CHRONICLES OF CANADA

Edited by George M. Wrong and H[illegible]n

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Chronicles of Canada

(19)

Path-finders of the Great Plains

Vol 19

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CHRONICLES OF CANADA

Edited by George M. Wrong and H. H. Langton

In thirty-two volumes

19

PATHFINDERS OF THE GREAT PLAINS

BY LAWRENCE J. BURPEE

Part VI

Pioneers of the North and West

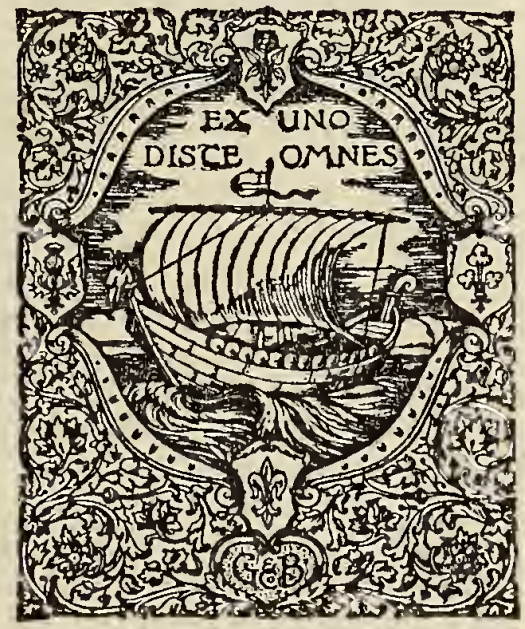

C.W. JEFFERYS

PATHFINDERS OF THE GREAT PLAINS

A Chronicle of La Vérendrye and his Sons

BY

LAWRENCE J. BURPEE



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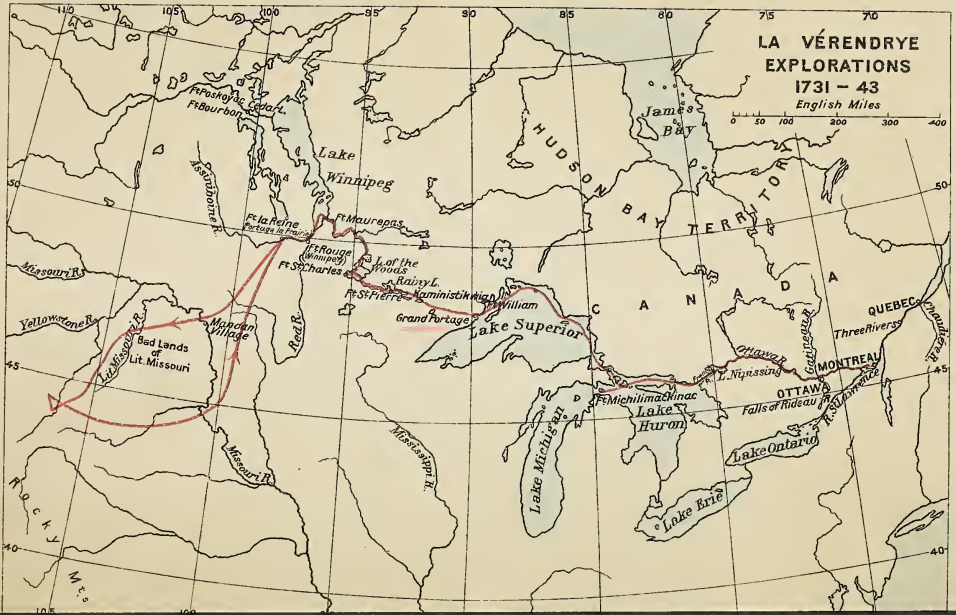
LA VÉRENDRYE
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Ft Bourbon
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Ft la Reine
Portage de la Prairie
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CHAPTER I

EARLY SERVICE

CANADA has had many brave sons, but none braver than Pierre Gaultier de La Vérendrye, who gave all that he had, including his life, for the glory and welfare of his country. La Vérendrye was born in the quaint little town of Three Rivers, on the St Lawrence, on November 17, 1685. His father was governor of the district of which Three Rivers was the capital; his mother was a daughter of Pierre Boucher, a former governor of the same district. In those days, when Canada was still a French colony, both Three Rivers and Montreal had their own governors, while the whole colony was under the authority of the governor-general, who lived at Quebec.

At that time Three Rivers was a more important place than it is to-day. Next to Quebec and Montreal, it was the largest town in Canada. If we could see it as it was in the days of La Vérendrye, we should find it very

different from the towns we know. It was surrounded by a palisade fifteen to eighteen feet high and protected with cannon. The town had always a garrison of regular soldiers, and this garrison was supported in times of necessity by every man and boy in Three Rivers. Those who lived in the neighbourhood were also liable to be called upon for the service of defence. In earlier days, when the dreaded Iroquois might at any moment swoop down upon the little settlement, every man kept his gun within reach, and every man knew how to use it. When the alarm was given, men, women, and children swarmed into Three Rivers, and the town became a secure fortress; for the Indians, ready enough to ambush small parties of white men in the forest or in the fields, rarely dared to attack fortified towns.

In this little walled town Pierre Gaultier de La Vérendrye was born, and spent his boyhood. He was one of ten children, so that he must have had no lack of companions. We have no exact description of the home of the governor of Three Rivers, but it was probably much like that of other seigneurs or landed gentry of New France—a low, rambling, wooden building, with walls solid enough to resist a siege, perhaps a wing or two, many

gables, and a lofty roof. It would be flanked, too, with many outhouses. It stood outside the palisades. It must not be supposed, however, that the governor of Three Rivers and his family lived in luxury. People then were obliged to live more simply than they live to-day. The governor had a salary of twelve hundred francs a year, or about two hundred and forty dollars. At that time, it is true, food and clothing were cheaper than they are now, so that this sum would buy a great deal more than it would at the present time; and the governor had other slight resources, for he was able to add to his official income the profits of a small farm and of a trading post on the St Maurice river. Still, it was a small income on which to support a family of ten lusty children, and at the same time keep up the dignity of the position as governor of an important town. Pierre, therefore, like most of the other boys of New France, had to shift for himself at an age when the boys of to-day are still at school.

In those days there was practically only one career for a gentleman's son—that of a soldier. Accordingly we find Pierre entering the army as a cadet at the age of twelve. Nothing is known of his military service up to the year 1704. In that year, however, he took part in

an expedition against Deerfield, on the north western frontier of the colony of Massachusetts The expedition was commanded by a well known guerilla leader, Hertel de Rouville, and consisted of about fifty Canadians and two hundred Abnakis and Caughnawagas. These adventurers and redskins were accustomed to all kinds of hardship. In the depth of winter they set out from Montreal to make a journey of nearly three hundred miles. They travelled on snow-shoes through the forest, carrying supplies and provisions on their backs. At the end of a long day's tramp, some comparatively sheltered spot would be found for the camp; the snow would be cleared away with their snow-shoes, and a big camp-fire built in the midst of the clearing. Round this the weary men, white and red, would gather to eat their simple meal and smoke a pipe; then each man would wrap himself in his cloak or blanket and fall asleep, with his feet towards the fire. From time to time some one, warned by the increasing cold, would spring up to throw on the fire another log or two. With the first appearance of dawn, the party would be once more astir, a hasty breakfast would be swallowed, and they would be off again on their long tramp to the south.

So day after day they journeyed until at ast, just when they had come to the very end f their provisions, they arrived within sight f the doomed little English frontier village of Deerfield. In the dead of the night Rouville alled a halt in a pine forest two miles from he village, and made preparations to surprise he inhabitants. The people of Deerfield were holly unconscious of the danger from the pproach of the French raiders. Although the lace had a rude garrison this force was in- ffective, since it had little or no discipline. On his particular night even the sentries seem to ave found their patrol duty within the alisades of the village so uncomfortable, in he bitter night air, that they had betaken hemselves to bed.

Parkman has described the next step:

> Rouville and his men, savage with hunger, lay shivering under the pines till about two hours before dawn; then, leaving their packs and their snow-shoes behind, they moved cautiously towards their prey. There was a crust on the snow strong enough to bear their weight, though not to prevent a rustling noise, as it crunched under the weight of so many men. It is said that from time to time Rouville commanded a halt, in order

that the sentinels, if such there were, migh mistake the distant sound for rising an falling gusts of wind. In any case, n alarm was given till they had mounted th palisade and dropped silently into the un conscious village. Then with one accor they screeched the war-whoop, and assaile the doors of the houses with axes an hatchets.

The surprised villagers, awakened out c their sleep to find a howling force of Frenc and Indians in their midst, hastily barricade their doors, and fought desperately with an weapons they could snatch up. In some case the defenders succeeded in keeping the enem at bay; but others were not so successful. Th French and the Indians hacked openings i the doors and the windows of some of th houses, and through these shot down the in mates. Finally, when day broke, the Frenc had gained possession of most of the villag Then they collected their prisoners and drov them out to their camp in the forest. A fe burned houses, a score or so of dead bodie not only of men but of helpless women an children, and a crowd of shivering prisoner some of whom were butchered by the way, wer the evidences of this inglorious victory.

From the plunder of the houses the victors obtained some provisions which helped to feed their party on the long homeward journey. Before noon of the following day they had started northward again, driving their captives before them through the deep snow. The mid-winter tramp through the wilderness proved extremely trying to both the French and their prisoners, but particularly to the prisoners, among whom were many women and children. Many of them were unaccustomed to snow-shoes. Yet now they had to make long forced marches in this way over the deep snow. Food, too, was scarce. Some of the prisoners died of starvation; others of exhaustion. Finally the remnant reached the French settlements on the St Lawrence, where they were kindly treated by the inhabitants. Some were afterwards exchanged for French captives in New England, but many never again saw their former homes.

The year after his return from the expedition to Deerfield, Pierre de La Vérendrye took part in another raid against the English settlements. On this occasion, however, the attack was not upon a New England village, but against the town of St John's, in Newfoundland. The expedition was commanded

by an officer named Subercase, who afterwards became governor of Acadia. St John's was defended by two forts, with small English garrisons. The French, who had about four hundred and fifty soldiers, found themselves unable to capture the forts. They therefore abandoned the attack on St John's and returned to the French settlement of Placentia, burning, as they went, a number of English fishing villages along the shore.

This kind of warfare could not bring much honour to a young soldier, and it was probably joyful news to Pierre to learn that he had been appointed an ensign in the Bretagne regiment of the Grenadiers serving in Flanders. He sailed from Canada in 1707, and for three years fought with his regiment in what was known as the War of the Spanish Succession, in which the English armies were commanded by the famous Duke of Marlborough. Finally, at the terrible battle of Malplaquet, in which thousands of both English and French were killed, Pierre so distinguished himself that he won the rank of lieutenant. He received no less than nine wounds, and was left for dead upon the field. Fortunately he managed to escape, to render to his country in the years to come much greater service.

Finding that there was little hope of further omotion in the French army, since he had o influence in high quarters, Pierre returned Canada in 1711. After several years in e colonial forces, he abandoned the army, d engaged in the fur trade. As a boy at ree Rivers, he had enjoyed many chances of eeting the fur-traders who came down to the tle town on the St Lawrence with their packs valuable peltry, and had shown an especial d fascinated interest in their stories of the undless country that lay north and west of e string of settlements on the St Lawrence. his country was so vast in extent that even e most remote tribes yet visited by the white aders could state nothing definite as to its ter boundaries, though, in answer to the ger questions of the white men, they in- nted many untrue tales about it.

The fur-traders themselves were divided into o classes. The more staid and respectable ass built trading forts in the interior on the rders of territories occupied by the Indians. ere they kept a supply of the things required the natives: guns, powder and balls, bacco, blankets, bright-coloured cotton, axes d small tools, flints and steels, vermilion for r-paint, and beads of every colour and de-

scription. The Indians brought their furs in the forts and bartered them for the goo that they needed. Sometimes, with no sen of real values, they traded beaver skins a other pelts of high worth for a piece of gau cotton, a little vermilion, or a handful beads. The white men, of course, broug things which rapidly became indispensable the Indians, whose native bows and arro and hatchets of stone seemed almost usel compared with the muskets and the st axes brought from Europe. To acquire th things became vital to the Indians, and t traders who now supplied them acquired ea year thousands of beautiful furs. These w tied up securely into packs and carried canoes down to Montreal or Three Rive where they were bought by the great mercha and sent by ship to France. The furs th had been bought from the Indian for a m trifle fetched hundreds of francs when th finally reached Paris.

The second class of traders, known coureurs de bois, or wood-runners, were v different from the first. Speaking general they were young men, sometimes of go family, who found life in the older towns a settlements prosaic and uninteresting, and wh

ey went to the interior did not care to be
d down to the humdrum existence of the
ading forts. Instead of requiring the Indians
bring their furs down to some fort, these
terprising rovers of the forest went into the
dian country. Sometimes they took light
ading goods with them to barter with the
dskins for furs, but oftener they themselves
unted and trapped the beaver, the otter, and
e fox. The coureurs de bois were generally
en of reckless courage, ready to face danger
d hardship. From long living among the
vages they themselves became in time half
vage. Some of them took Indian wives and
ere adopted into the tribes.

