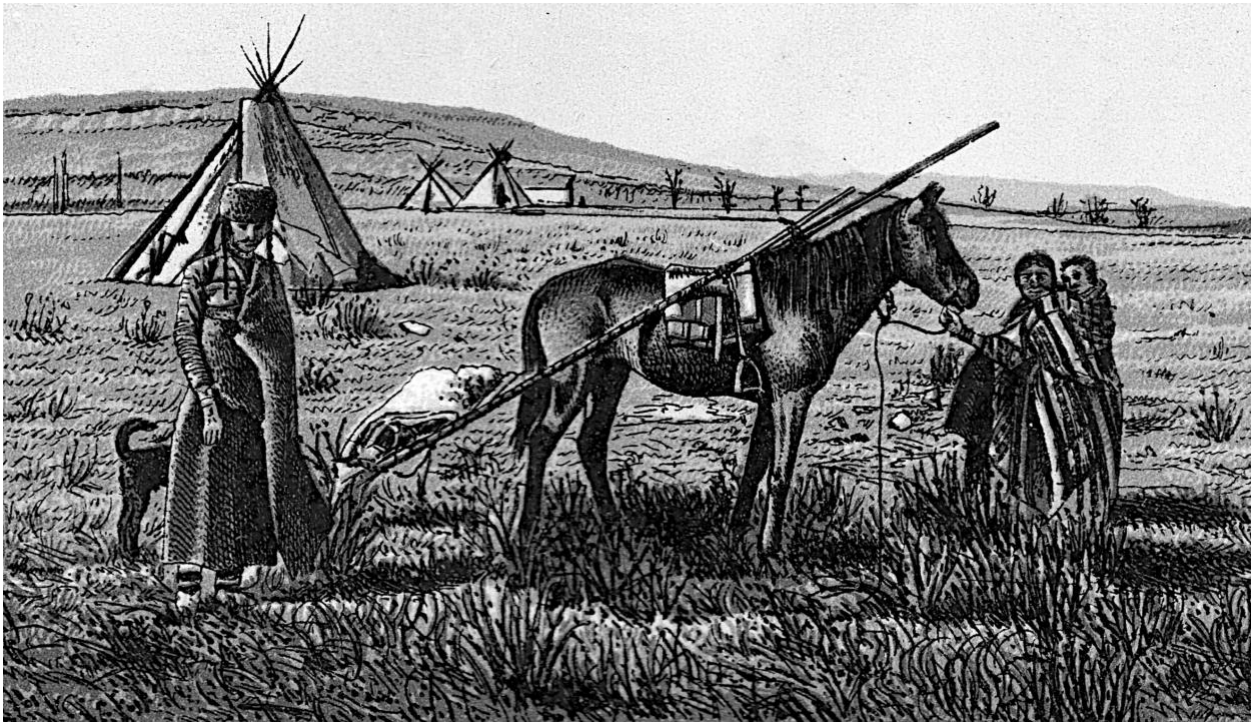
Reginald Beatty

Stories of Indian Days

O-ge-mas-es Relates Many Incidents
Of Early Life in the West.



Edited and Annotated by Chris Willmore

2019

For my mother
(and her time)

A Skeride Publication

Cover: INDIAN WITH TRAVERSE ON THE PLAINS [Print]. (c. 1890). Editor's collection.

From the Diary of a Hudson's Bay Clerk in the Seventies

By O-GE-MAS-ES (Little Clerk).

CONTENTS

A QUICK NOTE

The stories in this volume are mostly taken from newspapers published between 1920 and 1921. Since these were often printed on a tight deadline, there are more errors than usual in the source material. I have silently corrected obvious typos, and sometimes changed spelling to be internally consistent in each article. I have also added paragraph breaks for ease of reading, and broken up some run–on sentences with commas.

I find that part of the fun in reading from the past is seeing how language evolves. To that end, I've left spelling and punctuation mostly as it was in the original articles.

All text in bold (save some article titles) is mine, as are all footnotes[1] and [words in square brackets]. I've made use of the following standard devices to comment on the text:

[…] = "I've skipped some words here."
[sic.] = "I know this looks like a typo, but it was written that way in the original."

It was common in the past for Canadian newspapers to use words that are now (and in many cases, were then) ethnic slurs, especially when writing about Indigenous people. I believe it is important to acknowledge that these hurtful terms were used, but I have no wish to either perpetuate them, or to introduce them to new audiences. I have therefore replaced such words with their first letters followed with several dashes, as in h———— (referring to a person of mixed heritage).

