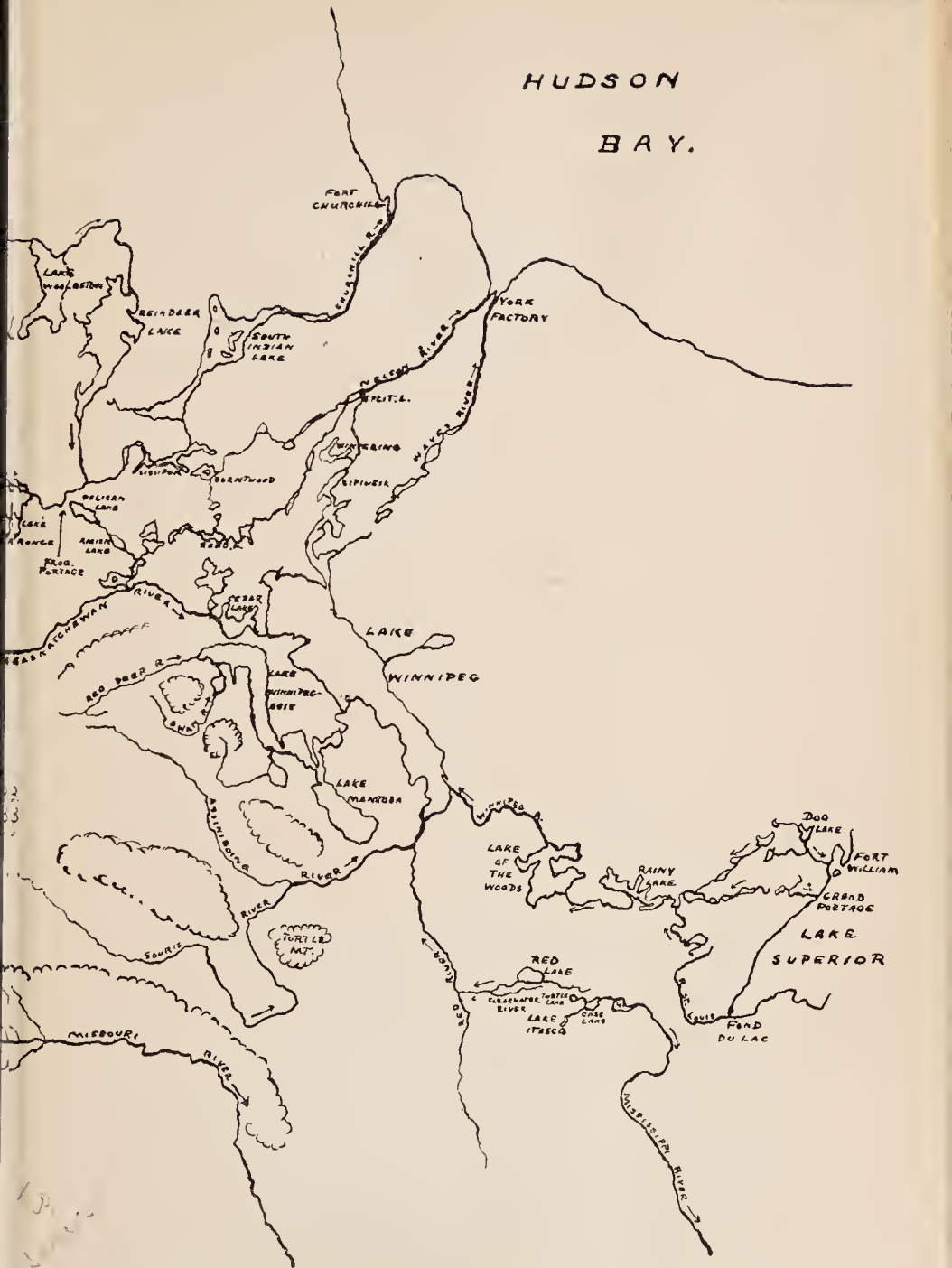
CANADIAN MEN OF ACTION

EDITED BY W. STEWART WALLACE

THOMPSON

CHARLES NORRIS COCHRANE

THIS MAP WILL HELP YOU TO UNDERSTAND



AVID THOMPSON'S JOURNEYS

CANADIAN MEN OF ACTION — NUMBER II.

The Series edited by W. Stewart Wallace, Librarian of the University of Toronto.

DAVID THOMPSON

DAVID THOMPSON

THE EXPLORER

BY

CHARLES NORRIS COCHRANE

Associate Professor of Ancient History,
University College, Toronto

TORONTO
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED
1924

Printed in Canada

PREFATORY NOTE

I WISH to acknowledge the great debt which I owe to Mr. J. B. Tyrrell for the use of material contained in his edition of Thompson's *Narrative*.

It was Mr. Tyrrell who first rescued the name of Thompson from the undeserved oblivion into which it had sunk. Those who are familiar with his introduction and notes, will recognize how largely I have borrowed from them in preparing this short life.

C. N. C.

June 1924.

CONTENTS

DAVID THOMPSON

CHAPTER I

APPRENTICED TO THE COMPANY

ON THE 30th of December, 1783, the Governors of the Grey Coat School at Westminster, England, received from the secretary of the Hudson's Bay Company a request for four boys, trained in navigation, to be apprenticed to the Company for service at their posts in America. At that time, there were in the school but two boys so qualified—Samuel John McPherson and David Thompson. The one was so terrified by the prospect of perils and hardships unknown, that within a week he ran away from the school and was heard of no more. The other accepted the destiny for which he had been marked out, and became one of the greatest land surveyors that the British race has ever produced.

When David Thompson was called before the Headmaster to be informed of his fate, he was in his fourteenth year, and had been for

nearly seven years a pupil in the school. No description exists of the poor charity boy as he then was; but from accounts given of him in later life, it is possible to imagine his appearance. Though he was short of stature, his sturdy frame already gave promise of the strength that was to enable him to drive his canoe through the currents and eddies of the western waterways, or trudge at the head of his men across the plains in the teeth of a December blizzard. His complexion was ruddy, though his smooth cheeks were not as yet tanned and furrowed by a life of exposure to the sun and wind of the great North West. The straight, black hair which hung down over his forehead combined with a stub nose to give him an odd look. Yet there must have been already evident, in his expression, the animation and kindliness which in after years distinguished him, and suggested at once the boldness and fire of Curran the Irish orator, and the strength and piety of the puritan Bunyan, both of whom he is said to have greatly resembled.

Thompson's parents were Welsh, and had borne the name of ApThomas until they had come to live in London. It was there in the parish of St. John the Evangelist, that David was born on the last day of April, in the year 1770. While yet a mere child, he was left an orphan by the death of his father. So poor was the family that the dead man had to be buried at the expense of the parish, and the widow, with David and a still younger infant, was left alone to face the hardships of life in the metropolis. The boy, however, must have shown unusual promise; because, while still quite young, he attracted the attention of a certain Abram Acworth. Through the recommendation of this otherwise unknown benefactor, he was at the age of seven accepted as a scholar by the Governors of the Grey Coat School.

The Grey Coat School was a royal foundation "the principall designe of which" was "to educate poor children in the principles of piety and virtue, and thereby lay the foundations for a sober and Christian life". Almost within the shadow of Westminster Abbey, the

old building is still to be seen—a red brick house, built in the Elizabethan manner, its walls covered with grape-vine and Virginia creeper, standing in the midst of a large garden and playground.

In the school, Thompson found himself a member of the class in mathematics, and received such training in geography, algebra, mechanics, and the art of navigation as was possible with the aid of texts, many of which were at that time a century old. In those days books were scarce and dear; and, for their general reading, the boys had to be satisfied with such miscellaneous works as came their way. These were passed eagerly from hand to hand, and as eagerly read and discussed. Youthful imaginations were excited by the romantic adventures of the Persian and Arabian tales, or by the travels of Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver in strange lands and among strange peoples.

Within five minutes' walk of the school was the Abbey and its cloisters. His hours of recreation David spent mainly in wandering through the venerable pile, reading the history

of England on the monuments of her heroic dead, and drinking in the beauty of the architecture, especially that of the noble Henry VII Chapel. On other occasions, when chance offered, he would stroll through the Strand and Fleet Street as far east as London Bridge or westward to Chelsea, rich in historical memories and famous for its beautiful lawns. Other favourite haunts were St. James' Park and Spring Gardens in Vauxhall, across the Thames. Forty years of wandering through rock and forest, by plain and mountain, served merely to render yet more vivid his boyish recollection of the city and its parks "where all was beauty to the eye and verdure to the feet."

Thompson's school days, however, were now to be cut short. By the 20th of May, 1784, the formalities were completed by which he was bound apprentice to the Hudson's Bay Company for seven years; and he at once embarked from the Port of London on the Company's ship, *Prince Rupert*, en route for North America. The lines were cast off, and the vessel with its cargo of goods for the

Indian trade drifted lazily down stream with the tide, carrying Thompson away for ever from the sights and sounds of London, which he knew and loved so well.

The voyage was uneventful, except for the usual incidents that attended the westward journey of the Company's annual fleet. Not a detail, however, escaped the keen eye of the young traveller, unaccustomed as he was to anything but the quiet life of the school, and thirsting to see something of the world, which he knew only in the pages of Gulliver and Robinson Crusoe. The ship sailed up the North Sea to Stromness in the Orkneys, there to wait three weeks for the two vessels which were to accompany her across the Atlantic, and to receive final instructions and sailing orders. As they lay in the harbour of Stromness, Thompson's keen eyes noted the strange life of the kelp-burners on shore, men, women, and children who, half-naked, gathered the dripping sea-weed in baskets, and lugged it on their shoulders to the kilns. Gazing at the rocky shore line and the low, dark cottages with their smoky peat fires, which dotted the

barren hills, he was smitten with regret for the rich meadows and woods of England, and for a moment he wished himself back amid the scenes of his school life. Yet in his rambles ashore, the lad found much to interest him. He observed with amusement the quaint habits of the cottagers, who combined a brisk trade in smuggled liquor with lengthy and solemn weekly devotions at the old-fashioned Kirk by the shores of the harbour.

Sailing orders finally arrived from London, and the little fleet was soon off on its hazardous journey across the stormy North Atlantic. Presently the sight of icebergs drifting south with the Arctic current, warned the crews that they were nearing Hudson Straits. It was a month before they had worked their way through the floating ice of the Straits; after which the three ships separated, one for the factories at Moose and Albany rivers, the second for York, while the *Prince Rupert*, with Thompson aboard, headed for Churchill, the most northerly of the Company's settlements on the west side of the Bay. Before long, they sighted the granite

coast, which they followed southward. This ended at Churchill in a low point of rock and sand, surmounted by the grim stone battlements of Fort Prince of Wales, which two years before had been gutted by the French in their raid on the Bay. Rounding this point, they found themselves in the mouth of the Churchill, a noble stream, almost a mile in breadth. Up the river they made their way for a distance of five miles to a small bay at the head of the estuary, where they cast anchor before the log huts of the still unfinished new fort.

The arrival of the annual ship was the event of the year. Hurried preparations were made for discharging the cargo of provisions for the factory and supplies for the Indian trade, and taking on board the year's accumulation of furs, which were destined to adorn the persons of the fashionable world of England and the Continent. In the midst of this confusion, the new apprentice was taken ashore, and within ten days the *Prince Rupert* sailed away, leaving him to face the rigours of his new life on the dismal shores of Hudson Bay.

It was indeed a new life in which David Thompson found himself. Apart from the officers, there was a staff of sixty artisans and servants in the fort. These were all busy from dawn till dark; for, besides conducting their trade with the Indians, they had to maintain themselves as a community in an utterly barren land. At six each morning in summer, and eight in winter, the duty bell summoned to their toil, accountant, steward, armourer, shipwright, carpenter, cooper, blacksmith, mason, tailor, and labourers. Assisted by his officers, the governor, gorgeous in scarlet tunic and ruffles, his sword and pistols in his belt, supervised the labours of the factory.

By the early part of October, the myriads of wild geese and ducks which each summer lived in the vast swamps to the south of Churchill had winged their way to warmer climes. The middle of the month saw the marshes stiff with frost, and snow lying on the ground. The polar bear made his appearance, waiting for the ice to extend some distance from the shore, when he left to prey on

the seal, his favourite food. By the fifteenth of November, the broad and deep river was frozen solid from bank to bank, not to break up until the middle of June in the following year. Till the end of December, the staff were able to keep the yard of the fort clear of snow. At that time, a three days' blow from the north-east filled the fort with snow to a depth of six feet, with drifts as high as the stockades. Thereafter it was enough if they could keep paths cleared from one hut to another.

The cold was intense. The noise of rocks split by the frost broke the silence of the night with a sound like that of a cannon shot. On the interior walls of the still unfurnished huts, the rime collected to a depth of four inches, and on this the shivering inhabitants threw pails of water in order that it might form a coat of ice to increase the warmth of the houses. Owing to the haste with which the huts had been thrown up, there had been no time to lay in a sufficient supply of firewood for the winter; and all the wood that could be gathered for fuel allowed

only one fire in the morning and one in the evening. During the rest of the day, if the weather was bad, Thompson, with the others, had to pace the guard room floor, muffled to the eyes in his beaver coat, in order to keep himself from freezing. On clear days, however, he passed his time in shooting grouse, and this activity he enjoyed except for the tumbles in the snow and the sore feet and ankles that resulted from his eager efforts to walk in snow-shoes.

The dreary winter seemed endless, when, in the middle of June, summer burst with the suddenness of dawn in the Tropics, bringing with it torments which made Thompson regret even the discomforts of winter. "Hudson Bay," he says in his narrative, "is certainly a country which Sinbad the sailor never saw, for he makes no mention of musketoes." These pests rose from the marshes in clouds, driving man and beast to distraction. The dogs in the fort howled in their agony, rolling themselves on the ground and hiding in the pools. Even the fox was in a fighting humour, barking and snapping; and, hungry though

he was, he was forced to seek shelter in his hole.

Such was Thompson's first year on the Bay. He had expected, when he reached the Fort, to be employed as a clerk, but he soon found that his only business was to amuse himself, "in winter growling at the cold, and in the open season shooting gulls, duck, and plover and quarreling with musketoes and sand flies." Fortunately, however, he had for company three of the officers of the factory, the deputy governor, the sloop-master, and the surgeon. To these gentlemen he felt himself greatly indebted for the loan of various books on history and natural science, by reading which he was able to put his hours of idleness to profitable use.

The governor at that time was Samuel Hearne, a handsome giant with a rubicund face. It was Hearne who in 1782 had surrendered without a blow the great stone fort at the mouth of the river. That fort had cost the Company forty years to build, and it was barely completed when Hearne raised the white flag at the challenge of the French

admiral, La Pérouse. To the mind of young Thompson, this act was enough to stamp the governor as a coward. It was, none the less, the same Hearne who had succeeded in penetrating as far North as the mouth of the Coppermine river, and was thus the first white man to reach the margin of the Arctic ocean. Nevertheless, Thompson disliked him. Like so many others at the close of the eighteenth century, Hearne was infected with the doctrines of Voltaire, and his atheism shocked the sensitive mind of the pious boy. To a lad of Thompson's ambition, the life of a hunter afforded no sort of satisfaction, and he dreaded lest he should succumb to the deadening influence of his surroundings. He complained to Hearne that his lack of clerical employment might lead to the loss of his penmanship, and was barely satisfied when the governor handed him an invoice or two to copy, and gave him occupation for a few days upon the manuscript of his *Journey to the North*.

The idleness of which Thompson complained was, however, to end before long. With the arrival of the annual ship in 1785,

orders came that the young apprentice should proceed to York factory, the principal dépôt of the Company, situated near the mouth of the Hayes river, one hundred and fifty miles further up the Bay. South of the Churchill, the rim of granite which hems the coast recedes for some miles inland, leaving a vast waste of marshy alluvial between the hills and the water line. Trees there are none, and the monotony of the landscape is relieved only by boulders which the ice has scattered over the face of the land.

To journey on foot the length of this swamp, with two drunken Indians alone for company, was enough to test the courage and reliance of a boy of fifteen. Equipped with but a single blanket to protect him from the chill of the September nights, the young David was ferried across the river and put ashore on the south bank. The day was fine; but the Indians had been given their usual gallon of grog on leaving the fort, and they soon reduced themselves to a drunken stupor. A night in the open, however, restored them to their senses. The next morning the party

made an early start, marching till evening without breakfast or dinner. During the day, the Indians had shot a goose and three ducks. When they finally came to something like a dry spot by the bank of a stream, the wild fowl were hastily cooked and eaten; and the wearied travellers, wrapped in their blankets, flung themselves on the ground to sleep.

Day after day, they trudged along the beach at high water mark, always wet and muddy. Innumerable creeks which drained the swamp crossed their path and interrupted their progress. Finally they came to the mighty Kissiskatchewan or Nelson river, on the north bank of which the Indians had laid up a canoe. Paddling across to the south shore, they crossed the tongue of low land that separates the mouth of the Nelson from that of the Hayes river; and were at last in York.

The governor to whom Thompson reported was the notorious Humphrey Marten. This old tyrant was now in his twenty-fourth year of service with the Company. Surrounded by his numerous native wives and a

horde of half-breed children, he ruled the fort with a rod of iron. The Indians who visited the factory he would beat most cruelly, sending them away with revenge burning in their hearts. In the fort, his subordinates felt the weight of his unbridled temper; and they bowed to his brutality only because they feared his vindictiveness. Amid such surroundings and under such a taskmaster, Thompson passed the following year. He kept the accounts of the factory in his neat handwriting, and joined with the rest of the staff in the hunting necessary to supply the fort with food during the winter.

