big nor so prosperous and established as this outpost of civilisation. But the look of permanency was all purely superficial.



TEMPORARY WOODEN TRESTLE OVER WOLF CREEK.

The stream itself, though narrow, has carved a deep rift necessitating a trestle 652 feet long by 125 feet high.



The one absorbing topic of conversation was the approximate date when the railhead would move forward.

Twenty years ago the end-of-steel town in North America was regarded with dread by the authorities, for it was always a hot-bed of lawlessness and crime. Every tent, shack and hut housed some human vulture of either sex, ready to rob the navvy of his hard-earned money; while murder was considered no more serious than rifling a chicken-roost. The gambling-hell provoked many a fatal quarrel; the revolver was in more request than the lead pencil. The dancing-hall, with its gaily caparisoned terpsichorean "exponents," enticed the steadier-going workman who abhorred gambling, and pitched him downhill into the saloon, where the dregs of the distilleries finished him up. Every form of vice and debauchery was rife. Canada had one experience of this evil, and made firm resolution that such a community should never flourish unchecked again. The consequence is that although the end-of-steel town is still provocative of much anxiety to the authorities, it is always held in hand—the machinery of the law is ample to cope with any situation that may arise.

In the first place, legislation enacts that no alcoholic liquor is to be sold within a certain distance of a public work, such as the building of a railway; the workman is debarred from intoxicants as rigorously as the Indian. The gambling-hell and all other forms of dubious amusement are tabooed. It seems rather hard that a navvy should be denied a glass of ale when he has finished his day's work; but prevention is better than cure. "No drink, no crime," say the authorities; and experience proves them to be correct. The upshot is that there is an entire absence of disorder at the end-of-steel to-day; the camps are models of sobriety; the men are healthier, their *moral*—and here I speak of the lower classes of Europeans who migrate to Canada—is higher than before they came. Nine out of ten

men can point to a nice-sized nest-egg, the accumulated reward for the sweat of their brow. Of course there is no curbing some spirits. If a man is determined "to go on the jag" he will do so. No power on earth can stop him, even if he has to make a journey of a hundred or more miles to gratify his desires. He does it once; he does it twice; then probably he reflects, and will turn over a new leaf. He finds that the game is not worth the candle, and consequently settles down and becomes a respectable member of the community.

Yet this proscription of alcohol by the authorities has, in a way, defeated its own object. The men, being denied what may be best described as legal alcohol, resort to anything that is a more or less efficient substitute. The redskin found this out. He, as is well known, must not be served with whisky or any other alcoholic liquor properly so called. Yet what is the result? The prohibited have ascertained that there are innumerable commodities on the market, under other guises, which are more potent in their effect than a straightforward alcoholic beverage. Red ink is one article you must keep out of the men's way; they will swallow it with avidity, for it contains a good percentage of low-grade alcohol. Another popular refreshment is lemon-extract, such as the housewife utilises for the flavouring of table delicacies! But the drink *par excellence* and in greatest demand is a certain patent medicine. This is as common in the end-of-steel town and among the construction camps as whisky-and-soda is in London, and its effects are far worse, inasmuch as the preparation contains 80 per cent. of pure alcohol. A certain flavouring extract is even a greater offender in this respect, for the alcohol percentage is about 95 per cent. The workmen and Indians drink it like water, freely paying twelve shillings, and in some cases a sovereign, for a bottle of the apparently harmless flavouring concoction which in the

city costs a shilling. In fact, the workmen and Indians are open to drink any patent medicine that has alcohol as its basis.

Then the lower members of the end-of-steel community concoct their own liquors and vend them in a clandestine manner. This illicit establishment has the illusory name of "Blind Pig." Here, if the proprietor is well favoured by fortune, and your credentials as to not being a spy are satisfactory, you can secure a thimbleful of a well-known Irish or Scotch brand of whisky for a shilling, or a bottle from ten shillings upwards. A bottle which we obtained cost us 12s. 6d. If the owner cannot smuggle in the genuine article he has no compunction in making up a concoction which is colloquially known as "rock-cut." It is more potent than the famous stogies which Mark Twain was accustomed to present to his visitors. It is brewed from dried peaches, apples or other fruits, which are stewed for a prolonged period with sugar, and the drained liquor is soured heavily with tobacco juice, opium or some other powerful narcotic, producing a most diabolical intoxicating drink, the effects of which are terrible.

I had one experience of it—that was sufficient for a lifetime. Within ten minutes of swallowing the liquor every part of the human engine sprang into active revolt. My head spun round faster than any teetotum yet designed, throbbed like a steam-hammer, and felt as if it were bursting in all directions. The abdominal muscles were contracted to the uttermost limit, while the whole frame vibrated with an intense chilling sensation. One could not walk; the limbs were as if paralysed, and one simply blundered and groped along. Some days elapsed before the effects of that glass of liquor wore off, and ever after, until we got over the confines of the "dry district," any bottle of a known brand, the seals of which bore the slightest trace of having been tampered with, was left severely alone,

for he who drives the "Blind Pig" has no scruples in making his poison take the place of any brand of liquor, whether it be whisky, brandy or rum. Yet these men in the woods swallow it like water, and reck not of what they may suffer.

The brewer of the "rock-cut" plies his nefarious calling to distinct personal profit, until the strong arm of the law swings down on him, smashing his illicit still, and mulcting him to the tune of £10 for the first offence. The vendor of flavouring extracts and patent medicines, however, escapes scot free, as these concentrated alcohols are recognised by the law, because of the labels, as commodities of culinary and therapeutic value, notwithstanding their higher percentage of pure alcohol. One man we met boasted that he had sold six dozen bottles of extract, which cost him a shilling apiece, to the Indians for 12s. 6d. per bottle. Judging from the behaviour of that band of natives which we met, their crazy dancing, wild shrieks, howls, and general indications of mad intoxication, this extract could beat whisky to fits in giving a man a "jag."

As we did not intend to start out on the trail until the Monday morning, we spent the day wandering around the country. The broken, serrated humps of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, garbed from top to bottom in forest, stretched from the west to the north. The expanse between rolled away gently in a mass of dark green. Here and there columns of blue smoke could be observed curling lazily skywards, betraying the activity of some homesteader clearing his land. The air was bracing, for Wolf Creek rests at an altitude of 2,700 feet, and the hot blasts of summer were tempered by the cooling currents blowing off the ice-capped Rockies beyond the horizon.

The constructional engineers' locomotive was standing beside our Pullman, and the driver lapsed into conversation. But the topic was the eternal one that is



CONSTRUCTION CAMPS AND FERRY AT THE CONFLUENCE OF THE MCLEOD
RIVER AND WOLF CREEK.

discussed throughout Canada and America—the quest for the Almighty Dollar. Every man you meet is ready to canvass some proposition or to propound some scheme for turning words and deeds into money. I thought I should escape it when civilisation was all but left behind. But no! Here every man was infected with the same fever. The engine-driver's particular malady was town-sites. He had bought some plots in a new town for £20 or £25 apiece, and had been offered double that figure. Should he accept or hold on?—that was the question as it appealed to him. In another deal he had "cleaned up" £100 in one case, while a third represented a clear profit of over £90. It says much for the thrift of the man that he could go out into the open market and purchase land in this manner. He was as keen a speculator as your Stock Exchange plunger. Certainly the opportunities of making money in Canada quickly are unique, and it is astonishing the class of men who venture into this maelstrom. "Make or break" is the average Canadian's motto, or, as one reckless whole-hogger put it, "I'll either be a millionaire or a jail-bird." I afterwards met a train conductor who had speculated in land, and had amassed sufficient capital to ensure a certain comfortable income. He was seriously debating the question of throwing up the New World and coming to England to live in retirement.

Land is the great gamble throughout Canada, and fortunes are being piled up in this manner every day. Town-sites are the most tempting prizes, though good farming country will always attract. But the former is that with the greater number of adherents. When a town is on the boom, the prices that are paid for sites are tremendous.

To argue against such speculation is useless. They tell you that the whole country from Halifax to Prince Rupert is booming, that prices of land are going up—

up—up. In this statement they are certainly correct, and they can enumerate cases of the sudden accumulation of wealth through the sale of land. Take Saskatoon, for instance. In 1901 it boasted only 113 inhabitants all told; to-day it has over 14,000. In the early days one man bought two adjacent plots on a corner. He built his own shop on the inner plot, leaving the corner space vacant, since such sites always command the readiest sale and fetch the highest prices. When Saskatoon boomed, a commercial house cast envious eyes on this corner vacancy, and the upshot of the deliberation was that the owner, who had bought it for about £50, sold it for £12,000! And it is the same all through the West.

More amusing, perhaps, was the case of Edson. My engine-driver was particularly anxious about its future. His personal impression was that a big boom was in prospect. He had acquired some plots and was resolved to "hang on" to them, for the time being at all events. The men working on the railway have seen the rise of these western towns and the war of property has soared in value. So they know what they are talking about, and, what is more, being on the spot, building the railway that is to make the future of a new community, they are able to profit to advantage. Shortly after starting on our overland journey we were destined to see this town-that-is-to-be in its very first stages, since Edson lay directly on our path.

Presently my engine-driver acquaintance had to go to the scene of the bridge-building operations. With his hand on the regulator he sung out, "Care to go right to the end-of-steel and see the bridge going up? They are hard at it. It's Sunday, I know, but that don't stop 'em from raking in the dollars. And I can promise you a magnificent view in the bargain."

I accepted his offer with alacrity and sprang on the engine. Like all such locomotives employed for the

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"BRIDGE FLIES" AT WORK.

Building a massive steel bridge over the McLeod River.

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rough-and-tumble of railway construction, where knocks are hard and frequent, it was a decrepit mass of moving metal, wheezy and rattling in all its bones. But it served its purpose, and though apparently in the last stages of senile debility, was still good for many years to come. We moved, or rather rocked and lurched, along a mile of track still under construction, with the rails all sixes and sevens, and indifferently secured to crazy sleepers beneath. After crawling over the shivery wooden trestle temporarily providing communication across Wolf Creek, we pulled through a cutting to the eastern bank of the McLeod River.

A terrific din assailed the ears, reverberating strangely the otherwise silent river valley. The McLeod is a typical Canadian waterway, and offers a striking instance of the powerful erosion of soft friable soil and rock that has taken place during the flight of ages. The river is no more than 200 feet broad at this point, but has cut such a deep channel as to necessitate the erection of a massive steel bridge 600 feet in length, with a height of 180 feet in the centre. The "bridge flies" were toiling as if for their dear lives, setting and bolting the ponderous ribs of the metallic structure together, for the engineers had set down a time by which it was to be completed, and things were cut so fine that no stoppage could be made, even for Sunday. The work, when I arrived, was half finished, the men being engaged in throwing out a span from a massive lofty concrete pier that had been erected on an island in mid-stream. An engine slowly backed a train loaded with the weighty dissected limbs of metal. A crane dipped its head and grabbed the foremost piece, whipped it into the air, and, firmly holding it in its mouth, rapidly ran out to the end of the bridge, where the human flies, working in mid-air and clinging to flimsy footholds, seized it, guided it to its position, and then rapidly slipped in bolts which secured it to its fellow

for the time being. Another crane was laboriously stooping over the side of the bridge picking up huge baulks of timber from the river bank 120 feet below, whizzing them up through the air, and gently setting them down here or there to assist in the erection work. On precarious platforms boys were strenuously puffing portable furnaces with bellows, in which the rivets were being heated. When a bolt was white hot a man grabbed it with his tongs, and with a "Heigh-ho" sent it flying through the air to another boy standing on a swinging plank some twelve or sixteen feet above. This boy deftly caught the hissing heated rivet in a bucket, swung it round to another workman standing near by, who in turn seized the sizzling rivet once more in a pair of tongs and slipped it into its appointed hole, when another "fly" drove it home safe and sound with a few raps of the pneumatic riveter.

Watching a bridge grow in this manner is intensely fascinating. The men swing from point to point of the structure like monkeys, and, heedless of the raging torrent below, walk narrow planks slung in mid-air, and which swing with their movement. Their temerity makes you shudder; the height at which they are working produces a feeling of nauseating giddiness. When one of the men invited me to come out on the outermost rib and watch another rib being set in position I politely declined. "What! Give you a cold shiver down your backbone?" he grinned. "Oh, you'd soon get accustomed to it." But I was not to be persuaded.

Climbing the bank of the cutting through which the bridge is approached, I looked towards the west and beheld one of the most magnificent panoramas it is possible to conceive. Stretching away from my feet in gentle undulations was an endless ocean of forest. It was trees, trees, trees on every side, with their sombre, majestic tone of dark green. Here and there the prevailing colour was splashed with brown where

a bush fire had ravaged the vegetation recently, scorching the life from the tree-tops and branches; or a blaze of purple as the setting sun glinted upon the tall gaunt dead trunks, the sad monuments of a bygone conflagration, whose barkless sides had become silvered under the agency of wind and weather; or a ragged blot of vivid emerald green where luxuriantly growing bush was striving to conceal the devastation wrought by the enemy of the forest. Winding to and fro through the sea of colour like a ribbon was the placid blue water of the McLeod River on its way to the slopes of the divide.

This ocean of vegetation stretched right away to the horizon, over which hung a thin streak of cloud, like a blanket of mist reflecting a golden sheen in the sunshine. But above this film could be seen a more impressive spectacle. Through the haze could be faintly descried, rising spectre-like, the ice-crowned points of the Rockies, whose glaciers, caught in the rays of the sun, sparkled like gigantic diamonds slung in mid-air a hundred miles away. The row of scintillating pinnacles runs diagonally to the route of the line, which, in order to preserve the requisite easy grade, keeps to the crest of the rolling hills, so that west-bound travellers over this system will have a magnificent vista for some three hours before they dash through the grim portals and plunge into the welter of eternally white-mantled peaks. This view at sunset afforded one a spectacle difficult to parallel. The sun sank lower and lower, the mists of waning day gathered over the sinuous streak of the river, blotting out the country beneath, while the sky was transformed into a mass of glowing fire, causing the ice-caps, glittering with ever-changing hues, to stand out in vivid contrast in mid-air, like some celestial wonder. At last the hill-tops faded gradually from view, and the mass of snow and ice suddenly changed to an intensely cold blue in the darkening mantle of night.

CHAPTER II

Among the Money-Makers in the Bush

Striking Camp—The Pack-Train—Horses and their Leaders—Pioneers—
A Profit of 2,000 per cent.—Big Eddy—Bog-holes and Creeks—
A Teamster's Life—Our First Night Out—In an Engineer's Camp—
"Canned Music"—Cooks in Request in the Bush—The "Station Man"—
Payment by Results—Openings for Engineers—A Town in the
"is-to-be" Stage—Rapid Rises in Land Values.

It was a raw, damp morning. The clouds hung low and threatening. The distant wavy line of the horizon stood out black against the grey of the heavens. The soddened soil—for it had been raining heavily through the night—threw back a dismal reeking moisture which penetrated the thick woollen clothes we had donned ready for "roughing it."

The camp was in the throes of activity. The personal impedimenta, cooking utensils, bedding and provisions had been so divided up that no animal was called upon to carry a load exceeding 200 lb. The last diamond hitch was thrown, the bell boy sprang astride, and with a seductive whistle induced the leading pack-horse to trot along in his wake. The tethers of the saddle horses were slipped, and the train of the bush moved off.

The camp was at the top of the eastern bank of the McLeod river, just below the confluence with Wolf Creek. The descent, a matter of 300 feet, was steep, and the soft soil was as slippery as ice under the action of the rain, so the horses either tobogganed down on their haunches or sawed the decline. At the bottom, owing to the depth and swift current of the water, a



THROWING THE DIAMOND HITCH IN LOADING A PACK-HORSE.



ferry had been provided to maintain communication with the opposite bank until the railway bridge was finished.

As we serpentine up the opposite bank we gave a last peep at Wolf Creek, with its shacks and tents straggling all over the countryside. Scarcely a sign of life was to be seen, for the end-of-steelers had dipped into the turmoil of labour for another six days. We could just descry a small crowd around the post office, the rendezvous for gossip and conversation. Then the trail bent sharply at a right angle, and the bush blotted Wolf Creek out for all time so far as we were concerned.

A pack-train is at the same time the easiest and the most difficult vehicle to drive. For the first few days out everything is sixes and sevens. The animals are fresh and restive, darting every few minutes into the bush, causing the packs to get shifted and slackened by constant violent contact with trees and bushes. Delay after delay occurs while the loads are tightened up, and the frisky animals provoke the packer to violence. In the course of a day or so, however, the animals chum up, and take up their positions in the train, and this order they will maintain till their journey's end. Woe betide an animal which attempts to get out of his rotation: his colleagues will bite, kick, and worry him until he returns to his settled position. It is curious how a bunch of thirty horses will resolve themselves into small cliques, will keep constantly together, and will act in concert to repel an intruder. One horse will always assume the lead, and will not relinquish the van in any circumstances whatever, not hesitating to defend his post with teeth and heels.

The country through which the trail wound its tortuous way was mostly covered with thick bush, in which young jack pine and poplar flourished luxuriantly, the

latter testifying to the richness of the soil. It is an axiom among experienced Canadian agriculturists that where poplar thrives any produce will grow, and land covered with this tree, no matter how dense and appalling the task may appear, will pay to clear. Jack pine, on the other hand, has a preference for gravel, but I saw on frequent occasions large tracts of this tree growing in first-class soil. Still, taken on the whole, the Canadian aphorism is the best guide when cruising about for arable land in a scrub-covered country. The whole of the territory we were traversing had been devastated by a bush fire some years ago, as was evident from the outlines of the thick trunks rotting on the ground in a bed of moss, building up that thick vegetable top soil which brings such joy to the farmer and so many dollars to his banking account.

The settler, however, had not invaded this district very extensively; it is the last corner of Alberta which will be turned from forest into wheat- or vegetable-growing expanses. Out on the prairies there is still plenty of perfectly open land, which can be instantly brought into a revenue-producing condition. It is on such land that the plough can work in the spring and the harvester in the autumn of the first year. One cannot blame the canny farmer for preferring such conditions, for the prairie provides the shortest and easiest road to affluence.

Occasionally, however, we met an energetic young man with his wife and family who had decided to make a new home in the wilderness. The prospect of awful isolation had no terrors for them; the arduousness of clearing was no deterrent. The prairie schooners—the capacious box-like wagons mounted on four wheels and drawn by two horses—contained the whole of their worldly goods and chattels, as well as agricultural implements, and they were crawling along slowly to the accompaniment of the drivers' lusty singing.

These men do not know what trouble or worry is: they are too intoxicated with enthusiasm and buoyant optimism. These are the men who are opening up the North-West of Canada, and they are the type of workers the Dominion wants to-day. They go on to the land with practically no cash resources, but from the time the first tree is felled their possession enhances in value, and when the railway comes along, bringing in its train an endless stream of agriculturists with money in their pockets searching for partly developed farms, then these pioneers make money. They may have to wait years for a purchaser, or perhaps only a few months; but sooner or later the buyer comes their way and enables them to make a profit of anything from 2,000 per cent. upwards on their original investment.

The country is gently rolling for the whole of the distance between Wolf Creek and the foothills of the Rockies, being somewhat in the form of high, wide ridges, separated from one another by yawning valleys, through which broad rivers make their way. These waterways in the distant past, wider, and more formidable than they are to-day, brought down rich deposits from the mountains, and shed this alluvium in thick layers for a great distance on either side of the present channels. But they will shrink still more as the country is opened up; the moisture which now merely drains into the rivers will be sucked up by the roots of the thirsty crops. The valleys for the most part have steep slopes, terraces as it were, on which fruit cultivation should be highly profitable. The stretches on the river banks make splendid meadowland for grazing, but the soil is so rich and nutritious that it should be utilised for "truck" gardening. There is not sufficient prevailing level to render it suitable for wheat-growing. But cereals are not the most remunerative form of farming in all parts of Canada. Stock raising, especially of swine and cattle,

is far more promising, as the demands, not only of Canada, but of other countries, are far ahead of the supply.

We were not yet on the "lonely trail." Twenty-two miles ahead of us, at Big Eddy, a huge timber trestle was going up, and as contracts and time wait for no man, all material had to be transported to the site by road. A continuous chain of wagons hauled by horses or oxen and loaded with heavy baulks of timber, some measuring as much as 60 feet in length by 10 inches or so in breadth and thickness, was toiling laboriously westwards, while an equally interminable procession of empty vehicles was coming east. There is no rule of the road. Indeed, it is not wide enough to admit of any such observance of etiquette, for the trees have been cleared on either side of the trail only sufficiently to admit of the passage of a pair of wheels. A laden and an empty vehicle travelling in opposite directions meet. The empty one blunders straight into the bush to permit the other to pass. If it gets stuck in the process—well, the driver has to get out of the hole as best he can. The trail was churned up into a thick mud, which at places was two feet or so in depth, and as sticky as treacle. And these bog-holes are fiendish traps. The unsuspecting laden vehicle lurches forward; then there is a wicked squelch as the wagon tilts over dangerously to one side, burying the wheel to the axle. The driver flogs and urges his beasts to greater effort. The frightened animals tug and pull in desperation, assisted by the driver and his mate, standing knee-deep in the slime, with shoulders to the wheels, and thus laboriously the wagon is extricated from the quagmire.

But the negotiation of the creeks is the severest tax on teamster and team alike. The drop on the one side is often so steep that the wheels have to be locked, and the wagon steadied in its descent by a rope snubbed round a tree-stump. At the critical

moment the wheels are released and the rope uncoupled, so that the animals may have the advantage of a little declivity to rush the creek and gain the opposite bank.

"Now then! Git up! Whoo! Up! Up!" The driver savagely slashes his team; they give a plunge forward, the wagon creaks and rolls, and with suddenly acquired impetus it flops into the water, the team straining every muscle to breaking point in order to reach the other side before momentum is lost. Sometimes the wagon will roll drunkenly through the water and up the opposite bank with the force of a battering ram; more often, as it drops into the creek bed, the latter sucks it down and it is tightly embraced in the soft ooze. Then the men have to wade possibly up to their thighs, prising, levering, and using every artifice to get the vehicle out of the hole. In one case where a "rush" through a creek twelve feet wide had failed, I saw combined animal and manual labour force the laden wagon forward two feet in half an hour! If another wagon is coming along its team will be unhitched and coupled up to the foremost vehicle to haul it out of the morass, a similar compliment being paid to the second wagon. There has to be considerable mutual assistance to get wagons over such roads as these, and every "stall in the mud" only makes the "bad place" worse from the struggle that takes place.

The teamster's lot is to be pitied indeed. He is the epitome of "roughing it." He toils from dawn to twilight, with only brief cessations for his meals. In this particular instance the material had to be hauled twenty-two miles, and for the round journey of forty-four miles the man received £3. Out of this he had to pay a labourer, who perchance received 8s. a day together with his food, the teamster providing the trolley and team. By dint of hard work he could cover the forty-four miles in a little less than three days,

if the weather and roads were kind to him. On his wagon he carried a bale or two of hay for his animals, and a small box filled with flour, sugar, pork and beans (the staple diet of the bush), tea, milk, and a few tins of fruit. At twelve they pulled up alongside the trail, the horses were baited, a fire was lighted, and a hastily prepared meal hurriedly swallowed. Off again immediately, and no further stop until approaching dark, when the wagon was hauled a bit on one side, the horses were unhitched, hobbled and turned loose in the bush to graze, camp was pitched and a roaring camp-fire kindled. After supper, more often taken only in the light of the camp-fire, the two men stretched a canvas sheet above them if it were wet, curled up in their blankets, and went to sleep thoroughly worn out. If the weather were fine the "fly" was dispensed with, the men slumbering in the open beneath the star-spangled canopy. At sunrise they were astir, and while one tramped off through the reeking wet bush in search of the horses, the other prepared breakfast. When the horses were brought in, the matutinal meal was hastily disposed of, the horses were hitched to the wagon, and the road was struck once more.

Such is the round, day after day; and the teamster may be able to scrape together a net profit of about £3 a week. It is a life with no recreation; nothing to vary the monotony. No wonder the men cultivate the boorishness of a bear, the hang-dog expression of a jaded cab-horse, and the conversation of a deaf-mute. But they are worshipping the Almighty Dollar, and that in the North American Continent to-day is the chief aim of existence.

As we pushed farther and farther into the bush the trail became heavier and heavier. The heavens opened and let down the rain in bucketfuls. Our slickers protected the upper parts of our bodies, but our boots became water-logged, and the brushing of the branches

overhanging the trail whipped the face like a lash. The cavalcade soon assumed an appearance of profound dejection. Conversation, which for an hour past had been flagging, now ceased altogether. Each of us was wrapped in his own thoughts, momentarily fearing a sudden introduction to Mother Earth, when the horse might flop into a concealed mud-hole and throw you over the pommel of the saddle.

The horses also toiled along with diminished pace, as if they, too, had contracted a "fit of the blues." If you endeavoured to shake off the melancholia by whistling, your impromptu siffling had an uncanny tone, while to sing was to encourage the woods to throw back your sounds in hollow mockery of your discomfort. Even the packers abandoned invective and rode along in moody silence. The feeling that your couch would be the cold, wet ground or a semi-quagmire did not inspire any pleasantries. If you attempted to liven up things by cracking a joke you were regarded with a scowl by your companions. The best thing in such circumstances is to ride along wrapped in your own thoughts.

It had been arranged that the first night out should be spent at one of the Grand Trunk Pacific resident engineer's camps, the day's ride being made short purposely to get things into ship-shape. We had come up as far as Wolf Creek with the young engineer, and he had cordially invited us to partake of the camp's hospitality. We were not a bit sorry when at last the strains of a phonograph, grinding out "Put on your old grey bonnet," struck our ears, for we had been in the saddle a matter of four hours, and our anatomy, unaccustomed to maintaining its equilibrium on the saw-edge of a pack-horse's backbone, bore painful testimony to the ordeal.

These camps are distributed along the grade at intervals of about twelve miles, the duties of the en-

gineer being to supervise construction, and to check the work as it is carried out. Each camp numbers about half a dozen young fellows all told, comprising chain-men, rod-man, transit-man, cook, and possibly one or two other supernumeraries. It is a somewhat lonely life, since the camps are ahead of construction, so that the little colony is entirely dependent upon its own resources for amusement and the profitable utilisation of leisure moments. "Canned music" offers a staple form of recreation, and keeps the party in touch with the musical world and the latest triumphs of the vaudeville art. The phonograph is started up about six o'clock in the evening, and is kept continuously at it until bed-time, only to be resumed directly the gong awakes the sleepers in the morning, and to be kept churning music until the party starts off for the day's labours. A musically accompanied shave, toilet and breakfast is somewhat novel, but after we had passed the third camp we all keenly anticipated the time when we should be beyond the strains of this concentrated music-hall, orchestra and concert platform.

The little colony at this camp were indeed industrious. In their spare time a lofty tower for experiments in wireless telegraphy had been built up; a stream just below was being dammed, a primitive pile-driver having been fashioned for driving logs of wood to form a barrage, for securing sufficient head of water to run a small water turbine whereby the camp could be electrically lighted; while a small cleared patch in the bush testified that horticulture had one or two enterprising exponents.

The members of the camp are for the most part young fellows to whom the lonely life appeals; while, owing to the absence of inducements to spend, they unavoidably save their money. They make their quarters snug and comfortable, and their employers see to it that no complaint can be offered in regard to the commissariat or the cook. I can vouchsafe for this fact from personal

experience. In these resident engineers' camps I secured a far greater variety of more nourishing food, more appetisingly and better prepared, than I had enjoyed in a first-class Canadian hotel. Certainly many of the latter establishments could not point to such a master-hand in their kitchens as these camps possessed. The cooks, for the most part, I found to be young fellows from home, who like the life, and consider a monthly salary of £12 clear a good wage. And it may be pointed out that this rate is not confined to the railways. Mining, lumbering, prospecting—in fact, all the camps out in the West pay this figure, and it is not a bit difficult for a young man to save £120 or more a year, for his requirements in the way of clothing are obviously very limited. One young man whom I met in the wilds, presiding over the kitchen of a mining camp, stated that he had left London twelve years before, had been in steady employment ever since he reached the Far West, and had contrived to bank over £1,000 as the reward of his culinary skill. The demand for good cooks in the West is steady, for the employers know that nowadays the skill of the *chef* has much to do with the contentment of a small community in the wilds, a satisfied "little Mary" more than counteracting innumerable irksome deficiencies.

In the railway camp no complaint on the side of insufficiency of food could be raised. We sat down to an evening meal. There was infinite variety, and everything in plenty. Although extensive resort has necessarily to be made to canned foods, an expert cook can ring the changes pretty frequently thereon, while if he is a good pastry hand and can concoct delectable dainties in the way of pies—well, his comrades will forgive his lack of prowess in the preparation of other dishes, for to the Westerner, pie, whether it be mince, pumpkin, raisin, pineapple, peach, or anything else, is the great gustatory delight.

Railway construction was in active progress near the camp, and here the resident engineer introduced me to a phase of life which is not seen outside America, and is depicted to its fullest degree in Canada. This was the "station man"—not the superintendent of an aggregation of buildings and administrative machinery, but what may be perhaps best described as the very bottom rung of the ladder of success.

A railway contract is divided into stretches of 100 feet each. The basis of the contract is payment by the cubic yard, the survey plans and specifications showing how much earth it is necessary to remove from this point to be dumped at that. Instead of engaging a large staff of navvies working at so much an hour, the contractor encourages the labourer to become his own master. A man can take over a "station," as a length of 100 feet is called, and is paid so much a yard for excavation; this sum is, of course, less than that which the contractor receives, the latter's profit being represented by the difference between the two amounts. The scale of payment varies according to the nature of the earth worked: so much for ordinary earth, or "common" as it is called, a little more for loose rock, and a higher rate for solid rock. The last, as it involves drilling and blasting, is generally taken over by the most expert hands, but anyone who can wield a pick and shovel is competent to tackle the other classifications.

Now, it is perfectly obvious that under this arrangement the more work a man does the more he earns; his prosperity is governed entirely by his industry. On this particular station it was mostly "common" and loose rock. The sole tools required were pick, shovel, crowbar, wheelbarrow, and one or two planks. The station men I saw here were three burly Galicians, raggedly clad—for any clothes suffice for this work—and they were toiling like slaves. They had co-operated

on the job, and were wrestling with "muskeg"—in other words, swampy ground formed of water-logged, decaying vegetable matter. They were up to their knees in a viscous, black-looking slime, which had spattered them from head to foot. In appearance they were more disreputable than a mud-lark at home. But they were cheery.

As I swung down into the cut and plodded through the ooze with the resident they gave us a cheery hail, but did not stop a second in their task.

"Say, what do you get for shifting this?"

"Twenty-two cents a yard."

That was practically elevenpence. It seemed small enough pay, in all conscience, looking at it from the uninitiated point of view.

"And what can you make a day?"

"All d'pen's upon th' time o' year. Th' longer th' day th' more we can do."

"What are you making at the present moment?"

One of the trio paused and gave a sly look at the resident, as if he might be giving himself away. Then, as he resumed his labours, he blurted out:

"Well, the three o' us are cleaning up 35 dollars a day."

The resident nodded affirmatively; he knew by his returns of excavation accomplished. I figured it out. That meant excavating some 160 cubic yards, for which they received, roughly, £7 between them—practically 47s. a day each.

"And how long do you put in to make that?"

"From kin to k'int. An' we stop for nothin'."

It certainly looked like it, for they never slackened chopping out huge chunks of the sticky mass during conversation. The resident explained that the colloquialism meant from dawn to dusk. It was now past nine o'clock in the evening, and yet there were no signs of cessation. Those three Galicians certainly

seemed bent on putting every minute of daylight to profitable account.

Working under these conditions is somewhat of a dog's life. The men are out on the job about four in the morning and slog incessantly until seven, when they make a short pause for breakfast. This is gulped down, and they are at it again until the mid-day hour compels another brief respite for a scanty meal. This is quickly digested, and then ensues a straight toil until six in the evening, when supper is disposed of, followed by a fourth spell of work till fading daylight compels abandonment until dawn.

Such is the round, day in and day out, with Sunday as the only break. The men live in little rude shacks, and the day of enforced idleness—from their point of view—is spent in washing what clothes they require and the performance of other domestic duties for the ensuing week. Their food, though wholesome, is reduced to the minimum, pork and beans being the staple diet, for these men have to board themselves, and consequently they reduce living expenses to the minimum. The work is hard, but it carries its own reward. They only ply their calling during the summer months, when the days are longest, and put in the other six months on a homestead.

This is one way in which Canada is becoming peopled with a solid backbone, for these men get their land practically free, perform the necessary improvements prescribed by the homestead law, and while the produce on their farms is maturing they are earning from £10 to £12 a week upwards. They carefully husband their wages, and by the time they have secured the patent for their farms are comfortably well off and have the capital in hand for the purchase of agricultural implements and so forth.

Galicians and a few Irishmen form the station men for the most part, especially where work is in "common."

Scandinavians and Italians figure on the heavy rock work, for they are born "rock-hogs," as the drillers and blasters are called. The average navy regards the station man and his work with disdain, preferring to toil for £6 a month all found, ignoring the fact that the station man is on the way to become his own master. Many railway sub-contractors of substance in Canada to-day numbered a 100-foot length as their first start, and had not a penny of capital to their name.

Canada offers a great field for the young engineer. Wages are good and promotion is rapid, according to a man's merit. There is many a youth in the Old Country who, when he issues from his apprenticeship in civil engineering, could "make good" in the West. The British engineer is preferred, as he generally has a good all-round knowledge, whereas the native railway engineer is specialised in a single branch of his profession. As a rule he has made his way up the ladder from the humble position of axeman, lopping down trees for the surveying party at £7 a month all found. The young engineer from Britain, if he were given an axe with which to start, would probably throw it down in disgust and march off in high dudgeon, feeling that this was a slur upon his abilities and a poor reward for his apprenticeship. But he has got to learn how to wield an axe, and he might just as well be paid for gaining that knowledge as not. Next he will take the position of rear chainman, walking over the tumbled country with the 100-foot measuring length. The same wage, £7 a month, will be the reward for this labour, and then he will graduate to front chainman at £8 a month, after which he will receive a slight increase in salary to £9 a month as rodman.

If his brains warrant it, he will then make a big jump, both in position and salary, to instrument-man, entrusted with the transit and level, at £15 monthly. This position achieved, and his skill being sufficiently

marked, he becomes resident engineer as soon as a vacancy occurs. He will be responsible then for the construction of a section of track varying from one to twelve miles in length, according to its character and situation, at an inclusive monthly wage of £25. His next rise is to assistant divisional engineer, supervising on the spot a whole section of line at £35 a month. As divisional engineer he will command a salary of £60 per mensem, and then his future rests in his own hands.

This may seem a long ladder, but the rungs are not very far apart, and energy and brains enable a capable man to climb from axeman to resident engineer in two or three years or so. The positions above are the plums of the profession, and in view of the tremendous amount of railway construction at present under way in Canada, they are not difficult to pick up. The wonder is that more British engineers do not turn their attention to the Dominion. They are in urgent request, for it must be confessed that their peculiar training renders them more fit for responsible offices than the average Canadian or American trained engineer, who is merely a cog-wheel in the constructional machine. One contractor put the matter very concisely to me, although he was an American. "Experience has shown me that the average British engineer has more knowledge of his profession in one hand than a six-foot Yankee has in the whole of his hide."

Apart from the railway construction—and it is mighty fascinating to watch graders, steam-shovels and gun-powder tearing out a path for the parallel lines of steel—the most interesting spot was about eight miles west of Wolf Creek. Here we pulled into the town of Edson, or, rather, where Edson was planned to exist, for it was then in the "is-to-be" stage, as the Westerner puts it. Here we saw the foundations of a typical Canadian Western town being laid. Imagine

a stretch of densely wooded country, with the bush as thick as the jungle, and about 20 feet or so in height. A square mile of this is pegged off. The railway station site is selected, and immediately opposite extends what is to be eventually the principal thoroughfare. On either side, at regular intervals, are run parallel roads of uniform width. From each of these streets, at intervals of 300 feet, transverse highways are driven at right angles.

- At the time we rode into Edson one or two of the main thoroughfares had been defined, but the scrub had been cleared only just widely enough to permit a wagon to pass. As we looked down the main street, our view was obstructed by an ugly square-shaped, black building. We turned towards it, and found that it was the hotel! Boniface was a Chinaman, and he had been the first to reach the place, had run up a wooden building of two floors, and had covered it all over externally with tarred felt to keep out water and for warmth. We could not see a soul in sight, and the ways and means of poor Johnny's existence appeared extremely slender. The interior was scrupulously clean, and the "ground floor" tenant was ready to give you a good square meal for two shillings, and to put you up for the same price for a night!

"Yes, things are velly quiet just now. But I have been velly busy."

"Busy?" We looked round at the undisturbed isolation.

"Yes; ther have been velly manny men come round to buy land."

We recalled our friend the engine-driver at Wolf Creek. He had plunged here; and the outlook was about as dismal as one could wish. It appeared that he might as well have thrown his money into Wolf Creek as have put it into land here. Why, the place was as quiet as a churchyard. One part of the town

was practically swamp or muskeg, and the rest was covered with a dense tangle of rank vegetation.

But that Chinaman was perfectly correct. There had been an invasion of the "town" by speculators. The town-site is divided into lots of uniform size—50 feet wide by 100 feet deep—and from what we ascertained, some very lively speculating had been going on in this out-of-the-way place. The railway company had decided that Edson should be a divisional point—such a town has a greater commercial importance than the ordinary town—while the discovery of coal about fifty miles distant had resulted in the survey of a line linking the newly discovered collieries with the town. A boom in land had consequently set in, and prices ruled high.

One plot at the corner of Third Avenue had been bought for £100, and had changed hands shortly afterwards for £340—a profit of 240 per cent. Several lots which had cost originally £50 had changed hands at £200 upwards; another which had cost £500 had sold for £760, and so on. The Chinaman was evidently well posted up in what had been happening in this "is-to-be" town, and his statements were confirmed when a little later we succeeded in running an unostentatious individual to earth, for he was the local land agent, and up to his eyes in work.

"D'ye know," he blurted out, "that this town's goin' to be a reg'lar hummer? I've some stunnin' lots going cheap. Now's your chance. Come in and make a good choice."

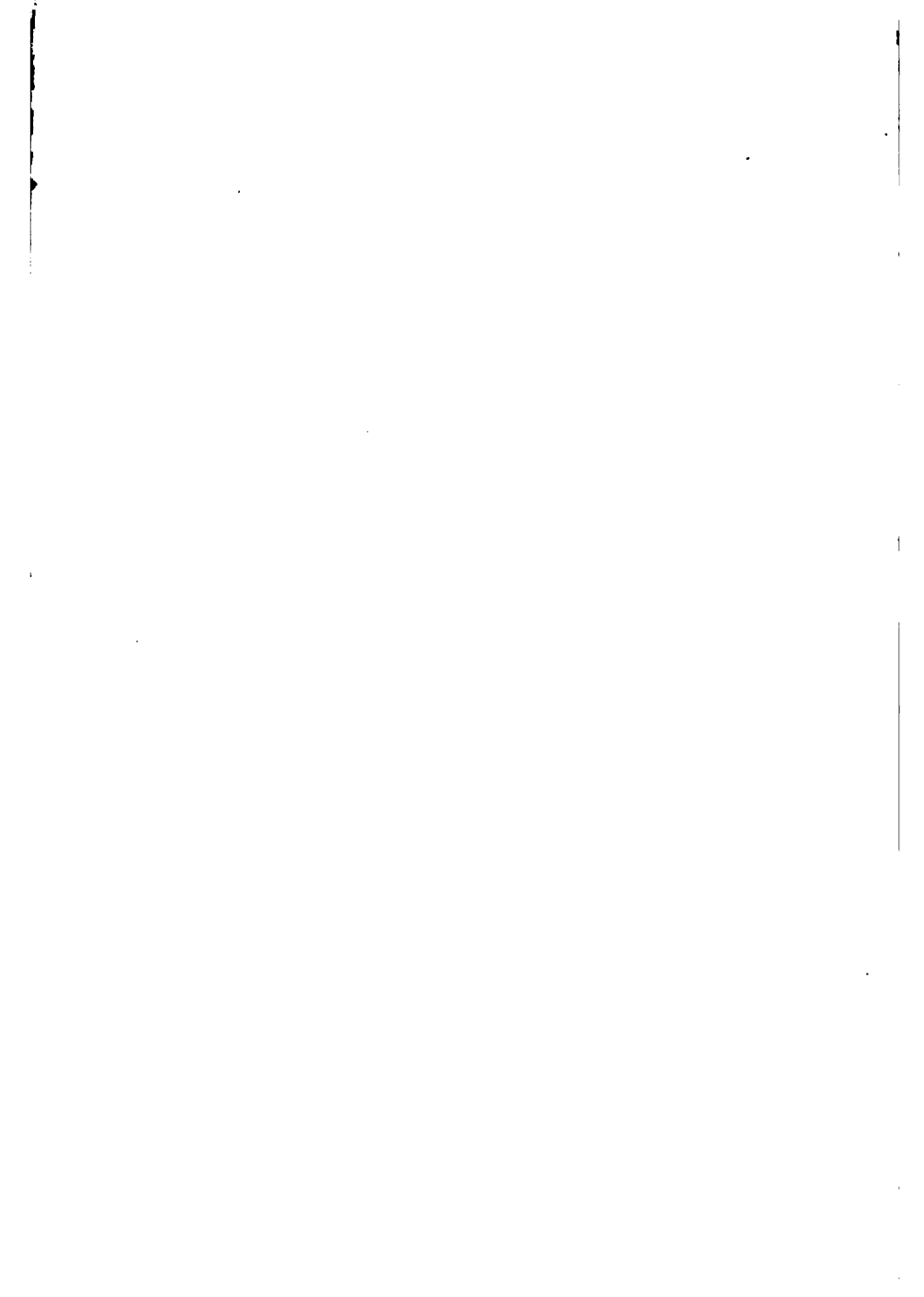
He had taken us for land purchasers. He seemed highly mortified when we shook our heads negatively, proof against his persuasions.

We struck through the bush to pick up the trail once more, and every few yards we stumbled upon a hidden pile of lumber, or into a clearing where a building was to go up. In half a dozen places we found



THE TOWN OF EDSON AS WE FOUND IT.

The erection in the centre is the Chinaman's "hotel" in Main Street. Three months later a square mile of bush was cleared, and to-day there is a thriving town.



frame buildings either complete and occupied or nearly so. We had thought the place deserted when we first struck it, whereas the bush was hiding extraordinary activity.

Three months later the boom in Edson went ahead with a vengeance. Directly the railway metals arrived at the front door, speculators, commercial ambassadors and tradesmen swarmed in. The whole square mile was stripped of bush, and left as clear as a cricket ground. Miles of sidings were laid, and a healthy timber colony sprang into existence, with all preliminary arrangements completed for the raising of a first-class permanent town. Such is the way in which Canada is being opened up. Dense forest to-day, tents next week, wooden frame-houses the following month, masonry buildings a year later, a healthy town in five years, and a full-blown hustling city in ten years, with tramways, telephones, and what not. Within a quarter of a century land grows so scarce and costly in the heart of the centre that the sky-scraper has to be brought into vogue.

It is not surprising that the Western public has contracted a town-site speculating mania, for fortunes are being made every day. The Canadian is the biggest plunger you can find, and he plunges wildly, spreading his net over a large area. He has the advantage of being on the spot, and many of these landlords will squat on their holdings waiting for buyers. As keen as ferrets, they are able to follow developments closely, and to benefit from every tit-bit of information which can possibly enhance the value of their property. These speculators buy heavily, as the lots are sold on easy terms. A man stakes his whole on the first plunge, expecting to have sold out before the second payment becomes due. At any rate, very often he does not know from where the money for the second instalment is coming. True, the buyer becomes a Canadian free-

holder, but whether his acquisition is valuable or really marketable he cannot tell. It may be worth less than the value of the paper on which the title-deed is written, and then ten years later suddenly leap into first-class prominence and net him a small fortune.

CHAPTER III

Through the McLeod River Valley

Watching the Growth of a Timber Bridge—Bannock—Roving Horses—
A Lonely Grave in the Bush—How to Walk along a Trail—An Old-
Timer's Journey across the Continent—A Bush Hotel—Joe Brown
and His Catering Experiences—His Vigorous Welcome to an Old
Chum—A Hairbreadth Escape from Destruction—Succulent Pastur-
age—Bidding Adieu to the McLeod River.

It was our first night in camp. It had been raining hard all the afternoon, and when we pulled into an open space in the shadow of the huge timber trestle that was going up over Sundance Creek we were a sorry-looking party. But the evening meal revived our depressed spirits, although "little Mary" resented the rough treatment meted out to her with bannock, canned beef, and other comestibles of the tinning factory. We did not feel the effects immediately, but a few hours later more than one set of digestive organs was in active rebellion.

The erection of the massive timber structure whereby the grade of the line was to be preserved over a yawning depression through which flowed the McLeod river was an operation of deep interest. We had passed freighters toiling wearily along in the mud, slime and water, with the massive baulks of wood, and here we saw these squared tree-trunks being fitted and fixed together as tightly as iron dogs could grip them, while lying in a prone position. When all was ready, a hook and cable were attached to the top side, a mighty pull was given by the steam engine, and lo! the section stood upright. Men swarmed over the "bent," as it is called, rapidly drove in the bolts to keep it vertical, the

cross members were lifted up and set in position in the twinkling of an eye. One could see the labyrinth of timber actually growing. Half a mile or so it measures from end to end, and at the point where it spans Sundance Creek it is 125 feet in height. It does not leap across the McLeod river, since that waterway, in the manner peculiar to Canadian rivers, suddenly alters its mind when it meets the turbulent little stream, and bends sharply on itself, making a huge elbow.

That night, as I have hinted, was painful to more than one member of the party. The man who first contrived a substitute for bread, viz. baking powder and bacon fat, giving the mixture the generic name of "bannock," was freely anathematised. The digestions of members of a community accustomed to city life are not prepared for midnight struggles with trail food. Bannock may be highly satisfying, but until the human engine has become accustomed to this class of fuel it is apt to make vigorous protest against it.

The following morning introduced us to one of the tribulations of the trail, and one from which, by the way, we were destined to suffer considerably.

When camp is pitched, and the packs have been removed from the horses' backs, the animals are turned loose into the bush to wander where they will, and to feed how and when they like. Some are blessed with very pronounced roving proclivities, and stray a considerable distance. Then a large train will split up into colonies and each select its own point of the compass. The result is that a pack of thirty may easily be distributed over an area of twenty or thirty square miles. The bush is so thick that they cannot be discovered readily by the packers, who turn out at dawn and proceed afoot through the dense moisture-laden brush in search of them, for their tracks criss-cross in every direction in a bewildering manner. Eyes must be kept open and ears ever on the alert to catch the tinkling

of the bell carried round the animal's neck. Consequently no little skill is required to discern the most recent spoor, and a good "rustler" of horses is not an easy acquisition.

Our packers rolled out of their tents before the sun had thrown its rays over the eastern horizon, but it was nearly seven o'clock before all the horses had been rounded up and coralled within the rope enclosure. Packing occupied a further two and a half hours, so we were late in getting away. The experienced man of the trail likes to hit the hike before the summer sun has shot very high into the heavens, so that the day's journey may be finished about three in the afternoon, a single being generally preferred to a double "drive," the former expression signifying being on the road continuously for several hours instead of for three or four hours in the morning, followed by two or three hours' rest in the heat of the day, and then another three hours' jaunt in the late afternoon. The single drive is certainly preferable. It gets one into camp early, and gives a few hours' recreation before tumbling into the blankets.

Leaving Big Eddy behind us, we made our sinuous way up through the winding valley. We had well-nigh struck the lonely trail now, for the freighters who passed us were few and far between. The ravine was gently undulating, with broad stretches of open expanse on either side, fringed by thick poplar-covered banks and with the glinting fir forming a rising background. Here and there some hardy pioneers had set to work ploughing, and the loam—a deep black chocolate colour, such as one meets for mile after mile on the prairie—proved that the farmers here would have no great difficulty in raising produce.

Before we had ridden more than a mile or so the loneliness of the bush was brought home to us in a vivid manner. Under a lofty cedar tree, whose branches

were bowed down as if in grief, was a small enclosure about seven feet by four. It railed off a rough grassy mound with a cross of two thick wooden sticks nailed crudely together. There was no name, possibly the form sleeping the long rest below had never been known to his "pards" on the trail by other than a nick-name; but when he handed in his checks in the bush, his rough companions had not shirked carrying out the last sad rites in the lonely wilderness to the best of their ability, and, in their own rough way, had marked the spot with two sticks so that one and all might understand the significance of the railing. That lonely little God's acre in the wilds, with its decaying wooden cross, impressed us more forcibly than the crowded cemetery of civilisation bedecked with the most beautiful and ornate mausoleums that architect and sculptor can devise. Its utter simplicity struck a note of strangely vibrating emotional intensity.

We jogged along at a steady pace of about three miles an hour, the pack-train following in our wake like a misshapen snake. Presently the more or less open country gave way to rising slopes, dotted here and there with clumps of towering fir. Up and down over the humps wound the interminable trail. The man who trod that track first paid no regard to cutting corners. He simply followed the line of least resistance. The man who went in his wake did the same, and so did the third, fourth and perhaps ten thousandth pair of feet. Such is the way in which a trail is made through the bush. It is only a matter of six inches in width, and more often than not is forced through a perpendicular wall of bush three or four feet in height. The horse is perfectly at home. He planks his feet comfortably in the rut, beaten down to a depth of six inches or so. But try to walk along the same track with your customary pavement step, and you will soon be stumbling and tripping. Your toes are for ever

striking the wall of the rut, or coming into contact with an obstacle which the horse never discovers. You see an Indian on the trail in front. You are inclined to ridicule his inturned feet, which give him a clumsy, shuffling appearance, and dub him "duck-footed" right away. But watch him silently gliding along at a speed twice that of the pack-horse. He never stumbles or trips, for the simple reason that his inturned toes keep to the centre line of the trail, and even should he come into contact with a small obstacle, owing to the pointed prow-like angle offered by his feet they glance off, as the waves slip by the sharp bow of a vessel.

One of our party was a weather-beaten old-timer, who joined the Hudson's Bay forces in Canada way back in the 'sixties, and whose first important journey was overland from Montreal to Vancouver with provisions for the post at the latter point. That was a journey over the trail and no mistake. The pack-train set out on the 1st of May, and after being buried in the bush for four months, making its three thousand miles' journey, got to its destination in the early days of September. When this trader reached Winnipeg for the first time, what is now a hive of 130,000 hustlers and of sky-scraping buildings was nothing but rolling prairie, broken only by Fort Garry and some shacks which housed a few intrepid whites and more Indians. The "city" of Edmonton numbered only the buildings of the Hudson's Bay post, with a solitary Indian shack to keep it company. That was barely half a century ago. Truly the West has undergone a tremendous transformation, which, however, is still only in its early stage.

It was approaching noon. The sun blazed furiously from an unruffled sky, and the ground reflected the intense heat. We had ridden fairly hard for some four hours on end, and were tired, hungry and thirsty. The warmth in this valley is an outstanding feature being

evidently due to the warm Japanese Chinook wind which blows through the mountain passes. This tempering feature, combined with the richness of the soil and moderate moisture, renders the whole of this stretch of country ideal arable land. It recalls vividly to mind the meteorological conditions prevailing in the southern and south-western counties of England—and, indeed, were it not for occasional glimpses of the white caps of the Rockies, it would not be difficult to imagine that one was gazing on an English scene. While meandering along slowly, we suddenly observed a long, rambling shack perched beneath the trees on a high bank over a creek, and in a few minutes were face to face with another way of making a living in the bush. As we climbed up the bank leading to the shack a sign-board stared us in the face, upon which was printed, in a distinctly amateurish hand, "White Mud. Joe Brown's Stopping Place. Meals, 50 cents."

We had struck a "bush hotel," since a stopping-place for man and beast is the Canadian backwoods equivalent of an English wayside inn, but without a licence. We were in the proscribed area, because the railway was in active progress barely a mile away. Adam's ale was the only available refreshment with which it appeared possible for us to quench our thirst. But old Joe Brown rose to the occasion. He brought in a pail filled with ice-cold water, from which jutted out the necks of four black bottles, bearing a label which looked like a well-known brand of Scotch whisky. But the label was a fraud. The contents were merely good, wholesome, unadulterated cider. But never had cider so welcome a taste—never was the juice of the apple so refreshing. It stimulated us for a good hearty lunch.

Old Joe Brown—everybody calls him old, though he is as skittish as a kitten, despite his advanced middle age—raked us up some succulent young lettuces and

spring onions which he had raised on a small patch beneath the shadow of his livery stable. He had not troubled to dig, but had merely scratched the surface with a primitive rake and sown his seed; the climate and the richness of the soil had completed the work. It was a roaring big lunch to which we sat down and did ample justice, extending from tomato soup through prime steaks, chops, vegetables, stewed fruits, milk puddings and pies, to cheese and crackers, the whole washed down with copious draughts of good tea or cocoa. And the total cost was two shillings a head. I have sat down to a meal in a London hotel costing six times as much, and not had such variety, such abundance, and such nourishing, wholesome victuals as this *chef* of the woods gave us in his primitive log hut. One wondered how he could do it.

"Blest if I know," he replied to an interrogation on the subject. "But I do. It's the number as pays."

"Number? Where on earth do customers come from out here? Do you grow them in the woods?"

"Gee! You ought to have been here last season. Why, I cleaned up a good wad. For weeks on end I served three hundred meals a day to a hundred men here—that was 150 dollars—say, £30—and had my four large stables chock full of horses every night, and they represented a good bit of money. They were rattling good times, were they. But I can tell you, one has got to look alive to make it pay at 50 cents a meal. It's the freight what kills, for I have to bring everything in from Wolf Creek by road. I lay in stock for ten months ahead, having it brought in during winter by sleigh. That way of freighting's cheaper, costing me 65 cents—2s. 8½d.—the hundred pounds. Even then the expense of transporting many things, such as matches, runs into more than the value of the articles. When I first come out here the railway could not transport farther than Entwistle, and from there goods

had to be freighted in by road, fifty-four miles, to Wolf Creek. I then had to bring them another thirty-three miles to White Mud. Well, at that time flour cost me 50s. the hundred pounds—6d. a pound—owing to the long freight haul, and I had to make it up into bread, pies and what not to serve with a two-shilling meal. It seems impossible, but I did it, and it paid me pretty well too. Now flour costs me 14s. 6d. the hundred pounds. If I hadn't known the game backwards I never could have made it pay. But I had been twenty years as cook on a Grand Trunk Railway dining-car running between Montreal and Chicago, and the experience there gained stood me in good stead out here, where good cooking, and first-class pastry especially, are highly appreciated. These backwoods fellows are keen critics in matters pertaining to the culinary art."

Brown is a genial host, and can relate yarns by the hour. No one thinks of passing White Mud without looking him up, as we readily recognised, for even in the space of an hour several men appeared suddenly from out of the bush, disposed of a good square meal, and apparently disappeared to nowhere in particular in the scrub.

"What made me come out here?" answered old Joe to our inquiry. "Well, twenty years on a train sickened me somewhat. I had grown tired of the city, and wanted to see what the Great West, of which I had heard so much in conversation with passengers, was really like. I had saved a few hundred dollars, and some pals of mine having made good out here at this kind of thing, I decided to make a splash. So here I am. I settled on this spot when the railway was so far back as Edmonton—160 miles east—and it was pretty lonely and uphill work at first. I had a bit of difficulty in obtaining labour to assist me in putting up this shack, which cost me £240, the wood being obtained on the spot. I then sat down to wait for my

first customers. They were not long in coming. The contractors were pushing their camps ahead of the end-of-steel, and things were pretty busy last summer and winter. Of course, when the contractors commenced railway building about a mile yonder, they set up their own kitchen and brought in their own cook, so that my trade fell off. But I cannot grumble. Things, though a bit slack just now, will look up again directly as the end-of-steel approaches. You see, a lot of material has got to be forwarded yet. When that is over I shall sell out this holding and move a hundred miles or so farther on. That's the way to make money out here at this game."

While we were lounging around after our repast we suddenly heard a wild cheering, and looking around saw Brown throwing brickbats as hard as he could down the bank.

"Hello! you son of a gun!" he yelled. "What the blazes have you come out here again for?"—accompanying each word with the heaving of a good-sized rock at some hidden object.

In a second or two the target hove in sight up the bank. It was our leading packer, who was dodging the missiles as best he could, and laughing merrily at the top of his voice at Brown's ineffective aim. This was a curious means of extending a greeting in the wilds; but when the packer dismounted the two disappeared into the shack, and the rafters rang with vociferous laughter, that of the packer being a kind of wild gurgling and choking as he endeavoured to force down a pumpkin pie at the same time that he was exercising his risible faculties. The two were old companions, but the appearance of the packer had somewhat roused Brown's exuberance, which had found vent in the vigorous fusillade greeting. Truly the ways of the bush are strange.

That afternoon we had our first shock. We were

44 THE NEW GARDEN OF CANADA

riding along the hump of a cliff, taking in the magnificent panorama of mountain unfolded before us. The cliff dropped sheer down for some 300 feet into the McLeod river, which ambled along lazily, and from its opposite bank tall cathedral pines waved backwards to the foot of the snow-capped Rockies, the whole range of which stood out clearly before us in the dazzling sunlight, the ice and glaciers reflecting the rays of the sun like diamonds.

The trail along the cliff was very narrow and riven with small ditches, down which the surface water after a rainstorm cascades into the McLeod. The party had strung out to a length of half a mile or so, our pace having slackened down to a tortoise's gallop, so that one and all might admire the beauty of the scene at leisure. The foremost members, including myself, had drawn up at an ugly wound in the cliff face, where a gang of rock-drillers were busily engaged tearing out a path for the railway, which skirts the summit of this precipice. We were intently following the disengagement of huge chunks of rock—how they were prised and warped to the cliff edge, and then forced over to go hopping, skipping and jumping down the perpendicular wall with increasing velocity, until they ended their mad career with a loud report and a terrific splash in the river. We had pulled our horses to the brink of the cutting, to follow operations at the closest possible range, when a wild cry broke out behind.

Casting round, we saw one of the members of the party coming along like the wind and pulling his steed furiously. His horse had bolted. Jumping a ditch, it had rapped its forelegs against some concealed iron rods used by the drillers, and the terrific clatter that ensued among the disturbed rods frightened the horse out of its wits. It made straight for the cliff edge, reaching which, it made a sharp swerve and drove right into us. As it swung round from certain death we lost sight of

the rider, and to our horror we saw the saddle go over the cliff.

"Good heavens! he's over!"

We slipped off our horses and ran to the spot, expecting to see the battered corpse of our friend lying at the bottom of the cliff. We crawled out on hands and knees, but could see no trace of him, except the saddle, caught on a projecting rock about ten feet below. The gangers had thrown down their tools, and were likewise peering intently into the gulch below.

"What's the matter? Who are you looking for?" asked a trembling voice behind us.

It was our friend Charlton. We were looking for his mangled body, and here he was beside us, as white as a sheet, and rubbing his right shoulder pretty vigorously.