That's it! You're all set – enjoy!

C. WILLMORE

[1] Like this one.

1. My First Dog Driving (January 1874)

I[2] received orders in January of the year 1874 to start west with the Winter Packet[3] of the Hudson's Bay Company, and had purchased a nice team of young dogs with light cariole[4] from a clerk who came in from Swan River[5]. The packet man was a famous traveller and known far and wide as one of the best long–distance runners in the Northwest. Poor Johnny Beads; like so many natives, he did not stand civilization and went to his long home a year or so ago[6].

I had been a year in the Fort Garry[7] sale shop and hated the confinement, and had made application on several occasions to be sent inland (as all the area outside the Red River settlement[8] was called in those days), but the matter dragged, and at last, on threatening to resign, I had my way. So the long–looked for time had come at last, and I was really off for the unknown interior next day. I slept mighty little that night, having waking dreams of great prairie stretches covered with buffalo, high mountains and huge forests, with lakes as big as inland seas, and above all, thousands of really wild Indians. It seemed too good to be true. The morning came at last, and what with delays in the office, closing up important despatches, it was after an early lunch before we left. I paid hurried good–byes to all my friends, and received a hearty hand clasp from Chief Factor[9] John H. McTavish[10]. He was at that time the uncrowned king of Fort Garry and was one of the best chiefs I ever had. His last words to me were: "If you don't like it in the north there is always a place for you here."

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[2] These stories are written by Reginald B. Beatty (1854 – 1928). He was a fur trader for the Hudson's Bay Company from 1873 to 1883, and a free trader for many years after that. Among his accomplishments are the founding of Melfort, Saskatchewan and aiding in the creation of the Kinistino Indian Reserve (detailed in a later story).

[3] A caravan carrying mail and cargo. There were no roads in the region at this time, so this was a challenging enterprise.

[4] In this case, a dog sled. The word can also refer to a light one–horse carriage.

[5] Now the town of Swan River, Manitoba.

[6] This story was written in 1921, placing the death of 'Johnny Beads' around 1920.

[7] A Hudson's Bay Company trading post in what is now Winnipeg. It was temporarily seized by Louis Riel during the Red River Rebellion of 1869 – 1870, and was finally demolished in the early 1880s.

[8] Also called the Selkirk settlement, the Red River colony included and surrounded what is now Winnipeg. It was founded in 1812 as the project of the Scottish Lord Selkirk, who obtained a large grant of land in the region, at a nominal price, from the Hudson's Bay Company (of which he was a shareholder). Troubles in the settlement were instrumental in the merging of the Northwest Company and Hudson's Bay Company in 1821, and the creation of the province of Manitoba via the Manitoba Act of 1870. The colony was also the epicenter of Louis Riel's rebellions, and is a site of important historical and cultural significance to the Métis people.

[9] The title given to the trader in command of a Hudson's Bay Company trading post or region.

[10] John Henry McTavish (1837 – 1888). In 1870, he was elected, as a Conservative, to the first legislature of the province of Manitoba. He later left politics to become Land Commissioner for the Canadian Pacific Railway. This important national project, completed in 1885–1886, linked British Columbia's Pacific coast with the eastern provinces and was responsible for the creation of the city of Vancouver. The railway was financed in large part by a grant of 25 million acres of land, which would have made McTavish's post an important one.

Johnny called "*Marche*![11]" and away we went. His dogs were a fearsome sight and very savage. They were called Brandy, Grog[12], Rum and Whiskey. They were all from the plains, were used to travois[13], and were as big as large timber wolves, with split ears, and were grey and white in color. Both my young dogs and myself treated them with the utmost respect – at a distance – and they evidently had a contempt for us as greenhorns[14]. He was loaded entirely with mail matter and, of course, dog food and provisions on top of this. His only bedding was a single H. B. Co. white blanket. The packet boxes were carefully made of the thinnest and lightest of wood and he was to take them to Fort Carlton[15] on the North Branch of the Saskatchewan. This was a distance of between five and six hundred miles, with many a long stretch of plain and but little wood here and there. Other packet carriers met him at Carlton, and on went the great Northern Packet, only reaching some of the furthest posts on last ice. The greatest care was always taken of the precious mail matter.