When one of these wood-runners had ob-
ined a quantity of furs, he made them up
to packs, loaded them carefully in his canoe,
d set out for the distant settlements, Montreal,
hree Rivers, or Quebec. He knew the wild
orthern streams as well as any Indian; he
uld run his canoe safely down a rapid where
inch one way or the other would dash it
gainst the rocks; and he could paddle all day
ith only an occasional stop for a meal or a
noke. When he came to an impassable rapid
r waterfall, he beached his canoe and carried
verything—canoe, packs, gun, and provisions

—overland to the navigable water ahead. night he pulled his canoe ashore, built a cam fire, and cooked over the flames a partrid a wild duck, or a venison steak. If he had n been fortunate enough to meet with such gam he made a simple meal of pemmican—dri venison mixed with fat—a supply of which always carried in a bag in case of need. Th he smoked his pipe, rolled himself in h blanket, placed his gun within reach, and sle soundly until the sun awakened him on t following morning. When he reached t far-off towns on the St Lawrence, he trad part of his furs for any goods which he neede and was only too likely to get rid of the rest dissipation. As soon as his money was spe he would turn his back on civilization a live once more the wild life of the India country.

From such men as these, who were co stantly to be seen in the little town of Thr Rivers, Pierre de La Vérendrye heard ma stories of the wonderful country that lay f towards the setting sun. They told him mighty rivers and great lakes. Some of the they had seen; others they had heard of fro the Indians. Always the young man hea rumours of a great *Mer de l'Ouest*, or Weste

a, which French explorers had been seeking
dently ever since the days of Jacques Cartier
d Samuel Champlain. In the earlier days,
en the French first came to Canada, this
estern Sea was supposed to be somewhere
ove Montreal. Probably the Indians who
st spoke of it to Jacques Cartier meant
thing more than Lake Ontario. Then,
the days of Champlain, the sea was
ught farther westward. Champlain heard
mours of a great water beyond the Ottawa
ver. He paddled up the Ottawa, reached
ke Nipissing, and, descending what is now
own as French River, found the immense
dy of water of which the Indians had told
m. He had discovered Lake Huron, but this,
ain, was not the Western Sea. Other ex-
orers, following in his footsteps, discovered
ke Michigan and Lake Superior; but still
ither of these was the Western Sea. So, in
Vérendrye's day, men were dreaming of a
estern Sea somewhere beyond Lake Superior.
ow far was it westward of Lake Superior?
ho could tell? The Indians were always
ady with a plausible tale, and many believed
at the Western Sea would still be found at
great distance beyond the uppermost of the
reat Lakes.

La Vérendrye was a young man of ambit
and imagination. The spirit of advent
called him to a great exploit in discovery,
it had called earlier explorers French in bloo
Jacques Cartier and Champlain and Radiss
Nicolet and Etienne Brulé, Marquette and
Salle. They one and all had sought diliger
for the Western Sea; they had made m
notable discoveries, but in this one thing t
all had failed. La Vérendrye determined
strive even more earnestly than any of his g
predecessors to discover a way to the West
Sea, not so much for his own advantage
for the honour and glory of his native coun
This great idea had been taking form in
mind from the days of his early boyho
when, seated before the great log fire in
father's home in Three Rivers, he had
listened to the stirring tales of the wo
runners.

Years went by, however, before any me
appeared whereby his ambition might
realized. In 1712, after his return fr
France, he had married the daughter o
Canadian named Dandonneau and had m
his home on the island of Dupas in
St Lawrence, near Three Rivers. Here f
sons were born to him, all of whom w

er to accompany their father on his stern explorations. His principal occupation at this time was to look after the trading-st of La Gabelle on the St Maurice river, t far from the point where it discharges its ters into the St Lawrence.

La Vérendrye's experience and capacity as ur-trader, gained at this post of La Gabelle, the governor of the colony to offer him, the year 1726, the command of an important ding fort on Lake Nipigon, north of Lake perior. With his great project of western loration always in mind, he eagerly accepted offer. For three or four years he remained command of the Nipigon post, faithfully charging his duties as a fur-trader, but h his mind always alert for any information that might help him later to discover a y to the Western Sea.

One day there came to him from the ministikwia river—on which the city of t William now stands—an Indian named nagach. According to his own story, nagach had travelled far towards the setting , until he came to a great lake, out of which river flowed westward. He said that he l paddled down this river until he reached oint where the water ebbed and flowed.

Through fear of the savage tribes that
habited the shores of the river, he had not g
to its mouth, but he had been told that the ri
emptied into a great salt lake or sea, upon
coasts of which dwelt men of terrifying m
who lived in fortified towns; he had been
that these men wore armour and rode
horseback, and that great ships visited
towns which they had built on the coasts.

Ochagach's story made a deep impress
on La Vérendrye. Not that he accepted
whole account as true. He knew too
the wild imagination of the Indian, and
delight in telling marvellous tales to
white men. But the river that flowed w
ward and fell into a great sea answered
closely to his own dream, and seemed on
whole so probable, that he was persuaded
the truth of the story. He determined, th
fore, to surrender his command of the Nipi
post and to equip an expedition for the
covery of the Western Sea, which now see
to be within comparatively easy reach. T
this, he must obtain the permission and sup
of the governor-general of Canada, the Mar
de Beauharnois. He therefore set out
Quebec, taking with him a rough map w
Ochagach had drawn for him. This

ofessed to make clear the position of the untries which Ochagach declared that he d visited.

The governor at Quebec was keenly interested these plans for western discovery, and wrote mediately to the French king, urging that a Vérendrye should be provided with one ndred men and the necessary supplies and uipment. But King Louis at this time was eply engaged in European wars and intrigues d could not spare any money for the work exploration. All that he would grant was a onopoly of the western fur trade. That is say, La Vérendrye was to be allowed to ild trading forts in the country which he as about to explore, and, out of the profits his traffic with the Indians, he might pay e cost of his expedition to the Western Sea. o other French traders would be permitted to ade in this part of the country.

This was sorry encouragement to a man ose only desire was to bring glory and nour to his native country; but it was all at could be hoped for from the government the king. La Vérendrye was too true a ader to abandon plans merely because the ad was not made easy for him. As the king uld not pay the cost of his expedition, he

made up his mind to find help from some oth source. He must have men; he must ha canoes, provisions, and goods to trade with t natives. All this demanded a great deal money. He devoted at once to the cause l own little fortune, but this was far fr sufficient. Off he went to Montreal, to ple with its merchants to help him. T merchants, however, were not much interest in his plans for western discovery. They we business men without patriotism; they look for something that would bring profit, n for what might advance the interests of th country.

It thus happened that if La Vérendrye h had nothing to offer them but the opportun of sharing in the distinction of his great d covery, they would have turned deaf ears his appeal, no matter how eloquent he mig have been. But he was too shrewd a man urge plans to which he knew the merchar would not listen. He could turn the kin monopoly to good account. 'Give me mon to pay my men,' he said, 'and goods to tra with the western tribes, and I will bring y rich returns in beaver skins. No other trade are permitted to go into the country west Lake Superior. I will build trading fo

ere. From these as a base I will continue y search for the Western Sea. All the profits the enterprise, the rich furs that are ought into my posts, shall be yours.' Here as something that the self-seeking merchants uld understand. They saw in the fur-ading monopoly a chance of a golden harvest, return of hundreds for every franc that they vanced towards the expenses of the under-king. With cheerful haste, therefore, they reed to pay the cost of the expedition. La érendrye was delighted and lost no time in nploying such persons as he needed—soldiers, noe-men, and hunters. Birch-bark canoes ere procured and laden with provisions, uipment, and packages of goods to trade ith the Indians; and in the early summer of 731 all was ready for the great western urney. With La Vérendrye were to go three his sons, Jean-Baptiste, Pierre, and François, d his nephew La Jemeraye. A Jesuit issionary, Father Messager, would join the rty at Fort Michilimackinac, and the Indian chagach was to act as guide.

CHAPTER II

FIRST ATTEMPT AT EXPLORATION

As La Vérendrye led his men from the gates
Montreal to the river where waited his litt
fleet of birch-bark canoes, his departure w
watched with varied and conflicting emotion
In the crowd that surrounded him were frien
and enemies; some who openly applaud
his design, others who less openly scoffed
it; priests exhorting him to devote all h
energies to furthering the missionary aims
their Church among the wild tribes of the Wes
jealous traders commenting among themselv
upon the injustice involved in granting
monopoly of the western fur trade to th
scheming adventurer; partners in the ente
prise anxiously watching the loading of th
precious merchandise they had advanced
him, and wondering whether their cast of th
dice would bring fortune or failure; busy
bodies bombarding him with advice; and
crowd of idle onlookers, divided in their mind

s to whether La Vérendrye would return riumphantly from the Western Sea laden with ne spoils of Cathay and Cipango, or would fall victim to the half-human monsters that were eputed to inhabit the wilderness of the West.

But now everything was ready. La Vérendrye gave the word of command, and the anoes leaped forward on their long voyage. new search for the Western Sea had begun. o man knew how it would end. The perils nd hardships encountered by the discoverers f America in crossing the Atlantic were much ss terrible than those with which La Vérendrye and his men must battle in exploring he boundless plains of the unknown West. he voyage across the sea would occupy but few weeks; this journey by inland waterays and across the illimitable spaces of the estern prairies would take many months nd even years. There was a daily menace rom savage foes lurking on the path of he adventurers. Hardy and dauntless must hey be who should return safely from such a uest. Little those knew who stood enviously atching the departure of the expedition what itter tribute its leader must pay to the relentess gods of the Great Plains for his hardihood n invading their savage domain.

The way lay up the broad and picturesqu
Ottawa, rich even then with the romanti
history of a century of heroic exploits. Th
was the great highway between the St Lawrenc
and the Upper Lakes for explorers, mission
aries, war parties, and traders. Up th
stream, one hundred and eighteen years befor
Champlain had pushed his way, persuaded b
the ingenious impostor Nicolas Vignau tha
here was the direct road to Cathay. At S
Anne's the expedition made a brief halt to as
a blessing on the enterprise. Here the me
according to custom, each received a dram o
liquor. When they had again taken the
places, paddles dipped at the word of comman
and, like a covey of birds, the canoes skimme
over the dark waters of the Ottawa, springin
under the sinewy strokes of a double row o
paddlers against the swift current of the rive
Following the shore closely, they made rapi
progress up-stream. At noon they landed o
a convenient island, where they quickl
kindled a fire. A pot of tea was swung abov
it from a tripod. With jest and story the mea
went on, and as soon as it was finished the
were again afloat, paddling vigorously an
making quick time. Sunset approached—
the brief but indescribably beautiful suns

f a Canadian summer. The sun sank ehind the maples and cedars, and a riot of olour flooded the western horizon. Rainbow ues swept up half-way to the zenith, waving, ningling, changing from tint to tint, as hrough the clouds flamed up the last bright- ess of the sinking sun. A rollicking chorus ank away on the still air, and the men gazed or a moment upon a scene which, however amiliar, could never lose its charm. The song f the birds was hushed. All nature seemed o pause. Then as the outermost rim of the un dropped from sight, and the brilliant olouring of a moment ago toned to rose and affron, pink and mauve, the world moved on gain, but with a seemingly subdued motion. The voyageurs resumed their song, but the gay horus that had wakened echoes from the overhanging cliffs,

> En roulant ma boule,
> Rouli, roulant, ma boule roulant,
> En roulant ma boule roulant,
> En roulant ma boule,

was changed to the pathetic refrain of a song then as now dear to the heart of French Canadians—*A la claire fontaine.*

In the cool twilight the men paddled on, placing mile after mile between them and

Montreal. Presently the river widened int
a lakelike expanse. The moon rose and sh
its soft gleam across the water. No ripp
stirred the smooth surface, save where th
paddles dipped and the prow of each cano
cut like a knife through the stream. Belate
birds flew overhead, making for home. A sta
broke through the bushes on the farther shore
caught sight of the canoes, gazed at them for
moment, and then disappeared. It was grow
ing late when La Vérendrye, from the foremos
canoe, gave the word to camp. The canoe
turned shoreward, lightly touching the shelvin
bank, and the men sprang nimbly to the land
Fires were lighted, the tents were pitched, an
everything was made snug for the night. The
hunters had not been idle during the day
and a dozen brace of birds were soon twirlin
merrily on the spit, while venison steaks adde
appetizing odours.

Their hunger satisfied, the men lounged about on the grass, smoking and listening to the yarns of some famous story-teller. He would tell them, perhaps, the pathetic story of Cadieux, who, on this very stream, had held the dreaded Iroquois at bay while his comrades escaped. Cadieux himself escaped the Iroquois, only to fall a victim to the *folie des bois*, or

dness of the woods, wandering aimlessly circles, until, famished and exhausted, he down to die. When his comrades returned search of him, they found beside him a birch k on which he had written his death chant:

Thou little rock of the high hill, attend!
Hither I come this last campaign to end!
Ye echoes soft, give ear unto my sigh;
In languishing I speedily shall die.

Dear little birds, your dulcet harmony
What time you sing makes this life dear to me.
Ah! had I wings that I might fly like you;
Ere two days sped I should be happy too.

en, as the camp-fires sank into heaps of wing embers, each man would wrap his nket about him and with kind mother th for his pillow and only the dome of aven above him, would sleep as only those y whose resting-place is in the free air of e wilderness.