"Gee! That was a close shave. What happened?"

"The girth snapped just as the brute swerved at the edge, pitching me to the ground in a small ditch, and throwing the saddle the other way over the cliff."

Charlton looked pretty scared, as well he might. He was as near handing in his checks as ever he had been in his life, and had the saddle not given way as it did, there is no doubt but that horse and rider would have been hurled over.

Valleys and humps alternate with striking regularity, and the fertility of the low-lying stretches is astonishing. This peculiarity becomes more pronounced the nearer the mountains are approached. Vetches grow in the wildest profusion and to a great height, twining round the slim trunks of the poplar trees like hops. We came across more than one little patch in these depressions where some energetic pioneer had succeeded in raising vegetables, and there is no doubt but that throughout this stretch of Alberta a great future is available for truck or market gardening. The rolling humps protect the valleys from the biting winds of the north and east. The raising

of fodder for cattle should prove highly remunerative, as we found wide open expanses of rich, succulent pasturage bordering the streams. It was now that driving the ship of the bush became an exacting task. The animals could not resist the tempting growth and straggled from the trail, gulping down large mouthfuls at gluttonous speed, until the packer hove in sight, and they were stimulated into rapid forward movement once more under the strident tones of his adjurations. Even then they were not going to be denied, for they incessantly made a big snatch here and there as they went along.

We had threaded our way for about thirteen and a half miles beyond White Mud, and now bade adieu to the McLeod, whose winding waters had kept us company for so many miles. We had gained the "Leavings," or, as it was called in the olden days, "Plum Pudding Cache." From this point the river makes a sudden break to the south, for the rising low mountain immediately ahead is the divide between the McLeod and Athabaska rivers. In its wandering southwards for two or three score miles, the McLeod cuts a channel which, when traced out on paper, resolves itself into the striking profile of a human face. The trail, however, keeps to a direct westerly course, crossing the divide at almost its highest point.

CHAPTER IV

Crossing the Divide into the Athabaska Valley

The Trail becomes more difficult—Muskeg—Over the Divide into the Athabaska Valley—A Hundred-Thousand-Acre Fire—A Dismal Way—An Altitude of 4,640 feet—Beginning the Descent—A Terrific Storm—"Hikers"—Hardisty Creek—Prairie Creek—Beheading a Hill—A Bush Hospital—Antiseptic Effect of the Air.

"You've got a pretty stiff trail in front of you," remarked a freighter coming eastwards. "The muskeg's pretty bad. It's been fixed a bit here and there, but I should advise you to go carefully."

It was not long before we were destined to find out just what that muskeg was like. So far, the trail had been what the Westerner calls "easy," though perhaps I should have disputed the veracity of that phrase with my knowledge of English roads, lanes and footpaths. Now we were brought face to face with one of its worst phases. Muskeg is nothing more nor less than swamp; a peat bog would be the nearest simile, and it is almost as treacherous. It is formed, as I have said, of the decayed vegetable accumulations of centuries, saturated with stagnant water. It looks fairly substantial with its top growth of stubble and moss, calling to mind nothing so much as a pond dried up by the heat in summer, leaving its evil-looking, cracked bottom with dank puddles here and there. More often than not a stream will be running through the mass in a semi-subterranean manner. One particularly bad patch ran right across our trail. A person walking does not experience any untoward results beyond a possible springiness beneath the feet, and the sudden slide of a foot now and again into viscous slime up to the

knee. But woe betide the horse that gets caught in its sticky clutches. Some animals are more adept at crossing the muskeg than others, being intuitively guided as to the best way to step from point to point. But, as a rule, the horse's foot plunges into the mass like a stake driven by a hammer, and the brute has to exercise considerable effort to withdraw it.

When he comes to the edge of a swamp the pack-horse sniffs round suspiciously and paws his feet in a half-hearted manner. He puts one foot carefully forward, brings it back again, and moves sideways a trifle to reach out to a rather more substantial-looking spot. Then he strikes out. His feet give a wicked squelch as they go down, and another ominous gurgle as they are pulled out. As he proceeds he sinks deeper and deeper, until he is immersed almost to his girth. Feet drawn from the stirrup, you keep a sharp eye on the animal's movements, ready to spring clear the moment he gets into difficulties. The poor beast lurches rather than walks, and no little effort is required to preserve your balance. Should you slip—well, you may be certain of a good sousing in the most evil-looking semi-liquid mass it is possible to imagine. One packer came a cropper through his animal losing his balance, and when he at last got up he presented a sorry sight. He could not have looked worse if he had fallen into Thames mud. It took us over half an hour to cross that muskeg, although it was not more than 60 feet in width. The slow progress was due to a pack-horse getting caught. He stepped into a concealed bad spot, and instantly sank up to his girth. Then he started kicking and floundering as if demented, but the weight of the pack and his own frantic struggles only served to cause him to sink deeper and deeper into the mire. At last he gave it up, and rolled helplessly over on to his side. In the twinkling of an eye the packers had rushed to his assistance. Wading up to well over their knees—a packer never knows what it is to

possess a dry pair of nether garments—they released the pack and hauled it to one side. Then, while one pulled at the bridle, the others pushed against the flank, the animal meanwhile being urged to a fresh attempt at extrication. The mud flew about in clouds, spattering the packers from head to feet. The more the horse struggled the louder yelled the packers, and the more they tugged and pushed. At last, with a supreme effort, the horse sprang out of the hole and stood on dry ground, shaking and trembling like an aspen leaf.

For mile after mile we had to battle against this treacherous muskeg, and it was tiring and heavy work. Sometimes we would see a bad spot in the middle of the trail, and, sooner than attempt to force our way through, would make a wide detour, only to be caught in a worse place, and would wallow and flounder in water and mud three or four feet deep. Very few of us could boast a dry suit of clothes in the course of three or four hours' tussle with this frolic of Nature's, and our garments looked much the worse for wear, with their thick, large and frequent blotches of black, unsavoury mud.

Every ledge on that hill could boast a muskeg, for the water collects in the basin-like depressions, and there awaits the unwary. At more than one place we could see that the freighters who occasionally came so far as this had been engaged in a stiff fight, and had resorted to the only defensive measure possible. This is the building of a corduroy; merely the trunks of trees and branches felled by the wayside and laid transversely beside one another, forming a kind of mat. These in themselves are a first-rate trap to catch the careless horseman, for as the horse walks over them they roll round, causing the animal to stumble and stagger like a drunken man, while here and there, where a dead trunk has been pressed into service, it will collapse beneath the horse's weight, and let its feet through into the unstable ooze below. One stretch of muskeg we traversed, at the foot of a towering

hump over which the trail wound its way, was spanned by a section of corduroy over a quarter of a mile long. This particular causeway had been well built in its time, having longitudinal heavy trees upon which the cross logs were laid. But it had fallen somewhat into decay, and now and again when a horse put its foot down a broken log would fly up like a big tip-cat.

The divide proved to be one of the most desolate stretches on the whole of the trail. Some fifty years ago it was clothed from foot to crest with fine massive timber, the value of which must have run into hundreds of thousands of pounds. Then a fire swept through the mass, denuding over a hundred thousand acres. Where before stretched an endless expanse of varying shades of green, where towering pines converted the trail into a picturesque avenue, is now nothing but depressing sterility. The sky-line is broken on all sides by gaunt tree-stumps, which, burnt and scorched and bare, make a ghastly blot on the landscape. The ground is piled to a height of ten, twelve—aye, twenty feet with the decomposing carcasses of what were once stately trees, criss-crossed and packed into such a dense, impenetrable maze as to beat you back should you attempt to break from the trail. On a hot summer's day, when the sun is pouring down relentlessly from a cloudless sky, the effect is poignantly acute, for nothing is so liable to provoke depression on the trail as dead tree-stumps for mile after mile on all sides. The bush is endeavouring to hide these grisly wounds inflicted upon Nature by the fire fiend, but only serves to render the scene more melancholy. The silence is one that can be felt, for not a sound breaks the stillness of the wilderness, save possibly the wind, which whistles and sighs through the ugly jagged standing trunks as if mourning the desolation. The trail is littered with the fallen monarchs which have been levelled by tempest, and each successive gale only serves to render the trail more difficult and the going more

trying. A trunk between three and four feet in diameter is a fearsome obstacle across your path, and you have to plough your way as best you can through the bush—the branches of which cut your face like a whip—to make your way round the obstruction. When you plunge into the undergrowth you cannot see where you are going. You trust blindly to luck and the sagacity of the pack-horse. Tangled vegetation walls you in on every side and closes over your head. It is by sheer weight that you force your way, clinging tightly to your saddle for fear that you should be suddenly unseated, rocking wildly from side to side as the horse stumbles and falls over concealed rotting trees, and keeping as sharp an eye as you can in the circumstances for snags—the dead branches of trees snapped off near the trunk, leaving only a few inches projecting which are capable of inflicting uglier wounds than a bayonet.

The dangers of the dead and living vegetation were only equalled by the perils of the ground over which we were picking our toilsome way. Now and again there would be a savage jolt, caused by the horse flopping into a mudhole, or slipping on its haunches, as a piece of rock rolled away from under its feet. Under such conditions it is not surprising that but little more than a mile an hour can be registered. When at times a hundred feet or so of free trail is met and the country opens out, letting you secure a glimpse of the middle and extreme distance, you pull up for a welcome breather and to gather strength for another plunge into the blinding bush.

One such peep as we got through a rift in the mountain side afforded us a gorgeous view to the east. We were at an altitude of about 4,000 feet, and the expanse of rolling country was impressively vast. The atmosphere was wonderfully clear, and for some fifty or seventy miles stretched away nothing but trees, trees, trees, to the point where earth and sky appeared to meet in a wavy line. We

could see the meandering McLeod stretching for miles, and could take in many of its remarkably sharp hairpin bends, with here and there a large blob of scintillating crystal where the river had spread itself over a depression forming a lake. That was the last glimpse of the McLeod we obtained, for the interminable dead jack pine presently blotted out the panorama.

Up, up we toiled, winding round crags, in and out piles of windfall, over hummocks of rocks, through furiously boiling creeks and innocent-looking muskegs. The heat was intense, and the arduousness of the going set up violent perspiration. At first coats were shed, and then sweaters, in order to seek a little relief; and when this was insufficient, shirt fronts were opened wide to the slight cooling breeze.

At last the summit was gained. We had notched an altitude of 4,640 feet. Wolf Creek to our rear was only 2,500 feet above the Atlantic, and to cross the Rockies by the Yellowhead we should not have to rise to such a height as this. This was the greatest altitude we should attain throughout the whole of our journey. We had been climbing steadily for nearly five hours, and had covered about ten miles—two miles an hour cannot be construed into fast travelling, but in the circumstances we considered we had done well. On one hand the McLeod made its way, on the other rolled the mighty Athabaska. The nearest point between the banks of these two rivers over the divide as the crow flies is about ten miles; by trail it is nearly twice as much. Utter desolation enveloped us on every side, and the summit of that divide is about the most melancholy spot on which human eyes could alight. During our persistent climb scarcely a word had been spoken. All topics of conversation had long been exhausted; dead timber and a windfall-strewn trail, with their pitfalls and dangers, are not conducive to comment, except of a querulous character.

And the prospect as we started down the western slope was even more disconsolate than that on the eastern ascent. Brilliant sunshine and perspiring warmth had attended our climb; now we were to experience the reverse conditions. Dense black clouds came rolling up the Athabaska valley, and in the distance could be heard the growling of thunder. As we dipped lower and lower the growling grew louder and the gathering gloom was relieved by brilliant flashes of vivid lightning ribboning across the black canopy from one ridge to the other. The wind suddenly sprang up, and was soon whistling through the dead, silent forest. Now another danger confronted us. It is bad enough to have to keep your eyes glued to the ground for deadfall and muskeg, but when there is danger from collapsing giants suddenly surrendering to the fury of the storm the perils are a thousand times worse. When that visitation burst above our heads, it was as if inferno had been let loose. The clouds enveloped the country in an almost inky blackness, and when the lightning flashed the brilliance of the momentary illumination was blinding, and threw the gaunt trunks into powerful, grotesque relief. The deafening crash and roll was continuous as the heavy artillery of Nature reverberated from mountain top to mountain top, and the effect upon the drums of the ears was very similar to that experienced when standing in close proximity to a twelve-inch gun at the moment of discharge. Instinctively one clapped hands over ears to stop the violent vibration and singing. When there was a momentary lull in the thunders, there was heard the crack, creak, and final terrifying crash of a towering tree being swept to the ground by the wind. Advancing up the valley was an opaque, dull grey-coloured sheet, stretching from one side right across to the other, and completely blotting out everything in its rear. The curtain advanced with startling velocity, and in a few minutes we were enveloped in a torrential downpour. Fortunately

we had donned our slickers in time, otherwise we should have been soaked to the skin before we could have slipped them on when the rain broke over us. The downfall was so heavy that the water bounced off our oil-soaked outer cloaks in miniature cascades.

One of the strangest features of the trail is the comparatively large number of travellers one meets afoot. They disdain the pack-horse because they can get along quicker by Shanks's pony. This is perfectly true, for whereas with a horse, on a trail such as winds over the divide, one can only reckon on a steady one and a-half to two miles an hour, afoot one can easily keep up a pace of three or four miles an hour—and these backwoodsmen are pedestrians of the finest class. As we dropped down into the Athabaska valley, we met one of these "hikers." He was trudging sturdily along, with no protection against the inclement weather, with only a small pack strapped to his back, and his rifle slung over his shoulder. He was truly making a steady three miles an hour, and as he came within hailing distance cheerily sang out. We drew rein, and inquired after his welfare.

"Where are you going?"

"Wolf Creek."

Phew! This was something like a walk. It was nearly six o'clock; there was a fearsome lonely trail over rough country, and there was no likelihood of his meeting a soul for sixteen miles. But he never paused in his gait. He went on like a machine, throwing back answers to our interrogations.

"How long are you going to keep going to-night?"

"Until about nine. Then I'll make a fire, roll up in my blanket until dawn, and be off again."

"How about food?"

"I'm all right. I've got some bannock and cold pork in my pocket. That'll do for to-night, and I'll strike a railway camp about ten in the morning."

"Nothing wanted?"

"No, thanks! Good night."

He was gone—lost to sight round a bend in the trail. Yet his was no isolated case. We met many a hiker, who either disdained his horse or did not possess one, plodding along as nonchalantly as a pedestrian treads a city street. Many prospectors we met were in this plight, their animals being fully loaded with the requirements for the trail. Fortunately good fellowship prevails in the bush, and when travellers meet, the first inquiry is in regard to respective food supplies or other requirements. If a man hits a camp late at night, he is always freely welcomed and a meal straightway prepared for him. The hospitality on the narrow pathway in the wilderness is unique. The one may be a millionaire and the other a "hobo," but social inequalities are forgotten, and they sit down like brothers to share and share alike.

We pulled up for that night at a stopping-place which was among the most isolated it was our lot to encounter. It was a Scotsman's investment, and Mackenzie dwelt there in lonely state. His patronage seemed even more remote than that of Joe Brown at White Mud, but he was looking to the future, so he said. Even as it was, he had about a dozen or so callers a day. We made a raid on his menu, but unfortunately we found the mosquitoes somewhat pugnacious in the heat of the shack, gulped down our supper, and beat a hurried retreat to the open, where we set to work putting up our tents on ground that held the water like a sponge. It was a dreary spot on the banks of a little creek, with only the chipmunks for company, but in the course of an hour two freighters, with their lumbering wagon and team of oxen, pulled in. Though they were as taciturn as the majority of these backwoodsmen—the silence of the bush appears to enter the very souls of those who move therein—we managed to pull and tear some little scraps of conversation out of them, though it was not of a very enlightening character, being confined mostly to the trials of the

freighter's life and the hardness of the grind for a few dollars.

When we set out again, we left the burned timber and deadfall behind us with little regret. Poplar scrub, here dense and there sparse, relieved with wide open patches, was traversed, and we made a merry, swinging pace. The valley of the Athabaska is destined to become one of the busiest and most prosperous gardens of the North-West in the next decade. On the southern and western side of the river the land rolls back very gently, and extensive open expanses of meadowland, easily reclaimable for the plough, were traversed. Some of these little prairies, as they are called in the vernacular, are of large area, and the grass grows luxuriantly. The great majority of those entirely void of scrub and practically level were already occupied, pioneers having grabbed up the land, not for cultivation, but to hold to sell to the seekers for farms who follow in throngs behind the end-of-steel. Some are in the possession of the Indians, who till a small patch during the summer, on which they raise the barest necessities of life, eking out an existence during the winter by trapping, though in this territory fur and feather life has been wellnigh exterminated. But the Indian is just as canny as the white man, perhaps more so. He can live on a scantier and simpler diet than his rival, and the cheaper he can live the more he wants for his holding. Down by the river-side the soil is exceedingly rich, and the pasturage thrives thick and high. As we dropped lower and lower into the valley the Rockies loomed higher and higher, with gaunt bare slopes of limestone—for, taken on the whole, these sides exposed to the bitter east and north have not enough soil to support the hardest of vegetation, and the contrast between the glittering snowcaps and the sombre dull massive flanks is very impressive.

We first swept down to the edge of the Athabaska at Hardisty Creek, which tumbles into the larger river, and

over which Mount Hardisty stands sentinel. The waterway had already attained respectable proportions, being about three hundred yards in width and swinging along at about eight miles an hour. Crossing the creek, we pressed on through another six miles of excellent arable land, until the low-lying flat came to an abrupt conclusion at Prairie Creek. This flat is semicircular and about a mile across, the hills hemming it in like a huge amphitheatre. This was our destination for the night. So we thought; but the gods and horses willed otherwise. However, it was an idyllic situation, and our enforced prolonged stay of two days was highly enjoyable, for here a pronouncedly British element among the resident engineering staff served to while away the time in first-class style, as they could relate experiences in the backwoods without end. From here were obtained magnificent glimpses of the outer barrier of the Rockies, which, owing to the clear atmosphere, seemed no more than half a dozen or so miles away—in reality the distance was nearer thirty miles—and as we were at a low level they seemed to rear up suddenly in massive peaks to a great height.

We followed the operations of a gang cutting off the top of the hill on the northern side to make way for the iron road. Five or six horses were harnessed to a plough, which was driven up and down a steep declivity having a gradient of about 1 in $2\frac{1}{2}$. On the descent the grader lowered the steel nose of the implement into the ground, which, as the horses tugged downwards, loosened the earth and stones, sending the spoil glancing along an angular plate, in the same manner as a snow-plough works in the street. When the horses neared the bottom of the decline they sat down on their haunches to form a brake, and at the critical moment gave a sudden sweep and swung the plough at right angles, shooting the removed spoil in a rattle down the hillside for two hundred feet or so. In this way the crown of the hill was being lowered rapidly. A little farther on the hillside was being

removed in huge chunks by dynamite to provide foundations for an 800-foot bridge which was to span a wide gorge in order to gain a ledge on the opposite mountain shoulder.

About half a mile east of the camp, nestling among the trees, was a strange blend of civilisation and the wild North-West. Here was a long, rambling building erected in the ordinary log-shack manner. The large door was entered, and there stood out in regular rows a number of cots replete with snowy white linen. This was the railway construction hospital, and it would have done credit to many a town in regard to its equipment. The care of the men in sickness and accident is one of the first thoughts of the contractors. One ward was available for contagious diseases, while its fellow served for housing accident cases. The floor was spotless, as were also the walls and ceiling, though fashioned of rough timber. The cots were equipped with every requirement, and two attendants were retained to tend the patients. At the time of our visit there was only one solitary case—an axeman, while wielding his axe, having lost three toes of one foot through the tool glancing and cutting through his boot. No case, no matter how complicated its character, could baffle the resources of this hospital in the bush. There was an operating theatre, spacious, well-lighted and finished off in white American cloth, to permit easy and rapid washing down, with every requisite for the most serious operation. Alongside was a well-stocked dispensary.

The hospital is presided over by a fully qualified physician and surgeon, as well as a resident doctor, but fortunately their services are seldom required. The worst case that had come into their hands up to the time of my visit, the doctor related, was where a man in working a grading-plough had slipped and had his thigh, body, and legs torn badly by a hook. Septic poisoning was feared, but he recovered in next to no time, an effect due

in a great measure to the healthy physique of the patient and the bracing purity of the air.

The rapidity and ease with which men who meet with accidents in the bush recover without skilled medical advice or special treatment is astonishing. A man's axe slips and pulls up in his leg, inflicting a gaping wound or possibly lopping off a toe or two. No antiseptic or other washing is resorted to, but the injury is bound up tightly with the first material that comes handy. These men never give a thought to the possibilities of foreign matter or microbes entering the wound. They know practically nothing about blood-poisoning. There is no special dieting, for the simple reason that it cannot be adopted, even if advisable; but in a few days the man is out and about, following his usual occupation.

CHAPTER V

Jasper Park to the Foothills of the Rockies

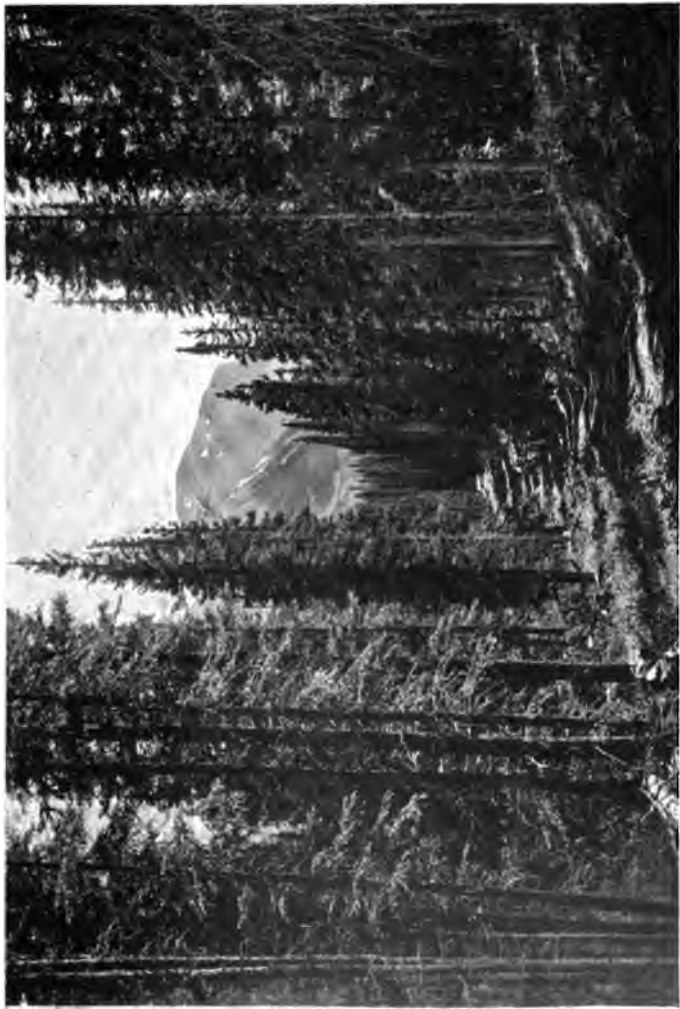
Indians as Caretakers of Horses—A Park half as large as Belgium—Charms of Jasper Park—An old Pioneer—Drystone Creek—An Excursion to Brulé Lake—The Game Warden of Jasper Park—Sealing Firearms—Hot Springs at Fiddle Creek—An Enormous Coal Bed.

OUR arrangements permitted the acceptance of but a single night's hospitality of the resident engineer at Prairie Creek. But Fate, as typified by the pack-horses and Indians, was against us. The packers were out early in the morning "rustling" for the creatures, but they came in five short. Where the others were they could not say; the bush is as tight in regard to its secrets as the slums of a city. We were stranded all that day while penetrating though futile search was made for the missing beasts.

The packer in charge came to us in dismay.

"Can't find those plugs anywhere. Those sons o' guns o' Indians have coralled them!" he growled, scratching his head.

The resident engineer thought this was very probable. The red men are extremely wily, and if they can turn a dollar over, no matter how dubious the method, they will do so. They would not openly practise horse-stealing, as that would bring them up against the law. So they resort to subterfuge. They know that horses are gregarious. Consequently stragglers in the bush are lured away by driving their own cayouses among them, and thus all are rounded up in a bunch. If the owners discover their animals among the cayouses, the Indians naïvely remark that they had not noticed the strangers.



CANADA'S LATEST ACQUISITION IN THE FAR WEST.

A peep in the Jasper National Park. This is to be preserved as 5,000 square miles of primeval North-West.



"What's to be done, Walter?"

The packer scratched his forehead vigorously.

"Darned if I know, 'cept offer a reward. If I catch 'em, there'll be something doing. If we put up ten dollars for the discovery of the plugs, they'll appear like lightning."

It certainly is amazing with what alacrity lost horses will appear in a territory inhabited by Indians when a reward is offered.

At this juncture the owner of the horses appeared on the scene, having driven hard on our heels, and the situation was explained to him.

"Well, look here," he remarked, after listening to the recital of details, "I can get another five horses. You push on, and I'll tempt them with ten dollars."

Walter the packer knew the Indians and their ways. He observed the speed with which the Indians scurried off. Jumping astride his own horse, he pelted hard towards the bush after them, and was soon lost to sight. Three hours later he was observed driving towards the camp like mad, with five frantic and kicking animals in front of him. They were the lost beasts.

"Did you stump up, Walter?"

"Not by a darn sight."

"Where were they?"

"Corralled! The Indians had got 'em! I guessed that was what was up."

"Did you have any trouble?" asked one of the party. The red man is always ready to levy a complaint against the paleface to the Mounted Police, and we did not wish to court trouble in that direction.

"Not much!" and Walter gave a merry chuckle.

It seemed as though he had enjoyed an untoward adventure, so we pressed for information.

"Well, it was like this. I didn't like the look of those Indians, so I tracked 'em. I came up against a settler's

shack. A white woman was at home, and I asked her if she'd seen any stray horses about?

"'No,' she replied slowly; but all of a sudden she started out: 'Come to think of it, I saw the Indian below driving home his beasts last evenin', and he had one or two new 'uns among 'em. But ask that boy thar, he'll tell you.'

"I went up to his Indian lordship. I sounded 'im, and said I'd give 'im ten dollars if he found 'em. He said 'he'd 'ave a look,' and bolted off. I got to the windward side of 'im in the bush and followed 'im. I saw him makin' for an Indian shack, so I slipped off my 'plug,' whipped ahead, and got to the shack first. Thar I found the whole bunch. As I war leadin' 'em out, up came the red boy. 'Give ten doll'rs!' 'No, sonny,' I replied, 'I found 'em, not you; I guess I'll get that reward.' The boy stormed and cussed, but I steered in: 'Now, sonny, cut it out. If I hear any more o' yar palaver, I'll 'ave the Mounted Police on your track. I'll meet one to-morrow, so look out for trouble.' He hiked like a shot grizzly. And here we are, so now we'd better be gettin' a move on!"

We heard no more of the episode. The threat of the Mounted Police was enough. No one dreads the little man with the yellow stripe more than the Indian, especially if he has been up to any underhand work, for his punishment is short and sharp.

We were soon on the trail again, but the first half-mile was a teaser. We had to get to the summit of the ridge overlooking the western side of Prairie Creek, and it entailed a climb of three or four hundred feet rising one in two. It was like walking up the side of a house, and though the path zig-zagged like a worm in agony, it was pretty difficult work. Half an hour slipped by before we paused for a breather on the crest, for man and beast were puffing furiously.

It was all downhill now. When the horses had got

their second wind we set off gaily, winding in and out of the poplar scrub. In a short time these slim trees gave way to tall, stately, cathedral pines. We had entered Canada's latest acquisition—the Jasper National Park. This is a tremendous reservation, comprising five thousand square miles—a tract half the size of Belgium—of some of the finest stretches of mountain, valley, river and forest scenery to be found in the whole of the Dominion. This is a territory rich in historic associations and Indian legend; it was the scene of many a fierce tussle between the Hudson's Bay and the North-West Trading Companies for supremacy in the fur trade.

The preservation of this imposing expanse for the public in perpetuity was an excellent move on the part of the Dominion Government, and their action will be more highly appreciated by posterity, since, as it is intended to retain the natural characteristics of the country, future generations will be able to obtain a graphic idea of the wild, difficult character of their country when the pack-horse or Shanks's pony was the only means of conveyance, and of the heavy odds against which the pioneers in the unknown West were pitted when they undertook to lift the veil from the wilderness. Nothing will be done to the Park, except that wide roads will be driven through the dense bush in order to facilitate movement from one part to the other, and that the reserve will be bisected by the iron path of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, by means of which the Park will be brought into direct, easy touch with the teeming cities east and west.

The diversified view of woodland and riverscape is one of the grandest in the country, and the grim, frowning mountains, with their white, glittering mantles and scintillating peaks, form an imposing frame to the picture. The Park stretches right up to the inter-provincial boundary, a matter of sixty miles or so as the bird flies. Lofty coigns of vantage, from which wonderful vistas are unfolded, are accessible on every side; and when trails

are driven to these eyries, tourists and sightseers, anxious to catch glimpses of Nature unadorned, will be able to gratify their desire to the full in ease and comfort.

One hundred years ago the district teemed with game of all descriptions—bear, marten, mink, beaver, elk, mountain goat, sheep, cariboo and so forth roaming in profusion. But during later years the Indians, roving to and fro in what they considered their happy hunting-ground, almost exterminated every indigenous animal. When it was announced that the Government were going to take over the 3,200,000 acres, and that the Indians would have to move to pastures new, they had a grand final round up. Precisely what the total of that slaughter was is unknown, but it must have been considerable. By making the reservation an asylum for game of all descriptions, with perfect freedom to go wherever they like, the authorities hope to be able gradually to bring about a re-stocking of the preserve. But they will have to take the Park in hand at the earliest possible moment, for it is in sore need of overhauling to ensure its security. The forest is densely piled up with deadfall, as dry as tinder. Should this be ignited, the whole stretch of magnificent cathedral pines, cedar and other noble trees would be devastated, and the Park would present as desolate and melancholy a scene as the divide.

On the confines of the Park we came across a hardy old pioneer of some seventy summers. Gregg was his name, and his had been a marvellous example of burial alive in the wilderness. He had squatted on a flat some twenty-five years before, when the nearest railway station was two hundred miles or so away. We found him extremely taciturn, replying monosyllabically when we plied him with questions. But what else was to be expected after nearly a quarter of a century's immersion in the bush, without a soul to whom to speak outside his own family circle, except when he ventured to

Edmonton to re-stock his provisions? But he had been wonderfully industrious. His farm wore an appearance of high productivity and gayness, the vegetables being well developed and wonderfully healthy, while his stretches of pasturage were brilliantly green, dense, and of great promise.

The trail through the National Park had been widened already to admit of the passage of a wagon, with muskeg corduroyed and streams bridged, so that progress was easy and rapid. Towering, graceful pines girdled either side, forming a beautiful avenue still retaining its primeval characteristics. As one looked down the cleavage through the trees, the view was completed by a massive sombre-looking wall garbed with a rich green to the top, for the trail skirts the foothills. Then the trees fell back, and we emerged upon a rolling depression where the trail switchbacked in a gentle manner. The gloom of the forest gave way to a gay brilliancy, for the wild tiger-lily here flourishes luxuriantly, and at the time of our visit was at the height of its beauty. The bright flamingo-red of this bulb stood out in striking contrast to the greens of the trees and the dull blackish grey of the mountains, presenting a scene of gorgeous splendour.

The tiger-lily is not the only flower indigenous to this region. cursory examination revealed a score of plants which are raised with difficulty in an English garden thriving in wild luxuriance—such flowers as the campanula, primrose-calceolaria, aquilegia, sunflower, summer chrysanthemum, moon-daisy and Michaelmas daisy. When this Park is rendered accessible by the railway, it will be a treasure-ground for the botanist because of the flowers, ornamental grasses, mosses and lichens growing here in the greatest profusion.

We hugged the foothills tightly for mile after mile. Then the trail gave a sudden dip and swerve to the west. As we urged our way through a dense stretch

of undergrowth in the low-lying, damp ground, the mountain range which had faced us for so long like an endless wall seemed to have been forced apart with a gigantic wedge, for we came to an abruptly rounded end known as Folding Mountain. We had gained the broad gateway through which the Athabaska debouches from the mountains, and where it becomes slightly swollen by the waters of Fiddle and Drystone Creeks. We swung across the latter and under Folding Mountain—which appears to fold up as you swing round its base, but with its bare mottled head has a stronger resemblance to a crouching animal—we pitched our camp.

Up to this point, except for the fatiguing toil over the divide the trail had been tolerably easy. Now its difficulties loomed up in dead earnest. We called a halt at this point because a side journey was to be made to Brulé Lake. We reached Drystone Creek early on a hot summer's Sunday afternoon. One or two members of the party felt uncomfortably hot, were bathed in perspiration and grimed with dust. The shallow, limpid waters of the creek were so fascinatingly inviting that they decided upon a "dip." No comment was offered, but a grim smile flickered round the mouths of the packers, as if in anticipation of some fun. The seekers for a bath toddled off to find a shady pool, were soon stripped, and with a gay shout made a plunge. But the sound of the water splash had scarcely struck the ears of the others in camp when there ensued a savage, long-drawn-out, tremulous "Whoo-oo-oo-oo!" and the bathers were out again on the bank shivering, and rubbing themselves vigorously. The packers burst out into uproarious mirth. The "tenderfeet" had not realised that the creek has its birth in snow and ice a mile or two above, and that it is glacial in its coldness. The intrepid ones did not venture on a second plunge, but dressed as rapidly as possible and indulged in a smart walk to get their circulation back. Hence-



THE EASTERN GATEWAY THROUGH THE ROCKIES.
Our camp under Folding Mountain.

forth seductive crystal streams were regarded somewhat askance.

Our excursion to Brulé Lake involved a doubling back for about seven miles, and when we reached its shores we came to the conclusion that the French name was most apt. The lakeside is a mass of sand, littered with the barkless, bleached carcasses of noble trees borne down by the Athabaska, of which Brulé Lake is merely a widening to about a mile at the broadest part by something like seven miles in length. The main channel of the river lies at the foot of Bull-rush Mountain, which rose up sheer before us on the opposite bank. Scarcely a vestige relieved the dull-brown, burnt flanks of this mountain, but it possessed a striking and picturesque individuality, inasmuch as the stratification of the rock was thrown out with vivid force, synclines and anticlines being very easily discernible. A conspicuous and curious feature of the lake is the wind that always sweeps it from end to end, often with the force of a gale. This is no doubt attributable to the fact that it lies directly at the mouth of the rift between the mountains, this rift acting as a funnel through which the winds rattle and roar over the water.

Apart from its excellent sandy beach, the lake has practically no attraction. It is comparatively shallow and muddy coloured. No member of the finny tribe dwells here; it is dangerous for sailing, owing to the treachery of the winds, and possesses no bathing attractions, the water being icy cold even in midsummer. The wind sweeping over the water strikes the banks, catching up the flour-like sand and scattering it, whistling, in all directions. At the far end we saw a lively battle against wind and sand in progress. The engineers of the Grand Trunk Pacific, which skirts the southern bank of the lake, were ploughing their way through the unstable mass. Here they had a deep cutting, and there a lofty

embankment, some of the embankments being from 70 to 100 feet in height. These the wind struck, stripping them of clouds of sand, which were hurled down into the cuttings the engineers had made. It was a ceaseless struggle. Screens were being set up at the entrance to the cuttings to deflect the winds, and in a measure this had been successful. The engineers were resolved not to be beaten, and were hatching ingenious ways and means to protect their handiwork.

When we returned to Drystone Creek camp we found the Jasper Park game warden in possession. He demanded all our firearms, for the purposes of sealing, since these must not be used within the confines of the reservation. Having accomplished this, he sat down for a chat, for these rangers are glad to get a little break in the monotony of their lonely round.

"Say, warden," broke in one of the boys who had been following the sealing process with silent interest, "what happens if you should catch us with the seal broken?"

"Oh, just fine you fifty dollars and confiscate your weapon!"

"Gee! Can't we draw in self-defence?"

"Not in the Park."

"But suppose a vicious old grizzly comes up against us and wants to be too familiar. You wouldn't be so severe on us if we plugged her, would you?"

"You just have it out with the grizzly first and then see me—that is, if you can. I'll judge the case on its merits."

There was no more discussion. The inevitable was accepted, but low mutterings were heard as to what that individual would do if a "bar" came up against him.

The game warden very kindly informed us that we were about to hit the "hike" in grim earnest. So far,

he said, we had been on a carriage road in comparison with what was immediately in front!

"You've got to get over the Roche Miette. That'll give you a few shivers. The trail's a perfect fright. There's one place where you have to crawl along a ledge that drops clean down into the Athabaska. If you slip—well, you've got a good shoot for about two hundred feet before you'll pull up in the water."

This was encouraging. It gave the trip the first spice of excitement we had yet experienced. But there was an alternative. We could avoid this nerve-shaking ordeal if we were to swim the Athabaska at the foot of the mountain. So we pushed along to Fiddle Creek, four miles or so farther on. Here another short pause was to be made to enable us to ascend the creek to its higher reaches, where there were said to be some remarkable hot springs, about the merits of which much was said locally, though none of our informants appeared to have ventured there, as the trail was said to exist only in imagination. This latter part of the story we found to be quite correct.

The general conception of a creek is that of an insignificant tumbling stream or babbling brook. But in these parts "creek" is colloquially used to describe any tributary to a main river. It may be but a few feet in width, with only inches of water rolling lazily along, or it may be a rushing stream as wide as the average British waterway, several feet in depth and somewhat exciting to cross. As a matter of fact, it is generally both: the former in the winter, and the latter in the spring and summer, when the melting snows cause numerous freshets to spring suddenly into life. Fiddle Creek was a case in point. When we crossed, it was about 20 feet wide, and the water did not come above the horses' fetlocks. But the mass of pebbles and boulders strewn through the forest on either side of the channel proved that when thoroughly roused the creek

was 200 or 300 feet from bank to bank, and, judging from the large chunks of rock, torn and twisted tree-trunks, and piles of sand strewn on all sides, it pelted into the Athabaska River more in the form of a miniature Niagara than a brook.

It was about nine miles off the trail up the mountain-side to the springs. A guide offered his services, but he disdained the loan of a horse. He could walk it quicker and easier, he said. It was a constant fight with brush, deadfall and rocks for every foot of the way. Riding was absolutely out of the question, and hiking was decidedly painful and laborious. Now and again there would be a yap as sudden contact was made with some obstruction, and anathema fiercely uttered when one landed in a muskeg or the bed of the creek in a sitting posture. The mountain sides were as rough as a rusting wreck covered with barnacles, and foothold was difficult.

It was a steady uphill climb until an altitude of 4,200 feet was notched, and there, amid the scrub, were observed the clear and sparkling springs for which search was being made, almost hidden beneath a mass of tangled, dead vegetation. This was lopped with the axe, and cleared away. Three pools were found, the temperature of the two higher of which registered 125 and 116 degrees respectively. There was no very strongly developed odour, and the water was almost tasteless. These are so far the most important hot springs that have been found in Canada, possessing a greater degree of heat than those at Banff. The waters are rich in essential constituents, and there is little doubt but that "taking the waters at Fiddle Creek" will develop into a craze within the next few years. Certainly the springs will recompense enterprising development—indeed, the Canadian Government and others have decided to develop them directly railway communication is secured, it being an inexpensive and comparatively easy matter



THE TRAIL TO THE FIDDLE CREEK HOT SPRINGS.

An ill-defined, hard and difficult track. This photograph gives a graphic idea of the burnt, littered and broken character of the country.

TO THE FOOTHILLS OF THE ROCKIES 71

to make a carriageway from the station to the springs. The Government propose to provide a sanatorium and accommodation for taking baths, while private interests are promoting a well-built, commodious hotel for the delectation of invalids and of tourists to this spa. From the tourist point of view an hotel at this point would command general acceptance, owing to the striking and varied views of mountain, lake and woodland offered from the elevation.

Apart from a pleasure resort, this immediate district promises to develop considerable industrial importance. An energetic prospector, while investigating the geological composition of the mountains, stumbled upon coal. It was a good outcrop, and, following up his initial slice of luck, he found the whole eastern mountain shoulder under the shadow of the Roche Miette to be a vast storehouse of coal. Further careful examination proved the bed to dip under the river, and to reappear in the continuation of the chain on the opposite side of the waterway. The deposits stretch over a matter of 15,000 acres. The fortunate prospector succeeded in enlisting the support of some well-known American and Canadian financiers, and when I reached the spot development was taking place as actively as is possible when a railway is a hundred miles away.

I ran up against a young English surveyor, H. H. Rhodes, who had recently trekked to these pastures, new from the busy centres of Yorkshire, and he piloted me over the Jasper Park Collieries, as they are called. Coal was visible on every side, and Nature appeared to have distributed it with a free hand in this neighbourhood, for the seams, extending to the surface, varied from 4 to 15 feet in thickness. And Nature was as discriminating as she was liberal, for the coal appeared to vary in quality from a semi-anthracite, recalling English silkstone, to bituminous, excellent for coking;

some of the latter, under test, has yielded as much as 80 per cent. of fixed carbon.

This discovery, should anticipations be fulfilled, will, in conjunction with the discoveries of the same commodity near Edson, have far-reaching effects in the Middle West, which is dependent upon the Pennsylvania fields of the United States for supplies of hard coal, ranging in price from 26s. to 60s. a ton, according to quality.

The owners of the Jasper Park Collieries were not losing time. They were resolved to be in readiness by the time the railway passed their front door, barely one hundred yards distant. Galleries were being cut connecting the shafts with the coke ovens, which are to be set out on the bank, overlooking the iron road, so that the trucks can be fed by force of gravity with fuel for the market.

There is no doubt that other finds of this fuel will be made in these mountains. The mineral wealth of this part of the Rocky range is absolutely unknown. The discovery of coal was unexpected, and the unearthing of such a vast deposit as must repose in a region $23\frac{1}{2}$ square miles in extent is quite sufficient to stimulate belief that when the prospector gets to work upon a methodical and scientific basis "strikes" of other minerals of commerce may be made. At all events, the results so far achieved are quite sufficient to make "mountain scratching" a very promising speculation.

CHAPTER VI

Our Climb over the Roche Miette

A Toilsome Ascent—The Summit—A Glorious View—Scene of the Fight between the Hudson's Bay and North-Western Companies—The Descent to the Rocky River—Missing the Trail—Camping in a Swamp—Crossing the Athabaska.

WHILE the exploration of the springs was in progress the packers pushed on to see if the Athabaska could be crossed a little distance ahead. They returned with the news that this could be done, but might be dangerous, as the landing on the opposite bank was perilous to the horses, and they demurred against taking the risk, the river being high.

There was nothing for it, then: we must face the hazard of the Roche Miette. Its grim head was frowning above us now. This is a strangely shaped peak, and its rugged outline had stood out boldly on our western horizon for some miles past. It is a serrated ridge, about 8,000 feet high, running almost due north. Within a few hundred feet of the river it breaks off abruptly, and its face for a matter of 2,000 feet is as straight as if the range had been cleft perpendicularly with a knife, the straight wall falling off at its base into a hump which slopes gradually like a hog's back to the water's edge, when there is another straight drop of 300 feet or so.

Our way to the foot of the ridge wound through a broad flat, riven with the now dried-up beds of torrents, the lofty precipices being so steep that they seemed to lean forward, enclosing the lowland as if in a box, with trees clinging frantically to little crevices here and

there, and at such a height that they appeared to belong to a toy Noah's Ark. In the spring, when the snows melt under the warm sun, cascades leap from these vertical faces, and the valley is converted practically into a seething maelstrom, the water darting hither and thither in a wild effort to gain the Athabaska. We could hear the swish, swish, and gurgle of the mighty river tearing along on our right, and at last saw it eddying round the foot of the hump over which we were to make our way.

Straggling over this rock, at an angle of about 80 degrees, like a saw which has lost many of its teeth and is lying on its side, was the trail, no more than ten inches wide, and within six inches of the edge of the cliff. When the horse was half-way up it seemed to be rearing. Riding was out of the question, even if one felt inclined, for it would have been impossible to keep the seat. As we passed along the ledge we could hear voices below, and, peering over, we saw rock-hogs blasting a ledge along the face of the rock for the railway, only a few feet above the level of the river, and pitching the excavated debris overboard to form an embankment, which the water was savagely licking as if bent on devouring the work of man.

Then the trail swung inward for some distance, slowly rising the meanwhile. We were crossing the first hump, and it was fairly easy going after we had negotiated the ledge, which is liable to unnerve anyone who is apt to become dizzy when looking down from a height.

Glancing ahead, we could see a high, rolling ridge. It was promiscuously strewn with what looked like matches, but they were in reality fallen trees levelled by the wind after a fire. They appeared so thickly strewn as to be impassable. We were "up against it" now, as our friend the game warden had remarked. The prospect was appalling, becoming all the more so

as we advanced. Within twenty minutes we were in the thick of it, slipping, floundering, reeling and tumbling among the tree-trunks. Riding was quite an impossibility, so with rein over shoulder, and horse plodding along warily behind, we trudged forward. Now and again there would be a sudden wrench backwards as the horse slipped on to its knees, and as an unlucky throw from this cause might result in ugly contusions and possibly in broken limbs, the reins were thrown over the pommel, and the horse left, like the rider, to find its way as best it could.

The time slipped by and we did not appear to make very appreciable progress up that mountain flank. Bruises and hard knocks from innumerable obstructions were our lot. And climbing over these hog-backs is as deceptive as galling. Ahead rises a steep ridge. You can see nothing beyond, and you spurt forward in the belief that it is the summit at last. You reach its crest and another juts up immediately in front of you. You plod steadily forward, but never seem any nearer the top. The trail, following the easiest path, doubles and redoubles on itself; in fact, in following its sinuous way you practically box the compass during every hundred yards. You do not walk, because you cannot; instead, advance is made in a series of slips, slides and crawls, with a sharp look-out for a dead trunk with short snags bristling like *chevaux de frise*.

For three solid hours we groped our way upward, and then, just as we were despairing at the sight of a huge, precipitous hump, more formidable than any we had yet met, running right across the direction the trail was taking, the track, in its usual tantalising manner, swung round sharply and plunged into a thicket, from which it emerged on to a confined plateau, whence the hump fell away abruptly on all sides. We were at the top! Our three hours' climb along three miles of execrable trail had brought us 1,100 feet nearer the

clouds. But the spectacle unfolded was worth every ounce of physical exertion put into that toil. We had an unobstructed outlook through an arc of some 300 degrees over an interminable expanse of the wildest mountain scenery one could possibly conceive. It was as if we were on the hub of a huge wheel lying on its side, for the ridges radiated from us like spokes in all directions. Passengers by the completed railway far below will gain a glorious view from the river level of walls of mountain, but they will miss the magnificent panorama of peaks that the crest of Roche Miette provides.

On the west a broad valley extended, carpeted with primeval forest, cut into countless patches by the serpentine channels of the Rocky River. This is an evil waterway, which at its lowest level requires ten channels to carry its tumbling waters into the Athabaska, but, when in flood, needs a dozen more, for then its rush is fiendish, sweeping soil, trees and what not away like straws. Directly in front we could see where the Athabaska swung round a right-angle corner, and, following its course, saw its entrance into the large ham-shaped basin known as Jasper Lake, now a blazing mirror in the noonday summer sun.

At the eastern end we could see the narrow cut through the rocky bank where the lake waters make their exit, and once more become the river, with its tributaries, the Snaring and Rocky Rivers, as well as numerous creeks, emptying in on either side. After rounding the Roche Miette, the river breaks its bounds and sprawls across the whole valley, lapping the mountain bases on either hand. Snow-capped peaks confronted us in every direction, the Fiddle Back range, with its pinnacles beetling from 8,000 to 10,000 feet, framing the panorama in the form of a huge bow which lost its identity at both ends in a wild jumble of ragged, hoary crests.

Cutting straight as an arrow through the trees at

our feet was a broad, open causeway, looking like a giant's trail through the stagnant pools, forest and muskeg. This was the road for the iron horse, 100 feet in width, which is to stretch in an unbroken line from Atlantic to Pacific, and looking even then like a high road across the continent. The clearing gang had completed its task. All was ready for the steam shovel and ballast train to build up the truncated pyramid embankment for the two lines of steel, and they would be brought up as soon as the toe of the Roche Miette had been trimmed by dynamite to admit of their advance.

On the northern shore of Jasper Lake we could see a tumbledown ruin—the last remaining link of a bygone prosperity in this region. A century or so ago Jasper Lake was a humming hive. Here the Adventurers of Hudson's Bay had set up an outpost in charge of Jasper Hawes. The Indians flocked here to barter their furs, which were easily obtained, for the woods teemed with animals of all descriptions. Then, a few miles above, came the outpost of the North-Western Company, which was sufficiently bold to attempt to compete with the established English organisation. A keen rivalry sprang up for the Indians' harvests of fur. The struggle was sharp and bitter, but was not of long duration. Hudson's Bay could not be ousted from its entrenchments, and Henry House, as the competitive post was called, was vacated, and fell into decay.

Then the fur trade dwindled to such an extent, owing to the depletion of the forests, that Jasper House scarcely paid expenses. When fire swept the outpost into oblivion, it was never rebuilt, though up to about twenty years ago the Hudson's Bay Company maintained a flying post here for a part of the season, but now even that is a thing of the past; Jasper Park knows the fur trader no longer, though the name has been perpetuated by its application to the national reserve of which the lake

forms a part. The Indians round about nurse a belief that in the cellars of the ruins extensive consignments of "fire-water" still remain. No serious attempts have been made to discover the treasure, its existence being attributed to the lively Indian imagination.

If the ascent of the Roche Miette was exasperating, the descent was ten times more so, owing to its excessive steepness, which precluded any attempt at forcing the pace. On the west side the hump drops down almost perpendicularly, and, to descend, the trail saws the side in sharp, steep, short grades. It took us almost as long to drop into the valley as it had taken to ascend the opposite flank.

When we reached the vale we had to strike off on another exciting hunt—the safest point at which to ford the main channel of the Rocky River. Sometimes one has to make a detour of as many as ten miles to get across this fierce waterway, and even then you may be in danger of being swept off your feet. Better luck favoured us, however, though the crossing was exciting, for the river was swinging along at about ten miles an hour, and was up to the girths of the pack-horses.

Fording a river such as this produces a curious sensation. The horse cuts across the water at an acute angle to the direction of flow, so as to avoid the danger of being carried off its feet. You can feel the horse battling with the current, which swirls and curls wickedly round it. Then the horse cants over, and leans against the water. As you approach the opposite bank, this appears to be slipping by you at a terrific velocity, and you have the feeling of vainly pawing the water to get a grasp at the travelling terra firma. The greenhorn experiences a peculiar dizziness closely akin to *mal de mer* for a moment; the next he is on dry land.

We stuck to the narrow winding trail curling through the trees, the tedium of the jog-trot being varied by a "hold up" in muskeg, until at last we emerged on to

a park-like open low ridge which forms the southern bank of Jasper Lake, whose muddy-coloured waters—for the Athabaska was in flood and heavily charged with soil scoured out of the banks—offered a different aspect at close quarters from that presented from the distant elevation of the Roche Miette, and stood out in vivid contrast against the limpid turquoise blue of the placid waters of Fish Lake on our left hand.

The open character of the country was a welcome relief from that which we had been travelling over for some seven hours, and was strikingly reminiscent of the park-like, undulating stretches characteristic of rural England. We followed the sandy shore of Jasper Lake, which mirrored the ragged outline of the mountains on all sides, to its western end, and there fell on ill-luck—we lost the trail.

It is an axiom among the pathfinders that where one man or horse has passed safely before, another can follow. Our tracker failed to observe the sharp bend the long beaten-down trail made through the woods, but kept his eye glued to a scarcely discernible track running at right angles in the opposite direction. This led us into a swamp, where the rushes and grass were growing to a height of five or six feet, and where we wallowed in three feet of fetid water and slime. The weeds were beaten down ahead, and the tracker stuck to the scarcely visible evidence of someone else's tracks like a sleuthhound. Now and again he would pause and look anxiously around for drier ground, but the dense bush gave no signs. For an hour and a half we battled with this slough (pronounced "sloo" in these parts), and wandered aimlessly round and round, for the scarcely discernible trail to which we clung so tenaciously proved a veritable will-o'-the-wisp. It was getting late, and the rapidly lengthening shadows told only too plainly that we should have to hasten if we were to camp in daylight. At last the tracker paused.

"Gee, boys! I guess we've hit a blind steer."

Those behind were pushing blindly on through the tall scrub, and all were splattered with viscous mud from head to foot. We crowded into a bunch. To retrace our footsteps would have taken another hour and a half, and falling darkness would have found us imprisoned in the slough.

"Well, the Athabaska's ahead somewhere. Let's push on and find it. We'll have to camp in half an hour," commented Duggie, another packer, who was in consultation with the bell-boy. "Give her another quarter of an hour."

Another resumption, but only for a few yards, since the swamp became deeper and deeper, while, to make matters worse, a stagnant creek crossed the trail and no signs of footprints on the opposite bank could be seen.

"Stay here, I'll cruise about a bit." And digging his spurs into his horse, the leader blundered through the swamp along the stream to search for a crossing. In five minutes he returned, looking glum.

"Well, we've got to get to the other side, anyway, and we might as well do it sooner as later. Saying which he sprang off his horse, and, wading up to his thighs through the stagnant slough, blundered into the stream, trusting blindly to luck that it would not be too deep. Bedraggled and wet, he crawled to the top of the opposite bank and yelled to us to follow him.

We crashed through the rushes and swarmed into the stream in a happy-go-lucky manner. The other bank shelved up a trifle to a small dry patch. On that site we spent the night. In other circumstances we should have given it a wide berth, for, surrounded as it was by an evil-smelling, desolate waste of still water, it was enough to provoke a host of virulent epidemics. The taste of the water was as bad as its aroma, and, to make matters worse, it swarmed with mosquitoes.

There was many a malediction heard in the tents

that night, and many a furious battle with the persistent insects which swarmed to the attack. But we drank the water, which was more polluted than the effluent from an up-to-date sewage farm, without a thought of what might happen, for we were too tired to worry about such trifles. Still, we felt pretty sore when, after supper, one of the boys wandering round called out that the Athabaska was only fifty yards ahead. We had been grotesquely cutting circles and other designs in that swamp for about two hours, and all the time were within a stone's throw of the river, the shore of which offered an excellent camping-spot. Such is the luck of the trail.

We were astir early next morning, thanks to the persistence of the pestilential mosquitoes and the nausea of the slough, and pressed along the Athabaska river. Before we had gone fifty yards along the bank we picked up the trail we had missed, and the leader was pretty healthily congratulated upon his eyesight, and strongly recommended to invest in a pair of powerful magnifying glasses when he got back to Edmonton.

That day we had another slow and fatiguing wrestle with muskeg, rock and deadfall, intermingled with arduous climbs up and down mountain flanks. There are two trails—one on either side of the river—and had we crossed the Athabaska at the Roche Miette we should have struck the easier one, which runs through tolerably level country. But it was useless to bemoan our ill luck. We had to cross the river shortly at all events, and pushed forward as fast as possible in order to do so that day. The toil of the trail, however, was compensated by the magnificent views we were able to obtain from repeated elevations—the white fang of Mount Geikie, towering up 11,000 feet into the clouds, and from our side presenting a solid wall of snow with a square-shaped crest, being particularly conspicuous and beautiful.

We had been wandering slowly along for some four hours when the trail gave a sudden dip, and we came to the river level once more. The sight of a shack and a railed-in pasture spurred us on in the hope of seeing a living soul outside our own little party. We rode smartly up, only to be arrested by an aspect of absolute vacancy. The owners had gone. They were a small party of half-breeds, one of whom, the eldest daughter, we were somewhat anxious to meet, for we had heard that she was an inveterate and expert poker player, who had never known defeat, and had bled white men from far and near of their savings. One of our party was burning to lower her colours, and bitter was his chagrin when he found that he had drawn a blank.

At this point we had to cross the Athabaska, which here is about 600 feet wide, and rushes along at about eight miles an hour. One of the boys scouted down the bank and discovered a dilapidated Indian dug-out, with which he essayed to cross the river to discover the condition of the landing on the opposite shore. While he was absent the owner of the canoe turned up and wanted to know, with much carmine embellishment, who had commandeered his vessel, as he was in a hurry to get across. He somewhat resented our action, but calmed down when he found that his vapourings were only being wasted on the air. His wrath was completely turned aside by an invitation to supper.

The next morning early, preparations were hurried forward to cross the waterway. A collapsible canoe had been secured, and this, with the crazy dug-out, served for the transportation of the baggage, a proceeding that occupied four hours. Then came the most exciting incident of the enterprise—the driving across of the horses. They had to swim for it, and it was an active half-hour.

A rope corral was built around a slope down the



HOW THE ATHABASKA HAD TO BE CROSSED AT SWIFTS.

Pack-horses swimming the river, which is some 600 feet wide and runs at about six miles an hour.

bank into the water, and in this the horses were cornered. When all was ready, the packers suddenly took leave of their senses. They indulged in blood-curdling yells, which would have startled a mummy, and jumped and danced in a manner that would have put the Indian to shame. The horses, taking fright, made for the water, the packers hallooing and shouting more ferociously than ever. But the bank of the Athabaska juts out a little below, and the leading horse, catching sight of this protuberance, made for it, with the others in his train, pursued by the yelling men on the bank, who endeavoured to head them off. Their demoniacal yells and gesticulations were fruitless, however; the horses gained the bank and stampeded into the bush. Then ensued a lively interlude rounding-up the animals and herding them into the corral once more. Further yelling, dancing and shrieking, fiercer than before, and again the horses took to the water to escape. To prevent a repetition of the preceding attempt, one of the boys pushed out in the dug-out, and there, adrift the stream, waving his arms like a maniac in a manner that threatened a capsize into the river every moment, drove the leading horses into the centre of the waterway, where, owing to the velocity of the current, the animals were soon engaged in a fierce struggle. Drifting somewhat, blowing like whales, and almost exhausted, they contrived to make the bank, on which they stood trembling as the result of their trying experience. Crossing a furious river like the Athabaska is full of danger to animals, but it is a risk which cannot be eliminated from travelling through an unopened country.

I crossed in the frail, collapsible canvas canoe, and as it ran into the bank a horny hand shot out to steady me up the crumbling slope. I grabbed it tightly, and the next instant was face to face with one of the most celebrated characters between Edmonton and the Pacific—Swift, the frontiersman.

CHAPTER VII

Swift, the Frontiersman, and his Famous Ranch

An Immigrant from the States—The Spirit of Adventure—A First Failure—Tobogganing on a Gold-Pan—Back at the Athabaska—Fetching Supplies from Edmonton—Building a Flour-Mill—An Irrigation System.

UNLIKE the majority of these pioneer settlers in the backwoods, Swift has not lost the gift of conversation; the silence of the forests has not dulled his spirits. His life is one continuous romance; his industry, resource and ingenuity a striking object-lesson. He can relate stories and experiences of the bush accumulated during a lonely life of nearly a quarter of a century, spiced with dramatic and humorous touches, to further order. His hospitality is immense.