CHAPTER II

HE FINDS HIS MÉTIER

HIS first two years of service brought nothing but disappointment and disillusion to David Thompson. Vaguely sensible of his capacities, he was conscious of nothing except that as yet he had been given no scope to realize them. But in the summer of 1786 a new and important chapter opened in his life. Fitted out with a trunk, a handkerchief, shoes, shirts, a gun, powder, and a tin cup, he was included in a party of forty-six "Englishmen" who left for the interior under the leadership of Robert Longmore to establish trading posts on the Saskatchewan river to the west of those already occupied by the Company.

For over one hundred years from the time when the merry monarch had vested in them a monopoly of trading rights in the vast territory whose waters drain into Hudson Bay, the "adventurers of England trading into

Hudson Bay" had maintained their factories on the coast, and allowed the Indians from the interior to make their way to them for trade. Great rivers flowed from all directions to the Bay; but the courses of these rivers were still unknown to the map makers of the British Admiralty in 1784, the year in which David Thompson landed at Churchill. For Hudson Bay is encircled from Labrador on the north-east to the Arctic on the north-west by a giant horse shoe of Archæan rock, most of it clothed with the dense northern forest; and so long as the red men were willing to make the tedious journey up and down the rivers, the slumbering giant on the Bay was content to accept the annual tribute of furs which they flung at his feet. Each September, when the ships from London arrived, the factories were crammed with pelts that meant a fortune on the markets of the Continent; and the traders eagerly awaited a fresh supply of guns, axes, and kettles for the Indian, and awls and beads for his squaw, as well as the fire-water which made him the anxious though reluctant slave of the great white chiefs on the Bay.

But the monopoly of trade to which the Company laid claim had not been accepted without challenge. On the eastern face of North America, the St. Lawrence river points like a finger to the heart of the continent, and from the head of Lake Superior it is possible, by a comparatively easy portage, to cross the height of land and descend through Rainy lake, the Lake of the Woods, and the Winnipeg river to Lake Winnipeg. Lake Winnipeg forms a vast collecting basin for the waters of the interior, before they finally discharge through the Nelson river into Hudson Bay. Thus it affords communication south and west by way of the Red and Assiniboine rivers through the prairie country of southern Manitoba, the Dakotas, and Minnesota; while, from the north west corner of the lake, the Saskatchewan carries the traveller to its sources in the Rockies. While therefore the English had waited for the Indians to bring their furs down to them on the Bay, the French from Quebec had pushed their way along these waters to the heart of the hunting grounds, and the advance of these gallant

adventurers was marked by a string of forts that extended from Dulhut's post at the head of Lake Superior to Fort La Jonquière near the site of Calgary.

The fall of Quebec in 1759 had brought with it the destruction of the organized French fur trade, and the traders were scattered through the wilds. But new groups of adventurers, mainly of Scotch descent, swarmed westward from their headquarters at Montreal, and penetrated into the wilderness further than the French had ever gone. By the year 1772, the Montreal traders had crossed from the Saskatchewan to the still more northerly Churchill river, and cut the line of communication ordinarily used by the Indians of Lake Athabaska in their long journey to Hudson Bay. The consolidation of the rival interests into one great firm—the North West Company—was accomplished in 1784 at the very time of Thompson's arrival in the West. This achievement brought vastly increased strength to the Montreal traders by mitigating the evils of their fierce competition. Thus the Hudson's Bay Com-

pany was threatened with the loss of its fur supply at the same moment as the French war interrupted its convoys, and La Pérouse swept the Bay, destroying the posts at Churchill, York, and Albany.

Energetic measures were necessary if the lost trade was to be recovered. As early as 1774, Samuel Hearne had taken the momentous step of founding the first inland post of the Hudson's Bay Company at Cumberland House. Situated on the Saskatchewan a few miles west of Lake Winnipeg, Cumberland House stood, as it were, in the centre of a vast web of waterways. "A canoe could start from this house, and with no portage of more than a day's length could be launched on the Arctic ocean, Hudson Bay, the Gulf of St. Lawrence or the Gulf of Mexico; and without much greater interruption could be floated on to the Pacific ocean." Despite the disasters of the French war, and the dreadful epidemic of small pox which in 1781 had swept across the West, decimating and demoralizing the natives, the advance of the Company was continued by the establishment of further

posts along the Saskatchewan river. Thompson was thus drawn into the forefront of the battle for furs, when he was included in Longmore's party in the summer of '86.

On the 21st of July, the brigade of canoes left York factory for the upper country. Longmore, the chief, was well qualified for the task of leading the expedition. For many years he had served as lieutenant to Tomison, the "chief inland" of the dépôt at Cumberland House. Here he had acquired the difficult knack of dealing with the Indians, besides earning their love and respect. Thompson's immediate superior was Mitchell Oman, an old and experienced trader of the Company, to whom he had been assigned as clerk. Oman could neither read nor write, but he nevertheless impressed the lad by the unusual quality of his curious and inquisitive mind. During the tedious paddle into the interior, he drew from the pages of a retentive memory endless tales of the Company's early activities inland. "In those days," he declared, "our situation was by no means pleasant. The Indians were very numerous, and although

by far the greater part behaved well, and were kindly to us, yet among such a number there will always be found bad men. To protect ourselves from them, we had to get a respectable chief to stay with us and assist us in trading, and prevent as much as possible the demands of these men." His valuable reminiscences were not lost upon the boy.

As the boatmen slowly worked their way up the river, Thompson's eyes gazed for the first time on the country he was afterwards to know so well. Their course lay up the Hayes river, and thence, by way of Lake Winnipeg, to the Saskatchewan. Progress at first was rapid, even against the stream, for they were still in the low and marshy country that fringes the south-west corner of the Bay. Presently, however, they encountered the first of the many rapids which mark the descent of the river to the sea. At each of these, with monotonous reiteration, the packs were all heaved ashore and shouldered along the rugged path of the portage to the higher level of the river. At the same time, the face of the landscape suddenly altered. The

marshy alluvial gave way to naked granite, and they entered the belt of dark and gloomy northern forest. As they passed through the heart of the rocky country, the character of the river was also changed. From point to point the stream was held back by ledges of granite which broke its progress, giving rise to an irregular chain of wide and deep lakes. Through these lakes they threaded their way until, reaching the end of the granite country, they saw before them the broad expanse of Lake Winnipeg, the "bad water" of the Indians. Sixty miles along its northern coast brought them to the point where the Saskatchewan, after a swift and unbroken course of over one thousand miles through the plains, plunges in a long series of cascades into the lake. Having portaged past these, and wended their way through the alluvial flats of Cedar lake, they came at last to Cumberland House, and the first stage of their journey was accomplished.

Their objective was a point on the Saskatchewan about fifty miles above the present site of Battleford. As they continued their

journey westward from Cumberland House, the forest gradually gave way to open country, and they found themselves in the vast expanse of the plains, dotted here and there with clumps of trees—the country of the bison, the antelope, and the red deer. Passing the forks of the river, they came to the site which the keen eye of Longmore had selected. There, on the northern bank of the stream, they cleared the ground and ran up a series of log huts, surrounded by a wooden stockade—the future Manchester House. Except for a solitary post which the North-Westers had for three years maintained about forty miles further up stream, Thompson had now reached the limit of country at that time familiar to civilized men. To the west stretched the unknown wilderness, which it was his destiny, in considerable measure, to explore.

The object of the new post was to secure the trade of the natives of the plains; and during the following winter David was busy learning the complicated ritual of Indian barter. In the course of a year he had so far mastered his duties that he was selected to

lead a party of six men across country to the south branch of the Saskatchewan, in order to open friendly relations with the Piegan and Blackfeet Indians whose camps lay along the banks of that stream. Each man had a horse, and among them they carried a small assortment of goods. The duties of the young diplomat were to find the camps of the Piegans and winter among them, in order to induce them to hunt for furs and to make pemmican or dried buffalo meat for the traders. He was to persuade as many as possible to travel to the post for trade. With those who were unwilling to do so, he was to bargain for furs.

The party set forth in October, under their seventeen-year-old leader. The trail they followed led through a fine rolling country, everywhere clothed with short grass, and dotted with islands of poplar and birch. For twenty-three days they rode without seeing any animals other than a chance bull-bison which they shot for food. To the south of the Bow river they found an Indian camp pitched in a spot where the tender grass afforded rich pasture for the buffalo; but

the plains, which were ordinarily black with moving herds, were at this time strangely deserted. After several moves, they finally struck a large encampment of Piegans near the present site of Calgary. Sending some of his men back to Manchester House, Thompson settled down in this camp to spend the winter.

The Piegan, Blood, and Blackfeet Indians were three allied tribes of Algonquin stock who had emerged from the northern forest and taken possession of the plains, driving their enemies, the Kootenay, Salish, and Snake Indians, before them to the mountains. Since the white men had come to trade on the river, they had advanced from the Eagle hills in western Saskatchewan to the very foot of the Rockies. This rapid conclusion of an age-long struggle for the mastery of the grazing country had been due to the fire-arms which they had procured from the traders.

The manners and customs of the confederate tribes were in keeping with their warlike disposition and constant danger. Unlike the scattered forest Indians, they lived in

large camps, and without yielding their traditional liberty to the control of a single authority, they had nevertheless evolved a rudimentary form of social organization. Hunters of the bison, they were in constant need of horses. Horse-stealing was thus among them an honourable pursuit, and their raids extended far to the south and west. During the winter of Thompson's stay among them, a raid on the Snakes took a part of two hundred and fifty warriors a distance of one thousand, five hundred miles to the south-west, as was testified by the thirty well-bred animals that were brought back to camp, and the Spanish saddles and bridles that lay thrown about among the tents.

Of the three allied tribes, the Piegans occupied the most exposed position, and consequently led the most precarious and watchful life. From boyhood they were trained in arms, and their martial bearing and enterprising character produced a strong impression upon Thompson. They had an hereditary civil chief or "orator", as he was called, who presided at all councils except

those of war. Arrayed in his splendid mantle of otter skin, he paced the camp each day three hours after sunset, reciting in a loud voice the news which his couriers had gathered, announcing in particular where the herds of bison were feeding and what direction they were taking. The war chief, on the other hand, was a self-made man, whose power and influence had developed from his conduct in war. Kootanae Appee, as he was called, was a magnificent giant, six feet six inches in height, and was the father of twenty-two warriors, no less tall and sinewy than himself. In after years, when Thompson was battling his way south along the Columbia river, the bond of friendship which he now forged with this old chief stood him in good stead.

The chief in whose tent Thompson passed the winter bore the name of Saukamappee (Young Man). Saukamappee was broad of shoulder and strong of limb. Old age had not bowed his grey head, nor had a troubled life obliterated the mild and playful expression of his countenance. During the long winter evenings, he entertained his guest with re-

miniscences that went back for fifty years. From him, Thompson learned of the Indian methods of fighting before the time of fire-arms, of the first importation of these deadly weapons from the distant factory at York, of the introduction of the horse among the Blackfeet, and of the dreadful effects of the small-pox epidemic in '81, of which Saukamappee himself had been a victim. While Thompson thus learned the history of the tribes among whom he was staying, he practised himself in the use of their language. His note books contain long lists of Indian words with their English equivalents, gathered from the Piegans and from other tribes whom he encountered.

The winter over, Thompson returned to the post, from which he was sent to Cumberland House in the summer of 1789. Here he began to keep a careful meteorological journal, noting two or three times daily the temperature, the strength and direction of the wind, and the general character of the climate. He also began a series of astronomical observations, as the result of which he was able to

determine the exact latitude and longitude of Cumberland House. This post was thus the first of a series of widely scattered points fixed by him on the map of British North America. It was then, too, that he acquired the large brass sextant which was to be his constant companion for years to come.

Having made this start, Thompson attempted in the following summer to make a survey of the canoe route from Cumberland House to York factory, by way of the Saskatchewan and the Hayes rivers. In the autumn, he returned to Cumberland House. While there, he had the good fortune to meet Philip Turnor, the man without whose guidance and help Thompson could hardly have realized his future career.

For several years, the Colonial Office had been urging the Hudson's Bay Company to proceed with the survey of the vast territory over which it exercised sway; and to satisfy the pressing demand of the government, the Company had engaged Philip Turnor as astronomer and surveyor. Possessed of a sound theoretical training, Turnor had been

employed in England as one of the compilers of the *Nautical Almanac;* and since 1776 he had added to his qualifications a wide practical experience drawn from numerous surveys throughout the region of the Bay. Here was a man who could solve Thompson's doubts and difficulties, and correct the deficiencies of his education for the work which he had in view. An eager pupil, Thompson sat at the feet of Turnor during the winter of 1790; and when, in the following spring, he returned to York factory, it was as a man with his mind made up. If a man knows clearly what he wants and has the intelligence and perseverance to pursue his aims, no obstacle, not even such as these which confronted Thompson, can keep him from attaining his goal.

Thereafter Thompson and his beloved instruments were inseparable companions in journeys that carried him for thousands of miles through the wildest parts of the unknown west. By day and night, he was an object of wonder to his French-Canadian and Indian followers, as, armed with his sextant, telescope, compass, and other instruments,

he took observations on the sun, moon, and stars. While he sought to determine the position of rivers, lakes, and mountains, to be recorded on the map which was to be his life's work, his activities suggested to their superstitious minds the idea that he was in communication with powers not of this world, and earned him the title which he bore among them, Koo-Koo-Sint, "The man who looks at the stars."

CHAPTER III

TRADER, SURVEYOR, EXPLORER

WHEN Thompson returned to York factory in the spring of 1791, it was to find that great changes had taken place at the fort. Five years before, the tyrannous sway of old Humphrey Marten had come to an end, and he had been succeeded as governor by Joseph Colen. This man was to direct Thompson's movements during the next six years.

The new governor was a man of unquestioned ability; but his jealous and suspicious temperament made him work at cross purposes with the governor of Churchill, and brought him into frequent conflict with Tomison at Cumberland House. He had never caught the spirit of the aggressive policy initiated by Samuel Hearne, and preferred to develop the fur trade with the Indians who came down to the coast for trade,

rather than to follow them to their hunting grounds. In his reports to the directors in London, he endeavoured to excuse his lack of enterprise by hurling vague accusations at his colleagues; while his subordinates, men like Thompson and Malcolm Ross, were irritated and provoked by the lack of support from headquarters which constantly frustrated their efforts to push forward the work of exploring the more remote interior.

The seven years of David's apprenticeship were now at an end, and he was engaged at a good salary as trader and surveyor to the Company. He was not yet, however, given an opportunity of practising his profession. The previous spring, an ice-jam at the mouth of the Hayes river had caused the water to rise, flooding the low land on which the factory was situated; and for a year or more, Thompson had to assist Colen in moving the fort to its present site on a high clay bank about a quarter mile further up stream.

Meanwhile Philip Turnor had returned from a journey to Lake Athabaska, and the report of his explorations had reached the

directors in London. Proceeding from Cumberland House, he had worked his way north through Amisk and Pelican lakes to Frog Portage, a distance of one hundred miles. After crossing the portage, he found himself in the basin of the upper Churchill river. This stream he ascended as far as Isle à la Crosse, and thence he made his way through Buffalo lake and Lake la Roche to the Methy Portage. This portage marks the divide between the waters that flow eastward to Hudson Bay and those that discharge through the Mackenzie into the Arctic ocean. Crossing the portage, he descended the Clearwater river to its junction with the Athabaska, whose broad stream soon carried him to the lake of that name. This was the regular route followed by the Indians of the far north in their journeys to Hudson Bay.

Turnor's report filled the directors with a desire to dispute the trade of Lake Athabaska with the men of the North West Company; and they bombarded Colen with instructions to send Ross and Thompson to that region. But to Colen's mind there was a more pressing

necessity nearer home. The North-Westers had entered the rocky belt to the south-west of York, and had monopolized trade throughout the irregular series of lakes and rivers which form the tributaries of the Nelson and lower Churchill, thus challenging the "English" on their home front itself. Accordingly Colen ignored the instructions from London, and despatched Ross and Thompson into this "muskrat country," as it was called, with orders to build posts at strategic points and restore the trade of the Company.

On the 5th of September, 1792, Thompson set forth with two canoes on his first independent command. Rounding the point from York factory, the canoes swung into the broad channel of the Nelson river. By the end of the month they were well above Split lake, Thompson making a survey as they moved along. At this point one of the canoes turned aside to ascend Grass river, while Thompson with the other continued along the main stream until he reached the upper end of Sipiwisk lake. Here in a little cove formed by two projecting points of rock,

with the dark spruce forest at his back and a view to the south west over the island-studded lake, he built his first trading post, and settled down to face the winter in a country almost devoid of fish and game.

His heart, however, was set on exploration. From the Indians he learned that, besides the well-known route which had been followed by Turnor to Lake Athabaska, there existed another, north from the Churchill river to Reindeer lake, and thence westward by way of the Black river to the east end of Lake Athabaska. This route he made up his mind to explore.

Accordingly, when the ice had cleared from the rivers, he set forth alone without any help or encouragement from headquarters. Descending to the lower end of Sipiwisk lake, he turned to the left and passed by a series of portages through Wintering, Red Paint and Burntwood lakes to the Missinippi or Churchill river, up which he paddled for a distance of thirty-three miles. But the Indian guides whom he had expected to meet failed to put in an appearance, and he was forced to turn

back. He therefore descended through Burntwood lake and the Nelson river to York factory.