My young train followed close behind his sleigh, and I noted Johnny studying my dog's gait from time to time. The first stop made was at Poplar Point[16] (an H. B. Post), and Mr. Chisholm[17] was hospitable as usual; in fact, too much so, as it was getting dusky before we pulled out for Portage[18]. Just as we were hitching up, Johnny, who by the way stuttered badly, said "B–b–boy, your Herod (my foregoer[19]) hauls too hard in front, so I will put him in the middle of my team and give you Bub–bub–Brandy ahead"; well, I was green and knew no better, so he very quickly made the exchange, threw himself on his sled and was off like a flash. When I called, "*Marche*!" the dog sat down on the road and eyed me with a wicked look. I took a step towards him and shook my whip. His reply was to advance in my direction growling savagely, so I retreated. Well, I was in a quandary. Pride forbade me from going in and asking for Chisholm's assistance. Suddenly I noted the fence, and taking a good–sized rail off it, crept up to the rear of the train, balanced the rail on end carefully, then sighting

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[11] French for 'March!' or 'Onward!'.

[12] Rum mixed with water.

[13] A travois is a simple sled made of two poles joined in an 'X' shape. The cargo is held by a cross–beam near the bottom of the 'X', while the dog(s) are held between the cargo and the middle of the X. A variant saw the poles joined in an 'H' shape instead of an 'X' shape. Travois sleds were originally used by Indigenous peoples, and were later adopted by fur traders. The name is believed to be a corruption of the French *travail*, meaning 'work'.

[14] A greenhorn is someone new to a task; a rookie.

[15] This was the fifth Hudson's Bay Company post of that name, located about 65 km. north of Saskatoon. It was built ca. 1855 (replacing an earlier structure) and destroyed by fire during the North–West Rebellion of 1885.

[16] Now the village of Poplar Point, Manitoba.

[17] Probably Alexander Chisholm (b. 1846). He was the salesman or clerk in charge of Poplar Point from 1874 to 1879. In the 1870 census of Manitoba, he is listed as single. By the time of the 1881 census, he had become a farmer, and lived with his wife Annie (33), daughter Annie (6), and son Angus (4). Both he and his wife were ethnically 'Scotch', but Alexander was a Catholic born in Ontario, and Annie was a Protestant born in Manitoba. Two other women formed part of their household; the seventy–year old Mary Taylor, an ethnic Scotch from the Northwest Territories, and an un–named sixty–year–old 'Indian', also from the Territories. Both of these women shared Annie's faith (Church of England).

[18] Now the city of Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.

[19] The dog named Herod was in front of all the other dogs pulling the sled.

between old Brandy's ear, let it fall. My aim was true, and it bowled him over. With dreadful howls he sprang to his feet and started after my companion at a gallop, I just managing to throw myself in the cariole. Catching up with Johnny at last, I noted he was shaking with merriment, and on stopping for a smoke, he said: "Bub–bub–boy, what did you do to Bub–bub–Brandy?" We had a great laugh over it, but in future I kept my own dogs.

We reached Portage about nine that night, and Mr. Jas. Hargrave[20] made us very welcome as is usual among Hudson's Bay men. Next day we camped at White Mud River[21], where was one Jimmy Whiteway[22], postmaster, and here we met my new chief, Factor Archie McDonald[23], king of the Swan River district. He was by no means prejudiced in favor of Canadians as by far the majority of the officers and men of the H. B. Co. at that time were Scotch, and very clannish at that. Johnny Beads started early next morning for his long trip across the plains and I accompanied Mr. McDonald and party on his inspecting trip. Up to this time I had an easy time with my light cariole, but conditions were changed and my dogs were loaded to capacity, so it was me for the road. Jeune–Homme, a young French h———[24], who was guide, fortunately took a fancy to the young tender foot, and at once christened me Ogemases, meaning 'little clerk'[25]. He had overheard the bourgeois say, "Well, we will see what kind of stuff this little Canuck is made of and he can head the party tomorrow."

It was a good thing for me the day was a short one, only some thirty miles, as I was running the whole distance. If you want to know what it was like, just watch a dog trotting beside a rig[26], and you follow him, and keep that up for thirty miles. Luckily for me, the track was hard and snowshoes not needed. Oh, boy, but I was tired that night and my legs were cramped with the unusual exertion, and it seemed that just about the time I fell asleep the call was made to get up again. This was my first introduction to an abominable habit customary with the big men of the company at that period. The guide called all hands between three and four in the morning, dogs were hitched and away we went, the bourgeois[27] at once going to sleep in his cariole, while us poor beggars trotted along. There was no sign of daylight, it was very

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[20] James H. Hargrave. He was in charge of Portage la Prairie for the Hudson's Bay Company from 1874 to 1876, obtaining the post after serving as an apprentice clerk at York Factory from 1867 to 1871, and in an unknown capacity somewhere in Saskatchewan from 1872 to 1873. He would later serve as Clerk at Fort Frances and Cumberland House, before resigning in 1882.