Swift is, or was, a citizen of the United States, but he has been so long in the Dominion that he regards himself as a thoroughbred Canadian. His father's home was somewhere down Washington way, but the States were not large enough for Young Hopeful. The spirit of adventure defied quenching; the desire to go to the north could not be lived down. That he has had more than his fair share of roughing it, has had his ups and downs, and has been in some pretty tight corners at times, his own life-story soon proves, while his weather-beaten face tells its own tale of exposure to the elements and the vicissitudes of climate. He is as hard as nails, and is as much at home sleeping on a grassy couch beneath a tree in the starlit abbey of nature as the average Englishman between the sheets on a hair-spring mattress.

"How did I get hyar? Well, upon my soul, I can hardly tell yar. I guess I jes' drifted hyar, that's all. One day down home, when I war a young strapper, I suddenly thought I'd like to go north somewhar—I didn't much mind whar. That war thirty odd years ago, and the State of Washington war not then what it is to-day. Well, I wandered off on the trail with jes' me gun and plug. I struck somewhat to the north-east, and kep' ploddin' along until one day I fell in with a bunch of hikers. They war goin' north too, so I jes' joins 'em for company's sake. We jaunted along, day after day, through the wilderness, never seein' a soul bar one or two Indians now and agen. We crossed the Rockies, and then struck due north. This country at that time war quite unknown. The Canadian Pacific war only just thought of, and the survey engineers hadn't even got to the mountains; Edmonton war a Hudson's Bay post and no more.

"We made Edmonton, and thar the bunch broke up. I got on to the Hudson's Bay trails, and my pard and I—for I had picked up a chum—came through the Rockies agen, cruised about a bit, struck Jasper House, which was then doin' business, and came on here. Somethin' seemed to draw me to this part, and although I went off first this way and then that, I war always pulled up by th' Athabaska River jes' about hyar. At last, gettin' a bit tired o' wandrin' aroun', my pard and I thought we'd settle down and start farmin'. We staked off our ground, ran up a bit of a shack, and set to work.

"But things didn't go right. My pard got in with th' Indians, and let work at the farm slide while I was out trappin'. At last the smash came. We had a few plain words; my pard went his way, and I went mine. I war determined that I would pay off all the debts and make a fresh start, but as things didn't look very promisin' hereabouts I went off prospectin'. I war a bit lucky, and at last war able to square up what we owed,

and cast about to settle down once more. This district called me agen, and afore I had bin cruisin' about long, hyar I war on th' Athabaska. I squatted down on th' old farm, which had gone astray, and made a fresh start with a clean sheet.

"But I'll tell yar an amusin' little thing as happened while we war out prospectin'. I fell in with another old guy on the same game—lookin' for gold. We went together jes' for company like, and got right up on the mount'ns, whar we stayed all the summer. We war makin' our way back into th' valley with our gold-pan, shovel, pick, and other kit on our back. On th' way we struck a sheet of snow, and my pard got a bit ingenious like. He warn't goin' to walk; he war going to terboggan down that snow-shoot—it 'ud save 'is feet a bit. Well, he untied his gold-pan, sat down in it, doubled up his legs so that his feet rested on the rim, packed his pick this side and his shovel that, with the rest of his outfit bundled up under his knees.

"He started off, but he hadn't gone many yards down the slide before summut war up. That blarmed gold-pan, instead of goin' straight down like a respectable sledge, started spinnin' roun' like a top. As it shot down, it whizzed roun' faster and faster. The prospector lost his balance, his feet shot into th' air, and thar he war careerin' down lyin' on his back, yellin' and cussin' to beat the band. First his kit shot out on one side, then his shovel on th' other, while his pick went off somewhar else. I laughed till my sides ached, and my roars made my pard more furious than ever. Presently the pan got up to top speed, pitched him head first out, an' he went rollin' over and over until he pulled up against a bank o' snow. As for the gold-pan, that kept on goin', and we never saw it agen. My pard picked hisself up, rubbed hisself like fury; and when I came up to him he war still swarin' and cussin' worse'n an Indian, for he war nothin' else but bruises from top to bottom. No more

war sed about shootin' a snow-slide on a gold-pan, I can tell yar. It war a sore p'int with him."

Swift, according to his own statement, squatted down in this district about five-and-twenty years ago. It was hard going at first, for he was pretty well all alone, save for a few Indians and one or two half-breeds in Jasper Park. He staked off some 2,000 acres on the hill-side, which gradually slopes down from the feet of the mountains, hamming him in behind, to the river's bank, giving him a nice stretch of tolerably open flat near the water. The country was covered for the most part with poplar and cottonwood, with a few large Douglas firs here and there. In order to secure a constant supply of pure, fresh water, he pitched his shack beside a rushing creek rising amid the snows of Pyramid Mountain, the four-sided, pointed white peak of which just peeps over a mountain wall and keeps its eye on his back door from a height of 8,000 feet. His tools comprised an axe and hammer. With these he shaped some respectable logs and built his shack, chinking the interstices with moss, and crudely shingling the roof. At the front the roof projects, forming a stoep where he receives visitors, for no passer-by omits, under any pretence, to look up Swift, a rough welcome, the swopping of a few yarns, items of news and bush gossip serving to break the monotony of life in the wilderness.

As his personal requirements in regard to the necessities of life were few, he only cultivated about two acres of land. This is within a stone's throw of his home, and on practically level surface; the remainder was largely used for grazing purposes. But Swift practised no half-methods. When he had got a roof over his head and had broken his plot of ground, he trudged off to Edmonton, about 350 miles distant, for supplies. He bought provisions, seeds for his land, and a few head of cattle, which he drove home over the trail, making them swim the Athabaska. This in itself was an undertaking from

which many men would have shrunk, and he paints vivid pictures of the difficulties he encountered with his stock during that tedious drive over the execrable, littered, narrow path.

On arriving home at last, he seeded his ground with vegetables and what not. Planting finished, he set to work upon improvements, and to-day uses the very tools he then contrived with so much effort, and at the expenditure of considerable inventiveness. He felled a huge fir having a solid cylindrical trunk. A section about 5 feet long and about 2 feet in diameter was cut out and turned into a roller, the shafts being crudely fashioned from small straight jack pine. His plough and harrow are likewise fashioned primitively from wood, as are also his other garden implements. He uses them to this day, regarding his handiwork with justifiable pride, and disdaining the idea of resorting to modern tools.

His greatest anxiety was in regard to his flour. This commodity is weighty for transport, and large quantities had to be brought in every time he made the trip to Edmonton—a journey which, owing to its trials, dangers, and laborious character, he only took about once a year. Even then it entailed his absence from home for a month or six weeks. At last he decided to attempt to solve this problem himself by building a mill. He secured a small corn grinder in Edmonton, and set to work to fashion a waterwheel. That waterwheel is Swift's greatest achievement. Bearing in mind the fact that the only tools at his command were an axe, adze, saw, hammer and nails, and that he was single-handed, his achievement is a striking *tour de force*.

"It war a tough job and no error," Swift remarked as he showed us his handiwork, "an' it took me more weeks 'n I can remember to rig it up, workin' from dawn to twilight. But I never felt so proud of meself as when I at last cried 'Done!' and threw down my tools. I war not long in seein' whether it would work or not. I fixed

up th' corn mill, yanked on the belt, and opened the sluice. It war some little while 'fore the wheel gave any signs o' movin', and I war half afraid that summut had gone wrong somewhar, when thar war a creakin' and a grindin', and it began to move. I let in more water, and soon it war poundin' round steadily, an' the little pulley on the corn mill war whizzin' round to beat th' band. Then I didn't care a hang. When harvest time came round I got my wheat in, threshed it as best I could, and set th' box o' tricks to work. That flour was perfect. Sure that wheel war a pretty tough proposition, but it war the best summer's work I ever put in. What it has meant to me you cannot guess, but I've not had to go to Edmonton to fetch flour for ten years past, and that has lifted a pretty heavy load off my mind, I can tell yar."

Swift, however, did not rest on his oars. The summer sun is hot, and sometimes weeks will go by without a drop of rain falling, and that just at the period when the crops long for a drink. A failure of his crops would spell disaster. Swift saw that, and was resolved to take no chances. He drove a ditch from his tiny mill-pond right through his cultivated patch from one end to the other. On either side of this main channel he cut lateral shallow trenches. Every one is fitted with a primitive sluice gate at its junction with the main ditch, while the latter is similarly fitted at the pond. When the ground becomes somewhat parched, Swift just diverts a portion of the water from the stream, sends it surging down the main ditch, and then turns it on to the ground, flooding the farm just when, where, and to what extent he deems advisable.

When we arrived, his farm was a picture of flourishing fertility. The vegetables were healthy and well nourished, the potatoes of large size, and the corn in first-class condition. Swift never knows what a shortage is in his crops; irrigation, primitive though it may be, has saved them time after time. "After I got these jobs

done," pointing to the improvements, "I only made that 700-mile trip to Edmonton and back once a year, travellin' light jes' to fetch letters like," he chuckled. Witnessing the many striking evidences of his enterprise and ingenuity, I suggested that he should go on, harness the creek a bit more, and generate his own electricity. "So I would," he rapped back, "but I don't understand th' blarmed thing. Th' juice beats me." As he accompanied these reflections with a ruminating scratch of his head, I went away with the half-smothered idea that, if he remained on his farm, he would set about electrically lighting his shack before long.

CHAPTER VIII

The Lonely Trail to the Yellowhead Pass

From the Athabaska to the Miette—A Delectable Supper—In a World of Silence—Fertile Prairies in a Defile—Dominion Prairie—Baseball with Bannock—An Adventure at Derr Creek.

STRIKING on from Swift's oasis in the wilderness, we followed the rift in the range through which the Athabaska flows swiftly, drawing nearer and nearer to the solid, snow-covered wall, Mount Geikie, rising up defiantly sheer before us directly ahead. The trail, following the cleared grade of the Grand Trunk Pacific, became somewhat easier for a few miles, it only being necessary to keep a sharp look-out for tree-stumps, against which the pack-horses would stumble ever and anon. On the southern side the river was hemmed in by the perpendicular serried bluffs of the Colin range, while on the north side a similar battlemented array of cliffs overlooked us. The view of Mount Geikie, standing out in bold relief against the azure blue sky, however, was one of exquisite beauty, and amply redeemed the constricted range of vision on either hand.

Swinging past the tumbled valley, its steep slopes clothed in primeval, impenetrable forest, through which the Maligne River forces its mysterious way from Medicine Lake nestling at the foot of the other side of the Colin range, we dropped down to the water-side of the Athabaska once more. A lonely grave in a small, railed-in enclosure, where a whitened stone commemorated an untimely death by drowning in the surging river, once more recalled the description we had heard uttered more than once as to this waterway being a "holy fright." Then,

when it seemed as if the towering mountain in front cut off all further progress, the trail reclinced the northern slope, and turned sharply to the west.

But we merely swung from one river to another. The rushing Miette, of great width at its confluence with the Athabaska, and boiling like a maelstrom, was now our companion. The broad valley of the Athabaska gave way to a narrower passage, the walls of which ran sharply up from the edge of the river bank towards the clouds. It is a sombre defile. The mountain flanks are tumbled, scrub-covered and littered with deadfall. The shadows of the hills were thrown right across the trail, wrapping it in a diffused light, but in the extreme distance, at the head of the gulch, rose three lofty pinnacles, the snow caps of which gleamed brilliantly. For supper that night we had some of the finest rainbow trout that the mountain streams could yield, as two of the boys, while camp was being pitched and the evening meal was in preparation, wandered off up the hill-sides, following a creek until they lighted upon two small lakes where the fish were so plentiful and voracious that a score, ranging in weight from 7 to 14 ounces apiece, were landed in half an hour. These two lakes were literally crammed with rainbow trout, and those of keen angling instincts were somewhat disappointed that we pushed ahead early the following morning.

We had now struck the lonely desolate trail in deadly earnest. It had been bad before, but then we were all the time in proximity to the railway construction camps, and somehow the going felt easier. A certain volume of traffic had helped to beat down the track, while the roar of rock-splitting dynamite, the chink-chink of drills, and the spitting of steam were company. Now we were in a silent world. The forest was hushed save for a long-drawn-out sigh, as a puff of wind mournfully swished through the trees. No pipe or twitter of a bird was to be heard, for song birds do not venture into these wilds.

Now and again would be heard the croaking of a raven perched on some bare, withered branch pushing its dismal outline against the sky, or the savage screech of a bald-headed eagle as he hovered above us. The pervading solitude was broken only by the murmuring of the Miette or the roar of melted snows cascading down the steep mountain slopes.

Up and down we laboriously threaded our way, now slowly crawling along a loose, rock-strewn ledge, scarcely defined, on the side of a hump, then ploughing madly through a morass down by the river-side. We were penetrating the heart of the range. The mountains grew more formidable around us, shooting upwards in terraces of thickly wooded banks, mirroring all shades of green, with here and there a snowy cone jutting above the timber to offer striking contrast. As we pushed farther west the defile grew more and more like a fissure, suddenly opening out here and there into a large flat expanse smothered with grasses, vetches and weeds, upon which the pack-horses fell furiously—whenever they had the opportunity. These little prairies are of small area, but will make excellent farms when the country is rendered accessible. The bottom is saucer-like, the lowest point being heavily waterlogged and boggy, but a trench through the rim will empty this superfluous moisture into the river or creek flowing near by. They are covered with scrub, dank and tangled, which, however, can be quickly cleared by fire. The soil is really decomposed vegetable matter, and when drained will prove of extraordinary fertility.

Being aware of the characteristic canniness of the Western pioneer in grabbing land which has any pretensions to agricultural value, if not to farm himself, to hold as a speculation, it seemed somewhat strange that these flats had not been appropriated, for of this we could see no signs. One night some wanderers on the trail struck our camp. As we were chatting round the fire, after disposing of a substantial rude evening meal, I

remarked upon this apparent apathy of the enterprising Westerner.

"Don't you worry, sonny," was the reply. "All these likely spots have been well looked over and sized up. It's too much trouble to homestead just at the moment, but a sharp eye is being kept on them ready for seizure when the railway comes along."

The trail clings tenaciously to the Miette, and though the mountains of the same name, clothed with timber from the water's edge to the line where vegetation ceases to exist, shut in our view to the south, we had inspiring glimpses straight ahead. The three white cones we had espied when we swerved away from the Athabaska still loomed up before us. We toiled up humps, and dropped into abysses at the other side, wound round this spur and laboured up that, but those three peaks could not be evaded, though they seemed to approach no nearer. Their persistent jutting into the blue sky whetted our curiosity, and one evening, after camp, we tediously climbed foot over foot, sliding and slipping over deadfall piled six and eight feet high, up a steep slope for some 500 feet to secure an uninterrupted view of their scarred flanks. It was a hard pull, but we were well rewarded, for we gained a bare shoulder from which we could see right up the valley, which was no more than a sharp V—as if a wedge had been driven into the mountains by cyclopean fury—garbed in green trees down each limb, with the silver streak of the Miette in the inverted apex. We were looking through the defile along which the trail wound like a snake, admitting to the Yellowhead Pass, and these three grim peaks, the jagged teeth of a formidable range, were standing sentinel over the gulch. Looking behind, we could see nothing but the two steeply sloping walls rising to 6,000 feet or more on either side, and forming a gloomy alley, all the gloomier at the moment as the bottom was wrapped in the darkness of approaching night. It was just as narrow a passage ahead, but, lit by the last slanting

rays of the setting sun, striking through a narrow side gorge, and bathing rock, snow, tree and bush in a galaxy of soft tints which no palette could faithfully record, it was an enchanting picture.

The bottom of this narrow defile was so depressing, owing to constriction of outlook, that we pushed forward energetically until we emerged upon Dominion Prairie, which is first an exasperating stretch of marsh, conducive neither to rapid progress nor to the maintenance of good temper, but which afterwards became drier and easier. We hastened through the grass, four or five feet in height, among burned and scorched carcasses of jack pine, to be pulled up by an unexpected obstacle. We had been enjoying several days of sweltering hot weather, which had melted the snows on the mountains, and had swollen Derr Creek, the conduit for this glacial water into the Miette, to an exceptional degree. We had been anticipating floodwater from our experience in crossing the Miette some distance below, for the trail drops uncereemoniously into the river four times in three miles in order to avoid steep rocky bluffs, which tumble to the water's edge too abruptly to be rounded on dry land. But to find Derr Creek tearing along with mad velocity, a mass of foam, sweeping boulders, trees and what not before it as contemptuously as if they were straws, was something upon which we had not counted. We pitched camp early in the afternoon to make a thorough reconnaissance of the river, since the regular ford was absolutely impassable.

After supper we scoured round for some diversion. Then the party lighted upon some remnants of bannock, cooked a week or so before, and of the shape of doughnuts or dumplings. The first was picked up and thrown disgustedly against a tree. The ball didn't break, but the bark was chipped. That gave the discoverer an idea. Smiling contentedly, he picked up the bannock, rummaged out a short club, and sailed up with these articles

to the remainder of the company who were smoking round the camp fire.

"Say, boys, how about a round at baseball?"

"Right, you find the ball, and we're game!"

"Here you are!" And he tossed the globe of petrified flour and baking-powder into the group.

There was a yell of mirth, but the shriek was ten times louder when one of the boys threw the solidified aggregation at the batsman, who, with a mighty swipe, sent it hurtling for about fifty yards and recovered his "ball" uninjured! That ball gave us a solid half-hour's amusement, until one unlucky crack caught it on a vulnerable spot and broke it in halves. Baseball with bannock was the cause of many a chuckle during the rest of the journey.

We had a lively time negotiating Derr Creek. The packers, by dint of much ferreting and sounding, had found an easier point for crossing. It was deep, and the water tore along viciously, spitting round the horses' flanks. More than one animal was swung into a hole and plunged wildly for a few seconds, until his feet regained the bottom.

Marsh and meadow were now our lot for a few miles, and then, the ground becoming softer and softer, we were driven towards the mountain wall to seek drier land, where the going, though more up and down, was somewhat easier than ploughing our way through dangerous sloughs. Indeed, we could not have traversed the latter had we so desired, for we saw where the surveying engineers, in their plotting of the line, had been having a pretty stiff tussle in the bog. Then the mountains on the north began to press on the Miette, forcing us to its bank, and plunging us into more difficulties among loose rock, bog-holes, and heavy deadfall. The barrier looming up more and more immediately before us indicated only too forcibly that we should be called upon presently to ford the river, and after wandering for a little while



TOASTING UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

The bush chef's kitchen fire and primitive fork—a cleft stick cut from a willow.

among the back waters, we at last emerged on a low bank of shingle, shelving gradually into the river. The Miette proper at this point is little wider than an average English brook, but, owing to its sudden grade, runs downhill with savage speed. There is a general belief that rapidly flowing streams are shallow. However true that may be in regard to respectable, well-ordered and known waters in the home country, it certainly does not apply to the backwood rivers of Canada, as I found to my cost.

The river is littered with log-jams, round which the water curls and eddies. The leading horse passed over, and the water scarcely reached above its fetlocks. My pack-horse, while fording, suddenly became somewhat enterprising, and started off on a side exploration, with the result that it slipped off the ford, and landed in deep water. The brute kicked and struggled, but the more it plunged the deeper it got into difficulty. It could not regain its feet, hampered with me on its back, and the treacherous current threw both of us into a hole against a log-jam. There the water attempted to force us round the edge of the obstruction, with its current swinging along at about twelve miles an hour, and so, to assist the horse, I decided to cast off and gain the bank along the massive tree against which I was pinned. But no sooner had I swung one foot clear of the stirrup than the wicked undertow caught me, twisted me round, and left me hanging by my fingers on the end of the trunk. I tried to draw myself up on to the log, but the pace of the water was too much, and I felt myself slowly slipping, my finger nails cutting into the wood and my legs absolutely incapable of muscular effort. Luckily Lett, one of the party, turned round on his horse and saw my predicament. In a flash he sprang off his horse, and was walking rapidly along the tree trunk, which groaned and creaked under his weight.

"Look out! You'll have both of us in," I yelled. But he came on.

Just as my fingers gave another slip of an inch or so round the tree, he grabbed me by the collar and pulled like grim death. But there was no impression. The suck of the water was too powerful, while the glacial temperature had deprived my legs of all power to co-operate. He made another lunge.

"Up! Oo—oo—oo! Now then!" Saying which he gave a savage tug, and got me higher on the log, when I was able to assist him, though that rotting trunk was bending and creaking ominously. Had he been a minute later, there would have been a wooden cross stuck up on the bank of the Miette, for no swimmer could have lived five minutes in those waters.

When I got ashore my legs were completely numbed, and the icy coldness prevented the return of circulation for some little time. I got astride my pack-horse with difficulty. Now it was as docile as a lamb, and the picture of innocence. It never attempted any further unrehearsed circus performances while I was on its back.

Now the trees of the endless forest became taller, nobler, and of greater girth as we advanced. We were approaching the eastern portal to British Columbia. The ground sloped up gradually. We climbed the acclivity and called a halt. There, under the gigantic firs, through which the brilliant sunshine with difficulty forced its way, we stood beside a small post, no more than four feet in height, a silent monument of years of untiring effort on the part of engineering enterprise, in which British energy has played no inconspicuous part, for it marks the highest point to which the steel track of the Grand Trunk Pacific will be lifted in its span of 3,556 miles between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans—the Yellowhead Pass.

CHAPTER IX

Picking up the Source of the Fraser River

The Yellowhead Pass—Derivation of this and other Names—The Yellowhead Lake and its Trout—A Bad Character among Rivers—A Fierce Trail—Two of the Horses get "Snagged"—Crossing the Moose River—Alongside the Moose Lake—Canadian Distances.

At the mention of the word "mountain pass" popular imagination conjures up a defile, a few feet in width, winding tortuously between two mountain walls running up perpendicularly for several hundred feet, shadowing the bottom of the gulch, through which a tumultuous river is speeding its cascading way in gloom. However true such a description may be of some mountain passes, it certainly does not apply to the Yellowhead, which measures about one thousand feet from side to side. Indeed, you would never know that you were at the "pass" if you failed to observe that the Miette on your right hand when you face the north is running east to swell the Atlantic, while on your left the streams turn westward to the Pacific—except, indeed, for that insignificant four-foot post, merely a squared, slender tree-stump. Even if it caught your eye you would be somewhat perplexed probably by the hieroglyphics inscribed on one of its faces, thus:—

L. B. M. 3720.
G. T. P.

They indicate the surveying engineer's crowning triumph, and show where the Rocky Mountains will be threaded by the iron road at a lower altitude than has ever been achieved before. Interpreted, it means: "Location

Bench Mark, 3,720 feet above sea-level. Grand Trunk Pacific." One cannot help contrasting the engineer's achievement in this latitude with that many hundred miles to the south, in Colorado, where in order to carry the railway over the same formidable range the metals had to be lifted to an altitude of some 10,000 feet above the ocean-level.

There is much speculation as to how and why these rifts through the Rockies have received their curious appellations. Yet the explanation is very simple, for there is concealed beneath the apparently irrelevant and sometimes bizarre nomenclature some little incident whereby the cognomen was suggested. The Yellowhead Pass was so christened by the Indians because a famous trapper in the service of Jasper Hawes, at the Hudson's Bay outpost in Jasper Park, flitted to and fro through this breach in the mountain wall between the post and the Fraser River, whereby he reached Fort George, some 400 miles distant to the west. He was an Iroquois of huge stature and physique, blessed with flowing locks of bright auburn hair, and the Indians, with their quaint aptitude, promptly dubbed him "Tête Jaune," while the path he followed through the mountains became known as the "Pass of Tête Jaune," afterwards turned into its briefer English equivalent, "Yellowhead Pass."

The various other passes in this range can point to equally relevant reasons for the names they bear. The "Pine River" Pass was so called owing to the mountain slopes being clothed with dense stretches of firs; the Wapiti Pass because of the large wapiti deer in its neighbourhood; the Peace River Pass because it was the scene of a pow-wow and conclusion of peace between opposing bands of Indians after a fierce, prolonged battle; Moberly's Pass from the fact that Mr. Walter Moberly, C.E., found this path through the mountains for the Canadian Pacific. Roger's Pass is

named after Major A. B. Rogers, who, after many privations and adventurous experiences, first threaded this defile in 1881; Eagle Pass from an eagle which, by its flight, showed a way through the apparently solid wall to Mr. Walter Moberly, who, after a wearisome search on foot, had failed to find a single break in the barrier. The Kicking Horse Pass has probably occasioned the greatest discussion, the most generally accepted theory being that at this point an American survey engineer, named Randolph, received a severe kick on the knee from his horse while trying to force his way through the mountains. My own investigations point to a totally different origin. The pass was used by traders long before Randolph arrived, being, in fact, a somewhat favoured highway to the coast. While one of the pack trains was passing through the rift, at that time unnamed, two uncontrollable bronchos ran amok, threw the whole train into sixes and sevens, every animal participating in the general disorder, and each landing out with its feet in all directions at every and any thing. It was only with great difficulty that quiet was restored, and the traders, whenever referring to that locality, always mentioned it as the "Pass where the horses kicked," and this, in time, became condensed into "Kicking Horse Pass."

The vegetation changed with startling suddenness, for tall, imposing firs, as straight as arrows, towered a couple of hundred feet or so above us, while the bush was thickly matted with the tall fire-weed or wild honesty, whose spikes of pink gave the ground a glorious carpet. Here again, unfortunately, fire had wrought widespread damage, for the trees stood gaunt and lifeless, with bark shed in large patches like jagged skin abrasions, showing the hard wood underneath in a silvery coat produced by the action of weather.

Presently a gigantic mirror flashed through the trees. We were rounding the eastern arm of Yellowhead Lake,

which from its idyllic situation, clear, transparent hue, and reflection of snow-capped battlements and pinnacles, may be aptly described as the Lucerne of British Columbia. We skirted the north side and secured a glorious view of Mount Peelee rearing its crest above the green sea, the white snow on its summit contrasting vividly with its variegated rocky flanks, the strata of which reflect myriad colours from the minerals which enter into their formation. Only its head could be seen, as a rich forest garbed the ridge, dropping steeply into the lake. These waters are alive with trout, among which may be found some patriarchs of the Dolly Varden and rainbow varieties. Angling from the bank returned us no luck, however, owing to the transparency and shallowness of the water, but when we unearthed a flimsy log raft, evidently used by some trapper in the bygone days, and one of the most daring of the company poled off with a line trolling behind, he soon hooked a splendid three-pounder, which recompensed him for a shaky journey and threatened foundering of his crazy craft.

The trail wound along the rough bank to the western end of the lake, where the outlet, a shallow brook, flows a few hundred yards through the trees and then bends sharply westward to join another creek. We had struck one of the sources and the confluence of the most ill-famed, albeit the most inspiring, the noblest and longest river in British Columbia—the Fraser. The arm we followed was quiet enough, but its other limb was a tumbling, rushing mountain torrent, and such the river is for the whole of its 700 odd miles. We had picked up one of the sources of this famous river near its birth at the pass, traced it into Yellowhead Lake, and thence out again at the opposite end. For the next 400 miles or so we clung to this waterway—because we were compelled for the most part—and so we were able to follow its growth from a mere ditch

but a few inches in width to an estuary miles across. Simon Fraser when he first lighted on this waterway, thinking it the Columbia, called it the "Bad River." Such it is in very truth.

Even in the upper reaches those few pioneers and traders who are unavoidably brought into contact with it evince for it a great respect, and with good reason. When the two limbs in which it has its rise meet, the river rapidly assumes a more imposing width and commences to foam and boil. A short distance below the confluence it makes a sharp right-angled turn, shooting round the corner with fearful velocity, and forming a vicious whirlpool in the eddy. Then come lengths of rapids where the steeply falling grade gives the water a fierce impetus, provoking a sea of short, choppy wavelets curling in foam. So it is the whole way to the sea—whirlpools, cañons, falls and rapids, and it demands a skilful navigator indeed to wend his way through such treacherous waters.

Its roar was a constant accompaniment to our movement. But the trail was fierce. Now we were crawling gingerly along a ledge, only a few inches in width, cut in the face of a cliff. Trees and boulders freely disputed our progress. A little later we were in mud among dense undergrowth, keeping a sharp eye for an unlucky blow from a "devil's club," a plant whose broad, flat leaves and branches carry at their outer end a small bristly sphere. The tendrils trail aimlessly along the ground, and should you tread on one, the spiky bludgeon may fly up and give you a jarring blow, inflicting a nasty wound. One of the packers was so unfortunate as to receive such a blow on the cheek, and he was troubled with an inflamed, suppurating wound for days.

The trail became worse and worse as the ground became more rocky and precipitous. The horses had to perform unrehearsed feats. More than once an almost

perpendicular descent became imperative. The trail led into a cul-de-sac between rocks. There was a sharp hairpin bend, and not enough space for the animal to turn round. To get round the bend it had to warp and hop in an extraordinary manner. The bend negotiated, there was a steep, angular slide down which it would toboggan, then another similar hairpin bend, more sliding and warping in turns, until at last it pulled up in a mud hole or flung the rider sideways against a tree. You looked behind, and there was the trail winding up the hill-side in a series of Z's piled one on top of the other. The ascent was the same, only if anything more tiring, since the acclivity was too steep to attempt to ride.

On this stretch we met with what might be described as our first serious mishap. While attempting to jump an uprooted tree, one of the horses got "snagged"—impaled by one of the short, bayonet-pointed dead branches. The accident was not discovered until more than an hour afterwards, when curiosity was aroused by a trail of fresh blood. A search along the train found the animal limping along in agony, and weak from loss of blood. Examination revealed a terrible wound, from which a jagged splinter some three inches in length was withdrawn. The injury was temporarily bathed, the load removed from the animal's back, and it was allowed to follow slowly along in our wake till camp was pitched, when a thorough dressing was effected. The following morning the poor brute was stiff, weak, and still suffering, so our pace was reduced to a mere crawl.

Grant Brook was forded with difficulty, for the rushing stream was like a millrace, so that the horses had a lively crossing. The valley was depressing, though the thick bush offered us some welcome shelter from the fierce summer sun blazing from a cloudless sky. On the other hand, when we were on an elevation we were given extensive views of romantic scenery. The



PACK-TRAIN RETURNING ACROSS THE BACK CHANNEL OF THE MOOSE RIVER.

The main waterway was found to be in flood and impassable.

north bank of the river, along which we were limping, is a broken succession of ridges bending from the main range, with its castellated summits, fantastically carved by Nature, standing out bare and grim from the devastation of bush fires and rock slides. The south bank ran up from the water's edge at a stiff slope, and was a wealth of green timber where the fire fiend had wrought scarcely any havoc, with here and there silvery ribbons winding in and out where the melting snows were cascading from crag to crag, from 50 to 150 feet apart, with a loud purring into the Fraser below.

Two prospectors on their gaunt horses passed us on the trail speeding Edmontonwards. They pulled up for a brief conversation, and vouchsafed the intelligence that Moose River required careful crossing, as it was in high flood, and scarcely fordable. They advised us to push on so as to cross before four o'clock, when it would begin to rise. We accepted their advice and hurried our horses. But we were doomed to disappointment. At the ford the river is about 150 feet wide, and when we arrived the water was rushing along with torrential fury. Soundings gave a depth of about six feet, and with a current swirling so fiercely it was possible that the smaller horses might get washed off their feet, and at any rate the packs would get wet, if some were not lost.

That was certain, said the packers, and a halt to permit the waters to fall a few inches was decided upon. These rivers assume their greatest depth and fiercest disposition in midsummer, and as we had been experiencing several days of almost tropical heat, the melting of the snows up in the mountains had been unduly heavy, hence the rise in the river. We did not anticipate a delay of more than a few hours, but it resolved itself into a wait of four days in a most inhospitable spot, on a flat void of all shelter and infested with mosquitoes and bull-dog flies.

The "hold-up" was seized as an opportunity to permit the lame horse to recuperate somewhat under careful nursing and dressing of his injury. Then another mishap occurred. One of the best animals, in cantering through the brush after being turned loose, got snagged in the eye by a dead branch. When the horse was discovered the eye was invisible, the socket and lid fearfully inflamed and bleeding. Careful examination showed no sign of the eyeball, and it was feared that it had been jabbed out. Two animals were now *hors de combat*.

There was a narrow, deep gulch in the Rainbow Mountains through which the Moose River flowed, and we struck up the waterway to search for another point of crossing. It was a matter of about half a mile to the defile as the crow flies, but it took us a solid hour and a half to reach the point, slipping and sliding among gaunt, prone trunks with their bristling snags. When we reached the ravine we found the width of the river narrowed to about a third of what it was down below, and here the troubled waters in flood were thundering in a torment after pouring over a ledge some fifty feet in height in a beautiful fall. The cañon is one of wild beauty, for the poplar, spruce and pine rise up from the water's edge. With the greatest difficulty we swarmed along the side of the gulch to, where the waters pour through a channel scarcely twenty feet in width. Conversation was impossible, for the roar of the cascade drowned all shouts. At the top of the fall, which is lined on either side by huge rocks, we found that a crude bridge had been thrown across by the survey engineers, merely by lopping down three trees so that they stretched the chasm, for the railway is to run across the mouth of the cañon. Just what horse-power is running to waste at this point only the engineer can say, but an estimate of 10,000 would not be an exaggeration, for the river falls very rapidly to



HOW WE CROSSED THE MOOSE RIVER.
A frail bridge of felled trees dropped across the brink of the
waterfall.

the rift, and the whole volume has to pass over the ledge.

The bridge appeared so frail that at first there was hesitancy in trusting thereto, especially as the brink of the fall was barely three feet below, and a slip would mean—well, a pretty good ducking at the least. A few strokes of the axe and two more trees lay across the gap. One ventured over, and though the bridge bent and creaked ominously, and demanded a little Blondin-like dexterity to preserve equilibrium, it was decided that no further delay should be caused by the swollen river, but that we should let the pack train swim the torrent the next day, ourselves following by the bridge.

Up early the following morning, we found the river higher than ever, so while six of us set out on the toil to the falls, the packers got ready to ford or swim, trusting to luck to negotiate the waters safely. As our detour of three miles would occupy about two hours, we set off immediately after breakfast and reached the bridge. It was slimy and wet from spray, and our crossing would have afforded illimitable opportunities to a cartoonist. The first went boldly, waving his arms like a frantic windmill to preserve his balance, for it was no more than inches wide; the second crawled across with his eyes shut; the next went on all fours like a cat; another poled it; his successor bravely set out to walk normally, but half-way across changed his mind and went on all fours, for the slippery surface of the trees could not be trusted.

Rejoining the pack-train, which had got across safely, and fortunately with but little damage, we resumed our "hike." That day was destined to be the hardest we experienced; the going was the worst which it had been our ill-luck to fall against, for the trail was the most execrable of the whole 250 miles. It wound along the north bank of the Moose Lake, which is really an enlargement of the Fraser River to about one mile at the

broadest part, over a basin about seven and a half miles long. The man who first guided his horse along its banks must have started out boldly, and, after going a few miles, must have swum to the opposite end of the sheet of water. He who came in his wake followed his predecessor's footsteps to the water's edge, then swam a little, and espying a favourable stretch of dry land, took to the bank again, dropping into the water when progress on land was difficult. Briefly summed up, there is no trail in the Indian's sense of the word—and on such questions the red man is the greatest authority. The country is too broken and rocky, for it appears as if the top of the Rainbow Mountains at some time or other had been cut off and pushed bodily over, littering the shelf by the waterside with débris.

To traverse this twelve or fifteen miles the pack-train became amphibious. We swung through a muskeg, then crawled to the top of a ridge, climbing and falling over huge trees which had been levelled by wind and fire, and creeping among rocks. Then the path dropped suddenly downhill, and came to the water's edge. The horse had to take to the water, walking as long as he was able. And it was not as if he could follow the lake bank. The shore was littered too extensively with driftwood, and one had to strike boldly towards the middle of the lake to get round such obstructions. Progress was painfully slow, the heat of the sun intense, and after about four hours' steady pegging along, first in water then on land, we seemed as far off as ever from the opposite end.

There is nothing so galling as Canadian distances in the Far West. The clearness of the atmosphere renders calculation by eye illusory. Even the Indians and the few persons you meet can give you no reliable information; they have no means of judging. They simply guess by the time it takes them to travel from one



PACK-TRAIN COMING INTO CAMP.

point to another. And they have precious little idea of time, too. They calculate that their horse can do three miles an hour. If that horse covers six or eight miles in the sixty minutes they still conclude that he has only traversed three miles. Consequently a New British Columbian mile is the longest that has ever yet been brought into use, completely eclipsing the Scottish, the Irish and the Sussex miles.

Even the horses wearied of this continual dropping into and emerging from the water. One pack-horse, after about the fifth incursion, started swimming boldly down the lake. Others were going to follow his lead, when we espied the move. They had our bedding on their backs, and we had visions of a dripping couch that night. We shouted and yelled, but it was not until a packer started to head it off that the animal could be dissuaded from its enterprise.

Four o'clock found us still a considerable distance from the lake end. Our pace dropped to about one mile an hour, and when we did at last plunge boldly into the burnt forest among the scrub, leaving the lake behind, no one was sorry. Eight o'clock had passed before we descried a wreath of blue smoke curling lazily through the trees, and a few minutes later we emerged on a little flat, where a prospector in solitary state was just finishing his supper, for he too had had a hard day's ride, from the opposite direction. It was nine o'clock before we settled down to our meal. We had been on the trail twelve hours, travelling the whole time to cover less than fifteen miles!

CHAPTER X

Mount Robson

The Rainbow Mountains—A Danger Point—Our Introduction to Mount Robson—The Canadian Mecca of Mountaineers—A Story of the Man who climbed It—Lake Helena—Site of Mackenzie's Hotel—Famine Prices—A "Hiker"—Approaching Tête Jaune Cache.

We were considerably relieved to learn, however, from our prospecting fellow-camper that we had covered practically the worst of the trail. A good night's sound sleep greatly refreshed our party, though during the hours of darkness the weather had completely changed, and it was a cold, murky, wet morning when we crawled out of our blankets. We pulled out early, and within half an hour were wrestling grimly with the deadfall. The trail wound in and out like S's laid on end, and in many places almost complete circles, one hundred yards in diameter, were described to go twenty yards as the crow flies.

Then we struck a recently burnt-out stretch where the trees had come down, obliterating the trail entirely, and presenting a scene of absolute ruin, with the trunks piled in all kinds of ways. The leaders picked their path carefully, first in this direction then in that, hewing and cutting a passage for the animals, doubling and redoubling in the most amazing manner. The Rainbow range of mountains—so called from the varied tints of the mineral rocks, ranging from red through greens and yellows to blues—walled us in. The valley grew narrower and narrower as the serrated ridges on either side of the Fraser inclined towards each other. The river itself became somewhat constricted, and,

having a rapid fall through this defile, rushed boisterously along. Now and again a long-drawn-out roar, in crescendo and diminuendo in turn, could be heard above the music of the river, as some rock-slide or avalanche hurried down the steep precipices into the valley. The manner in which the river twisted and writhed was bewildering, the turns being exceedingly sharp and sudden, and as the valley became more closed in, the trail hugged the waterway more tenaciously. Swooping round one bend, we could see a "danger point," of which our prospecting friend had warned us. The slope into the river was almost perpendicular, and the train cut across a shelf of shale which overhung in a precarious manner. We could plainly see the constant slipping action of the brittle mass into the river, which picked it up in its embrace and bore it seawards, for the "fault" was just at the point of the bend where the scouring action of the water was the greatest, so that a constant movement of shale was in progress. As the horse trod on the narrow shelf, the mass was set in motion, and a false step here would have sent the unlucky animal to a certain end, as no foothold could have been gained in the crumbling bank below. Similarly a jar would have sufficed to set the loose mass above us in movement.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when, as we rode over a crest through the dense bush which had shut in our view on either side for some time past, we emerged into a broad valley. Now mountains of the wildest grandeur confronted us on all sides. It had been raining hard, heavy clouds still hung low down, and the contours of the monarchs shaped in rock stood out grim and forbidding. In the distant west there was a blaze of light where the clouds had broken, and the snow and glaciers were reflecting the summer sunshine struggling through the leaden canopy. Behind us reared up a solid wall, completely shutting in the basin, the

flanks so steep as to be absolutely vertical, with a ruffle of thunder-cloud running right across the face, causing the wet rock to stand out blacker and more sombre than ever. In the centre of the murky mass was a straggling, dirty-white blotch, like a snowball thrown against a tarred fence. The thunder was rolling in long-drawn-out rising and falling cadences and echoes thrown from one mountain wall to the other. Such was our introduction to the wildest and most majestic of Canada's mountains, whose peak towers higher towards the sky than any other pinnacle of the Rocky range in the Dominion—Mount Robson.

In its shadow we pitched our camp, for we were bent on an excursion to its western base, since this is destined to be the Mecca of mountaineers in Canada, and will become an important tourist centre, few other districts offering such varied attractions as this. In the evening the weather cleared, the genial sunshine burst forth, and we spent the time waiting to see the hoary giant doff his diaphanous necklace of cloud. But we waited in vain, for Mount Robson is somewhat shy. He has not been seen by many people yet, and has not become accustomed to the glare and stare of admiring eyes.

The next day we also drew a blank. He lifted his ruffle a little higher, as if about to take a peep at us, but no sign of the magnificent ice-cap he wears was vouchsafed. Still he bared his head a little more, and we waited in the hope that by the following day he would have realised that we were not to be denied in our curiosity. Further disappointment on the third day. That mountain was becoming exasperating. But while we were enjoying our evening smoke before twilight died away, the peak suddenly abandoned his fleecy covering, and stood with his profile limned sharply and clearly against the evening-tinted sky. It was as if the mountain had awaited the opportunity to present



THE MOST MAJESTIC OF CANADIAN MOUNTAINS.

Mount Robson, 13,700 feet high, the loftiest peak in the Canadian Rockies, viewed from the Grand Forks.

himself in his best attire before abandoning his reserve, for the sun, low down in the heavens, threw its rays at a long angle, and the mountain top appeared bathed in fire, with the glacier that formed its crest reflecting all the colours of the rainbow as the beam of light struck its innumerable facets, causing it to show like a gigantic prism, while from the uppermost point of snow lazily curled a thin wreath of white smoky cloud.

Undoubtedly Mount Robson offers the finest spectacle in mountain scenery that Canada possesses—it is the show-piece of the Dominion. Its western face, bluff and square, rises up like the front of a huge building scarred and torn by wind and weather, with gable-like formations and fantastically carved plinths giving it the appearance of an ancient Egyptian tomb. Then the northern side runs up sharply at an angle of about forty-five degrees, shelving up still more steeply to the pinnacle, which is 13,700 feet above sea-level. From all points in the valley, and indeed for miles beyond, its rugged, grim-outline and massive glacier are the dominating features of the landscape.

The mountain has long been known among the few frequenting this country. Old traders and trappers, for the want of a better name, described it as "The Peak," using the definite article to emphasise the fact that it was supreme in point of height. The Indians gave it a more fantastic appellation, "Yuh-hai-has-kun," because to them the eroding forces of Nature, which had washed away the softer rock, gave what was left behind the semblance of an ascending spiral road. During the past few years it has excited the attention of the whole world, but, owing to its inaccessibility, only a few have had the determination to face the trail leading to its base, and such hesitation, as we found from experience, has certainly been justified. Two or three more adventurous spirits, among them Messrs. L. S. Amery and Mumm, have equipped expeditions for the

purpose of scaling its precipitous heights, but so far have been baffled. Only one man, the Rev. B. M. Kinney, claims to have reached the summit.

In this connection one of the Grand Trunk Pacific railway engineers, who was out on survey, related an amusing anecdote, which I retell for what it is worth, and without any guarantee as to its truth.

"I was busy at work one night in camp, unravelling the fruits of my day's labour in the field, when I became conscious of somebody at the entrance. I looked up and saw a stranger considerably the worse for wear, his clothes being knocked about pretty considerably.

" 'I hope you will pardon my intrusion, but could you manage to put me up for the night? ' "

"I looked at him pretty squarely to size him up. He was not a prospector, and certainly was not a hobo, as this genus was not found so far in the wilds.

" 'Well, I don't know. Who are you, anyway? ' "

" 'My name's Kinney—the Reverend Kinney.' "

"I was a bit puzzled. This was a most outlandish place to meet a clergyman.

" 'Well, I don't want to be hard on a fellow-creature. Where have you come from? ' "

" 'From the top of Mount Robson.' "

"I wondered for a moment whether a lunatic had struck my camp. He had the joke on me, you see. However, I thought I would humour him.

" 'Well, come in and make yourself comfortable. I hope you will excuse the boys, for they are rough diamonds out here in the bush, and something like Bob Acres.' "

"He entered and made himself at home. The other boys, hearing of the coming of the stranger, but somewhat awestruck by the 'frock,' trooped sheepishly along, and were soon in conversation. He gave us an exciting story, and certainly entertained us in a way that was a welcome relaxation from our duties. We listened



THE EAST SIDE OF MOUNT ROBSON.
Showing one of its many glaciers.

intently, the auditors punctuating his recital now and again with some monosyllabic vernacular. Still, he proved a regular decent sort. He took the boys as he found them, and neither felt nor showed any resentment at their picturesque language. We put him up, and were mighty sorry when he went on the next day. Personally that was the toughest experience of my life, for I was on tenterhooks the whole time that one of the boys would let fly something which would have shocked the visitor."

We had an amusing experience ourselves when a visit was made to the foot of the mountain. There was no trail, and a path had to be cut and hewn foot by foot. The horses had to be left behind. First there was a struggle across muskeg, followed by worming through a cedar forest, where many of the trees had been uprooted, their six-foot trunks standing right in the way and necessitating clambering over as best one could; then came a crawl over treacherous, disintegrated rock brought down by a landslip. In due course, after some eight hours' work, the edge of a beautiful stretch of water, first discovered by Mr. Kinney, who named it Lake Helena, was reached. We hastily fashioned a raft, by roping three or four logs together, and a cruise was undertaken over the lake, a pole being used for propulsion. While moving slowly along, what looked uncommonly like a signboard was espied on the bank. Pulling rapidly towards it to ascertain what it was, we saw, in scrawling print—

SITE OF MACKENZIE'S HOTEL.

The irrepressible Scot again! That canny son from the land o' cakes had evidently heard about the beauties of Mount Robson, ascertained that the railway was to skirt its base, and made his way up here to take a look round. He was quick to grasp the situation; foresaw that visitors would desire to approach as closely

as possible to the base of the mountain to investigate its massive proportions and glaciers from close range; and human nature told him that, after a toil of eight miles to reach the spot, at least a glass of milk and a Bath bun would be in demand! Hence the hotel. And, what was more, the shrewd pioneer had carefully staked out his ground.

August Bank Holiday was spent in gazing upon the splendours of this mountain from all points of view. But our several delays had made heavy inroads upon our provisions; we were running woefully short. We had calculated upon sufficient to carry us to Tête Jaune Cache, where the canoes to take us to Fort George were to bring further supplies; but they were not due till August 6th, and might be late, as time-tables in canoeing up the Fraser are poor reeds upon which to depend. However, we were able to secure ample supplies of Dolly Varden and rainbow trout from the Fraser merely for the fishing, and hooked some beauties which would have made an English angler stare, scaling as they did in the neighbourhood of two pounds or more. The abundance of fish and the certainty of excellent sport will serve to render this beauty-spot of more than sight-seeing interest when it has become easily accessible by the railway. Huckleberries, a stoneless fruit about the size of a black-heart cherry, luscious, sweet and palatable, provided us with delectable dainties in abundance. But our food supplies diminished with startling rapidity, and the immediate future was regarded with a certain alarm.

Then luck came our way. A small party of prospectors from Tête Jaune Cache were returning Edmontonwards, and were willing to dispose of their surplus provisions. They were limited, but we took all we could get. But at what a price! Thirty pounds of flour cost us 33s.—1s. 1½d. per pound; tea 4s. per pound, and butter 4s. per pound. The flour was the



EXPLORING LAKE HELENA.

A limpid gem at the foot of Mount Robson. The raft was fashioned from dead-tree logs roped together.

most important, and we were glad to get it even at that famine figure.

Tête Jaune Cache was but a hard day's ride distant, and we pushed forward rapidly, fording the Grand Fork just above its junction with the Fraser, then crossing Swift Current, a most erratic stream fed by melting snow. Eventually we camped for the night about four miles this side of the Cache on a little grass-covered flat which offered good pasturage for the horses. While we were seated round the fire two strangers pulled in, eastward bound. One was astride, the other was marching along with his rifle slung over his shoulder. They shared our meal in true frontier fashion. We inquired of the "hiker" what he was doing afoot.

"Oh, a fellow offered me ten pounds for my plug, so I let him go. I'd sooner have the money than the horse, anyway."

"How far are you walking?"

"Wolf Creek! I'll do it in about ten days all right."

This hardy old prospector had not even a blanket in which to wrap himself at night, and he did not seem to worry about provisions.

"I'll rub along all right till I strike a railway camp," he replied to our offers to fit him out a bit. "Besides, I've got a pard here, and I guess he won't let me starve."

With that they went off in the darkness.

As we approached Tête Jaune Cache the Fraser bent round to meet us, giving us a broadside view of a magnificent waterfall, where the whole width of the river tumbles over a ledge, about 30 feet in height, to flow through a rock-girt channel. We struck a fine stretch of trail through the forest that had evidently been trodden down by a few thousand feet, judging from its hard, firm character, and along this we moved more speedily. But that trail was too good to last. It debouched from the wood, swung round a little shack

in ruins, and disappeared into the river. We had reached the end of the overland trail through the Yellowhead, over which Jasper Hawes's yellow-shocked Iroquois went his way, and here took to the canoes. The dismantled ruin was the little store where the Indian kept his provisions and concealed furs until sufficient had accumulated to warrant a journey east or west—in fact, it was his half-way house, and consequently became known as Tête Jaune Cache, from which the locality takes its name.



WHERE MOUNTAIN TRAIL AND RIVER MEET.

Tête Jaune Cache, showing old camping ground of fur trappers. In the distance is Mica Mountain.



CHAPTER XI

Where Trail and River Meet

The Hermit of Tête Jaune Cache—His Camp—Mount Thompson—A Great Watershed—Mineral Wealth—Mica Mountain—"Starvation Flat"—Our Diminishing Commissariat—Ernest Keller's Adventures—His Hopes—His "Neighbours"—Our Canoes Arrive.

SWINGING round the remaining crumbled fabric of the cache of the hunting and trading yellow-headed Iroquois, we moved away from the river, striking a newer trail that led along its banks. The range on our right fell back into a jumble of pinnacles, dropping towards the river in broad slopes, stepped so as to present wide terraces or benches paved with a rich, deep top-soil, and having a southern aspect; on these terraces vegetables and other agricultural produce can, and will, be raised in abundance. We reached a little clearing in the bush which poles and pegs denoted to be a camping-ground, and which has been so used by the trappers and frontiersmen for many a year. Here, reclining under a tree, was a brawny, husky type of manhood in his prime, reading a newspaper. We hailed him, and found that he was awaiting our arrival. He is the hermit of Tête Jaune Cache, otherwise Ernest Keller, as rough, as genial, and as dare-devil a backwoodsman as you could find north of the tropics. But his greeting scarcely cheered us. He had come up the Fraser River, and bore the unwelcome intelligence that our boats would be a week late at the least. To say that our spirits fell is to describe the situation very mildly, for our thoughts irresistibly stole to our commissariat and its rapidly disappearing bulk.

But one could not fall into the "blues" with Keller about. He has been "up against it" so many times; he knows so well what it is to catch his breakfast before eating it that he made light of our situation.

"Gee! you won't starve hereabouts. I can keep the wolf from the door for a bit, though I have not an extensive range of luxuries. My larder is severely restricted to the urgent wants of life. Besides, there's plenty of fish in the Fraser! Why, we'll be getting salmon steaks up here before long; there's plenty of blueberries, and there's some game knocking about. I reckon you're in clover."

We took his word for it, and said no more.

Keller's camp was about a mile distant, and we followed on his heels. He led us into a broad valley to give us a view that was worth going on short rations to see. Following the river bank we wound over hillocks of rich loam, finally climbing up a high, steep knoll or cut-bank, the Fraser's handiwork. From its crest, looking southwards, a wide depression lay before us. Right straight ahead, about twenty miles distant, rose a massive hump to a height of some 7,000 feet, bathed in an ethereal blue haze, which gave it a spectre-like aspect. This was Mount Thompson. Its summit was sparsely sprinkled with snow, and Keller assured us that on the top was some of the finest pasturage to be found for miles around.

On the east of this old head was a broad valley which, from our coign of vantage, looked like a long passage, so straight was the serried mountain wall on either side, stretching for mile after mile, until the two straight lines, in obedience to the laws of perspective, seemed to meet on our horizon. This broad valley extends right down to the Columbia River, a matter of some 150 miles or so distant. The range which had been hugging us on the south side of the Fraser broke off abruptly, joining the spur which came



NATIVES AT TÊTE JAUNE CACHE.
A group of Shuswap Indians.



up from the south; the dale between was the dividing line between the Rockies and the Selkirks. In the bottom of the valley thus formed runs the Canoe River, which feeds the mighty "Columbee," and the descent is so gentle that the "height of land" is only some 21 feet above the level of the Fraser at Tête Jaune Cache, and was plainly visible from our elevation. On the opposite side Mount Thompson rounds off into a mingle of snow-capped peaks and glaciers, through which we could just descry a gloomy, cavernous passage, the Albreda Pass—the only place where the range can be penetrated from this valley—this range continuing sharply round towards the Fraser, which it joins again just below Tête Jaune Cache.

The valley, of which we secured a bird's-eye view, was remarkable. It was almost level, and was cut up in all directions by waterways and creeks. Most conspicuous in the foreground was the Fraser, with its extraordinary twists and turns; then behind we could see the McGlennan, which empties into the Fraser. We could see also the area in which the Canoe River takes its rise, and the country forming the headwaters of the famous North Thompson, while the creeks and streams feeding the different main rivers were too numerous to mention. We were, in fact, scanning one of the most remarkable watersheds in British Columbia, a dent in the mountain range on which the enterprising have already made their footprints.

This valley is certain of a great future. It will be one of the busiest and most important railway centres in the interior of the province. Survey has settled the location of two or three railways, the most important of which is the Grand Trunk Pacific, and rumour has elaborated the routes for half a dozen other lines coming up from the south. Private enterprise has projected the acquisition of eight square miles for town sites.

Certainly there is plenty of scope for development

in a score of ways. The mountains teem with minerals of all descriptions, Keller showing us specimens of galena, gold, silver and other valuable metals, claims for which he had staked out. Mica Mountain is a great storehouse of mica, and some of the mineral obtained from it is quite noteworthy. It is white, and of good cleavage, and sheets from 32 inches square upwards can be readily obtained. If such veins are extensive, the mica mining prospect here is brilliant indeed. About twenty claims have already been staked, and the large block of this mineral which carried off a distinguished award at the last Paris Exhibition was mined on this mountain. When the neighbourhood becomes more accessible, prospectors will pour into the country, and carry out their task upon a broad, scientific basis, whereas up to the present only the surface here and there has been scratched. The wealth in the mountains hereabouts is beyond human conception, and, after the experience of Cobalt, he would be a rash man indeed, no matter what his geological and other qualifications might be, who would dare to say what could not be found.

Apart from the mining industry, the valley will attract large numbers of agriculturists, for the soil is rich and light. Market gardening will here find great opportunities when the towns are born. The work will be hard, but the returns will be sure, as the teeming communities must be fed, and the cost of transport must result in the immediately contiguous sources of supply being patronised. There is only one bleak spot. That is "Starvation Flat," which sinister sobriquet is well deserved, for it is terribly exposed to the east and north. Yet possibly it will be rescued from obloquy after all the surrounding arable area has been taken up. Or it may blossom into a hustling town!

We pitched camp under some tall pines, on the bank of the Fraser, now grown to a formidable waterway some 400 feet in width, and swinging merrily

along at from six to eight miles an hour. We passed the time as best we could in exploring the neighbourhood, examining Keller's efforts to grow vegetables—which, by the way, did not call for much skill or attention, owing to the congeniality of the soil and climate—and sampling with great relish the lettuces, onions, potatoes, cabbages and so forth. The Fraser yielded some excellent sport and magnificent prizes, though as we were in urgent need of fresh meat for our table, we did not follow the true sporting instinct, but, pushed somewhat by emergencies, yanked them out as best we could with a bait of bacon or fresh squirrel and chip-munk, the latter brought down with a Browning automatic pistol. Other time we passed in making the camp comfortable, displaying our cabinet-making proclivities by fashioning and erecting seats, tables, etc., with our solitary tool—the axe.

But our commissariat was of vital concern. Some of the most urgent necessities had shrunk to very slender proportions indeed. What might be termed the essential articles of the bush, such as flour, bacon, sugar and tea, had well-nigh disappeared. We sought Keller, and he sold us what he could spare. But we had to pay dearly for our succour, though, bearing in mind our predicament and situation, we were lucky to get off as cheaply as we did.

Keller was a host in himself. At evening, sitting round a log camp-fire, which threw ghostly shadows among the trees, he regaled us with stories and adventures innumerable which had befallen him through a wildly adventurous life—some grave, others gay, but one and all first-rate time-killers. Like so many others buried in the wilderness, he hailed from the United States, having been raised somewhere down on the Pacific coast. The quest for gold enthused him early in life, and he had searched patiently for the yellow metal from sunny California to ice-bound Alaska. He

was in far-off Nome when he first heard about the upper reaches of the Fraser River.