Colen had given the English directors to understand that he planned to send Ross and Thompson to the Athabaska country; and with the arrival of the annual ship in the autumn of '93, they wrote that they expected much good to follow from the projected expedition, and that they wished William Cook, who had accompanied David into the Muskrat country the previous autumn, to join with the others in the invasion of the far north. But Cook was not recalled from his post on Split lake, and Ross and Thompson were sent up the Saskatchewan to Cumberland House. Thence Thompson was despatched, not to Lake Athabaska, as he had expected, but westward along the river to a new post called Buckingham House, from which he rode still further west to the Beaver hills near the future site of Fort Augustus (Edmonton). Returning, he surveyed the Saskatchewan east from Buckingham House to the Forks, and from the Forks he resurveyed the rest of

the river. From Cumberland House, he explored a new route through Goose, Reed, and Burntwood lakes to the Nelson, and thus opened up a direct line of communication between the dépôt at Cumberland House and York factory, much superior to the old course by way of Lake Winnipeg and the Hayes river.

Thompson's reappearance at York without having been to the Athabaska country made it necessary for Colen to do no little explaining to the impatient London directors. In a long letter to them, he hinted that it was Tomison who was responsible for the fiasco. Tomison, he said, had refused to pass his word for the advance of wages promised by the Council to those who would volunteer to accompany the expedition. Ross, he declared, was utterly disgusted with the repeated disappointments, and would have returned at once to England, had not Thompson prevailed upon him to make one last trial, this time by way of Reindeer lake. Thompson and Ross, he added, were being fitted out with canoes and supplies at York, and would be sent up

the Nelson river track. The directors were deceived, and swallowed their disappointment, hoping to hear that the difficulties which stood in the way of the Athabaska expedition had been successfully overcome.

But, even now, Thompson was sent, not to the North, but back once more to the Muskrat country, this time to Reed lake. Here, in a district comparatively rich in fish, game, and furs, he built a house, and spent one of the coldest winters in the history of the Hudson Bay. While hunting and trading, he also prepared for the directors of the Company, the maps and surveys of the country which he had already traversed. In July of the following year, 1795, he paddled down the river on what was to be his last visit to York.

On this occasion Colen was absent on a trip to England, but the factory was seething with discontent. Thompson found the staff impatiently waiting, in order that he, the youngest and bravest among them, might take the lead in drawing up a statement of the grievances which they suffered under

Colen's rule. This office he accepted, although with some hesitation on account of the absence of the governor. Assisted by his friend the surgeon, he drew up a statement which Colen declared seriously prejudiced him in the eyes of the directors; although, according to Thompson, not one half of the evils were even mentioned of which the staff had cause to complain. Thompson was not ashamed of the part he had played in this mutinous outbreak. As soon as he had left the service, he took the opportunity of explaining to his old chief that he was the author of the protest which had so much displeased him. "Many of us," his letter concluded, "acknowledge with readiness that you have some good qualities, and I once had the greatest respect for you; I have some yet, but——it is not my wish to say those things which I know you do not wish to hear. How is it, Sir, that everyone who has once wished you well should turn to be indifferent to you, and even some to hate you, although they are constant in their other friendships?—there must be a defect somewhere. The fact is,

that from your peculiar manner of conduct, you are also one of those unfortunate men who will have many an acquaintance, but never a real friend."

Thompson's final break with Colen did not, however, occur until two years later. He turned in his furs, and without waiting, except to secure supplies for the coming winter, went back to his duties in the Muskrat country. This time he built a house far to the north on Duck Portage, the link connecting Burntwood lake with the Churchill river. When spring opened, instead of returning to York, he made ready for his dash to Lake Athabaska.

Formal permission had reached him from Colen, sanctioning his venture into the unknown wilds. This, however, meant nothing, because it was not accompanied by help of any kind. At that moment, indeed, the Company was seriously crippled for lack of men to keep up the few inland trading posts that then existed, for the war which was raging between England and France had drained the Orkney islands of all men who

were fit for service in the army and navy. The few miserable dwarfs who could be obtained for the fur trade excited the contempt of even the Indians.

Thompson, nevertheless, was not to be deterred from his enterprise. He proceeded at once to Fairford House, the trading post kept by Malcolm Ross on the Churchill near the mouth of the Reindeer river, where he hoped to get some assistance. To his great disappointment, he found that not a man could be spared from the trade in furs. There were, however, a few Chepawyan Indians lingering about the fort and from among these he managed to engage two young men. Kozdaw and "Paddy" had hunted for two winters in the country he was about to explore, although neither of them had ever been on the rivers and lakes in summer. Their only practice in canoes had been to lie offshore in the lakes on a calm day, watching for the deer to take refuge from the flies, and this gave them no experience of the currents and rapids of rivers; yet, such as they were, Thompson had no choice but to take them.

The first task was to construct a canoe. Having searched the forest for a supply of birch bark, they made a boat seventeen feet in length. Into this they packed their meagre outfit, a fowling piece with forty balls, five pounds of shot, three flints and five pounds of powder, a fishing net, a hatchet and a small tent of grey cotton. These articles, together with a few handfuls of beads, rings, and awls for trading, made up their terribly inadequate equipment.

In the grey dawn of a June morning, 1796, Thompson launched his canoe on the turbid waters of the Missinippi. The party advanced rapidly, making a survey as they went. For supplies they relied on their solitary net and gun. Turning into the Reindeer river, they worked their way north against a moderate current to Reindeer lake. A hundred miles up the west coast of this lake brought them to a point clothed with tolerably good pines. This point Thompson noted as a suitable site for building a trading post on his return.

The whole distance through which they had come had a barren, rocky appearance,

relieved only by patches of stunted birch, aspen, and spruce. Since there was little or no soil, the trees stood with their roots interlaced like the trees on the frozen lands of Hudson Bay; and, like them, they were kept moist in summer by the wet moss with which their roots were covered. Through wide stretches the forest fires had passed, leaving the country unsightly and ghostlike, and destroying the wild animals of the forest. Thompson was now in fact approaching the northern limit of trees, beyond which stretch the barren lands, the home of the musk ox and caribou.

In order to avoid the wide circuit of the Cochrane river, which flows to Reindeer lake from Lake Wollaston, the guides directed Thompson up a stream that emptied from the west a few miles north of his point of pines. From the head of this stream there was a passage by a series of ponds and brooks to the south end of Wollaston lake. But the water was low, and they were forced to carry their packs for the better part of fifty miles, stumbling over the rocks and wading through the

marshes, while clouds of mosquitoes buzzed about their defenceless heads. It was a welcome relief when they launched out on the clear and deep waters of Lake Wollaston, which they crossed without trouble to the Black river. Here they made camp on the evening of June 23, and rested while Thompson took observations and made up the notes of his survey.

Two days later they were once more under way. Lake Wollaston, as Thompson discovered, was situated on the height of land between the basins of Hudson Bay and the Mackenzie river. Part of its waters discharged eastward and south into Reindeer lake, while part flowed westward through the Black river into Lake Athabaska. From this curious circumstance, the lake was known to the Indians as "Lake Manito," and was considered to be of supernatural character. Entering the Black river, the party passed at first through the quiet reaches of the upper river, in a wretched country of solitude, where the wild laugh of the loon alone woke the echoes of the barren hills. Presently the

banks closed in, and as the current stiffened, they had to paddle vigorously to avoid the projecting rocks. Finally an expansion of the stream brought them to Black lake. It was during this stretch that they came upon the only human beings they had so far encountered —five tents of Chepawyans, hunting and fishing in an otherwise deserted land.

They could afford but one day to enjoy the hospitality of the Indians. From Black lake, the river tumbles in two wild cascades to the level of Lake Athabaska. A series of rapids, cutting through a high hill, warned them that they were approaching the first of the falls. For half a mile they shot the rapids to a point where the river is compressed within a channel only twelve yards in width. At the end of this channel, the current rushed against a projecting ledge of rock with such force that the whole river seemed to be turned up from its bottom. The dashing of the water against the rocks, the deep roar of the torrent, the hollow sound of the fall, in the midst of the dark, high, and frowning hills, made a sight so grand and terrible that

Kozdaw and Paddy were awe-struck, and offered their simple tributes to the manito of the fall—the one a bit of tobacco, the other a ring. Past this fall the travellers descended by a well-beaten native trail. A second series of rapids and a second fall brought them to the last lap of their journey, and they paddled quietly for six miles into the east end of Lake Athabaska. Here they passed the night, resting from their dangers, toils, and sufferings under a pine tree which had been lopped and marked by Philip Turnor in his survey of 1791.

Thompson's heart was thrilled by the thought that he had finally accomplished the journey on which for the last five years his heart had been set, and that in so doing he had blazed a trail through the wilderness over ground which the feet of white men had never trod before. He was sobered, however, by the prospect of the long and difficult journey home. His net and gun afforded but a scanty supply of food, and should these fail him, there was but slight hope of succour. But gloomy as were his forebodings, it was well that he did not know what lay before him.

Half way up the Black river, he encountered one of the rapids which was broken about the middle by a twelve-foot fall. Portaging past the fall, he attempted to "track" the canoe up the rest of the rapid. The two Indians were ashore tugging at the tow-line, while Thompson in the canoe tried to steer and at the same time direct their movements. Near the head of the rapid there was at the water's edge a tree which blocked their progress, and as the Indians stood hesitating which side of it they should pass, the canoe sheered off across the current. An upset was inevitable, had not Thompson waved to the Indians to let go the line and leave him to his fate. Springing to the bow, he cut the rope off short with the clasp knife which he kept in his waistcoat pocket, and got the head of the canoe around into the stream just in time to take the plunge over the cataract. For an instant, Thompson was buried beneath the boiling water at the foot of the fall. Striking his feet against the bottom, he pushed himself to the surface close to the upturned canoe. This he seized and dragged through shallow

water to the beach. The Indians came rushing to his assistance, and, while he lay on the rocks, bruised, bleeding, and exhausted by his exertions, they searched the shore below the rapids for what could be recovered of their precious kit.

The gun, the axe, and the tent had remained fastened in the canoe. In half an hour's time, the Indians brought back the cork-lined box containing Thompson's instruments and the maps of his survey, together with their three paddles and a pewter basin. Not one moment was to be lost. Thompson's body was naked except for his shirt and a thin linen vest, and his companions were in like condition. The small tent they tore into three pieces with which to wrap themselves as a defence against flies by day and chill by night. Worse still, Thompson found as he painfully raised himself from the rocks that the flesh of his foot had been torn away by the impact of the jagged stones of the river bed, and a part of his share of the tent had to be taken to bind the wound.

The first duty was to repair the canoe, and the Indians were sent to the woods to

procure gum from the pines. The question was then how to light a fire, for they had neither flint nor steel. Thompson pointed to his gun from which they took the flint, and with the steel blade of his pocket knife they struck a spark. When the gum was melted, they repaired the canoe and carried their kit above the fall and rapids. The Indians shouldered the canoe, while behind them the wounded leader hobbled painfully along under the burden of gun, axe, and sextant case.

Night had fallen before they found time to make a fire and warm themselves. Their situation was enough to strike terror into the boldest heart. Destitute, almost naked, and suffering from the weather, they faced a journey of three hundred miles through a barren country. Yet Thompson did not despair. For two days they paddled and portaged up the river without a bite to eat. On the afternoon of the second day they saw two gulls hovering over a reedy bay as if to protect their young. They found the nest and in it three young gulls, but the few ounces of meat which they were able to pick

from their miserable carcases sufficed only to sharpen their hunger.

The next day as they went along, Thompson remembered an eagle's nest on the banks of a small lake before them. When they came to the lake they found the nest in the spreading branches of a birch tree, about sixteen feet above the ground. Kozdaw had barely time to climb to the nest before the old birds arrived. Paddy and Thompson, with shouts and stones, succeeded in preventing them from attacking Kozdaw, while the latter threw the two young eagles to the ground. The birds fought with beak and claw for their lives, but were finally killed and flung into the canoe.

In the evening, they opened the eagles by the gleam of the camp fire, and divided the meat and yellow fat into three equal portions. While Kozdaw roasted his meat and oiled his body with the fat, the others ate only the fat, reserving the meat for next day. In the night they were both awakened by a violent dysentery, which continued to plague them for many days, although a strong in-

fusion of a certain dried moss, known as Labrador tea, brought them some relief.

Day by day they continued their voyage, subsisting on the wretched crow-berries of the far north. By the sixteenth of July, Thompson and Paddy were like skeletons, from hunger, dysentery, and cold. On that day Thompson scratched what he thought was his dying message on a scrap of birch bark which Kozdaw was to carry back with him to civilization. Late in the afternoon, as they paddled weakly and painfully along, they came upon two tents of Chepawyans. The savages pitied their condition and restored them with broth. From them Thompson procured some provisions, a flint and a few rounds of ammunition, together with a pair of shoes each for himself and his men. Thus they were able to proceed on their journey, and arrived without further adventure at Fairford House after an absence of thirty-one days.

At Fairford House Thompson was joined by Malcolm Ross with a stock of provisions for the northern trade, and together they

returned to build a trading post on Reindeer lake. Along with the supplies, Ross brought a letter from Colen to Thompson, containing a curt order that he should cease his surveys and explorations. This was his reward.

CHAPTER IV

WITH THE NORTH-WESTERS

THE chilly reception which Thompson met after his return from Lake Athabaska was enough to quench the enthusiasm of any man. He might have lain down under the blow. In that case he would no doubt have ended his days as an obscure and broken-spirited trader, embittered by his fate, but powerless so late in life to change it. Another course, however, was open to him, if he had the courage and self-reliance to take it. This was to throw up his post with the Hudson's Bay Company, and seek employment in other quarters where his talents would meet with the recognition they deserved.

In the long winter evenings at Reindeer lake, he weighed the problem before him. Colen, his chief, had undoubtedly failed to appreciate the value of his work. Worse

still, he had hampered it, since for the last two years he had neglected even to supply Thompson with the *Nautical Almanac* so necessary for his surveys. But behind Colen stood the Company. How far had they given him the sympathy and encouragement which he needed? The directors, he felt, might easily have had the northern part of the continent surveyed as far as the Pacific coast, and thus greatly extended the range of their trade. This they could have accomplished at trifling expense, for in England there were numbers of highly-trained naval officers on half pay, who would have jumped at the chance of employment. But any explorations which they had undertaken were solely at the behest of the Colonial Office. His feelings toward the Company may not have been altogether justified. Nevertheless, he could only conclude that there was little or no future for him in the service. With Thompson to think was to act. On the 28th of May, 1797, he left his post on Reindeer lake and walked south through the bush for seventy-five miles to the nearest house of the

North-Westers. After ten days spent there, he proceeded to Grand Portage, the headquarters of the Company at the west end of Lake Superior, in order that he might offer his services to the merchants from Canada.

Situated on a small bay at the mouth of Pigeon river, Grand Portage had been for several years the general dépôt for the trader of the North West Company, the lair from which those "sly wolves of the North" had sallied forth to work such havoc with the trade of the English on Hudson Bay. Along the shore ran a line of docks, which each summer were piled high, now with the parcels of merchandise for the interior trade, now with the packs of furs which had been gathered from the distant trading posts for the market in the east. Along the bay front and up the bank of the river sprawled the village of log huts in which dwelt the half-breed families of the French voyageurs.

The fort itself was in keeping with the dignity of the Company and the magnitude of its operations. A palisade eighteen feet high enclosed the great square in which stood

the various offices—storehouses, servants' quarters, and lodgings for the clerks. In the centre of the courtyard towered the main building, a stout log structure surmounted by a high balcony. This contained the apartments of the partners, and the great hall, its walls covered with portraits of the leading members of the Company in all the glory of ruffles and scarlet coats. Here took place the grave deliberations of the merchants, and here each evening they dined in solemn state. The stone powder magazine, the jail with its barred windows, and the sentry in the archway of the great gate lent a touch of grimness to the picture of this far-flung outpost of commerce.

At Grand Portage, Thompson received a warm welcome from those of the partners who were at the time present in the fort. On his way down he had met Roderick Mackenzie, cousin to the famous Sir Alexander, and Simon Fraser, soon to win distinction as the discoverer of the Fraser river. At the post he found the Honourable William McGillivray, prominent in the councils of the Company,

and Sir Alexander Mackenzie himself. Sir Alexander had been the first white man to descend the Mackenzie river to its mouth, and he had blazed a trail across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific. He had but recently returned from England, wearing the honour of knighthood which he had earned for his explorations. All of these gentlemen impressed Thompson as being men of enterprise and vision, and among them he found the liberal and public spirit which in his former employers he had sought in vain.

At that time, questions of serious import were agitating the minds of the partners. By the treaty which closed the American Revolutionary War, the boundary between the British dominions and the territories of the United States had been fixed as a line drawn from the northwest corner of the Lake of the Woods to the source of the Mississippi, which was then thought to lie considerably north of its true position. Nine years later, the forty-ninth parallel of latitude had been accepted as the boundary; and by the Treaty of Amity and Commerce subsequently passed, it had

been agreed that all British trading posts south of this line should be withdrawn. This made it necessary for the Company to fix at once the location of their houses on the upper Red river, and incidentally if possible to discover the true source of the Mississippi. The partners were also anxious to have a route surveyed to the headwaters of the Missouri river, where there existed the villages of an Indian people who got their living from the cultivation of the soil. The scientific spirit of the merchants was shown by their further desire to search for the fossil bones of prehistoric animals and any monuments which might throw light on the earlier condition of the regions surveyed. Finally, they wished to ascertain the courses of the rivers and the situation of the lakes, in order that they might rearrange their network of trading houses so as to cover more completely the territory under their sway.