[21] Whitemud River, as it is now known, is a popular fishing destination in southwest Manitoba.

[22] James Whiteway. He was a salesman or clerk at the White Mud post from 1875 to 1877, and was listed as being a clerk at Brokenhead River Outpost in 1887, where he lived alone despite being married.

[23] Archibald McDonald, Jr. (1836 – 1915). From his bases of operations at Fort Qu'Appelle and Fort Ellice, he was Clerk in Charge of Fort Qu'Appelle from 1866 to 1869, Chief Trader from 1869 to 1873, and Chief Factor of the Swan River District from 1873 to his retirement in 1911.

[24] An offensive term for a person of mixed heritage. Beatty often uses it as a synonym for Métis.

[25] In the Cree language as spoken in Saskatchewan. Beatty was very proud of this name; he brings it up often in his tales and would use it as the pseudonym under which he wrote his stories.

[26] In this context, probably a sled or wagon.

[27] A member of the middle class.

cold, and our stomachs were fairly grinding for something to eat. In my own case, I was stiff and sore from the unusual exertions of the day previous. I also had a sharp pain in one heel. Would daylight never come? Talk about an appetite; mine was like a raging wolf. Well, after a long three hours, the guide called a halt, a huge fire was made, and we runners breakfasted mightily on bannock[28] and raw pemmican[29], with oceans of black tea. I told Jeune–Homme on the quiet that my heel was stabbing me, and he at once pulled off my moccasins and socks. There was a crack in the hard skin of the heel over an inch long, and this would naturally open every step I took. "Oh, boy," he exclaimed, "I will soon fix that." Taking off his fur cap, in the crown of which was a square needle (really a three–cornered glover's[30]) threaded with deer sinew[31], and holding my foot tightly, he put in three or four stitches. He then covered it with spruce gum, placed some cotton on this, and it bothered me no more. I remembered this recipe and used it afterwards on many occasions.

I also speedily adopted the native dress which is infinitely the best for the north. A dark blue 3 ½ ell[32] blanket capot[33], unlined, which came about halfway to the knee, and strange to say they were made without buttons but fastened with buckskin thongs and gartering[34]. Then stroud[35] leggings coming halfway up the thigh, made loosely and always with a fringe on the outside seam, white for every day and blue for festive occasions. These were always gartered firmly below the knee. Then best of all, a full–sized *La Assomption* belt[36] of many colors which was girded above the hips and formed a great support and also made the costume much warmer. A huge pair of fur or moose skin mittens were always carried as a spare. These were fastened together by a thong long enough to go over the belt. Gloves or light mitts were used when running, but if caught in a storm or lost track the big ones were essential.

The first experience a tender foot has when running is to sweat violently, and here the ordinary wool sock is but of little use as it gets wet where you tread and is difficult and slow to dry. So I soon discarded them and adopted the oblong duffle[37] or stroud square, which can be dried in a minute or two at any stop and there are four changes, one in each corner of it. I still kept the legs of the wool stockings and simply cut the feet off.

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[28] A simple unleavened bread, common in both Scottish cuisine and that of Canada's First Nations.
[29] A high–calorie food made from powdered buffalo meat mixed with fat, and sometimes berries.
[30] The three–cornered point of the glover's needle makes it especially well suited to punching through leather.
[31] Tendon or ligament.
[32] An ell is a measure of cloth, 45 inches long.
[33] A *capote* is a long coat with a hood.
[34] Horizontal bands used to hold up sleeves or stockings.
[35] A heavy woolen 'trade cloth' made in Britain and popular with Indigenous peoples.
[36] These were typically between 4 to 6 inches wide and 8 to 10 feet long, and were commonly traded to Indigenous peoples by fur traders. The style was named after L'Assomption, Quebec, where the best of these belts were made.
[37] A coarse woolen cloth, often used for blankets.