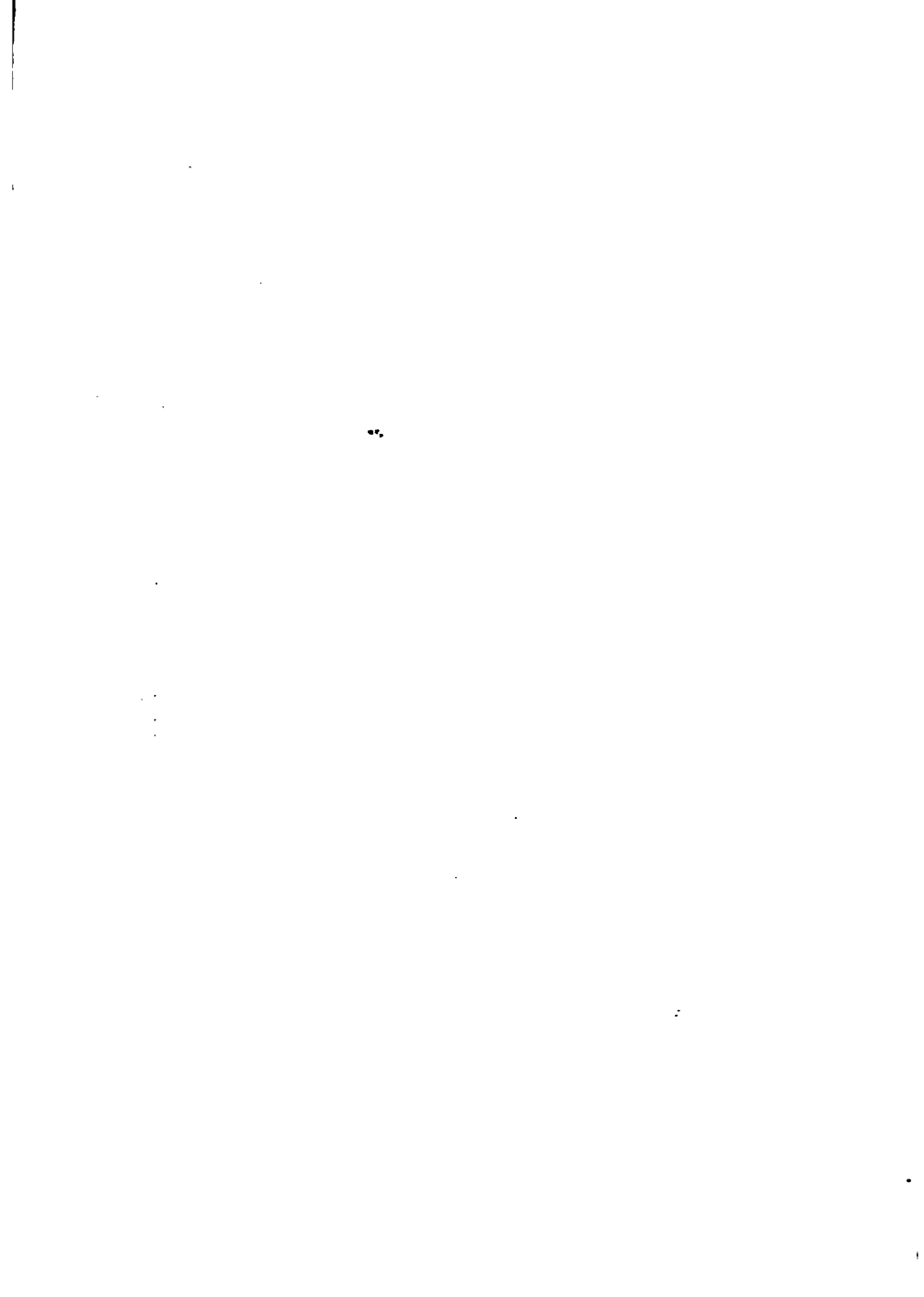
"I had knocked about Alaska and Prince of Wales Island without striking much luck, so when I once more found myself in Vancouver I started off for Fort George. I heard that there was some good mineral country up round Tête Jaune Cache. I got hold of a canoe, came up, and cruised around to see how the land lay. That was five years ago, and I am still here. Yes, I am in solitary state. Another frontier lad, Wilson, and a pard, have a piece of land about fifty miles down the Fraser, and give me a call now and again. They're on the opposite side of the river at the moment. How do I like the life? Why, it's the only life to lead, if one doesn't mind being lonely. Sometimes I am here for three months and don't see a soul, not even an Indian. If it hits me a bit too hard I go off on a hunting trip after cariboo, goat, sheep, or what not. I have been all over these mountains. Or else I go prospecting and exploring. Illness? You can never fall ill in this open, free air."

It certainly looked like it. Keller had a magnificent physique, was as hard as iron, and the picture of health. He did not know what a malady was; even a cold was foreign to him, though he walked about merely in a thin under-vest and a pair of nether garments, with sockless feet shod in a heavy pair of boots. His wardrobe was certainly no cause for anxiety. Twenty-five shillings would have given him a complete rig-out from top to toe with all he wanted, and the season of the year made little difference.

"I am often away from here for weeks at a time. I just take my blanket, some small supplies, and my rifle, and off I go. Time has no worry for me. I don't know what is the day of the week, the date of the month, or the time, as I have neither watch nor calendar, and I certainly do not bother my head over



A HALF-HOUR'S CATCH OF DOLLY VARDEN TROUT AT TÊTE JAUNE CACHE.



either. I just work when I feel like it, and rest when I feel so disposed."

In such circumstances it seems difficult to understand how these frontier men exist. But a little prying suffices to show. They trade with the Indians, and the furs thus obtained find a ready, lucrative sale at Fort George, and with the proceeds fresh supplies of provisions, sufficient for months, are obtained. But Keller has faint dreams, or castles in the clouds, of becoming a Croesus—some day. He hopes to dispose of his mineral finds when the railway comes along and permits machinery to be brought in. Then his holdings will no doubt be taken over, and he will hie to pastures new.

"I might settle down at Tête Jaune Cache, though," he remarked. "I have got to like the country hereabouts."

He was squatting on a few hundred acres of first-class agricultural land. This will be worth some hundreds of pounds and will be readily saleable when the territory develops after the coming of the iron horse. He had furthermore built himself a canoe, in which he cruised about the various waterways in the neighbourhood, and made periodical visits to Fort George. However one might be inclined to sympathise with Keller, he would not change his devil-may-care lot with any city dweller. His adventures are without end. He has been robbed by desperadoes; been upset in treacherous rivers; had tight squeezes in pursuit of big game—and he merely laughs heartily over it all.

One night we heard a hail, and Wilson and his "pard" strode into the camp. Wilson was just as rough a diamond as Keller; of the same free and don't-care-a-damn spirit. He had got hold of some tobacco, and that came as a pleasant relief, as he had been making shift with ki-ni-ki-nick for some weeks past. This is

a smoking mixture made from the dried-up bark of willow and roots, and as a substitute for the genuine weed is passable. His clothes were so patched that the original material was scarcely visible, though, like Keller, he made a pair of trousers and vest suffice for his needs, while his toes thrust themselves through his boots. He wanted a match or two, and these being furnished, he endeavoured to strike one on his nether garments.

"Guess I'll have to be careful," he remarked at the fourth attempt. "I must find a piece of my trousers where there ain't a patch, or I'll break the head off." But he gave it up and lit his pipe with a glowing ember. Matches are a luxury in the wilderness, ranking next to tobacco.

On Sunday morning, about noon, a yell came sounding across the river, "Got any mail to go down?" Two prospectors in a small Peterborough were returning to Fort George, and were willing, in true frontier fashion, to take any letters we might have. Inquiring as to the time they were starting, and securing an hour's respite, soon we were all busily engaged in letter-writing at top speed. At one o'clock they drew in. No one possessed any stamps, but the newcomers were not perturbed. "Give us the letters and don't worry. We'll see them mailed all right." Such is one of the little courtesies of the bush, and those letters were as safe in these couriers' hands, although they had to bear the expense of franking, as if they were paid to carry His Majesty's Mails. We felt a bit depressed as we saw them go swinging down stream singing lustily; but they had promised if they passed our canoes to give the men in charge a "wakkener oop," as the passengers were waiting at Tête Jaune Cache in a starving condition!

In the twilight a week later we heard a loud Indian wail echoing up the river. It was a peculiar call—a

typical high-pitched cry which the Indian uses when hallo-ing. Some minutes later a gaunt figure broke through the bush and inquired for the party going down to Fort George. It was George Williams, who was to take us there. We turned in early that night so as to be in tip-top fettle for the first hard, long day on the roaring waterway.

CHAPTER XII

Down the Upper Fraser in a Dug-out

Indian Dug-outs—A Timber-jam—Our Indian Crew—George Williams and His Record—Farming in the Wilds—The Good Time Coming for Pioneers—Pitching Camp at Little Smoky River—Lashing the Canoes together—The Rau Shuswap River—A Cry of "Bar!"—The Indian Notion of Sport—Pursued by Bald-headed Eagles—Strenuous Work—Camping at Night—Mosquitoes—Shooting the Goat Rapids.

SHORTLY after daylight the next morning Joe the cook was astir preparing our matutinal meal of "mush"—no Canadian would ever start on a day's work without his feast of porridge—pork and beans. We were doomed to short rations, or rather limited fare, until we reached Fort George, for our canoes had come up without provisions, owing to a misunderstanding; but on reflection we concluded that we could just about scramble through another week with what we had.

The canoes were typical Indian dug-outs; merely the hollowed three-quarter section carcasses of cottonwood tree-trunks, about thirty feet long, with pointed ends. They are crazy-looking craft in all conscience, and about the most uncomfortable vessels that man ever designed, though comfort to the Indian mind is the last and least consideration. In the hands of the red men they are wonderfully handy. The European, however, on first acquaintance regards them somewhat with dismay, since they roll like a log, and the slightest shifting of the balance is sufficient to bring about a capsize. They have no gunwale, and as the Indian knows nothing about Plimsoll marks he simply emulates the American tram conductor's example and keeps loading them up until only about two inches of hull are above the water.

Consequently, if you should move and tilt the boat, for it is keel-less and rolls at the slightest motion, a swamping is very probable.

When we embarked, the freeboard was about an inch and a half, as the boats were hard pushed to take on half a ton of impedimenta and ten passengers between them. We had to sit as best we could amid the baggage, which had been stowed to give the best trim, with our legs doubled up and cramped. A week afloat like this was not a very rosy outlook.

At ten o'clock there was a guttural exclamation from the Indians, followed by a smart push, and we were adrift the roaring Fraser. A few deft strokes drove the dug-out from the lee of the bank into mid-stream, where we were caught up like straws by the fierce current, swung round prow forwards, and hurried along at about six or eight miles an hour. The getting under way was accomplished so quickly and dexterously that we had not shaken down to our confined quarters, causing the boat to roll ominously. Lett, who can manage a dug-out as well as any Indian, tried to steady the violent rocking, and, looking forward, spotted me smoking.

"Got a cigarette on?"

"Yes." I had lighted on an unknown packet of "coffin-nails," and was enjoying a puff.

"Then for heaven's sake don't shift it to the other side of your mouth, or else you'll have us over!"

Keller sped us on our way, and the last we saw of this husky, hospitable son of the wilderness was a brawny arm waving through the bushes as we shot round a bend.

It took us some little time and effort to get as comfortable as the cramped accommodation would permit, and every movement gave the dug-out a wicked lurch. We had looked forward to a leisurely, easy ride down the river, and here we were huddled worse than

cattle in a railway truck! There was not a single one who would not rather have been wrestling with the rock- and tree-strewn trail than courting disaster in such a craft as this.

The mountains on either side once more swung sharply towards the river, hemming us in on either side, the lowland being covered with scrub as dense as a jungle, while the trees stretched in an unbroken mass to the timber line about 6,000 feet above us. We had been clipping along pretty smartly for about an hour when we heard an awful roaring and snarling ahead. Right in front was a huge timber jam, where the hundreds of trees torn up by the Fraser in flood, caught in its awful embrace, and hurried down stream, had been piled up in an inextricable mass about fifty feet in height. It stretched halfway across the river, and the flotsam and jetsam formed a dam that constricted the waterway considerably, and converted the narrow channel into a millrace. We had to steer between two of these vicious-looking obstructions, and the water curled round the ends with a greedy sucking. The tendency of the current is to draw the canoe towards the eddy, where, caught by the undertow, it is pulled right down.

The Indians were on the alert. They felt the dug-out strike the undertow, and with their wonderful alacrity they bent to the stiff paddles and literally pulled the boat away from the current. The force put into the strokes was enough to break the paddles, and if one had given way as we shot rolling and rocking through that narrow rapid, the timber-jam would have received another little contribution, and the Fraser a few more victims.

The Fort George Siwash Indians—and we had four aboard, Denis, William, Louis and A-mo—are fine waterdogs, expert with the canoe, and can send the boat spinning along at a merry speed—when they feel inclined. With a current beneath them running eight



HOW ONE HAS TO TRAVEL UP THE FRASER RIVER.

The current is too swift to permit of rowing or paddling, so the crew have to pole up foot by foot.

miles an hour, they see no need to row; they just give a spurt now and again to get steering way, and that is practically all. Denis, a young fellow of about twenty, was a powerful oarsman, and when he bent to the task he put such force into his strokes as to lift the fore-end of the boat right out of the water. But he was very rarely moved to such exertion, except when we were in a bad place. His usual practice was to row ten strokes, and then doze for as many minutes. He was the most slothful member of the crew, though the most powerful oarsman. True, they had been hard put to it coming up the river, for George Williams had driven them like a torpedo destroyer on her speed trials, and ascending the Upper Fraser is enough to take it out of any man, since the canoe has to be poled-up, like a punt, for nearly 300 miles, it being impossible to paddle a heavy dug-out against such a swift current.

The average time occupied in the up journey from Fort George to Tête Jaune Cache is eighteen to twenty-one days. Williams in coming to meet us had established a record, for he had covered the distance in sixteen days, making the Siwashas under him do over thirty miles in the last day, and keeping them at it consistently during the trip from 5.30 in the morning till 6.30 at night. They knew this, and were bent on revenge on the downward run. For this work they are paid 15s. a day all found. On the up journey they earn it; but going downstream, unless pushed, they have a holiday. Williams holds the record for doing this stretch of the Fraser both up and down, and is about the biggest hustler we met in New British Columbia. He was at Aldermere, 260 miles north of Fort George, when he received the summons to come and fetch our party from Tête Jaune Cache. With two horses, and travelling as lightly as possible, he covered the 260 miles of trail in five days—rapid travelling that

—and, without a pause at Fort George, jumped into the canoes and set off up-stream. A few months before our arrival, the divisional engineer of the Grand Trunk Pacific had to be taken down the river over the same route, and was pushed for time. Williams was urged to let himself go. He did; and drove the Indians with him like mad, covering the 315 miles in four days, resting only about four hours at night. On the last lap they pitched camp at midnight, and started off again an hour and a half later. His feat was noised far and wide through the country, as well as the fact that on reaching Fort George he tumbled into bed at the Hudson's Bay Post and slept for thirty-six hours on end.

At noon the Indians pulled into the bank, and the midday meal was hurried forward. The red men have no trades union, but are just as strict in their methods and as regular in their hours. Unless cajoled they will not work after six in the evening, and meals must be taken punctually, come what may. If you do not like it you must do the other thing—go off by yourself. They are quite ready to face a 200-mile tramp through the bush, or capable of fashioning a raft which would carry them down stream, and they can subsist where a white man would starve, and thread their way through dense virgin bush where a white man would get lost.

About thirty miles below Tête Jaune Cache, Louis gave vent to an hallo. The Indian hail is pitched in a high tone so as to travel well and far, and resembles a long-drawn-out "Wah-oo-wah-ooo-wah." Certainly the peculiar cry can be heard at a great distance. In a second or two came back a faint answer like an echo. We drew towards the bank, there was a rustling in the bush, and presently a head was thrust through the bushes:

"Any mail?"

"No thanks. Everything all right. You're pretty low down"—referring to the depth of the dug-outs in the water.

"Oh, we're all right. The canoes are riding steady," returned Williams. "So long!" Another push and we were in mid-stream.

What this man could be doing so far from civilisation and in such an out-of-the-way spot as this, it seemed doubtful if even Heaven knew. He was farming! Leastways, he had cleared a patch in the forest, discovered some first-class soil, and was getting ready for his first crop. However, he was but one of three hardy old backwoodsmen who had launched out in this country. Wilson, who visited us at the Tête Jaune Cache, had wild hay topping five feet not far distant. Two others farther down the river were dwelling likewise in solitary state, with visitors few and far between, the river the only highway between the various points of civilisation, as there is no trail through these tangled primeval forests, and the dug-out is the sole means of travel.

And clearing is an appalling task, demanding ceaseless effort and a pluck that cannot be fathomed. We made more than one effort to penetrate the bush, but were always driven back by the tangled vegetation, the branches of which intertwine, forming a stockade which can be broken down only by the axe. The trees grow to lofty heights, and as thickly as weeds. Once or twice, for our midday repast, we had to cleave a narrow pathway to the top of the river bank and make a small clearing sufficient to light our fire. But the forest is like a gigantic cavern. No daylight ever reaches the soil, which is as cold as ice, spongy from the accumulated vegetation of centuries, which has become heavily logged with water. The whole of the valley may almost be described as muskeg—such is the most fitting description. The timber for the most part is suited to pulping, and the larger trees for lumber. Some of these giants

are of tremendous size, and the lumberjack when he enters will be amidst a wealth of wood.

Owing to the valley being sheltered on all sides, there is no doubt but that the next ten years will witness a tremendous expansion, and that what is now primeval forest will be cleared and converted into an immense garden. The lumberjack will come first—the timber cruiser spying out new resources for lumber is already active—then, as the land is cleared, the farmer will come in and turn the rich, dark topsoil to valuable account in the raising of produce. The land shelves very gently to the foot of the range on either side, and, generally speaking, the lower mountain-slopes are not steep, and should be available for cultivation to a very appreciable extent. The land will have to be drained, but that will not be a task presenting much difficulty, inasmuch as the plateau for the most part is a few feet above the level of the Fraser, and directly cultivation is practised on an extensive scale the river will shrink still lower, in common with those on the prairie, owing to the roots sucking up a large proportion of the moisture which at present simply helps to swell the Fraser.

The land at the moment is absolutely valueless except to the lumberjack. His axes and sawmills are required to level the forest growth. Fire will soon clear the dense scrub, and as the roots of the trees do not run downwards, but spread out along the surface, the removal of stumps is a comparatively easy matter. Farming is impossible at the moment, even should the forests be cleared, since there are no facilities for bringing in the machinery, but directly the railway comes through, the valley will spring into bustle and activity.

These pioneers realise that they have to wait. So long as they can just struggle along—and their wants are few—they are satisfied. This land, which to-day can be purchased for a dollar an acre, in five years' time will be commanding anything from £3 per acre

upwards. These intrepid adventurers in the wilderness fully realise that fact, and though comparatively poor to-day in point of cash, their real estate holdings, whether only a few hundred acres or a couple of square miles, render them comparatively wealthy; at any rate they will be able to command a position of comfortable independence in the near future. These are the men the country wants—men who acquire land and develop it; not mere land-grabbers who stake and claim everything, and then put it up for sale or stack it on the shelves until they can get the exorbitant price they demand.

The brightness of this morrow is already dawning. The engineers had completed their work of plotting the pathway for the iron road, and their bench-marks were plainly visible at regular intervals. The axemen are rapidly approaching Tête Jaune Cache, and will soon cross the river, cutting and burning the vegetation over a swathe 100 feet wide, as they go up hill and down dale. Directly these outposts appear the country will awaken from its long sleep. In their wake will come the construction camps and the end-of-steel town, with pioneers pushing ahead and to each side in all directions. Then, the moment the first forward movement of the huge army of navvies takes place—this will be any day now—with the steam shovel, grading machines, troops of horses and other impediments of the engineer's heavy artillery, the investment of the Fraser valley will commence in grim earnest. Those in quest of land overrun the country on all sides, settle, and lose no time setting to work, for immediately behind the railway army comes the town-builder planting down his streets here, there and everywhere, bringing with him an enterprising community with all sorts and conditions of ambassadors of trade and industry. The silent Fraser forests, which to-day are undisturbed save by the screech of an eagle or the twitter of a little

colony of small red-breasted birds, will give way to the hundred-and-one handmaids of civilisation; the silence will be broken by the throb of the locomotive piston-rod, the whirl of the circular saw, the nerve-racking clang-clang of the electric tramcar, and the whizzing bur-r-r of the telephone bell, for it must be remembered that as much history and development are compressed within a decade of Canada as in a century of the old world. Copious clouds of smoke and fumes will streak towards the sky, as the inexhaustible mineral wealth of the mountains is torn out and smelted for all the varied demands of the world. The ranges have only been scoured perfunctorily by the prospector as yet, but those who have had the hardihood to penetrate this silent world have been rewarded sufficiently for their endeavours to sit down a while and harbour their secrets until transportation provides the way and renders the moment opportune for launching their discoveries upon the market.

The Fraser River Valley possesses every sign of becoming a little empire in itself, throbbing with the life of an industrious hustling community—such men as have built up the cities on the prairie, and are to-day opening up New Ontario. At the Little Smoky River we pitched camp. We espied the fire warden coming down in his crazy dug-out, assisted by his wife and child. They are nomads in the strictest sense of the word, carrying their home in the bottom of the hollowed-out tree trunk, pitching their pillow here to-night and there to-morrow. They have no permanent address, and if you wish to find this official—well, you must be prepared for a hunt compared to which the search for a needle in the proverbial bundle of hay is the merest child's play.

"Anything doing out here?" he repeated, as he sat with us round the camp fire. "Why, I should smile. This valley is in for a big hum, and no mistake. I've



PITCHING CAMP ON THE UPPER FRASER.

The two dug-outs are being coupled together to secure greater safety and comfort.



already been over 600 timber limits—licenses for exploiting the timber wealth—this year, and have enough to keep me going for several weeks yet.”

One hundred miles out of Fort George we came across a survey encampment. They were hard at work, toiling from dawn to twilight plotting out the ground to meet the impending agricultural assault.

“Invasion of settlers!” one of the camp remarked. “Gee! It’ll be no mere invasion when the run up here sets in. It’ll be a wholesale investment!” Such, as it appears to those engaged in preliminary operations, is the future of the Fraser valley and the wide open dales which run laterally into it, bearing a host of tributaries to the famous waterway.

After our first day out the Indians decided upon a new plan of campaign. So far the canoes had been travelling singly, but the dangers due to rolling and low freeboard had come home to them. Steadier travelling, greater safety, and enhanced comfort could be secured by coupling the two together. This was done, the two boats being placed side by side, spaced two feet apart, and rigidly coupled together by cross poles firmly lashed to the hulls to form a kind of raft. Our craft was more cumbersome, slower in travel, but the conjunction à la catamaran gave us more space and freedom, with complete immunity from the prospect of a sudden immersion in the scurrying waters.

As we neared the mouth of the Rau Shuswap River, which flows through a tangled, mountainous mass rich in mica, gold and other metals, we pulled ashore to retrim the boat so as to ease the oarsmanship. We had plumped into the bank, and were looking up the rushing tributary upon which the sunlight was dancing brilliantly, when the Indians cried “Bar,” and Dennis, excitedly grabbing his Remington 22, let drive two shots. At first glance we could see no sign of any animal, but in a few seconds snatched a glimpse of a small black

speck in the middle of the Shuswap barely an inch square, looking like the end of a branch fluttering on the water. It was making steadily for the opposite bank, and then it came home to us that this was Bruin's nose, just projecting above the water as he was swimming from bank to bank. Three other rifles cracked out loudly, and the water within two inches of the dark speck flew up in spray. At that range, with the sun in our eyes, Bruin's rapidly moving nose was a difficult target, yet that animal must have felt relieved when he gained the opposite side and was lost to sight in the dense undergrowth, for the rain of lead that screamed around his nasal organ during his swim must have been disconcerting.

We were now in the midst of the game country, for the Upper Fraser Valley swarms with the black bear. We were recompensed soon for our initial disappointment. That afternoon we were swinging round a big bend through a low-lying plateau, where the river was about 200 yards wide. We had eased up a bit when Williams, looking round, suddenly started up to grab his rifle. Dennis did likewise. There was something doing.

"Not a sound," growled Williams, looking towards the opposite bank, where we could just see outlined against a blackened tree trunk the form of a black bear standing on his hind legs, with one front paw enclosing a bush, while the other was busily forcing luscious berries into his capacious mouth.

Dennis let fly first with his "22" and missed, the bear simply turning his head and dropping on his feet at the report. Immediately two other rifles cracked out in concert at the range of about a hundred yards, and the bear crashed down the bank towards the water. The shot, or shots, had hit him in a vulnerable spot—probably the spine—judging from the frantic way in which he was clawing the bank. The Indians went



THE ETERNAL QUEST.
Panning for gold in a creek emptying into the Fraser.

mad with excitement, for they cherish an utter detestation of the bear.

"No shoo' any mor'. No kill. We play wit' bar," they jerked out as they pulled viciously across stream to the further accompaniment of weird gutturals and exclamatory shrieks in unintelligible Cree. We came into the bank with a jolt, and the four Siwashes, intoxicated with excitement, grabbed poles and commenced jabbing at the wounded animal to prevent him from landing, and giving him sundry knocks on the head. This is the Indian's characteristic idea of sport, and recalled the pen-pictures vividly painted by Fenimore Cooper and others of the delight of the Indians in agony and torture. Williams, when he had regained his feet, snatched his rifle, and, pushing the Indians roughly aside, yelled savagely: "Stop it; out of the way," at the same moment lifting his rifle to give the struggling brute his quietus.

"No shoo'! No shoo'! We play," cried the Indians.

"Play be hanged! We're not going to stop here all night to amuse you. Beat!"

But there was no need for further discussion. The corpse of the bear was floating down stream. The task was now to gain its body before it sank. The canoe was pushed off hurriedly, and as the animal swept by, Dennis grabbed it by the ear and, clinging tightly, towed it to a flat on the opposite side of the river, where it was quickly and deftly skinned, the Indians at the same time hacking off the hams for food.

It proved to be a male of about three years, was of good size, but as a trophy of little value, because the coat was poor and thin, being the summer pelt. Accordingly further bear shooting was straightway vetoed, since we did not want to kill for killing's sake. This decision was resented by Dennis, who, in true Siwash style, desired to blaze away at anything that was moving, whether of value or otherwise.

In camp that night bear steaks were the *pièce de résistance* of the menu. The bullet which had brought that brute down had done its work well, as the spine—the best point in which to hit this animal—was completely broken in two and an ugly jagged wound was caused by the bullet. Whether the Remington 22 of George Williams or the Savage automatic rifle of Lett had brought the quarry down could not be told, but the amusing part of the whole incident was that Dennis, in true Indian fashion, laid claim to the prize, notwithstanding that he had only pumped one shot at it, and that had missed, as the bear looked round after his crack to see what was the matter.

The next day we had another spice of excitement. Two legs of bear were lying in the prow, and we were pulling along gaily in the misty morning, when we heard a furious screech over our heads. Looking up, there was a large bald-headed eagle poised about two hundred feet above, and evidently attracted by the sight of the fresh meat. He swooped down a bit, looking a trifle aggressive, and Lett whipped out his Browning automatic and let drive seven shots in rapid succession. Though he missed, owing to the difficult angle at which he was shooting, he evidently made things too warm for the bird, for we saw its wings buckle under after each shot, showing that the missile sped by it pretty closely. It took the hint and got to a higher level, giving vent to fiercer screeches than ever, which were reinforced from directly ahead. Looking forward we saw, perched on the topmost twig of a dead tree, another big bird. A bark from the "22" started him off screeching madly, and as we came round a big cottonwood tree we spotted a bald-headed eagle's clumsy nest, perched like a crown on the top of a dead jack pine about fifty feet from the bank, and about the same distance above the ground, with the mother in possession. Another blaze, and she started off with a shriek. The din was terrific, for their



A TROPHY FROM THE FOREST.
Skinning a black bear on the Upper Fraser.

infuriated screeches made the welkin ring. The three birds hung about us, wheeling and circling right overhead, and occasionally swooping down to within a hundred feet or so. They were bent on that meat, evidently. Two Remingtons and the Browning automatic commenced talking once more, and those birds had such an uncomfortable sixty or ninety seconds under the fusillade that was rained upon them that they beat a discreet retreat. Had we bagged those three birds we should have been richer by forty-five shillings, as there is a bounty on the head of the bald-headed eagle.

Canoeing down the Fraser was strenuous work, and the day long. The cook tore us rudely from our sleep about 5.30 a.m., and although it was the early days of August the mornings were chilly, the ground vegetation being white with hoar frost, and the air misty and raw. We huddled round the camp-fire as breakfast was discussed, about 5.45, and then there was a hurried rush to strike camp, which stimulated blood circulation somewhat, for we invariably pushed off as the watch scored seven o'clock. The river was wrapped in a cold mist, which penetrated to the very marrow of the bones; but as exercise outside of rowing or paddling was impossible, one had to sit and freeze until the welcome warm rays of the sun burst through the shroud over the water. About half-past eleven a sharp look out was kept for a suitable site on which to kindle a fire and dispose of a hurried lunch—generally pork and beans, with bannock, bacon, butter, jam and tea. The respite from the water was always very brief—never more than an hour—and when we were once more adrift, a combined sun-bath and siesta was snatched if the conditions were favourable. When it rained—and the rainfall in the Fraser valley is fierce at times, the climatic conditions being closely analogous to those obtaining in England—we sat huddled and wet, as miserable specimens of humanity as you

could imagine, vainly endeavouring to restore some signs of warmth to our nipped extremities. About 6 o'clock in the evening the canoes were run ashore for the day, a blazing log fire was kindled, and while supper was being prepared the ground was cleared for the pitching of the tents.

Owing to the dense vegetation overhead—for the trees seemed to have raced upwards to get the warmth of the sun—the ground was as cold as an ice-well. Indeed, one had not to dig very deeply to come across traces of frost, and this state of affairs will continue until the land is cleared and the soil broken to let in the rays of the sun. Sleeping on such a couch, no matter how much ingenuity one might expend in concocting a mattress of spruce boughs, was not exactly like reposing beneath fleecy blankets and soft sheets on a spring mattress, for the heat radiating from the body tended to suck up the latent moisture and cold. Supper invariably put new life into us, and we sat around the fire with the gaunt tree-trunks walling us in like a prison, fighting the mosquitoes which, with the coming of eventide, rose up in clouds from concealed positions and swarmed to the attack. And they were not ordinary mosquitoes either, but exceptionally pugnacious specimens of their tribe, which could not be beaten off readily, and which, when you offered opposition, reared up on their back legs and fought like furies. We kindled "smudges"—small fires of damp leaves which emitted copious clouds of smoke—and suffered semi-suffocation, preferring a quasi-curing process, with our faces bathed in the nauseating fumes, to overwhelming onrushes of the ubiquitous enemy. One suffered smoke-drying until the lungs rebelled against the inhalation of the asphyxiating atmosphere by provoking a fit of violent choking and coughing. Then there was a rush to an open spot to cleanse them with pure air, pursued by hordes of the foe, who swept to the attack with redoubled efforts, biting

and stinging harder than ever in a kind of mad glee. Relief was only secured by return to the smoke.

In the miserable darkness we turned into our blankets, first making sure that the nets which enshrouded our heads like a meat-safe did not harbour any of our winged enemies who had forced their way surreptitiously into the inner space and were lying low awaiting their opportunity to resume hostilities when we were asleep. Crawling into a mosquito net in the dark demands no little skill, and one of the party, Russell, always performed unrehearsed acrobatic feats when crawling to his couch, which ended in his complete entanglement in the muslin.

A little after noon on the third day out from Tête Jaune Cache we slipped by the mouth of Goat River, and were then brought face to face with our first peril on the waterway—the Goat Rapids. A deserted prospector's shack caught the Indians' eyes, and they pulled rapidly ashore. We seized the opportunity to give our cramped limbs a stretch while the canoes were being overhauled and the transverse joints stiffened by logs of cedar wood torn from the roof of the neglected house. Some ambitious and hardy old pioneer years before had the intrepidity to force his way painfully up to this point, magnetised by the yellow metal. A creek rattles into the Fraser here, and the stones giving indications of gold, he made this his home. He left a calendar behind him, on which he had endeavoured evidently to keep track of the days, but had apparently got into a hopeless tangle, and at last gave up the attempts in disgust.

Once more aboard, we drifted stealthily towards the head of the rapids. The fall in the river here is considerable, and one can see the water racing downhill, frothing and foaming furiously, with short, choppy waves licking one another, and emitting a peculiar smacking sound like a hound cleaning its teeth after a

juicy meal. Ugly rocks projected above the surface, like fangs ready to snap at any floating thing that came within their reach. The river was like a bath half filled with water, which two people pick up and attempt to carry, the result being that the water curls and spatters in all directions. The declivity in the channel tended to pull the water downhill, the rocks sent it in another direction, the current in yet a third; and the undertow in a fourth, with the inevitable result—hopeless confusion. Rapids demand skilful navigation, and sturdy oarsmen who are not likely to give out through exertion, and who always possess a reserve of strength to pull the craft out of a tight corner. One does not strike a bee-line down stream, but saws from one side to the other, picking out the channel, for the waters are shallow. If the dug-out goes amiss and hits a rock it cracks like a nut, splits in twain from end to end, and a capsizes in such turbulent waters as the Goat Rapids invariably means the end, for no one could hope to swim a yard in that maelstrom.

We struck the brink of the agitated mass. Immediately the canoe was caught up like a rock, and bounced about in all directions, the cross pieces securing the two boats together groaning and moaning under the strain. The alert Indians pulled in steady long strokes, the steersmen dug their paddles deeply and threw their weight against them. The wonder is that the oars ever stand the strain. They bent ominously and gave short sharp cracks, but held out. A large rock stood directly in our path, and we were making straight for it at about ten miles an hour. It came nearer and nearer, the swishing waters making fiendish music.

Every Indian was on his feet, watching that rock. We were in the spot where the water was racing at its fastest, and the shores slipped by as if on wheels. The Indians gave a deep dip into the water, holding the oars in readiness.

"Now then," yelled out Williams. "All together. Row like hell!"

The reserve power of the Indians shot out with tremendous force.

"Hu'son's Bay! Ooo-ooo-ooo! Hu'son's Bay!"

The body of Adventurers trading to the Far North is evidently the Fort George Siwashes' patron saint, for whenever spurred to great effort they yell "Hu'son's Bay!" to the accompaniment of long, savage pulls, mingled with fearsome Cree gutturals, and exclamatory laughs as of derision at the fury of the water, which sound peculiarly out of place in desperate situations.

The boat flew on. The rock, with its sharp edge set towards us, was scarcely ten feet distant, and then with a mighty swoop the steersman sent the boat shooting across the river, and we gave a sigh of relief. The rock had suddenly slipped to our rear. We at least had cheated it. The water was running still as rapidly, but was more agitated, and though we flopped about on its surface like a duck wounded in the wing, we kept sawing from side to side until the last stretch was gained, when the Indians eased up, just rowing enough to secure steering way, and we tore along madly.

We seemed an age passing through that troubled mile of water; as a matter of fact, we rattled through in a matter of seconds. Then the Fraser, with its characteristic tendency towards striking contrasts, opened out and became as placid as a lake. The Indians threw down their oars, and, lolling back, sang one of their songs in the vernacular, or rapped out untunefully: "Goo'-bye, li'le gir', goo'-bye," which, being the only words they knew of the ditty, were repeated to serve as every line of verse and chorus.

When we camped that night the Indians referred disdainfully to shooting the Goat Rapids as mere child's play, though they admitted that if we had shipped much water we should have been in a hole, since swamping

in a rapid is a danger as great and as ever-present as striking a solid, sharp-edged rock.

"Bu' wait. To-moro' we get Gran' Caneeon. Yo' fro' Lon'on, we sho' yo' sometin'. We go troo' lik' dat!" shooting one palm over the other to indicate a flash.

CHAPTER XIII

Shooting the Grand Cañon

At "Hell's Gate"—Portaging the First Cañon—Shooting the Second—Touch-and-Go—A Grim Warning—A Fertile Valley—Blue Jays—The Game Warden's Lonely Life—A Fuel Station—Outracing the Peterborough Canoe—The Giscombe Rapids—At Fort George.

We had heard much about this Grand Cañon. It is regarded as one of the worst on the Upper Fraser. Keller had recounted hairbreadth escapes which he and others had experienced while in its grip, and had told of the number who had got "fixed," his crude backwoods expression for meeting a watery grave, while attempting to rush it. We had been anticipating the cañon with mixed feelings, and were resolved, come what might, to pay it the respect it demanded. And here were the Indians treating it with contempt, although more than one of their tribe, expert with the paddle as he was, had entered its gloomy depths never to be seen nor heard of again, for the cañon hugs its secrets tightly.

It was late the next afternoon when we swung round a huge loop some three hundred yards across the bosom of the river running its normal pace. Over the trees we could see where the opposing ranges of mountains suddenly swung towards the river to kiss, thereby forming the narrow fissure through which the waters rush furiously. Williams was graphic in his description. "Another few minutes, boys, and we'll be at hell's gate, so get ready!"

We did, but not to go through. We had decided to take his and the Indians' advice—walk round. We crept round the bend, and presently saw a mass of rocks

ahead, rearing up like two lofty walls on either side, making a portal gloomy and uninviting. We bumped into the bank, and the more important contents of the canoes were tumbled out pell-mell. Each man shouldered as much as he could, and tramped the well-trodden half-mile of portage through the bush to the lower end. Portaging is hard work, and it took us an hour. I was just turning to the trail for the last time, when the Indians crowded round, and each thrust out his hand. It was not a farewell, but each was giving me his watch!

"Go shoot caneeon. No tak' watch. Vairy like'y go over. Nevair know. Ha! ha! Shoot la Gran' Caneeon. We now sho' yo' somet'ing."

Dennis even went to the trouble of guiding me to a spot where I could snatch a glimpse of them at the moment when they would be in the grip of the worst piece of water. The canoes were uncoupled, for each was to go alone with two men, one in the bow and the other at the stern.

The mouth of the cañon is certainly forbidding. It is not more than thirty feet across at the entrance, and the whole waters of the river, suddenly narrowed down from about 200 feet wide, have to pour through this gorge. They curl over the brink, and when the canoe dipped, half its length was out of water. Moreover, the defile twists and turns, is a mass of evil rocks, and, dropping a matter of feet in half a mile, the stream rushes through with terrific fury. It was raining hard, the sky was overladen, and the greyness of the clouds deadened the green verdure of the primeval forest on either side. Immediately below, the cañon was like a huge devil's bowl, the water fussing, spluttering and jumping in all directions.

Presently there was a weird shout, and the first canoe shot round the corner. The foremost Indian was standing up working like a Trojan, while the steersman had



OUR SIWASH INDIANS SHOOTING THE GRAND CAÑON ON THE UPPER FRASER
IN THEIR DUG-OUTS.



literally thrown himself on his paddle to force the boat round. In an instant he had changed his position, and, with his foot against the rim of the dug-out to secure leverage, had squatted and was pulling on the paddle like grim death, the front Indian rowing as if demented, and giving vent to fierce cries of "Hu'son's Bay!" with each pull. They flew through the bottom portal like a flash into a big basin, almost a lake, which was quite calm, pulled the boat round and paddled into the bank as if shooting the fiendish waters were a mere nothing. The other canoe followed hard on their heels. Both men and boats bore traces of the ordeal. The Indians were puffing like labouring locomotives after their exertion, were doused with water, and the boat itself was nearly half-full.

The two canoes were quickly lashed together once more, and the baggage safely stowed aboard. A hundred yards below was another cañon, and we were to be shipped across the river and landed on the opposite bank to make another portage. The second cañon looked even grimmer than the first, for the wall of rock rose higher on each side, like huge pillars, and the cavernous opening was scarcely fifty feet wide, presenting an aspect of sombre, awful grandeur. It was like peering into a huge vault, for no daylight could be seen beyond a slight splash of sky.

We started off, but the Indians, finding the going easier than they expected, and plenty of water, did not land us on the opposite bank as arranged, but struck boldly for the cañon. As we slipped over the brink between the imposing cliffs, and the boat suddenly awoke to life as it was caught up by the rushing waters, the Indians and those of the party equipped with oars jumped to their feet, while the rest of us were ready with various articles for baling out any water that might be shipped. About half-way through, the river turns sharply at right angles, a buttress of rock thrusting its nose half-way

across the channel, around which the water swirls in a big eddy. We had reached the turn, and with a tremendous stroke Williams shouted :

" Now then, pull like blazes ! "

Seven paddles dipped simultaneously ; the tremendous leverage exerted lifted the boat half out of the water and turned her round as if on a pivot to negotiate the bend. We shipped a big wave and were baling for dear life, since the gunwale was almost awash. A mighty roar broke on our ears as we rounded the rock ; we were on the edge of a big whirlpool where the water was swinging round at terrific speed and with a vortex some six feet deep, like a big cup, the bottom of which we could plainly see as a mass of foam. The canoes had struck the edge of the whirlpool, and we were being sucked in. The men rowed harder than ever, the two steersmen hanging over the canoes as they pushed against their oars to force the prow of the canoe away from the maelstrom. They had to dig their finger-nails into their sweeps to retain their hold, as they could feel the whirlpool tugging at the submerged blades. If one snapped, the Grand Cañon would have "fixed " another party. But the paddles held, and as the nose of the catamaran was slowly and almost imperceptibly jammed round, the outer swirl caught the stern of the canoe and flung it with an unseating jerk across the river clear of the peril. We had an anxious thirty seconds battling against the sucking force of the water, and the Indians showed that they were "up against it " by their grim faces and the way they bit their lips. The Siwash may be lazy, but when he gets into a tight corner he keeps his head and fights with the strength of a giant. Swamping, or the snap of a sweep, is the danger they fear, and the way the canoes groaned as they bent under the dual and opposite forces might have split the dug-out from end to end, since the cottonwood, with its straight grain, does not require much stress to rend it in twain. While the men

were battling with the current, complete silence prevailed, but as we shot across the river they gave vent to a loud derisive laugh. That is the true Indian. Directly he has cleared a danger he mocks it.

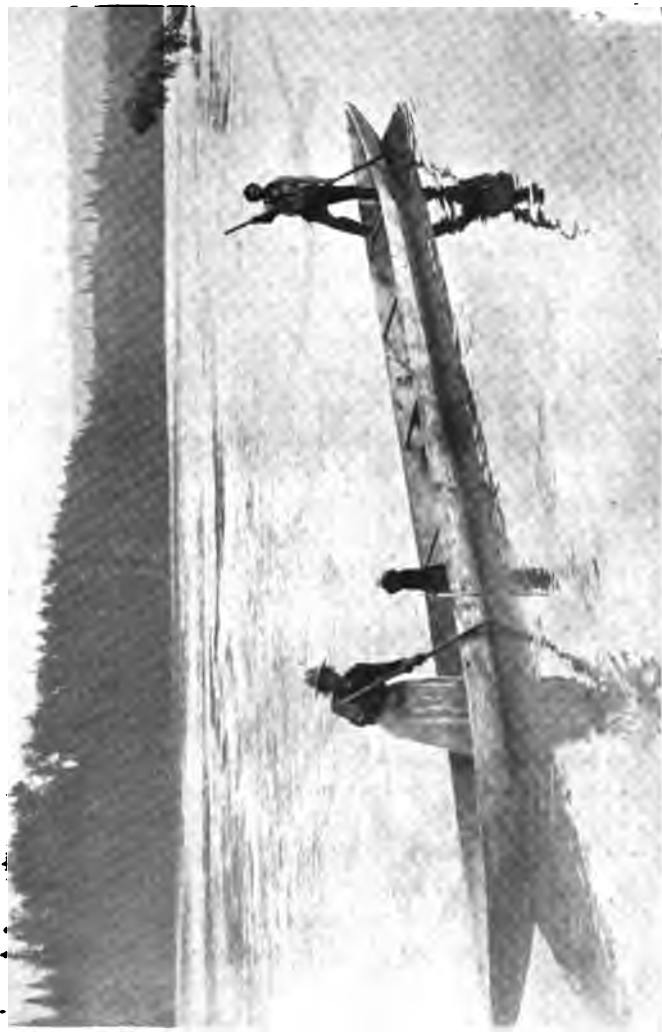
"That's the thing you've got to avoid coming through here," commented Williams, nodding towards something on the bank a few yards below the whirlpool.

That "something" was a rude wooden cross. Two fellows, a half-breed and a Siwash, were coming through the cañon—expert waterdogs and as skilled in handling a dug-out as men could be. Like us, they evidently got caught on the edge of the maelstrom, but at the critical moment their sweep, unable to stand the awful strain, gave way, they were tossed into the whirlpool, and at last the canoe made a straight dive, like a stick on end, into the wicked vortex. Both were drowned, and the primitive monument stands there a grim warning to all and sundry who try to pass through that troubled stretch. One involuntarily shuddered at the thought of their fierce struggle against overwhelming odds, and their feelings when they realised at last the impotency of their efforts. And they are not the only ones who have gone to their last account in that gorge. Every man who attempts to go through, no matter how clever an oarsman he may be, takes his life in his hand. Its passage is easier at some times than at others; it all depends upon the state of the river and its velocity. We came through when the water was somewhat high, and uglier than usual.

But the whirlpool, in bitter mortification at its defeat, had thrown us away to face another terror. Right in the middle of the stream reared up a huge rock. The current sped directly towards it, as we could see by the mass of dead trees piled up on its head, and curled round on either side. After we had cleared the whirlpool the rowers rested, letting the river speed us along until this new danger confronted us barely thirty feet distant.

Then they rowed like fury, making for the rock, bow on. It rushed towards us with fearful speed, and then the famous cry, "Now then! Hu'son's Bay!" rang out again. The oars bent to the task, the speed of the boat increased, and when it seemed as if a crash were inevitable the nose of the catamaran swung round gracefully, and in an instant the rock was well astern. We passed so close that an oar could have touched the granite fang. The rushing water picked us up, the Indians rested again on their oars, and we shot out of the rapids as if from a gun on to a wide stretch of water, for the river suddenly expanded to a width of some three hundred feet and lolled lazily along. We found out afterwards that we had portaged the cañon which had presented the lesser dangers, and had had a pretty grim fight with the perils of the second. George Williams, who knew every inch of that gorge, said so, and did not wish for another such shave, and he certainly ought to have known. But in his characteristic frontier manner he made light of it—when we were safely through—on the plea that troubles overcome are not worth a thought; they may cause the hair to stand on end for a few minutes, but are incidental to life in a new country.

The cañon negotiated, we said good-bye to the mountains, for they hurried away from the river's bank in almost a straight line, leaving a wide open valley, covered with dense brush and towering trees. The river eased up its pace, which was not, however, to our fancy, as it involved harder rowing. It is this valley, stretching for about a hundred miles to Fort George, which is commanding the immediate attention of the settlers. The land is almost as level as a billiard-table, and is well-watered by rivers and creeks which empty into the Fraser, the most important tributary on the north side being the North Fork. The agricultural possibilities on all sides are immense, for the soil is wonderfully rich, though clearing is a stupendous task.



THE ROMANY OF THE RIVER.

The fire warden, his wife, and child in their floating home—an Indian dug-out on the Fraser. At night they pitch their tent on the bank.



Although we were denied the sight of strange human faces, visitors were not long in making their appearance when we pitched camp for the midday meal or at night. These were the blue jays, so-called from their gorgeous royal-blue plumage. They are exceedingly bold, appearing to know intuitively that their companionship is welcomed by the wanderers through the bush. They herald their approach by a jarring screech, and take up a position in a tree near by to size up the situation. Like the robin at home, they are perky, and when they realise that a friendly greeting awaits them, they are not long before they fly to the ground and hop about the feet of the campers, snatching this or that piece of food and beating a hurried retreat to a safe distance to devour it in peace. In the course of a few minutes they have become sufficiently tame to take proffered food from an outstretched hand. These birds are among the few encountered in the Fraser River valley, the chicken hawk and eagles being the object of human hostility, while the raven is met only occasionally, and never approaches very closely, preferring to con strangers sagely from the safe perch of the topmost branch of the highest tree in the vicinity. No traveller would think of lifting a finger against the blue jay, and the bird's industrious efforts to rifle the larder are regarded with amusement. When we struck camp we invariably left a small colony of them chattering and fighting over the remnants of food we had left behind.

While the life of the fire warden whom we met on Little Smoky River is undoubtedly lonely, yet he has his family to keep him company. The game warden, whom we met later, has a far more pitiable existence. We were making a smart pace down mid-stream when the sharp eyesight of A-mo detected the outlines of a Peterborough among the overhanging branches about half a mile ahead, slowly creeping up the river. We were travelling through a country rich in moose, the

shooting of which is sternly prohibited except during a season of a few days' duration later in the year. Indeed, the previous afternoon, we had been within a dozen feet of one of these magnificent creatures while quietly drinking, and although Dennis had grabbed his rifle and was about to let drive in true Indian fashion, the threat of being pitched overboard if he did fire, as the meat was useless to us, had the desired effect. The animal lifted its massive head, regarded us with momentary wonder and alarm, and then plunged madly into the bush.

The game warden was evidently suspicious of us. He guessed that if we got within bullet's reach of one of these animals we should not let it escape. The bulky appearance of our coupled dug-outs confirmed his suspicions, and he resolved upon a closer examination. He pulled his frail boat into the centre of the river, right in our path, and just paddled sufficiently to off-set the current. From his position he was enabled to glance over our approaching vessel from stem to stern, and, satisfied that we had no contraband aboard, he let us pass within three feet, with a curt greeting and an inquiry as to whether the fire warden was nearabouts. The game warden wanders up and down the rivers of this wild country the whole year through. The loneliness is such as can be felt. His home by day is a frail craft barely eighteen feet in length, while in the bow is piled up roughly his domicile by night—a small A-tent and bedding. Sometimes for weeks he never sees a soul to speak to, and even the Indians and backwoodsmen confessed that, though their positions were lonely, they preferred their situations to the roaming life and greater loneliness of Roberts the game warden. George Williams sagely summed up the situation in the brief comment, "No one but a blarmed Englishman would ever take the job on."

When we were within easy distance of Fort George

we were introduced to another way of making a living in the bush. We observed a small A-tent on shore, and could hear the steady plonk, plonk, plonk of an axe engaged in tree-felling. We gave a shrill hail, and in a few seconds two gaunt, sparsely clad figures appeared at the water's edge, momentarily ceasing their labours to investigate the source of the greeting. Beside them was a huge stock of split wood. What was it for? Well, adventurous, enterprising spirits down in Fort George were planning the steamboat subjugation of the Fraser River, and fuel was necessary to their scheme. These shallow-draught river craft burn wood, which is abundant and cheap, in preference to coal, which is scarce and expensive. Wood-loading stations have to be disposed at frequent intervals.

These two young fellows heard about the project and immediately conceived the idea of going up the river and, at a suitable point, establishing a fuel station. The huge pile beside them represented a month's labour, and aggregated about 115 cords, firewood measurement. The steamboat company would pay them 14s. 6d. a cord measuring 4 feet high by the same in depth and 8 feet in length, so that their four weeks' toil was worth to them, roughly, a matter of £88. Seeing that their expenses were practically nothing, comprising only a stock of provisions, a small tent, one or two kitchen utensils, a blanket or two, and a supply of axes, the whole of which could be covered by a ten-pound note, it will be seen that their investment was highly profitable. When the construction of the railway commences through the Fraser River Valley and the contractors' steamboats hurtle up and down the waterway with supplies for the camps, such axemen as these will earn the attractive wage of above £20 a month, for the engines burn about a cord of wood per hour.

The day after we passed the Grand Cañon we notched our longest day's run—62 miles—rowing from 6.30 a.m.

to 6 p.m., with only 45 minutes' respite for lunch. And it was hard work all the time; it was like rowing over a huge lake, the current being very sluggish and certainly not making more than four miles an hour, even though it was slightly in flood.

We had been plodding along for about three hours when a wreath of smoke was observed curling up from the trees. Louis instantly gave vent to a long-drawn-out "Wah—ooo—wah—wah—oo—ooo—ooo." Silence for a few minutes, broken only by the echoing of the cry. Then there came across the water the unmistakable stentorian tones of an American.

"Gee-whiz! You sons of sea cooks got down here already! Guess you've been going some! Catch you up in an hour. So long."

It was our friend of the Peterborough canoe, with our mail from Tête Jaune Cache. We threw back a defiant shout and laugh. The Indians, inspired by the signs of a race, rowed harder than ever, and we made the canoes clip along merrily. Lunch was hurried down, and we were off again. The Siwashers were determined not to be overtaken by, to their mind, a despicable Peterborough while they could row. At 6 o'clock that evening we caught sight of a few shacks in a clearing among the trees. It was Giscombe. We pulled in smartly, beached the canoes, and our dejected spirits were once more revived by the sight of a dozen or so white faces—of settlers and frontier traders already in possession. We were on the fringe of civilisation once more, and we sat down to supper that night with a keener relish than we had had for five days.

About two hours later the Peterborough drew in and our mail once more reverted to us. We were a jovial party that night, for one of these Americans—they both hailed from the Windy City down in Illinois—was the most exuberant fellow-creature we had struck for weeks, and he kept us going with anecdotes, reminiscences, and

experiences of a prospector's life from Klondike to Tête Jaune Cache, from Nome to Mexico.

The last peril of the river lay a mile distant—the Giscombe rapids, described by our genial American friend as “ten miles of hell.” That was certainly cheering. However, the Indians were in conclave, and at last suggested that as the occupants of the Peterborough were unfamiliar with its waters, we should give them a pilot, and they in return should help us out by carrying some of our baggage, as our canoes were a trifle too low down in the water to get through safely. The bargain was struck, and in the misty dawn the two crews were hard at work, George Williams agreeing to steer the Peterborough.

Giscombe Portage is an important point on the Upper Fraser. A few miles to the north is the height of land on the opposite slope of which nestles Summit Lake, the outlet giving rise to the Crooked River, which forms one leg of the Parsnip, this becoming in turn the mighty Peace River, which flows through one of the most fertile territories in the Great North-West, and finally empties into the Arctic Ocean as the mighty Mackenzie. The portage is about nine miles long, and has formed a well-trodden highway for traffic to the land of the North. During the Klondike gold rush a large number from “down South” trekked this way to the new Eldorado.

Our canoes lightened somewhat, they had a higher freeboard and rode much more easily. The rapids were a bit wicked, and we were in for some more hair-raising. It was about 7 o'clock that we pushed off on our last lap of forty-one miles on the Fraser River, and, nursing their energy for the tussle looming ahead, the Indians sat stolidly still, just giving a spurt now and again to get steering way. At last we were within a few yards of the edge of the choppy run with its twists and turns, contrary currents, narrow passages, and bristling rocks lurking for the most part about two inches below the

surface, and only showing their whereabouts by ruffs of foam. The water could be seen running down-hill, and we were soon in the *mêlée*. The Indians, at the prospect of a race with a light Peterborough, were keen, and rowed like demons. The manner in which the rapids have to be criss-crossed is astonishing. First you are driving at full speed towards the south bank, passing rocks so closely that you could lean over and touch them; then there is a race to the other bank, the Indians calculating the side drift to a nicety. It is touch-and-go the whole time. The danger of our run through the rapids was partially removed from our eyes by the inspiring race and the evolutions which George Williams was executing in the Peterborough, to the dismay of his jovial companion from Chicago, who could not for the life of him understand why the pilot wanted to go on expeditions off the beaten channel among a seething mass of foam and rocks. The Peterborough, riding so lightly, bounced like a cork, and the amusing American was getting a more than fair share of excitement.

When at last we cleared the broken, swiftly-running foam—the ten miles had been covered in an hour, and we had shipped little water—the Indians settled down to a hard row. We raced that Peterborough time after time, for it was light and made swift pace. But the Indians, with their long powerful strokes, could overtake it and leave it behind with little trouble.

About 8 o'clock we rounded a bend through lofty tree-clothed banks. Immediately ahead, at the end of our perspective view of water, was a gap in the endless forest; a church spire broke the horizon of timber. Rude shacks of diminutive size loomed up. We put more effort into our strokes and sped along. We swung across a broad estuary—where the blue waters of the Nechaco join the yellowish-green of the Fraser—shot under a bank on which were crowded "klotchmans," as wives of the Siwashes are called, who laughed, giggled, and threw

greetings to our Indian oarsmen; hugged the bank for some distance, and finally pulled up at the mouth of a mere stream. We clambered ashore, toiled up the slope, and stood within the shadow of a famous landmark of New British Columbia—the Hudson's Bay Post, the white walls of which glistened in the brilliance of the unsurpassable sunlight. There at our feet lay a town with a great future—Fort George.

CHAPTER XIV

A Metropolis in the Making

The Story of Fort George—Its Position in Commercial Strategy—The First Settlers—An Inland Port that-is-to-be—Streets in Embryo—Soaring Prices of Freeholds—Recreations—"Hudson's Bay Rum"—Prices of Commodities—The Story of a Man who Succeeded—A Splendid Country for Mixed Farming—Fruit Culture and Summer Frosts—Starting a Newspaper—Taking their Pleasures Madly—The Telephone.

As one looked down upon the pulsating little town, rapidly pushing out its tentacles of streets and avenues north and west, forcing the wall of dense forest back farther and farther, one's thoughts flew back a hundred years; recalled Mackenzie's wonderful journey wherein he discovered the source of the famous river which bears his name, and on his way out to the Pacific struck the Fraser River near Giscombe Portage and skirted this point. One almost wonders how he came to miss the estuary of the Nechaco, since he must have been somewhat puzzled by the strange line which runs well defined almost down the centre of the river. South of the line are the muddy waters of the Fraser, while north are the crystal blue waters of the Nechaco, and it is some time before the two commingle. The line of demarcation is plainly visible, and although the estuary of the Nechaco cannot be discerned readily, since it is hidden by low-lying islands, giving the Fraser at the junction the appearance of a lake, yet the two strongly coloured waters running side by side could not fail to create curiosity. The only explanation that can be offered is that the famous explorer must have hugged the south bank very tightly, in which event, owing to the width of the river,



FORT GEORGE.

The metropolis of New British Columbia in its early stages, showing the American system of laying out the streets at right angles. The Fraser River in the foreground.

the phenomenon would escape his observation from a canoe.

The trading post dates back from the year 1807, and was named in honour of the then reigning King. Much water has rolled past Fort George since that day: the old and stout wooden walls have witnessed strange sights and passed through many vicissitudes; but the strangest episode of all was the appearance of a few sturdy adventurous spirits, some three or four years ago—almost a century to the year after the foundation of the post—with their axes and blankets, who set to work sedulously to lay the foundations of what cannot help becoming the capital city of New British Columbia.

The position is commercially strategical. There is every attribute for development into a busy hub. The Fraser flows by the front door; the Nechaco rolls by the back entrance, meandering through a wonderfully fertile valley of nearly 300,000 acres. The mountains, in the hollows of which the innumerable streams rise and flow northwards to swell the great rivers pouring into the Arctic seas, run in ridges radiating from this point like the spokes of a wheel; and pushing westwards from the north through their passes, one eventually comes to this focus. In fact, all roads from the north, east and west lead to Fort George, and those who, four years ago, had the prescience and tenacity to state that Fort George would become a "humming" city, are heaping up corroboration every day. When the Grand Trunk Pacific comes in from the north-west, west, and east, when Edmonton is less than twenty-four hours' ride to the east, and the Pacific at Prince Rupert and Vancouver is about the same space of time distant on the west, then much will be doing. The town will go ahead with a rush as the railway unveils new fields of industry, and creates new openings for human activity.

When the town-builders arrived on the scene a pretty problem faced them. They must have cast envious eyes

upon the thousand-acres tract of the Indian reservation, occupying the angle at the junction of the rivers, where some 200 Siwashas drag out a miserable existence by some means or other, and live under conditions which an English dog would spurn—for it was the only open level stretch of country for miles around. But casting round half a mile below the village they found the high bank of the river giving way to a gentle slope, where first-class mooring facilities for shallow-draught vessels could be easily and inexpensively provided.

Yet the outlook was forbidding in the extreme. Dense scrub and towering trees lapped the water, and stretched back in an unbroken tangled mass to the ridge behind. Undeterred by the prospect, they set bravely to work. In a short space of time they had cleared a large area, and had plotted a network of streets on the American plan, where the main avenues run in one direction—broad thoroughfares from 60 to 80 feet wide—with the lateral arteries crossing at right-angles at regularly spaced intervals. The moment the plots were staked out, they sold under the hammer like hot cakes. Inside plots facing the main thoroughfares down by the waterside fetched from £80 to £95 apiece, while corners with frontages on two streets ran up to as much as £200. The purchasers squatted on their freeholds in tents, bravely facing privations and adventure. As soon as the steam engine and circular saw were brought up from the south by superhuman effort, erected, and set to work ripping the tree-trunks into planks, the settlers changed from canvas to wooden dwellings. When I arrived, the town was in the throes of this transition to timber. The next development is permanent masonry, but much will happen before that move is made. The community has got to shake itself down; has to let the different social, industrial and commercial districts define themselves, and determine their own particular localities. At present Fort George is in the melting-pot

stage; everyone is too busy setting the foundations of the city firmly and irremovably to trouble about which is east and which is west from the social point of view.