At sunrise they were once more away, on a g day's paddle up-stream. They passed the ng Sault, where long before the heroic llard and his little band of Frenchmen held bay a large war party of Iroquois—sacrificing ir lives to save the little struggling colony at ntreal. Again, their way lay beneath those vering cliffs overlooking the Ottawa, on ich now stand the Canadian Houses of

Parliament. They had just passed the curtai
like falls of the Rideau on one side, and t
mouth of the turbulent Gatineau on the oth
and before them lay the majestic Chaudiè
Here they disembarked. The voyageurs, follo
ing the Indian example, threw a votive off
ing of tobacco into the boiling cauldron,
the benefit of the dreaded Windigo. The
shouldering canoes and cargo, they made th
way along the portage to the upper strea
and, launching and reloading the canoes, p
ceeded on their journey. So the days pass
each one carrying them farther from t
settlements and on, ever on, towards the u
known West, and perhaps to the Western S

From the upper waters of the Ottawa th
carried their canoes over into a series of sm
lakes and creeks that led to Lake Nipissing, a
thence they ran down the French river
Lake Huron. Launching out fearlessly
this great lake, they paddled swiftly along
north shore to Fort Michilimackinac, wh
they rested for a day or two. Fort Mich
mackinac was on the south side of the st
which connects Lake Huron and L
Michigan, and lay so near the water that
waves frequently broke against the stocka
Passing through the gates, above which floa

e fleurs-de-lis of France, they found themves in an enclosure, some two acres in tent, containing thirty houses and a small urch. On the bastions stood in a conspicuis position two small brass cannon, captured m the English at Fort Albany on Hudson y, in 1686, by De Troyes and Iberville.[1]

It was now the end of July, and La Vérenye had still a long way to go. After a ief rest, he gathered his party together, emrked once more, and steered his way on that eat inland sea, Lake Superior. All that had ne before was child's play to what must now encountered. In contrast to the blue and acid waters of Lake Huron, the explorers now und themselves in the midst of a dark and mbre sea, whose waves, seldom if ever still, uld on occasion rival the Atlantic in their rce tumult. Even in this hottest month of the ar the water was icy cold, and the keen wind at blew across the lake forced those who were t paddling to put on extra clothing. They ust needs be hardy and experienced voyageurs ho could safely navigate these mad waters in ail bark canoes. Slowly they made their way ong the north shore, buffeted by storms and in nstant peril of their lives, until at last, on

[1] See *The 'Adventurers of England' on Hudson Bay*, pages 73-88.

August 26, they reached the Grand Porta near the mouth of the Pigeon river, or ab fifteen leagues south-west of Fort Kaminist wia, where the city of Fort William now stan

La Vérendrye would have pushed on once for Lac la Pluie, or Rainy Lake, wh he purposed to build the first of his west posts, but when he ordered his men to ma the portage there was first deep mutteri and then open mutiny. Two or three of boatmen, bribed by La Vérendrye's enemies Montreal, had drawn such terrible pictures the horrors before them, and had so play upon the fears of their superstitious comrad that these now refused flatly to follow th leader into the unhallowed and fiend-infes regions which lay beyond. The hardsh they had already endured, and the further ha ships of the long and difficult series of porta which lay between them and Rainy Lake, a served to dishearten the men. Some of the however, had been with La Jemeraye at La Pepin, on the Mississippi, and were not to dismayed. These La Vérendrye persuaded continue the exploration. The others grad ally weakened in their opposition, and at l it was agreed that La Jemeraye, with half men, should go on to Rainy Lake and build

there, while La Vérendrye, with the other f, should spend the winter at Kaministikwia, l keep the expedition supplied with pro- ons.

n this way the winter passed. The leader s, we may be sure, restless at the delay and patient to advance farther. The spring ught good news. Late in May La neraye returned from Rainy Lake, bringing oes laden with valuable furs, the result of winter's traffic. These were immediately t on to Michilimackinac, for shipment to the tners at Montreal. La Jemeraye reported t he had built a fort at the foot of a series of ids, where Rainy Lake discharges into the r of the same name. He had built the fort a meadow, among groves of oak. The lake med with fish, and the woods which lined shores were alive with game, large and all. The picture was one to make La endrye even more eager to advance. On e 8 he set out with his entire party for Fort Pierre, as the new establishment had been ned, to commemorate his own name of rre. It took a month to traverse the intri- e chain of small lakes and streams, with their ny portages, connecting Lake Superior and ny Lake.

After a short rest at Fort St Pierre, Vérendrye pushed on rapidly, escorted in st by fifty canoes of Indians, to the Lake of Woods. Here he built a second post, Fort Charles, on a peninsula running out far i the lake on the south-west side—an admira situation, both for trading purposes and defence. This fort he describes as consist of 'an enclosure made with four rows of po from twelve to fifteen feet in height, in form of an oblong square, within which ar few rough cabins constructed of logs and cl and covered with bark.'

In the spring of 1735 Father Messa returned to Montreal, and with him w La Jemeraye, to report the progress alre made. He described to the governor difficulties they had encountered, and ur that the king should be persuaded to assu the expense of further explorations towa the Western Sea. The governor could, h ever, do nothing.

Meanwhile Jean, La Vérendrye's eldest s had advanced still farther and had made way to Lake Winnipeg. He took with hi handful of toughened veterans, and tram on snow-shoes through the frozen forest—f hundred and fifty miles in the stern midwi

a region bitterly cold. Near the mouth of Winnipeg river, where it empties into Lake nnipeg, they found an ideal site for the fort ch they intended to build. Immediately y set to work, felled trees, drove stout stakes o the frozen ground for a stockade, put up a gh shelter inside, and had everything ready La Vérendrye's arrival in the spring. They ned the post Fort Maurepas, in honour of a minent minister of the king in France at time.

a Vérendrye had now carried out, and more n carried out, the agreement made with the ernor Beauharnois. He had established a in of posts—strung like beads on a string rom Lake Superior to Lake Winnipeg, from river Kaministikwia to the open prairie. the distance he had traversed, the diffi-ies he had encountered, and, above all, expense incurred, had been far in excess anything he had anticipated. These were couraging experiences. He seemed at last nave reached the limit of his resources and urance. To advance farther with the nder means now at his command seemed nost impossible. Should he turn back? men were more than willing. Every o eastward would bring them nearer their

homes, their families, and the pleasures a
dissipations of the Canadian towns on the f
off St Lawrence. To turn back was the eas
thing for them. But it was not easy fo
man like La Vérendrye. To return me
failure ; and for him there was no such th
as failure while health and strength endur
At whatever cost, he must push on towards
Western Sea.

The situation was nevertheless most criti
His own means had long since been exhaust
True, he possessed a monopoly of the
trade, but what did it profit him ? He had
touched, and never would be able to tou
a franc of the proceeds : the shrewd mercha
of Montreal had made sure of this. To
Vérendrye the monopoly was simply a m
stone added to the burdens he was alre
forced to bear. It did not increase his
sources ; it delayed his great enterprise ;
it put an effective weapon in the hands of
enemies. Little cause had he to be grat
for the royal monopoly. He would have
finitely preferred the direct grant of even a sc
of capable, well-equipped men. These, ma
tained at the king's expense, he might lead
the quickest route to the Western Sea.

As it was, the merchants in Montreal refu

send up further supplies; his men remained paid; he even lacked a sufficient supply of od. There was nothing for it but to turn ck, make the long journey to Montreal and ebec, and there do his utmost to arrange tters. He had already sunk from 40,000 50,000 livres in the enterprise. In all tice, the king should assume the expense of ther explorations in quest of the Great Sea. e governor, the Marquis de Beauharnois, ared this view, and had already pressed court to grant La Vérendrye the assistance so urgently needed. 'The outlay,' he ote to the king's minister, Maurepas, 'will be great; the cost of the *engagés* [hired n] for three years, taking into account at can be furnished from the king's stores, uld not exceed 30,000 livres at most.' The g, however, refused to undertake the ex- se of the expedition. Those who had umed the task should, he thought, be in a ition to continue it by means of the profits ived from their monopoly of the fur trade. e facts did not justify the royal view of matter. La Vérendrye had enjoyed the nopoly for two or three years—with the ult that he was now very heavily, indeed rmingly, in debt.

His was not a nature, however, to be crush by either indifference or opposition. He h reached the parting of the ways. Nothing w to be hoped for from the court. He mu either abandon his enterprise or continue at his own risk and expense. He went Montreal and saw his partners. With infini patience he suffered their unjust reproache He was neglecting their interests, th grumbled. The profits were not what th had a right to expect. He thought too muc of the Western Sea and not enough of t beavers. He was a dreamer, and they we practical men of business.

What could La Vérendrye say that wou have weight with men of this stamp? Shou he tell them of the glory that would accr to his and their country by the discovery the Western Sea? At this they would on shrug their shoulders. Should he tell the of the unseen forces that drew him to th wonderful land of the West—where the cri clear air held an intoxicating quality unknow in the East; where the eye roamed on a on over limitless expanses of waving gree till the mind was staggered at the vastness the prospect; where the very largeness nature seemed to enter into a man and

rush out things petty and selfish? In doing
is he would be beating the air. They were
incapable of understanding him. They would
eem him mad.

Crushing down, therefore, both his en-
usiasm for the western land and his anger
their dulness, he met the merchants of
ontreal on their own commercial level. He
ld them that the posts he had established were
the very heart of the fur country; that the
ssiniboines and Crees had engaged to bring
rge quantities of beaver skins to the forts;
at the northern tribes were already turn-
g from the English posts of the Hudson's
ay Company in the Far North to the more
cessible posts of the French; that the
chly watered and wooded country between
aministikwia and Lake Winnipeg abounded
every description of fur-bearing animal;
at over the western prairies roamed the
ffalo in vast herds which seemed to blacken
e green earth as far as eye could reach. His
oquence over the outlook for trade proved
nvincing. As he painted the riches of the
'est in terms that appealed with peculiar
rce to these traders in furs, their hostility
elted away. The prospect of profit at the
te of a hundred per cent once more filled

them with enthusiasm. They agreed to equi
the expedition anew. It thus happened tha
when the intrepid explorer again turned his fac
towards the West, fortune seemed to smile onc
more. His canoes were loaded with a secon
equipment for the posts of the Western Se
Perhaps at that moment it seemed to hi
hardly to matter that he was in debt deep
than ever.

While in the East completing these arrang
ments, La Vérendrye took steps to ensure th
his youngest son, Louis, now eighteen years
age, should join the other members of th
family engaged in the work. The boy was
be taught how to prepare maps and plans,
that, when he came west in the following yea
he might be of material assistance to the e
pedition. The explorer would then have h
four sons and his nephew in the enterprise.

The hopeful outlook did not long endu
It was soon clear that La Vérendrye had aga
to meet trials which should try his mett
still more severely. Shortly after his retu
to Fort St Charles on the Lake of the Woo
his son Jean arrived from Fort Maurepas, wi
evil news indeed. La Jemeraye, his nephe
and chief lieutenant, whose knowledge of th
western tribes was invaluable, whose e

usiasm for the great project was only second
his own, whose patience and resourceful-
ess had helped the expedition out of many
tight corner—La Jemeraye was dead. He
ad remained in harness to the last, and had
boured day and night, in season and out of
ason, pushing explorations in every direction,
eeting and conciliating the Indian tribes,
uilding up the fur trade at the western posts.
hough sorely needing rest, he had toiled on
ncomplainingly, with no thought that he was
owing heroism, till at last his overtaxed
dy collapsed and he died almost on his feet—
e first victim of the search for the Western Sea.

Meanwhile the little garrison at Fort St
harles was almost at the point of starvation.
a Vérendrye had travelled ahead at such
pid speed that his supplies were still a long
ay in the rear when he reached the fort.
face of the pressing need, it was decided
send a party down to meet the boats at
aministikwia and to fetch back at once the
pplies which were most urgently required.
an, now twenty-three years of age, was
aced in charge of the expedition, and with
im went the Jesuit missionary, Father
ulneau, on his way down to Fort Michili-
ackinac. The day for departure was named,

and everything was made ready the nigh before so that there might be no delay in start ing early in the morning. The sun had hardl risen above the horizon and was yet filterin through the dense foliage of pine and ceda when Jean de La Vérendrye and his men em barked and pushed off from the shore. Th paddles dipped almost noiselessly, and the thre light canoes skimmed lightly over the surfac of the Lake of the Woods, followed by shout of farewell from the fort.

For a time the party skirted the shor Then they struck out boldly across the lak The melodies of the forest followed them fo a time, and then died away in the distanc Nothing was now to be heard but the dip o paddles and the soft swirl of eddies flyin backward from either side of the canoes. Th morning sun swept across the lake; a fai breeze stirred a ripple on the surface of th water. From far away came faintly the laug of a solitary loon. The men paddled strenu ously, with minds intent upon nothing mo serious than the halt for breakfast. The prie was lost in meditation. Jean de La Vérendry sat in the foremost canoe, with eyes aler scanning the horizon as the little flotilla dre rapidly across the lake.

At the same time, approaching from the opposite direction, was a fleet of canoes manned by a hundred savages, the fierce and implacable Sioux of the prairie. They had reached the Lake of the Woods by way of a stream that bore the significant name *The Road of War*. This was the war-path of the Sioux from their own country, south of what is now the province of Manitoba, to the country of the Chippewas and the Crees further east. Whenever the Sioux followed this route, they were upon no peaceful errand. As the Sioux entered the lake, a mist was rising slowly from the water; but before it completely hid their canoes a keen-sighted savage saw the three canoes of the French, who were about to land on the far side of an island out in the lake. Cautiously the Sioux felt their way across to the near side of the island, and landed unperceived. They glided noiselessly through the thick underbrush, and, as they approached the other shore, crept from tree to tree, finally wriggling snake-wise to the very edge of the thicket. Beneath them lay a narrow beach, on which some of the voyageurs had built a fire to prepare the morning meal. Others lay about, smoking and chatting idly. Jean de La Vérendrye sat a little apart, perhaps

recording the scanty particulars of the journe
The Jesuit priest walked up and down, deep
his breviary.