There is another most important part of a dog driver's equipment, and that is the whip. The ordinary husky is as cute as a fox and quite often as wicked as a bear, so his respect for his driver is governed by the latter's ability to punish. A good whip is made of plaited[38] deerskin thongs over a round heart, which is loaded with shot tapering in size. Four, six or eight thongs are used according to taste. First–class whip makers were famous and found a ready sale for their whips practically at their own prices. The handle was of hardwood, sixteen to twenty inches long, and loaded at the head. This was useful as a weapon if the dogs attacked you. Well, I have described the whip to the best of my ability, but how to use it is quite another matter. What hours I spent in practising, and after some years did attain a certain measure of success, but was never a crack by any means.

It was a fearsome sight to see Johnny Beads when thoroughly exasperated by the conduct of his team, applying the whip. Upsetting his flat sleight and placing his foot on the trace[39] he would proceed to flay the culprit whose yells could be heard for miles, while his mates would join in for sympathy. At every stroke the hair would fly from the shoulders to the hips. The Russian Knout[40] could not have been much worse. The whip, however, was not brutal, but a club was, and I have often interfered when the latter was used. Fortunately my own team were so willing and high–spirited that a whip was not necessary. Sired by a Scotch stag hound, their mother a husky, they all took after the father in disposition, and were the only first–class train I was ever lucky enough to own. The whip, however, was always necessary at feeding time to protect your own team. Two whitefish was the day's meal for each dog and this was his breakfast, dinner and supper all in one, for as a rule dogs were never fed in the daytime; though with my fast travellers, especially when alone, I found a small quantity of dried or pounded meat very helpful in the middle of the day. These fish were carried frozen and were thawed at night before the camp fire. They are stuck through the tails by a stick called the *spede*, which was useful to carry them by. Feeding time arrives and the dogs consisting of two, three or four trains, have been watching the fish at the fire closely. You call your own dogs, all the men being a little distance apart. My dogs were delicate and did not bolt the fish in two bites as Brandy would. Accordingly an attack would be made on my team by the other dogs every night, and at first I would yell for assistance, much to the amusement of the other drivers.

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[38] Braided.

[39] In this context, the word probably refers to the track or trail the dogs are to follow.

[40] The Knout is a whip once used by Russian authorities to punish criminals. From an eyewitness description of its use in the 1830s: "The knout consists of a handle about a foot long, with a piece of twisted hide of the same length. To this hide is attached, by a loop, a piece of thong, prepared to almost metallic hardness, in length about four or five feet, perfectly flat, and an inch broad: it is changed after every six or eight blows, as it is considered unfit for use when it becomes soft." The Punishment of the Knout in Russia. (1839, January 19). *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, p. 4.

And so the days went on. Post after post was visited by the factor until we were homeward bound for Fort Ellis[41], making the last camp at Riding Mountain House[42] with some sixty miles to go. The iron factor still kept me ahead and descending a hill, a branch caught my snow goggles and whirled them into space. No one could find them, so on we went, and consequently I was laid up for a day or two with a severe attack of snow blindness which is most painful. The native cure is to steam the eyes over strong black tea and poultice them with the leaves.

Speaking of pains in one place which are dreaded by dog drivers, I was camping later on that winter with Johnny Beads at the Qu'Appelle River *en route* to Fort Pelly[43], and after we had made our camp he took his blanket and axe and started for the ice. I watched him with interest as he steadily chopped for half an hour and at last struck the water which, as usual, rose to the top. He then stripped off his moose skin pants and moccasins and held his leg in the ice water right up to his middle for over five minutes. Then, wrapping his blanket round him, he came tearing up through the snow barefooted to camp. "What have you been doing, Johnny?" I asked. "Oh," he replied, "I had a pain in my leg and that is the best cure!"

2. The Last Brigade from Swan River to York Factory (Spring 1874)

To Mrs. A. M.[44]

A Foreword: It is a hard matter for an old Fur Trader to take a pen and try to show the modern reader what the old days were like. But, when one is asked by a most charming and talented lady, and when she becomes persistent, why then nothing remains but to comply with her request.

In the spring of 1874, being at that time an apprentice clerk in the honorable Hudson's Bay Co's. service, and rejoicing in a salary of £30 a year[45], with the usual clerk's allowances (yearly) of 200 lb. flour, 200 lb. sugar, 20 lb. tea, 10 lb. of rice and 10 lb. of chocolate, with two gallons of wine and two of spirits. I received orders from

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[41] I have not found a clear description of 'Fort Ellis'. This is possibly a mis–spelling of Fort Ellice, a Hudson's Bay Company trading post on the Qu'Appelle River, near the current border with Saskatchewan. At this time, it was home to Beatty's superior, Archibald McDonald, Jr.