It was a frontier town in the fullest sense of the word. Consider the situation and conditions, then you can gain some idea of the formidable nature of the task confronting the builders in converting into a hive of industry what had been forest since British Columbia was moulded. The nearest railway station was Ashcroft, 318 miles to the south. Every ounce of material had to be brought across country by animal labour, and freight soared to fancy prices. From Ashcroft, fortunately, the Cariboo Road, a splendidly built highway—itsself a product and reminiscence of an early gold stampede—ran northwards for 163 miles to Soda Creek on the Fraser River. But the path thence, for 155 miles, was existent more in name than in actuality.

When the nucleus of Fort George's population came in, they had a rough experience, for the last stretch was a fierce hand-to-hand fight with deadfall, obstructed trail, rock and muskeg. When the subsequent rush set in—a host of other "Fort Georges" sprang into existence in the vicinity of the pioneer town owing to the success of the initial enterprise—the sight was fearful, and the plight of those surging forward to get in on the "ground floor" recalled the fearful struggle to reach the Klondike overland from Edmonton. The sun had just begun to drive hoary winter back to the Arctic Circle, and the going was difficult. The stream of speculators, traders and others tumbled out of the train at Ashcroft and poured northwards as best they could. Some seized the stage, others rode on horseback, but a larger number walked, reeling off some twenty or thirty miles a day, swallowing meals hurriedly at stopping-places at two shillings apiece, and passing the night either wrapped in a blanket under a tree, or jammed into the cramped bedroom of a stopping-place or stable, for which accommoda-

tion they had to pay two shillings. Anyone who has endeavoured to woo a few hours' repose in one of these shacks will readily admit that Sam Weller's twopenny rope ranked as a feather-bed in comparison. The stopping-places drove a thriving trade, as did also the cattle dealers at Ashcroft, who flocked there in large numbers with pack-horses which they sold to luckless travellers at £20 per head, but which would have been dear at half the price.

South Fort George pursued the even tenor of its way unconcerned. It held the long stretch of waterfront, and that was a vital consideration, for down at Soda Creek shallow-draught steamboats were being built, and soon, for the first time since its birth, the mighty Upper Fraser and its forests echoed the shriek of a siren and the throb of a piston. The arrival of the first steamboat was received with tremendous jubilation by the Fort Georgers. They were now in touch with civilisation as represented by Quesnel and Soda Creek. Then another advance was made. A stage coach ran between Ashcroft and Soda Creek, connecting with the steamers, and covering the 163 miles in three days. But such transport was too slow; there was no room for eighteenth-century methods out in a twentieth-century territory, for the new town was going ahead like a bush-fire. Commerce clamoured for more rapid travel. It came in the form of a motor-car, which reeled off the 163 miles between Ashcroft and Soda Creek in ten or twelve hours. That was something like travelling.

Once the town was cut off for two months by a mishap to a steamboat, and the inhabitants were reduced to famine. Did they sit down and bemoan their fate? Not by any means. Down on Fort George's waterfront brawny workmen set to work building the hull of a steamboat, and, what was more, safely committed it to the bosom of the Fraser. The machinery was brought up with infinite labour and at prodigious expense and suc-

cessfully installed, so that it was not long before the new creation was whisking up and down the waterway. The maiden trip of that vessel was a red-letter day for the interior of British Columbia. A town of less than one hundred people who could build and launch a fair-sized steamboat without the hundred-and-one facilities of a shipyard, could do anything!

Fort George is likely to develop into a busy inland port. The shallow-draught boats, after establishing themselves on the Fraser between Soda Creek and the new town, undertook voyages of discovery up the various other rivers. This was a somewhat daring enterprise, considering the swift currents, lurking dangers, and absence of all knowledge concerning their navigation. The only pilots available were the Indians, and it was found that their intelligence was remarkably reliable, so thoroughly have they studied the idiosyncrasies of these treacherous waterways. The smallest and shallowest-draught vessel was employed for this exploration work, and it succeeded in making its way up the Fraser as far as Tête Jaune Cache, ascended the Nechaco to Fort Fraser, a matter of 120 miles, and also the Stuart River to Fort St. James on Stuart Lake, 139 miles. These investigations conclusively proved that there are about 1,000 miles of navigable waters available to shallow-draught steamers in the interior of British Columbia which can be exploited profitably, and of which Fort George is the obvious centre, including a continuous stretch of 470 miles on the River Fraser.

We found the town in the full excitement of development. Main Street was paved with some inches of dust, and had a surface something like the edge of a saw, though timber sidewalks were provided. One avenue was in flames; another was a piled-up mass of levelled tree trunks smouldering and smoking; one cross-street was impassable unless you had an axe to cut your way through the bush; while four feet of muskeg ooze and slime barred

another. The plans showed streets almost without number, but it would have been impossible to locate them in the forest, though the wooden pegs were somewhere there, setting out the delimitations.

Every man was in his shirt-sleeves doing something or other. Down on the waterside the saw-mill was screeching from morning to night ripping up logs, and the 30,000 feet of lumber it turned out in the day disappeared like magic at anything between £6 and £10 per thousand lineal feet. Twice the quantity could have been absorbed, and then there would have been demands for more. Labour was scarce, wages were heavy; the Indians stood stolidly by and refused to touch a tool unless paid from 15s. to £1 a day. White labour soared up to 25s. a day, with all found. One English carpenter was netting 29s. a day, and when offered a job for the winter a few miles out, refused to take it under 52s. a day, with all found! There was not a soul idle in the whole place, and workshies and law-breakers, if they did reach this point, were treated in a peculiarly drastic and effective manner. There was no argument: they were made to work. There was no such thing as charity for unemployed, as the demand for labour far exceeded the supply.

The clerks of two banks were endeavouring to work scheduled hours, but business ruled otherwise; the little restaurant started by two enterprising young waitresses who had hurried up from Quesnel in the first move to the town was striving hard to fulfil all demands for meals three times a day at 2s. apiece per head. Those who could not get a seat inside the restaurant secured their victuals and enjoyed an alfresco meal sprawling on a plank or the bare ground; a baker was turning out 1-lb. loaves at a shilling apiece and dough nuts at four a shilling, clearing out his stock before the morning was gone; land agents were busy selling lots, for the freeholds were constantly changing hands, and the prices soared upwards like an aeroplane, those who had paid originally £80 or

£95 for an inside plot selling readily at £150 upwards, while corner lots which were bought at the auction for £200 found buyers at anything from £300 upwards; timber-frame shops and dwellings were springing up like mushrooms: a bare plot to-day was covered with an imposing frame building to-morrow, and occupied the next day; stores were serving an endless stream of customers with requirements of all descriptions.

Ample recreation was provided in the pool room, where snooker, Boston, and pyramids held sway. When the frequenters grew tired of cue and ivories the tables were pushed into a corner and vent was found for exuberance in dancing to the strains of a wheezy, expiring gramophone, in footwear which could scarcely be described as ballroom, for heavy hobnailed half-inch soles clattered over the uneven knotty boards. Opposite was a small gambling hell presided over by a Chinaman, whence continually issued, "Hit me! Hit me again!" as black-jack was briskly played, with poker and other games of chance. This saloon was a certain outlet for money, and as Johnny is an inveterate gambler, participating with keen gusto in the games, always winning, he was acquiring a pretty long and heavily weighted stocking. To play a game of chance with a Chinaman is like pitting oneself against an automatic machine.

An interesting psychological sidelight was afforded at this gambling den. There was one worthy who was possessed of some fine horses, one of which was always hitched to the door-post. It stood there for hours while its owner was inside trying to win fortune with the cards. Presently there would be a hubbub. The player emerged having lost everything. "Here! how much for the plug?" drawing attention to his horse. "Give me eighty dollars! What, too much! Well, say seventy! No good! Sixty! Fifty! Gee-whiz! you are a lot of robbers. Who says forty?" Eventually the horse would change hands for about thirty dollars, and, armed

with the greenbacks, the gambler once more disappeared exultantly into the saloon. When he won—and he did often and heavily at that—he came out, and bought back his horse for double the price he had received. If he lost he simply staggered back to his tent, to reappear the next day with another animal and to repeat the same round.

Fort George was a "dry" town—officially. Actually it was "wetter" than a licensed community bristling with gin-palaces. Drink was freely smuggled in, while "rock-cut" was brewed extensively in a certain quarter and vended as "Hudson's Bay Rum" to secure a ready sale, this being the most famous drink in the West. It was as much like Hudson's Bay Rum as salad oil is like Chartreuse. The opium or nicotine juice with which it was saturated provoked intoxication in the shortest possible space of time, and the Indians were to be seen on every hand staggering and reeling under its baneful influence. The larger, well-ordered section of the community endeavoured to check this abuse, but in vain. There was no policeman within a hundred miles, so the law could not be invoked. Had the brewer and vendor been caught red-handed he would have received short shrift, for both he and his evil machinery would have made a sudden acquaintance with the Fraser. But his hour of retribution came in due course. We heard that a police inspector stole up from Quesnel and caught the "blind pig" very much alive. It squealed terribly while being put out of business, the owner was fined heavily on the spot, and given two years' imprisonment, or as an alternative to the latter to leave the province within a week. He preferred exile, and his pockets were sadly depleted when, amid general execration, he departed.

Fort George was a town in which money was made easily and melted quickly. You went into a store. Nothing was less than "two bits"—a survival of the Spanish influence in California—the term generally used throughout the province to denote the equivalent of an

English shilling, and the tradesmen, not approving of metal currency, were endeavouring to make the paper dollar the standard. For instance, you could buy two 1-lb. pots of jam for eighty cents—3s. 4d.—but three for a dollar, and so on. Other articles were sold in the same manner. In a frontier country, paper money is certainly preferable to coins, being less bulky and weighty, while the possibility of loss is more remote, the frontiersman carrying his "wad" rolled snugly in a little purse sewn to his belt.

No possible stretch of imagination could call Fort George a poor man's town. As we were striking the trail again to travel 320 miles across New Caledonia, we had to provision here. The prices, which would have provoked hysteria in an English housewife, were as follows :—

Flour	62s. per 100 lbs.
Sugar	1s. per lb.
Fresh meat	1s. " "
Tea and coffee	4s. " "
Rice	1s. " "
Butter	3s. " "
Dried fruits	1s. " "
Rolled oatmeal	5s. per 5-lb. bag.
Peaches, apricots, etc.	2s. 6d. per 2-lb. tin.
Bacon	1s. 8d. to 1s. 10½d. per lb.
Eggs	4s. per dozen.
Bread	1s. per 1-lb. loaf.

When it is remembered that it cost the merchants £20 per ton to haul their produce from Ashcroft, the reason for these high prices is readily appreciable. The baker, who, like many other Fort George pioneers, had trekked to this point from the Klondike after the gold fever died out, said that he paid £32 per ton more for his flour in Fort George than it had cost him in Dawson City !

Vegetables and farm produce were just as expensive. Potatoes ranged from 5d. to 3d. per lb., according to season, and easily fetched 14s. 6d. per bushel. Cabbages,

peas, and greens were 4d. per lb. all round, while chickens were a luxury at 16s. 6d. each.

Yet fortunes have been made in Fort George and its immediate vicinity by many a bright young fellow. One large landholder related a fascinating and romantic story, typical of dozens of others in this new territory. Like every other member of the little community, he was in his shirt-sleeves, bared to the elbow. He was no stranger to Fort George; on the contrary, he was one of the first white men, apart from the trappers and traders, to thread the country. According to his own account he first came into the district in 1900, having made his way here by canoe from the Peace River district, portaging across country from one river to the other, and making 165 miles in nine days of continuous hard toiling. He naturally came down the Nechaco and Fraser rivers, since Vancouver was his objective, and the Siwash canoes piloted him down the terrible waterway through its swirling cañon to Quesnel and Soda Creek, where he struck the Cariboo Road.

His home was Boston way; Harvard his alma mater, and he had graduated in medicine, just to satisfy his parents, so he said. But forceps and drugs did not appeal to his temperament. The Great North-West of Canada exercised an irresistible fascination over him, so he left the Atlantic seaboard and set off to the great unknown. He made a prolonged cruise through the Peace River district, a keenly observant eye fastening on the most attractive spots. The next year found him again casting about Fort George from Giscombe Rapids to Summit Lake; round Stuart Lake and through the Nechaco Valley. In this wise two summers were spent. He spotted many an excellent stretch, carefully making notes of just the land he would like to acquire. In all he staked 20 sections—12,800 acres of land. When he opened negotiations with the Government for its acquisition, he was regarded somewhat with pity, inasmuch as

this region was practically a *terra incognita*, and officialdom had no idea of its agricultural wealth. As a result, he secured the land practically at his own figure—a matter of cents per acre. Returning home, he succeeded in enlisting the interest of some friends, impressed upon them the point that this new country was bound to boom sooner or later, and that, taken all round, it was a “good thing.” A small syndicate was formed, and with the financial support thus provided the valleys of the Fraser and Nechaco rivers were skimmed of their cream in the way of choice land at leisure to the tune of some 200,000 acres.

The little party clung tightly to its holdings until the financial panic of 1907 startled everyone in the United States. His friends were infected with the general atmosphere of uncertainty, took alarm, and forthwith announced that they had held on to this New British Columbia land long enough, and as there was no prospect of the long-expected “boom” materialising, they were going to unload their shares in the worthless wilderness. By dint of great effort he contrived to buy out the whole of their holdings, and thereby found himself the undisputed owner of over 315 square miles of arable country scattered through New Caledonia within easy reach of Fort George. Scarcely had he bought out his fidgety friends than the rush to New British Columbia set in, and he found his property doubling, trebling and multiplying in value with astonishing rapidity.

“I was convinced in my own mind,” he said, “that once the general public received an inkling of the possibilities of the new land of promise, a wave of prosperity would burst upon it. But I could not induce my friends to see eye to eye with me at the time. Now they are sorry they backed out during the general money scare. What is the land worth to-day? Well, it is impossible to say, but I should have no difficulty in obtaining £3 to £4 per acre for that still in its virgin condition, and at that price

could realise the whole of my possessions in next to no time. Prices just now are soaring rather high and fabulous amounts are being paid—prices out of all proportion to the value of the land changing hands. Only a few days ago a pioneer here netted £10 an acre for what had cost him only a dollar or so. This, however, is an outside figure, and considering that this is untouched country, it is too much.

"What do I intend to do with my land? Well, I am developing it as fast as I can, but labour is against me. Most of what is already under cultivation is under hay, and I am putting another area under the same crop right away. I have just signed a contract to that effect. The contractors undertake to do what little clearing is necessary and to complete breaking the ground this autumn. Then next spring they will disk plough, seed the hay (timothy); the whole for an inclusive price of 24s. per acre. That is a fair price under the circumstances. Of course, if heavy clearing were necessary, the prices would be much higher, but coming in here so many years ago I had the time and opportunity to make a careful selection and to secure land which is open or only lightly covered with poplar."

Seeing that this pioneer had been in the country so long, and had secured conclusive evidence from experience of just what the land could and could not produce, his views on the agricultural possibilities of the locality are worth relating.

"This will be a great mixed farming country, the potentialities of which it is impossible to fathom. What are the most remunerative crops? Well, just at the moment, and until the railway enters the district, thereby bringing valuable markets into immediate touch with the growers, hay and oats will enable the farmer to recoup his outlay upon land within a year or two. Take hay, for instance. Here, owing to the high cost of freightage—£20 per ton from Ashcroft—this readily com-

mands from £8 to £10 per ton. Last winter fodder ran up to £37 10s. per ton, and was difficult to obtain at that price. I saw one of my sections which is under hay yesterday, and there were 500 tons of first-class timothy standing. Why, even wild hay grows to a height of 5 and 5½ feet, and yields from 3 to 4 tons per acre. You see, when seeded to hay there is no further expense beyond cutting, after the first year, for there is no need to re-seed for ten or fifteen years. Then take oats. The price here at the present time is 10s. per bushel, and you could not get twenty bushels in the town to-day at that price. I am putting some 1,200 acres under oats this year, netting my first crop next season.

“How about mixed farming? One of the best districts in the Dominion at the moment for this phase of agriculture, and the chances here for the British farmer, who from his experience in Great Britain, where he has to make the most of his land, knows just exactly how to set about the task in the most business-like manner, are unique, to my way of thinking. Cattle-ranching, pure and simple, does not pay. I have had eleven years' experience of that game and have not drawn a single cent from the investment yet. But associate the stock raising industry with dairying, poultry farming, the cultivation of vegetables, cereals, and roots, and then the chances of making money quickly are difficult to equal elsewhere.

“Is fruit culture profitable? Well, so far as the Nechaco Valley is concerned, I can emphatically say that it possesses great possibilities. Cherries and apples appear to do excellently, as do also gooseberries, currants and general ground fruits. It has been said that the summer frosts are detrimental. The valleys certainly do suffer from that drawback, but it does not appear to react very severely on the fruit. At all events, summer frosts are only to be expected in any new country, but as the territory becomes extensively settled they will disappear, as experience in Ontario, Manitoba, and the

other prairie provinces has exemplified abundantly. The ground in the dense forests, owing to the sun being shut out, is cold and ice-laden, but when the land is cleared, and the soil well broken and aerated, this disadvantage will not afflict the farmer any longer."

Another little hive of activity was a small shack measuring barely 12 feet by 10, and even this diminutive space was subdivided. In the front part a compositor was busily setting type, and in a small cupboard-like space at the rear a young journalist, Mr. J. B. Daniells, was turning out "copy" with the aid of Egyptian cigarettes. He was in his shirt-sleeves, buried under a large sombrero, with a box as his desk, a jar as his ink-pot, a typewriter as an elbow rest, and a murderous-looking Browning automatic pistol as a paper weight. He was an alert, keen-eyed, young fellow, bred and reared in the Midlands, who had emigrated to Canada in the days of his early youth, knocked about the Dominion, putting his hand to anything which would earn a few dollars and yield experience, until he landed in the Cariboo district, where he settled down to control the local Fourth Estate.

"Come in, you wandering Britisher," he shouted cheerily, and then, tilting back his chair and perching his doubled-up legs against his desk, he went on: "Cramped quarters for an editor's sanctum, eh? Well, I've got a new home going up—see that large frame building yonder? I shall be in there in a few days, and shall have room to stretch myself out. What's running a newspaper on the frontier like? Well, not so bad. If you're cute you can make money at it; if you're not, you get landed in the ditch. I've made a good thing down in Cariboo, and so, when this place was launched I came up here. Starting a newspaper in such an out-of-the-way place is certainly somewhat expensive. I've sunk £2,000 in this enterprise, and am going to carry it through neck or nothing. No! I'm not the only expression of public

opinion. There's another paper in the new town. Does it pay? Well, I should smile; you wouldn't catch me here if it didn't," flicking the end off his cigarette. "Where's the revenue? Well, not in the circulation, I can assure you." Seeing that the combined towns in the vicinity boasted a population of less than 300, I readily concurred.

"I'll tell you how money's made in this line up here. It's the advertisements!"

I looked incredulously at him. If circulation were impossible, the feasibility of such a small community soliciting trade among themselves two or three hundred miles from civilisation was still more visionary. He observed my lack of comprehension, and went on:

"Guess you're a tenderfoot in western journalism, anyway. Look here," picking up the last issue of his Cariboo property. "There's so many solid pages of land advertisements. You see, when you stake land in British Columbia, according to the law you have to advertise your claim in the Government gazette, and also in the paper published nearest the locality in which the land is situate. The charges are regulated by law, and I can tell you when a land boom is raging such as is taking place about here at the moment, that revenue mounts up pretty respectably. In British Columbia frontier towns new organs of the Press don't come into existence at first for the dissemination of news, but are essentially vehicles for the publication of land advertisements. Nobody in a new country bothers about what the world is doing; but they are mighty anxious to find out if Jack Robinson has already staked such-and-such a piece of land upon which they have cast covetous eyes; or whether Tom Smith or Bill Jones is attempting to claim that stretch which they have already staked. Advertisements out here are read with greater avidity than the most sensational news items. What happens when the land boom dies out? Oh, if you have not established yourself by the time the

town develops, and cannot run along on the legitimate newspaper lines, you simply pack up your traps and hike with your press to the next spot which is looming big in the land speculation field.

"Still, the expenses are heavy. This paper has to be 'kicked out' by myself and the printer outside on a small handpress. His wages are an item—£40 a month. Guess printers on the other side don't make £10 a week. In my new printing-office I am setting up a larger press with a petrol motor drive. But it has cost me, in freightage, half the price of the machine to get it here, and I am paying eight dollars a case for petrol—roughly 3s. 4d. a gallon. No, running a newspaper in the wilds is not all honey, but when I want a change I take this—indicating his Browning—and that—pointing to a 22—and go off for a 'bar.' There's plenty round here, and the sport relieves the worries of an editor to a mighty degree."

The builders of Fort George do not believe in devoting their whole lives to work, even though it does mean the upbuilding of a metropolis. They know the truth of the old adage about Jack and continuous work, so are resolved to avoid its stultifying influences. But amusement has to be created. This takes the form of what for a better term can only be described as a "maffick," otherwise an outburst of exuberant spirits piled up during six days, to find vent on the seventh. It starts about dusk, and the whole town is given over to general uproar until the succeeding dawn. Jollification is represented by buck-dancing and other forms of the art in the open street, a raucous singing procession round the whole town, practical joking, the lusty chanting of the latest music-hall ditties woefully out of tune, cat-calls, whistling, and the frantic manipulation of any instrument capable of emitting a noise, musical or otherwise. Should any member of the community have been guilty of an action disapproved by the colony at large, the first succeeding

"bust-up" finds him a victim. The primitive revelries are kept up until sheer exhaustion, or the breaking of dawn, compels one and all to hie to their couches, to reappear the next morning ready for an allotted task as if nothing had happened.

Yet Fort George was not so isolated as appeared on first acquaintance. A pair of copper wires drooped along Main Street to pull up abruptly at the baker's shop. The announcement "Public Telephone" arrested our civilised eyes. Here we could learn something of what the world at large was doing, for this telephone trailed sixty miles through the silent woods to a little cabin where it linked up with the single telegraph wire running from Ashcroft to Dawson City, not far from the Arctic circle. It was a handshake with civilisation contrasting vividly with the wild harum-scarum little colony in which we were planted for the time being. But the true frontiersman resented its intrusion. It deprived the distant town of that inaccessible, cut-off feeling, which he so warmly cherishes. He cursed that "talking wire" more furiously than any other newfangled notion which broke up his environment. The steamboat was bad enough, but that telephone—"it was the limit." Although months would elapse before the iron horse stepped in, that 'phone had unsettled everything. Several true old dogs of the wilds, who have built up many a humming town in Canada, were talking seriously of moving on. The great problem was, "Where shall we go?" and they reiterated the query in pitiful tones. The Klondike was as open as the city, New British Columbia was being unfolded to the public searchlight more and more every day, and Alaska was being surveyed! There was only one untouched virgin field in the whole North American continent, from the Gulf of Mexico to Hudson's Bay. When we left vibrating Fort George, these rugged old fellows of the bush were discussing among themselves the advisability of trekking to this pasture new; planning ways

and means of bringing their efforts to bear upon this possible field for their activity. And that field, wrapped in an air of wild romance and presenting a most forbidding prospect, and to reach which involved a march right across the Continent, was the last place in Canada—Ungava!

CHAPTER XV

On the Skirts of a Bush Fire

Sam the Packer—A Town that did not Come Off—Character of the Land around Fort George—A Paradise of Vegetables—A Bush Fire—Strange Atmospheric Effects—Danger from Falling Trees.

Noon had sped by half an hour or so, and the summer sun was blazing down furiously from a cloudless sky as the last diamond hitch was thrown on the Fraser's banks. Even then we had to move out with only one packer, Sam by name, the other not being well enough to continue the journey. Sam, with Mexican blood coursing through his veins, worked like a Trojan, and was about the finest exponent of his rough craft whom I encountered on my journey through Canada. Well-built, with a constitution hardened to steel from prolonged roughing it, an expert horseman, possessed of giant strength, he was just the man for the trail and a tight corner, while he was even more remarkable for his conscientiousness. He nursed his horses, and their co-ordinate working was a feature that we much appreciated, for a harmonious pack-train contributes to easy, rapid progress.

The life of the pack-horse is hard and monotonous enough, in all conscience, but so long as he is kept in as prime a condition as is possible with grass feeding in the bush, he will keep plodding along at his steady pace, up hill and down dale, for hour after hour. These animals never see an oat from one month's end to another, since the packer must make his journeys while he can—otherwise while the weather lasts, and no sooner has he safely carried one party to its destination than

he immediately loads up and strikes off somewhere else. The pack train is the tramp-ship of the bush. It very seldom has a regular scheduled sailing between two distinctive points, but wanders from pillar to post, sometimes not catching a glimpse of the home port during the whole summer.

As we skirted the Hudson's Bay post, having bid adieu to the hustling frontiersmen building up the nucleus of British Columbia's capital, and struck across the Indian reservation, we met a "hiker" coming in.

"Whar yar hiking?"

"Hazelton!"

"Guess yar'd better turn back. See that!" pointing to a thick streak of yellowish brown trailing in a long-drawn-out blotch in the blue August sky on the horizon immediately ahead. "Well, a fierce bush fire's raging out thar. I guess you'll never get through. It's right along th' trail."

However, we determined to try our luck. Fortunately there was no wind, so that the fire could not be lashed into fury and make one of its characteristic sweeping rushes through the country, while should rain break its early extinction was inevitable. Throughout the whole of New British Columbia the summer had been one of exceptional dryness, and the dead vegetation, moss with which the ground is carpeted like a heavy pile, as well as the ground growth, was as dry as tinder, and flared like shavings. A drought, however, in this country is not likely to act detrimentally to crops, for the dews are heavy. We pulled over the ridge dominating the distant town, ploughing through a soft sand and gravel where jack-pine grew luxuriantly. In the course of an hour we came into a maze of broad swathes cut through the forest, running at right angles to one another. We had entered one of the speculative towns which had been born of the Fort George boom. The main avenue was a fine cut through the forest, its name was painted up in

big letters, but it was an utter blank. The streets were there, but unfortunately the people had not been found who were prepared to flank the thoroughfares with substantial buildings. The timber hotel, rapidly approaching completion, presented the only sign of humanity. This town was side-tracked badly. Whether it will ever be put on the rails of progress once more one cannot say. Canada is a country for rudely upsetting theories and preternaturally sage prognostications.

We were told that practically every acre of the land we were now traversing had been purchased by speculators at a dollar or so an acre. We felt sorry for any fool who plunged here on hearsay, for while some of this land is of agricultural value, much is absolutely useless from the arable point of view, even the grass having a difficulty in forcing its green blades between the stones. The purchaser here on the strength of advertisement will be worse off than the plunger who buys blindly in a salted mine. He will not secure a rich farm nor even a quarry—he will simply buy one of Nature's refuse piles in which only the straggling roots of the jack-pine can find nourishment, and that only sufficient for a stunted growth. It is no more productive than the summit of Snowdon, or the glaciers of the Rockies. If anyone is bent on acquiring land in the vicinity of Fort George it is best to cruise round and make a selection on the spot. Land can be obtained here at 24s. an acre, such as it is, but it is dear at that figure. If you cannot visit the country, then the next best advice that can be extended is to communicate with the British Columbia Government. The authorities will furnish the names and addresses of thoroughly trustworthy land agents, who can be relied upon to give a square deal.

Here and there within the dells sloping towards the waters of the Nechaco we struck rich streaks of land, the fertility of which passes description. For instance, a few miles beyond Fort George the land suddenly dipped,

and there amid the tall, huge timber we came across a small patch where a settler had pluckily stripped the land of the trees and brought it under cultivation. About five acres in all were productive. Three had been given over to hay, the crop of which had just been gathered, and a fine healthy-looking stack it made—quite sufficient to meet the requirements of the settler's cattle during the coming winter. The remaining two acres had been planted with potatoes, and these were then in the prime of their growth, with large well-developed haulm which testified strikingly to the feeding power of the soil. The "murphy" is a profitable crop in Canada, since the native would as lief think of sitting down to a dinner from which potatoes were absent as the Scotsman would think of breakfasting without porridge. This settler had taken over a quarter of a section—160 acres—but the density of the bush made clearing slow and tedious. Yet from his own account he could not quarrel with his luck. The previous year he had raised two acres of potatoes, and the crop had netted him £200. This year he was reckoning on as large, if not a larger financial return from the same source, since prices due to greater demand were higher. The astonishing point was that he had not tilled the soil. This was just a thick deposit of decayed vegetable matter and alluvium, for in the distant past his farm was at the bottom of a large lake occupying the whole of the depression known as the Nechaco Valley. This light, nourishing topsoil was so soft that one could plunge one's arm up to the armpit without meeting the subsoil. All that was necessary was to make the drills, push the tubers in with the fingers, bank up, and then let them grow.

A little farther on we came upon another settlement where about the same acreage was under cultivation. In this case the crops were of a more varied character, coinciding very closely with an English kitchen garden or mixed farm. There were patches of turnips, carrots,

parsnips, lettuces, cabbages, and so on. The white turnips had grown to an immense size, those we pulled up ranging up to ten inches in circumference, beautifully solid from rind to core, and as palatable as any English-grown root of this species. The carrots were long, measuring about eighteen inches from crown to tip, well formed, free from woodiness or fibre, sound and of excellent colour. The parsnips seemed to be equally good, though those were early days to judge this root; still, they measured about three inches across the crown. The beet also were doing well. The lettuces were large and succulent, and though not possessing the crispness characteristic of the English variety, were yet of excellent flavour. The cabbages were large, the hearts well turned in, and of good shape. The new settler in these parts has certainly one advantage over his British confrère. He is not pestered with worms, caterpillars, and other plagues which wreak such havoc in the field or garden, while the lightness and richness of the soil conduce to remarkable yield with the minimum of effort, after clearing is accomplished. Such land as this is pre-empted at about one dollar per acre, and the moment the settler commences to improve it the value increases ten- or twentyfold. The pre-emptor who had raised potatoes here had made sufficient from his first year's crop to defray his initial outlay six times over! And that from less than one-thirtieth of the area he had acquired!

The dirty yellow cloud disfiguring the sky on our departure from Fort George loomed up larger and larger as we advanced, until at last it spread over us like a huge canopy, stifling the sunlight. It recalled nothing so much as those peculiar smoke-fogs occasionally experienced in the English metropolis. It was early in the afternoon when we crept under this banner, and the effect was curious. The sky could not be seen for the smoke depending lazily about five hundred feet above us. Yet on the ground level the air was of virgin purity and

clearness, one being able to see horizontally through the trees for a long distance. But the curious colour of the cloud threw everything into strange relief: the verdure of the trees stood out with an unnatural vividness. The green did not appear to be that of Nature, but rather of that tone which the inexperienced artist freely daubs upon his landscapes. Similarly the bark of the trees assumed an uncanny hue, while the lichens and mosses infesting the trees' outer armour were as detailed as if seen through a microscope. The topsy-turvydom of colouring was no doubt due to the absence of that toning influence which sunlight and the overhead sky produce.

As we ventured farther and farther beneath the smoky pall the effect became more and more weird, the topmost branches of the trees being bathed in green as bright as verdigris. No artist would credit that Nature could possibly assume such tints and produce such clashing contrasts in colour schemes. Even the grass attained a brightness which was entirely foreign, and when now and again the sunshine did contrive to struggle through the canopy, lighting up the sward and forest, everything seemed to have suddenly become deadened—the tones relapsed as if by magic into the characteristic softness—only to revert to an uncanny luminosity when the smoke blind was once more pulled across the sun's face.

The effect on the waters of the Nechaco was even more fantastic. Under normal conditions this river, owing to its crystal clearness, has a hue of deep prussian blue, but under the smoky overhead curtain the colour was as if the artist in disgust had thrown all the blues known to his profession into the mixing pot, and had committed the resultant indescribable tint to his canvas.

As we pushed into the forest we saw on every side smoking trails through the moss, where the fire had eaten its insidious way amid the dry pile carpet, while wicked tongues of flame betrayed the consumption of a more than ordinary tender morsel. Now and again there

would be a sudden rush, accompanied by a vicious cracking and snapping. Looking towards the spot, one would see the flames jumping from the ground, from branch to branch of a dry tree, setting it aglow from top to bottom in a flash. The spruce tree is the food on which the fire feasts. Its lower branches have the life crushed out of them by the pressure of the thicket and hang dry and dead, covered with a hair-like lichen which droops down in thick tangled masses and is highly combustible. Then, again, the wood of this tree is richly resinous. When the fire reaches the foot of a spruce it embraces it in a sheet of roaring flame.

We threaded our way between these aisles of fire for some two hours. It was our intention to push on as far as possible and camp about eight o'clock that night, but our plans were sadly sent to the four winds. One of the pack-horses took fright and bolted pell-mell towards Fort George with Sam in hot pursuit. It was not long before Sam came rumbling in with the runaway, but its pack showed sad evidences of the wild canter among the trees.

The incident delayed us considerably, and the close proximity of good feeding on the banks of the Nechaco for the horses decided us to camp there and then. We made a clearing in the bush, ran up the tents, and then went off for water. Anyone who has trudged for about a third of a mile with a couple of pails for supplies of this indispensable liquid can form some idea of what it means, but when the operation is coupled with a clamber over deadfall, a toil up a zigzagging steep bank a hundred feet high, and finally a plough through a swamp, he will realise that the chances of bringing back more than about an eighth of the contents of the pails are slender.

At ten o'clock, although daylight had departed, we could still read a newspaper with little trouble owing to the brilliant diffused light from the fire. While we were discussing the prospects of our march on the morrow a

gaunt figure was observed striding through the gloom towards the camp, leading his horse.

"Pitched camp, eh?"

"Yes. What are the chances of getting on?"

"Pretty bad. I've turned back. There are two pack-trains held up with forty-four horses, and the packers are cutting their way through the fallen timber. You'll be up against it to-morrow."

That night was the most uncomfortable we experienced on the trail. The heat was stifling, and the atmosphere within the tents became unbearable. We pegged up the sides so as to secure a current of such fresh air as there was, but it was a slight and almost imperceptibly beneficial measure. About three o'clock we heard the welcome pitter-patter of falling rain, which had the effect of tempering the atmosphere though it was not sufficient for quenching the flames.

The next morning we pushed ahead. We were still hugging the south bank of the Nechaco River, which follows a meandering course through this valley named after the waterway, the water rolling lazily along, with a sharp burst here and there as it tumbles down a sharp decline in the form of a rapid.

Presently we emerged from a thicket and came upon the full brunt of the effects of the fire. The pack-trains held up the previous day had forced their way through successfully, but the fall of timber during the night had obliterated their clearing, while the trail itself was wiped out of existence. The ground was smoking furiously, and the dead trees were glowing red embers. Riding now was quite out of the question. There was nothing for it but to walk with the horse's rein over shoulder. But one's feet sank into about six inches of hot ash, and they became uncomfortably hot in a few minutes. Axes were necessary to slash a way through the debris, with windings in and out to avoid an unusually stubborn obstacle in the form of a fallen giant of the forest. It took us

nearly an hour to make the first mile, and progress was precarious in the extreme. The hot ashes were a source of considerable danger to the horses, which became extremely restive, and we kept a sharp eye on our own boots in case the soles gave signs of parting from the uppers through the stitches becoming burned or charred.

Here and there, about a dozen yards from the trail, a huge fire in full blast would be discerned, presenting a solid phalanx of roaring, darting flame a hundred yards or so in width, and lapping branches a hundred feet or more above ground. When the flames suddenly spurted out with a deafening crackling and spitting, the pack-horses would stand stock still, fixing their eyes on the burning mass as if hypnotised, and could only be driven forward by the whip. But it was not the burning forest we so much dreaded, for that was on our leeward, but the wreckage the flames had left in their wake. The roots of these trees spread along the surface, drawing their nourishment from the top moss. As this, a kind of peat, was being consumed, the roots would char slowly until the tree, deprived of its foundation, would cant over, and without the slightest warning come crashing to the ground, unless its descent was arrested by an obstructing tree, when it would be held at a dangerous angle until the support succumbed to the insidious attack of the smouldering fire about its own roots, or a furious wind came along and swept the bending giant to the ground. We had one or two narrow escapes from this danger. The first premonition of a collapse would be a heavy sigh. You looked in the direction whence the sound proceeded, and saw a towering tree slightly heeling over. The question was, in which direction would it fall? You backed your horse well out of the way, for although trying to beat a falling tree is exciting, the chances are a hundred to one that your animal will not move quickly enough. Then there would be heard a snap, snap, snap, as if cords strained to the limit of their elasticity had

suddenly given way, the tree would swing over with rapidly gathering speed, its branches crashing through those of its comrades, and possibly giving other decrepit trunks the slight push necessary to send them reeling, and then would come the final concussion and roar as the ground was struck with such force as to make it tremble.

For about three hours we wended slowly through this smouldering, burning, smoking labyrinth of collapsing trees, all the time on tenterhooks. Then, emerging upon a rolling flat covered with cottonwood trees, or what is locally described as poplar, though it is quite distinct from the English tree of this name, we were once more able to stretch our lungs with pure invigorating air, and to secure a welcome increase in the pack-train's speed, which through the burning bush had been a mere crawl. About four o'clock in the afternoon we struck the junction of the Mud River with the Nechaco, and the flat, open character of this stretch of land in the angle formed by the rivers persuaded us to pitch camp, more especially as directly ahead there was another stretch of blazing timber.

CHAPTER XVI

The Nechaco Valley, the Land of Plenty

The Mud River Valley—The Nechaco Valley—Vicissitudes of Climate—
Disturbing a Hornet's Nest—The Land around Gluculs Lake—
Experiences of a Pioneer—Wild Hay Galore—The Yukon Telegraph.

THOUGH the Mud or Chilako River is a sluggish waterway, it drains a huge tract of country. It rises in Lake Totuk, a small sheet of water on the eastern slope of the ridge which encloses the extensive Ootsa Lake district, the watershed of the Nechaco. The Mud River then runs slightly south-east for a considerable distance, its volume being reinforced by the surplus waters of Naltesby Lake and several creeks. Then it describes a sharp turn and takes a northerly course, following a sinuous way until it meets the Nechaco.

The plateau it drains has an altitude of about 2,000 ft., and has compelled the particular attention of the pre-emptor. If the luxuriance of the wild vegetation offers any criterion, then farming in this territory presents incalculably attractive possibilities. The natural grasses grow to a tropical height and density. Sugar-cane grass 7 ft. high, red top at 6 ft., brome grass $5\frac{1}{2}$ ft., and wild timothy topping 5 ft., were quite common. The vetches also are prolific, being found in such dense masses as greatly to impede ready progress. The growth is strangely diversified. There are some first-class stretches of huge marketable timber; other land is covered with poplar and light scrub, which can be cleared easily; while the low-lying expanses are little prairies, on which the timber has been burned off, and are now covered with dense, dank wild hay averaging in

yield between two and four tons per acre. Some of these lesser bush-infested stretches are of considerable area; two new-comers whom we met had staked some 3,000 acres of excellent meadowland, about seven miles above the point where we camped.

It is computed that the cream of this valley, suited to agriculture, aggregates about 36,000 acres, of which 15,358 acres have been surveyed by the Government and are reserved for pre-emption at 4s. an acre. Whether fruit culture beyond bush and ground fruits will be possible, only experience can tell, but it is anticipated that tree fruits should be successful up to about 3,000 ft. altitude line. Wild bush-fruits flourished in profusion, and this fact lends colour to the belief that apples, pears, plums, cherries, prunes, and so forth should do equally well on the bench-lands.

The Nechaco Valley proper is in reality an old lake-bed. The soil is a thick deposit of silt, in some places running to 40 ft. in depth, with a clay subsoil. The silt is freely impregnated with thoroughly decomposed vegetable substance. The rainfall is just sufficient to stimulate growth to perfection, the temperature is equable, and the climate is about the same as that prevailing in Central Europe, which is only natural, seeing that the latitude is about the same as that of the south of England.

After leaving the Mud River, we found the land reverting to its gravelly nature on the high ridges, and more or less densely covered with the interminable jack-pine. While the soil in these upper situations is of little value from the farming point of view, yet, cleared of the timber, it should make excellent grazing land. It can be cleared expeditiously and cheaply by fire, and that the grass will grow thickly when afforded the opportunity is indicated very convincingly by the rich grasses found in the open spaces, where the flames had already accomplished their clearing work.

British Columbia, like the homeland, is able to point to some strange vagaries in regard to weather; it can provide a taste of the four seasons within the space of twenty-four hours, as we found out to our cost. We had been travelling all day Sunday enshrouded in a damp, raw mist, reminiscent of Scotland, and when we reached the Bednesti Meadows, about three o'clock in the afternoon, we decided to call a halt. We pitched camp in a torrential downpour, for a thunderstorm broke over us as we entered the little flat. We toiled valiantly waist high in the dense, reeking bush searching for tent poles and firewood until the feet were immersed in water, which filled our top-boots and saturated us to the skin. As we partook of the belated midday meal with coat collars upturned and the rain pouring down pitilessly, we were an abject-looking group; but when the storm had expended its fury we built up a huge fire, and standing first with our backs to the blaze to dry one half of our clothes, and then with our faces to dry the other half, we were able to sit down to supper little the worse for our experience. It is astonishing what the human constitution will tolerate, for not the slightest cold is ever contracted on the trail by turning oneself into a clothes-horse before a blazing fire, with clouds of steam rising from the sodden attire drying on your frame.

The next morning we started off about half-past six. The ground was white with frost, and a dismal damp veil hung over everything. The air was of a rawness that penetrated to the very marrow, and though we were wrapped thickly in woollens, our teeth rattled in our heads. We soon got a little excitement, which had the effect of stirring up the horses, for the leader of the train stumbled into a hornet's nest. The enraged yellow jackets poured out to the fight in battalions, and in less than half a minute there was a wild kicking and plunging in all directions. Collision with a wasp's stronghold will liven a pack-train up more effectively than anything.

The animals plunged, reared, and commenced bucking with the greatest spirit, and, ignoring their loads, started off on a spirited canter which quickened our circulations splendidly.

About ten in the morning the mist lifted somewhat, only to let down a cold penetrating rain, which persistently drove into our faces. Miniature waterfalls were coursing down everyone's neck, for the branches of the tall scrub deposited their small pools of water inside the collar of the slicker. After an hour's steady downpour there was another change to heavy hail, which brought about an almost complete closing of the eyes. This bombardment continued for about three-quarters of an hour, and then gave way to a lighter fusillade of sleet, ultimately reverting to rain. The slickers only kept the upper half of the body partially dry, and soon everyone slipped off the saddle and endeavoured to restore some semblance of life to numbed limbs by vigorous walking. Our miseries were completed about two o'clock by a downfall of snow—and this on the 22nd of August! That sudden preliminary taste of winter completed our discomfiture, and reaching a small depression void of trees, so quaking with the cold that we could not feel our limbs, we decided to go no farther, especially as the weather was beginning to affect the horses.

Fires were quickly kindled, and in their welcome blaze we discussed steaming cups of tea and hot bacon and beans as best we could in the teeth of the driving snow and sleet, roasting and steaming like basted joints on the one side and freezing on the other. Our bedding was wet and cold, and the ground was very like a marsh, but rolling ourselves up as best we could, that night we slept the sleep of the tired and jaded travellers we were.

When we awoke the next morning the canvas tent was frozen as solid as a deal board: the thermometer showed six degrees of frost! But the clerk of the weather evidently felt for us; considered that one day's experience

of what British Columbia could offer in the way of climatic variation was quite sufficient for tenderfeet from the East. This morning the sun burst over us in brilliance from a cloudless sky, though the air had a crisp touch that behooved one to keep moving. In the distance, through the trees, we could see a silvery sheet of water—Gluculz Lake, the northern bank of which we were soon skirting.

We had now reached an elevated plateau; the country was for the most part dull and uninteresting, as it demanded clearing, though round Gluculz Lake we saw numerous traces of industry, in the form of cleared stretches and shacks of aggressive newness. The timber around this sheet of water was large and valuable, but only what was required on the spot by the settler was being put to advantage, the other being destroyed with the useless scrub. On the higher levels the country was more open, having been ravaged by the flames years back, and such tracts would not be difficult to bring under the plough or to utilise for grazing purposes—preferably the latter, owing to their exposed positions.

Here and there could be seen evidences of upland reclamation in the form of cocks of wild hay. We rode across one ranch—through missing the trail—where a fine yield of natural growth was stacked. There appears to be no need for the pioneer to have any anxiety as to food for his stock during winter in view of these bounteous wild supplies, effort being confined merely to the cutting and gathering of the succulent, tall, well-developed grasses. Taken on the whole, however, such patches are few and far between, and these highlands, if exploited at all, will be valuable commercially for little else than ranching, though as such they will be of assistance to the mixed farmer raising his miscellaneous vegetable and cereal produce in the lowlands. The country is a series of low ridges between the Rockies on the east and the Cascades or coast range on the west, separated by broad

valleys. It is these vales which will prove the making of the settlers, for below an altitude of about 3,000 ft. any description of agricultural produce which can be raised in Great Britain can be grown with thrice or five times the yield per acre. The broad benches or terraces are adapted from every point of view to the culture of fruit, having a southern and westerly aspect, with excellent natural protection against the north and east.

About forty miles out from Fort George we met a pioneer in the thick of his work of development, and as his case is typical of what one has to face in the interior of British Columbia, his experiences and results are worth recounting. His was a stretch of rather thickly timbered land, with trees of relatively small girth and height. This settler had taken over half a section—320 acres—at 4s. per acre. The timber was useless, so what he did not require for fencing he simply burned to get rid of it. He had only succeeded in clearing a few acres, which were ample for his necessities at this time, though he was extending his stretch of arable land in anticipation of a keener demand for produce arising from the coming of the Grand Trunk Pacific construction armies. There were one or two little flats on his land under wild hay, and he had cropped 30 tons, which he could sell readily at £10 per ton, if disposing of the whole in bulk. But he refused to sell in this manner, preferring to peddle it out in small doles to all and sundry who required fodder, in this way making about 50 per cent. more per ton. He had a field of oats, somewhat thin it is true, but first year's sowing, and tolerably well filled in the ear considering that he had sown the crop rather late. The remainder of his ground was under mixed vegetables. His onions, potatoes, cabbages, lettuces, carrots, and so forth were very finely matured and healthy, the summer frosts having done no serious damage to his crops.

This pioneer was finding a ready market for his pro-

duce among the camps engaged in the building of the Government roads, in which work is now very active in this district, a wagon road having been slotted from Fort George to Stoney Creek. His spring onions readily commanded 5d. per lb., with carrots at about the same figure. He had built a roomy shack, in which he dwelt with his wife and three children. His one complaint was the expense of sawn lumber, which had to be hauled from a long distance, the local supplies being of no value for such purposes even if he had been possessed of facilities to cut it up. The nearest town was Quesnel, 125 miles south, and there he had to journey periodically to restock his commissariat with flour, sugar, tea and the like. He had brought in some stock, and had also contrived to secure some agricultural implements. On a little calculation he considered that it had cost him £400 to establish his position. The household expenses of himself and family averaged about £160 per annum, and he was easily making ends meet. The day before our arrival, for instance, he had sold a calf for £20.

In his expenditure of about £3 per week the high cost of provisions, of course, figured very prominently. His land had cost him less than £100 all told, and with the improvements he had effected its capital value at the time of our visit was approximately £2,500, on a modest computation. That this is no outside figure was proved by the experience of another settler not far distant who had acquired 160 acres at 4s. an acre, and who, almost before he had commenced improvements, had sold out for £1,000. In other words, he had netted a clear profit of over £960 on capital outlay. Such is the way land has jumped up in value in the Nechaco Valley. When eventually the railway traverses the territory the increase in price will be still more marked. The settler first referred to was not particularly disposed to sell. He was living cheaply without drawing on his capital except for

improvements in the way of implements and stock, and even in his own very limited market was getting a good showing on the right side of his profit-and-loss account. When the railway opens up the country, while his produce will not command such high prices as prevail at present, there will be a greater inducement to extend development to supply the wider market that will be accessible.

In the summer, when the land was apt to become parched on the surface, this settler satisfied the thirst of his crops from a creek winding through his land. Such irrigations, though not imperative, owing to the latent moisture in the soil, yet repay amply the labour expended, and make an appreciable difference in the quality of the crops.

We continued our way westwards, moving through a gently broken country ripe for development, silently calling the settler with its profusion of wild hay in the dales, and growing tall grasses among the poplar scrub. The Canadian says that where "four inches of grass will grow, wheat will grow, and where wheat can be raised any produce will thrive." In face of this enunciation the Nechaco Valley, with its wild hay topping five feet, should be a land of plenty.

We had gained the top of a hillock. Masses of poplar, willow, and open patches surrounded us. But there, in the middle distance, was a shimmering, irregular blotch on the prevailing green. We hustled our horses and in a few minutes were among the bushes fringing Tsinkut Lake. But a more conspicuous feature compelled our attention. Just above our heads trailed across the azure of the sky a thin, dull-grey thread, festooning regularly along the trail through the forest. We could not suppress a strange thrill. We were shaking inanimate hands with civilisation stretching in an unbroken line from Vancouver to the far north, threading dense forests, jumping wild ravines, spanning roaring rivers,

climbing and dropping over lofty storm-, rain-, and snow-swept mountains, until at last Dawson City is gained. It is a slender link, bringing isolated, distant Klondike into direct touch with the restless throbbing pulses of the world as surely as London is connected with New York—the Yukon telegraph.

CHAPTER XVII

The Domain of the Red Indian

Le Barge and his Abortive Enterprise—After Many Days—The Stoney Creek Indians and their Ways—Telegraph Cabins—An Operator's Experience as an Agriculturist—Profitable Crops—Tachick Lake—Salmon Trout—A Yankee who Prefers British Columbia to Dakota—"Game Preserving"—Vital Lefort—Fort Fraser.

THAT aerial spider's line recalled a romance of human endeavour which was derailed from the path of progress. When conceived it was a colossal enterprise, and had it succeeded it would have furnished one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of the telegraph.

A bright mind conceived the idea of linking New York with London overland in the early 'sixties. The promoters of the Atlantic Cable were grappling with the difficulties attending that audacious undertaking, which was regarded generally as impossible of successful realisation. The overland telegraph line, however, was considered as perfectly feasible, although it entailed penetration of the wildest, most forbidding and most inhospitable country on the surface of the globe. Still, it was well supported commercially, and the task was put in hand. Succinctly described, it involved the construction of a single wire from a junction with the telegraphic network spreading over the United States, northwards through New Caledonia—now known as New British Columbia—and Alaska to a convenient point on Behring Straits, connecting with a short length of submarine cable spanning that narrow neck of water to gain the Russian shore. The line was to run thence across hundreds of miles of bleak tundra and the terrible steppes

of Siberia to the Ural Mountains, and after entering Europe to join up with the general continental telegraphic system.

The progenitor of this tremendous task, Le Barge, started out boldly with a small band of men in the spring of 1867. They blazed their way through the bush with a compass, lopping a path through the trees a few feet in width, down the centre of which they set up the line. They had run through lower British Columbia, had crossed the Skeena River, and were buried among the dizzy snow-swept mountains from which that waterway takes its name, enduring untold privations, breaking down tremendous difficulties foot by foot, and at last had reached Telegraph Creek, about 800 miles north of Vancouver.

The small gang was busily at work. Round them were stacked piles of wire and other bulky impedimenta necessary to the task. Suddenly there flashed up the strand the news that the Atlantic Cable had been laid, and was working satisfactorily. The bridging of the Atlantic sealed the doom of the overland wire. The men threw down their tools there and then, saddled their pack-horses, and, leaving everything just as it was, bade adieu to the enterprise and retraced their footsteps to the south! So ended abruptly one of the most daring undertakings ever fostered by commerce, and just how much money was lost over the undertaking only those immediately concerned can relate. Had that line gone a few hundred miles farther north before its progress was stopped, the story of British Columbia might have been written differently, for it was plotted to pass right through the auriferous Klondike, and there is not the slightest doubt but that the men engaged in construction would have struck the yellow metal. As it was, the line was simply abandoned. The country traversed was quite untenanted, and no one dreamed that it had before it a prosperous future. The line draped through the bush mournfully until the

poles rotted and brought it to the ground. For thirty years or so it lay forgotten by all but a few.

Then came the Klondike rush. The extreme isolation of the gold country demanded some connection with civilisation, and the Dominion Government determined to chain it up by telegraph. An overland line was decided upon, and the path was to follow that of the ill-starred enterprise of '67. Bands of men were dispatched to various points in the spring of 1900 to carry out constructional work simultaneously, and if they could find traces still extant of the old trail, they were to follow it. The swathe which Le Barge cut through the forest was easily discovered, cleared and widened, and down the centre a new wire was erected. Traces of the former enterprise were found over the whole distance between Vancouver and Telegraph Creek, the disbanded stores and supplies at the latter point being found rusting in the ditch. Many of the men who assisted in the building of the second line obtained interesting mementoes of the original project, which they showed me, while all along the trail could be seen ends of wire projecting from the ground, it having become buried under rotting vegetation. Here and there small coils were unearthed, and to-day when the line men require some wire for staying poles of the existent line, they pull up strands of the old material.

We were now in the land of the Indian. The red man of to-day is the most inoffensive specimen of humanity breathing. That he has degenerated from the types roaming these territories a century ago there is not the slightest doubt. As a hunter he cannot be compared with his prototypes; as a fighter he has sunk to insignificance; as a member of the community he is most law-abiding and peaceable. The war-paint, feathers, scalp, and other fiendish decorations have disappeared in favour of European habiliments. He still retains his abilities for finding his way through impenetrable coun-



A SETTLERS CABIN NEAR TSINKUT LAKE, IN THE NECHACO VALLEY.

try, is fleet of foot, possessed of great stamina, is a keen hunter, but withal a lazy lout. If you want to see the true Indian of history and romance you must go farther north—to the wilder parts of the country where the white man yet has to set his feet.

Tsinkut Lake is a picturesque sheet of water in the midst of a wonderfully fertile country. On the farther side we could see many a new gash in the mass of trees, testifying to the recent arrival of a settler. Cultivation here will not be a difficult matter, though clearing is a stupendous task. This country should be avoided at all costs by the English settler who is not possessed of an indomitable spirit, is not prepared to toil from dawn to dusk for a time, and would be oppressed by an extreme of isolation. If he is half-hearted he will come a cropper, develop into a "calamity howler" of the first water, give up his holding and return, "knocking" the country right and left. But "roughing it" brings its own reward; the persevering settler earns an ample return for the sweat of his brow. I met more than one English settler in the district who had made his way to this country with infinite difficulty, had settled down to hard work, and could point to a blossoming garden where a few months previously towering trees and dank bush had held undisputed sway.

"How's the railway getting on? What's Fort George like? When will the Grand Trunk Pacific be here?" were questions rattled at us whenever we met a settler. On the whole, there was no complaint about isolation. The British Columbia Government, with its characteristic go-ahead policy, was advancing in the van of the line, cutting wide roads through the bush to afford access to different points. We found this work in active progress, and somehow there is a certain feeling of relief at the sight of a wide regular cleavage through the forest which has been cut by human hands. It dispels the impression of inaccessibility and remoteness. The men on this work

receive a wage of 7s. 6d. per day, out of which, however, they have to board themselves. During the year 1910, apprehending a rush to the Nechaco Valley, the Government started work early in the season, and spent £12,000 on new highways through this part of the bush alone.

The Indians have a large village at Stoney Creek. We rode through a rolling expanse of poplar scrub, wild weeds and grasses. Presently a rude fence stretching through the wood betokened our entry to private property, and we soon had a striking instance of the red man's emulation of the white man's methods, for at the gateway a printed notice informed us that pack-trains would be charged so much a head for their horses if they camped within the "rancheree."

The mention of this word brings to mind a little display of social distinction even in the bush. The moneyed agriculturist, boasting a town house in Vancouver, refers to his up-country farm, or estate, as his "raunch." The pre-emptor, when speaking of his quarter or half-section, uses the ordinary English pronunciation of "ranch." But the Indian must use neither. There must be a broad line of demarcation between white and red, impossible of confusion through pronunciation, and consequently by means of this affix the Indian's possession is termed a "rancheree."

The Stoney Creek Indian reservation is a territory on which the white man might cast envious eyes. It is one of the finest stretches of agrarian land in the whole of New British Columbia. The pre-emptor and native is loud in his wailings against the Indians' good fortune, for the greater part of the reservation is rolling and open land, consisting, in fact, of respectably sized prairies which could be brought under cultivation with the minimum of trouble and expense. But the Indian is an indifferent agriculturist. Possibly here and there he has a small potato patch, the tubers, after being planted in a primitive manner, being left to their own devices until



"QU'APPELLE?" (WHO CALLS?)

A "klootchman" and her child, at Noolki Lake, Stoney Creek.



the time to dig comes round. The oat- or wheatfield is the same—patchy and thin—the kind of crop the English farmer would plough in with disgust. The rest of the land is used for grazing, and on this the cayouses are turned loose to feed.

The pack-train, on its way round Tsinkut Lake, divided; we reached the village in advance and decided to await the arrival of the main body. Killing time in an Indian reservation is the most difficult operation extant. Tumble-down shacks from which exudes a noisome aroma compel you to keep a safe distance; the general neglected appearance of the homes is depressing; the slattern klotches would disgrace a city slum. The lean, hungry huskies prowl and sneak around as if bent on securing a bite of the fleshy parts of your anatomy at the most opportune moment. Sloth is printed indelibly on everything, and one feels somewhat inclined to give the well-built red-man, lolling about in the shade smoking his pipe, half-dazed with some brutal alcoholic brew which he has concocted and imbibed freely, a good sound kick for allowing the land about to run to seed, too indolent even to scratch its surface. The klotches spend their time gathering sugar plums—ottalabs or saskatoons—a wild fruit which grows luxuriantly, and from which they make an evil-looking preserve, in appearance somewhat of a cross between stick-jaw and boot blacking, persistently trying to foist it on white visitors! The only sign of decency about the whole place is the church, which gleams brightly in the sunlight; this the natives have to keep in apple-pie order under threat of dire punishment from the priest. He knows the Indians and their indolent ways, and when the news reaches Stoney Creek that he is coming, the whole colony is galvanised into unwonted activity. The men set to work and toil hard, while the klotches smarten themselves up for "his honour's" arrival. The moment he has turned his back on the place they lapse

into their former semi-hibernating condition. The Stoney Creek Indians are members of the extensive Siwash tribe, but we learned afterwards that they were the laziest set in the whole family. I quite believe it.