The circumstances could hardly have bee
more favourable for the sudden attack whi
the savages were eager to make. The Fren
had laid aside their weapons, or had left the
behind in the canoes. They had no reas
to expect an attack. They were at peace wi
the western tribes—even with those Ishmaelit
of the prairie, the Sioux. Presently a tw
snapped under the foot of a savage. You
La Vérendrye turned quickly, caught sight
a waving plume, and shouted to his me
Immediately from a hundred fierce throa
the war-whoop rang out. The Sioux leap
to their feet. Arrows showered down up
the French. Jean, Father Aulneau, and
dozen voyageurs fell. The rest snatched
their guns and fired. Several of the Sioux, w
had incautiously left cover, fell. The od
were, however, overwhelmingly against t
French. They must fight in the open, while t
Indians remained comparatively secure amo
the trees. The French made an attempt to rea
the canoes, but had to abandon it, for t
Sioux now completely commanded the a
proach and no man could reach the water aliv

The surviving French, now reduced to half lozen, retreated down the shore. With yells triumph the Sioux followed, keeping within elter of the trees. In desperation the voyageurs pped their guns and took to the water, ping to be able to swim to a neighbouring and. This was a counsel of despair, for unded and exhausted as they were, the t was impossible. When the Sioux rushed wn to the shore, they realized the plight of the ench, and did not even waste an arrow on m. One by one the swimmers sank beneath waves. After watching their tragic fate, savages returned to scalp those who had len at the camp. With characteristic ocity they hacked and mutilated the bodies. en, gathering up their own dead, they hastily reated by the way they had come.

For some time it was not known why the ux had made an attack, seemingly unpro- ked, upon the French. Gradually, however, leaked out that earlier in the year a party Sioux on their way to Fort St Charles on friendly visit had been fired upon by a ty of Chippewas. The Sioux had shouted lignantly, 'Who fire on us?' and the ippewas, in ambush, had yelled back with m humour, 'The French.' The Sioux re-

treated, vowing a terrible vengeance agai
the treacherous white men. Their opportun
came even sooner than they had expected.
trader named Bourassa, who had left Fort
Charles for Michilimackinac shortly before t
setting out of Jean de La Vérendrye and
party, had camped for the night on the ban
of the Rainy river. The following morning,
he was about to push off from the shore,
was surrounded by thirty canoes manned
a hundred Sioux. They bound him hand a
foot, tied him to a stake, and were about
burn him alive when a squaw who was w
him sprang forward to defend him. F
tunately for him his companion had been
Sioux maiden; she had been captured by
war party of Monsones some years befo
and rescued from them by Bourassa. S
knew of the projected journey of Jean de
Vérendrye. 'My kinsmen,' she now cri
'what are you about to do? I owe my l
to this Frenchman. He has done nothi
but good to me. Why should you destr
him? If you wish to be revenged for t
attack made upon you, go forward and you w
meet twenty-four Frenchman, with whom
the son of the chief who killed your people.'

Bourassa was too much frightened to oppo

statement. In his own account of what pened he is, indeed, careful to omit any ition of this particular incident. The Sioux ased Bourassa, after taking possession of arms and supplies. Then they paddled n to the lake, where they were only too cessful in finding the French and in making n the victims of the cruel joke of the ppewas.

his murder of his son was the most bitter v that had yet fallen upon La Vérendrye. he betrayed no sign of weakness. Not n the loss of his son was sufficient to turn back from his search for the Western Sea. have lost,' he writes simply to Maurepas, y son, the reverend Father, and my French- n, misfortunes which I shall lament all my ' Some comfort remained. The great lorer still had three sons, ready and willing himself to sacrifice their lives for the glory New France.

CHAPTER III

ACROSS THE PLAINS

For several years La Vérendrye had b
hearing wonderful accounts of a tribe
Indians in the West who were known as
Mandans. Wherever he went, among
Chippewas, the Crees, or the Assiniboi
some one was sure to speak of the Mand
and the stories grew more and more mar
lous. La Vérendrye knew that Indians w
very much inclined to exaggerate. They wo
never spoil a good story by limiting it to w
they knew to be true. They liked a joke
well as other people; and, when they fo
that the white men who visited them w
eager to know all about the country and
tribes of the far interior, they invented all s
of impossible stories, in which truth and fic
were so mingled that at length the explo
did not know what to believe.

Much that was told him by the Indi
concerning the Mandans La Vérendrye kn

d not possibly be true; he thought that
e of their stories were probably correct.
Indians said that the Mandans were
te like himself, that they dressed like Euro-
ns, wore armour, had horses and cattle,
ivated the ground, and lived in fortified
ns. Their home was described as being
towards the setting sun, on a great river
flowed into the ocean. La Vérendrye
w that the Spaniards had made settle-
ts on the western coast of America, and
thought that the mysterious strangers
ht perhaps be Spaniards. At any rate
seemed to be white men, and, if the
an stories were even partially true, they
ld be able to show him that way to
great water which it was the ambition
is life to find. His resolve, therefore,
inevitable. He would visit these white
ngers, whoever they might be; and he had
t hopes that they would be able to guide
to the object of his quest.

or some time, however, he was not able to
y out this intended visit to the Mandans.
death of his nephew La Jemeraye, followed
n after by the murder of his son Jean, upset
is plans for a time. Further, he had great
culty in keeping peace among the Indian

tribes. The Chippewas and the Crees, who h
always been friendly to the French, were i
dignant at the treacherous massacre of t
white men by the Sioux, and urged La Véré
drye to lead a war party against this enem
La Vérendrye not only refused to do this hi
self, but he told them that they must on
account go to war with the Sioux. He warn
them that their Great Father, the king
France, would be very angry with them if th
disobeyed his commands. Had they not kno
him so well, the Indians would have despis
La Vérendrye as a coward for refusing
revenge himself upon the Sioux for the dea
of his son; but they knew that, whatev
his reason might be, it was not due to a
fear of the Sioux. As time went on, th
thought that he would perhaps change
mind, and again and again they came to h
begging for leave to take the war-path. 'T
blood of your son,' they said, 'cries for
venge. We have not ceased to weep for h
and for the other Frenchmen who were sla
Give us permission and we will avenge th
death upon the Sioux.'

La Vérendrye, however, disregarding
personal feelings, knew that it would be fa
to all his plans to let the friendly Indians ha

ir way. An attack on the Sioux would be signal for a general war among all the ghbouring tribes. In that case his forts uld be destroyed and the fur trade would broken up. In the end, he and his men uld probably be driven out of the western ntry, and all his schemes for the discovery the Western Sea would come to nothing. was therefore of the utmost importance t he should remain where he was, in the ntry about the Lake of the Woods, until excitement among the Indians had quieted wn and there was no longer any immediate nger of war.

At length, in the summer of 1738, La rendrye felt that he could carry out his n of visiting the Mandans. He left one of sons, Pierre, in charge of Fort St Charles, d with the other two, François and Louis, forth on his journey to the West. Travelling wn the Winnipeg river in canoes, they pped for a few hours at Fort Maurepas, n crossed Lake Winnipeg and paddled up muddy waters of Red River to the mouth the Assiniboine, the site of the present city Winnipeg, then seen by white men for the st time. La Vérendrye found it occupied by a nd of Crees under two war chiefs. He landed,

pitched his tent on the banks of the Assin
boine, and sent for the two chiefs and r
proached them with what he had heard—th
they had abandoned the French posts and h
taken their furs to the English on Hudson Ba
They replied that the accusation was fals
that they had gone to the English during on
one season, the season in which the French h
abandoned Fort Maurepas after the death
La Jemeraye, and had thus left the Crees wi
no other means of getting the goods they r
quired. 'As long as the French remain
our lands,' they said, 'we promise you not
go elsewhere with our furs.' One of the chi
then asked him where he was now goi
La Vérendrye replied that it was his purp
to ascend the Assiniboine river in order
see the country. 'You will find yours
among the Assiniboines,' said the chief; 'a
they are a useless people, without intelligen
who do not hunt the beaver, and clothe the
selves only in the skins of buffalo. T
are a good-for-nothing lot of rascals a
might do you harm.' But La Vérendrye h
heard such tales before and was not to
frightened from his purpose. He took le
of the Crees, turned his canoes up the shall
waters of the Assiniboine river, and ascen

to where now stands the city of Portage Prairie. Here he built a fort, which he med Fort La Reine, in honour of the queen France.

While this was being done, a party of siniboines arrived. La Vérendrye soon nd, as he had expected, that the Crees ough jealousy had given the Assiniboines haracter which they did not deserve. With friendliness they welcomed the strangers d were overjoyed at the presents which French gave them. The most valued sents consisted of knives, chisels, awls, and er small tools. Up to this time these people d been dependent upon implements made stone and of bone roughly fashioned to serve ir purposes, and these implements were y crude and inferior compared with the rp steel tools of the white men.

While La Vérendrye had been occupied in lding Fort La Reine, one of his men, uvière, had been sent to the mouth of the siniboine to put up a small post for the es. He found a suitable place on the south k of the Assiniboine, near the point where it ers the Red, and here he built his trading t and named it Fort Rouge. This fort s abandoned in a year or two, as it was

soon found more convenient to trade wi
the Indians either at Fort Maurepas ne
the mouth of the Winnipeg, or at Fort
Reine on the Assiniboine. The memory
the fort is, however, preserved to this da
The quarter of Winnipeg in the vicinity of t
old fort is still known as Fort Rouge. T
memory of La Vérendrye is also preserved, f
a large school built near the site of the old fo
bears the name of the great explorer.

The completion of Fort La Reine freed
Vérendrye to make preparations for his journ
to the Mandans. He left some of his men
the fort and selected twenty to accompa
him on his expedition. To each of these f
lowers he gave a supply of powder and bulle
an ax, a kettle, and other things needful
the way. In later years horses were abunda
on the western prairie, but at that time neith
the French nor the Indians had horses, a
everything needed for the journey was carr
on men's backs.

Three days after leaving Fort La Rei
La Vérendrye met a party of Assiniboi
travelling over the prairie. He gave th
some small presents, and told them that
had built in their country a fort where t
could get all kinds of useful articles in

ıange for their furs and provisions. They emed delighted at having white men so near, ıd promised to keep the fort supplied with erything that the traders required.

A day or two afterwards several other dians appeared, from an Assiniboine village. ıey bore hospitable messages from the chiefs, ıo begged the white travellers to come to sit them. This it was difficult to do. The llage was some miles distant from the road ı which they were travelling, and already ey had lost much time because their guide as either too lazy or too stupid to take em by the most direct way to the Man-n villages on the banks of the Missouri. ill, La Vérendrye did not think it wise to sappoint the Assiniboines, or to offend them, ıce he might have to depend upon their pport in making his plans for further dis-veries. Accordingly, although it was now arly the middle of November, the very best ne of the year for travelling across the ains, he made up his mind to go to the ssiniboine village.

As the party drew near the village, a number young warriors came to meet them, and to l them that the Assiniboines were greatly eased to have them as guests. It is pos-

sible that the Assiniboines had heard of the presents which the French had given to some of their countrymen, and that they too hoped to receive knives, powder and bullets, things which they prized very highly. At any rate the explorer and his men received vociferous welcome when they entered the village. 'Our arrival,' says La Vérendrye, 'was hailed with great joy, and we were taken into the dwelling of a young chief, where everything had been made ready for our reception. They gave us and all our men very good cheer, and none of us lacked appetite.'

The following day La Vérendrye sent for the principal chiefs of the tribe, and gave to each of them a present of powder and ball, or knives and tobacco. He told them that if the Assiniboines would hunt beaver diligently and would bring the skins to Fort La Reine, they should receive in return everything that they needed. One of the chiefs made a speech in reply. 'We thank you,' he said, 'for the trouble you have taken to come to visit us. We are going to accompany you to the Mandans and then to see you safely back to your fort. We have already sent word to the Mandans that you are on your way to visit them, and the Mandans are delighted. We shall travel

AN ASSINIBOINE INDIAN

From a pastel by Edmund Morris

y easy marches, so that we may hunt by the
vay and have plenty of provisions.' The
xplorer was not wholly pleased to find that
he entire village was to accompany him, for
his involved still further delays on the journey.
t was necessary, however, to give no cause of
ffence; so he thanked them for their good-
vill, and merely urged that they should be
eady to leave as soon as possible and travel
vith all speed by the shortest road, as the
eason was growing late.

On the next morning they all set out to-
ether, a motley company, the French with
heir Indian guides and hunters accompanied
y the entire village of Assiniboines. La
'érendrye was astonished at the orderly way
n which these savages, about six hundred in
umber, travelled across the prairies. Every-
hing was done in perfect order, as if they
vere a regiment of trained soldiers. The
varriors divided themselves into parties; they
ent out scouts in advance to both the right and
he left, in order to keep watch for enemies and
lso to look out for buffalo and other game;
he old men marched in the centre with the
vomen and the children; and in the rear was
strong guard of warriors. If the scouts saw
uffalo ahead, they signalled to the rear-guard,

who crept round the herd on both sides until it was surrounded. They killed as many buffaloes as were needed to provision the camp and this completed the men's part of the work. It was the women who cut up the meat and carried it to the place where the company encamped for the night. The women, indeed, were the burden-bearers and had to carry most of the baggage. There were, of course, dogs in great numbers on such excursions, and these bore a part of the load. The men burdened themselves with nothing but their arms.