[42] A Hudson's Bay Company trading post near Elphinstone, Manitoba. It was originally built in 1860 to allow trade with the Ojibwe people, and remained in place until 1895. The land where it stood now forms part of the reserve of the Keeseekooweenin Ojibway First Nation.

[43] A Hudson's Bay Company trading post near modern Pelly, Saskatchewan.

[44]At first blush, this would appear to refer to Ellen McDonald (nee Inkster) (1840 – 1891). She married Archibald McDonald Jr. in 1863, and the couple had four children together. Since Archie McDonald was Beatty's superior, and in charge of the Swan River district, asking for this story to be told would make sense. This story was published in November of 1920, however, almost 30 years after her death. If Ellen's eldest child, John Archibald McDonald (1865 – 1929), went by his middle name, 'Mrs. A.M.' could be his wife, Elleonara Catherine McDonald (nee Campbell) (1865 – 1939).

[45] About £3,120 or $5,400 CAN in 2018, using British inflation data. This should be taken as a very rough estimate.

the Chief Factor, at Fort Ellis, to take charge of Shoal River House[46], which post was situated about sixteen miles from the mouth of Swan River, on the north side of Shoal Lake. Reaching there with two dog trains in the latter part of March and after complying with all the formalities incidental to taking over a post, I settled down to my first independent charge with feelings of great pride and no small sense of responsibility.

Shoal River House was charmingly situated on a sandy bar immediately fronting the lake, while to the west and south showed up the grim ranges of the Porcupine Mountains[47], densely covered with spruce. The Fort itself was enclosed with a stout wall of hewn timber. Heavy gates opened directly in front of the Master's house, and on each side of the enclosure were the usual store houses and men's quarters.

Trading furs kept me busily employed until the opening of the lakes and rivers, when official orders reached me to engage as many boatmen as possible to make the trip to York Factory[48], my post to be the starting point of the Brigade[49]. Finally, having secured every able–bodied man within a radius of 100 miles, the post began to assume appearance of a little town; long rows of Indian Tepees were erected along the ridge east of the Fort, dancing, gambling and love–making were the order of the day. Time was short, and who could tell how many would return after their trip to the sea? My time was fully occupied; every man who signed a contract for the voyage, was entitled to draw half his wages in advance, and there being no cash in circulation this was paid out of the store goods. Finally the head guide, old Lion–like McNab[50],

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[46] "Near the north–east angle of [Swan] lake, Shoal River House, a trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company, is beautifully situated on a small open plain close to the shore, with a gently sloping beach of gravel, extending to the edge of the water. In the open clearing the land rises gently to a total height of twenty feet above the lake, beyond which is a forest of spruce and poplar. The trail from the post to the mouth of the river is cut through this forest, and at a distance of a mile and a half ascends to a height of sixty feet above the lake on a ridge of sand and gravel wooded with Banksian pine." Geological Survey of Canada. (1893). *Annual Report 1890–1891*, V(I). Ottawa: S. E. Dawson.

[47] Probably Manitoba's Porcupine Hills, which are a short distance to the southwest of Shoal River House. The Porcupine Mountains are the site of Michigan's largest state park, and are far to the south and east of Swan Lake.

[48] The Hudson Bay Company's main trading post for centuries after its construction in 1684. It was located on the shore of Hudson's Bay.

[49] "The new business year – "new outfit" in fur trade parlance – was commenced on the departure of the Saskatchewan brigade of boats in early June for York factory. Besides the ten boats intended to bring back the supplies for the year, ten other new boats, built at Rocky Mountain House and Edmonton for other districts started, all laden with buffalo provisions, pemmican, dried meat, cured tongues, tallow and marrowfat, as well as leather, shapanappi, rawhide cords, leather lodges and unprimed robes for use in the country. The twenty boats went down with the crews; ten boats and most of the buffalo products were left at Norway House for distribution, and the ten other boats with full crews went on to York Factory with the fur trade returns of the season." Cowie, I. (1916, April 15). JACK NORRIS – An Edmonton Pioneer. *The Edmonton Bulletin*, p. 13.