Thompson's arrival came therefore at an opportune moment. He was promptly engaged as astronomer and surveyor to the company, and the partners and agents all

agreed to send orders to their various trading posts that he should be given any assistance he required. In August, the great canoes arrived from Montreal with the goods for the Indian trade. When these were unloaded, the merchandise was assorted and made up in parcels each of ninety pounds' weight, so that the boatmen might be able to shoulder them over the portages. These were then taken in charge by the various agents and their shouting crews of voyageurs. Five days of hard labour were needed for the carry over Grand Portage to the upper waters of Pigeon river. When all was ready, Thompson climbed the long trail from the lake. Armed with his precious instruments, he joined the Swan river brigade of four canoes, and embarked on what was to be the longest, fastest and most brilliant piece of survey in his whole career.

Progress was tedious until the party had crossed the watershed beyond which all streams flow north-westward into Lake Winnipeg and thence into Hudson Bay. They then made a rapid descent through Rainy

lake and the Lake of the Woods to the Winnipeg river (the mad or foaming water of the Indians), down which they paddled and portaged to its mouth. Coasting along the south shore of Lake Winnipeg under the shelter of its low limestone cliffs, they came to the mouth of the Dauphin or Little Saskatchewan river. The ascent of this stream brought them to the waters of Lake Manitoba. They had only to paddle to the head of this lake, and from thence the length of Lake Winnipegosis, in order to find themselves at the mouth of the Swan river. Twelve miles up this stream was their objective—Swan River House.

As they approached their goal, Thompson observed that the land was rapidly improving in character; until at Swan River House he found himself in the heart of a fine varied country of hill and plain, woodland and meadow—the beaver country *par excellence*. Here on every side were to be found traces of the labours of these industrious animals; the dammed brooks, the flooded meadows, the dome-like huts in which they lived and the

burrows to which they fled for refuge when attacked. All this fine country was the hunting ground of the Cree Indians, the possession of which they had from time immemorial disputed with the beaver, the bison, and the red deer.

When the early French traders arrived, they brought with them chisels, knives, and other implements of iron. The Indians, having got possession of these, were able to cut through the dams, drain the waters of the ponds, and thus expose the huts and burrows of the beaver. Then, assisted by their small half-savage dogs, they would chisel their way through the thick walls of the huts until they came to the beaver. Since there was a ready market for his skin among the French traders, they soon became rich, and for several years men, women, and children were gay with brooches, ear-rings and beads, and gaudy with scarlet coats.

But then the Nipissing and Iroquois Indians, who had exhausted their own countries, spread to the north and west. Armed with their new steel traps, they began a war

of annihilation upon the beaver; and by the year 1797, when Thompson travelled through the Swan river district, almost the whole of that extensive region was denuded. The short phase of prosperity was over. The greed of the white man and the improvidence of the Indian had done their work, and while the native might still hope to gain a bare subsistence from hunting the deer and the bison, he was once more poor, thus to remain for ever.

Over this country, Thompson made a series of rapid excursions by horse and canoe, in order that he might fix the location of the various trading houses of the North West Company. In the course of five weeks, he had crossed to the basins of the Red Deer and the Assiniboine rivers, and surveyed each of these streams to its source. He then descended the Assiniboine to its confluence with the Souris, near where the city of Brandon now stands. Here toward the end of November he put up at Assiniboine House, which was at that time kept by a trader called John McDonnell.

McDonnell's house was the natural point of departure for the journey across to the Mandan Villages on the upper Missouri. The trail lay in a south-westerly direction along the south bank of the Souris river as far as the great bend, and from thence across the open plains to the heights of the Missouri. As the country was generally treeless, the custom of travellers was to move from point to point where patches of wood growing in the river bottom or at the higher levels afforded fire-wood and shelter for the night.

Winter had come, and three inches of snow lay upon the ground, making travel both disagreeable and dangerous. Worse still, the road passed through the hunting grounds of the Sioux Indians, those wild riders of the plains who lived by pursuit of the bison. The Sioux had lately suffered the loss of several men at the hands of the Mandan Indians; and these losses they blamed on the whites who had supplied the Mandans with guns and ammunition. They were therefore in a very menacing temper, and had determined to waylay, scalp, and plunder the next party of

traders who ventured the journey to the villages.

Thompson, however, was not to be deterred; and he made his preparations for the dash across the plains. As guide and interpreter, he engaged a man who had resided for eight years among the Mandans, by name René Jussomme. He also picked up a light-hearted Irishman, Hugh McCrachan, who had often been to the villages for months at a time. The rest of the party was made up of French Canadians, gay and gluttonous vagabonds, who could nevertheless work as hard as they boasted, and hunt as much as they ate. All these men enlisted for the expedition as free traders; that is to say, each of them borrowed from McDonnell goods and trinkets to the value of fifty beaver skins, which he undertook to repay on his return. Thompson himself was supplied with two horses, and ammunition and tobacco for trade. Jussomme had one horse; while the men each bought two half-savage dogs from the Assiniboines. These were to haul their sled-loads of goods across the plains.

Thus equipped, the party set forth on the 28th day of November. The dogs were unaccustomed to hauling anything. Snapping and barking, they dashed hither and thither in all directions, hardly restrained by the loud *sacrés* of the Frenchmen, reinforced by lashes freely administered with their stout rawhide whips. The motley procession crossed the Assiniboine on the ice, and camped that evening in a wood by the side of the Souris river, hardly six miles from the point from which they had set out. Meanwhile, the temperature was falling. At eight that night Thompson observed that it was 20° below zero. By the following morning it had dropped seven degrees more, and a stinging west wind had sprung up which kept them in camp. Here they remained for five days, in a temperature that sank as low as 40° below zero; while the high wind whistled through their canvas, and filled the tent with smoke from their fire. During this time, they devoured the flesh of three bison which the Frenchmen had brought into camp, while the dogs rejoiced in the offal.

The wind had by this time shifted to the north-west, and the weather turned milder with snow. When the storm was over, they renewed their journey, keeping close to the river in order that they might not lose sight of the familiar landmarks, for the men neither knew the compass nor would trust it to guide them. After making eleven miles, they came to a grove of hardwood, in which they found five tents of Assiniboine Indians. These gave them a hospitable welcome, but warned them that the Sioux were on the warpath. Nevertheless, they pressed forward, and by the following morning had reached the point where the trail led away from the river across the wind-swept plain to Turtle Mountain on the international frontier.

Jussomme now announced that they must prepare for an early start, as they faced a long journey across country before they could reach the shelter of the wooded heights. At seven the following morning they were on their way. Mile after mile they trudged over the boundless plain until one o'clock in the afternoon, and still no Turtle hill was in sight.

The weather had now turned threatening, and anxiety was in every face. At this point Jussomme threw up his hands and confessed that he had lost his way.

It was a critical moment. Springing to his horse, Thompson galloped to the nearest knoll, from which with his glass he scanned the horizon on every side. Not a vestige of wood was in sight, but far to the north-west his eye caught what seemed to be the tops of a clump of trees. On this he took a bearing with his compass, and called to the party to follow him, which after some hesitation they made up their minds to do. Meanwhile the wind came on with increasing force, and the darkness closed in before they could see whether it was really a wood to which their painful and tedious march led. However, they kept in file and close together, and the dogs gave no trouble. It was black night before they finally reached the wood. Utterly wearied, the men hurriedly threw up their canvas and sought shelter from the storm.

The blizzard continued through the next day, and the men were too exhausted to

proceed. They remained in camp with nothing but the meat of two tough old bulls to relieve their hunger. The day following two of the three horses went lame, their hoofs eaten away by the hard crusty snow. Luckily they encountered a small party of Assiniboines on their way to McDonnell's house to trade, and were able to send the horses back with them to the fort, purchasing dogs from the Indians in their stead. Two days later they met another party of Indians, and from them got a good meal. These Indians warned them that the Sioux were in waiting at the Dog Tent Hills; and no offer would induce anyone of them to go forward with the party as a guide.

They were now in the neighbourhood of Turtle Mountain, and Thompson had taken sole command. Another gale, another blizzard, and another march till nightfall brought them to the hill. On this occasion again the compass proved a trusty guide. In the darkness, Thompson's face brushed against the overhanging branch of a tree, and he knew that he had guided his men safely to the wood.

Thus they continued as far as the Dog Tent Hills, near the elbow of the Souris. On approaching the broken country, Thompson espied a long line of horsemen descending the slope and moving off to the south. It was the Sioux, who had made up their minds that no traveller would venture forth in such tempestuous weather. Thompson signalled his men to throw themselves flat on the ground. This they did, and remained unperceived until the enemy was out of sight. They then entered the hills, and while they rested and hunted, cut tent poles and firewood for the dash across the barren plain. The fifty miles that still divided them from the waters of the Missouri were passed without adventure, and they arrived, tired but triumphant, at the upper village of the Mandans after a journey of thirty-three days.

Thompson was now introduced by Jussomme to a chief who bore the name of "Big White Man." To this chief he explained that his business was not to trade, but to visit the various tribes of natives, in order to see how they could be more regularly supplied

with arms, ammunition, and other articles which they much needed. Surprised and pleased at this agreeable information, the chief led the white man to his own hut, where he and his servant Boisseau were comfortably installed and entertained with all the rites of native hospitality.

In company with Jussomme and McCrachan, Thompson then paid a visit to each of the five villages in turn. These, he found, were all built alike of domelike huts constructed of mud plastered over a framework of wood, each with an aperture in the centre of the roof to carry off the smoke of the fire and admit light to the solitary chamber of the dwelling. In front of each house stood a porch made of stretched bison skins, affording an approach to a doorway large enough to admit a horse. Passing the door, one entered a circular chamber about forty feet across, and, from the earthen floor to the aperture in the roof, eighteen or twenty feet in height. To the left of the doorway, sat the master of the house on a couch covered with buffalo robes. Before him was the fire, built in a

circular space hollowed out of the floor, and surrounded by vessels of native pottery containing maize and boiled meat, the food of the household. Around the walls were a series of frame bunks about three feet from the ground, each of them enclosed by hides except for the front and made comfortable by a soft buffalo robe. To the right of the entrance were the stalls for the two or three horses which belonged to the household, to which every evening they were led back after pasturing on the plains. In the smallest of these villages, Thompson counted thirty-one such huts, in the largest one hundred-and-thirteen, each hut containing a family of from eight to ten souls.

Surrounded as they were by fierce and violent enemies, the Mandans had constructed their villages with an eye to defence rather than to comfort. For this purpose a site was selected on elevated ground, so that no attack could be made from above. The houses were then built irregularly without regard for streets, and the whole village surrounded by a stockade of timbers at least twelve feet in height. On more than one occasion, Thomp-

son learned, the Sioux had taken advantage of a dark and stormy night to approach the villages and fire the palisades. But the flames had no power to destroy the earthen houses; there were no straight streets down which the enemy could shoot; and, as a regular siege was beyond the power of any of their foes, the Mandans had hitherto escaped destruction.

The tribe, when Thompson visited them, were already acquainted with the use of iron. Their flint-tipped spears and arrows they gladly laid aside, when they could, for a long spear, headed with a flat iron bayonet nine or ten inches in length. Thus far, however, they had been visited only irregularly by traders; and so had but few guns among them. Iron was so precious for purposes of war that it had not yet come into common use for agriculture. Their ploughs were made of the shoulder blade of a deer or bison, neatly fastened by thongs to a handle. For hoes, they used pointed sticks hardened in the fire. A council of old men allotted to each family its portion of ground in the rich

alluvial of the river bottom. From this they were able with their rude implements to raise a sufficient quantity of the maize, pumpkins, beans, and melons which were native to America.

Thompson was anxious to find out the origin of this interesting people, for they had not been many years on the banks of the Missouri. Their traditions, however, went back no further than the days of their great-great-grandfathers. These, they said, had dwelt to the eastward, possessing the rich flats about the upper waters of the Red river and the Mississippi. There the wild rice grew in abundance and the deer were in plenty, though the horse and the buffalo were unknown. On all these streams they had villages and cultivated the ground as at present from before the memory of man.

The Sioux to the south of their ancient home were their enemies, but, armed only with stone-headed spears and arrows, could do them little harm. To the north-east, in the depths of the gloomy forest, dwelt the Chippewas, who were likewise powerless to

hurt them. But the day came when the Chippewas, armed by the white traders with guns, ironheaded arrows, and spears, silently collected under cover of the forest, and sallied out to harry their villages with fire, and cut off their men as they were scattered in hunting parties far and wide. Hard pressed by the attacks of an enemy whom they could not resist, they gave way from point to point until they arrived at the banks of the Missouri; and thus put the width of the great plains between them and their implacable foes.

Having made friends with the natives and taken the observations necessary to determine the position of their villages, Thompson prepared to depart. As the Mandans dwelt in the territory of the United States, and it was contrary to the treaty of 1794 for a British company to plant trading posts among them, commerce was possible only if they were willing to make the journey to McDonnell's house to trade. Accordingly a chief in the prime of life, together with four young warriors, was selected to accom-

pany Thompson on the trip home. These were joined by an old man and his squaw, who said that they wished to see the houses of the white men before they died. But the heights of the Missouri were too much for the aged couple, and they dropped out. Fourteen days of storm and tempest on the open plain sufficed to kill the spirit of two of the warriors, and they also dropped out. With the remainder, Thompson arrived at Assiniboine House on the 3rd of February, 1798. Unfortunately, the attempt to open up trade with the Mandans turned out to be unsuccessful. The journey was long and difficult in winter; and, in summer, the Sioux were active and cut off parties who tried to make the passage across their land so that the Mandan villages proved to be beyond the reach of the merchants from Canada.

At McDonnell's house, Thompson prepared the maps and notes of his survey to be sent by the next convoy to headquarters at Grand Portage. He then took leave of his hospitable friend, and set forth on his ex-

plorations up the Red river. With three French Canadians and an Indian guide, he started down the Assiniboine, hauling his baggage and provisions by dog sleds on the ice. The tedious windings of the stream and the ever increasing depth of snow made progress difficult. Nevertheless, by the 7th of March he had reached the junction of the Assiniboine and the Red rivers, where the city of Winnipeg now stands. He then turned up the Red river, and in six days' travel came to the international boundary, beyond which it was his duty to warn all traders that they were trespassing in the territory of the United States.

By the 25th of March he had worked his way south as far as the post of Baptiste Cadotte, which was situated on a tributary of the Red river, near the present site of the town of Red Lake Falls. From this point he purposed to cross the height of land to the western end of Lake Superior. Could he do it before the break-up of winter, and while the mantle of snow still lay on the

ground to give passage to his dogs? He had, it will be remembered, no experience of southern latitudes. His last winter had been spent by the shore of Reindeer lake, where the ice stood firm till a windstorm broke it up on the fifth day of July. Cadotte warned him that the season was too far advanced; but he took the risk.

On the 27th of March he began his his journey eastward up the Clearwater river into Minnesota, picking up a guide from some Chippewas whom he found on the way. As the day wore on, the rays of the sun increased in power, and walking became difficult in the thawing snow. The night was mild, and the following morning the guide took care to break his snow-shoes that he might have an excuse for returning to camp. The day was wasted, while Thompson waited impatiently for another guide to be sent to take the place of the first. At sundown a storm came on with thunder, lightning, and rain, which continued the night through and far into the next day. The snow was now so heavy that progress was impossible. The continuous rains had soaked

the clothes and the baggage of the party through and through. The fourth day opened with gusts of hail and sleet. The country before them was like a lake, and Thompson was compelled to admit himself beaten. Splashing and stumbling through the bush and along the treacherous ice of the river, the party struggled to make their way back to the protecting shelter of Cadotte's roof. But their baggage was too much for them, and they had to give in. Finally Thompson with one man, travelling light, pressed forward to the post for help; and by the afternoon of the second day the weary travellers were brought safely into camp.

When the rivers were finally clear of ice, Thompson, with his three Canadians and a native woman, made a fresh start, this time by canoe and with dried provisions to last for twelve days. They had first to battle their way against the current of Clearwater river, to the portage which brought them to Red lake. The country was everywhere soaked with water, so that at night they were forced to cut down trees and sleep on the branches.

Red lake, they found, was still covered with patches of broken ice. Hauling and paddling their canoe in turn they crossed the lake, and entered an immense area of pond and marsh to the south. Everywhere stretched beds of wild rice, the haunt of innumerable geese, duck, and loon. With infinite toil they made their way from lake to lake and brook to brook, until after five days in the marsh they arrived at Turtle lake.

This lake Thompson took to be the true source of the Mississippi. Twenty years later American surveyors reached the conclusion that, of all the ponds whose waters join to form the Mississippi, Lake Itaska most deserved the name. Lake Itaska lies a few miles to the south and west of Turtle lake. Yet this fact hardly suffices to rob David Thompson of the glory of being the first man to fix the point from which the Father of Waters takes its rise.

There was still a long journey ahead to the coast of Lake Superior; and the canoe was leaky from bumping about among the ice floes. Luckily two boats of Chippewas

came along on their way to John Sayer's post at Red Cedar or Cass lake. With these Thompson and his party embarked. A carry of two hundred yards took them past the narrow and shallow waters of Turtle brook, to a point where the stream was enlarged by a tributary from a nearby lake. Here they launched their canoes and followed the stream through its incredible windings to the lake. This was the country of wild rice and maple sugar, and on these the poor Indians were compelled to subsist. Not a deer or a beaver was to be seen; all had been destroyed. The geese and ducks flew overhead in safety; for the impoverished natives could not even afford the price of guns and ammunition, and they had lost the art of making and using the bow.