The main part of the pack-train encamped in the reservation on the waters of Lake Noolki, nestling in a wide basin of which the low Telegraph Range forms the southern rim. But we had scarcely pitched our camp when up came the "chief." He demanded his rent for grazing the pack-train in advance. This matter was rather abruptly handled by one of the party who had spent many years among these folk and knew their ways.

"Does Indian ever pay white man for camping on white man's ground?"

"Indian no pay for feeding horses!"

"Well, then, 'beat,'" waving his hand. "Indian no get money here."

The chief immediately started off on some incoherent rambling and muttering, but our spokesman cut him short by telling him to go to blazes. Instead, the chief squatted down before the fire and looked at us in stoical silence, puffing vigorously at his pipe. We smoothed down his feelings of ruffled dignity by inviting him to supper. No further claims for rent were made, although our stay was longer than anticipated, since during the night our pack-horses chummed-up with the Indians' cayouses, and the whole lot could not be found next day, for the reservation stretches over a pretty good expanse of territory.

Perched up on a small hill behind us was a little cabin. This was the lonely residence of the telegraph men. It was merely a log shack divided into a small kitchen, living-room, and a box-like sleeping space, with the instrument standing on a table between the bunks, as these men have to be on the alert day and night to answer the call of the ghosts speaking to them from the great beyond. The sleeping quarters are reduced in dimensions to make room for a small office where postal business is

transacted, for outside, displayed prominently, are the magic initials "G.R." Letters are delivered and collected about once in eighteen days, the postman having a round of 250 miles or so.

The telegraph cabins are long distances apart; that to the south was at Bobtail, a matter of forty miles, while the one in the opposite direction was at Fraser Lake, about thirty-five miles distant. Two men are stationed at each cabin—one as operator, the other as linesman, the latter's duty being to keep the wire on his section in repair. The length of the section varies according to the distance between cabins, but he is held responsible for half the span between his and the next station on either side—in this instance some twenty miles on the south and about seventeen miles on the north. The result is that he is rarely at home, for the line is constantly in need of an overhaul.

The operator, Mr. J. W. Millan, had spent some years up in this country among the Siwashes, and was thoroughly familiar with the agricultural possibilities of the district, seeing that he had devoted his spare time and income as operator (£15 per month with all found) in purchasing available land in the locality, until now he could point to a total possession of about 800 acres, purchased on the average at about 4s. an acre. The land he had taken over was thickly covered with tall poplar and dense willow undergrowth. This had been cleared first by driving a fire through the mass in the usual manner, followed by stump removal. With poplar, if the trees are not too large, this is an easy task, since the roots are mostly surface, but the more matured trees have a long tap-root which renders stump-pulling somewhat more arduous.

"My great difficulty," he explained, "is getting in machinery. The freightage is so high that a settler cannot afford it. Anyone coming in here now must make ends meet until the arrival of the railway, within the next

two years. The thing is to raise just enough to keep one rolling along comfortably for the time being.

"I have at the present moment ten acres under oats. The yield per acre varies from thirty-five to sixty-five bushels. Taking an average of fifty bushels per acre, which is fair, this represents 500 bushels. I can get 3d. a pound for this grain on my ranch, and at 8s. 6d. per bushel that represents a sum exceeding £200. Then this year I have cropped five tons of hay per acre. This is worth to-day £12 per ton, which, less £2 per ton for labour in cutting and stacking, leaves me a net profit of £10 per ton."

It will thus be seen that the pre-emptor can recoup his initial outlay upon the land very easily. Lest £12 per ton for hay may be considered an absurd price, it may be mentioned that during the winter of 1909-10 hay at Hazelton was fetching £20 per ton, and Alaskan hay was doled out in handfuls at 10d. per pound—over £93 per ton in round figures. Of course, such fancy prices will obtain only until the completion of the railway.

There is another point in the settler's favour. If land will give, under primitive farming conditions, fifty bushels of oats per acre, it can be made to give much more when it becomes possible to cultivate scientifically with the aid of proper implements. Such land as Millan holds, so he said, he would not sell for less than £7 to £8 per acre, and when railway communication is established through the district—and it will pass within easy distance of his farm—his 800 acres, which have cost him less than £200 all told, will be worth, and will readily command, several thousand pounds.

Other pioneers in this district are working diligently to ascertain just what the land will do, so that at the opportune moment they can launch out on an extensive scale and specialise in that branch of agriculture which will net the highest returns. All are experimenting, as it were. One, a Chinaman, had a penchant for market



MR. J. W. MILLAN'S RANCH AT STONEY CREEK.

This picture shows the four stages in development. The dense forest in the background; an area cleared of top-growth and ready for stump-pulling; a patch of ground just broken; and in the foreground a hay-field.

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THE DOMAIN OF THE RED INDIAN 207

gardening, raising all kinds of vegetables. Johnny is the most persevering farmer one can find or ever desire to meet. He carries out his work in a methodical fashion, and is shrewd in his operations. This particular Celestial had raised celery, which to Stoney Creek was like asparagus in the tenement district of a city. But no pioneer we had met so far could tell us whether or not celery could be raised. Johnny had observed this deficiency, and had laid his plans accordingly. We heard that his bed of celery was a splendid sight, which he was rightly regarding with great pride. We heard that Another pioneer has seeded his holding to alfalfa, which is a highly profitable crop. The district was considered to be too far to the north to permit of its remunerative culture. This man, however, threw theories to the winds, and set out to determine the matter for himself. His industry was most handsomely rewarded, for he had cropped four times in the year. This was a new development, which testified in a striking manner to the amazing fertility of the soil and the congeniality of the climate, while it had sent the value of that pioneer's land to high-water mark, it being easily worth £20 per acre.

Across the lake could be seen a ranch in the initial stages of development. The pre-emptor was an Australian who had spent his life in the grain-growing districts of the Antipodes, but family reasons had compelled him to exchange the back-blocks of Australia for the back-woods of New British Columbia. He had established himself firmly, having secured the loan of a home Millan but did not require, until he could erect his own house, the courtesy enabling him to devote his whole time to the cultivation of his land. We saw him being moderately thick

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healthy race between the pre-emptor and the railway builders. The former wanted their possessions ship-shape by the time the iron horse got within measurable distance, for from that day their prosperity was assured.

We were by no means sorry to get away from the unsalubrious environment of the Siwashes, though we could not shed their company entirely, as we were traversing the heart of their country. Four miles beyond Stoney Creek we entered a smaller village, Laketown, sloping down to the waters of Noolki Lake, which was nothing else but a small pocket edition of the larger reservation upon which we had encamped. Here, however, a white man had struck out a line of business for himself. He had established a store, which we visited for the replenishment of supplies. The shack was crammed from roof to floor with articles of every description, for the man was driving a fur-bartering trade in opposition to the Hudson's Bay Post, a few miles farther on, as well as straight selling. There were about 300 Siwashes among his customers. This trader was "making good" to a pronounced extent. His store and cache were packed, but he had to restock four times in the course of a year. Five hundred pounds had been sent to the bank as the result of a single month's trading, and the fortnight before we arrived the turnover had been equal to £300.

Leaving Laketown we missed the trail, owing to a little accident which I need not pause to recount. Presently we struck an Indian trail, and were soon in a maze of these inches-wide pathways, which cross and recross in all directions. But keeping the sun steadily on the same hand we plodded on deeper and deeper into the forest, until Tachick Lake was gained, when we turned sharply, and reached the north-western end. Here we pitched camp near a pre-emption, the owners of which were away, leaving the dog in charge, and he was mounting faithful guard over the entrance.

While the pack-train was loading up for resumption of the journey early the next morning, we spied a dug-out spinning over the lake towards us, and the agitation of the water showed that the oarsman was having some fine sport. When he pulled in he held up his prize, and yelled: "Say, fren's, what d'yar think o' this? Bully, ain't it, eh?" displaying a fine, sleek, rainbow-coloured, glittering mass of scales. A silver salmon trout he called it, and it was a beauty, turning the scales at 3 lb. "I come out ev'ry mornin' befor breakfast an' hook one of these," he went on. "Why, thar lake's full o' them. Say, come an' have a throw?"

Lett grabbed up his line and a stick to form an impromptu rod, ours having been left behind on the Little Smoky River. The dug-out was soon pulling towards the centre of the lake with the troll out. Presently we saw a vicious tug, and an instant later there was a bright flash in the air as the fish made a leap of about ten feet. The fighting and plunging went on for about ten minutes, and then the dug-out came in with a sharp shoot with another quivering specimen lying in the bottom. When weighed it tipped the beam at $3\frac{1}{2}$ lb., and they were two as fine specimens of the trout family as one could desire to land. Our American visitor said they were "fair devils" when hooked, and would often jump clean over the canoe, while their rushes made the pike's movements a mere tortoise crawl in comparison. Lett confessed that his catch had given him a lively five minutes, accustomed though he was to all classes of fish found in Canadian river waters.

Our affable American informed us that he had taken over a section—a square mile—on the shore of this lake, and that his son had bought a like area of land just near us. "I came up hyar last year, and I war so impressed with th' country that I'm goin' to make it my home. I guess this is just about God's country right enough! My wheat farms are down in Dakota, but I'll clear out down

thar, because I can't tear myself away from this spot. Is the land good? Well, I should smile! You would not catch me clearing the forest if it warn't. How about winter? Well, last winter I worked about in my shirt-sleeves. It's not near so cold as it is down Dakota way; we didn't have two feet of snow.

"I'm not goin' to spend another winter in Dakota yet awhile. You bet yar life. I'm fixin' up a huntin' camp up in th' hills for th' winter. Talk about sport! Why, yar can get just so much as yar like. One day my wife, son, a friend, and myself went down to Noolki Creek, which runs into Noolki Lake, and landed 135 pounds of trout in two hours. They war the primeest fish yar ever clapt eyes on. We used salmon eggs for bait; they're bully for trout. What did we do with them? We just cleaned them, opened them up like a kipper, salted them down, and during the winter we had trout just when we wanted it, and when they could not be caught for love or money."

He also enlightened us as to the way they coped with their heavy bags of geese, ducks, and other wildfowl which teem in their thousands in the season on the waters of Tachick, Noolki, and Tsinkut lakes, and are brought down by the score. They are plucked and dressed; then boiled with spices until the flesh leaves the bones. The latter are removed and the flesh, now a pulp, is allowed to cool, the liquid solidifying into a jelly. Then the mass is pressed into muslin bags, and in that condition the food will keep for weeks in the cold weather, without the slightest deterioration, and steaming broth or boiled wild-fowl can be prepared at a minute's notice.

Diverging from the lake, we once more struck to the higher country, passing through land of great promise as pasturage for cattle, even if actual cultivation were not practised. It is the diversity of the country, owing to its configuration, which is such a predominant feature, for there seems an equal opening for all phases of

agriculture, where even the fool at the game can hope to realise some measure of profit and success. We emerged from the denser scrub on to an undulating plateau, which was tolerably open, having been ravaged evidently by fire in days gone by; here the grazing was magnificent, the land shelving gradually to the level of the Nechaco, which was lolling sluggish along, twisting and doubling in the most fantastic manner.

It was, about noon on Sunday when we came to a straight cut through the poplars, down which ran the telegraph wire to the river's banks. The descent was for more than a mile, and so easy as to be almost imperceptible. At the bottom of the dip the trail gave a sharp wind and we were on the river. At the sound of our horse's hoofs a keen-eyed, taciturn, wrinkled little fellow emerged from his shack, and in broken English inquired how many horses were to cross. He was the operator of the ferry across the Nechaco, and he led us to the strange craft whereby the road is continued in a moving rectangle across the river. This ferryman is one of the most remarkable personalities in British Columbia—Vital Lefort—and it was hard to believe, as he trudged determinedly along and manipulated the ferry across the slowly moving water, that he had long since passed the allotted span of man's life.

There is no man in the far western province of the vast Dominion who is more the personification of history than Vital Lefort. He came from Eastern Canada when but a lad, and his life is one long unbroken chapter of fascinating romance. What his baptismal name is, no one knows, but the Indians, with their quaint aptitude, called him *le fort vital*, meaning, "the strong life," and this became twisted round into Vital Lefort. Many are the endeavours that have been made to sound his depths, but without avail, though his very, very few intimate acquaintances, one of whom I met, related that occasionally he becomes reminiscent. Vital Lefort was the first

man ever to penetrate the interior of British Columbia, as a young man was in the van of Le Barge's construction party when that ambitious project, the Overland Telegraph, was launched, blazed the trail as far north as Telegraph Creek, and was the last to leave when the material was thrown into the ditch to rust. He was one of the first, if not the first, to find gold in the country, and the rush that ensued resulted in the creek where the strike was made becoming known as Vital Creek. He has passed the whole of his life in the wilds; but talk he will not. He is as silent as the sphinx. He dwells in his shack, but a few feet square, on the southern bank of the Nechaco; he lives by the fare he collects from travellers crossing the river. And he appears to be the embodiment of content. Fortunes have slipped through his hands, for one of his friends told me that when the gold rush at Vital Creek was at its height, he simply squatted on his claim and made no endeavours either to prove its worth, or to sell to others, though others round him cleaned up big "wads."

Through a wide V in the trees, caused by the river channel, we espied the white walls of the Hudson's Bay post, Fort Fraser, no longer surrounded by a stockade, this evidence of a strenuous past having been sent to oblivion. Soon we were treading its solid wooden hall, where the traveller is warmly hailed, for a Hudson's Bay post in the interior is a hostelry in the wilds, where one and all are sure to receive a hearty welcome.

CHAPTER XVIII

Through the Endako Valley

The Coldest Point in the Nechaco Valley—The Lake Stuart Country—Fort St. James—The Fraser Lake Region—Another Indian Settlement—A Rancher's Home—Education in the Bush—An Equine Nurse—A Settler's "Lucky Strike"—The Indian Way of Bargaining—A Vigorous Centenarian—A Lineman's Life—Looking for Trouble and Finding it—Colliding with a Telegraph Post—Burns Lake and its Cabin.

THIS old Hudson's Bay post stands at the eastern end of Fraser Lake, named after the famous explorer, at an elevation of about 2,250 ft. Locally it is regarded as the coldest point in the Nechaco Valley, to which the ridge it stands upon forms the northern boundary. Certainly the air even in August was very keen. The outflow from the lake, which is about fifteen miles long, joins the river just below the fort. The Nechaco at this point makes one of those sudden, big, sweeping bends for which British Columbia rivers are famous, the source of the waterway being on the slopes of the distant rugged Cascades fringing the Pacific coast, and draining in all an immense tract of country, of which about 640,000 acres are arable.

The old trading post has weathered nearly a hundred years, during which time it has changed its position from one side of the lake to the other about three times. In the courtyard stands the primitive wooden device which still serves to press the furs into bales for shipment as it did when the fort was first established. Forty miles or so to the east is Lake Stuart, with another post, Fort St. James, at its south-eastern corner; and the country between the two trading centres and immediately around

Lake Stuart offers great attractions for agriculture. I met one or two pioneers who had been cruising through this territory, and who had made Fort Fraser on their return journey to the south. Their reports were glowing, and they were emphatic in the opinion that it is impossible to exaggerate the agrarian potentialities of the Lake Stuart country.

The whole of this interior forms a huge plateau, with but slight variations in altitude. Thus, Cheslatta Lake, to the west, is at 2,900 ft., the land thence falling away gently to Fraser Lake and dropping still more easily to Stuart Lake, which lies at an altitude of 2,200 feet. This latter country, extending from Fraser Lake to the eastern side of Stuart Lake, is richly wooded, poplar (cottonwood) predominating, but this growth is denser than that which prevails in the Nechaco Valley, the large open flats of which are so attractive to the settler. Still, around Stuart Lake and Stuart River, to the confluence of the latter with the Upper Nechaco, there are nearly 350,000 acres of excellent farming land, the possibilities of which, after clearing, are reflected by the varied and prime produce which the industrious factor of Fort St. James successfully raises year after year, comprising the usual range of vegetables and bush fruits.

The whole of this country is within easy reach of Fort George by the Nechaco and Stuart rivers, which are navigable by shallow-draught steamers, and when the railway is completed competitive transportation facilities between the two points, and between them and others beyond, will be available. The climate around Stuart Lake is equable, the scanty rainfall being amply compensated by some six feet of snow during the winter, which melts slowly and steadily under the influence of the chinook winds, thereby mellowing the ground. The summer is magnificent, and the heat experienced is just of that degree to ensure the rapid growth of the crops and their maturing to perfection. Indeed, so far as we

could ascertain from those who were familiar with the Nechaco and Stuart agricultural districts respectively, there was a sharp difference of opinion as to which was the superior in regard to agrarian value. As a matter of fact, there is little to choose between the two, but the probability is that the former country will be developed first, as the initial expense of labour for clearing, owing to the general open state of the country, is lower.

The country immediately adjoining the Fraser Lake is wildly beautiful, and here the town-site planner intends to become unusually busy, it being generally considered that Fraser Lake can be converted into a great pleasure centre. Undoubtedly the elevated situation and bracing air render it a spot of potent recuperative power. The banks of the lake drop rather sharply into the water, and the conditions lend themselves to the founding of little sylvan colonies, with the streets rising in terraces, giving uninterrupted, magnificent views of lake and woodland scenery.

Within sight of the post, to the east, is another Indian village, as sleepy-looking, neglected, and unkempt as Stoney Creek, a section of which colony has established itself at this point. The natives had thrown their primitive wooden traps across the waterway, just below the outfall from the lake, since the salmon running up the Fraser attempt to reach this sheet of water, which is apparently a favourite spot for them to spawn. This year, however, the Indians had been rewarded with but indifferent success, the bumper harvest being netted every three years. Trapping is their livelihood, though one or two of the more enlightened have adopted agriculture, in a lackadaisical manner, as we could see from the ragged patches of potatoes, turnips, and cabbages. The trading post was typically English, for there was the kitchen garden growing something of everything, from peas to cabbages, in addition to a variety of flowers. Even in the Dominion the Britisher cannot stifle his love of

blossoms and their fragrance. When one catches sight of a vari-coloured border around a shack, nine times out of ten the owner may be set down as hailing from the home country, and the guess will be found to be correct.

When we started off from Fraser Lake it was raining hard. It was a cold downpour, too, which numbed the extremities. The opposite bank of the lake was wrapped in an impenetrable wet cloud. For hour after hour we climbed ridges, meandered through narrow gorges, floundered in muskeg, and silently and slowly crawled through dense poplar woods with the wild grasses and weeds topping five or six feet. We had been going for about six hours. Tired, hungry, and miserable, our pace had dropped to about a mile an hour against a driving, relentless rain, slight shelter from which was a welcome relief when we entered a small tract of that fine timber which is one of the most valuable assets of British Columbia. We were aroused rudely from our silent ruminations by a cheery hail. Just in front of us was a tall, gaunt figure wearing a long sou'wester, standing up under a tree to secure a little shelter from the beating rain which just then was coming down with trebled fury and volume. We returned the greeting and hurried up, our spirits raised by encountering a fellow-countryman in the bush.

"Well, what do you think of British Columbia weather, eh? Bit of a terror, isn't it, to-day? Gad! you look pretty cold. Go in my shack down the trail and get a warm up. My wife's at home, and she'll be jolly pleased to see you."

He was just off into the bush, but suddenly changed his mind and decided to accompany us to his woodland domicile. "I'll bet you come from the same village as I, eh? Well, how's London looking. It's a good many years since I was there. Here's my hut—a typical rancher's dwelling—something different from the semi-detached I used to have out Streatham way."

A rancher's home is something like the flat humor-

ously described by Dan Leno. It measures about 14 ft. by 20 ft. inside, is rectangular in shape, built up of logs which have been barked, and connected at the corners in dovetail or saddle joints, usually the latter, as being easier and simpler. The ridge roof is set at a sharp angle and shingled. Inside, level with the eaves and ten or twelve feet above the floor, which is set about two feet above the ground, is the wooden ceiling, the space above being used as a loft. In one corner is the bedroom, two steps away another corner serves as the living space, the third corner forms the kitchen, scullery, and so forth, while the space behind the door, opening directly into the room, constitutes the hall. Such is a typical rancher's home, serving the whole of his requirements until he has established his feet well on the ladder of prosperity, when he sets out to build a permanent residence replete with all conveniences. But even a shack like this runs into £30 or more, and takes three weeks' steady, continuous toil to build. This pioneer had not completed his home yet, for the interstices between the horizontally laid logs had not been chinked with moss; but "the crevices ensure good ventilation," laughed the owner, "though I'll have to set to work pretty soon to make it snug for the winter."

This settler, his wife and little baby, had come up from Quesnel the previous winter, travelling by sleigh a matter of 140 miles. His holding was 160 acres, preempted at 4s. per acre. Like all the other settlers I met, he had come in on the "ground floor" in anticipation of the railway's arrival, for his future hung entirely on this transportation link. It is impossible to realise the extent to which these pioneers in the wilderness depend upon the completion of the new iron road from Atlantic to Pacific; to them it is as the staff of life, for it demands considerable pluck to get into such a country in advance of the bond of steel.

But this lonely house gave me a curious, intimate

glimpse of frontier life. The husband was a public school boy, while the lady of the ranch had passed through a similar curriculum. Considering that anything outside the three R's is absolutely out of place in the bush, they certainly seemed like a square peg trying to force its way into a round hole, for the higher education they had received was gone astray very sadly. It recalled a case I had previously met, that of a youth who had gone through Eton at much expense to his parents for one of the higher services, and had developed into a cowboy. Human nature certainly has some strange kinks. But the wife was turning her knowledge to valuable account. Another rancher near by had three children. The nearest school was over a hundred miles away, and they were of too tender an age to be sent away on boarding terms. This lady had come to the rescue, and was giving the children of the wilderness the education which otherwise they would have missed. They came thrice a week, and when we reached the house the school, into which the dining corner had been converted for the nonce, was breaking up. The pupils' home was some four or five miles distant through the bush. Their means of transportation was a single horse. The three children clambered on his back with the eldest girl in front holding the reins, the youngest child behind her gripping her waist, and the third youngster at the rear clinging tightly to the one in front of her. The horse realised the responsibility of his position, for he walked along sedately with the minimum of jolt, bearing those three mites homewards. He required no rein to guide him; he knew the way blindfolded, and the children were safer with him than is a child with a nursemaid. Only once did he prick up his ears, as the father rode up bound for Fort Fraser to secure some requirements. The equine nurse neighed as his colleague sped by, but without a pause continued his homeward plod.

It was late in the afternoon, with the rain falling in

torrents, when we skirted the extreme edge of Fraser Lake and made another turn into the thick bush, leaving the Indian village of Stella on one side to follow the telegraph line through the thick grass-carpeted dell, until we met the Endako River, which pours into Fraser Lake. This waterway is entirely different from any other rivers we had met. It was more like an attenuated pond, so stagnant was the water. We were soaked to the skin, cold, hungry, and miserable, and so pitched our camp on its banks, in a small clearing in the bush. The ground was so saturated as to be ooze-like, and on this we laid our beds, there being a wicked squelch as we rolled into our blankets.

It poured incessantly all night, and the next day dawning with no sign of a lift-up in the weather, we resolved to stay where we were, and to make the most of an unhappy plight. We built a huge fire and rigged up a "fly" to secure some measure of protection from the elements. There we passed the day, steaming like basted joints on one side, and with our clothes sticking like gum on the other. The weather was more than depressing—it was maddening. The dripping bush on all sides, a violent shivering-fit if you moved beyond a certain distance from the fire, a water-logged tent and reeking bedding were our lot.

The pioneer settler in such a country as this never knows when he is going to make a "lucky strike." One hardy old farmer took over 640 acres at the northern end of Fraser Lake at 4s. an acre—an outlay of £128 all told. It was a good farming stretch, and he set to work in grim earnest. Then a town-planner came along and concluded that this particular site was far more suitable to the raising of houses, shops, and commercial establishments than mere potatoes, oats, and hay. Would the owner sell? Certainly, if the price were sufficiently enticing! The upshot was that the farmer packed up his traps, his pockets bulging with some £4,500, for the

town-planner had bought him out, lock, stock and barrel, at 35 dollars an acre, and he settled down again a little distance beyond on another square mile. He there put up imposing, spacious outbuildings for the housing of his stock and harvested crops, had a comfortable home, and could point to as fine a stretch of healthy potatoes and other vegetables as you could aspire to possess. The new location from his farming point of view was quite equal to that which the town-planner had coveted, and he was so many hundred pounds to the good over the transaction! And this was not an isolated case by any means; but it suffices to show that it is the man who gets in on the "ground floor" who scores.

Despite the inclemency of the elements, we had visitors. Three Indians came up with a string of salmon trout. They demanded a dollar: to be rid of their insistence we offered a quarter—a shilling. They would not accept, but laid the fish down on the ground and walked a short distance away. The first inclination was to kick the whole lot into the water, but such is the Indian's method of trading. He leaves the goods with you, although he will not accept your price, and then hangs about like a more dampening blanket than the weather. At last, to get them out of sight, we sprang another shilling, which they grabbed, and melted from view in double quick time amid the bush, fearing we might change our mind.

A little later we heard a faint splash in the water and another vendor was visiting us. He had a medley of provisions, and was as venerable a patriarch as ever walked the earth. The natives said he was over a hundred years old. He certainly looked it, for he was the most decrepit lump of humanity that ever I have seen. He was bent with age, his feet were bare, his nether garments sadly the worse for wear, and his ancient coat and shirt were soddened with rain.

Despite our repulsion we could not but feel commiseration. Even Sam, who cherished a keen hatred

against Siwashes and anything pertaining thereto, relented. "Come up to the fire, you old son of Noah," he yelled. A second invitation was not required. The old figure hurried up, and squatting on his haunches within a few inches of the blazing mass, rubbed his hands in high satisfaction. We tried to draw him into conversation; it was useless, for he failed to understand us. But his gnarled and knotted frame, in which the vital spark was not extinguished yet by any means, his wrinkled face and wiry hands, his mouth in which the whole set of teeth was still intact though worn down to the level of the gums, presented a study which it would be hard indeed to equal. He was one of the last warriors of a decaying race—tossed on one side by the younger generation as useless. His faculties were wonderfully acute. His hearing was fairly good, his eyesight, so far as we could judge, was keen, and when he departed after a square meal to which we invited him, we saw that age had not dimmed his prowess with the paddle, for he sent the old dug-out, as decrepit as himself, speeding swiftly and silently along the sluggish waterway. He represented in the flesh one of the types portrayed so strikingly by Fenimore Cooper, a type which is vanishing rapidly from the Great North-West. A vivid contrast to the backboneless Siwashes who hung on our camps.

In the evening the lineman of the telegraph, living barely a quarter of a mile away, strode up to the camp. He had about thirty miles of line to patrol, and had been pretty busy, for interruptions in communication had been occurring with startling frequency. His sole occupation was "looking for trouble," as these breakdowns in the telegraphic conversation are called. Bush fires had been giving him a hustling time, for they brought down post after post, and occasionally snapped the wire.

"Any excitement?" he repeated to a query. "Well, sometimes. But the breaks are generally caused by wind or fire; in winter we have but little trouble. I was out

once, and had come across a post in two. I pitched the reins of my horse over a snag and set to work. I heard my cayouse kicking and pawing the ground, but took no notice as it was getting dark. I had just got the post and wire up when I looked round, and there, barely twenty feet away, was a big bear watching my operations very intently. I stopped, and he advanced. Did I wait? Not much, for my gun was in the saddle. I gave a hop, skip and a jump, was on my horse's back in a flash, whisked the reins off the snag, turned her head, and was soon pelting away like the very wind, pulling out my gun as I sped along. The old girl came after me like winking. It was a healthy race, but the horse won, for when I at last pulled rein, judging I had got a safe distance to have a straight shot, she was nowhere to be seen.

"Yes, looking for trouble is pretty exasperating sometimes. Last week I had been ten miles over my line towards Fraser Lake and had put a breakdown right. I got home late that night to find another interruption. I called up Fraser Lake. That was all right. It was on the fifteen-mile stretch north that the break had happened. I was up in the early morning and off full pelt. A post had come down and there was a dead earth. I put that right and returned home. As I rode up, dog-tired, my wife told me that there was another break. I called up Fraser Lake, and got through, then tried the other side, and found Burns Lake on the north did not answer. I was off again at dawn, taking a blanket and a pocket full of provisions with me. I found a bush fire had been raging, and about a score of trees had dropped across the wire, bringing down two or three hundred feet of it, not far beyond where I was working the previous day. I had to lop everything away myself, and night was on me before I had finished getting some of the débris clear. I then made my way to the half-way hut provided for us between stations, made a fire, had a bit to eat, and

turned in for a sleep. I had not been resting long before my mate coming south from the next station clattered in. He was looking for the same break and had found his line all clear, so guessed I was in trouble. He gave me a hand the next day; we got along fine, and by working till dark got the line straight again. We said good-bye, and I steered for home through the darkness. Hang me if, when I got home, I didn't find another break had occurred on the Fraser Lake section. I had to be off again at dawn looking for this further trouble. A wind-fall had broken the line clean in two between posts. I had a pretty rough fortnight over those 'breaks,' I can assure you. This line has to carry such a lot of traffic, for although there is not much business doing with the Klondike these times, it is the sole means of ready communication between Prince Rupert and the outside world, and the amount of traffic over the line is sometimes tremendous."

It must be confessed that the Yukon telegraph is the most crazily built line I have ever seen. How it keeps intact so well is a marvel. The posts for the most part are tottering, for their life is short under the best conditions, and when wind and falling trees give them continuous jolts they are done for. Out of curiosity I asked one of the linemen whether the posts kept the line up, or if it was the wire that kept up the posts. "Hang me if I know," he replied; "but I guess it's a bit of both."

Besides carrying the Klondike and Prince Rupert messages, the line effects a junction at Dawson City with the United States telegraph system of Alaska, the outermost finger of which rests on the Behring Straits at Nome. One can therefore conceive the immense damming of messages that ensues sometimes when a breakdown occurs.

We had an exciting sixty seconds the next day as we were rounding a huge bank of shale that had tumbled from a cliff overhanging us. The pathway was littered

with broken rock, over which we had to crawl gingerly. Animated by some obscure reason, Sam's horse reared and was about to give a healthy buck, when it changed its mind and rubbed shoulders with a telegraph post, which snapped off like a carrot.

"Look alive," we called out, as we saw the post coming over. The packer dug heels into his horse and slashed it over the head with his lariat. It gave a mighty spring just as the post crashed down, missing Sam by inches only. Had it hit him he would have been laid out as surely as an ox under a pole-axe. We thought the wire had snapped, but it had stood the strain, so we managed with great difficulty to set the post vertical once more; the thread of conversation between London and Dawson City was maintained intact.

We skirted the north-eastern bank of Burns Lake, keeping to the higher ground. It is evident that Burns Lake has undergone considerable shrinkage, for a level bench reaches from the water's edge to a considerable distance; it is lightly covered with poplar scrub, and with wild hay in profusion, some of which the Indians had cut and roughly stacked. Here and there were large patches of soft ground of a semi-swampy nature, but which could be readily drained. The soil was a deep, rich black colour, and could easily be detected as an alluvial deposit with a clay subsoil.

The possibilities of the land in these depressions around the lake were shown us when we arrived at the telegraph operator's cabin, for he had cultivated a small garden with potatoes, lettuces, cabbages and so forth, growing luxuriantly in a soil which crumbled in the fingers, and into which one could plunge the arm without meeting solidity. The lineman had taken over a pre-emption in the hollow where we pitched our camp, and had turned a little creek on to his land so as to give it a thorough soaking before attempting to break it. The presence of this creek was an insurance of this pre-

emptor's crop, as it took but a minute or two to swing the water from its normal channel and to send it sprawling over the land.

Burns Lake cabin is probably the loneliest station south of the Skeena River. It is right off the beaten track, about sixty miles north of Fort Fraser, and about the same distance south of South Bulkley. The mailman coming from the south turns back at Fort Fraser, and his colleague from the north retraces his footsteps when he gains South Bulkley. Any mail destined for the operators at Burns Lake has to make its way wearily across country from Bella Coola on the coast, there being a delivery and collection about once a month. In the winter, when movement is confined to dog trains and is uncertain, only first-class mail is carried, such as letters, all book packages and newspapers being left at the Bella Coola post office until the weather breaks.

CHAPTER XIX

A Fertile Corner of the Province

The Lake François Region—The South Babine Country—The Siwash Indians and the Telegraph—The Bulkley Valley—Wild Fruits—Minerals—"Dolly's" Pranks—A "Growing" Country.

BURNS LAKE, and the smaller sheet of water a little farther north, Decker Lake, with which it is connected, are in the centre of a large district offering great promise for farming, and more especially, perhaps, seeing that the prevailing altitude is 2,700 feet or thereabouts, for the raising of stock. To the west and south-west extends the great plateau around Lakes François, Ootsa, and Cheslatta. The wild growth throughout this district is of magnificent luxuriance. The Ootsa and Cheslatta country is somewhat difficult of access from this point, involving as it does a long overland journey; but it can be entered with greater facility from the coast. The probability is that a spur will be driven from the main line of the Grand Trunk Pacific traversing the whole of this fertile expanse, possibly extending to tidewater at Bella Coola, whence there is a regular steamship service to Vancouver, 415 miles distant. Until some such transportation facilities are provided, the Ootsa Lake country will remain practically dormant, owing to the difficulty of getting produce to available markets.

On the other hand, François Lake, being more convenient to the railway, will open up very rapidly. Last year some twenty-five settlers made their way in, and when we arrived, were engaged actively in clearing operations. It is estimated that there are something like

130,000 acres of excellent farming land around this narrow sheet of water, which is roughly sixty miles in length by about a mile wide. The country was described to us by one or two of the settlers as being tolerably level, with extensive flats here and there, and though it was early to obtain conclusive evidence concerning the productivity of the soil from actual results, they stated that indications more than fulfilled anticipations, the soil being of the same rich character as is found in all the extensive depressions fringing the lakes and rivers of New British Columbia. One and all pointed out that under present conditions no one should attempt to settle here unless possessed of a little capital to defray the cost of entering the country, which is, at the moment, rather considerable; but this situation is being eased every month as the railway forces its path farther south.

On the northern side runs another splendid arable belt skirting the southern end of Babine Lake, and extending more or less continuously to Stuart Lake. In the South Babine country it is estimated that there are about 200,000 acres of excellent agricultural land, together with nearly 20,000 acres which have been reserved for pre-emptors. This country, again, is somewhat difficult and expensive to enter, but before long it will be linked to the trunk road, especially as the Stuart Lake and River districts advance under settlement.

An indication of what the settler must expect who ventures into this country in anticipation of the railway was afforded by the operator. A farmer on François Lake found it necessary to dispatch a telegram, which entailed a ride of some eighty miles. That wire communication involved the best part of a week's absence from home, with a blanket and a few pounds of the barest provisions thrown upon his horse. He spent the night in the cabin, in expectation of a reply which never came, so that the journey to all intents and purposes was wasted. Riding eighty miles to secure urgent communication with the

outside world is a phase of frontier existence which throws its isolation into glaring relief.

Another sidelight on life and movement in a new country was provided by an occasional meeting with a "hiker," bound from Hazelton to Fort George or Quesnel, or vice versa. It is a tramp of 320 or 430 miles, as the case may be. These sturdy pedestrians, however, make light of the journey, completing the distance easily in from eleven to fifteen days—about half the time it takes a pack-train to cover the same mileage. They strap a solitary blanket to the back, carry a few dollars in the pocket, and replenish supplies of provisions just where they can at stores by the wayside, and just sufficient in quantity to tide them over the intervening distances. They rely on making thirty miles a day, irrespectively of sunshine or rain, and more often than not pike along soaked to the skin. They endeavour to gain a telegraph station at night, but in cases where the stations are far apart, they spend the night in the half-way cabin provided for the linemen.

The presence of such overwhelming numbers of Siwashas led me to inquire if the red men ever interfered with the wire, either in appropriating lengths of the thread for personal purposes or out of devilment.

"No fear," returned the operator. "In the first place they know better; secondly, they realise its significance, though it is useless to them. Indeed, many of them will go out of their way, when they discover a break, to round up the lineman and guide him to the seat of the trouble, for which they receive a little recompense in some form or other. The rendering of such assistance they regard as the proudest moments in their lives, for they cherish the idea that on such occasions they are working for that almighty force—the Government. Sometimes we have to enlist their assistance, and they fall to with alacrity from the same motives. Moreover, one or two of the Siwashas, when they find a post down, instead of

reporting will re-erect it on their own initiative, feeling thereby that they have done something remarkable.

"But in their eagerness to be of assistance they have sometimes overstepped the mark through ignorance. One day we had a break in the wire south of here. The lineman started off, but reached the half-way cabin without observing any signs of the wire being down, or any collapse of poles. At the half-way house he met his colleague from the next station south. They tested up. The half to Fraser Lake was all right; the interruption was somewhere between the half-way house and Burns Lake. That was fully evident. Cursing for all he was worth, my comrade retraced his footsteps looking for short circuits, since wire and poles were intact. He had covered a good many miles without success when he came to a dead stop; the cause of the trouble was before him and he had passed it on his outward search. He gave vent to a good healthy ebullition of his mind. What had happened? Oh, the pole had evidently become partly uprooted under wind and weight of the wire, toppled over, and its condition had been observed by a Siwash. The Indian in his zeal to help us had picked up a length of the discarded wire of the '67 line lying on the ground, had looped it round the top of the fallen pole, had pulled the latter upright and fixed it so by converting his piece of wire into a stay. The result was a dead earth. The dots and dashes that were being pumped into that line were simply running down to the ground through this leak as the guy wire was doubled round our wire. When the lineman came in he was as mad as a hatter, and expressed his firm resolve to go out to look straightaway for that energetic Siwash with his gun."

The going became pretty hard as we approached the Bulkley summit. The country was extremely broken, and at places had been badly burnt over by recent furious bush fires, littering the trail with deadfall, with here and there teasing stretches of muskeg. Other spots were

badly obstructed by rocks. It was a succession of heavy climbs, the banks over which the trail made its way being steep and slippery from rain, and composed of crumbling shale. After five or six hours' wrestle with this severely undulating, winding, and arduous path we entered a magnificent plateau almost as level as a billiard-table and stretching for miles on either side to a tree-covered ridge. It recalled nothing so much as parts of the weald of Kent, for narrow streams fringed with willows, little more than ditches in point of width, though well charged with water, wound tortuously through the meadow land. The altitude and somewhat exposed nature of this prairie, no doubt rendering it very inhospitable if not absolutely untenable in winter, will operate against its settlement, but as a pasturage for cattle it was one of the finest stretches we had yet met, and the horses keenly enjoyed being turned loose on this vast tract for the night. The sole sign of habitation was a Siwash shack perched on the distant hillside, but evidently uninhabited at that moment, for we saw nothing of the owner. We kept to the western ridge, with its shield of young poplars in which wild grasses flourished to a man's height, proving that the area of meadowland could be extended easily and to decided profit by clearing. It was certainly a lonely corner of the province, a feature that was accentuated by the howl of the coyotes which made night hideous, while in the morning there was heard the curious and plaintive wail of the loon. At the broadest point this vale is fully five or six miles wide, and about twenty miles in length; judging from its character it had been timbered formerly, but the wood had fallen a victim to the ravages of fire, and so completely that the scrub had never been able to take root again.

We had touched the fringe of the Bulkley Valley, which has long been heralded as the Paradise of British Columbia—and certainly the description is not inappro-

prate, for after leaving this broad, long flat we traversed a succession of others. We could not help observing one very prominent feature. The Indian, who saw his land slipping more and more from his grasp, had made a last bold bid to retain some semblance of proprietorship by occupying all the best, most level and most open stretches. Whether his squatting will hold good or otherwise remains to be seen, inasmuch as the country has not yet been surveyed. Here and there a Siwash is industrious, as is evident from the manner in which he has fenced his holding and set it out more or less methodically, though it must be confessed that the red man's idea of symmetry is somewhat bizarre.

The most astonishing feature of the country we were threading now was the prolific yield of wild fruits. The bushes of gooseberries, both black and red, were laden to breaking point; the fruits, running to the size of a small marble, were sweet and juicy. They were dead ripe, the slightest shake of the branch sending them rattling in showers to the ground. Currants were just as thick, while the raspberry canes were bent with the weight of their produce, which for the most part was of greater size than can be obtained under cultivation at home. We rode for miles through this natural orchard, the bushes being as thick as the willow scrub, which indeed they appeared to have displaced.

Some twenty miles due north of us, at the southeastern end of Babine Lake, great activity was being displayed in the search for minerals on the slopes of the southern nose of the Babine range. One prospector had located a rich find of galena, some specimen ore of which we saw; so far as exploitation had been carried up to that time, there was a commercially practicable yield of gold per ton, while other minerals were present in large quantities. Development was being pushed forward energetically, the mine having been bonded for £15,000. The success of this "strike" had become noised abroad,

and occasionally we passed one or two prospectors toiling along with their horses and packs, striking across country to the new mining area.

During our toiling over the Bulkley divide we were treated to another exasperating incident. In the pack-train was a docile young mare which answered to the name of "Dolly." She had hardly shaken down to the rough tumble and steady pegging along demanded of the pack-horse, though she gave every promise of developing into a first-class ship of the bush in time. Dolly grew tired of marching along day after day in the same place in the pack-train, so took up a position at the rear, trotting along behind with her load like a dog. Now and again she would stop for a browse until we were some way ahead though still in sight, when in response to a whistle from Sam she would canter up and repeat the performance. But she did this once too often. We passed her quietly chewing a dainty morsel under a tree on the edge of the forest. An instant later she had disappeared. Sam darted into the dense forest, whistling and calling her by name, but there was no sign of the little grey mare. With a sharp adjuration from Sam, I was deputed to hustle the second half of the pack-train along, the leading division under the other packer being some way ahead. Lett lingered behind to give Sam assistance.

The pack-train realised that its proper driver was not in charge, and instantly commenced playing pranks, one slipping into the bush on this side, another trotting like mad ahead, while others wandered off to every point of the compass. Finally, recognising that even a tyro pack-driver has his limits of endurance, and can cut up rough when provoked, they shook down to their task, and made off at an inspiring trot to catch up the first division. For four solid hours I was steering that troublesome part of the ship, and gathered a faint idea of what a packer has to tolerate from his charges, and why it is that "to swear



THE AUTHOR AS PACK-TRAIN DRIVER.
A magnificent ranch in the Bulkley Valley.

like a packer " has come to denote the extreme perfection of invective.

At last we swung down from the high ridge into a broad valley, to be greeted with the welcome, "Well, boys, I guess now you're here you're going to stop here."

It was one of the twain who pass their lives in the telegraph cabin, for we had struck the South Bulkley station. While we were debating what we should do, up galloped Lett with the news that no signs of Dolly had been seen, that Sam was out in the woods scouring over a wide circle looking for her tracks, and that he would not come on till he had found her, even if he stayed there all night. It was obvious that we could not get too far ahead, for it was a moot point when Sam would reappear, so we splashed across the Bulkley River, then low and easily fordable, and on a flat on the western bank pitched our camp.

The two hail-fellows-well-met in charge of the telegraph cabin gave valuable assistance and information, for one, Mr. William Clark, is an encyclopædia on the northern part of New British Columbia. We were not long in making a hearty supper disappear. Just as we were stretching our limbs and enjoying an agreeable *tête-à-tête* with "my Lady Nicotine" there was a shout, a savage whoop, and Dolly tore through the scrub giving vent to a loud neigh, with Sam galloping hard on her heels. His little grey mare had given him a fine hunt in the bush. He had scoured over a wide circle, but without any success. Then as he paused for a breather on a clearing he spotted the hoofs of a horse in the air. Spurring his horse towards the point, he found Dolly enjoying a good roll in the tall wild hay.

"I giv' her 'roll,'" vehemently exclaimed Sam; "she never moved sar lively as when I gave her a dose o' thar end of my lariat. Th' minx had me tearin'

about in th' timber as black as night for five solid hours. Gee! hand over the tea, Joe; I'm as dry as a bottle with the cork out."

In the evening Clark and his companion spent an hour or two with us and the time flew rapidly.

"Grow?" said he. "Why, anything will grow here. You cannot help it. You cannot stop the seeds after they've once started, even if you wished to do so. There's only one difficulty. That's labour. It's a perfect fright. Why, I had to pay a man £3 a day for himself and team, only a week or two ago, to get my crops in, as I was out on the line and couldn't do it myself. But there, that wasn't so bad as one experience I had in the Klondike. There the son of a gun refused to work for half a day for less than 50 dollars (£10). But if you want to see how things will grow out here, you make a stop-over when you hit the Bulkley River again to-morrow and have a good look over McInnes' ranch. That'll open your eyes."

When we pulled out in the early morning Clark and his companion said they would follow us up. There was trouble on the line for which they had been searching for days past without success. "So long, boys," they said as we departed. "We'll see you before nightfall! I guess we'll catch you up, as you've got a pretty tight twenty-five miles in front of you."

He was right about the trail. It ran the fifteen miles along Moose Lake a pretty close second for arduousness and difficulty. First we had to make a wide detour of about two miles to avoid a stretch of muskeg which was generally passable, but now was saturated hopelessly. As it was, we struck its edge and had a lively time floundering in the morass. Then came a stiff climb of about one in three up a mountain hump, which the trail zig-zagged in the most astonishing manner, and even then was so steep that we had to walk, or, rather, pull ourselves up hand over hand. Muskeg, deadfall, slimy

stretches of loose stones, bush, snags—all were encountered in turn and with aggravating frequency. But at last we once more struck the Bulkley River, and an open spot beneath the trees. We drew up—a most bedraggled and limp assortment of man and beast.

CHAPTER XX

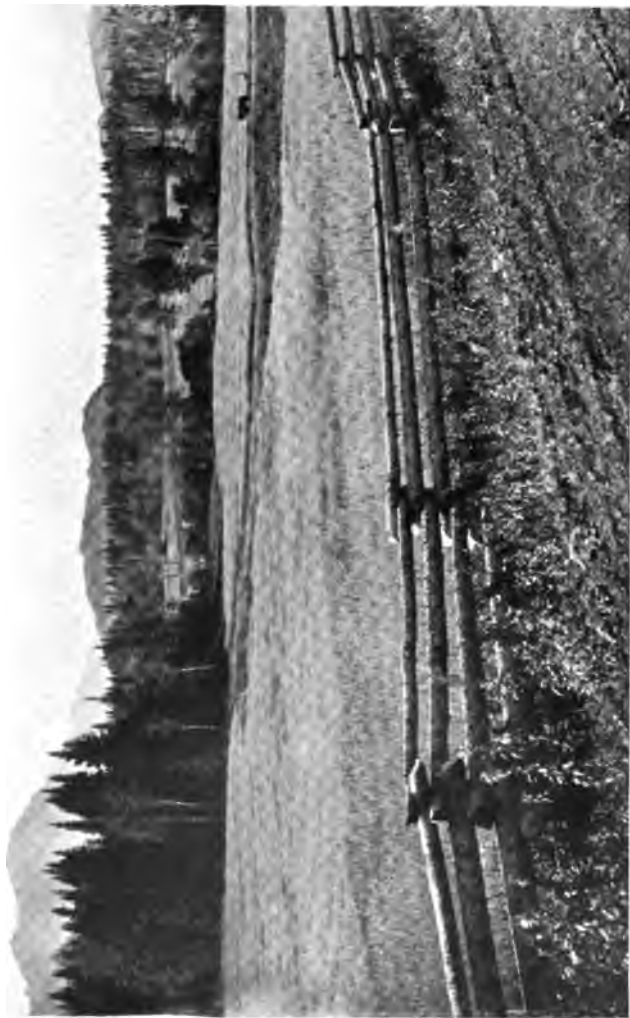
The Bulkley Valley: The Farmer's Treasureland

The McInnes Ranch—Timothy Six Feet in Length—Top Soil more than Twenty-eight Feet Deep—A Wonderful Field of Oats—The Kitchen Garden—A Bed of Purple-top Turnip—A Famous Potato—Strawberries—Live Stock—The Diamond Ranch—Leaving behind the Lonely Trail—The Commissariat for Three Thousand Navvies—Aldermere.

We had now reached the far-famed Bulkley Valley, about the possibilities of which much has been whispered, but of which very little has been seen, owing to its inaccessibility. Clark and his chum had reached our camp, both having come along slowly, looking for the trouble in the wire, but without avail; and being great friends with the McInnes brothers, whose celebrated ranch was near by, Clark offered to be our introducer.

The McInnes farm is the pioneer ranch in the South Bulkley Valley. The owners, two brothers, known popularly as "Long" and "Short," from their striking differences in stature, hail from Scotland, and reached this country via the Yukon Telegraph: in other words, were associated with its construction, afterwards settling down as lineman and operator in this neighbourhood. They first acquired 160 acres, which they tilled and tended in their spare time, but became so enamoured of the future that lay before them in the agricultural field that they relinquished the telegraph with its seventy-five dollars a month, all found, to devote the whole of their energies to exploiting the wealth of the land.

They have carried improvement to a remarkable point, considering their isolated position, and the extreme diffi-



THE BULKLEY VALLEY, THE PARADISE OF NEW BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Showing the rolling character of the country.

culty and expense that have to be encountered in bringing equipment from the coast. The outbuildings are of substantial and spacious construction, recalling those of home. Their stock, which gazed upon us in wonder as we approached, looked remarkably sleek, fat, and of fine development, and, as we found afterwards, appearances were not deceptive, for the flesh was tasty, juicy, and tender. Their fine proportions certainly offered striking contrast to the stunted, degenerated stock of the Indians, so in-bred that some full-grown bulls were not much larger than a finely developed St. Bernard dog.

The brothers had run up a commodious, snug and warm bungalow type of residence, with ample accommodation. Attached was a meat-storage room and dairy, for they were practising all ramifications of farming out here, on a scale limited, it is true, owing to the restricted markets, but capable of an immediate expansion when the moment arrived, that is, when the railway passed within earshot of their home.

Though up to their eyes in work, garnering their hay and other crops, they instantly offered to show us round. The barn was crammed with timothy; none of your thin wisps barely thirty inches long, but good substantial stalks ranging from five to six feet in length. In all, they had gathered in from £1,000 to £1,200 worth of hay.

"What's it worth? Well, here £8 per ton is a fair figure, though a larger price has been paid, and probably will be obtained again this coming winter, as there is not sufficient hay in the valley to meet all demands. Wild hay grows here tremendously. We have cropped one meadow where the hay was like canes, and when my brother went into the field you couldn't see him—and he stands a good six feet. Some of that hay we measured just before cutting, and it was nine feet in height.

"How many years' work does this farm represent?

Well, we've been settled here seven years now. We hold just on a thousand acres, and have some more which we can clear directly. But that can wait. Every foot of that thousand acres was ploughed, and you can form some idea of the nature of the soil when we tell you that throughout its whole area we only found one small stone. It works with extreme ease, being a friable loam—silt, probably."

Just what tremendous wealth this land represents may be judged from the depth of the top soil. The brothers were sinking a well for domestic purposes within easy reach of the house, and although they had delved to twenty-eight feet they were passing through merely the uppermost strata, and had not reached the subsoil. In no part of the thousand acres was the depth of top soil less than eight feet, and one can readily conceive that years must elapse before such ground as this becomes tired, exhausted, or requires any artificial stimulation. In one or two places the silt had been found to be as much as thirty-two feet deep! When we visited the kitchen garden, the feet sank into the black silt as if it were sand. At the same time, owing to its great depth it cannot become parched to the crops, for the reason that when saturated it holds a tremendous quantity of water, and as the roots of the plants can force their way easily below they can suck up illimitable quantities of nourishment for their development from a depth well below the evaporating effect of the sun's rays. Plants can never starve from the want of a drink in such soil as this. Also the Bulkley River acts as a stand-by. The brothers can quickly divert a part of its volume to flood their fields.

We were a trifle late in the season to see the farm at the height of its beauty, inasmuch as the hay, wheat, and barley had been garnered. There was a field of oats standing, and they were a sight to make an English farmer turn green with envy. Summer frost had wrought

no havoc here, although the oat is one of the plants most susceptible to its destructive effects. We had seen, however, fields of oats growing in exposed positions in which the crops had been ruined by frost. This field of grain was just ripening, and it easily topped four and a half feet in height, with long ears well filled and matured. This grain was worth £20 per ton on the ranch.

But the most remarkable sight was afforded by the kitchen garden. Something of everything had been planted. The carrots were the least successful from external appearance, but this was explained as being due to seeding by a new machine which was not working properly, so that blanks were frequent, giving the bed a ragged appearance. But the roots that were pulled for our inspection were of splendid shape and colour, about 18 inches long, by some 2 or 3 inches across the crown. The parsnips were better, while the white turnips were striking examples of British Columbian fertility, for they were almost completely spherical, weighed from 2 to 4 lb. apiece, and as sweet and juicy as an apple. Cabbages of all descriptions were growing in abundance. There were savoy's with hearts as tight as drums, and twelve inches across; curly kale thriving like young bushes; while the ordinary cabbages had attained huge proportions and were reeling under their own weight. One could not span a single plant with the two arms without crushing it. The largest cabbage these brothers have raised yet, so they related, turned the scale at 20 lb., and they kept it for some time to show passers-by.

"We made one mistake when we started our kitchen garden," remarked the brothers. "We had not quite shaken down to the new order of things, and to make sure, as we thought, we turned in a mass of stable manure to help the plants along. The plants grew all right, but they ran so much to neck, for that soil was too rich with the fertiliser we added. We haven't got rid yet of that stimulating dressing we gave it."

But the brothers kept their greatest surprise till the last. This was a bed of purple-top turnip which was being grown for winter feeding of the stock. Here was Brobdingnag with a vengeance. The top leaves were large, but they concealed only a far greater growth below. The crowns, many of which were split into five heads, were from 12 to 14 inches across. Some were pulled, and when measured gave a circumference ranging from 24 to 36 inches! Three roots made a bulky and heavy armful, as we found from experience. The McInnes Brothers hold the palm in the Bulkley Valley for raising this species of turnip, for they established a record with a single root weighing 20 lb.! "I remember that root," muttered Clark, "for I offered to carry it into Hazelton, to show what we were doing farther south, tied it to the saddle, and had it thumping my leg like a hammer all the way."

"That recalls the fellow at Prince Rupert with the South Bulkley potato," chuckled one of the brothers. Then turning to us, he explained that some fine potatoes had been raised between there and Aldermere, and they were taken over by an enthusiast, who carried them to Prince Rupert in triumph for exhibition. He was expatiating at great length about the tremendous, amazing, and paradise-like productivity of the soil, and picking up the largest "spud," a beauty about the size of a vegetable marrow, he went on, "Now this shows you what they can do in the Bulkley Valley! Can you raise potatoes like this? Have you ever seen one to beat this for size? How would you like to raise a hundred acres of them? This single tuber is worth so much. Talk about looking for gold. Why, potatoes down in Bulkley will bring you more gold than you'll ever dig up, and the strike is more certain too!"

"That's all right," struck in a "knocker"; "but how about your summer frosts down there?"

"Summer frosts! Gee! I guess you want a summer



TURNIPS WEIGHING FIFTEEN POUNDS A-PIECE.

How produce grows in the South Bulkeley Valley. One of the Brothers McInnes in their purple-top turnip field. The largest of the roots Mr. McInnes is holding measured 26 inches in circumference. The top soil on this ranch averages from 8 to 32 feet in depth over the 1,000 acres.

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frost or something to stop things growing. Where do you think this potato would have finished if it hadn't been for the frost?"

The long residence and farming experience of these two Scottish brothers in this valley prompted an inquiry as to the fruit-raising outlook.

"So far as ground and bush fruits are concerned," was the reply, "we can confidently say that everything is in favour of obtaining a prolific harvest. You should have been here a few weeks ago and seen the strawberries. They were as thick as 'saskatoons.' We turned the whole lot into preserve, and you can see indoors the stock of packed jars we obtained from these three or four dozen plants. As for currants, the bushes were strained to breaking point. You will find a few if you look." What was left on the bushes in question bore out the brothers' enthusiasm, for we picked handfuls of berries as large as black-heart cherries, a mass of juice, and intensely sweet. The gooseberries were also of large size, and we learned that these were simply wild bushes, such as we had passed in thousands along the trail, raised under cultivation conditions. The effect of rough pruning and tending was reflected in the size of the fruit, and when the country is opened up a little more, it should amply repay the extensive production of new species grafted on this stock.

The stock farm comprised 96 head all told, grazing on the hillsides, and securing a plenitude of nourishing food in the wild grasses among the trees. Five of this roll were hogs, and the brothers vouchsafed the firm opinion that ultimately the raising of swine would be found to be one of the most lucrative branches of stock-raising in the province, the demand being far in excess of the supply, not only locally, so far as they were concerned, but throughout the whole of the western country. Indeed, the authorities have drawn attention to the neglect of this phase of mixed farming, and have endea-

voured to stimulate greater interest in the porker. These isolated pioneer farmers were doing very well in regard to their stock. The previous day they had sold the hind-quarter of a steer at 9d. a lb., thereby netting £8 12s. 6d. over the transaction, while we decided not to miss the opportunity of obtaining the first taste of fresh meat for some ten weeks, by the purchase of a prime 28-lb. joint at 10d. per lb. Never did grilled steaks tickle the palate so much as those prepared over the camp fire that night. It was a welcome change from the eternal bacon, beans and fish. We had felt severely the absence of fresh meat from our menu, for although vegetables can be prepared appetisingly, a hard grind over the trail for six or seven hours soon proves that such fare possesses no staying properties. Those steaks quite rejuvenated us, and we felt fitter the next morning for a good day's wrestle with the trail over the hills than we had done for weeks past. To be able to withstand the rigours, hard knocks, and fatigue of the trail, one cannot do better than imitate the Indian, who is a staunch believer in a meat diet.

The Bulkley Valley extends from the Morice River to Moricetown, a distance of about a hundred miles in a direct line north, and lies between the coast range or Cascades on the one side, and the Babine mountains on the other, while on the north it is hemmed in by the opposing ranges closing together. The first-class arable country covers about 200,000 acres. The country clamours loudly for men who, though possessed of little capital, have abundant energy and are not afraid to work long and hard.

We had a hard climb over the rolling ridge guarding the Pioneer Ranch. This stretch of country holds out no promise of immediate development, owing to its rough character, though doubtless it will be useful in days to come as grazing ground. The upward toil led us on to a magnificent undulating plateau, rimmed by the sharp, tall, gaunt peaks of the outer chain of the Cascades, at



HARVESTING IN THE NEW NORTH-WEST, 150 MILES FROM THE RAILWAY.

The pioneer ranch in the South Bulkley Valley.

the foot of which was the silvery streak of the Bulkley River. On the right rose up the foothills of the Babine range, over which we could see the telegraph trail making its sinuous way, for we had now parted company with this friend. The elevation was high, the air clear, pure and invigorating. We passed through dense patches of scrub in which the luxuriant pea vine and prairie grasses were having a healthy race with the bush to see which could grow the highest.