CHAPTER IV

THE MANDAN INDIANS

It was towards the end of November when La Vérendrye and his party reached the point where the Mandans had promised to meet them. When he arrived no one was on the spot; but presently, after he had encamped, a Mandan chief appeared with thirty followers. This chief advanced to La Vérendrye and presented him with Indian corn in the ear and with a roll of Indian tobacco. These were tokens of friendship. He told La Vérendrye how glad he and his countrymen were to welcome him to their villages, and begged him to consider the Mandans as his children.

La Vérendrye was surprised to find the appearance of the Mandans very much like that of the other tribes he had met. Stories told by the Crees and the Assiniboines had prepared him to find them of a different type, a type like that of the white men. In reality they looked like the Assiniboines and dressed

in the same fashion. Their clothing was scanty enough, for it consisted of only a buffalo robe worn from the shoulders. It was clear now that the Indians had been telling him not what was true but what they thought he would like to hear. 'I knew then,' he says shrewdly, 'that a heavy discount must be taken off everything that an Indian tells you.'

The Mandan chief invited La Vérendrye to be his guest in the nearest village, and the whole party made ready to continue their journey to that point. Then the chief made a speech to the Assiniboines, very friendly in tone, but artfully intended to make them uneasy and send them back home. He was really anxious to have the white men as his guests, but he was not at all anxious to have as guests and to be obliged to feed an entire village of Assiniboines; and so, thinking to get rid of them, he played on their well-known fear of the fiery Sioux. 'We thank you,' he said to them, 'for having brought the French to see us. They could not have arrived at a better time. The Sioux are on the war-path, and may be here at any moment. We know the valour and courage of the French, and also of the Assiniboines, and we hope that you will both help us to defend ourselves from the Sioux.'

La Vérendrye was at first as much imposed upon by this story as were the Assiniboines, but with a very different effect. They were dismayed, while he rejoiced at the opportunity of having at last a fair chance to avenge the cruel death of his son. After the speech, the Mandan chief took him aside, and explained that the alarm was merely a trick to get rid of the Assiniboines. They had not food enough at the village, he said, to satisfy such a hungry horde. But, to the surprise and disgust of the chief, the Assiniboines swallowed their fears and decided to go forward. At first, in their terror, the majority of the tribe had thought it better to turn back; but one of their old chiefs shamed them into a different course. 'Do not think,' he said, in scornful accents, 'that our Father [La Vérendrye] is a coward,' and he looked about him at the young Assiniboine warriors until each felt that he himself was branded as a coward. 'I know him,' he continued, 'better than you do, and I tell you that the Sioux cannot frighten him or any of his men. What will he think of us? At our request, he went out of his way to visit our village. We promised to conduct him to the Mandans, and to bring him safely back to his fort. And now you talk of

abandoning him, because you fear the Sioux. This must never be. Let those of you who are faint-hearted remain here in camp with the women; but let those who are without fear follow our father.' After this scornful eloquence there was no further talk of turning back.

Early on the following morning the camp broke up, and the whole party, French and Assiniboines and Mandans, marched across the plains towards the Mandan village. One can imagine the striking picture made up by the little party of white men in their picturesque costumes, surrounded by hundreds of half-naked savages. Had the Indians cared to exercise their power, they might have overwhelmed the French at any moment, but apparently they had no thought of doing so. Indeed it is quite true that the Indians of North America, when first they met white men treated them in nearly every case with the utmost friendship. Only after the Indians had been deceived or betrayed by some rascal among the white men did they learn to look upon them as enemies and become cruel and treacherous in dealing with them.

When La Vérendrye had travelled some distance from the camp, he found that the ba

containing his papers and many other things that would be required at the Mandan villages had been stolen by one of the Assiniboines. The thief, he also learned, had made off with his spoil. Instantly he sent two young warriors to secure him. The culprit was overtaken on the following day and the bag was recovered. The pursuers, however, instead of bringing it back to La Vérendrye, carried it on to their village to keep for him until his return. This singular conduct was due to their fear of the Sioux. The white man's bag would be safe at the Assiniboine village, but if they ventured to carry it back to La Vérendrye they were not so sure that either it or their own scalps would be safe at the Mandan village, with the ferocious Sioux hovering about. They did not know, of course, that the story of the Sioux was nothing but a hoax.

When La Vérendrye arrived within a few miles of the Mandan village, he found awaiting him another party of Mandans under two of their chiefs. They had lighted a camp-fire and had brought food for their guests. The chiefs welcomed him, led him to the place of honour beside the fire, and presented him with some of their native dishes—corn pounded into a paste and baked in the coals and something

that looked like a pumpkin pie without the pastry. The party smoked the pipe of peace and carried on a rather clumsy conversation by means of an interpreter. Then they resumed the journey and presently the Mandan village appeared in sight. If the explorer had been disappointed in finding the Mandans very similar in appearance to other western tribes, now at least he was gratified to find their buildings more elaborate and interesting than any he had before met with. The village was in fact a fort, apparently strong enough to protect the inhabitants from anything less powerful than artillery, of which of course they had no knowledge.

La Vérendrye, knowing that the Indians were always impressed by an imposing ceremony, now drew up his men in military order. He told his son François to march in front, bearing the flag of France. The Mandans, who looked upon the explorer as a great white chief, would not permit him to walk, but carried him upon their shoulders to the gate of the fort. Naturally he did not like this mode of travel, but he submitted to it for fear of displeasing his hosts. As they drew near the fort, he ordered his men to fire a volley as a salute to the Mandans. The

principal chiefs and warriors flocked out to meet him, and escorted him within their walls. When he marched in with his force, he saw the ramparts crowded with men, women, and children, who looked with astonishment upon the first white men they had ever seen. The principal chief of the tribe led La Vérendrye into his own lodge, and told him to consider it his home so long as he cared to remain in the village. When the two entered the lodge a crowd of Mandans followed and the place became suffocating. La Vérendrye told the crowd that they should have many opportunities later to see him, and after some difficulty he managed to have the place cleared.

This, however, was not effected before the unfortunate explorer had suffered another loss. He found that, in the confusion, an enterprising Indian had snatched the bag of presents from one of his men, and had made off with it. This was serious. The bag contained nearly all the gifts which he had brought for the chiefs of the Mandans, and he feared that these chiefs might now look coldly upon a white man who was unable to offer the customary presents. He explained what had happened to the principal chief. The chief seemed very much put out and told La Vérendrye for his

consolation that there were a good many rascals among the Mandans. Later, when the Assiniboines told the chief that he was himself the thief, he made the weak retort that one of his accusers might be the culprit. He promised to do his best to recover the bag, but La Vérendrye never saw it again.

In a day or two the Assiniboines took leave of La Vérendrye, and, much to the relief of the Mandans, prepared to return to their own village. Before their departure, the chief of the Assiniboines made a speech to the Mandans. 'We are leaving you our father,' he said. 'Take great care of him, and of all the French. Learn to know them, for they are wise; they know how to do everything. We love our father, and we also fear him. Do as we do.' The Mandans promised to take every care of the visitors. Everything the village contained, they said, was at their service for the asking. They begged that the white chief would count them among the members of his family. In compliance with their wish, La Vérendrye went through the usual ceremony of placing his hands on the heads of each of the chiefs. By this ceremony they became his 'children.' The Assiniboines, though they had taken leave of La Vérendrye

still delayed their departure. The Mandans, alarmed at the quantities of provisions their unwelcome guests required, again spread the report that the Sioux were approaching. Indeed, they said, several Mandan hunters had caught sight of them. This time the ruse succeeded. The Assiniboines, in a panic of alarm, marched off in great haste, lest the Sioux should intercept them before they could reach their own country.

Further troubles awaited La Vérendrye. The day following the departure of the Assiniboines he found that his Cree interpreter had gone off with them, although he had promised faithfully to remain. Even with this interpreter communications with the Mandans had been difficult. Before La Vérendrye's thoughts expressed in French could reach the Mandans, they had to pass through the medium of three other languages. One of La Vérendrye's sons, who understood Cree, was able to translate the explorer's questions into that language; then the Cree interpreter put the questions into Assiniboine; and several of the Mandans were sufficiently familiar with the language of the Assiniboines to complete the chain and express the ideas in their own tongue. With the Cree interpreter gone, the problem of com-

munication became much more difficult. Indeed, the only method that remained of carrying on conversation with the Mandans was by means of signs and gestures.

One of La Vérendrye's principal reasons for visiting the Mandans had been to find out from them as much as possible of the country which lay westward. He had hoped that they would be able to tell him something definite about the Western Sea, something of the best way of reaching it, and of the tribes he should meet on the way. He had had very little time to put questions before his interpreter deserted, and now he feared that he should have to turn back, because he had no means of getting information from the Mandans. With a great deal of difficulty he managed to learn that there were six Mandan villages or forts, some on one side of the Missouri, some on the other, and that farther down this river lived two other tribes, the Panana and the Pananis, who were at war with the Mandans although they had formerly been their fast friends. The Mandans told him by signs that as one went down the Missouri it became very wide, and that there a race dwelt who were white like himself. These people, they said, rode on horseback both when they hunted

nd when they went to war; they wore armour nd fought with lances and sabres, which ney handled with great skill. Their forts nd houses were of stone and they cultivated neir fields. A whole summer was necessary o reach their country from the Mandan illages.

La Vérendrye did not know how much of his to believe, and he was not even sure that e correctly understood what the Mandans ied to convey to him by signs. He was not all certain that the quarter in which these eople, so different from the Mandans, were id to live was the direction it was necessary take in order to reach the Western Sea. He d not know the truth, that the river by which e stood, the Missouri, emptied into the ississippi, and that the settlements spoken of the Mandans were probably the Spanish ttlements on the lower waters of the Mississippi. In order to extend his information, he ed every agency to learn as much as possible out the Mandans themselves. He sent his n François to another village near by, to amine it and to make further inquiries.

La Vérendrye himself made close observaons. He walked about the village in which was quartered, and examined the fortifica-

tions with a great deal of interest. There we about one hundred and thirty cabins with the walls; the streets and squares were la out regularly and were kept remarkably ne and clean. The smooth, wide ramparts we built of timber strengthened with cross-piece At each corner was a bastion, and the fort w surrounded by a ditch fifteen feet deep a from fifteen to eighteen feet wide. He w astonished to find such elaborate fortificatio among a savage tribe. Nowhere else in t New World had he seen anything of the kind

The dwellings of the Mandans were lar and comfortable; they were divided in several rooms and round the walls were be in the form of bunks. They had earth vessels in which they cooked their food. T women made very neat baskets of wicke work. The most remarkable thing abo these people was their prudence for the futu They had storerooms underground in whi they stored the dressed skins which they p served to trade with neighbouring tribes guns and ammunition; they had products Europe in use, though they had not yet co into direct contact with Europeans. In the storerooms they preserved also dried meat a grain for food in the winter. This foresig

impressed La Vérendrye. Most of the Indian tribes lived only in the present; when they had food they feasted upon it from morning to night, and when their provisions were gone they starved. The Mandans, however, kept on hand an ample supply of food, both for their own use and for that of strangers who might visit them. They amused themselves with rude sports. Among these La Vérendrye mentions a game of ball, but he does not describe it. Probably it was the game of lacrosse, which was played by many of the Indian tribes long before white men came to copy it from them.

After an absence of a few days, François de La Vérendrye returned from the village which he had visited. He had been warmly welcomed. He reported that the village was much larger than the one his father was living in, and that it was fortified in the same way. He had tried to question the Mandans of this village, but could make nothing out of their answers. They were so impatient to speak that they would constantly interrupt one another; when asked about one thing they would answer about another, because they did not really understand the question. The Mandans tried to make up in hospitality for

their inability to answer the Frenchman's questions. 'As we found that it was a waste of time to question them, we had to fall back on feasting the whole time we were with them and even then we could not attend nearly all the feasts to which we were invited.'

Early in December La Vérendrye decided to leave the Mandans and to make the long return journey to Fort La Reine. He now saw that, even if he could gain useful information from the Mandans about the nearest way to the Western Sea, it would be impossible to attempt the journey without a supply of presents for the tribes he should meet. To get these presents he must return to the fort, but he would leave two of his men with the Mandans for the winter, in order to learn the language. Then, when he returned he would have interpreters upon whom he could rely. When he told the Mandans by signs that he must leave them, they seemed sorry to lose him, and loaded him with provisions for his journey. They also promised to take care of his two men during his absence. He distributed among them all the small articles which he had in his stores, particularly the needles, which they highly prized. To the principal chief he gave a flag, and a lead tablet

MANDAN GIRLS

From Prichard's *Natural History of Man*

bearing an inscription to the effect that he had taken possession of the Missouri country in the name of the king of France. This inscription the chief promised to preserve as his greatest treasure.