Sayer supplied Thompson with a fresh canoe, which enabled him to continue his voyage. From the south of the lake, the valley of the Mississippi now lay clear before him to the south east—a wide expanse of marshy ground through which the channel meandered like a writhing snake. As he advanced, however, the marsh gave way to a

sandy loam, heavily clothed with resinous fir. Arriving at Sand Lake river, he turned east along this to Sand lake. Before him was a great swamp, nearly five miles in width and stretching north and south as far as the eye could reach. This was the last barrier between him and the headwaters of the River St. Louis. Shouldering their canoe and baggage, they advanced along the rude corduroy road which the traders had laid across the bog. As often as they missed their step, they sank to their waists in the mire. A long day's work was needed before they had reached the other side. From thence a brook carried them to the main stream of River St. Louis. They passed into the forest country that surrounds the lake; and were soon at the trading house which the North-Westers maintained at Fond du Lac on the present site of the city of Duluth.

Here they found an old twenty-eight foot canoe, which they patched up and fitted with oars, for their slight river craft was unequal to the winds and waves of Superior; and they had still to make a survey of the lake. The

weather was fine; and they made the circuit without adventure, east along the south shore to Sault Ste. Marie, and westward along the north shore to Grand Portage. Late in the evening of the 7th of June, Thompson set foot on the pier, his long journey over.

At Sault Ste. Marie he had encountered Sir Alexander Mackenzie and William McGillivray travelling east to Montreal. When they heard what he had done, they were warm in their praise, and told him that he had accomplished as much in ten months as might have been expected in two years. His reputation was thus established, and his future with the North West Company was assured.

CHAPTER V

Eight Years of Trading

THE report which Thompson made to his employers after his return to Grand Portage was of immense value to them. They now had a clear idea of the whole stretch of country from Sault Ste. Marie to the upper waters of the Missouri river, and were in a position to rearrange their trading houses to meet the needs of the time. Similar work remained to be done in the other regions to which the interests of the Company extended. But the same haste was not required, and the surveys could be pushed forward with less difficulty and expense in connection with what was the main object of the partners, that is the prosecution of the trade in furs. Thompson was therefore requested to undertake some of the actual work of trading, with freedom to make such journeys of exploration as he saw fit.

The eight years following therefore mark a new period in his service with the North West Company, during which his activities carried him far and wide along the great waterways of the interior. Throughout these years he exercised, to the full, the qualities of mind and character which made him such a unique surveyor. His bulky note books were crammed with memoranda gathered with painstaking accuracy and checked with minute care. From time to time, where a less hurried visit to one of the more comfortable trading houses made it possible, he added his newly acquired information to the map which he had in hand. With each report that he made to Headquarters, the picture of the Great West gradually took shape. Its physical features were delineated; its wild life was noted and classified; its native populations, their numbers, their racial affinities and languages, their manners and customs were as far as possible described. This was indeed wizardry, as his ignorant French-Canadian and Indian followers imagined; but it was the wizardry of science, which, by the slow accumulation of

ascertained facts, lays the whole world of nature at the feet of civilized man.

In the summer of 1798, the attention of traders was largely directed to the western forest country, which lies beyond the divide separating the waters of the upper Saskatchewan from the basin of the Peace and Athabaska rivers. Twenty years before, Peter Pond had penetrated into this region as far as Lake Athabaska, and there established a post. At Lake Athabaska, ten years later, Roderick Mackenzie had built Fort Chippewyan, from which Sir Alexander had set out on his two famous voyages, the one down the Mackenzie to the Arctic, the other up the Peace to its headwaters and from thence across British Columbia to the Pacific. Apart, however, from the activity centred in Lake Athabaska, little had been done as yet to explore the possibilities of trade in what is now northern Alberta.

Thompson was therefore instructed to proceed to Lake la Biche or Red Deer lake, whose waters fall into the Athabaska river about fifty miles below Athabaska Landing.

On the 14th of July, he set forth from Grand Portage with the Churchill river brigade. By the middle of August they had reached Cumberland House, and a week later they had crossed over Frog Portage to the main stream of the Churchill.

From this point west the route lay through a region as yet new to Thompson. As he ascended the river to Isle à la Crosse, he found that the country was still composed of the denuded rock with which he was familiar on the lower stretches of the river. Ridges of this rock, crossing the valley of the stream from point to point, gave it the character of an irregular chain of lakes with many portages and falls. Like the rest of the stony country, it was somewhat poor in game and fur-bearing animals, although many of the lakes teemed with fish.

From Isle à la Crosse to the valley of the Athabaska there were two possible routes. To the north there was Turnor's old course by way of Methy Portage and Clearwater river. To the south, the Beaver river led through a district of plain and forest to its

headwaters at Beaver lake, from which there was an easy portage over the height of land to Lake la Biche. Thompson followed the Beaver river, and arrived at Lake la Biche in time to build a post before the beginning of winter.

He was now at the southern end of that vast stretch of country which he calls the Great Western Forest, and almost in the same latitude as that of Reed lake in the Muskrat country where he had spent the winter of 1794-5. He was thus in a position to compare the climate and soil of this region with that of his old home on the eastern or "Siberian" side of North America. Throughout the long winter months, he kept as usual a careful record of the temperatures registered from day to day by his thermometer. At Reed lake, the temperature for December had varied from $+31°$ to $-45°$ with a mean of $-10°$ F. For January it had varied from $+11°$ to $-47°$ with a mean of $-21.3°$, and for February from $+39°$ to $-31°$ with a mean of $+6°$. At Lake la Biche he found that although in each of the three winter months, the mercury

sank as low as 48° below zero, it rose at times as high as 43° above, and that the mean for December, the coldest month, was not lower than −6.5°. Then, too, while Reed lake was hardly above the level of Hudson Bay, the country about Lake la Biche was high and dry, and the snow did not lie so thick on the ground at the end of winter. Accordingly, the rays of the sun had a chance to exert their power on the face of the land much earlier in the year, and spring burst at Lake la Biche long before winter had loosened his iron grip on the region about Reed lake.

The forests with their wild life responded generously to the less rigorous climate. In the Muskrat region, the wretched traders and Indians were forced to scour the country for fish and game in quantities sufficient to keep them alive. At Lake la Biche the waters yielded an abundant supply of fish; and during the five months that he spent at the post, Thompson saw no less than forty-nine moose and several buffalo brought in, all of which had been shot within twenty miles of the house. There also all the animals, in-

cluding the precious beaver, attained their full size and development.

Thompson wished to get an idea of the extent and general character of this western forest land, and the quickest way to do so was to survey the Athabaskan waters from their sources. Accordingly, when spring opened, he rode across country southwest to Fort Augustus and from thence westward to the headwaters of the Pembina, which at this point was divided from the valley of the Saskatchewan by a narrow neck of land. Embarking on the Pembina, he followed it down till it merged with the main stream of the Athabaska river. A short excursion up the Slave Lake river enabled him to explore the shore line of Lesser Slave lake. Returning to the Athabaska, he continued along its broad stream past Athabaska Landing to the mouth of the Clearwater river, and from thence he made his way along the well-known track by Methy Portage and the Churchill to Grand Portage. Throughout the region embraced in his survey, he found little exposed rock and therefore few lakes, but what was

better for the beaver many small brooks and streams which they could dam for their ponds. The country thus promised a steady yield of furs from year to year, and this, with the generous supply of game which the forest offered to trader and trapper, was enough to justify the name which it bore, "The fur-traders' paradise."

In the mad competition for pelts, the different companies could not rest content with the trade of regions already within their grasp. Each of them sought always to push further afield; for he, who could anticipate his rivals in opening new country, might plant his trading houses on the most advantageous sites and bind the Indians to himself with ties which later comers could not break. In 1790, Peter Pangman for the North-Westers had pressed along the course of the North Saskatchewan to a point five miles above its junction with the Clearwater. There from a hill top he had gazed along the line of snow-capped Rockies, and his eyes had travelled up the winding course of the river to the gap through which it issued from the mountains.

From that time the partners had never ceased to dream of the wealth that lay beyond the Great Divide. In a decade the line of their trading posts had been extended to a point but three miles short of "Pangman's Pine." There, in a wide plain not far from the forks of the river, rose the walls and blockhouses of Rocky Mountain House, destined to serve as a point of departure for the invasion of the last great area as yet unknown.

But much tedious work remained to be done before it would be possible to hazard the passage of the Rocky Mountains. Besides the North Saskatchewan, there were two main branches of the South river, the Red Deer and the Bow rivers, and these had to be surveyed to their sources in the foothills in order to determine the best routes for trade. The Blackfoot, Blood, and Piegan Indians, whose encampments lay along the courses of these streams, were suspicious and hostile. They held these regions by right of conquest from the Kootenays and Snakes whom they had driven to the mountains; and these needed only to procure the muskets and ammunition

which the white men could supply in order to sweep down through the rugged passes and revenge themselves for the defeats of many years. The Indians therefore steadily opposed any movement of the traders toward the Rockies, and even the stoutly fortified trading posts were hardly secure against a sudden assault.

In these circumstances, the partners at Grand Portage could think of no one better qualified than David Thompson to accomplish the objects of the company. They remembered the early connections which he had made among the Piegans during his service with the English, and they had complete confidence in his skill and daring. Thompson was accordingly taken away from his work in the Athabaska country, almost before it was well begun, and despatched up the Saskatchewan to Fort George, in order that he might draw the maps of his recent surveys and complete his preparations for the work that was now in hand.

In the spring he took horse and rode overland to Fort Augustus, and thence south

along the Edmonton-Calgary line to a point just short of the present town of Lacombe. Turning west, he struck the Clearwater near its mouth and found himself at Rocky Mountain House. While he himself descended the North Saskatchewan to the elbow, making a survey as he went, he sent four French Canadians south to the Red Deer river, with orders to follow it to its junction with the main stream of the South Saskatchewan. A short distance below Rocky Mountain House, he found a party of Hudson's Bay men encamped for building. The English, as well as the Canadians, were bent on crossing the Great Divide; and it would be a serious blow if they were allowed to anticipate the North-Westers in so doing.

Accordingly, on his return to Rocky Mountain House, Thompson brought with him Duncan McGillivray from down the river, in order that he might have assistance in pressing forward his explorations. Along with McGillivray, he rode across to the Red Deer river, where he found a camp of Piegans. A short stay among them was enough to lull

their suspicions; and Thompson was then able to ride twenty-two miles west to the foot of the mountains, where he expected to meet a band of Kootenays. These he found, twenty-six strong. With their women and children they had crossed the divide to meet the white traders. These Kootenays were the first of the British Columbia Indians whom Thompson had encountered. He warned them of the presence of the Piegans only a few miles east, and sent them back across the mountains. In order to avoid the Piegans, they travelled by way of the North Saskatchewan and succeeded in reaching their homes unobserved.

Meanwhile, with McGillivray and four men on horseback, Thompson crossed the Red Deer river and rode still further south to the banks of the Bow, not far from Calgary. This stream he surveyed as far east as the bend and westward to Exshaw at the foot of the mountains. McGillivray then made a traverse across from the north fork of the Saskatchewan to the valley of the Athabaska, the results of which were carefully incor-

porated in Thompson's notes. Thompson himself spent the rest of the winter at Rocky Mountain House, trading with the natives and taking observations to fix the location of the post.

When spring opened, he resolved to attempt a journey into the mountains by land. With a party of eight men and an Indian guide, he started westward from Rocky Mountain House. In the narrow valley of the Sheep river, the horses could go no further; and as the guide knew of no other route, they returned to the post. A second attempt, this time by canoe up the Saskatchewan, was equally unsuccessful because of the floods on the river. When Thompson returned to eastern headquarters in the spring of 1802, he was not yet able to report that he had opened a practicable route to the west of the Rockies.

What was the effect of this news upon the minds of the partners? From Thompson's subsequent movements, it is possible to surmise. The attempt to pierce the mountains from the headwaters of the Saskatchewan was

for the time being abandoned, and attention was once more transferred to the north. According to the surveys already made by Thompson, the west end of Lesser Slave lake could not be more than fifty or seventy-five miles from the valley of the Peace river, up which Alexander Mackenzie had travelled ten years before. Thither Thompson was sent, with instructions to explore a route across the watershed.

From the upper end of Lesser Slave lake, he pushed his way west through a wide valley until he came to the banks of the Smoky river. On the different branches of the Saskatchewan, he had noted the seams of coal exposed along the banks. At Smoky river, the coal beds, ignited by spontaneous combustion, had been burning from beyond the memory of the oldest Indians on the river, and the dark clouds of smoke which they sent forth gave the river its name. Smoky river was a tributary of the Peace. A short journey down stream brought him to the Forks where now stands Peace River Landing.

Thompson spent the winters of 1803 and 1804 developing trade from the old posts built by Mackenzie at the Forks of the river, and westward beyond the frontiers of British Columbia. Here, as at the headwaters of the Saskatchewan, he found rivals. No sooner was he settled at the Forks than a party of XY traders from Montreal landed a few yards from the post and made preparations for the erection of a house. Thompson prosecuted his work with his accustomed vigour. In the winter of 1805, when Simon Fraser set forth on the journey that was to make him famous, he found that a base for his exploration of the Fraser river had been soundly established on the Peace by his friend and colleague David Thompson. He honoured him accordingly when he gave the name of Thompson to the greatest tributary of the Fraser river.

By the summer of 1804 Thompson was once more back at headquarters, no longer at Grand Portage (for that had been surrendered to the Americans), but at Fort William on Thunder Bay, where the dépôt of the company had now been established. In

that year, the trade war with the XY Company had reached an acute stage. The Hudson's Bay Company had also reorganized their enterprises, and between them these rivals had almost succeeded in wresting from the North-Westers the trade of the Muskrat country. Thompson was therefore withdrawn from the fields of his recent activity, his chance of crossing the mountains was indefinitely postponed, and he was sent into the Muskrat country to restore the trade of that region to the Canadians.

With a heavy heart he turned his back on the far west, and entered the cold and dismal forest which he knew only to loathe. But loyalty was one of the deepest instincts of his nature, and so, with indefatigable energy, he proceeded to build new posts and explore new routes in the region north-east of Lake Winnipeg. In the course of his efforts, he carried the flag of the North-Westers to a point on South Indian lake not more than two hundred and fifty miles distant from Churchill itself. In his relations with rival traders, he exhibited a friendliness and courtesy

that stands in marked contrast with the cut-throat methods too frequently adopted at critical moments of competition. The surveys begun years before, when he was working under Joseph Colen, were now triumphantly finished. Of them, a member of the Canadian Geological Survey says, "After Thompson had completed his surveys of this muskrat country, no further information was obtained about it for nearly a century, and when in 1896, I travelled through it, the only map of any service which was available was that drawn by David Thompson in 1813 from surveys made at this time."

It is sometimes imagined that the Indians a century ago existed in vast numbers; and that they were universally of a warlike and bloodthirsty disposition. This is a complete mistake. It was only in especially favourable localities that conditions were such as to promote the evolution of large bands, and generally speaking the Indian was a poor and humble creature. Lacking the power of invention, he was often satisfied to make use of utensils of the most primitive character, and he was almost, if not quite, unarmed.

Throughout the whole of the Muskrat country Thompson was able to count but ninety-two widely scattered families, each of them numbering perhaps seven souls. This gave to every human being from two to three hundred square miles of hunting country. Yet so poor was the region and so great the improvidence of its inhabitants that, in unfavourable seasons, the population was often reduced to the verge of starvation, and it was only by means of the greatest efforts that they wrested a livelihood from their gloomy land of rock and forest.

All of Thompson's efforts therefore did not avail to bring satisfactory returns from a region so poor in furs, and inhabited by such a sparse and wretched population. It was with joy in his heart that he handed over the district to a partner in the early summer of 1806, and once more wended his way back to Fort William.

Two events of personal interest in the life of Thompson occurred during these eight years. The first was his marriage to Charlotte Small, the half-breed daughter of Patrick Small, an early trader in the West.

Small was a member of a famous Irish family, which had given generals and admirals to the service of the Empire. He had, however, followed the custom of the country and taken a native woman to wife. Thompson's marriage took place at Isle à la Crosse in the summer of 1799. The other event took place on November 8, 1804, although the news of it did not reach Thompson until some time later. On that date the North West Company and the XY Company agreed to cease their ruinous competition and join forces for the expansion of their trade. In the terms of agreement, the name of David Thompson appears as a partner of the United Company. This was good news in itself; but better still was the prospect that loomed up before his eyes. With the wounds of competition healed, and the Canadian trading interests now presenting a united front, the last obstacle to an aggressive forward movement was removed, and the conquest of the Rockies might finally be achieved.

CHAPTER VI

ACROSS THE GREAT DIVIDE

THERE are long stretches in human life when the contest with fate seems endless and the result uncertain, but it is such periods that test the mettle of a man. In the life of David Thompson, the eight years just past had been marked by no striking achievement. Yet with unflagging patience and zeal he had discharged his routine duties, constantly adding to his equipment the knowledge and judgment that come from maturer years and wider experience. When therefore his hour at last struck, he was not unready. Expert surveyor, skilled trader, he was now to crown his life-work by a piece of original discovery and exploration on a scale grand enough to place him in the foremost rank among the builders of British North America.

It was summer of the year 1806 when Thompson returned from the Muskrat coun-

try to headquarters at Fort William. There he found a new excitement and a new enthusiasm in the air. During the preceding year the American officers, Lewis and Clark, had crossed from the upper Missouri to the valley of the Snake river, and followed that stream to its junction with the lower Columbia, down which they had made their way to the Pacific ocean. John Jacob Astor, the great American merchant, was exerting all his strength to build up a fur trading empire on the Pacific slope under the flag of the Republic; and the full extent of his ambitions was now disclosed. For some years the Hudson's Bay Company had been knocking at the barrier of the Rockies, and, spurred by competition, they might at any moment burst through. Fraser for the North-Westers had already advanced from the Forks of the Peace, and accomplished the difficult and dangerous feat of descending the Fraser river. But between the Fraser river on the north and the Snake on the south was a vast region on which the feet of white men had never trod; and the North West Company, no longer

crippled by their civil war with the XY traders, were resolved to claim this region for themselves. Thompson was at once despatched to Rocky Mountain House, with definite instructions to cross the mountains, this time as senior officer at the post and in full charge of the operations.