The whole of this highland tract, sandwiched between the opposing main mountain ranges, and running parallel therewith, with its slopes falling gradually on to large, gently undulating benches, was formerly a huge forest, swept clean out of existence by fire. For the most part the hump is quite bare. A large slice, aggregating 3,000 acres, constitutes one of the most celebrated ranches in this northern country, having been acquired some twenty years ago by Mr. Barrett, the bonanza farmer of New British Columbia, whose ship of the bush, the Diamond Ranch pack-train, is regarded as the finest and the best equipped between Los Angeles and the Klondike. His courage in advancing into this wild virgin domain brought its own reward. We could see a rich stretch of potatoes in the full glory of their growth. Like the other husbandmen through these valleys, he simply plants his tubers and lets the soil and climate do the rest, and to magnificent effect, too, seeing that they average 600 bushels, and realise over £200 per acre. The "murphies" are simply sown by the plough turning them in, and receive no further attention until they have ripened, when they are ploughed up by animal power.

Hay is another paying investment, as we could see by the numerous stacks. Something like a thousand acres have been seeded to timothy, and the yield varies from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 tons per acre, and commands about £8 per ton on the ranch. Wild hay also grows with characteristic luxuriance, the 500 acres or so under this plant

averaging about 2 tons per acre. The fodder raised on this expanse is of magnificent quality, and has been cut successively for some years past, showing the sustaining richness of the soil. At the time we reached the ranch the crop had been gathered in and the cattle were roaming whither they pleased.

Oats also have proved a winner, having averaged from 75 to 100 bushels per acre. Owing to the limited quantity of this grain at present raised in the valley this has commanded a highly satisfactory figure—about £30 per ton on the farm. The character of the country hereabouts adapts itself to mechanical farming, which, with the advent of transportation facilities, will doubtless be practised. Wheat has been grown, and with success, a yield of about 50 bushels per acre being recorded. In regard to quality, it compares favourably with that raised in the essentially wheat-growing areas of the Dominion, but as an investment it has not so far proved satisfactory, owing to lack of transport.

As we wound over the northern side of this ranch the whirl of a circular saw struck our ears. It was not euphonious, but it was strangely welcome. Two new towns were springing into existence about fifteen miles farther north, and lumber was urgently required for a multitude of purposes. Cruising round for timber revealed this situation, which, from all points of view, was eminently suitable for the establishment of the mill. There was a good wagon road, judged according to British Columbia standards, communicating between forest and market. Accordingly the plant was set up, and was now screeching from morning to night, rending tree trunks into rough boards, and so forth. This mill was turning the grim relics of a forest fire to commercial account, for the trees that were being sawn up were tall, straight pines, standing barkless and seasoned against the storm. This utilisation of such wood, which was perfectly sound, and far preferable for building purposes to green wood,



OATS THRIVING WHERE DENSE FOREST FORMERLY HELD SWAY.
The field was covered with trees as in the background when the McInnes Brothers took possession.



is a proceeding which might be followed profitably in other parts of the country.

The lonely trail was now left for good and all, since this wagon road runs through the valley for a matter of 75 miles to Hazelton. The glen itself is broad and for the most part flat, thickly covered with tall, dank prairie grass and vetches. Prominent among the wild flowers was the tall spike of the delphinium, rearing up to seven or eight feet, and in the summer we were informed that the valley was a splash of brilliant blue from the gorgeous blooms of this flower, which at home is found in every old garden. Here it was growing so rankly as to be considered a weed. The aquilegia ran the delphinium very close for supremacy, favouring the damper and more sheltered spots. The colours were more varied and gorgeous than those familiar to the horticulturist of Britain, while the petals were considerably larger. The tree growth for the most part was poplar, with patches of fir here and there.

As we advanced, signs of settlement became more pronounced, but the evidence pointed to recent invasion, for many of the cabins were brand-new, with but little progress to show in the way of breaking the ground. The usual plan was to clear just a little patch on which could be grown sufficient vegetable produce "to keep the pot boiling." The rail-head connecting with the Pacific coast was only about eighty miles distant, and everything was in a tear and bustle to get ready for the army of labourers which was expected to pour into the country; for these early settlers have golden opportunities of "making good" for a year or two at fancy prices with the investing force, the contractors preferring, when prices are right, to buy on the spot rather than ship up from the coast.

A graphic idea of the gigantic character of the task involved in feeding some 3,000 navvies was afforded us as we travelled over the trail. Fresh meat was an indispensable commodity at the camps, but the question was how to bring it up at a sufficiently low price. Prince

Rupert is 550 miles by sea from the nearest market, Vancouver, and then there was a pull of 180 miles up the Skeena River, taking anything from fourteen to twenty-one days, according to the state of the weather. To attempt to get enough supplies from the pioneer settlers in the valley was hopeless. The contractors thereupon conceived an extraordinarily bold project. They would have herds of animals driven overland and slaughtered on the spot as required. A week or two before we came over the trail a drove of 500 oxen had been sent up-country from Quesnel to Hazelton—a matter of 420 miles—in this manner. The pioneers described the spectacle afforded by such a small army of lumbering brutes being driven slowly—about fifteen miles per day—by a score or so of cowboys. It was a restless, heaving sea of white and brown, pouring over the narrow black trail, through the banks of green forest, browsing as they went, with a midday halt for dinner, turned loose at night to graze, and an exciting round-up in the morning. But no animals were lost, and the number of those injured by the wayside could easily be counted on the fingers, and so prime was the condition in which they reached their journey's end, that a contract was promptly settled for the transference of no less than 5,000 cattle over the same 420 miles during 1911. That herd must have pushed its way forward with the force of a battering ram, for we saw at places where the trail was narrowest how the surging beasts had struck blindly through the bush on either side, trampling down everything before them.

We had had many and varied scraps of information concerning Aldermere, the town for which we were making, and expected from the flamboyant descriptions to find at least a small village hustling along in the wilderness, such as had been brought before us at Fort George. But we were bitterly disappointed. On either side of the trail straggled some twenty frame buildings,

including a commodious timber hotel, a large store, a telegraph office and a newspaper. As for the population, why, sixty would have been an outside census. Down in the hollow, about a mile distant, we could see another little colony among the trees on the bank of the Bulkley River. As we were informed that good feeding ground for horses existed there, we made it our destination, crossing the river by a wooden truss bridge to a flat where a new town was being planned. The thoroughfares were cleared through the trees. We pitched our tents in the main street, and our camp-fire in the middle of the road. This was New Tel-kwa, a town without people—without even a sign of humanity beyond the two or three surveyors engaged in their plotting task. Everything was ready for the expected boom, for the lots were all laid out for a purchaser's inspection and acquisition, while a huge signboard perched on a low hummock announced the site of the hotel.

CHAPTER XXI

The Mineral Storehouse of New British Columbia

Tel-kwa and Aldermere: Rival Towns—Finds of Coal and of Metals—A Word of Caution—Enterprise at Tel-kwa—The Lumber Industry—Fortunes made in the Bulkley Valley—Summer and Winter—Hudson's Bay Mountain.

TEL-KWA is going to have a big future. So say the inhabitants, and as they are on the spot they ought to know. Aldermere?—the Tel-kwan considers that “a by-town, a back-number, a side-tracked hill of conceit.” The Aldermerean, when sounded on the subject, retorts in a similar strain to the disparagement of his rival. “Tel-kwa! Bah! It's a town in a swamp! A mosquito farm! A proposition gone into the ditch!” Such is the bitter rivalry between the two places—one has not a single redeeming word for the other. As a matter of fact, both probably will take up a prominent position when New British Columbia settles down to hard, steady business, and the completion of the railway has solved what is now little else than a gigantic jig-saw puzzle. Tel-kwa, from its river position and closer proximity to the line, will doubtless become the commercial centre, while Aldermere, from its elevated situation, commanding magnificent views over a most beautiful stretch of mountain country, and its keen bracing air, has every possible attraction for a residential centre. Perhaps both towns will go awry; no one can say. The railway is the deciding point. And in Tel-kwa and Aldermere it was whispered that the railway station was going to be four miles distant. Should this be the case, then both towns, and also the one in embryo, may be side-tracked, possibly for a good many years to come.



TEL-KWA.

This town hopes to become the foremost mining town in New British Columbia. It is situated in a country wonderfully rich in minerals of all descriptions.



At the present moment Tel-kwa is a gently humming centre. It holds a fine commercial position, as it is at the junction of the Tel-kwa with the Bulkley River. The mountains teem with minerals of all descriptions, and their flanks were alive with prospectors.

The twin towns are an excellent jumping-off point for prospectors among those rugged fastnesses, and one can get right into the Cascades easily from here by following the course of the Tel-kwa River, which rises in the range of the same name. The prospector has been exceptionally busy in these mountains, and rumours of great "strikes" on every side were rife. Here it was a heavy find of galena; there one of silver; coal abounded somewhere else; gold was the reward of another prospector's persistence; while copper seemed to be so abundant on all sides that one began to wonder if the mountains were not entirely composed of that metal. Certain it is, however, that lead, silver and coal exist in enormous quantities, and the office of the Deputy Mining Recorder, Mr. Reginald Gale, an Englishman who had trekked so far north-west as this, was embellished with huge chunks of ore, assay of which had shown the presence of minerals in varying quantities.

Altogether, up to August of 1910, about 500 claims had been allowed by the Government, so that fickle Fortune had evidently been kind to the "mountain scratchers." And they had barely touched the surface. When the scientific hand appears and carries out the search upon a systematic basis, then the real possibilities of the country will be revealed; but the pioneers have done sufficient to prove that, from the mineral point of view, upper New British Columbia is indeed a huge storehouse of dormant mineral wealth. Development naturally cannot be rapid until the advent of the railway, inasmuch as the cost of transport is so high as to militate against the introduction of the machinery necessary to mining on a commercial basis.

The most promising discovery which has been made is that of coal. If there is one mineral more than another which will spell prosperity to Northern British Columbia, it is this. In fact, should the "find" come within a tithe of the computation, its influence will be felt throughout the whole of this western province. Experts who have investigated the discovery very closely, informed me that the basin extends over 28,000 acres, and that it represents deposits of over 1,000,000,000 tons. Should this be correct, then indeed the "strike" will rank as one of the largest known beds of bituminous coal on the North American continent. The mines are about 30 miles due west of Tel-kwa, and it is pointed out that the course of the river offers the most feasible route to tap these resources and to link them with the main line. Considering that no coal has been found to the south within a radius of 500 miles, that Prince Rupert has to depend for every ounce of this fuel upon Nanaimo, some 500 miles distant by water, it is evident that the existence of these reserves is destined to send the northern part of the country forward with a tremendous impetus, especially as the field is within ninety miles of Prince Rupert.

Two other finds of coal-bearing land, west of Tel-kwa, have been made and are being exploited. On Hudson's Bay mountain a small syndicate has made a rich strike of silver-lead, the ore being of high grade, while another syndicate is operating a copper find. The mining activity on all sides is remarkable, and it only needs the announcement of a big strike of gold to complete the fascination.

But everything is in a nebulous state just at present. From my conversations with mining engineers in the locality, the position of affairs may be summed up briefly as "offering a first-rate sporting chance." The man who likes a speculation has just the opportunity. The outlook is in his favour—certainly more promising than the great majority of such propositions. But to give an emphatic declaration that absolute success is assured is

impossible. Only actual development can prove whether this or that claim is sufficiently strong in yield to be profitable. Very few of the finds yet made have been subjected to the stern investigation of assay. Until that is effected the yield per ton of ore, or the quality of the metal, cannot be determined. Then, again, the question of cost has to be considered, and there is no basis yet available upon which this important factor can be determined. But the speculator can be left to take care of himself.

From the investment point of view one must regard the matter in a different way. Apart from coal, which is in urgent demand throughout the whole territory, mining companies founded on propositions out here must be closely scrutinised, for the "wild cat" will be let loose soon. These mountains, while among the richest in mineral wealth, are the most untrustworthy on the surface of the globe from the geological point of view. When they were moulded by Nature there must have been terrible ructions; the stratification became broken up and twisted about sadly, with the result that faults are numerous, and when these occur, heavy and expensive work is often entailed in picking up the leads again. But one must not lose sight of the fact that down in Southern British Columbia, on the "Boundary," where similar conditions prevail, the mining industry has assumed huge proportions, and is one of the greatest mainstays of the province. Comparing the two territories, the north is far more attractive, and the indications are that, once the mining industry here becomes firmly established, it will outstrip the boundary, especially if the coal discoveries fulfil anticipations, for cheap fuel will in that case be on the spot.

Fort George provided some interesting studies of frontier life in a frontier town, and those we obtained of life in this frontier mining settlement came as a supplement. Up on the Babines a prospector, possessed of a

little more geological and scientific knowledge than the majority of his ilk, had rigged up a little assay equipment, so that he could obtain on the spot a rough calculation as to the value of his finds, and thereby ascertain whether the "strikes" he made were sufficiently promising to warrant the expense and trouble of staking. Down by the water-side another enterprising person was experimenting with fluxes for the treatment of refractory ores. A third was taking time by the forelock with a vengeance, Tel-kwa could point to but a single street, and that only in the timber stage, while the new town could not even boast a tent. Yet here was a pioneer diligently trying to make bricks, testing the qualities of the clays found in the vicinity of the town for this purpose, having contrived a small primitive, hand-operated pug mill, and also a tiny kiln. He was looking particularly to the town's transition from timber to brick, but realised that if mineral exploitation in the vicinity were carried to the anticipated commercial stage, in the near future too, there would be a demand for bricks for a hundred and one purposes, and he was determined to be ready for the occasion.

When Tel-kwa and Aldermere started moving, crossing the river was a difficulty, the existing bridge being a crazy structure and quite unsuited to traffic. The inhabitants petitioned the Government to build a new one across the two estuaries, so as to gain the flats immediately opposite Tel-kwa. The Government told the people to go ahead with it themselves, and they would defray the cost. The inhabitants set to work and built a solid structure, of the familiar open steel type, only wrought in wood, using huge balks about 12 or 15 inches square, secured together with large iron dogs. It is a fine piece of substantial timber work, but it cost some £6,000 to carry through.

The lumber industry will be one of considerable importance. Up the river are some large stretches of ex-

cellent timber, which is floated down the Bulkley River to Tel-kwa, and occasionally as far as Moricetown, some twenty miles beyond. Up to the time of our visit over 200,000 feet had been rafted down, one large consignment arriving the night we camped. Lumber commands a fairly high price; that cut up at the mill we passed, fifteen miles out, fetching £5 12s. 6d. per thousand lineal feet delivered in Aldermere and Tel-kwa, but cheaper at the mill.

The demand for lumber, though increasing every day, will have a great fillip when the mines get to work. To meet this contingency the enterprising pioneer who established the existing up-country saw-mill was erecting another large plant in the heart of the town. It was to be up-to-date in every respect. The saw-planer and other tools were to be electrically driven. It was costing this hard-headed pioneer a pretty penny to realise his ambition, as everything had to be brought in by road from Hazelton, a matter of sixty miles, and freightage charges were about £5 per ton, while a like amount had to be paid to bring the materials up the Skeena River from Prince Rupert. But his enterprise was to be doubly rewarded. Not only would he have the most modern saw-mill in the district, but the town of Tel-kwa had contracted for a supply of electric light from the same dynamo.

Taken on the whole, it may be said that there is a healthy race between agriculture and mining for the blue ribbon of industrial supremacy in the Bulkley valley. The future of the former is amply secured, but it will be pushed hard by its rival. The success of the mines will be to the material benefit of the farmers, since it will provide them with valuable markets for their produce on the spot.

Already more than one snug little fortune has been made in the Bulkley Valley out of land. One old sourdough came in with only some £15 in his pocket, and within five years of the allotted span of human life. Too

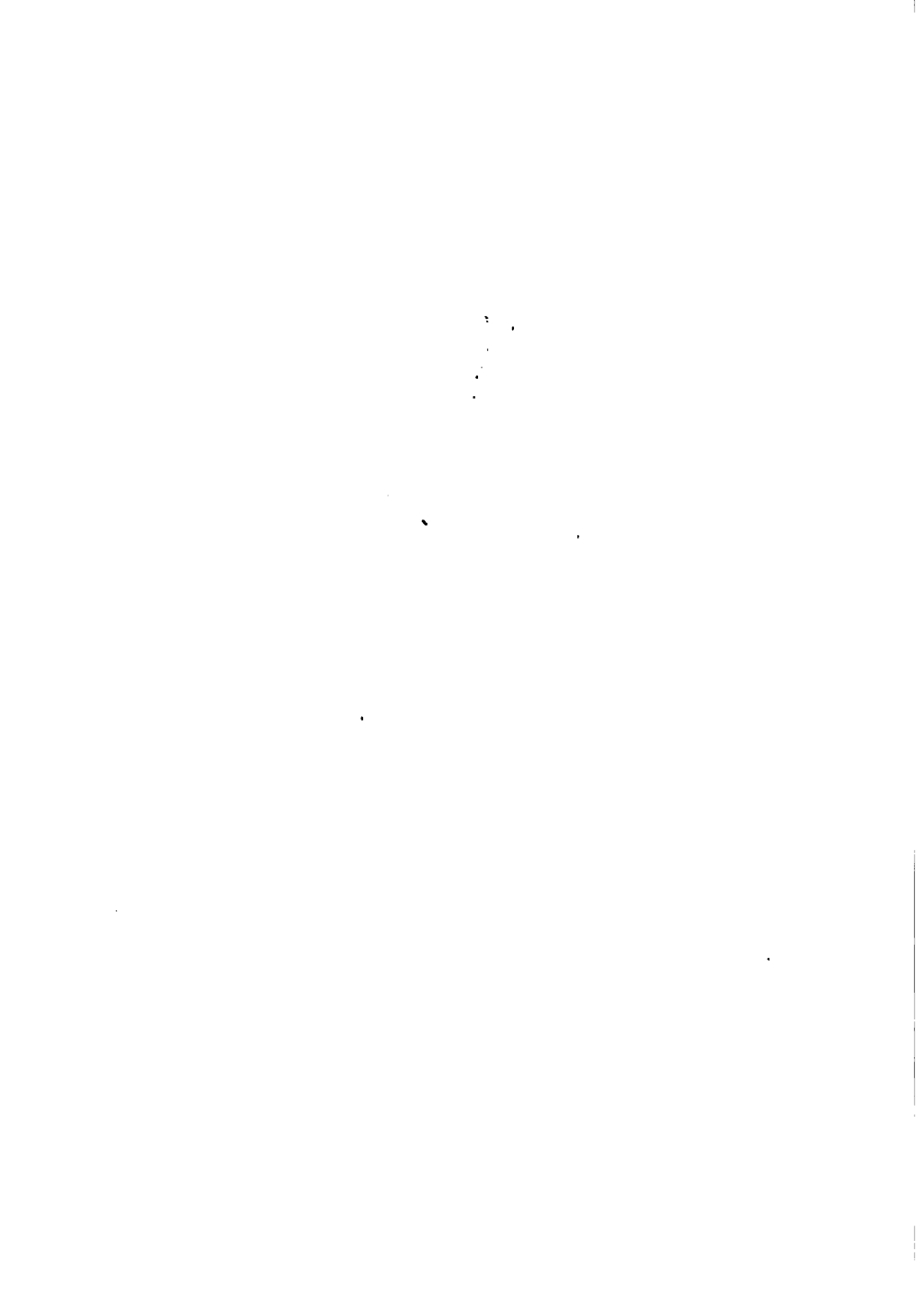
advanced to start farming, you might say; but you did not know that sturdy constitution. The veteran set to work energetically on his land, and to such effect that five years later he sold out for £4,000! Even then he had not finished, for he packed up his small requirements and straightway set his footsteps towards the Peace River, determined to participate in the boom that was developing in that country.

A similar story was related to me of another old campaigner, who was sixty years of age when he pulled into the South Bulkley Valley. His land was partly timbered, but he knew how to wield an axe and how to pull up stumps. One day he was observed passing through Aldermere northward bound. He was just going out, his improved farm having arrested the attention of a younger man who bought out the veteran for something like £3,000! In the Bulkley Valley, owing to the bounteousness of Nature, one is not too young to take up the land, nor too old to set about farming. The climate is ideal. Though in the summer, as we found, the sun blazes down from a cloudless sky and is somewhat hot, it is not unbearably so, and we could always sleep in comfort, as the winds blowing from any direction sweep the ice-clad mountain tops, cooling what would otherwise be a veritable oven. Though weeks may pass without rain falling, the ground, owing to its depth of top-soil, is wonderfully retentive of moisture, while the dews are heavy.

Winter in the valley is admittedly severe, owing probably in a great measure to the proximity of the mountains. But the snowfall, we were told, is far from heavy, 18 inches being considered a good depth. The reading of the thermometer is occasionally low, 40 degrees (Fahrenheit) of frost having been notched at some places. On the other hand, the air is crisp and dry, so that, with a little forethought in regard to clothing, the cold is not particularly felt; certainly, in the opinion of



LAKE KATHLYN (CHICKEN'S LAKE) AT THE FOOT OF HUDSON'S BAY MOUNTAIN.



many who had come up from the United States, it is not so severe as that prevailing in the Dakotas, Wisconsin, and Montana.

We spent two days at Tel-kwa, one of the party, Russell the artist, having contracted rheumatism in his knee, which rendered it extremely painful, if not impossible, to ride. This development was rather unfortunate, since so far we had borne a clean bill of health, the rigours and arduousness of the trail, the frequent soakings to the skin, often for day after day, notwithstanding. Aldermere is connected with Hazelton by a tolerably good wagon road, over which plies the mail stage, covering the sixty miles in a couple of days, and stopping over-night at Moricetown, about half-way. We suggested that Russell should avail himself of this conveyance, but with Scottish persistence he spurned the idea, so we resumed our "hike," though we anticipated that he would be unable to withstand the shaking up incidental to riding on a pack-horse.

By the time the Glacier House, directly opposite Hudson's Bay Mountain, was gained, our sick man was completely *hors de combat*, so we wired back to Aldermere for another vehicle to come along to carry him to Hazelton. At this juncture another of the party discarded his ship of the bush, and decided to complete the last forty-eight miles by stage. Our party had now dwindled to five all told, and we were going strong.

We camped in the vicinity of this wayside hotel, for the side journey to the base of Hudson's Bay Mountain. The rugged mass sheered up directly in front of us, and we had a splendid uninterrupted view of its mighty glacier. It seemed but three miles away, but mine host of the inn said it was fully twice that distance in a straight line and two more by trail. The latter, he said, was in first-class condition, and there was a bridge across the Bulkley River for foot traffic.

As the horses could not be taken in, it was decided

that Lett and Joe, the cook, should go on afoot, carrying a meagre midday meal in their pockets, while I should remain behind with the camp to act as cook. The two started off in the early morning confident of being back by nightfall. But night fell without any sign of their return, though, as the moon was shining brightly, we delayed turning in until after eleven o'clock.

During the night, being disturbed by what I took to be the sound of footsteps, and thinking our companions were coming in—as a matter of fact it was the horses rambling through the bush—I crept out of the tent, and received a momentary shock, for I was half asleep. The whole sky was brilliantly illuminated, and, looking to the north, there was a reflection as of the lights of a big city from afar. It was a brilliant display of the "northern lights," the suffusion on the horizon changing from deep rich purple through greens and reds to brilliant yellows. The display was so vivid that one could read a newspaper with ease, and not until coming day began to illumine the east did it pale its fires.

About eight o'clock we saw two figures come stumbling through the forest. They were the wanderers, and Lett was just about "done up." A stiff brandy, however, soon revived him somewhat, while a good, hearty breakfast completed the restorative process. Joe, being a man accustomed to the wilds, was in fine fettle, though in his broken English he confessed that "he was a bit tired." They had experienced a pretty rough time. The trail was little more than a myth, while the bridge across the Bulkley—well, that was a splash of frontier humour. After they had reached the lake and had completed their investigations they commenced their return journey, which should have landed them in the camp at nightfall, but they found such contradictory blazing on the trees of the forest that they lost their way, and had to pass the night, tired out and hungry, before a blazing pile which they kindled.

CHAPTER XXII

The End of the Trail

An Industrious Siwash—A Timely Salmon—Morissetown—The "Salmon Leap"—A Dispute with Siwashes—Cottonwood for Pulp?—A Falling Tree—The Last Lap of the Trail—A Native Bridge over the Skeena.

HAVING seen our invalid made as comfortable as a backwoods vehicle will allow, we pushed ahead. A glorious sunny day, bracing air, and a good dry trail invigorated man and beast alike, so we sped forwards rapidly. Here and there we saw a prospector come through the bush and turn his horses' heads towards Hazelton. Some bore weighty sacks containing the prizes they had won among the mountain couloirs, and which were to be examined farther south to determine the percentage of metal in the ore. A Siwash overtook us. He, too, had contracted the malady, and had been far into the heart of the Cascades' outer range scouring the bare sides for mineral. Yes, he had been lucky. He had made two good strikes, of which he had disposed already to his very distinct advantage. He was an exceptional Indian, educated and industrious, and, unlike the majority of his comrades, not above taking a leaf out of the white man's book. He scurried on ahead of us at the speed only an Indian can obtain out of his cayouse, and a little later we met him returning over the trail with a prairie schooner packed to overflowing with a settler's effects which he had contracted to bring in. Truly that Siwash was not letting the grass grow under his feet!

That Indian's second passing of our train brought us a little slice of luck. We observed on the back of his wagon a long string of big fat salmon—he was carrying

his fresh meat with him—and the sight developed in us a craving for a salmon steak, for these were large and more tempting than those we had seen hitherto. In the course of a few minutes we happened upon a beauty lying in the road. It was about 14 lb. in weight, and had fallen from the Siwash's string. From its appearance it had not been out of the water more than an hour or so, and we had a fine supper that night. The fish was all the more acceptable inasmuch as our larder was shrinking to a very low level. It would just about last the reduced party to Hazelton, but not a mile beyond.

Though the valley between the Glacier House and Moricetown is narrow, there are some excellent stretches of arable land, and these were being settled rapidly. As is usual throughout New British Columbia, the Indians were in possession of the most tempting areas, and with the invariable result—they harvested the utmost with the minimum of effort.

Moricetown is essentially an Indian village. It is a wide semicircular flat, with soil of the same rich character as prevails all through the Bulkley Valley, and as level as a cricket ground. The river makes a sharp bend, swinging through the centre of the reservation. On all sides were seen the ragged, crazy domiciles of the Indians, and the pure air of the country was contaminated by a sickening odour of fish. Moricetown is a great salmon centre, since the fish in their run up the Skeena River from the sea turn into the Bulkley and stampede up this noble waterway in swarms. But at Moricetown they meet an obstacle which none but the strongest can surmount—a waterfall some fifteen feet in height. Here the river tumbles over a rocky ledge in a somewhat narrowed channel, and then surges through a cañon. "Salmon Leap" this drop is indeed, for when the salmon are on the run they can be seen jumping in shoals, while the water at the foot of the fall is simply a mass of silvery scales.

The Indians have run out a crazy wooden platform from the northern bank to a point under the lowest part of the fall which the fish attempt to jump. We watched the Siwashes catching prime prizes up to 20 lb. in weight as fast as they could go, for as many as twelve or fifteen fish in the air, simultaneously endeavouring to make the leap, was no unusual sight. But only a small percentage succeeded—a large number fell victims to the Indian's spear.

The man's method was extremely crude. He stood on the edge of his platform armed with a pole. As the salmon jumped, his spear flew out like a flash, catching the fish in mid-air, and with a dexterous movement the quarry was whipped round and discharged on to a shelf. One Indian, who was evidently a master of the art, yanked twelve beauties out of the water, or rather out of the air, in a minute, and the narrow ledge was a gleaming, tumbled heap of quivering silver. As further fish were added to the pile, the whole mass was pushed along the shelf until the heap at last stretched from the outer end to the bank. Klootches passed in an endless stream, packing the fish into their capacious baskets and bearing them off to the curing shacks, in which, gutted and opened out like haddocks, they were being dried in the smoke. The Siwashes stand at the end of the platform from early morning till late at night; one man, directly he grows weary of the continually alternating throw of the pole and the haul in of a weighty prize, drops back to make way for another of his tribe, the round being kept up during the livelong day. Although the Indians wreak such destruction among the fish, yet large numbers are found at Tel-kwa, and even as far south as the Morice River.

We crossed the boiling waterway at the entrance to the little gorge, and were soon gripping our noses with our fingers, for the stench of the fish was overpowering. Shack after shack was seen crammed from ground to

roof with long rods of kippered salmon, packed as tightly as possible on the length of wood, their weight causing the support to sag ominously. Each curing shack carried thousands of fish. The Indians do fairly well out of this trade, selling the dried produce among their fellow-tribesmen in other parts of the district for food, while it is also the mainstay of their dog-trains during the winter. They endeavour to dispose of quantities to the white men, but the latter invariably turn a deaf ear to such entreaties, except for feeding their dogs, since the fish is far from appetising in its appearance, while the insanitary conditions under which it is cured cannot be forgotten. We met more than one hale old fellow, or klootch, trudging along towards Hazelton with a huge pile of fish strapped on the back, or saddled to the backs of dogs, which are pressed into service as pack-trains in the lack of a horse. The Siwashes think nothing of tramping over the thirty-two miles between their settlement and Hazelton, which is another large reservation, to dispose of their produce; this is somewhat remarkable, seeing that the Skeena River Indians have ample opportunities of netting large quantities of the fish in the waters flowing by their doors.

As we had had more than enough of Indian company, we left the village behind us, gaining a large open flat, also the property of the red man, about three miles beyond. Here we pitched camp, settling down to a quiet chat and smoke after supper, for we were rapidly approaching our journey's end so far as the trail was concerned. Only one more night after this in the bush. Such were our thoughts, but the Indians came pretty nigh upsetting our calculations. The horses were turned loose in the usual manner, though we had repeatedly advised Baker, our second packer, to hobble one of his six horses, for it was of a particularly roving disposition. But he refused to listen to argument, until his pocket was touched, and then he learned a short, sharp lesson.

When the two packers set out at dawn to round up their animals Sam came romping in with his bunch, but Baker had a fruitless search which lasted three hours. We were having breakfast, when up clattered an Indian boy, of about twelve, astride his steed, and with the inevitable Remington 22 across his shoulder—a red boy, almost as soon as he can walk, is taught to handle a gun.

"White man lose horses?" he asked laconically.

"Yep! Seen any?"

"'M. Indian barn."

"How many?"

"Four, five, six," holding up his grimy digits.

With much coaxing we induced him to describe them, and it was not difficult to grasp that our missing animals had been corralled by the red men. Baker tore off hotly with the young Indian, breathing revenge, and intending to teach the red man a lesson for daring to round up his beasts. But he came back looking pretty crestfallen.

"The sons of guns say my plugs jumped the fence round their oatfield during the night, that they had to get up and chase them out, that they got in agen, and at last had to be corralled," was his report.

"Well, go and get them out," advised Sam.

"Daren't! The damnable coloured sons of a sea cook won't let them go for less than fifty dollars. Say they did that amount of damage to the crops!"

One of the offended Indians soon came up, but he was proof against cajolery. "Whi'e man's horses eat an' tread oats. Whi'e man pay. Whi'e man make law: whi'e man keep law."

The Indian was right. From the legal point of view he was in an entrenched position, though he had overstepped his powers by corraling the animals. Still, it was more than we dared to take them by force.

When it comes to matters of this delicate character the wiliness of the Indian leaves the white man tied in knots. Sam was for taking the bull by the horns in his

rough frontier manner, and having it settled by the tribunal afterwards: Baker was somewhat nervous of such a high-handed proceeding; while Lett tried diplomacy. But this was of no effect.

"Giv' me fif'y doll'r. Whi'e man have cayouses," the red man muttered.

"Look here, you son of a gun. You're trying to put it up on me, and I'm not having any," Baker at last growled. "You come along with me to Hazelton and we'll see the Indian agent." This white official is the arbiter of all disputes and complaints between the white and red men, and it must be admitted he holds the balance with a striking degree of fairness.

"Me com' Hazelton sure. See Indian agent. He see Indian qui' right."

Baker argued with the Indian, vainly endeavouring to compromise matters. It occupied over two hours to bring the dispute to a satisfactory termination, the end being that the Indian reduced his claim for damages to £2, which Baker promptly paid, and came back with his horses.

"Say," said Sam, "did you see what damage your plugs had done to the oats?"

"No! What was the use? I got off with ten dollars anyway."

"Gee! You've been skinned clean. You bet yar life that those plugs war never in those oats."

We heard afterwards that Sam's surmise was correct. The damage was absolutely imaginary, the horses having been spotted browsing quietly in the open flat near by. But the Indian saw the chance to turn a penny at the expense of the white man and promptly took it, with complete success.

Wending our way off the flat, we dipped again into the bush. The valley closed up very rapidly now; the two ranges came within a few hundred feet of one another, with the Bulkley forcing its way through the

narrow gorge between. Leaving Aldermere, the view of river and mountain scenery is wildly picturesque, and the railway and high road are hard pushed to find a track through the narrow space, the iron path being forced clean up on to the mountain side. From the edge of the wagon road the bank drops precipitously into the river, and the water flows through a continuous series of rocky ravines. The permanent way requires a full hundred feet, and the wagon road demands sixty feet, so the two jostle one another very tightly here and there to get round a hump, shoulders of the Cascade having to be cut away in large chunks at places to permit the two to pass.

The men were out fixing the wagon road, while the clearing gangs were completing their work for the railway, there being a scene of general destruction where the immense cottonwoods had been felled, and were now smouldering slowly in huge piles. Large groves of cedar-wood were traversed, but the timber was of little practical value, being rather small or faulty. The cottonwood, on the other hand, attained an immense size. It will be a fortunate day for British Columbia when applied science discovers some economical use for this timber. At present it is useless except for Indian dug-outs, and such a market is limited. The tree will reach a girth of six or eight feet, but the wood is very soft and brittle, splits readily owing to the grain, and has no durability, so is useless for lumber purposes. There are huge expanses of this wood all through the country, especially down the Fraser River Valley, and unless some means of turning it to commercial advantage is found, it will disappear in smoke and ash. The most feasible field of utilisation would appear to be paper-making, and if its suitability for pulp should be proved, then what is at present an unmitigated nuisance will become a valuable asset, especially in view of the fact that what is generally described as small poplar is in reality young cottonwood.

We had one final exciting minute while threading this series of gorges—the last thrilling touch on the trail. The road wound in a broad horseshoe round a rift in the mountain side. At the bottom of the dip were two or three cottonwood trees towering to about 200 feet in height. The road gang was fixing the highway on this loop, easing the grade, and increasing the width. In so doing they had undercut the support of one of these trees, causing it to assume a threatening cant. They could not bring it down for a time, since their camp was situated in the bend of the horseshoe, directly in the line in which the tree would fall. We were walking along at the normal leisurely pack-train pace, when a number of sharp cracks and creaks were heard. Looking up, we saw the cottonwood column quivering violently and heeling over farther. The road builders scuttled like rabbits, and shouted to us to drive like mad. That pack-train was never galvanised into a gallop so quickly. The tree was coming over, and the question, as we could not turn back, or swing to one side, was whether we should get round the bend before the tree crashed down. The groaning and cracking continued, and we plunged forward in desperation, but just as we thought the whole lot was coming down pell mell into our midst, the lower branches of the collapsing giant became entangled in other trees alongside and propped it up. Though we got round safely, after an inspiring ride, which scattered the pack-train in a long-drawn-out line, the outlook for the building camp was by no means rosy. The men, however, were soon swarming round their tents, feverishly making a move to a safer position before bringing the tree to the ground for once and all with the aid of a dynamite cartridge.

That night was our last on the trail. We had gauged the commissariat pretty closely, for when breakfast was finished there was not enough to carry us through another meal. But Hazelton was only twelve miles dis-

tant. Even if we had to foot the remaining distance, it could be covered in about five hours, so we viewed the situation with an easy mind.

That last lap was a dismal pull. For best part of the way the trail wound through an interminable burnt forest. We climbed to the high land, from which we could see mountains on every side, including the white tops of the forbidding Skeena clumps, which stretch away in an unbroken mass for some three or four hundred miles to the Klondike. As we toiled along we heard a shrill blast reverberate up the valley. It was the strident tone of a steamboat siren, and its shriek produced a strange thrill. It quickened our pace. Twisting, turning, and switchbacking over desolate country where only the fire weed grows, for some three hours, brought us to a sudden dip leading to the Bulkley River, and a strange Indian village. Here dwells another tribe of Siwashes, far more industrious, intelligent, and agreeable than those we had encountered during our journey up to this point.

Hag-wel-get, or Acquilget, this settlement is called—no one appears to know the right name, though probably the latter is the correct one. Here the Bulkley rushes through a wild cañon. The channel is through the solid rock, the sides being perfectly vertical, and so smooth that they appear to have been trimmed with a chisel, offering no foothold for any wingless living creature. The gorge is about 80 ft. in depth, and the fierce velocity of the current would make it impossible for a ferry to cross from side to side, even if approaches were cut in the cliff face for such a convenience.

In solving the communication problem across this gorge the Skeena Siwashes displayed remarkable ingenuity. They built a bridge of logs, and what is more, adopted the cantilever principle, which the more learned white man regards as a *tour de force*. The Bulkley bridge is an interesting piece of work, and one would like to know how these unsophisticated natives were able to

set up the massive pieces of timber with the crude appliances at their command. From either cliff project outwards two huge tree trunks about 100 feet in length, anchored in the cliff face, which was hollowed out to carry them; on the ends were piled massive boulders and débris in general to a weight of about 30 tons. Two diagonal legs spring from beneath the anchorages to support the projecting deck beams. The gap between the arms overhanging the centre of the river is filled by two more logs, one on either side, lashed to the outermost ends of the shore pieces, while a continuation of the shore legs is effected at a sharper angle upwards, the outer ends of these in turn carrying longitudinal members from which the deck is partially slung. The bridge is a true type of cantilever design, though necessarily on primitive lines. But the amazing feature of the whole weird structure is that the varying members are not secured together by nails, bolts, or screws, but simply lashed up with willow thongs. It is a crazy-looking affair, and when you venture on, it creaks, groans, and swings as if threatening to collapse at every footstep. Even the weight of a dog is sufficient to set it in vibration. Yet it has fulfilled its purpose to an amazing degree, though white men prefer to look at, and not to walk upon it. Every spring the Indians have to overhaul the structure, and renew the lashings.

This fantastic, frail-looking link was the sole means of crossing the river at this point until a few years ago, when the British Columbia Government, in view of increasing traffic, erected a substantial wooden suspension bridge across the gorge a little lower down. The Indians were somewhat mortified to find that their handiwork was regarded as unsafe, and they gathered round to see what the white engineers would do. What appealed mostly to their imagination was the cables and wire-guys which the whites used. They could not grasp their



QUAINT CANTILEVER BRIDGE OF TIMBER.

It was built by the Indians across the gorge of the Bulkley River near Hazelton.



significance at all, so they came to the conclusion that these were merely decorations, and had nothing to do with holding the fabric together. Forthwith they resolved to embellish their structure in the same manner, so they begged, borrowed, and stole wire from wherever they could. The wonder is that they did not go the length of stripping the telegraph line which runs into Hazelton. Securing what they wanted, they ran the wire here, there, and everywhere over their bridge, with the result that it became more bizarre than ever. At the same time they strengthened the bridge somewhat with nail and other fastenings.

Four miles beyond the Bulkley River Gorge the trail, now a broad road, over which a considerable volume of traffic passes, emerged from the poplar scrub which screens vast tracts of valuable arable soil. The Skeena River could be seen rushing along, backed in the distance by a row of regular snow-cruled teeth—the Seven Sisters—and numerous other crested humps of the Cascades. Below in the hollow gleamed a number of white roofs, and there was a general air of pulsating activity. We had reached the end of the trail—the town beneath our feet was Hazelton.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Head of Navigation on the Skeena

The Origin of Hazelton—The Doorway of the Bulkley Valley—Why the Grand Trunk Pacific Avoided the Town—Moving Incidents—An Indian Cemetery—The Devil-may-care Spirit—Hazelton's Model Hospital—The "Moving-Picture Ward"—Colonisation in the Valleys around—Openings for Veterinary Surgeons and Doctors.

THE town of Hazelton, in the words of the westerner, is a "was-er"—that is to say, it is a centre of activity whose days of importance are waning rapidly. It sprang up around the Hudson's Bay post, nominally the head of navigation on the Skeena River, though, as a matter of fact, the shallow-draught boats can steam twelve or fourteen miles beyond. The Adventurers, however, determined this location to be the most convenient from their point of view, since easy communication can be maintained with the neighbouring posts north, south, and east, which possess no other doorway to the sea. When we drew rein within its portals ships of the bush were loading up with weighty and bulky packs of merchandise of every conceivable description, from portable cooking ranges to reels of cotton, preparatory to the last sail of the season to all parts of the surrounding country, one famous pack-train of some ninety head pushing off for the last trip into the Babines over a rough mountain trail of about seventy-five miles.

Scenically the town is very attractive, with its backing of towering, gaunt, steep mountains, while, from the health point of view, it is an ideal sanatorium, owing to its bracing air. When its days as a commercial pivot pass away it should yet possess a certain future as a

health resort, and also as a tourist rendezvous, since it is an excellent centre from which to penetrate the mountain fastnesses on every hand. Hitherto it has been of importance also as the doorway to the Bulkley Valley, through the series of narrow gorges which we had threaded, the waterway to the coast, 180 miles distant, being traversed by steamboat or Indian canoe. But the railway has sealed its fate. Commercially, it was useless to the Grand Trunk Pacific, since expansion of the town's limits is frustrated by the Indian possessions, which crush the white man's settlement—only thirteen acres in extent—on three sides, while the river is the barrier on the fourth. The railway avoids the town by some three miles, plunging through the shoulder of the mountain guarding the entrance to the Bulkley Valley. As the steamboat service will never be able to compete with the railway coming up the Skeena, either for freight or passenger traffic, Hazelton must inevitably tend to decay.

Hazelton is a combination of the end-of-steel town, a mining frontier colony, an Indian village, a white settlement and a trading centre, with untrammelled licensed hotels to liven things up—truly a strange mixture. But the components do not blend; for white and red in Canada, like oil and vinegar, will not mix. The one has no use, and cherishes a supreme contempt, for the other.

In winter the thermometer at Hazelton drops to the neighbourhood of 60 degrees Fahr. of frost, with a heavy snowfall, but the air is clear and invigorating, and the snow packs so firmly that movement is easy by snowshoe, ski and sled, while the sun shines from a cloudless sky for week after week continuously. One and all of the inhabitants told me that life then is indeed worth living, for they indulge in winter sports to their hearts' content, with fun fast and furious. On the other hand, the summer is glorious, there being a scanty rainfall and a temperature never rising to an unbearable point. When

other towns in the same latitude, and even farther north, are sweltering in an oven-like heat, Hazelton is cool and comfortable, with the thermometer oscillating between 80 and 90 degrees.

Now and again there is a touch of excitement which vibrates through the little colony like the pang of a jumping toothache. For instance, one night there were high words between an industrious and more than normally intelligent Siwash, named Simon, and a half-breed. There had been some clandestine meetings between the latter and Simon's klootch during the Indian's absence, and the red man's expostulations being met with taunts, he announced his intention of going home to fetch his gun and shoot his opponent. The half-breed laughed contemptuously; but Simon acted upon his word, shot the half-breed through the head with his 22, and, what was more, slugged another resident. The hue and cry was raised, but the Indian and a colleague bolted, seeking refuge in the rugged mountains north of the Skeena River, where they roam to this day with a third outlaw, ekeing out an existence by trapping.

On another occasion news sped into the town of an Indian uprising in the Kispiox Valley, some forty miles away to the north. Every Hazeltonian grabbed his rifle in expectancy of a spirited conflict. But it never came. The cause of the uproar was that the Government workmen, forcing a road through the valley, had been compelled to abandon their task by the aggressive attitude of the Indians. The latter had heard that when the railway acquired land lower down the river, the dispossessed owners received compensation, and they resolved to take similar action. This was the rebellion! The Indian agent hurried to the spot, explained the whole situation to the natives, and as the pronouncements of this arbitrator are always greatly respected by the Indians, the episode ended in a fizzle.

It was our intention, on gaining Hazelton, to aban-

don the tent which for so long had been our portable home, in favour of one of the two hotels of which we had heard much. But a hurried glimpse at the cramped cubicle available caused us to decide right away that canvas should shelter our couch until we struck civilisation fairly and squarely at Prince Rupert. Like gipsies, we planted ourselves upon a plot of ground belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company, facing the post, and through the courteous assistance of the factor, made ourselves thoroughly comfortable, since the duration of our stay was somewhat uncertain, steamboat navigation, owing to the low state of the river, being at sixes and sevens. Nor was this all. The monotonous round of trail fare was broken delightfully and surprisingly through the kindness of "my lady of the post," who evidently took compassion on a motley crowd of unkempt nomads, looking more ragged than the Indians after a round hundred days' grapple with the bush, and provided us with a goodly supply of raspberry preserve and an iced cake, for which unexpected delicacies, in a land where bacon and beans reign supreme, we were devoutly thankful.

Overlooking the town, on the eastern side, is a low hill dotted with what from the distance appeared to be ornate chicken runs or fantastic summer-houses. This is the Indian cemetery, one of the queerest sights that British Columbia can offer. The Indian observes the death of a relative in mighty lamentation—mafficking would be nearer the mark. There is an extensive round of wailing and gorgeous feasting. No matter if the deceased had been thrown on one side for some time past as a derelict, his embarkation for the happy hunting-ground must be accompanied by some sign of sad joy and his glorious memory honoured. The Indian God's acre is no carefully enclosed and trimly kept preserve, but merely an unfenced, uncleared strip of thick bush. When a grave has to be dug, the scrub is lopped from the

desired last resting-place, and the final phase in the obsequies is the erection of a weird monument, wrought in wood. The Siwashes appear to spare no effort to render it as grotesque as human skill can contrive. A miniature Chinese pagoda or summer-house seems to be the most popular type of monument.

In these strange transparent glazed mausoleums the personal belongings and gew-gaws of the deceased are prominently displayed. It may be a trunk or a dressing-table, bedecked sometimes with vases of withered blossoms. In one instance a massive gold-cased watch and heavy chain were conspicuous on the table. The embellishment of the tomb is completed invariably by a large photograph of the deceased, while from a line stretched across the interior depend mournfully the remnants of his or her clothing.

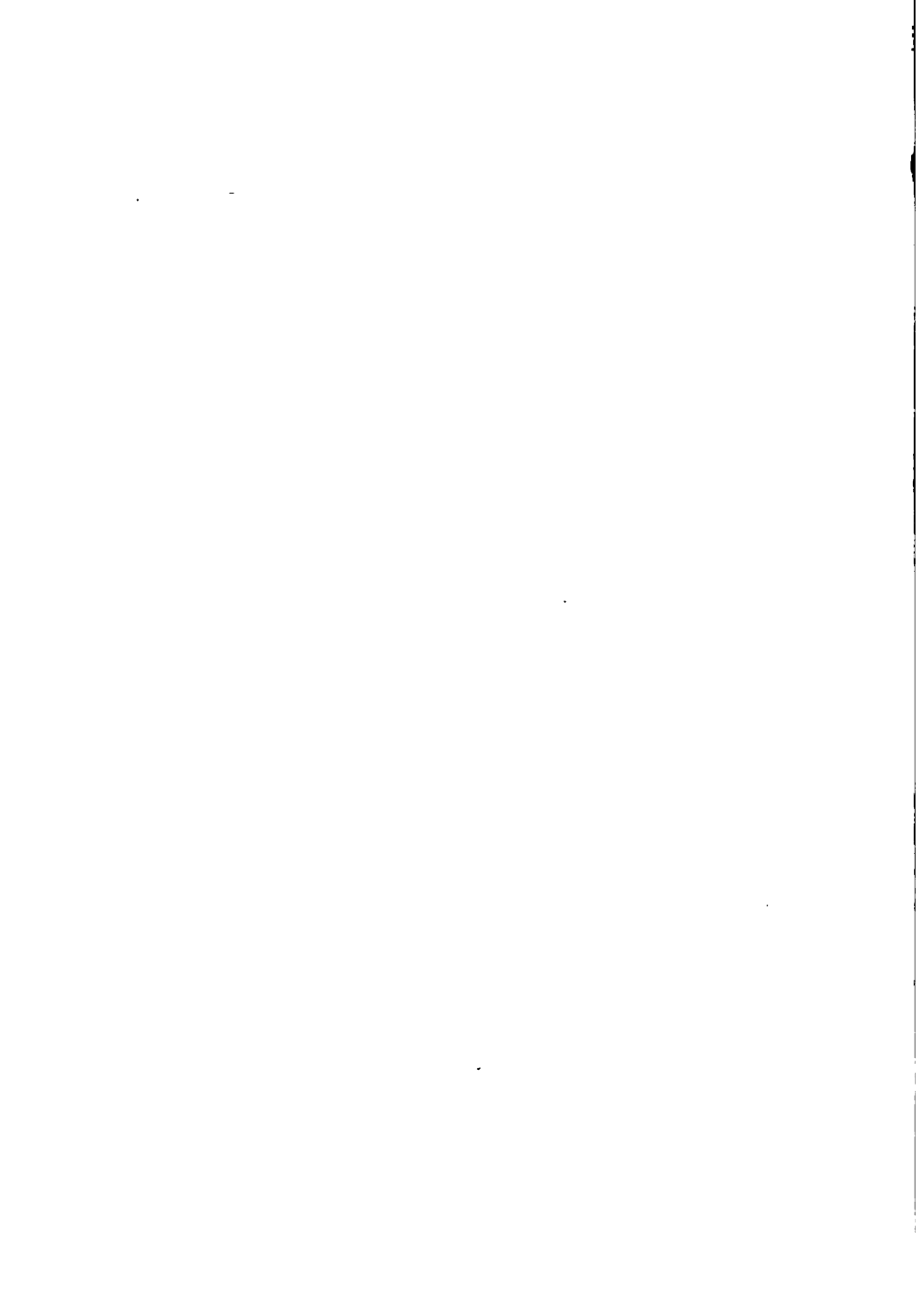
After a monument has been erected, the sad rites are terminated once and for all. The tomb is left to its own devices; not a cent is expended upon its upkeep. It stands until the ravages of rain, storm and dry-rot compass its destruction, or the rapidly growing bush forces the fabric apart. But the Indians, to be just to them, are by no means parsimonious in regard to the erection of these quaint structures, as much as £30 being sometimes expended upon the bizarre woodwork. In strange contrast to the red man's gross neglect of the graves of his forefathers was a small plain marble slab, which from its bright cleanliness was tended with evident regularity, commemorating the untimely death of a young Englishman from drowning while crossing a river up in the Ingenika country; it was erected by his sorrowing relatives at home.

The types of humanity one sees in such a town as Hazelton afford interesting studies to the psychologist. The atmosphere is one of devil-may-care. Owing to the mountains for miles around being rich in minerals, prospecting is the first and foremost occupation, every man



HAZELTON.

The head of navigation on the Skeena River, and an important Hudson's Bay Post. Looking over the white man's town, with the waterway on the right.



you meet being ready to discuss some proposition with you. This is gold—the yellow metal “strike” dominates—that copper, another silver, and so on through the whole mineralogical gamut. One and all finds are “bully”; the claims offered for disposal are as plentiful as strawberries in summer. The two hotels were the magnets of attraction, to which all and sundry flocked, especially the prospectors as they streamed in. After being buried for months in the mountains, moiling for mineral treasure, they celebrate their return to a bustling colony where drink is to be had by letting themselves go in the true *sans-gêne* manner. The hours of night are as busy and humming as those of day, possibly more so, since these rugged picturesque men of the wilds have a constitution that needs no repose—at all events, for several days on end. The pool room never closes its doors from one year’s end to the other, the clack, clack of cue and ball being heard incessantly.

Hazelton has a strikingly clean bill of health. The only malady, which breaks out with the virulence of an epidemic each spring and autumn, coinciding with the arrival of the mining prospectors and others from and for the coast, is that produced by the imbibing of alcohol, not wisely but too well and continuously, which complaint the medical faculty has designated delirium tremens. Upon a dominating eminence east of the town, where the full sweep of the bracing atmosphere is experienced, is a modern acquisition which “hits” one somewhat forcibly in such an out-of-the-way spot. This is an excellent, spacious, well-equipped hospital, serving a radius of 150 miles or more round, the finest institution of its kind from Edmonton to the Pacific, from Vancouver to the Klondike, able to cope with any situation that may develop, for it has a first-rate physician and nursing staff. In this hospital one section has achieved more than passing fame—the “Moving Picture Ward.”

It has nothing to do with cinematographic displays;

it earned its peculiar designation in this wise. One old sourdough, a Scotsman, who came in from the mountains, contracted the prospector's malady, and was hurried to the hospital. Shortly after his arrival a Hibernian fellow-sufferer joined him. In due time, thanks to the unremitting care bestowed, the twin souls were discharged. Both followed strictly an abstemious life for a week or two. Then the Scotsman, finding the temptation too powerful, one day stole off unobserved to the bar-room. He was on the point of swallowing hurriedly a glass of the wine of his country when a raucous voice yelled :

"Sandy! Sandy! Phwat in th' nim of He'vein are ye doin'?"

The Scotsman turned, half guilty, to find his ward-colleague, who likewise had been waiting an opportunity to gratify his desires in secret with Erin's specialty.

"Eh, mon! I dinna ken what you mean. Why should I leave it alone? Answer me the noo!"

"Be jabers! if ye don't dhrop it at once—at once, Sandy—ye'll be a-seein' th' mavin' picthures up on th' hill agen as ye did a month ago!"

Though Hazelton has been the portal to the Bulkley Valley through which a long-drawn-out stream of settlers has trickled, other agrarian country in the vicinity has attracted considerable attention of late. Winding away north of the river is another amazingly fertile belt, the Kispiox Valley, extending over 100,000 acres, of which 20,000 have been reserved for pre-emption, and here the prospects of success are just as rosy as south of the river. The railway is planned to cut through the heart of this depression in its rush to Dawson City, linking with the main line near Hazelton, but this enterprise must be delayed until the steel channel between Pacific and Atlantic is open. The Kispiox territory, however, is already in touch with the town by means of a first-class wagon road. If the results achieved by the Indians up Kispiox way, with their primitive methods, offer any

criterion, then this northern valley has indeed a bright future from the settlement point of view.

Energetic efforts are being made to introduce British settlers to these richly productive valleys. An admirable colonisation scheme, formulated by Mr. J. Norton Griffiths, M.P., has for its object the reservation of 30,000 acres in the Nechaco, Bulkley, and Kispiox valleys for the practical farmer of the homeland who aspires to woo wealth and fortune from British Columbia's ripened soil. But it is as well to repeat that only the right man can succeed. New British Columbia holds out no chances for the faint-hearted, the hesitating, or the man who does things by halves. On the contrary, it will break and crush him. The settler must pull hard against the collar for quite three years. Nature rules with a stern sway, and he must be prepared to pay her toll if he would gain her treasures, be they mineral or agricultural. Yet, despite the grim outlook, with land ranging in price from £3 to £5 an acre—except those stretches reserved for pre-emption at 4s. an acre, entailing compliance with certain laws—it is easily feasible to get a return of anything from £10 per acre upwards, and to prove up to the hilt the truth of the dictum of Mr. J. J. Hill, the veteran railway magnate, who knows this wild western land as do few other men, that "one good crop pays for the land more than three times over."

Although farming and mining are at the moment the most powerful loadstones, there are also chances for certain branches of the professions. The veterinary surgeon is a personality rarely seen, though much in request. The outbreak of an obscure disease among stock, or the occurrence of accident, means more to the settler than can be easily understood. There are openings, too, for enterprising medical men. A young man who has just graduated in medicine could not obtain a better field for his activities than among the little colonies in the wilds, where he has unique opportunities of displaying his skill.

I was accompanied to Vancouver by a brilliant young doctor who had had experiences which give a vivid idea of what practising in the bush means. He received an urgent call into the wilds of the Kispiox Valley to a patient some fifty miles away. This in the middle of winter, with the thermometer marking about 60 degrees (Fahr.) of frost. He started off on snow-shoes, about six in the morning, with a dog-train carrying his stock-in-trade. By dint of tremendous effort, running behind his sleigh, he contrived to make thirty-five miles in fifteen hours, camping that night, dead tired, at nine o'clock. On another occasion he was called into the Bulkley Valley to bring a young British Columbian into the world. This entailed a hard ride of about 75 miles—the longest distance he had ever covered to attend a case—and it was covered in a day and a half, with one change of horses en route. He was dog-weary by the time he gained his patient's home, but a night's rest restored his energies, and he was enabled to make the return jaunt somewhat more easily.

But the pay is good and prompt. Four shillings a mile is the generally accepted schedule for travelling out and home, the fee for the operation or attention depending upon the nature of the case. For a maternity case £10 is charged, in addition to the mileage, and this is increased should a prolonged stay at the patient's home be involved. To increase the population of the Bulkley Valley by one in the above case cost the father, in doctor's fees, a matter of £40—and the practitioner makes but one visit. My medical friend was emphatic in his statement that in one of these rising New British Columbian towns a young doctor could look forward to an annual income commencing with £400 or £600, steadily and persistently increasing as the town develops and the surrounding country is opened up. Accidents and births are two factors in life which cannot be avoided, and they offer a rich harvest to the medical man in a bush country.

CHAPTER XXIV

Down the Treacherous Skeena

A Stream that has to be "Juggled"—A Steamboat Captain's Philosophy—A Zigzagging Channel—The "Hornets' Nest"—Fruit-growing—Among Totem Poles—Antimaul—The "Hard Scrubble"—The Kitselas Cañon—How the *Mount Royal* was Lost—A Halt for the Night.

"We don't navigate this river; we juggle our way down it!"

The bronzed captain standing on the bridge gave a grin, and nodded his head significantly towards the water-way boiling and rushing at our feet.

"And if you don't do the trick neatly, what then?"

"Oh! we just go to the bottom, that's all. We manage as a rule to plump her nose into the bank to give the passengers a chance to get off."

"What happens to you if you lose the boat?"

"They just give us another in double-quick time. We have no Board of Trade inquiries out here. What's the use? No one has a chart of the river; it never runs two days alike; captains are few and far between. If you lose the boat it's just hard luck. That's all there is to it!"

Such is a Skeena River steamboat captain's happy-go-lucky philosophy. It is typical of those who have to steer their way up and down this fiercely moving channel of water. These men have to learn from experience where the innumerable dangers lurk unseen, and knowledge of the position of a great many rocks has been gained in the Irish pilot's manner, by scraping the boat's hull over them, generally with no benefit to the boat! Number-

less boats have gone down. Why, in one year the whole traffic between Hazelton and the coast was tied up, just because every vessel had hit hard luck, and was either a rusting shattered hulk at the bottom or lying wrecked on the bank. The Indian canoe was for months the only available vehicle of transport.

It is 180 miles from Hazelton to Prince Rupert, and sixty miles of this is tide-water. In the first 120 miles the water drops 750 ft! This will give some idea of its velocity, which at places is awful. When in full flood here and there, especially at Kitselas Cañon, the river is absolutely unnavigable.

We soon came to close grips with the foe. We had cast off the last rope, and the speeding waters in mad glee picked up our little vessel and hurried her along viciously. On each side the river bubbled and frothed, with fringes of combing foam indicating the presence of sharp rocks just below the surface, ready to give a savage snap at the boat if she ventured too close. The captain's telegraph rang out continuously; the engineer never left his station for an instant. Clangs followed so hard on one another that the wonder was the instructions could be interpreted correctly, and without the slightest hesitation, by the engineer.