Misfortune, however, still dogged the path of La Vérendrye. The day before that on which he had arranged to leave for the north, he was taken violently ill and for three days could not move from his bed. As ill luck would have it, his stock of medicines was in the bag which the Assiniboines had carried off to their village, so that he could do nothing for himself until he reached that place. About the middle of December he was a little better, and made up his mind to attempt the journey. When he and his men set out on their long march across the plains, it was bitterly cold. They had no means of making a fire, and were compelled to sleep at night on the open prairie in a half-frozen condition. We can imagine what La Vérendrye must have suffered before at last he reached the Assiniboine village, more dead than alive. After a few days' rest, he managed to make his way slowly to Fort La Reine. 'Never in my life,' he says, 'did I endure so much misery, pain, and fatigue as on that journey.'

While at the Assiniboine village La Vérendrye reproached the Indians with having lied to him about the Mandans, so as to lead him to believe that they were white men. They replied that he had misunderstood them; that they had not referred to the Mandans, but to another nation who lived farther down the river. One of the Assiniboines sprang up before him and exclaimed: 'I am the man best able to talk to you about this matter. Last summer I killed one of this nation of white men. He was covered with iron armour. If I had not killed his horse first, I should myself have been destroyed.' La Vérendrye asked him what he had brought back to prove his story. 'I had no chance to bring anything,' he said. 'When I was about to cut off his head, I saw some men on horseback who were trying to prevent my retreat, and I had much difficulty in making my escape. I had to throw away everything I had, even my blanket, and ran away naked.'

La Vérendrye thought that this man was probably telling the truth. What he said agreed fairly well with what he had himself heard from the Mandans, and was applicable probably to the Spaniards. But he was still as far away as ever from any direct information

about the road he should follow to reach the Western Sea, and this was first and always the thought that occupied his mind. He hoped that the men whom he had left behind to winter with the Mandans would be able to obtain from them the facts for which he was so anxiously waiting, and he looked forward eagerly to the spring, when they were to return to Fort La Reine with such news as they had been able to gather.

CHAPTER V

THE DISCOVERY OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

La Vérendrye had expected the return in the spring of 1739 of the two men whom he had left in the Mandan villages, but it was well into the autumn before they reached Fort La Reine. They brought good news, however. During the winter they had lost no opportunity of picking up Mandan words and phrases, until at last they were able to make themselves fairly well understood in that tongue. In the early summer a number of strange Indians had arrived from the West at the Mandan villages. They were on horseback, and brought with them many additional horses to carry their provisions and supplies. They came in order to trade embroidered buffalo hides and other skins with the Mandans for corn and beans which they did not grow in their own country.

The young Frenchmen learned from the Mandans that a band of these Indians had their home in the extreme West, towards the

setting sun. The Mandans also reported that in this country there were white men, who lived in brick and stone houses. In order to make further inquiries the two Frenchmen visited these Indians, and were fortunate enough to find among them a chief who spoke the language of the Mandans. He professed to speak also the language of the white men who dwelt in the West, but when the French heard this language they could make nothing of it. The chief declared that the strangers in his country wore beards and that in many other respects they resembled the white men. He declared that they prayed to the Master of Life in great buildings, where the Indians had seen them holding in their hands what, from their description, must have been books, the leaves like 'husks of Indian corn.' Their houses were described as standing near the shores of the great lake, whose waters rise and fall, and are unfit to drink. This would mean tides and salt water. If this Indian story was true, and there did not seem to be any reason for doubting it, La Vérendrye at last had something definite to guide him in his search for the Western Sea. He had but to find his way to the homes of these mysterious white strangers on its shores; and he hoped that the Indian

band who had visited the Mandans, and from whom his men had obtained these particulars, would be able and willing to provide him with competent guides.

For some reason La Vérendrye was unable himself to return to the country of the Mandans or to go still farther west. But in the spring of 1740 he sent his eldest son Pierre into that country in order to make further inquiries, and to obtain guides if possible for the projected journey to the Western Sea. Pierre spent the following winter with the Mandans, but he could not find the men he needed as guides, and so he returned to Fort La Reine in the summer of 1741.

Not discouraged by this failure, François, who was known as the Chevalier, set out for the Mandans in the spring of 1742, accompanied by one of his brothers and by two men from the fort. The journey was to prove momentous, but at first difficulties beset the explorers. When they arrived in the Mandan country they could find no sign of the Horse Indians, as the mounted Indians from the West were called. François and his brother waited long at the Mandan village with what patience they could summon. The month of May went by, then June, then

most of July, with still no sign of the missing band. Finally the brothers decided that, if they were to go farther west, they could wait no longer, for the season was advancing and it would soon be too late to do anything. At last they found among the Mandans two young men who agreed to lead them to the country of the Horse People. This would bring them to their hoped-for guides. Without a moment's delay they set out towards the south-west in search of the missing Indians.

They travelled for twenty days in a south-westerly direction, through what were afterwards known as the Bad Lands of the Little Missouri, a country unlike anything they had ever seen before. On every side they could see mounds and pillars of brilliantly-coloured earth, blue and crimson and green and yellow. So much were they struck with the singular spectacle that they would have liked to carry some of the coloured earth with them to show to their father on their return. But a long journey lay before them. They had to carry everything they needed on their backs, and it would have been folly to add to the load something that was useless for their immediate needs, something that they could neither eat nor wear.

About the beginning of August the party reached a mountain where the Mandans expected to find the Horse Indians so eagerly sought. But the Horse Indians had gone on a hunting expedition and had not yet returned; so François and his brother decided to wait for them. On the summit of the mountain they made a signal fire, and every day one of the explorers climbed up to the lookout to see if there were any signs of the Indians. At the foot of the mountain they built a small house in which they lived. Some of their time they spent in hunting to provision the camp, while waiting as patiently as they could for the Horse Indians to return from their hunting.

At last, on September 14, a smoke was seen rising in the south-western sky. One of the men was sent to investigate, and he found not the Horse Indians but a band known to the Mandans as the Good-looking Indians. Difficulties multiplied. One of the Mandan guides had already deserted them to go back to the Missouri, and the other now told the brothers that he must leave them. He was prompted by fear. The Good-looking Indians were not on friendly terms with the Mandans, and, although they had not offered to do him any harm, he was afraid to remain near these enemies.

After the Mandan had gone back, the brothers La Vérendrye managed to explain to the Good-looking Indians by signs that they were seeking the Horse Indians and asked for guides to one of the camps of these Indians. One of the Good-looking Indians said he knew the way, and they set out under his guidance; but they became anxious on finding that they were still travelling in the same direction as before, for this did not seem to be a very direct road to the Western Sea. Still, they had fixed their hopes on the Horse Indians as the people able to lead them there, and the most urgent thing to do was to find some members of that tribe, even though they had to go a long way out of their course to do so.

On the second day after they left the camp of the Good-looking Indians, they met a party of another tribe known as the Little Foxes, who were very friendly. The explorers gave them some small presents, and made them understand that they were seeking the Horse Indians, who had promised to show them the way to the sea. 'We will take you to the Horse Indians,' they said, and their whole party turned about and joined the French. But these new guides also, to the disgust of François La Vérendrye,

still marched towards the south-west. 'I felt sure,' he said, 'that in this direction we should never find the Western Sea.' However, there was nothing to do but to go forward, and to trust to better luck after they reached the Horse Indians.

After tramping on for many days they came at last to an encampment of the Horse Indians. These people, just then, were in great trouble. They had been attacked not long before by a war party of the Snake Indians; many of their bravest warriors had been killed, and many of their women had been carried into captivity. When asked the way to the sea these Indians now declared that none of them had ever been there, for the very good reason that the country of the fierce Snake Indians must be crossed to reach it. They said that a neighbouring tribe, the Bow Indians, might be able to give some information, as they either themselves traded with the white men of the sea-coast, or were on friendly terms with other tribes who had been down to the sea. These Bow Indians, they added, were the only tribe who dared to fight against the Snake Indians, for they were under the leadership of a wise and skilful chief, who had more than once led his tribe to victory against these dangerous enemies. A guid

was found to lead the explorers to the Bow Indians, and they went off once more, still travelling south-westerly, until at length, on November 21, they came in sight of the camp of the Bows. It was a huge camp, much larger than any the explorers had yet visited. Everywhere they could see numbers of horses, asses, and mules—animals unknown among the northern tribes.

When they reached the camp the chief of the Bows met them and at once took them to his own lodge. Nothing could be more friendly or polite than his treatment of the white travellers. In fact, as François said, he did not seem to have the manners of a savage. 'Up to that time we had always been very well received in the villages we had visited, but what we had before experienced in that way was nothing in comparison with the gracious manners of the head chief of the Bows. He took as much care of all our belongings as if they had been his own.' With him François and his brother remained for some time; and, very soon, through the kindness of the chief, they learnt enough of the language to make themselves understood.

The explorers had many interesting talks with this friendly chief. They asked him if he

knew anything about the white people who lived on the sea-coast. 'We know them,' he replied, 'through what has been told us by prisoners of the Snake tribe. We have never been to the sea ourselves.' 'Do not be surprised,' he continued, 'to see so many Indians camped round us. Word has been sent in all directions to our people to join us here. In a few days we shall march against the Snakes; and if you will come with us, we will take you to the high mountains that are near the sea. From their summits you will be able to look upon it.' The brothers La Vérendrye were overjoyed to hear such encouraging news, and agreed that one of them should accompany the Bow Indians on their expedition against the Snakes. It seemed almost too good to be true that they might be actually within reach of the sea, the goal towards which they and their father had been struggling for so many years. In fact, it proved too good to be true. Whether they had misunderstood the chief, or whether he was merely speaking from hearsay, certainly the view was far from correct that the mountains which they were approaching lay near the sea. These mountains, not far off, were the Rocky Mountains. Even if the explorers should succeed in reaching and in crossing them at

this point, there would still be hundreds of miles of mountain forest and plain to traverse before their eyes could rest on the waters of the Pacific ocean. François and his brother never knew this, however, for they were not destined to see the western side of the mountains.

The great war party of the Bows, consisting of more than two thousand fighting men, with their families, started out towards the Snake country in December, the comparatively mild December of the south-western plains. The scene must have been singularly animated as this horde of Indians, with their wives and children, their horses and dogs, and the innumerable odds and ends that made up their camp equipage, moved slowly across the plains. François was too full of his own affairs to describe the odd appearance of this native army in the journal which he wrote of the expedition, but fortunately the historian Francis Parkman lived for some time among these tribes of the western plains, and he has given us a good idea of what such an Indian army must have looked like on the march. 'The spectacle,' he says, 'was such as men still young have seen in these western lands, but which no man will see again. The vast plain

swarmed with the moving multitude. Th
tribes of the Missouri and the Yellowstone ha
by this time abundance of horses, the best o
which were used for war and hunting, and th
others as beasts of burden. These last wer
equipped in a peculiar manner. Several of th
long poles used to frame the teepees, or lodge
were secured by one end to each side of a rud
saddle, while the other end trailed on th
ground. Crossbars lashed to the poles, jus
behind the horse, kept them three or four fe
apart, and formed a firm support, on which wa
laid, compactly folded, the buffalo-skin cove
ing of the lodge. On this, again, sat a moth
with her young family, sometimes stowed f
safety in a large, open, willow basket, with th
occasional addition of some domestic pet—suc
as a tame raven, a puppy, or even a small be
cub. Other horses were laden in the sam
manner with wooden bowls, stone hammer
and other utensils, along with stores of dri
buffalo meat packed in cases of raw hi
whitened and painted. Many of the i
numerable dogs—whose manners and appea
ance strongly suggested their relatives t
wolves, to whom, however, they bore a mor
grudge—were equipped in a similar way, wi
shorter poles and lighter loads. Bands

naked boys, noisy and restless, roamed the prairie, practising their bows and arrows on any small animal they might find. Gay young squaws—adorned on each cheek with a spot of ochre or red clay and arrayed in tunics of fringed buckskin embroidered with porcupine quills—were mounted on ponies, astride like men; while lean and tattered hags—the drudges of the tribe, unkempt and hideous—scolded the lagging horses or screeched at the disorderly dogs, with voices not unlike the yell of the great horned owl. Most of the warriors were on horseback, armed with round white shields of bull hide, feathered lances, war clubs, bows, and quivers filled with stone-headed arrows; while a few of the elders, wrapped in robes of buffalo hide, talked along in groups with a stately air, chatting, laughing, and exchanging unseemly jokes.'

On the first day of January 1743, the Indians, accompanied by the brothers La Vérendrye and their Frenchmen, came within sight of the mountains. Rising mysteriously in the distance were those massive crags, those silent, snow-capped peaks, upon which, as far as we know, Europeans had never looked before. The party of Frenchmen and Indians pressed

on, for eight days, towards the foot of th mountains. Then, when they had come withi a few days' journey of the place where the expected to find the Snakes, they altered thei mode of advance. It was now decided to leav the women and children in camp under a sma guard, while the warriors pushed on in the hop of surprising the Snakes in their winter cam near the mountains. While his brother re mained in camp to look after the baggage o the party, which the Indians would probabl pillage if left unguarded, François and hi two Frenchmen went forward with the wa party; and four days later they arrived a the foot of the mountains, the first European who had ever put foot on those majesti slopes. François gazed with the keenes interest at the lofty summits, and longed t climb them to see what lay beyond.