The winter of 1806-7 was spent in preparation; and John McDonald of Garth, trader of the Company, together with Quesnel and Finan McDonald, clerks, lent a hand in the work. The route selected was by way of the North Saskatchewan, which Thompson knew must be practicable, because it was along this road that the Kootenay Indians had returned, when he sent them back to their homes some years before. He therefore despatched one of his men, a half-breed called Jaco Finlay, up this road into the mountains, with instructions to spy out the land. Everything was done with the utmost quietness. The Piegan Indians suspected nothing, although they were at all times visiting the fort. Even the Hudson's Bay people, encamped on the river just below the North-Westers, had not an inkling of Thompson's plans.

In the spring Jaco Finlay returned to the post with his report. He had penetrated through the gap in the mountains to a large valley near the head of the river, where he had built a small outpost and got in touch with the Kootenays. From this valley he had crossed the watershed to a small stream which flowed south-westward and emptied into a mighty river. At the mouth of this stream he had built a canoe, which he had carefully "cached" for Thompson's use.

At this moment an incident occurred in distant Montana, which, tragic in itself, was not without advantage for Thompson. Captain Lewis, the American officer, had became embroiled with the Blackfeet. They attacked his camp and two of their warriors were killed. Suddenly all the allied tribes were inflamed with the passion for revenge. War parties gathered throughout the plains, and the Piegans in the neighborhood of Rocky Mountain House were drawn off to the south. Perceiving the passes unguarded, Thompson gathered his equipment and made an immediate start. With his wife and children, Finan

McDonald and a party of half-breeds to help him, he moved up the river by horse and canoe and entered the mountains.

As he advanced, the country became rougher and wilder. The grassy hills were left behind, and the mountains raised their heads in mad confusion height on height, bald and precipitious masses of solid rock, except for the patches of pinewood that clung here and there to their slopes. At times, the crags came together compressing the river to the width of a few yards, through which the current rushed against them. Again, when the valley widened, the stream would divide into many channels dotted with rugged islets and marked by shoals of rock and sand. Finally they reached the valley in which Jaco Finlay had built his house—a low and level plain to the north side of the river, about five miles long and not less than a mile in width. On every hand were to be seen the remains of old tepees erected by the Kootenays, who frequented the spot to make dried provisions from the buffalo and mountain goat. For this reason Thompson gave the valley the name of Kootenay plains.

Above Kootenay plains, the river contracted to a width of barely fifteen yards, and so continued to the forks, at which point the canoes had to be laid up. From the forks, there was a splendid view of the mountains still ahead, their peaks more elevated and craggy than they had so far seen, for they were in fact the main range of the Rockies. Taking the left branch of the stream they followed it to within a mile of its end in Glacier lake. At this point, between Mount Balfour on the right and Mount Forbes on the left, was a gap opening to the west. Into this gap they turned. A march of two miles through heavy pinewood brought them to a rivulet whose waters flowed to the west. "May God in his mercy," says the pious explorer, "give me to see where its waters flow into the ocean and return in safety." Thus he marked out his programme for the next four years.

This rivulet (Blaeberry creek) descended sharply through a narrow, winding valley between the heights; and it was necessary for the party to force their way through the thick woods along the steep and rugged slopes, and

to cross and recross the stream through water knee-deep, in order to reach the mouth. A full day's travel, however, brought them to the valley of the Columbia. The weather had done its work on the canoe built by Jaco Finlay; and it was quite unseaworthy. They had to halt while they scoured the woods for materials and built new canoes. Finally they embarked and paddled south up the Columbia until they came to its headwaters. There, a short distace from Lake Windermere, they hewed logs of heavy fir and built a cabin which they strongly stockaded on three sides, the fourth resting on the steep bank of the river. This was Old Kootenay House, the first trading post erected by white men on the waters of the Columbia.

In this remote spot, the safety of all depended upon the courage and resource of the leader. Additional supplies were needed from Rocky Mountain House, and Finan McDonald was sent back across the mountains to fetch them. Until the end of autumn, provisions were scarce, for the red deer and antelope had not yet descended from the higher

levels, and the mountain goat was hard to shoot as he leapt from crag to crag. The party therefore relied on fish and the flesh of wild horses whose feeding grounds were not more than two miles from the house. For the purpose of trade, it was necessary to get in touch with the natives and to examine the country as well as possible. The season was late, but Thompson was able to make one short excursion with a chief of the Flatbow Indians.

When Finan McDonald rejoined his chief, he brought with him alarming intelligence. In the course of the summer, the brother of Old White Swan, a Blackfoot chief, had with his band assaulted and pillaged Fort Augustus, possessing himself of many guns, much ammunition and tobacco and various other articles. Whether or not he had murdered the traders at the Fort, McDonald could not say; but it was clear that the spirit of unrest and resentment against the whites which had for some time pervaded the whole Blackfeet confederacy was now coming to a head; and Thompson could hardly

hope that he himself would escape serious trouble.

Trouble came rather sooner than he expected. The fort was not yet finished when twelve Piegan Indians appeared on foot from across the mountains. A month later twenty-three more arrived. These set up their tents along with the others just outside the gates. For over two months they hung about the stockade, making themselves very objectionable, and forcing the garrison to remain together within the walls. But Thompson had a small stock of dried provisions on hand, and he put his men on short rations, so that there might be no need to scatter over the country for hunting. For water, he let down two large kettles nightly from the steep river bank and this was enough for the daily needs of the post. Towards the end of October, two of the Indians disappeared from the group, and the garrison feared a general attack. Nothing, however, materialized, and before winter set in, the savages drifted quietly away.

Yet their peril was not yet over. One morning, two more Piegans presented them-

selves at the fort. Thompson was anxious, but he did not flinch. He showed them the strength of his stockades and bastions, the walls bored with loopholes for his muskets. "I know," he said, "that you are come as spies and intend to destroy us, but many of you will die before you succeed. Go back to your countrymen and tell them this." At the same time, he loaded them with presents of tobacco for their friends. A fortunate circumstance hastened their departure. Two of the Kootenay Indians came to the fort while they were there, and when they saw the Piegans, they glared at them like tigers. Meanwhile the little garrison watched and waited, six hardy voyageurs ready to die if necessary in order to make good the words of their chief. And while they waited, winter came on, covering the mountains with snow and placing them in safety.

It was some time before Thompson learned the details of his escape. The two Piegans were, as he guessed, the advanced guard of a large war party that was being formed at the instigation of the civil chief to crush the

white men and the natives to the west side of the mountains before they became well armed. The war chief (Thompson's old friend Kootanae Appee) had opposed this venture. How, he urged, could they smoke to the Great Spirit for success, if without warning they invaded the lands of a people with whom for ten summers they had been at peace? Such, however, was the influence of the wilder spirits, that the old war chief was compelled to yield to their will.

In fifteen days about three hundred warriors under three chiefs assembled at the rendezvous named by Kootanae Appee, and under his leadership marched through the mountains to within twenty miles of the post. There they awaited the return of their scouts. It was not long before the latter arrived. The Kootenays, they said, were gathering under the white man to fight for the protection of their post. At the same time they presented the chiefs with Thompson's gifts, six feet of tobacco for Kootenae Appee, eighteen inches for each of the lesser chiefs, and a fine pipe of red porphyry with an ornamental stem in which to smoke it.

Thompson's knowledge of the Indians was thorough, and in this case, his guess as to their intentions had hit the mark. When the war chiefs heard his message of defiance, they were dumbfounded. "What can we do with this man," they exclaimed," our women cannot mend a pair of shoes but he sees them" (alluding, of course, to Thompson's astronomical observations). Then the eldest of the three war chiefs, wistfully eyeing the tobacco, of which they had none, observed: "I have attacked tents, my knife could cut through them and our enemies had no defence against us. I am ready to do so again. But to go and fight against logs of wood that a ball cannot pierce, and with people we cannot see and with whom we are at peace, is what I am averse to. I go no further!" So saying, he slowly fitted the pipe to the stem and handed it to Kootenae Appee. Led by Kootenae Appee, they all smoked; and, having accepted Thompson's present, were unable to go further against him. Thus by his own resource and by the support of an old friend won in the days of his service for the Hudson's Bay Company,

David Thompson prevented the destruction of the first trading post on the Columbia.

With the coming of spring began the work of exploring the country. Leaving McDonald in charge of Kootenay House, Thompson embarked with four voyageurs on the 20th of April, 1807, and paddled through Lake Windermere to the source of the Columbia. From thence, an easy portage of two miles across a grassy plain brought him to a fine stream flowing south, the Kootenay river of today. Launching his canoe, he proceeded to search for Indians.

The river flowed swiftly along between high and steep banks of rock, their slopes clothed with magnificent timber of all kinds. From time to time the stream narrowed so that the travellers were forced to paddle briskly in order to keep ahead of the current. As they approached Kootenay Falls, in Lincoln county, Montana, the river entered a cañon no less than a mile in length, terminating in a gorge where the trail left the river side and meandered along the dizzy slope of steep bed rock, three hundred feet above the level

of the stream. An hour and a quarter was necessary for the carry; and they cut their shoes to pieces. The least slip would have meant sure destruction; and they struggled along over the jagged rocks without a grain of earth or sand on them to relieve their crippled feet. On the 14th of May, having followed the winding course of the stream southward across the present international boundary and northward again as far as Kootenay lake, they at length came upon ten tepees of Indians.

During all this time, they had shot nothing except for a few antelope and they were nearly famished. Once they came upon the carcase of an antelope, on which an eagle was feeding. Chasing the bird, they seized the meat, but it was tainted and made them all sick. The day following, they encountered the Indians. These, however, had nothing to offer the white men except a few dried carp and some bitter black bread, made of the moss collected from the bark of the resinous fir and the larch.

The snows of the mountains were now melting, and the water of the river had risen

six feet, overflowing the wide meadows. Owing to the floods, none of the Kootenays were willing to come to the house to trade. To paddle home against the current was impossible. Thompson therefore laid up his canoe, bought horses from the Indians and engaged a guide who undertook to lead him overland by a well-known native trail northeast along the valley of the Grand Quête river to Kootenay House.

A day's travel brought them to a large brook, so deep and rapid that the horses could not cross. Thompson selected a large cedar growing by the bank. This he felled so that it lay across the stream and served as a bridge over which they carried their luggage. The horses were taken separately, and by means of a heavy strap of rawhide, dragged kicking and struggling to the further bank. The guide then went hunting, but returned empty handed, and the party went supperless to bed. Early next morning, he killed a small antelope, which was eagerly devoured. But the faint-hearted guide had already had enough. Without warning, he decamped and returned

to his people, leaving the white men stranded among the hills, without provisions and utterly ignorant of the country.

For two days they waited with faint hopes of his return. Thompson then sent two of his men back to the tepees to ask for another guide. In the presence of these men, Ugly Head, one of the chiefs, made a bitter attack upon his followers. He reproached them for their lack of spirit, contrasting their conduct with that of the white men who braved every danger and hardship to bring them arms, ammunition and other things which they needed. "How many of you," he said, "will volunteer to accompany the strangers back to their home?" Not a man answered the call. They knew too well the dangers of mountain travel at that season of the year. In this crisis Ugly Head himself announced that he would act as guide; and, with the voyageurs to lead him, made his way to Thompson's camp.

The noble and manly conduct of the Indian inspired the little party with great confidence and hope. Under his leadership, they

made their way among the rugged hills, avoiding the inundated meadows. The raging torrents they passed by throwing bridges of trees across them. Finally they reached the Kootenay river not far below the portage; and here, after building a canoe to complete their journey, they took leave of their guide. In a short time they were safe at Kootenay House.

Thompson had now to conduct the winter's hunt all the way east to Rainy River House, and bring back supplies for the following year. Among these supplies were two kegs of alcohol, which his partners insisted that he should take with him. Thompson was well aware of the deplorable results that had followed the introduction of spirits among the Indians, but he was overruled. When he came to the defiles of the Saskatchewan, he caused the two kegs to be loaded on the back of a vicious horse. By noon the kegs were empty and broken to pieces. He wrote to his partners, telling them what he had done, and vowing that so long as he was in charge of the fur trade across the mountains, he

would do the same with every keg of alcohol which was sent to him. He was as good as his word; and thus for a few years at least succeeded in keeping the curse of spirits from the Indians of the Pacific slope.

When Thompson reached Kootenay House, the season was too far advanced to allow of further exploration. He therefore sent Finan McDonald to open a trading house at Kootenay Falls, while he himself remained for the winter at the post, taking observations and trading with the Indians. In the following spring, he had once more to cross the mountains with the furs, but by midsummer he was back at his house ready to prosecute his discoveries further to the south.

In the neighborhood of the Falls, Thompson had found that the Kootenay river bent sharply to the west and north. In this direction, he had traced its course to Kootenay lake, before the floods came on, compelling him to cross overland to his home under the guidance of the chief Ugly Head. To the south of the Kootenay was a ridge of mountainous country, intersected however, by well-

marked Indian trails running north and south. These trails, he was told, led to another great river, parallel with the Kootenay and, like it, flowing mainly to the west. This river (now known as Clark's Fork) he made up his mind to explore.

His point of departure was from Ugly Head's encampment, near the present site of Bonner's Ferry, Idaho. There he laid up his canoes, and borrowed horses from the Kootenays for the journey across country. A two day's ride brought him to Clark's Fork at the point where it expands to form Lake Pend d'Oreille. Here he was met by a large deputation of Salish Indians, who welcomed him with presents and gave him every assistance in finding a site suitable for the erection of a post. Their joy was easy to understand, for they were armed merely with a few rude lances and flint-headed arrows, utterly useless in warfare against the Indians of the plains. Thompson had guns, ammunition, and iron arrow-heads for trade, but he warned them that in order to procure these advantages, they must learn to be industrious in hunting for

beaver and other furs, and cease spending their days and nights in gambling—the pet vice of the savage. This they eagerly promised to do.

It was the end of September before he had finished the construction of his new post (Kullyspell House), and he followed it up, by constructing a second post, Salish House, sixty miles further east along the river. From Salish House, he had only to ride out to the great camp of the Salish Indians near Flathead lake in order to secure the promise of their trade. He was now thoroughly established along the whole course of Clark's Fork river.

From information he had gathered, Thompson judged that both the Kootenay river and Clark's Fork were tributaries of the Columbia, and that if he followed them westward to their mouths he would strike that mighty river. From the unwelcome visitations he had experienced at the hands of the Piegans, he realized that the line of approach from the defiles of the Saskatchewan to his new trading post was exposed throughout its

length to raids of the plainsmen through the easy passes of the mountains. He therefore attempted to explore Clark's Fork to its junction with the Columbia, hoping that from thence he might discover a route further west and less accessible to his foes.

For some time he followed the course of the river westward through a country of extensive meadows and forests, enriched by innumerable streams of pure water, and already in March responding to the generous rays of the sun, and the warm breezes from the ocean. But as he approached the mouth, the appearance of the land was changed. Rude blocks of basalt made the country difficult for horses; the stream, tumbling in countless rapids and falls, was unnavigable for canoes. He was forced to turn back; and as the winter's furs were waiting for his arrival, he made his way to Kootenay House and thence, to the dépôt on Rainy river.

In the course of the winter the Salish Indians had traded upwards of twenty muskets and several hundreds of iron arrow-heads, and by dint of constant practice had become

so proficient in their use that they felt themselves a match for the Indians of the plains. In the month of July, when the bison bulls were getting fat, they formed a camp of not less than 150 men to hunt and make dried provisions as Thompson had asked them to do. With Finan McDonald, Michel Bourdeaux and Baptiste Buché to help and encourage them, they crossed the mountains by an easy defile to the east of Flathead lake, and boldly proceeded to hunt for the buffalo.

It was not long before the Piegans got wind of their presence. One morning, the scouts came riding into camp at breakneck speed with the cry, "The enemy is upon us." Down went the tents, and tent poles and baggage were quickly formed into a rude rampart. This was barely ready, when the enemy's horsemen came dashing at the rampart with wild shouts of rage. The Salish stood their ground; and neither a second nor a third charge was able to shake them. The battle was now to be of infantry. The Salish lay quietly behind their ramparts awaiting the assault; while all day long the enemy advanced

in parties of thirty or forty, shouting insulting cries and doing their best to lure them from their cover. As often as they came within gunshot, they were met with a fusilade of bullets. At nightfall they retired discomfited, leaving the Salish in possession of the field.

This was the first occasion on which the Salish had ventured to face the Piegans in the open field, and although no scalps were taken on either side, they counted it a victory to have stood their ground. As for the Piegans, their hearts were full of bitterness; and they swore an oath to wreak vengeance on the white men who had crossed the mountains to the west, and furnished arms and ammunition to their age-long foes.

CHAPTER VII

THE RACE TO THE SEA

BY THE middle of October, 1810, Thompson was once more at the foot of the Rockies en route for the Columbia with four canoe loads of supplies. At Rainy River House, he had learned that a vessel chartered by J. J. Astor and loaded with goods in charge of two former North West traders was on her way around Cape Horn, bound for the Columbia; and his orders were to anticipate this ship in reaching the mouth of the river. He was therefore anxious to get through the passes without delay, and at all costs to avoid a conflict with the Piegans.