The first twenty miles is one continuous excitement, the navigable channel being extremely narrow. Moreover, the bends and twists which the river takes are extremely sharp, so much so that the vessel cannot be driven round in a straightforward manner, but has to be warped or zig-zagged round the hairpin bend, first moving forwards, then backwards, then sideways, now drifting a little until the nose is brought into the channel and it is possible to strike ahead. The captain has to be ready to combat any movement of the boat. Where the rocks below him are, Heaven alone knows; he does not, until he pulls up against one with a sharp thud and an ear-splitting tear, like the rending of a piece of linen,



**A HUDSON'S BAY STEAMER ENGAGED IN THE SKEENA RIVER TRAFFIC AT
HAZELTON.**

A typical vessel of the "alligator" or stern-wheel class, which plies upon the treacherous, swiftly running rivers of the Far North. The Skeena mountains in the background.



which tells him that a few feet of his steel shell have been torn away.

In this upper stretch the worst place is the "Hornets' Nest." Certainly no yellow-jackets' home was ever ready to let drive fiercer jabs with stings against an interloper than are the rocks here. The surface is merely an expanse of short, choppy, milky waves tumbling and fussing in all directions. Progress is slow, the steamer passing through weird contortions to steer clear of this, that, and something else. It is a fortunate circumstance for the passengers that these boats are of shallow draught, for often it is only a matter of an inch or two between a granite tooth and the bottom of the boat, more particularly so late in the year as this, when the water is very low. Two seasons ago one boat was pulling warily up hand over hand by means of the line when there was a jar and a scrape. Half the hull had gone, and the captain just managed to get the cripple beached. Another craft, lower down, heard of her sister's fate, and hurried to her assistance. But she had not gone far when there was another greedy snap and shiver. Her captain had to make a quick turn for the bank. Both lay on the mud within a few feet of each other all the winter, showing their gaping wounds, until the season broke and a third vessel came up stream with a gang of repairers aboard. They strapped up the injuries temporarily, and towed the disabled craft down to Prince Rupert, where they were propped on the slips and equipped with new hulls. Soon both were wrestling with the river once more, but just a short while before our journey one had got trapped again. On the Skeena hull-patching is one of the busiest and most regular of occupations.

It took us more than an hour to thread the "Hornets' Nest." Curious to relate, the old-timers who travel up this river to reach the interior in the spring, and come down in the autumn, have the greatest dread of this waterway. "Give me a week in a blinding snowstorm

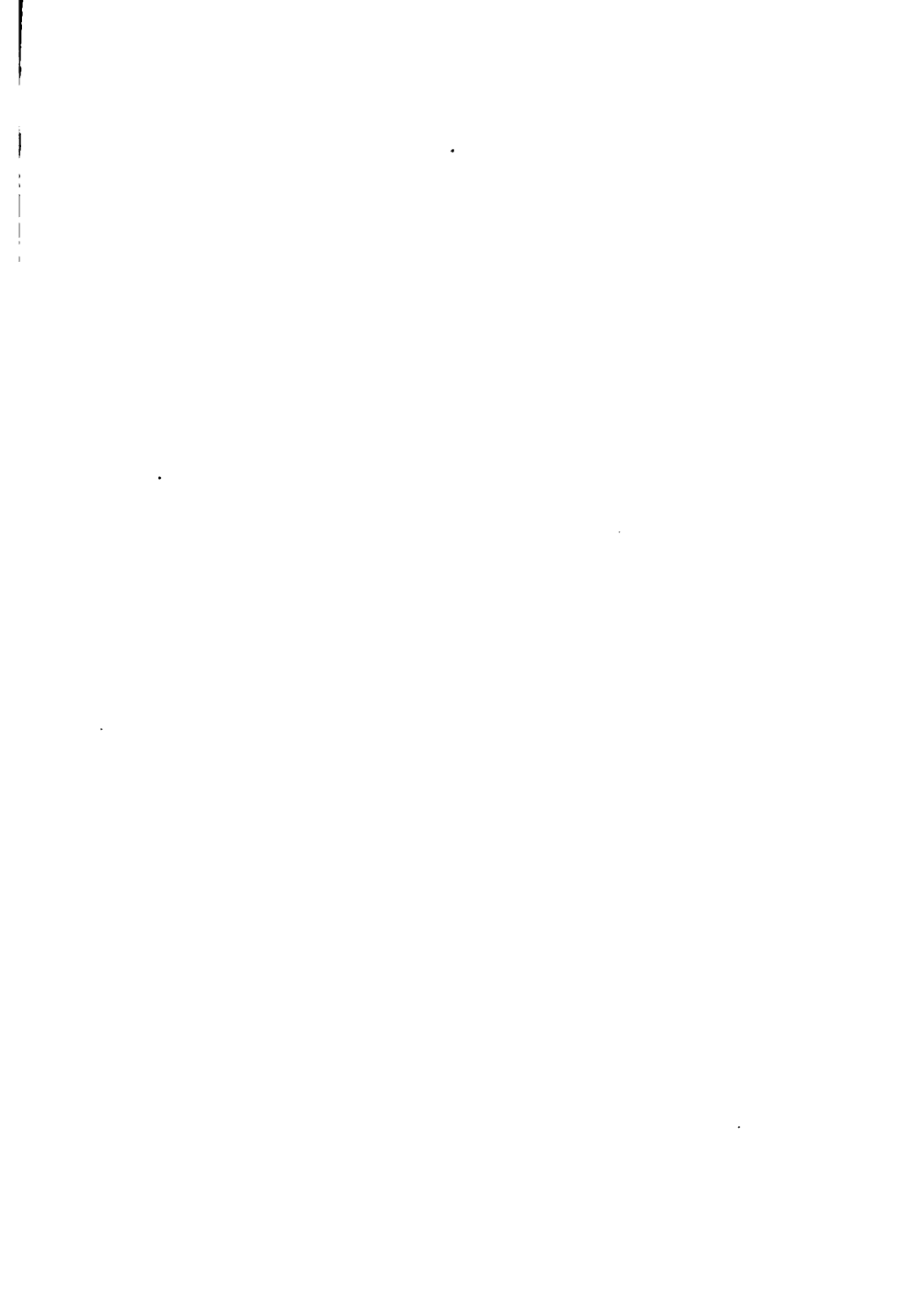
on the lonely trail to an hour on this blarmed streak of hell," growled one hardy pioneer; "it gives me fits every time I see it."

It is a lonely journey. The country on either side is for the most part still in its primeval condition, though here and there settlers are making valiant efforts to strip the ground for vegetables and fruit. But it is a heart-rending task for the most part. Tall, gaunt trees run down from the timber-line to the water's edge, many overhanging until their branches lap its glacial surface, for their roots have been laid bare by the greedy water which has devoured the soft soil. When the next flood comes these bowing giants will be caught in its insatiable embrace and borne down on its tumultuous bosom to be cast on a sand-bar. Time after time we slipped by a naked stripped carcass of a huge cottonwood, fir, or cedar, left high and dry on a strip of desolation to rot in the sun. There is one good point about the Skeena. It runs too swiftly to enable timber jams to be piled up, or to permit snags to lurk unseen in the navigable channel to trap the unsuspecting captain in an unlucky moment—at all events, so far as the upper reaches are concerned, though down nearer the mouth, where the pace eases up a bit, a "snagger" is seen searching for and destroying these menaces to travel.

Now and again the river emerges into a flat stretch of arable country, for the most part densely clothed with thick undergrowth, or passes between high benches, where the husbandman can secure a footing to practise his art to advantage. It appears as though fruit-growing will develop into the most important phase of agriculture down this waterway, since the trees flourish very promisingly. Yet a few years ago the idea of raising tree fruits so far north was laughed to scorn. But the detractors are being more than discomfited. The soil is a sandy loam with a subsoil of gravel or clay, according to whether it is high- or low-lying land. These men who are



A SHACK AMONG THE TREES ON THE SKEENA
RIVER.



routing the "calamity howlers" are growers who have prospered well down south in the Kootenay and Okanagan territories, the famous orchard districts of British Columbia. They have cleared tracts fringing the river, and put them under apple, pear, plum, cherry, and prunes. The results they report are fully justifying their enterprise, and they regard the Skeena River country as being as well suited to this culture as that to the south, if not better. Emphatically they declared the fruit to be superior in quality. But they have not yet been in the country a sufficiently long period to bring the orchards to their full power of productivity, so that the results of their endeavours are not quite conclusive. "But give me another three years," exclaimed one enthusiast, "to bring my trees to their full bearing stage, and then I calculate I'll have the pesky southerners guessing some!"

We had not been going more than about three hours when there was a pull-up. More fuel was required, for the engines of these river boats are extremely hungry, and eat wood as voraciously as a child devours chocolate. Every member of the crew was soon busy hurling clouts of wood, about three feet in length, aboard, and the engineer was stacking them up around his furnace in a barricade. Indians and white men make a comfortable income in felling and splitting up this fuel, selling it at 10s. a cord. Going upstream, the furnaces demolish five cords an hour, while downstream two cords less suffice for the same time. Seeing that there are about eight boats plying regularly on this waterway, it will be seen that the consumption of wood is considerable.

The Skeena might be called very appropriately the Totem Pole River, for from end to end it threads Indian settlements, where these symbols are in abundance. Some of them are very curious works of art, with their fearsome carvings from base to top, many decorated in the most contrastingly vivid hues, and capped by some strange device, such as a bear, an eagle, a fox, a salmon. At

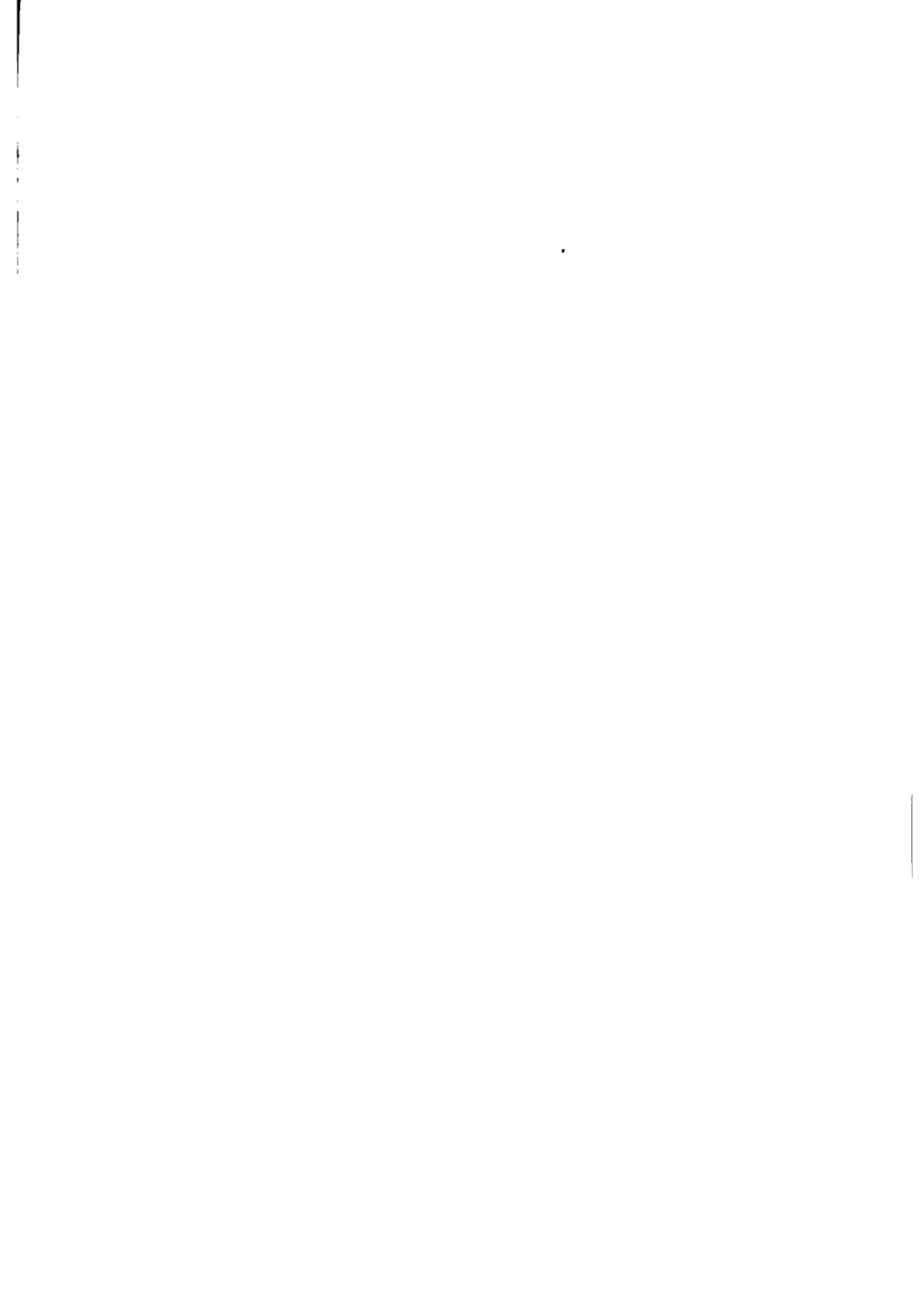
places they are so thick as to resemble in the distance the remains of a burnt-out forest. Each frowns over the doorway of the tumbling shack behind, and when read affords an interesting history of the family to which it belongs. The cottonwood tree is that generally employed for this illustrated biography, since it is soft and lends itself to carving. A short time before we arrived at Hazelton there had been a complete exodus of the natives to the Kispiox Valley, where the establishment of a new totem pole was to be celebrated, and the Indians let themselves go for a week in high jinks in honour of the event. On the other hand, the fall of a totem pole, through decomposition of the base, passes without the slightest sign of an outbreak of exuberance. It is lopped into chunks of firewood as a rule, and that is its undignified end.

Antimaul was our first stop. A white flag was waved frantically on the bank to show that there were mails or passengers to pick up. The method in which these craft heave to is interesting. They speed by the point whence the signal proceeds as if in defiance of its summons. Then the telegraph rings out sonorously, the engines slow down, and the boat gracefully wheels round to plough upstream to the stopping place. The sudden reversal gives one a vivid sense of the force of the current. One minute you are tearing along at some fourteen miles an hour; the next you are puffing laboriously upstream at a snail's pace, the engines belching out for all they are worth to give the paddles the mastery over the downward rush. There is no jetty, not even a jerry-built timber landing-stage. The boat raps into the bank, an Indian jumps ashore with a rope which he deftly snubs round a tree, a plank is run out, the passenger struggles aboard, the plank is withdrawn, the hawser let go, and off again. The paddles have scarcely ceased revolving before they are called into service again.

Another part of the river where vessels often get



INDIAN VILLAGE AND TOTEM POLES AT HAZELTON.



mauled badly is the "Hard Scrubble." The river here is about 300 ft. wide, and it looks perfectly safe to steam straight ahead. Not a trace of froth gives warning of any danger. The steamer suddenly changes its course and draws perilously near the rock cliff on one bank. You wonder why? Right across that waterway, but a few inches below its surface, so calm and still, runs a solid bar which can only be avoided through a very narrow twisting passage at one end. It is just wide enough to carry the steamer, and no more. But the captain cannot steam right ahead, since there is no space in which to swing round. He drives the craft's nose into the cauldron, and just manages to squeeze his stern into the same enclosure. He then backs gently until only inches separate the revolving stern wheels from the foot of the cliff, crawls forward a foot or so, backs again the same distance, and so on for a few minutes, the bow being brought round a trifle with each manoeuvre, until at last there is a straight drive ahead. Once the engines refused to obey the captain's telegraphic orders. There was a grating, a ripping, and a violent tremble from stem to stern. The wheels had caught on a rock and were chewing off chunks in their revolutions as well as imperilling their own structure.

But the spot most feared on the whole river is the Kitselas Cañon—the Scylla and Charybdis of the Skeena. We gained intelligence of our approach thereto by the officer coming round and inquiring if anyone desired to get off to avoid its passage. This cañon has captured so many vessels, and has built up such a death-roll, that many people prefer to land at the upper entrance and walk across country over the well-beaten portage to Kitselas. Sometimes the boats cannot go through at all—to make the attempt would be certain death. At other times you have to make the portage whether you so desire or not, as the captain will not undertake the responsibility of carrying you through.

Above the cañon the river is about 150 yards wide, flowing through undulating country backed by the mountains. Then a spur from the range makes a dart and cuts across the waterway, narrowing it down to a mere ditch, and littering its bottom with sharp rocks. Such a sudden contraction of the river means, of course, a sudden increase in speed. There are in reality two vents, one about 50 ft. in width, the other some 30 ft. across, but just below they merge into one. The speed of the water is terrific. "Sometimes it rattles through here at about twenty miles an hour," remarks one of the crew. You verily believe it, for in its calmest periods, such as this, it is nothing but a whirlpool. On one side the rocks sheer up, at first for about 15 ft. in ragged masses, and then give way to a perpendicular wall fully 100 ft. high.

The passage of this bad piece of water is a masterpiece of navigation. The boat can notch a steady ten or twelve miles an hour when driven hard. The prow swings round into the jaws bristling with black teeth, which appear ready to crush the frail humanity-laden shell. You are scarcely moving, when there is a sudden spurt—the current has clutched the steamer. But the captain is alert. Directly he feels its maw closing in on his craft the telegraph breaks out frantically. The engineer in an instant reverses, and we are going downstream with the wheels revolving at breaking-point astern. When the wheels get up full spin the steamer slows down and stops, held in check by a few inches of steel and harnessed steam. Everything is strained to the utmost; if anything gives, "thar's goin' to be an unrehearsed somersault into hell," as one of the sourdoughs aboard growled. The engines hold the steamer, though she trembles like a leaf. A bend has to be negotiated, and the captain throws his rudder hard over to bring the boat athwart the current.

"This is whar we get th' shivers," the old sourdough went on. The water was piling up on the upper side



KITSE LAS.

The busy town that has sprung up at the foot of the cañon of the same name on the Skeena River.



of the boat and surging round each end, for now there was only a narrow fissure between each end of the boat and the rocks, where it could make its tortuous way. Slowly we came right round, almost broadside on.

"This is whar th' *Mount Royal* got caught," pointed out the sourdough. "If th' damned old Skeena swings us round like it did her, and banks us up against each side blockin' thar river, well, I guess we won't all get ashore." Every man on board breathlessly watched the manœuvre. The *Mount Royal* was performing the same evolution when the captain, evidently misjudging the force of water, had the boat jerked out of his hands, jammed between the rocky walls, and smashed in two before he knew what had happened. "Lost twenty-seven people over that deal," the sourdough went on; "but the blarmed old engineer pushed his head up through th' bottom as she went over. . . Git yar checks ready, boys. All ready to hand in? Oh, we've cheated the old she-devil again!" he exclaimed as the telegraph rang out, the boat came round, cleared the bend and bounced through the rest of the gorge, with sundry knocks against the walls, at full speed.

At the lower portal of the cañon is a gauge. When it registers a rise of twelve inches in the water at that point, it means that an additional four and a half feet have been piled up at the higher entrance. And the variation may take place in a few hours, for the Skeena, fed by melting snows from the mountains far to the north, is a fickle river. Its behaviour is entirely governed by the strength of the sun during the day and by the depth of the snowfall at night!

Some distance below Kitselas the boat gave vent to a long-drawn-out whoop. Darkness was settling upon the water, and as the river is too dangerous to navigate at night, we pulled into the bank and were hitched up until the following dawn.

CHAPTER XXV

Through the Cascades to the Sea

The Kitsumkalim Valley—Experimental Fruit-growing—Majestic Mountain Scenery—The Grand Trunk Pacific—A Dead-Level Track in the Mountains—The Skeena Salmon Fishery—The Best Salmon Shipped to England—Port Essington.

THE point where we landed is in the Kitsumkalim Valley—a nook in the Cascades which has aroused considerable attention, among agriculturists and horticulturists especially, for it has proved as astonishing a prize-pocket as the Bulkley Valley, it being possible to raise fruit in the mountain cleft as prolifically as wheat can be grown on the prairie.

The bold pioneers who penetrated this country and stretched their enterprise far up and down the valleys extending at right angles to the Skeena River, and who, notwithstanding the natural obstacles in their way, essayed to clear little spaces here and there to test the fruit-growing possibilities of the soil, were in a worse plight than the moiler for gold on the scarred mountain sides. They had to nurse their tender charges day and night, since, although the soil, climate, and prevailing temperature were right, the cold from the silent outer ring of frost-gripped country was sufficient to nullify completely all the favourable influences.

The fruit-growers looked forward anxiously to the result of their first year's handiwork. Their pluck was rewarded, and the twelve months' growth of the trees convinced them that their opinions concerning the country were sound. They enlarged their plantations, forcing the encircling nipping wall of forest farther back, and as

they did so they found that the trees first planted appreciated the enlargement of their breathing space. They came into flower, the blossoms set, the fruit grew and matured, and, what was more, ripened. When the first fruit from the Kitsumkalim Valley reached the towns and cities farther south the people greeted it with mixed feelings. Such well-shaped, luscious, and fleshy produce grown on the banks of the Skeena, ravaged by summer frosts? They could not be fooled with such a story.

The pioneers, who had provided the surprise, did not waste words and time on useless argument. They have not the gift of persuasive conversation, as I found for myself, but they can work like Trojans. They were a trifle nettled at the reception awarded to the outcome of their efforts, but they were not going to be turned down except by Nature. But down south all were not deriders; a few, more adventurous than the rest, piked up to the Skeena to try their hand in the same field. It was a mere trickle of settlers at first, but the stream is now commencing to swell in volume as access to the country is being facilitated by the completion of the railway, which has thrust its arm a hundred miles up the river from the coast and plants you right in the heart of this expanse. Cherries, plums, pears, apples and prunes are being planted on all sides. And every new settler is hailed with enthusiasm by those already in possession. Each arrival signifies the clearing of a little more forest, and the occupation of another chunk of the hundred thousand acres of arable land nestling in the Kitsumkalim Valley, or its extension south of the River Skeena along the Lakelse Lake, where twice or thrice as much land is available. But years must elapse before the hemlock, spruce, cedar, fir, and cottonwood are swept away to make room for trees laden with juicy fruits.

One of the pioneers described the situation very neatly when he said, "Every settler who comes in here sends all our chances up ten points. To us it has been a mere

gamble. We came in when the country was in the grasp of the 'bears,' as represented by the knockers. Now the 'bulls' are having a turn, for we optimists are getting a run on the country. They laughed at our work at first; and when we showed them our apples, pears, and such like, they reckoned we were putting it up on them. But before we've finished we are going to raise grapes and peaches in the open air. We may be on line 55; but that line has shown wonders before, and it has not finished yet!"

Though the idea of growing these peaches and grapes in the open is highly attractive, it may not be feasible. Still, it would be rash to assert point-blank that it cannot be done, for Canada has made so many pessimistic prophets look foolish.

In order to ascertain conclusively just what are and what are not the possibilities of extensive fruit culture in these valleys amidst the Cascades, an experimental farm of 400 acres has been acquired on the Skeena in the neighbourhood of Kitwanger, and 1,500 trees have been planted. In all probability experiment and scientific research will result in the evolution of fruits especially suited to such a country as this, where they will be just as much at home and as prolific as are the trees raised down on the Boundary or around Niagara.

Our little craft sheered off as the first rays of dawn tinted the eastern sky. Now all was steady thumping along at full pelt, all perils, except snags, having been left behind. Tide-water was only some thirty miles or so distant, and the captain was able to take advantage of the river's helter-skeltering swing to the utmost extent. In the course of an hour or so all signs of settlement slipped by, for we were entering the mountain range where the main rib of the Cascades extends as an unbroken barrier from Alaska to Mexico, with rifts here and there to let such waterways as the Skeena foam their way to the sea.



GAP IN THE CASCADE MOUNTAINS.

The barrier of the Cascades fringes the Skeena River for about sixty miles, with only one gap, which is called "The Hole in the Wall." The track of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway is shown in the foreground.

THROUGH THE CASCADES TO THE SEA 289

The river winds, twists, and writhes for mile after mile through some of the most majestic mountain scenery that America can offer. From one end to the other this range is spectacular, but here a far more impressive idea of its massive grandeur is unfolded. The huge humps rise sheer out of the water on both sides, running up at angles of forty-five to ninety degrees, bedecked in a rich green mantle right up to the line in the clouds where vegetation can no longer exist. So far as you can see you are in a defile, the path through which is the tumbling river. Only once does the barrier on the river side break, and the cleavage is picturesquely designated "The Hole-in-the-Wall."

The verdure retains its vivid brilliance, and the prevailing expanse is free from those jagged wounds of black and brown inflicted by the fire fiend, because the flames must be greedy and ravenous indeed to lick up vegetation which is soddened with 120 inches of rainfall during the year. Among other things, the Skeena can give some idea of what rainfall is. When the heavens open in this wet belt, they alone know when they are going to close again. A two or three weeks' steady downpour without a single lift-up is not uncommon, and, what is more, it is none of your half-hearted sprinkles, but a deluge from which nothing but a sou'-wester can protect you, and that not for long, for it soon gets wet through. It is the same the whole way down the coast; and in the vicinity of Vancouver a stock of waterproofs is a safer investment than real estate. The rainfall on the Skeena, however, is no heavier than that on the Fraser at its estuary, though it appears to be so.

Yet the coast does not get it both ways. If there is a great deal of rain there is very little snow. Consequently this region is pleasant during the winter, the severity of the season being toned down agreeably by the warm chinooks blowing off the Pacific.

When we struck tide-water we were in the heart of

the Cascades. Amid the banks of clouds rolling at various levels overhead and creeping over the crests could be descried dizzy peaks with their soft, sparkling, everlasting turbans enwrapping their weather-beaten heads. Down the steep flanks tumbled gleaming silvery streams to the accompaniment of a musical rhythmic murmur. The river journey between Kitselas and Prince Rupert will be one that will appeal strongly to the sight-seeing visitor anxious to gaze upon Nature in her wildest and grandest moods, for it must be confessed that, as a moving picture in colours, the sail up the turbid torrent of the Cascades for one hundred miles is difficult to excel in the northern hemisphere—when the elements are propitious.

Winding along the bases of the precipitous bluffs, following the contour of the river, stretches the twin ribbon of steel which is to carry the Grand Trunk Pacific down to the coast. It is a marvellous piece of railway construction; for at least sixty miles, and that through the most difficult stretch of the mountains, the engineer has realised the greatest ambition of the railway manager, an absolutely dead-level track. The achievement is remarkable inasmuch as in no other part of the continent north of the equator has such a result been accomplished hitherto in connection with this formidable mountain barrier. Indeed, a few hundred miles farther south the other great transcontinental railways appear to have been engaged in a healthy rivalry in cloud-scratching effort. The victor in this competition contrives to scrape over the mountains by a ledge at a height of some 8,000 ft. above the Pacific. On the other hand, this new railway in the north is content with a level of some ten feet above the ocean. To accomplish this end, tens of thousands of pounds have been poured out. Dynamite has been used with a lavish hand, and the amount of rock it has ejected forcibly from this point to be dumped in that runs into millions of tons.



ALERT BAY.

An Indian village with a remarkable display of totem poles.

THROUGH THE CASCADES TO THE SEA 291

On the whole of our run down the river from Hazelton, the rock and sand hogs had been our companions, while the solitude of the forest was rudely torn by the screech of steam, the chink, chink of drills, the roar of explosives, and the groaning of mountains in agony as the path for the railway was being torn out foot by foot. We had seen men with ropes tightly clinched round their waists, clinging like flies to the precipitous rock faces, zealously plying their drills, and then, when the cartridges had been tamped home, hurriedly whisked through the air to the ledges above. Once or twice the captain of the boat had been pulled up sharply by the warning of a fluttering red flag, and had treated the passengers aboard to the spectacle of rock and smoke flying into the air with a long-drawn-out bellow as the pent-up force of the blasting agent burst its bonds.

As we drew nearer and nearer to the sea, the river opened out until it was some three miles or so from bank to bank. Signs of activity became more evident, rambling shack-like buildings standing out against the background of foliage by the water's edge. These were the salmon canneries, for the toll of fish levied from the Skeena is tremendously heavy. The salmon fishery is almost entirely in the hands of Orientals, and the scene during the harvest is one of unwonted bustle. Time was when the Fraser estuary was the largest salmon-fishing ground on the Pacific coast, but this is no longer. The Skeena river has proved a richer field, and each succeeding year sees its importance expanding.

Hundreds of boats of every conceivable type are pressed into the hunt, for the salmon swarm up the river in myriads. The waterway is netted practically for the whole of its width, and the fish are hauled in as fast as boats can be brought up in which to dump them. The fight is all on the fisherman's side, as the quarry are jammed so tightly together; those in the rear push so hard against those in front that avoidance of capture

is impossible. But the law demands that the fish shall be given their chance. For a spell of forty-eight hours in every week the whole of the fleet must withdraw from the field and allow the fish to have an uninterrupted run up the waterway. It was salmon that had made their way through during the armistice that we saw being caught by the Indians at Moricetown.

As fast as they are netted the fish are hurried to the canneries, gutted and dressed by machinery, cooked in capacious steam boilers, canned in tins and dispatched to all parts of the world. The season commences about the 1st of April with the appearance of the spring salmon, which run up to 90 lb. a-piece in weight. But the harvest rises to its greatest height in the autumn. The other edible types are the sock-eye, bright red in colour, the coho, and the steel-head; the hump-back and dog salmon are of little value. The primest fish of the whole lot, however, is the steel-head, the taste of which is denied to American and Canadian, inasmuch as every one of these is shipped to England. The whole of this fish is handled at Claxton, and the fishermen are tempted to bring in any catches of this dainty they may effect by the offer of a small bounty. The steel-head is not canned, but is frozen entire, as taken from the boats and scows, and in this condition shipped to the British market. The Skeena salmon fishery is a respectable source of revenue to the Government, inasmuch as the canning establishments have to be licensed, a round £60,000 having been collected in this way from the 1910 season.

The port for this prosperous industry is, or rather was, Port Essington. It took its rise through the salmon trade, but its glory has faded. Twenty miles distant a new port has risen up—Prince Rupert—and trade has migrated thereto owing to superior harbour and other facilities. Port Essington has therefore drooped into a semi-hibernating condition; has got into the ditch, and



ONE METHOD OF FISHING FOR SALMON NEAR PRINCE RUPERT.

This retriever was an expert grabber of fish.

will never be extricated again. The Hudson's Bay Company utilised it as their coast depot, where vessels discharged their cargoes intended for the interior, while it was the sea terminal of river traffic between Hazelton and the coast. This trade has disappeared entirely now; from a terminal, Port Essington has drooped into a port of call. The Hudson's Bay post was destroyed by fire, and the new buildings were reared at Prince Rupert.

The end of our river journey was barely thirty miles distant. We pulled out of the Skeena estuary, rounded Digby Island, skirted Kaien Island, and were soon speeding up one of the finest bays in the Pacific, at the extreme end of which was growing rapidly what every citizen optimistically regards as the "Liverpool of the Pacific." At half-past four in the afternoon of September 20 the alligator steamboat bumped into the quay, was made fast, and we put foot on the quay of Prince Rupert.

CHAPTER XXVI

The "Liverpool of the Pacific"

Why Prince Rupert's Turn came so Late—A Reef that was not there—
The Pioneers—Evictions—Incorporation of the Town—A Pull all
together—How Fortunes are being made out of the Land—A Town
in the Making—Buoyant Optimism—Port Arthur's Advantages—
Fisheries—Southward Bound.

THE first thought that flies to one's mind as one treads the timber wharf is, Why is this port so young? Looking seawards, scanning the huge landlocked anchorage, nearly ten miles in length, varying from three-quarters of a mile to a mile and a half in width, with an entrance 4,000 ft. wide opening on the Pacific, with a depth of water sufficient to float the largest ships, it appears extraordinary that its advantages should have been overlooked for so many years. Why, the shore drops down so suddenly that there is from 30 to 38 ft. of water at lowest tide alongside the landing-stage, while a stone's throw from the quay side it runs down to well over one hundred feet. The fact is that this magnificent harbour was sidetracked merely through a hydrographic error. The charts showed the bay rightly enough, and the lines on paper only served to emphasise its dimensions. But there, right in the fairway, was a huge submerged reef or rock!

Now the projection of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, with its severe stipulations concerning grades, demanded that a new vent on the Pacific coast should be found. Every bay and indent north of Vancouver was explored minutely, and this was the only one on the coast that coincided with every requirement. But that



A GLIMPSE OF PRINCE RUPERT AND ITS MAGNIFICENT HARBOUR.

This is the Pacific terminus of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. Four years ago it was tangled primeval forest, now it is a prosperous town of 5,000 inhabitants. The timber roads, serving for traffic until the macadam thoroughfares are made, are shown in the foreground.

rock! The survey vessel crawled round and round, the sounding-line plumbd every foot of the bottom, but no sign of a rock was found. It was not there! It was in a bay farther north. When the topographer committed the discovery of that particular rock to paper he simply put it in the wrong place, and it took many years to discover the error. But from this moment the future of the new port was assured.

It was less than five years ago that the first white men set their feet on this spot. They were a small party under Mr. J. H. Pillsbury, and their task was the survey and clearing of the waterside. It was a forbidding outlook. When they drew inshore and stepped from their boat there was an awful squelch, and their legs disappeared from sight. They were up to their thighs in muskeg. Further immersion was impossible, as their feet pulled up against solid rock. Huge trees as dense as the jungle bowed down to the water's edge, the boughs lapping the Pacific. They had to hack their way ashore, fighting the scrub with the axe, and floundering in three or four feet of bog. The axe work was terrific, for in whichever direction they moved, trees from six to twenty-four inches in thickness barred the way.

Their first task was the construction, with the crude facilities at their command, of a little wharf, alongside which small boats could pull up. In four years that jetty grew from twenty feet or so to a quay measuring 1,400 ft. from end to end! Then the rough frontiersmen poured in. They lopped down a few trees here and there and promptly claimed ownership by squatting, ignoring the fact that the railway and the Government, hand in hand, were laying out the town, and that all ground at that time was their property. The Canadian squatter is a quaint personality. He lays claim to everything upon which he can place his hand, and woe betide those who dispute his action. Prince Rupert, however, never had the opportunity to become a sink of iniquity, harbouring

the dregs of humanity, for as fast as the squatter settled down he was pitched neck and crop off, and though he stormed and threatened, his vapourings fell on deaf ears. Many of these hardy old fellows, however, had come up just to take stock of the whole affair, pick what they fancied, and, by holding possession, be in a better position to bid successfully for the land when the sale of lots came round. The out-and-out squatter, however, taken on the whole, has been a thorn in the sides of the authorities, though he always receives short shrift. Some were in occupation at the time of my visit, and still living in a tent in one of the principal streets, on lots which had not been sold, in the hope that continuous occupation of the site for a time would enable them to establish a valid claim to its possession. The squatter is evicted, but in a short time he returns and once more re-establishes his canvas home. Occasionally there are stirring times in Prince Rupert, but special powers exist for dealing with the obstreperous. None of your suave diplomatic persuasion, but rough and ready conflict with the axe and muscle. "If a man won't get out, then put him out," is the law of the land.

But the feature that most impresses the tenderfoot is the grim determination of these Rupertians. They are a peculiar type of men, bent on one object—the up-building of their city. They'll take no nonsense from anyone, but they are ready to act on any suggestion for the common weal. Each man is like the tooth of a cogwheel in a machine—all work together. By such means they have been able to convert muskeg and bush into a thriving, humming, prosperous colony of 5,000 people. Yet their situation is not by any means rosy. They are 550 miles from the rest of the world. Every pound of sugar, every pin, has to be brought up by boat from Vancouver. Just before our arrival the town had been incorporated; in other words, it was left to its own devices, and was responsible for its own future. One and all realised the

significance of this independence, and were going ahead in the firm conviction that Prince Rupert was to be the greatest port on earth.

Certainly there are no flies on these men. They are as a restless sea of humanity, toiling both day and night, striving earnestly to put things ship-shape by the time the two arms of the railway meet and the channel is clear for the cry "All aboard for Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax," heralding the dispatch of the Trans-Continental, Limited, on its 3,556 miles through journey. As to flies, it is worth mentioning that insect pests of any description are quite foreign to the town. A prominent citizen informed me that the sight of a fly of any kind in the city limits would precipitate a rush to view the curiosity. A fly-proof town is certainly unique, especially as other parts of the Dominion are having fierce fights with the relentless mosquito.

Large fortunes have been piled up at Prince Rupert. The rush for lots when the auction sale was held was more furious than a stampede to a region where streaks of yellow metal have been found. The townsite belongs to the railway company and the Government, the former having 480 and the latter 160 acres in each section of one square mile. The lots were put up for sale in May and June, 1909, and so great was the boom that over £300,000 was realised. This was, as it were, a preliminary canter, being held for the express purpose of getting some idea of the worth of the lots and fixing prices. The lots were selected from blocks here and there throughout the town. Moreover, only a certain stretch of land was offered for disposal in this manner.

Prices fluctuated at this initial sale to a remarkable degree, the cheapest plot of land going for £6, while high-water mark was reached with £3,300 for a corner site. These transactions were to a great extent in the nature of a gamble. The pioneer Canadian town-builder is a born speculator, and this was a unique opportunity, so that he

gave full rein to his foible. And, judged on the whole, it paid him pretty well. The authorities did not throw more on the market than could be readily absorbed. Not a few of these first plungers made such large profits out of their holdings by subsequent sales as to enable them to erect blocks of buildings, and many a townsman informed me that he came up into the country but three years ago with only a few hundred dollars in his pocket, which he laid out carefully in lots, and could now point to large blocks of real estate bringing him in a steady income of 20 per cent. on his outlay.

Mr. David M. Hays, who conducted the sales of the land, related several interesting incidents of money being made quickly. For several days after he returned from Vancouver, where the sale was conducted, his office was besieged with crowds of speculators desirous of participating in the boom. The staff was kept going at tip-top pressure, and the buyers poured through the office in a constant stream. The waiting queue at one time was over one hundred yards long, and one man who owned property in the port told me that he had to wait outside the office for two days before he secured it.

"I recall one case to mind where money was made quickly," related Mr. Hays. "I had disposed of all the lots in my hands and was returning to Prince Rupert. There was a young fellow on the boat who was very keen upon making a splash. Could I help him? Well, I had no more lots to sell, and was just wondering what could be done when I received a letter saying that twenty-two lots had been thrown back suddenly on the market, and asking me to dispose of them.

"I went up to the young man aboard. 'See here! take my advice and buy Prince Rupert lots. I have twenty-two lots in my pocket that have not been sold yet. Buy some of these; buy them all!'

"'But I haven't sufficient money!'

"'How much have you?'

"' Just 195 dollars.'

"' Well, look here, we'll go halves in the deal. We'll put up 192½ dollars each, that'll make the quarter cash down payment, and the balance can be paid in one, two, or three years. Are you game?'

"We clinched the matter there and then, taking up the whole of the twenty-two unsold lots. Within three months I remitted to that young fellow, in cash, his original outlay of 192½ dollars, together with an additional 900 dollars representing the profits from the sale of the lots up to that time. Thus in three months he was richer by about £180, and in addition to this he still holds lots worth £600, for he has declined that sum already. So his original investment of about £18 10s. paid him very well.

"Another man came up from New Mexico and purchased a couple of lots, for which he paid £200. To-day they are worth £1,000. Just as he was boarding the steamer I caught him. 'Say, can you spare any more cash? I have a good chance on my hands!'

"' Well, I can only manage £15.'

"' Good! Take over these,' and I told him what I had in my hand.

"He took my word, and this was what I got a few weeks ago from him," extending his hand. This was a photograph of the cheque the plunger had received, representing a profit of £107 on his original £15 investment, and that within five months.

Fortunes have thus been made out of land within weeks. Lots which under the hammer fetched £2,120 have since netted £6,000, and land which then was sold for £3,300 has since changed hands for £8,000. The largest investor at the sale was an Austrian, who bought up in a wholesale manner, paying sums ranging from £77 to £1,540.

The manner in which values have soared is amazing, and the trend is still upward. One speculator bought

a corner block measuring 50 feet wide by 100 feet deep fronting two streets. He gave less than £100 for it, held on for a short while, and when a man came along and offered £4,400 for it he refused. Another lucky purchaser paid £1,200 for a plot and ultimately parted with it for £2,800. In one case a plot for which £1,200 was paid was sold twice within seven days, the second time realising £2,000. These transactions, it must be remembered, have taken place within a town which is not yet five years old, and where no jostling has occurred yet for elbow room. One Englishman, I was informed, had startled the community by his audacity. He had strolled into the town, sized up the situation, and had then departed as unostentatiously as he had arrived, after having bought up lots to the tune of £20,000. It seemed an insane manner of dealing even in booming land, but he had not shaken the dust from his feet by more than twelve hours when some of his property was commanding sufficient to show a profit of 14 per cent., and was still going up. Though it is the man who buys under the hammer who stands the chance of clearing up the largest profits on land sale transactions, yet to-day, if plots are purchased carefully, the investor can rely for a certainty upon a profit varying from 25 to 1,000 per cent., and that within a very short time.

Property rises and falls in a new Canadian town more startlingly than a thermometer plunged alternately into ice and boiling water. It takes a new community some time to settle down. To be plumped from a far-off country into a town like Prince Rupert in the moulding stage, is akin to buying a house when but the bare walls have been raised. There is only the carcase and its general lay-out to assist you in judging. Prince Rupert is only just entering on the masonry stage. When I was there it had no streets in the civilised sense of the word. They were there, it is true, in the form of timber side-walks and staging on stilts, over which all traffic passed. And a

peep beneath these wooden thoroughfares was sufficient to give a man from the east, bent on real estate investment, a jarring shock. Nothing but solid rock, covered with a few inches of peaty moss to which tree stumps were still clinging, and as ragged on the surface as a mountain range. It did not require an experienced eye to see that street building would prove expensive. Yet things are going ahead just the same as if the town were built on level land and a gravelly soil. These townsfolk think nothing of tearing out a few thousand tons of rock to make a causeway. With such a solid foundation, the city, when built in masonry, will require an earthquake to move it.

Everything, I found, was in a state of chaos. Prince Rupert, as befits the latest port, was being laid out in accordance with the most modern ideas. The garden-city planner was in possession, and he was laying out the town in a manner commensurate with its æsthetic background. Streets were being ruthlessly torn up to make way for a modern sewerage system, and easy gradients were being provided to secure comfortable access from point to point, for the town is built on a hump. Down by the waterside the mountain shoulder was being blown away in huge chunks to provide a perfectly level plane upon which a magnificent terminal station could be erected, together with hotels, sidings, and all the paraphernalia of a modern port handling merchandise from and for all parts of the world. The splitting roar of dynamite was heard from early morn to late at night.

In the early days they were exciting times. The hub of activity was the point on the water-front where vessels called and unloaded. The quay space was being levelled. The shacks were of timber with shingled roofs. Suddenly there would be heard the strident blast of a siren. Instantly one and all hustled away from the water's edge to a respectful distance, leaving all buildings vacant. Workmen would be seen tumbling across the ragged

ground as a second blast rang out. A few seconds of intense silence. Then a violent shivering under foot, and a tremendous bellow, accompanied by plumes of smoke, dust and debris rising gracefully into the air. All eyes were turned skywards, and dodging rocks as they descended was an exhilarating pastime. There would be heard the sharp crack, crack, crack as of sniping rifles, as a few pounds of disintegrated rock swooped down into the streets and riddled the shacks. When the citizens returned they found the roofs of their establishments perforated like a pepper-box. Out in the yard were stacks of shingles, and soon one and all were aloft their buildings putting the damage aright. Riddled houses and shops were the penalties exacted for being in a hurry to settle down in the new hub of commerce before the fabric had been fashioned. Strange to say, never a man was killed. One or two received contusions from falling missiles, and that was all.

The buoyant optimism of these 5,000 people is astonishing. You ask them what they think their future will be when they are within railway touch of the great wheat fields of the prairies, the manufacturing cities of Eastern Canada, and the Atlantic seaboard. Their reply is characteristic, though you, being uninitiated in Canadian ways and methods, may consider it somewhat conceited. One and all are confident that Prince Rupert is going to be the "roarin'est, busiest city on the coast. Reckon we'll have 'Frisco, Seattle, and Vancouver guessin' when we get a fair start," they chuckle.

They have every reason to be jubilant concerning their prospects. In the first place, they are 550 miles nearer Yokohama than is their most formidable rival, Vancouver, and this is an advantage which no art or cunning of man can overcome. Consequently they rest assured that the great highway between London and Japan will be through Prince Rupert. Then Alaska is wakening up. Its immense resources are being de-

veloped: capital and labour are flowing to that huge country, and as Prince Rupert is the natural doorway thereto, it is confidently expected that all Alaskan traffic will flow through this channel.

Nor are these the only factors. Off the coast, within a few hours' sail of the port, are immense fishing grounds, the wealth of which in halibut, herring, and cod is incalculable. Vessels come to this region from all parts of the coast to participate in the silvery harvest of the sea. The shore line of the Queen Charlotte Islands, in the midst of this fishing area, is dotted with canneries, and it is no uncommon circumstance for a single haul of salmon to aggregate 10,000 prime fish. As many as 75,000 have been trapped in the nets as the result of a single cast, so that some idea of the magnitude of the industry, which employs over 12,000 men, may be gathered. In 1909 over 18,000,000 pounds of halibut were caught in the waters between Prince Rupert and the Queen Charlotte Islands, representing a value of over £200,000, while the salmon catch was valued at £1,000,000.

Hitherto the whole of this produce has had to be shipped to the interior of the continent via Seattle and Vancouver, but when the railway runs east from Prince Rupert it will be diverted into the new channel, since, via Prince Rupert, it will be possible to land the fish by refrigerator car at Chicago in the same time as is now taken by the vessels to make Seattle or Vancouver. British capital is being attracted to this industry in a very pronounced degree, and refrigerating plant is springing up around the port on all sides to cope with the situation which will develop when Chicago, Toronto, New York, and the east generally, have a new vent on the Pacific.

* * * * *

The twinkling lights of Prince Rupert were rapidly slipping below the horizon as the *Prince Rupert* throbbed

up the harbour. The white snow-cap of Mount Hays, standing sentinel over the harbour, and forming a solid, sombre background to the bustling community at its base, floated like a cloud in the clear firmament illumined by the red, purple, amber and green of the Northern Lights. The last of the bright yellow stars, drawn out in a long, thin line, dancing on the water and marking the navigable channel, glided astern. We gave a sharp turn as we gained the open Pacific to enter the inland passage, and were soon ploughing through wildly picturesque fjords wrapped in a silence that could be felt, the steamer feeling its way by the echoing of the siren from headland to headland. We were southward bound for Vancouver, Victoria and Seattle. The deadfall-littered trail, the rushing waterways, the little communities rising in the wilderness, and the silent wilds through which we had wandered for some 1,200 miles, were all left behind. The bewitching call of the wild was still sounding in our ears. But for us the alluring cry was in vain.

INDEX

A

- Acquilget, 265
- Agriculture at Stoney Creek, 206
 - in Bulkley Valley, 240, 243, 253
 - in Nechaco Valley, 193, 194, 196
 - (*see also Farming et passim*)
- Albreda Pass, 121
- Alcohol, prohibition of, at "End-of-Steel," 7
- Aldermere, 131, 246, 248
- Alfalfa at Stoney Creek, 207
- Amery, Mr. L. S., 113
- A-mo, Indian boatman, 130
- Antimaul, 282
- Ashcroft, 163
- Athabaska River, 53, 82, 93, 93
 - Valley, meadowland in, 56

B

- Babine Lake, 227, 231
 - Mountains, 231, 242
- Baker, the packer, 260, 261
- Bald-headed eagles on the Fraser, 140
- Bannock, 36, 95
- Bear-shooting on the Fraser, 138
- Bella Coola, 225
- Bednest Meadows, 191
- Big-Eddy, 20
- Bobtail, 205
- Bog-holes, 20
- Bridge-building, 13, 35
- Brown, Joe, 40
- Brulé Lake, 66
- Bulkley Divide, 232
 - River, 236, 243
 - Valley, 230, 236, 243, 253
 - farming in, 238
 - fruit-growing in, 241
- Bullrush Mountain, 67
- Burns Lake, 222, 224, 226
- Bush, clearing the, 123
 - fires, 50, 183
 - hospital, 58
 - hotel, 40
 - storms, 53

O

- Oanoe River, 121
- Canoeing on the Fraser, 128, 141
- Cariboo Road, 163
- Cascade Mountains, 242, 286, 288
- Catering in the bush, 40, 55
- Cedarwood, 263
- Celery-growing at Stoney Creek, 207
- Cheslatta Lake, 214, 226
- Chilako River, 189

- Clark, William, 233
- Clearing the bush, 133
- Coal deposits at Aldermere, 249, 250
 - at Roche Miette, 71
 - at Tel-kwa, 249, 250
- Colin Mountains, 91
- Colonisation scheme, 275
- Columbia River, 120
- Cooks, demand for, in the bush, 25
 - wages of, 25
- Corralling horses, 60, 62, 261
- Cottonwood, 263
- Creeks, 20
- Crooked River, 157
- Crossing Athabaska River, 82
 - Moose River, 107

D

- Daniels, Mr. J. B., 174
- Decker Lake, 226
- Denis, Indian boatman, 131
- Derr Creek, 95, 96
- Digby Island, 293
- Distances, Canadian, 108
- Doctors, demand for, 276
- Dominion Prairie, 95
- Drystone Creek, 66
- Dug-outs, Indian, 128

E

- Eagle Pass, 101
- Eagles on the Fraser, 140
- Edmonton, 1, 39
- Edson, 12, 30
 - land values at, 33
- Endako River, 219
- End-of-Steel town, 1
- Engineers, openings for, 29
- Essington, Port, 292

F

- Farming at Fort George, 173
 - future of, in Mud River Valley, 189
 - in Bulkley Valley, 238
 - prospects of, near Fraser Lake, 219
 - (*see also Agriculture et passim*)
- Fiddle Back Mountains, 76
 - Creek, 66, 69
 - hot springs at, 70
- Fire warden on the Fraser River, 136
- Fires, bush, 183
 - results of, 60

- Fish Lake, 79
 Fishing grounds off Prince Rupert,
 303
 Folding Mountain, 66
 Fort Fraser, 212, 213
 — George, 159, 160, 161
 — — commercial position of, 161
 — — cost of food at, 169
 — — farming at, 173
 — — land purchase at, 171, 181
 — — prospects of, 161
 — — streets at, 166
 — St. James, 165, 213
 François Lake, 236
 Fraser Lake, 214
 — — farming prospects near, 219
 — — River, 102, 111
 — — canoeing on, 128, 141
 — — Valley. Prospects of, 134, 136
 — Simon, 103
 Fruit-growing in Bulkley Valley, 241
 — in Kitsumkalim Valley, 286
 — in Skeena Valley, 280
 — wild, at Stoney Creek, 203
 — in Bulkley Valley, 231

G

- Gale, Mr. Reginald, 249
 Game warden on the Fraser River,
 154
 Gelkie, Mount, 81, 91
 Giscombe, 156
 — Portage, 157
 — Rapids, 157
 Glacier House, 255
 Glaciers on Mount Robson, 113
 Glucula Lake, 193
 Goat Rapids, 143
 — River, 143
 Grand Cañon, 147
 — Fork, 117
 — Trunk Pacific Railway, 2, 26, 35,
 57, 259, 290, 294, 297 et passim
 Grant Brook, 104
 Gregg, the old pioneer, 64
 Griffiths, Mr. J. Norton, M.P., 275

H

- Hag-wel-get, 265
 "Hard Scrubble," Skeena River, 283
 Hardisty Creek, 56
 — Mount, 57
 Hawes, Jasper, 77, 100, 118
 Hay at Stoney Creek, 206
 — in Bulkley Valley, 243
 — in Nechaco Valley, 193, 196
 Hays, Mr. David M., 298
 Hazelton, 267, 268, 269
 Helena, Lake, 115
 Hikers, 54, 117, 228
 Hole-in-the-Wall, 289
 "Hornets' Nest," Skeena River, 279
 Horses, loading, 37
 — roving tendencies of, 36
 Horse-stealing by Indians, 60, 62, 261
 Hospital at Hazelton, 273
 — in the bush, 58
 Hot springs at Fiddle Creek, 70
 Hotel in the bush, 40

- Hudson's Bay Company, 63, 77
 — — Mountain, 250, 255

I

- Indian outlaws, 270
 Indians, 200, 202
 — horse-stealing proclivities of, 60,
 261

J

- Jasper Lake, 76
 — National Park, 63
 — — fauna in, 64
 — — flora in, 65
 — — game warden of, 66
 — — sealing of firearms in,
 66
 Joe, the cook, 256
 Journalism at Fort George, 174

K

- Kaien Island, 293
 Keller, Ernest, 119
 — — experiences of, 123
 Kicking Horse Pass, 101
 Kinney, Rev. B. M., 114
 Kisplox Valley, 270, 274
 Kitselas Cañon, 278, 283
 Kitsumkalim Valley, 286
 — — fruit-growing in, 286
 Kitwanger, 288
 Klootchmans, 168
 Kootenay, 281

L

- Labour in New British Columbia,
 4, 21, 27, 29, 166, 172 et passim
 Lake François, 236
 — Helena, 115
 — Totuk, 189
 Lakelse Lake, 287
 Laketown, 208
 Le Barge, 199, 212
 Lead at Aldermere, 249
 — at Tel-kwa, 249
 Lefort, Vital, the ferryman, 211
 — — experiences of, 211
 Lett, Mr. Robert C. W., 97, 232, 256
 Little Smoky River, 136
 Lonely trail, 92
 Louis, Indian boatman, 130, 132
 Lumber industry at Aldermere, 253
 — at Tel-kwa, 252, 253
 — on Bulkley River, 253

M

- McGlennan River, 121
 McInnes brothers, 236
 — — experiences of, 211
 — — ranch of, 236
 Mackenzie River, 157
 — the pioneer, 65
 Mackenzie's hotel, 115
 McLeod River, 13, 15, 44, 46, 52

McLeod Valley, pasturage in, 45
 Maligne River, 91
 Meadowland in Athabaska Valley, 56
 — on fringe of Bulkley Valley, 230
 Medical men, demand for, 276
 Medicine Lake, 91
 Mica Mountain, 122
 Miette River, 92, 97
 Millan, Mr. J. W., 205
 Minerals, abundance of, in Mica Mountain region, 122
 — at Aldermere, 249
 — at Hazelton, 272
 — at Telkwa, 249
 — in Babine Range, 231
 — in Bulkley Valley, 253
 Moberly's Pass, 100
 Moose Lake, 107
 — River, 105, 106
 — crossing the, 107
 Morice River, 242
 Moricetown, 242, 258
 Mosquitoes, 142
 Mount Geikie, 81, 91
 — Hardisty, 57
 — Robson, 112
 — Peelee, 102
 — Thompson, 120
 Mud River, 189
 Muskeg, 27, 47, 48, 81, 234

N

Naltesly Lake, 189
 Nanaimo, 250
 Nechaco River, 158, 160, 161
 — Valley, 190
 Noolki Creek, 210
 — Lake, 204, 208, 210
 North Fork River, 152
 — Thomson River, 121
 North-West Trading Company, 63, 77

O

Oats at Stoney Creek, 206
 — in Bulkley Valley, 244
 Okanagan, 231
 Ootsa Lake, 189, 226
 Outlaws, 270

P

Pack-horses, 17
 — loading, 37
 — train crossing Athabaska River, 82
 — management of, 17
 Parsnip River, 157
 Pasturage in Athabaska Valley, 56
 — in McLeod Valley, 45
 Peace River, 157
 — Pass, 100
 Peelee Mount, 102
 Pillsbury, Mr. J. H., 295
 Pine River Pass, 100
 Pioneer Ranch, 236, 242
 Pioneers, 18

Port Eslington, 292
 Potatoes in Bulkley Valley, 240, 243
 Prairie Creek, 57
 Prince Rupert, 293, 294
 — building of, 295, 301
 — land values at, 297, 300
 — streets at, 300

Q

Queen Charlotte Islands, 303
 Quensel, 164, 195

R

Railway construction, 4, 26, 57, 290,
 291 *et passim*
 Rainbow Mountains, 106, 108, 110
 Rainfall in Endako Valley, 219
 — in Fraser River Valley, 141
 — in Nechaco Valley, 192
 Ranch of the McInnes brothers, 236
 — near Fraser Lake, 217
 Ran Shuswap River, 137
 Robson, Mount, 112
 Roche Miette, 71, 73
 — coal deposits at, 71
 Rocky River, 76, 78
 Roger's Pass, 100
 Russell, Mr. G. Horne, 142, 265

S

Salmon curing, 258, 292
 — fishing, 258, 291, 292
 "Salmon Leap," 258
 Sam, the packer, 179, 232, 233
 Saskatoon, boom at, 12
 Selkirk Mountains, 121
 Settlements outside Fort George, 181,
 182
 Shooting Goat Rapids, 143, 144
 — Grand Cañon, 147
 Silver at Aldermere, 249
 — at Telkwa, 249
 Siwash Indians, 130, 204, 257
 Skeena River, 258, 277
 — Valley, fruit-growing in, 220
 Snaring River, 76
 Soda Creek, 163
 South Babine district, 227
 — Bulkley telegraph station, 233
 Starvation Flat, 122
 Station-men, 26
 Stella, Indian village, 219
 Stoney Creek, 202
 — agriculture at, 206
 — celery-growing at, 207
 Storms in the bush, 53
 Streets at Fort George, 165
 — at Prince Rupert, 300
 Stuart Lake, 155, 213, 227
 — River, 166, 214
 Summit Lake, 157
 Surgeons, demand for, 276
 Surveyors at work, 137

Swift Current, 117
 — the frontiersman, 83, 84
 Swine in Bulkley Valley, 241

T

Tachick Lake, 208, 210
 Team of horses, management of, 20
 Teamster, life of a, 21
 Telegraph linesmen, 221
 — operators, 224
 Telephone at Fort George, 177
 Tel-kwa, 248
 — River, 249
 Tête Jaune Cache, 118
 Thompson, Mount, 120
 Timber round Glucula Lake, 193
 — in Skeena Valley, 280
 — jam, 130
 Totem poles, 281
 Totuk Lake, 189
 Trail, difficulties of, 38, 47
 — how to walk along, 38
 — lonely, 92
 Trout, abundance of, 92, 102, 116
 Tsinkut Lake, 196, 201, 210
 Turnips in Bulkley Valley, 240

U

Upper Nechaco River, 214

V

Vital Creek, 212

W

Wapiti Pass, 100
 Wheat in Bulkley Valley, 244
 "White Mud," 40
 Williams, George, 127, 131
 Wilson, the frontiersman, 124, 125,
 133
 Wolf Creek, 1, 3
 Wood-cutting in Fraser River Valley,
 155

Y

Yellowhead Lake, 101
 — — abundance of trout in, 102
 — Pass, 94, 99
 — — derivation of, 100
 Yukon telegraph, 197, 198, 223

215