Meanwhile he was obliged to share in vivid human drama. The chief of the Bow had sent scouts forward to search for the cam of the Snakes, and these scouts now reappeare They had found the camp, but the enemy ha fled; and had, indeed, gone off in such hurry that they had abandoned their lodg and most of their belongings. The effect pr duced by this news was singular. Instead

rejoicing because the dreaded Snakes had fled before them, which was evidently the case, the Bow warriors at once fell into a panic. The Snakes, they cried, had discovered the approach of their enemies, and must have gone back to attack the Bow camp and capture the women and children. The great chief tried to reason with his warriors; he pointed out that the Snakes could not know anything about the camp, that quite evidently they had been afraid to meet the Bows and had fled before them. But it was all to no purpose. The Bows would not listen to reason; they were sure that the Snakes had played them a cunning trick and that they should hasten back as speedily as possible to save their families. The result was characteristic of savage warfare. The Indian army that had marched a few days earlier in good order to attack the enemy now fled back along the trail in a panic, each man for himself.

It was in these ignominious circumstances that François La Vérendrye, having reached the foot of the Rocky Mountains, was obliged to turn back without going farther, leaving the mystery of the Great Sea still unsolved. François rode by the side of the disgusted chief and the two Frenchmen followed behind. Presently François noticed that his men had

disappeared. He galloped back for some miles and found them resting their horses on the banks of a river. While he talked with them his quick eye detected the approach of a party of Snake Indians from a neighbouring wood. They were covering themselves with their shields, and were evidently bent on an attack. François and his men loaded their guns and waited until the Indians were well within range. Then they took aim and fired. The Snakes knew little or nothing about firearms, and when one or two of their number fell before the volley, they fled in disorder.

There was still danger of an attack by a larger band of the enemy, and the Frenchmen remained on guard where they were until nightfall. Then, under cover of darkness, they attempted to follow the trail of the Bows. But the ground was so dry and hard at that season of the year that they found it impossible to pick up the trail of their friends. For two days they wandered about. Skill and good fortune, however, aided them, and at last they arrived at the camp of the Bows, tired and half starved. The chief had been anxious at the disappearance of his white guests, and was overjoyed at their safe return. It is almost needless to say that the panic-stricken warriors

had found their camp just as they had left it; no one had heard or seen anything of the Snakes; and the warriors were forced to submit to the jeers of the squaws for their failure to come even within sight of the enemy.

François, his brother, and their two men accompanied the Bows for some days on their homeward journey. They found, however, that the Bows were travelling away from the course which they wished to follow, and so decided to leave them and to turn towards the Missouri river. The chief of the Bows seemed to feel genuine regret at bidding farewell to his French guests, and he made them promise to return and pay him another visit in the following spring, after they had seen their father at Fort La Reine. On the long journey to this point the three Frenchmen now set out across the limitless frozen prairie.

About the middle of March they came upon a party of strange Indians known as the People of the Little Cherry. They were returning from their winter's hunting, and were then only two days' journey from their village on the banks of the Missouri. Like all the other tribes, the People of the Little Cherry received the Frenchmen with perfect friendliness. The party lingered with these Indians in their

village until the beginning of April, and François spent most of his time learning their language. This he found quite easy, perhaps because he had already picked up a fair knowledge of the language of some of the neighbouring tribes, and it proved not unlike that of the Little Cherry Indians. François found in the village an Indian who had been brought up among the Spaniards of the Pacific Coast, and who still spoke their language as readily as he spoke his mother tongue. He questioned him eagerly about the distance to the Spanish settlements and the difficulties of the way. The man replied that the journey was long. It was also, he said, very dangerous, because it must be through the country of the Snake Indians. This Indian assured François that another Frenchman lived in the country where they were, in a village distant about three days' journey. Naturally this surprised François and his brother. They thought of going to visit him; but their horses were badly in need of a rest after the long trip from the mountains, and must be kept fresh for the journey to the Mandan villages. They therefore sent instead a letter to the Frenchman, asking him to visit them at the village of the Little Cherries, or, if that was not possible,

at least to send them an answer. No answer came, and we may well doubt whether such a Frenchman existed. Before leaving the country, La Vérendrye buried on the summit of a hill a tablet of lead, with the arms and inscription of the French king. This was to take possession of the country for France. He also built a pyramid of stones in honour of the governor of Canada.[1]

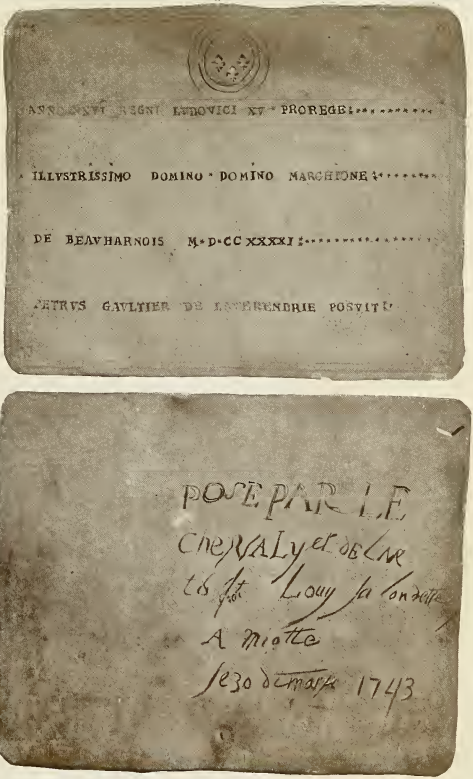
About the beginning of April, when the horses were in good condition and all preparations had been made for the journey, the explorers said good-bye to the People of the Little Cherry and set out for the Mandan villages. Like the Bow Indians, the Little Cherries seemed sorry to lose them and begged them to come back. In return for the kindness and hospitality he had received, La Vérendrye distributed some presents and promised to visit them again when he could.

On May 18 the travellers reached the

[1] This tablet remained buried where it was deposited for 170 years. In March 1913 it was found by a young girl on the west bank of the Missouri river opposite the city of Pierre, S. Dakota, thus bearing testimony to the trustworthiness of François La Vérendrye's journal, from which this chapter was written before the tablet was discovered. Photographs of the tablet were made by W. O'Reilly of Pierre and published in the *Manitoba Free Press* and are reproduced in this book by courtesy of Charles N. Bell, F.R.G.S., of Winnipeg.

Mandan villages and were welcomed as if they had returned from the dead. Their long absence had led the Mandans to conclude that they had been killed by some unfriendly Indians, or that some fatal accident had happened on the way. They had intended to rest for some time at the Mandan villages, but they found that a party of Assiniboines was going to Fort La Reine, and they determined to travel with them. The Assiniboines had in fact already left on their journey, but the Frenchmen overtook them at their first camp.

This latter part of the journey had its own excitements and perils. On the last day of May, as they were travelling over the prairie, they discovered a party of Sioux waiting in ambush. The Sioux had expected to meet a smaller party, and now decided not to fight. At the same time, they were too proud to run away before the despised Assiniboines, even though they numbered only thirty and the Assiniboines numbered more than a hundred. They retreated with dignified slowness, facing around on the Assiniboines from time to time, and driving them back when they ventured too near. But when they recognized the Frenchmen, mounted on horses and armed with their deadly muskets, their attitude changed; they



TABLET DEPOSITED BY LA VÉRENDRYE, 1743

Obverse and reverse sides

From photographs lent by Charles N. Bell, F.R.G.S., President of the Manitoba Historical and Scientific Society

forgot their dignity and made off as fast as they could go. Even with heavy odds against them these virile savages managed to wound several of the Assiniboines, while they lost only one man, who mistook the enemy for his friends and was captured. The brothers La Vérendrye finally reached Fort La Reine on July 2, to the great delight of their father, who had grown anxious on account of their long absence. They had been away from the fort for one year and eighty-four days.

CHAPTER VI

LA VÉRENDRYES' LATTER DAYS

DURING all this time the elder La Vérendrye had been working at other plans for discovery and for trade in the Far West. In the year 1739, on his return from the first visit to the Mandans, he had sent his son François to build a fort on the Lake of the Prairies, now known as Lake Manitoba. When young La Vérendrye had built this fort, he went farther north to Cedar Lake, near the mouth of the Saskatchewan river, and there built another fort. The purpose was to intercept the trade of the Indians with the English on Hudson Bay. For over half a century the Indians of this region had taken their furs down the rivers leading from Lake Winnipeg to the trading-posts of the Hudson's Bay Company on the shores of the Bay, but now the French intended to offer them a market nearer home and divert to themselves this profitable trade. The first of their new forts was named Fort Dauphin, and the one on Cedar Lake was called Fort Bourbon.

Having built Fort Bourbon, François La Vérendrye had ascended the Saskatchewan river as far as the Forks, where the north and south branches of that great river join. Here he met a number of Crees, whom he questioned as to the source of the Saskatchewan. They told him that it came from a great distance, rising among lofty mountains far to the west, and that beyond those mountains they knew of a great lake, as they called it, the water of which was not good to drink. The mountains were of course the Rocky Mountains, and the waters of the great lake which the Crees spoke of were the salt waters of the Pacific ocean. François La Vérendrye had continued his work of building forts. Shortly after building Fort Bourbon, he built Fort Paskoyac, on the Saskatchewan, at a place now known as the Pas, between Cedar Lake and the Forks. It is interesting to know that a railway has just been completed to this place, and that it is to be continued from there to the shores of Hudson Bay. How this modern change would have startled the old fur-traders! Even if they could have dreamed of anything so wonderful as a railway, we can imagine their ridicule of the idea that some day men should travel from the East to the far-off

shores of the Saskatchewan in two or three days, a trip which cost them months of wearisome paddling.

In carrying on his work in the West, La Vérendrye had to face difficulties even greater than those caused by the hard life in the wilderness. His base of supplies was in danger. He had many enemies in Canada, who took advantage of his absence in the West to prejudice the governor against him. They even sent false reports to the king of France, saying that he was spending his time, not in searching for a way to the Western Sea, but in making money out of the fur trade. This was not true. Not only was he making no money out of the fur trade, but, as we have seen, he was heavily in debt because of the enormous cost of carrying on his explorations. For a time, however, the truth did not help him. The tales told by his enemies were believed, and he was ordered to return to Montreal with his sons. He and they withdrew from their work in the West, left behind their promising beginnings, and returned to the East. Never again, as it happened, was the father to resume his work. Another officer, M. de Noyelle, was sent to the West to continue the work of exploration. Noyelle spent two years in the West without

adding anything to the information La Vérendrye had gained. By that time a natural reaction had come in favour of La Vérendrye, and the acting governor of Canada, the Marquis de La Galissonière, decided to put the work of exploration again in charge of La Vérendrye and his sons. In recognition of his services he was given the rank of captain and was decorated with the Cross of St Louis.

While these events were ripening, the years passed, and not until 1749 was La Vérendrye restored to his leadership in the West. Though now sixty-four years old, he was overjoyed at the prospect. Not only was he permitted to continue his search for the Western Sea; the quality of his work was recognized, for the governor and the king had at last understood that, instead of seeking his own profit in his explorations, as his enemies had said, he had the one object of adding to the honour and glory of his country. He made preparations to start from Montreal in the spring of 1750, and intended to push forward as rapidly as possible to Fort Bourbon, or Fort Paskoyac, where he would spend the winter. In the spring of the following year he would ascend the Saskatchewan river and make his way over the mountains to the shores of the Western

Sea, the Pacific ocean as we know it to-day. But the greatest of all enemies now blocked his way. La Vérendrye was taken ill while making his preparations for the expedition, and before the close of the year 1749 he had set out on the journey from which no man returns.

After the death of La Vérendrye, his sons made preparations to carry out his plan for reaching the Western Sea by way of the Saskatchewan river. They had the same unselfish desire to bring honour to their king and to add new territories to their native land. Moreover, this project, which their father had had so much at heart, had become now for them a sacred duty. To their dismay, however, they soon found that the promise made to their father did not extend to themselves. Another officer, Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, was appointed by the governor of Canada to carry on the search for the Western Sea. They had spent years of toil and discomfort in the wilderness and endured countless hardships and dangers. They had carefully studied the languages, manners, and customs of the Indian tribes, and they had found out by hard experience what would be the best means of completing their discovery. Yet now they were thrown aside in

THE MARQUIS DE LA GALISSONIÈRE

From an engraving in the Château de Ramezay

favour of an officer who had never been in the Far West and who knew nothing of the conditions he would there be compelled to meet.

They could at least appeal for justice. In a last attempt to obtain this for himself and his brothers, François de La Vérendrye wrote this letter to the king's minister:

> The only resource left to me is to throw myself at the feet of your Lordship and to trouble you with the story of my misfortunes. My name is La Vérendrye; my late father is known here [in Canada] and in France by the exploration for the discovery of the Western Sea to which he devoted the last fifteen years of his life. He travelled and made myself and my brothers travel with such vigour that we should have reached our goal, if he had had only a little more help, and if he had not been so much thwarted, especially by envy. Envy is still here, more than elsewhere, a prevailing passion against which one has no protection. While my father, my brothers, and myself were exhausting ourselves with toil, and while we were incurring a crushing burden of expense, his steps and ours were represented as directed only towards [our own gain by] the finding of

beaver; the outlay he was forced to incur was described as dissipation; and his narratives were spoken of as a pack of lies. Envy as it exists in this country is no half envy; its principle is to calumniate furiously in the hope that if even half of what is said finds favour, it will be enough to injure. In point of fact, my father, thus opposed, had to his sorrow been obliged more than once to return and to make us return because of the lack of help and protection. He has even been reproached by the court [for not giving adequate reports upon his work]; he was, indeed, more intent on making progress than on telling what he was doing until he could give definite statements. He was running into debt, he failed to receive promotions. Yet his zeal for his project never slackened, persuaded as he was that sooner or later his labours would be crowned with success and recompense.