Since the 24th of September the brigade had been held up in the neighborhood of Rocky Mountain House. The post was thronged by noisy bands of Piegan, Sarcee, Blood, and Fall Indians, who had come ostensibly to trade, but really to head off any

movement of the white man toward the mountains. Alexander Henry, the trader in charge, endeavoured to get rid of these unwelcome visitors, but all in vain. In such a crisis, the time-honoured expedient was rum. While some of the Indians were drunk, however, others were sober, and for some weeks it was impossible to get the canoes away without observation, either by day or night. Finally, however, Henry got the frightened voyageurs under way, and by the 13th of October, the brigade was already within twenty miles of the mountains.

Thompson himself with a partner, William Henry, and two Indian hunters had ridden ahead to the gap, scouring the country for game and keeping a sharp watch for possible enemies. The party had killed three red deer, made a scaffold, and placed the meat on it for safety against wild animals. Days passed, and the canoes did not put in an appearance. On the 17th the oldest hunter, rising as usual very early in the morning, looked at the scaffold and remarked, "I have had bad dreams; this meat will never be eaten." So

saying, he saddled his horse and rode away.

Thompson could no longer conceal his anxiety. He ordered Henry and the other Indian to proceed down the river in search of the canoes; with positive orders not to fire a shot except in self-defence. At eight in the evening they returned, and he heard their story. Some miles down the river, they had seen a number of Piegans encamped on the bank. A short distance below this camp, they had descended the slope to the river, where they found the marks of canoes and near them in the bottom a rude rampart of stones on which there were traces of blood. Proceeding further down stream, they had fired a shot as a signal to the lost canoemen, but it was not returned.

Thoroughly alarmed by their rashness and folly, Thompson prepared to fly for his life, for he knew that the Piegans would be on them in the morning. At dawn of day, they took horse and made their way east by a wide detour through the forest. Fallen trees and undergrowth interrupted their progress, and their horses' hoofs made their track easy to follow. Fortunately the afternoon brought

with it a light fall of snow, giving them some hope of shaking off their pursuers, and late in the evening they ventured to halt and kindle a small fire.

Racked with fear for his own safety and anxiety for the fate of his men, Thompson passed a sleepless night. His first care was to find the brigade. Avoiding Rocky Mountain House, he continued east for sixty miles along the river, and there, on the second afternoon, he came upon his men, safe and sound, encamped in an abandoned trading-post known as Boggy Hall.

All hope was now abandoned of passing in safety by the defiles of the Saskatchewan, and Thompson determined to blaze anew trail across the Rockies by way of the Athabaska river. The route projected lay over an old path of the Assiniboine Indians to a point on the Athabaska not far from the present line of the Canadian National Railways; and from thence along the valley of the river past the mouth of Yellowhead Pass to its headwaters some miles further south. From this point a pass led across the height of land to the Wood

river, a small tributary of the Columbia. In later years this pass (known as the Athabaska Pass) was the regular route for traders of the Hudson's Bay Company on their journeys to British Columbia.

Horses and dogs were rapidly collected for the trip over land. The men were detailed to their several duties, four to hunt, two to clear a path through the woods, and the remainder to look after the animals and perform the labour of the camp. By the 28th of October all was in readiness; and the little party set off with Thomas, an Iroquois Indian, to act as guide.

It was a full month before they had crossed the belt that lay between them and the Athabaska. The road ran through a wretched country, over mountains and across muskegs. Here and there the fires of the forest had cut wide swathes through the woods, leaving in their wake a tangled mass of fallen timber, through which they had to hack their way. In the bogs the horses lost their footing, shifting their packs and bruising their knees, until in a short while they

were almost useless. To complete the misery of the travellers, there was the difficulty of securing food. Their dried provisions were soon exhausted. Game was scarce; and the hunters often returned empty-handed after a long day's chase.

By the first of December they had reached the Athabaska. Four days later they had come to a point on the river a little above Brulé lake, where the guide informed Thompson that owing to the lateness of the season, all thought of crossing the mountains with horses had to be given up. The greater number of the beasts were therefore sent back to Rocky Mountain House; four only were retained to ease the burden of the dogs.

The thermometer now registered 32° below zero; and the party threw themselves into the work of building a rough shelter of logs to serve while they prepared sleds and snow shoes with which to complete their journey. At the end of the month they made a fresh start. Urged by the shouts and lashings of the voyageurs, the dogs with their burdens scurried along the ice of the river. In

five days they came to the grassy ponds that marked its headwaters—the last possible pasturage for horses. Here, therefore, the poor animals were turned loose to survive the winter as best they could.

Four days more brought the party to the height of land. The landscape, as far as the eye could reach, was clothed with a heavy mantle of gleaming snow. Round about towered the lofty peaks, their sides scarred by avalanches which had swept the slopes bare of trees and rocks in their descent. To the right lay an enormous glacier, a mass of blue-green ice, the eastern face of which was not less than two thousand feet in height. The night was fine, and the stars shone with such brilliance that one of the men told Thompson that he felt he could almost touch them with his hands.

Early next morning they began the descent to the valley of the Columbia. On the eastern face of the mountains, the approach to the height of land had been a long and steady climb. To the west, the ground fell away in a series of abrupt slopes, so steep

in places that it required sure footing to avoid a tumble. A short advance therefore was enough to produce an amazing difference in the climate. The snow which to the east of the mountains was thin and dry, here lay heavy and wet upon the ground; and they entered a forest of clean grown pine of gigantic height and girth. So heavy were the loads and so steep the slope that the dogs were unable to guide the sleds, and from time to time they came against the base of a pine tree with considerable force, dog on one side, sled on the other, so that they were disentangled with difficulty. To relieve the animals, Thompson had a portion of the loads removed from the sleds. The men grumbled as they were forced to lug these packs forward through the heavy snow. Finally after fifteen days' travel they arrived at the banks of the Columbia.

Mutterings of discontent were now openly heard among the French Canadians. They had had enough, and would follow the madman no further. Four of them suited the action to the word and deserted. Two of the

others Thompson despatched with letters to William Henry, describing the route he had discovered, and ordering Henry to follow him along it with an additional supply of goods. With the remainder, Thompson set forth on the journey up the Columbia. They had gone but one day when they, too, balked at the restless energy of their leader. Faced with incipient mutiny, Thompson had no choice except to return to the mouth of the Wood river, and there pass the rest of the winter.

The place of his enforced residence was the famous "Boat Encampment" of later days. At this point, the Columbia, after having pursued a north-westerly course for upwards of two hundred miles from its sources, bent sharply around the head of the Selkirk Mountains, and flowed off to the south. At the bend, the stream was joined by two tributaries, the Wood and Canoe rivers, coming in from the north, and forming at their mouths a wide meadow of rich alluvial soil. There in the midst of a forest of giant pine and larch, the party cleared a site, and built themselves a rough cabin. Thomp-

son, never idle, spent his time exploring the neighbourhood, and constructing a boat for the remainder of the journey. As there was no birch bark available, he built it clinker-fashion of cedar boards split thin; and these, in default of nails, he sewed together with the fine roots of the pine.

The snow was not yet off the ground when he was once more on his way. He had counted on reaching the mouth of the Columbia not later than the first of August, and would gladly have made the descent by way of the river itself, which here lay clear before him. Of his canoemen, however, three only had the courage to risk the chances of the voyage. With so few men it would have been madness to venture a long journey on unknown waters and in the midst of possible enemies; so he determined to make his way past his old trading posts to the Salish country. There he knew he could find plenty of free hunters to help him in accomplishing the voyage to the sea.

It was six weeks before he had reached Salish House, where he hoped to find Finan

McDonald. But neither McDonald nor Jaco Finlay was at the post, and, as they had left no letter to indicate their whereabouts, Thompson prepared to descend Clark's Fork by himself. The river presented an appearance vastly different from that of the autumn of 1809, when he had passed down it before. The spring floods were now at their height, and the water was rising at the rate of two feet each day, inundating the meadows to the foot of the hills, and dashing along with such violence that every island became a water-fall, with a strong eddy at the lower end. Down this raging torrent they paddled, keeping in midstream, and thankful as they passed each danger spot in safety. The antelopes had retired to the hills, and they lived on the meat of horses which they traded from the Indians.

On the 8th of June they arrived at the point where the river entered the Box cañon and became utterly unnavigable. There Thompson found a small camp of Kullyspell Indians, who informed him that Finan McDonald was now at a post which he had built on the banks of the Spokane river further

south. Thompson engaged two of these Indians to inform McDonald of his presence; while he himself waited until the latter should join him with horses to carry his goods overland to the new post. Four days later McDonald, with thirteen horses, arrived; and Thompson with all his possessions was transported overland to Spokane House, about ten miles northwest of the present city of Spokane.

The Spokane river, like Clark's Fork, was a tributary of the Columbia, and, like it, unnavigable toward the mouth. Thompson therefore left a small assortment of goods with McDonald, and proceeded northwest along a well-beaten Indian trail to a point on the Columbia, just below Ilthkoyape or Kettle Falls. Here the stream dropped several feet in two magnificent cataracts, the roar of which could be heard for many miles around.

Just below the falls was an Indian village, the first of its kind that Thompson had seen. It was composed of a number of huts, each from thirty to sixty feet in length, roughly built of large cedar logs which had drifted down the river, and roofed with mats

of woven fibre stout enough to withstand the rain. The Indians who dwelt here subsisted mainly on fish. Each spring, as the spawning season drew near, they propitiated the manito of the salmon with elaborate dances and ceremonies. Thus purified, they took their stand just beneath the falls and speared or netted the fish, which they smoked in quantities sufficient to last them through the year.

Thompson enquired of these people regarding the course of the river both up and down. From them he learned that the village at Kettle Falls was the highest along the stream that had survived the incursions of the Piegans. Below them there was a journey of ninety miles of rapids, at the end of which stood another village of salmon fishers. Beyond this they could tell him nothing. Meanwhile the canoemen were busy preparing a boat. In this region timber was very scarce. They had to journey seven miles from the river before they found a clump of cedar from which they could hew the planking of a canoe; and it was not until the third day of July that the boat was finished.

With five French Canadians, two Iroquois Indians, and a couple of the natives for interpreters, Thompson now embarked on the last stage of his journey to the sea. He remembered how, following the settlement of the international boundary west of Lake Superior, the traders of the North West Company had been driven from a country which they had made their own. By that settlement, the forty-ninth parallel had been accepted as the line from the Lake of the Woods to the watershed of the Rocky Mountains. West of the Rockies however, all was still debatable land; and in that vast region, with its timbered mountains and rich valleys, the wealth of fish in its rivers and of minerals hidden in its bosom, he claimed the right of a discoverer. At the stern of his little craft, the Union Jack floated proudly in the breeze; and at each halting place, Thompson posted a written notice in the name of the North West Company of merchants from Canada, formally taking possession of the country for His Majesty, King George the Third.

Down the river sped the canoe, the paddlers with long swinging strokes easily keeping abreast of the stream. Most of the rapids they were able to shoot; and before nightfall they had completed the ninety miles to the village of which they had heard above. Tents were pitched and Thompson summoned the chiefs to smoke with him.

In a short while the chief arrived, followed by his men in single file. All sat down in a circle about the tent, and the chief made a brief speech, welcoming the strangers and offering them presents of dried salmon and native herbs. Pipes were then lighted and solemnly passed round. Following this the chief delivered a long harangue, in which he expressed the hope that the white men would provide his people with guns, ammunition, axes, knives, awls, not to mention steels and flints and many other articles of which they stood sadly in need. They were, he said, able and willing to hunt, and would pay for everything they got. At present, however, they had only their hands with which to procure food and clothing.

Thompson explained that his object was to explore the course of the river to the sea. If it proved navigable, very large canoes would come from over the ocean with goods of all kinds, and industrious hunters would be supplied with everything they required.

The colloquy finished, permission was given for the women of the tribe to approach. A dance of welcome followed, at the end of which the weary travellers were left to their repose. In this way Thompon made friends with the natives wherever he found them along the river.

As he advanced, Thompson passed out of the forest country, and entered the arid plain that lies about the confluence of the Snake river with the Columbia. Occasional willows and cottonwoods were to be seen, growing in the neighbourhood of streams; but over the greater part of this region, the only shrub capable of finding a lodging was the hardy sage. The natives he now encountered were of the unhappy Snake family, who had been driven for refuge to this barren country by the relentless pressure of their foes. Some

of them fled in terror at his approach. Others, less timid, gazed with admiring eyes upon the guns, kettles, axes, and other paraphernalia of his camp. Their eagerness to obtain such wonders was in proportion to their need; for they did not appear to possess even bows and arrows or the stone axes and knives that were common among the Eskimos of the far north.

The river now turned to the west; and far ahead on his left Thompson discerned the snow-capped cone of Mount Hood, which marked the line of the Cascade Mountains near the coast. Fifty miles short of this, he came to a village at which, as usual, he put ashore. Here the natives warned him of the treacherous Dalles or rapids just ahead, where the river for a distance of two miles glides noiselessly through a cañon never more than two hundred yards wide, and the ledges of basalt, projecting into the stream, create whirlpools and eddies in which the traveller is sucked to his death. At the same time, the natives informed him that at the mouth of the river, a party of white men who had

come in a great canoe from the ocean, were busy erecting a house. Thus he learned that the Astorian party had anticipated him in reaching the mouth of the Columbia.

A guide from the village carried him safely through the Dalles, was paid, and returned to the village. Fifty miles further down stream, Thompson approached "the Cascades," where the river cuts through the deep lava beds of the Cascade mountains and makes a descent of about three hundred feet. Here the cañon was no less than six miles long, and nearly a mile in depth. Trying in vain to secure a guide, Thompson entered the rapids alone. For three miles he "ran" the rapids; a portage of one mile followed, taking him past the worst stretch of the river; he then reembarked, and emerged in safety to the quiet water below.

There was still one hundred and fifty miles to the mouth of the river; but the magnificent forests of Douglas fir, cedar, and hemlock which now clothed the country told them that they had come within the beneficient influence of the sea. Two days' paddle

brought them to Tongue point, beyond which they had a full view of the ocean. To the left, not more than a couple of miles distant, they beheld four low log huts, constructed of timbers newly cut—in the words of Thompson, "the famous Fort Astoria of John Jacob Astor and the United States".

At Fort Astoria, Thompson was welcomed by Duncan McDougall and David Stuart, old colleagues in the service of the North West Company. As their guest, he spent a week at the post taking observations for its position and preparing for the return voyage. Toward the mouth of the river, the natives had been demoralized by their association with wandering traders from the sea; and remembering their surly behaviour and menacing looks, Thompson saw to it that his men had their arms in readiness. On the 22nd of July, he embarked. At the Cascades, he was forced to appeal to the natives for assistance in climbing the rapids. The scoundrels were importunate in their demands. With knives in their hands and poisoned arrows in their bows, they were ready to kill and plunder the travellers. But the courage and resolu-

tion of Thompson warded off the crisis; and once above the Cascades he was again among the poor but friendly savages of the interior.

Thompson was anxious to avoid the ninety miles of rapids below Kettle Falls. When he came to the mouth of the Snake river, he turned up this stream and ascended it as far as the present Lyon's Ferry. From thence, having borrowed horses of the natives, he journeyed overland across the sterile, sandy plain as far as Spokane House; and from Spokane House, with the assistance of Jaco Finlay, he once more reached the Columbia above Kettle Falls. There, building a fresh canoe, he re-embarked and made his way through the Arrow lakes to the Boat Encampment, thus completing his survey of the Columbia from its source to its mouth.

The following winter Thompson spent inspecting his various posts, and distributing among them additional supplies of goods which he had received from beyond the mountains. From Salish House, he rode east along Clark's Fork to a hill top within the limits of the present city of Missoula; and from thence he was able to trace the route of Lewis

and Clark through the Bitter Root Mountains to the banks of Snake river.

In the spring he was once more back at Kettle Falls, where the furs from the winter's hunt were being collected. The results were excellent; six canoes had to be made ready to accommodate the packs. By the 22nd of April, his preparations were complete. The brigade set off by way of the Columbia, Athabaska pass, and Churchill river route to Fort William.

In the summer of 1812, when Thompson arrived at Fort William after his last journey from beyond the Rockies, he was in the forty-third year of his life. It was twenty-eight years since he had landed as an apprentice on the shores of Hudson Bay; and twenty-three years since he had actively embarked on his career as a surveyor. During all this time he had been constantly accumulating materials for his great map of the North West. His work was now complete; so that instead of returning to the interior, he joined the annual brigade of great canoes bound for Montreal. Thus did David Thompson bid adieu forever to the Great North West.

CHAPTER VIII

LAST YEARS

IN 1812, hostilities had broken out between the British Empire and the United States, and the flame of war was raging along the international border. In the St. Mary's river, the voyageurs of the North West convoy with which Thompson was travelling feared that American troops might intercept their rich cargo of furs, but they passed through the narrows without being molested and were soon safe among the islands of the north shore of Lake Huron. From thence they made a speedy passage up the French river and down the Ottawa to Montreal.

His country endangered, Thompson accepted a commission in a battalion of infantry then being raised by his old colleague Roderick Mackenzie, but it does not appear that he was ever on active service. The winter of 1813-4 he spent in preparing a final

draft of his map. This map, in which was embodied the record of his life work, became a proud possession of the North West Company. For many years it occupied a place of honour on the walls of the banqueting hall at Fort William.

When the war was over, Thompson was selected as British representative on the commission which surveyed the international boundary from the River St. Lawrence to the Lake of the Woods. This task occupied him for the next ten years, and was concluded in the autumn of 1826.