[50] Probably Thomas McNab, who was born around 1836 on Company land. He served the Hudson's Bay Company as a transporter in the Swan River district from 1857 to 1867, after which he became a free agent.

came in from Fort Pelly[51] with more men and the last of the boats and assumed absolute charge of the Brigade. Woe betide the unlucky white who disputed his authority[52]. Down he went with the first thing that came to hand. Now followed several days hard work, seeing that every boat would have its full complement of provisions, coverings, etc. Then carefully assorting the crews, for be it known to the uninitiated that every York boat[53] is manned by eight men and a steersman. The heavy oars[54] used are a load for a man, so to get better mastery of the stroke the whole crew rise and fall when rowing. The steersman, standing on a platform in the stern sheets, controls every motion of the boat with a huge sweep; this being replaced by a

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[51] "Fort Pelly was situated on rising sandy ground on the east side of [the Assiniboine] river. It was a large well–built fort protected by a high fence or wall of sawn planks. Over the heavy gate in front was a stout bastion from the top of which a magnificent view of surrounding country was seen. It was a compact, well–ordered post, on route from Fort Garry to Fort Carlton on the Saskatchewan. Sheltered on [the] north by woods, with the Assiniboine river in front. For many years after 1806, Fort Pelly was one of the main trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Co. Boats from 3 to 4 tons burden annually descended the Swan river carrying furs to York Factory, the proximity of which enabled the Company to trade goods among the Indians a month earlier than the North West Co. whose goods were transported from Montreal to Fort William and thence distributed. A short portage led from Fort Pelly to the Swan river. This fort was operated by the Hudson's Bay Co. for over 100 years, until about 1900." Voorhis, E. (1930). *Historic Forts and Trading Posts of the French regime and of the English Fur Trading Companies*. Ottawa: Department of the Interior. The North West Co. was the main rival of the Hudson's Bay Co. until their merger in 1821.

[52] This view of Métis guides was apparently common among non–Indigenous fur traders at the time: "Old hands and veterans all the world over are wont to regard with contempt the trials of 'prentice hands. The native boatmen in charge of each end of the craft were no exception to this common failing of mankind, but in their case it was intensified by racial pride and prejudice most galling to any white man bearing similar sentiments towards foreigners and men of color. While all Indians, of that day and generation considered themselves as "the people," they did not assert their inborn sense of superiority over the "Moonyass" (green white man) in the offensive and vain–glorious manner of the Metis." Cowie, I. (1916, April 15). JACK NORRIS – An Edmonton Pioneer. *The Edmonton Bulletin*, p. 13. Isaac Cowie served the Hudson's Bay Company as a clerk in the Swan River district from 1867 to 1879, and was Beatty's immediate superior during his time at Fairford House.

[53] A flat–bottomed boat with a design resembling a Viking longship. After 1821, the Hudson's Bay Company used them as a replacement for canoes, which could carry less than 1/3 of the York boat's 3–ton cargo capacity.

[54] Rowing the boats was exceptionally hard work. "The inland or "York" boat is admirably modelled for the different services it performs: but the infernal instruments of torture and of least driving force for the greatest muscular exertion euphemistically called "oars" are outrages on common sense and humanity. They are immensely clumsy, heavy "sweeps," not oars, and the unchangeable fashion of handling them native fashion is a parody on rowing, requiring the greatest amount of useless muscular exertion and producing the minimum of propulsion which the perverted ingenuity of man could devise. The effect of this back–breaking circular motion was that the blade entered the water obliquely, instead of perpendicularly, and came out horizontally, with a boil and a sinking pressure on the gunwale. […] The fashion also produced the greatest of all the great miseries the boatmen underwent, in that the brutal oar soon produced blistered hands. It was considered unmanly to quit for such a trifle, so the blisters broke and the rower went on with raw bleeding palms till inflammation of the whole arm set in, and the galley slave was only exempted honorably from duty when no longer fit to move." Cowie, I. (1916, April 15). JACK NORRIS – An Edmonton Pioneer. *The Edmonton Bulletin*, p. 13.

rudder when sailing, a single mast and large square sail being used when the wind is favorable.