At the time when he was most eager in the good work, envy won the day, and he saw the posts he had established and his own work pass into other hands. While he was thus checked in his operations, the reward of a plentiful harvest of beaver skins [which he had made possible] went

to another rather than himself. Yet [in spite of this profitable trade the good work slackened] ; the posts, instead of multiplying, fell into decay, and no progress was made in exploration ; it was this, indeed, which grieved him the most.

Meanwhile the Marquis de la Galissonière arrived in the country [to act as governor]. In the hubbub of contradictory opinions that prevailed, he came to the conclusion that the man who had pursued such discoveries at his own charge and expense, without any cost to the king, and who had gone into debt to establish useful posts, merited better fortune. Apart from advancing the project of discovery, practical services had been rendered. There was [the marquis reported] a large increase of beaver in the colony, and four or five posts had been well-established, and defended by forts as good as could be made in countries so distant ; a multitude of savages had been turned into subjects of the king ; some of them, in a party which I commanded, showed an example to our own domiciled savages by striking at the Anniers Indians, who are devoted to England. Progress [the marquis concluded] could be hastened and rendered

more efficacious only by allowing the work to remain in the same hands.

Thus it was that the Marquis de la Galissonière was good enough to explain his position. No doubt he expressed himself to the court to a similar effect, for in the following year, that is to say last year, my father was honoured with the Cross of St Louis, and was invited to continue with his sons the work which he had begun. He made arrangements with great earnestness for starting on his expedition; he spared nothing that might make for success; he had already bought and prepared all the goods to be used in trade; he inspired me and my brothers with his own ardour. Then in the month of December last death carried him off.

Great as was my grief at the time, I could never have imagined or foreseen all that I lost in losing him. When I succeeded to his engagements and his responsibilities, I ventured to hope that I should succeed to the same advantages. I had the honour to write on the subject to the Marquis de la Jonquière [then governor], informing him that I had recovered from an indisposition from which I had been suffering, and which might

serve as a pretext to some one seeking to supplant me. His reply was that he had chosen Monsieur de Saint-Pierre to go to the Western Sea.

I started at once for Quebec from Montreal, where I then was; I represented the situation in which I was left by my father; I declared that there was more than one post in the direction of the Western Sea and that I and my brothers would be delighted to be under the orders of Monsieur de Saint-Pierre, and that we could content ourselves, if necessary, with a single post, and that the most distant one; I stated that we even asked no more than leave to go on in advance [of the new leader], so that while we were pushing the work of exploration, we might be able to help ourselves by disposing of my father's latest purchases and of what remained to us in the posts. We should in this have the consolation of making our utmost efforts to meet the wishes of the court.

The Marquis de la Jonquière, though he felt the force of my representations, and, as it seemed to me, was touched by them, told me at last that Monsieur de Saint-Pierre did not wish for either me or my brothers. I asked what would become of the debts we

had incurred. Monsieur de Saint-Pierre, however, had spoken, and I could not obtain anything. I returned to Montreal with this not too consoling information. There I offered for sale a small piece of property, all that I had inherited from my father. The proceeds of this sale served to satisfy my most urgent creditors.

Meanwhile the season was advancing. There was now the question of my going as usual to the rendezvous arranged with my hired men, so as to save their lives [by bringing provisions], and to secure the stores which, without this precaution, would probably be pillaged and abandoned. In spite of Monsieur de Saint-Pierre, I obtained permission to make this trip, and I was subject to conditions and restrictions such as might be imposed on the commonest voyageur. Nevertheless, scarcely had I left when Monsieur de Saint-Pierre complained of my action and alleged that this start of mine before him injured him to the amount of more than ten thousand francs. He also accused me, without the slightest reserve, of having loaded my canoe beyond the permission accorded me.

The accusation was considered and my canoe was pursued; had I been overtaken

at once, Monsieur de Saint-Pierre would have been promptly reassured. He overtook me at Michilimackinac, and if I can believe what he said, he now saw that he had been in the wrong in acting as he did, and was vexed with himself for not having taken me and my brothers with him. He expressed much regret to me and paid me many compliments. It may be that this is his usual mode of acting; but it is difficult for me to recognize in it either good faith or humanity.

Monsieur de Saint-Pierre might have obtained all that he has obtained; he might have made sure of his interests and have gained surprising advantages; and have taken [as he desired] some relative with him while not shutting us out entirely. Monsieur de Saint-Pierre is an officer of merit, and I am only the more to be pitied to find him thus turned against me. Yet in spite of the favourable impressions he has created on different occasions, he will find it difficult to show that in this matter he kept the main interest [that of discovery] in view, and that he conformed to the intentions of the court and respected the kindly disposition with which the Marquis de la Galissonière honours us. Before

such a wrong could be done to us, he must have injured us seriously in the opinion of Monsieur de la Jonquière, who himself is always disposed to be kind.

None the less am I ruined. My returns for this year were only half collected, and a thousand subsequent difficulties make the disaster complete; with credit gone in relation both to my father and to myself, I am in debt for over twenty thousand francs; I remain without funds and without patrimony. Moreover, I am a simple ensign of the second grade; my elder brother has only the same rank as myself, while my younger brother is only a junior cadet.

Such is the net result of all that my father, my brothers, and I have done. The one who was murdered some years ago was not the most unfortunate of us. His blood does not count in our behalf. Unless Monsieur de Saint-Pierre becomes imbued with better sentiments and communicates them to the Marquis de la Jonquière, all my father's toils and ours fail to serve us, and we must abandon what has cost us so much. We certainly should not have been and should not be useless to Monsieur de Saint-Pierre. I explained to him fully how I believed I could serve him; clever as he

may be, and inspired with the best intentions, I venture to say that by keeping us away he is in danger of making many mistakes and of getting often on the wrong track. It is something gained to have gone astray, but to have found out your error; we think that now we should be sure of the right road to reach the goal, whatever it may be. It is our greatest cause of distress to find ourselves thus snatched away from a sphere of action in which we were proposing to use every effort to reach a definite result.

Deign therefore, Monseigneur, to judge the cause of three orphans. Our misfortune is great, but is it without remedy? There are in the hands of your Lordship resources of compensation and of consolation, and I venture to hope for some benefit from them. To find ourselves thus excluded from the West would be to find ourselves robbed in the most cruel manner of our heritage. We should have had all that was bitter and others all that was sweet.

This eloquent appeal of François fell upon unheeding ears; the appointment of his rival was confirmed. The only grace he could obtain was leave to take to the West a small portion of the supplies for which he and his

brothers had already paid, and to return with the furs his men had collected and brought down to Michilimackinac. Thus ended, sadly enough, the devoted efforts of this remarkable family of explorers to complete the long search for a route overland to the Pacific ocean. The brothers La Vérendrye, ruined in purse and denied opportunity, fell into obscurity and were forgotten.

It remains only to tell briefly of the attempts of Saint-Pierre and his men to carry out the same great project. In obedience to the governor's instructions, Saint-Pierre left Montreal in the spring of 1750. He paddled up the Ottawa, and then through Lake Nipissing, and down the French river to Georgian Bay. He crossed Lake Huron to Michilimackinac, where he remained for a short time to give his men a rest. Then he pushed on to Grand Portage, where he spent some time in talking to the Indians. In spite of his ungenerous treatment of the sons of La Vérendrye, Saint-Pierre was a brave and capable soldier; but he knew very little of the hardships of western exploration, or of the patience needed in dealing with Indians. He grumbled bitterly about the difficulties and hardships of the portages, which La Véren-

lrye had taken as a matter of course; and, nstead of treating the Indians with patience ınd forbearance, he lost no opportunity to ıarangue and scold them. We need not vonder, therefore, that the natives, who had ooked up to La Vérendrye as a superior being, oon learned to dislike the overbearing Saint-Pierre, and would do nothing to help him in ıis attempts at exploration.

Saint-Pierre visited Fort St Charles; he pent the winter at Fort Maurepas; in the pring of 1751 he went on to Fort La Reine. Meanwhile he had sent Niverville, a young fficer of his party, to the Saskatchewan river, vith instructions to push his discoveries vestward beyond the farthest point reached y La Vérendrye. Winter had set in before Iiverville set out on his long journey, and he ravelled over the snow and ice with snow-hoes, dragging his provisions on toboggans. Ie knew nothing of the Indian method of arnessing dogs to their toboggans, and he and is men dragged the toboggans themselves. Ie travelled slowly across Lake Winnipeg, over ough ice and through deep snowdrifts, with o protection from the bitter winds. So great ere the hardships that, in the end, he was ompelled to abandon some of the heavier

supplies and provisions. Before he and hi men reached Fort Paskoyac they were at th point of starvation. During the last few day they had nothing to eat but a few small fis caught through holes in the ice.

Niverville was taken seriously ill, and ha to remain at Fort Paskoyac, while some o his men in the spring of 1751 ascended th Saskatchewan in canoes. These men, we ar told, paddled up the river to the foot of th Rocky Mountains, where they built a fort named Fort La Jonquière, in honour of th governor. Later in the year Niverville fol lowed his men up the river. At Fort L Jonquière he met a party of Western Indians who told him that in the course of a war ex pedition they had encountered a number o Indians of a strange tribe carrying loads o beaver skins. These strange Indians told th Frenchmen that they were on their way ove the Rocky Mountains to trade their furs wit white men on the sea-coast. For some reason either through lack of supplies or because h did not possess the courage and enthusiasm which had carried the La Vérendryes throug so many difficulties, Niverville made no effo to cross the mountains. This attempt to reac the Western Sea ended, so far as French ex

plorers were concerned, at Fort La Jonquière. All the toils and hardships of the French explorers ended in failure to achieve the great end at which they aimed. Members of another race reaped the coveted reward. Many years later a Scottish-Canadian explorer, Alexander Mackenzie, realized La Vérendrye's dream by successfully crossing the Rocky Mountains and forcing his way through the difficult country that lay beyond, until at last he stood upon the shores of the Pacific ocean.

Meanwhile Saint-Pierre had remained at Fort La Reine, leaving the work of exploration to his young lieutenant, Niverville. One incident of his life there remains to be described before we close this story of the search for the Western Sea. It cannot be better told than in Saint-Pierre's own narrative:

> On February 22, 1752 [he says], about nine o'clock in the morning, I was at this post with five Frenchmen. I had sent the rest of my people, consisting of fourteen persons, to look for provisions, of which I had been in need for several days. I was sitting quietly in my room, when two hundred Assiniboines entered the fort, all of them armed. These Indians scattered immediately all through the place; several

of them even entered my room, but unarmed; others remained in adjacent parts of the fort. My people came to warn me of the behaviour of these Indians. I ran to them and told them sharply that they were very impudent to come in a crowd to my house, and armed. One of them answered in the Cree language that they came to smoke. I told them that they were not behaving properly, and that they must leave the fort at once. I believe that the firmness with which I spoke somewhat frightened them, especially as I put four of the most resolute out of the door without their saying a word.

I went at once to my room. At that very moment, however, a soldier came to tell me that the guard-house was full of Indians who had taken possession of the arms. I ran to the guard-house and demanded, through a Cree interpreter, what they meant by such behaviour. During all this time I was preparing to fight them with my weak force. My interpreter, who proved a traitor, said that these Indians had no bad intentions. Yet a moment before, an Assiniboine orator, who had been constantly making fine speeches to me, had told the interpreter that, in spite of him, the Indians would kill and rob me.

When I had barely made out their intentions I failed to realize that I ought to have taken their arms from them. [To frighten them] I seized hold of a blazing brand, broke in the door of the powder magazine, and knocked down a barrel of gunpowder. Over this I held the brand, and I told the Indians in an assured tone [through the interpreter] that I expected nothing at their hands, and that even if I was killed I should have the glory of subjecting them to the same fate. No sooner had the Indians seen the lighted brand, and the barrel of gunpowder with its head staved in, and heard my interpreter, than they all fled out of the gate of the fort. They damaged the gate considerably in their hurried flight. I soon laid down my brand, and then I had nothing more exciting to do than to close the gate of the fort.

Soon after this incident with the Assiniboines, Saint-Pierre gave up his half-hearted attempt to find a route to the Western Sea, and returned to Montreal. He had proved himself a brave man enough. He did not, however, understand, and made no attempt to understand, the character of the Indians, and, as an explorer, he was a complete failure. In

a couple of years he managed to undo all the work which La Vérendrye had accomplished. After he abandoned the West, the forts which had been built there with such difficulty and at such great expense soon fell into decay. The only men who had the knowledge and the enthusiasm to make real La Vérendrye's dream of exploration, his own sons, were denied the privilege of doing so; and no one else seemed anxious even to attempt such a difficult task.

The period of French rule in Canada was now rapidly drawing to a close. Instead of adding to the territories of France in North America, her sons were preparing to make their last stand in defence of what they already possessed. Half a dozen years later their dream of western exploration, and of a great North American empire reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, came to an end on the Plains of Abraham. It was left for those of another race who came after them to turn the dream of their rivals into tangible achievements. It must never be forgotten, however, that, although Pierre de La Vérendrye failed to complete the great object of his ambition, we owe to him and his gallant sons the discovery of a large part of what is to-day Western Canada.

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