At this time, Thompson planned to offer to the public an edition of his map, and even went so far as to prepare a prospectus. This prospectus is worth reproducing, because it sets forth in Thompson's own words the achievements of his career as a geographer:

"PROSPECTUS"

"To be published in England, by David Thompson, a new and correct map of the Countries in North America; situated between the parallels of 45 degrees; and 60 degrees of North Latitude; and extending in longitude

from the east side of Lake Superior, and Hudson's Bay, quite across the Continent to the Pacific Ocean; and from his own local knowledge; being the result of 22 years employment in discovering, and laying down the several rivers, lakes, hills and mountains on this extensive tract of country; many parts of which had never before been explored; these discoveries were only finished in 1812. The whole founded on astronomical observations, the author being an astronomer by profession.

"A small part of this work has already found its way to the public, being copies of a rough map laid before the North West Company of Canada.

"Of these regions the map makers have no doubt given the best delineation they could acquire; but of what was known, so little was founded on astronomical observations; and their being obliged to fill up the vacant space with what information they could procure, has led them into many errors.

"In this map now offered to the public, almost all the great rivers on the above part

of the continent, on both sides the great mountains are traced to their sources; the sources of the Mississippi, and several other great rivers, and the shores of Lake Superior, have been examined and laid down by the author only.

"The position, extent and height of the hills and mountains, have engaged much of his attention; of which he has many landscapes. The last six years of his discoveries were on the west side of the mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Each Indian Nation's Territories, with their limits, and the places of the trading settlements will be marked out.

"The courses and distances, (taken when necessary to 100 yards,) with their calculations, etc., the astronomical observations, and rough maps on the scale of one inch to a mile, on which these maps are founded will be open to the inspection of the curious, while the work is publishing; and it will doubtless afford much speculation to the scientific, to find many of the great rivers of North America taking their rise in a small compass, and going off to the different seas like Radii from a centre.

"To render the map more general, and to give connection to all the parts, the author will avail himself of the Sea Coast of Hudson's Bay and the Pacific Ocean, etc., etc., as laid down by the latest navigators and travellers; whatever he has not personally examined himself, will be in a different colour, and the authority mentioned.

"Nothing less than an unremitting perseverance bordering on enthusiasm could have enabled him to have brought these maps to their present state; in early life he conceived the idea of this work, and Providence has given him to complete, amidst various dangers, all that one man could hope to perform.

"The map will be engraved in a neat, chaste manner, combining elegance and economy, on the scale of 3 inches to one degree of longitude and will form either a map or an atlas at the will of the subscriber.

"The arduous survey, on which the author is at present employed does not permit him to present the Public with a description of these Countries and the nations of aborigines.

This he hopes to perform as soon as time permits.

"It is expected the geographical map will be ready for delivery to the subscribers by the latter end of the summer of 1820 at the latest.

"These parts of North America have long been a desideratum on geography.

"He also offers to the scientific public, of the same size as the general map, a chart to contain only the grand features of this part of the Continent, such as the great mountains and hills, the principal rivers and extensive lakes; as he proposes to delineate on this chart, the position and extent of the coal mines; of the various beds of different kinds of stone and rock; of the great meadows and forests; the limits of the countries on which the Bison, Elk, Red Deer, Wild Sheep, etc., etc., are found; the line of the old, and new portions of this part of the continent; the line of the position of the Countries, over which, is the most constant appearance and greatest brightness of the Aurora Borealis; and the line that bounds their appearance to

the westward, beyond which they are not seen; and whatever else he may deem worthy of remark; all of which could not have been delineated on the geographical map without causing confusion."

The terms of this prospectus reveal in striking fashion the scientific spirit in which Thompson's great work was conceived; but if he hoped that the learned world would welcome and support his efforts, he was doomed to disappointment. In the early years of the nineteenth century, interest in the interior of North America was confined to very few persons. It may have been that the number of subscribers was inadequate. It may have been that no publisher would take the risk of issuing the work. At any rate the map and chart which Thompson projected never saw the light of day.

At the conclusion of his labours on the International Boundary Commission, Thompson felt himself in a position to retire. Throughout his working career, he had always enjoyed a good salary. With part of his savings, he purchased a comfortable house at Williams-

town in the county of Glengarry, where he settled down with his wife and growing family. It was there, on the 4th of March 1829, that the last of his thirteen children was born. With characteristic public spirit, he entered into the life of the community. When the Presbyterians of Williamstown desired to build a church, he lent them money with which to do so. As his sons grew to manhood, a considerable amount of his savings was required to set them up in business.

Thompson's declining years were clouded by financial worries, which were largely the result of his generous and honourable disposition. The congregation whom he had assisted were unable to pay off their mortgage, so he deeded to them the church and grounds. His sons failed in business, and in discharging their debts, he seriously crippled himself. He sold his home at Williamstown, and removed to Longueuil, near Montreal, where there were greater opportunities of securing employment. Resuming his old occupation, he surveyed the canoe route from Lake Huron to the upper Ottawa. This was in 1837, and

some years later he surveyed the shores of Lake St. Peter.

During these years, Thompson worked on the narrative account of his explorations which he had undertaken to give the world at the time when he planned to publish his map. He was anxious also to earn what money he could from the publication of his book. It is said that Washington Irving, the great American writer, and the author of *Astoria*, wished to buy the manuscript. Irving, however, was unwilling to promise that in using it he would give to Thompson the recognition which he felt was his due; and, jealous to the last of his reputation, the old man refused to part with his work. The manuscript therefore, like the map, lay forgotten, until it was discovered in recent years, and published in 1915 by the Champlain Society.

The American Revolutionary War had left a legacy of boundary disputes which were destined to disturb peaceful relations between Great Britain and the United States for years to come. Owing to his work both for

the North West Company and on the International Boundary Commission, Thompson was better acquainted than most men with the issues involved in these disputes; and he was convinced that on account of the stupidity and carelessness of British diplomats, the just claims of British America had been continuously ignored or overridden from the time when the original treaty of peace had been drawn in 1783. In his narrative, Thompson relates an interesting story regarding the settlement made in that year. The story is worth repeating, not only because it illustrates his attitude toward the boundary question, but also because of the light it sheds on conditions in the North West at the time, and the greatness of the service which Thompson and others performed in mapping the country.

Among the traders, he says, who made their way from Montreal into the fur countries was a certain Peter Pond, a native of Boston. Pond was a man of violent and unprincipled character. In the winter of 1780-1, he was stationed at Lake La Ronge with orders

to act in concert with Wadin, a fellow trader of the North West Company. One evening, while dining with Wadin, he made himself drunk; and in an outburst of passion shot Wadin through the thigh. His unhappy victim expired from loss of blood.

Pond, however, was an energetic trader; and since in those wild times and remote places the arm of the law was weak, he escaped the punishment which he richly deserved. A few years later he had penetrated to Lake Athabaska, the first white man to do so. There he disputed the fur trade with a certain John Ross, who followed him into the country in the interests of a rival firm. An altercation took place between the two traders, and Pond shot Ross dead.

On this occasion Pond was arrested and brought to Canada for trial. But the authorities at Quebec did not consider that their jurisdiction extended to the territories of the Hudson's Bay Company, and the prisoner was set at liberty. He thereupon returned to Boston, his native city.

The peace negotiations were at that time

in progress. The commissioners for great Britain were two honest, well-meaning gentlemen, who however knew nothing of the geography of the countries with which they had to deal. The maps at their disposal were wretchedly inadequate. One of them, Farren's, dated 1773, showed the country as far west as the middle of Lake Ontario. Beyond that point the interior was represented as made up of rocks and swamps, and described as uninhabitable. Such maps gave every advantage to one who was personally acquainted with the west, and the United States commissioners had at their service the expert advice of Peter Pond.

Had the British possessed the slightest idea of the value of the territories in question, and had they been disposed in the slightest degree to press their claims, they might have insisted on a line drawn due west from the middle of Lake Champlain. Such a division the Americans would have been glad to accept, for it gave them more than they could justly demand. But Pond was at the elbow of the United States commissioners.

He suggested to them a line passing through the Great Lakes to the north west corner of the Lake of the Woods, and from thence westward (as he imagined from his own rough surveys) to the head of the Mississippi river. This demand, exorbitant though it was, the British commissioners accepted, and it was confirmed by both nations. Such was the hand (concludes Thompson grimly) that designated the boundary between the dominions of Great Britain and the territories of the United States.

The settlement of 1783 was in Thompson's eyes merely the first of a series of unfortunate arrangements, by which the British dominions were robbed of extensive and valuable territory. Edmund Burke had remarked that a malignant fate seemed to attend all the operations of Great Britain on the continent of North America. Thompson, who from his personal experience knew the land and the people who disputed its possession, was able to explain in a less mysterious way the failure of the British to defend their claims against American pretensions.

Accordingly, in the summer of 1840, Thompson addressed a number of letters to Sir Robert Peel, Lord Stanley and the Hon. W. E. Gladstone on the subject of disputed points along the border. His object was to urge a prompt and just settlement in each case. Such a settlement, he felt, was important if peace was to be maintained with "so litigious a neighbour." It was vital, if the steady encroachments of that neighbour were to be brought to an end, and Britain was not to be gradually deprived of her hold upon her last possessions in America.

Thompson therefore endeavoured to arouse the leading statesmen of the Mother Country to the significance of American policy as he saw it. The leading men of the United States, he pointed out, all held it as a maxim that no foreign power had any right to any part of North America; and that every means ought to be employed to expel this foreign power. They were well aware of the insecurity of their position. On their northern frontier a powerful foreign nation was in possession for upwards of one thousand miles.

Their sea coast was open and exposed. The numerous slaves in their southern and western states were ready for revolt; while to the west were seventy thousand Indian warriors, who had been compelled by force or fraud to quit their lands, and who could readily be aroused to a war of revenge.

Accordingly, he alleged, the Americans had aimed ever since the treaty of 1783 to restrict as far as possible the territory of Great Britain and to destroy her influence over the Indians. Their method was to advance claims which, though exorbitant, would be softened and rendered familiar by the operation of time, and in each case, when the settlements came to be made, they aimed to be in possession of the areas in dispute. British subjects on the other hand had been compelled to yield ground from point to point, because they could not rely on the support of the Imperial government if they stood firm.

As he wrote, the situation was acute along the whole length of the frontier. On the Quebec border, all the way from St. Regis on the St. Lawrence to the Connecticut river,

the Americans were holding fast to a line some distance north of the true parallel of 45° which had been named as the frontier in the original treaty of peace and confirmed some years later by the award of the King of the Netherlands. In the St. Mary's river, American commissioners were claiming two of the three boat channels and all but two or three hundred yards of a river bed four miles wide. If their demands at that point were granted, Great Britain would surrender the keys to her northern and western dominions, and shut herself off from communication with them except by the frozen shores of the Hudson Bay. At the head of Lake Superior, the Americans had driven the British traders from two of the three possible routes joining the Great Lakes with the Lake of the Woods, and were claiming that the treaty of 1783 implied a boundary running along the line of the third and last possible route (the Kaministiquia river), although the very existence of that route was utterly unknown until at least seventeen years after the treaty was drawn. In the present congress they were again

urging the necessity of taking possession of what they called the "Oregon Territory," and demanding a line down the middle of the Columbia river to the Pacific ocean.

Thus did the old man endeavour to arm British statesmanship for the diplomatic contests which he foresaw were inevitable; but his efforts bore little or no fruit. On the part of Great Britain, conciliatory motives continued to prevail; and within a few years, Thompson had the mortification of seeing even the Oregon territory (that is, all the fine country south of 49° north latitude which he himself had discovered) lost to the Empire. It is not surprising that he fumed at British diplomats in general, and in particular at "the stupidity of that blockhead Lord Ashburton."

There is little more to record in the life of David Thompson. Presently, his eyesight failed, and he suffered the misery of a destitute old age. One by one his possessions fell into the hands of money-lenders. So poor did he become that he was forced to part with his precious instruments, and even to pawn his coat in order to buy a little food. A

late entry of his diary reads, "This day borrowed 2/6 from a friend. Thank God for this relief." On the 10th of February, 1857, the long ordeal was ended and Thompson passed away in the eighty-seventh year of his age. He was buried in Mount Royal cemetery without even a stone to mark his grave.

For a long while after the death of Thompson, it seemed as though the memory of his achievements had perished with him. But of recent years his fame, so nearly eclipsed, has shone with renewed brilliance, and it is now possible to estimate in some degree the greatness of his character and the magnitude of his work.

In the sheer length of his journeys, few western explorers have equalled the record of Thompson, for he travelled in all not less than fifty thousand miles. Much of this was through country untrodden by the feet of white men; nearly all of it was in regions as yet unsurveyed. The unvarying exactitude with which Thompson mapped this vast area excited the surprise and admiration of members of the Canadian Geological Survey who

with infinitely better equipment traced his progresses nearly a century later. There are certain districts which since his day have never been re-surveyed; some of his work therefore still appears on the published maps of Canada.

Throughout his life Thompson was inspired by a restless impulse to push forward the exploration and mapping of the west until not a corner of it remained unknown. The greatest satisfaction of his career was undoubtedly the discovering of the Columbia valley. West of the Rockies, he was not merely a surveyor and explorer, but in a real sense an Empire builder, for he added a region of vast and varied resources to the territories of the Crown.

It is difficult for Europeans to associate with savages without misunderstandings more or less serious. The savage governs his life by an elaborate ritual which he has inherited from his ancestors. His code is sufficient to cover his dealings with his fellows; but it fails to guide him in his relations with the strange new beings who burst in upon him from what is in truth a different world. The white man,

unless he is gifted with unusual tact and sympathy, treats with contempt and scorn the customs of the natives and seldom attempts to understand their ways. Worse still, he feels himself freed from the restraints which bind him in civilized life, and frequently gives rein to the basest passions of his nature. Thus mutual misunderstanding too often breeds hatred, and results in the shedding of blood.

To a surprising degree, the traders of the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies were able to overcome the difficulties and dangers of dealing with the Indians, and their relations with them were correspondingly successful. Yet even successful traders often lacked the imaginative sympathy which would have enabled them to submit with patience to the complicated ritual of Indian life; and standing aloof as they did from the Indians, they were involved in constant broils and, not infrequently, in danger at their hands.

Moreover, in the fierceness of their competition, the traders were too often willing to play sharp tricks on one another, and these

practices taught the Indians evil ways. To drug the natives with liquor and steal furs destined for rival firms was a habit only too common. It sometimes happened also that small independent traders had their supplies taken from them, their canoes destroyed and themselves beaten senseless, so that they were driven from the fur countries, ruined men. Individuals like Peter Pond were guilty of offences more serious still. Their hands were stained with the blood of their competitors, and in the rough and tumble of life in the wilds, their crimes were hard to detect and harder still to punish. The Indians had learned that the Great Spirit hates to see the ground reddened with blood. But when they saw thuggery and murder flourish, how could they preserve their simple faith?

Throughout his career in the west, Thompson was one of those whose influence among the Indians was almost wholly for good, and whose activities shed lustre on the history of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, whom they served. His travels carried him into the rocky belt

south-west of the Bay, over the prairies, through the western forest, and across the mountains of the Pacific slope. Wherever he came in contact with the natives, he easily won their admiration and respect. This was due to the insight with which he studied their customs and to the sympathy with which he regarded their way of life. For Thompson was infinitely more than a trader: he had the mind of a scientist and the soul of a poet.

Love of country springs from many roots; but perhaps the deepest patriotism is that which comes from an intimate knowledge of the face of the land itself. Thompson loved the great North West with the love of a man who knew it in all its moods; for he had journeyed through it and studied it carefully over a long period of years. He foresaw the day when the rolling prairies would be covered with smiling farms, and the Columbia valley would be the seat of a rich and vigorous civilization. In one respect, his vision of the future fell short of reality. Living in an age prior to the development of railways, he failed to see that these regions were destined to be

linked by steel bands with the Canadas in a Dominion stretching from sea to sea. He thought of them rather as isolated communities, the middle west looking mainly for its outlet to Hudson Bay, the Pacific coast joined to civilization by the paths of ocean.

Characters such as David Thompson are all too rare in the annals of a nation. So long as honour is due to great men, his memory deserves to be enshrined in the hearts of his countrymen; and his high qualities should be a model to those who inherit the Dominion which he did so much to make.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The most important source of information regarding the life and work of David Thompson is to be found in the *Publications of the Champlain Society*, Vol. XII. (Toronto, 1915). This volume contains the *Narrative* of Thompson's explorations, edited by Mr. J. B. Tyrrell with a full general introduction, an itinerary or catalogue of Thompson's journeys year by year, and notes on the text. The manuscript journals of Alexander Henry and David Thompson have been, published, under the title of *New Light on the Early History of the Great North West*, by Elliott Coues (2 vols., New York, 1897). In this work, Henry's journal has been published as a continuous narrative, and extracts have been made from Thompson's journal to throw additional light on specific points. Thompson's original note books are in the Crown Lands Department, Parliament Buildings, Toronto.

They are too bulky, and too much encumbered with mathematical data, to be of interest to the general reader, and so have never been published as they stand. An article by Mr. L. J. Burpee in the *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. IV., 1923, p. 105 ff., contains the prospectus of Thompson's map, and the series of five letters which he addressed to English statesmen on the subject of boundary disputes in 1840.

Washington Irving's *Astoria* presents a graphic picture of the occupation of the mouth of the Columbia by the agents of John Jacob Astor. The narrative contains an interesting account of the appearance of David Thompson at the newly erected fort, and of the impression which his arrival made upon the Astorians.

There are short chapters on Thompson in G. Bryce, *History of the Hudson's Bay Company*, Agnes Laut, *Conquest of the Great North West*, and W. S. Wallace, *By Star and Compass*.