Guide McNab fixes the time of starting for the next day and confusion increases. The shop which stood open from early morning till late at night swarmed with men, women, children and dogs, for with every man engaged came a whole tribe of hangers–on, all expecting a little of his bounty. At last the time for departure came. A few steady old hands had pulled the boats up to the beach and ladings consisted of furs, goose quills and *castoreum*[55] for shipment to Britain; pemmican and dressed leather for posts *en route* to the Bay, provisions for the trip. But, alas, over twenty men were missing. Then McNab, arming himself with a stout filler[56], requested me to join in the hunt, and one by one we discovered the deserters, some in Tepees under piles of bedding, often sheltered by dark dames' skirts, others in the woods. Out they were pulled, McNab's voice raging out in trumpet tones, a strange mixture of English, French and Indian oaths, predominating. Some were dragged, some carried to the boats and all were pitched in with small ceremony. At last everything was ready, and though much beyond the time fixed for starting, off we pulled with the cheers of the men and shrill yells of farewell from Indian women and children, the eight boats passed out of sight round the point.

My orders were to accompany the Brigade until relieved, so leaving a trusty man in temporary charge of the fort, taking another and light bark canoe to assure my return, I ensconced myself in the stern sheets of the guide's boat. Nine miles down the Shoal River brought us to Lake Winnipegosis. It was beautifully calm, the different boats vying with one another for leadership. Camp was ordered at Graves Point, a watch set to prevent further desertions, eight huge fires were built for each crew and a smaller one for myself and guide. Each man was given his rations of pemmican and flour. In half an hour from landing, a full supply of bread was being rapidly baked, "Beaver Tail Bread."[57] Would you like to know how it is made? Well, a stiff dough is rapidly mixed, generally on an empty sack, no shortening added, and when it attains the right consistency, lumps averaging half a pound, are handed to each man, who has already armed himself with a slender stick and half a dozen wood skewers. Pulling the dough over one end, flattening it out at the base and gradually bringing it to a point at the top, this all held firm by skewers across, the whole bearing resemblance to a beaver tail; one end is pushed into the ground before the fire and a few turns thoroughly cook it, and when eaten hot, it is by no means to be despised. Others of the men were busy cooking pemmican in huge open kettles, some munching it raw. Jesting, songs and stories made the camp an animated scene. The gay *capote*[58] of the French h———[59], with small hat set jauntily on the side of the head,

[55] Secretions from the anal glands of an adult beaver. *Castoreum* is used in perfume manufacture, and as a substitute for vanilla in certain foods.
[56] It is not clear what 'filler' means in this context.
[57] This appears to be an ancestor of the modern Beaver Tail pastry popularized by a chain of eateries of the same name.
[58] A hooded cloak.
[59] An offensive term for someone of mixed heritage. McNab was Métis.

surmounted by two black ostrich feathers, beads and silk work galore, made them the most conspicuous figures of the crowd. Gay songs followed supper in the rude patois of the Métis, all hands joining in the chorus, while sombre Indians looked on with sphinx–like faces, and at last bed, on most fragrant spruce brush.

Hardly had I closed my eyes, when McNab's voice was heard in stentorian[60] tones, "*Leve*[61]*, Leve, Leve, Le, petite nujons, Leve*," and beating time with a tiller on the gunwale[62] of a boat. Incredible! Had the night passed already. Even so, for faint streaks of daylight showed in the east, and my watch said half past two. All hands tumbled in the boats, and two hours good pulling was done before breakfast. Thence on through the narrow and tortuous Waterhen River into Lake Manitoba. Glory, a fair wind. The oars were all shipped, masts stepped, eight mighty sails hoisted and out sailed the Brigade in the lake, our boat leading. A traverse of eighty miles lay before us and after carefully noting the weather, McNab boldly stood out to sea, followed by the other boats, for it is an unwritten law, that where the guide's boat leads the other must follow. By the time we were half way across, the wind freshened to a gale and several of the crew were lying sea sick in the bottom of the boat. It was a delightful experience to me having been used to sailing from my youth up.

Towards evening we made the mouth of the Fairfort River and a few minutes pulling brought us up to the post where, alas, a senior officer was waiting to take charge of the outfit. I was busily engaged that evening in giving over the various accounts. An early start was made next morning, and away went the Brigade with many kind exclamations of regret at parting with their little clerk of Ogemases, to give the Indian title.

Then, with my man and canoe, warily coasting the shore of lakes and rivers, we retraced our way to Shoal River House. And so four months of the summer passed until one day a youngster, breathless with excitement, rushed into the fort, calling, "*Chemaun*[63], *Chemaun*," and so it was, for afar off could be heard the ringing of the mighty oars and at last, one by one the boats swept round the point, weather beaten and worn in appearance, but the veteran crews, pulling like lions. For was not this the home of many of them? After many hand shakings and congratulations, my winter outfit was put ashore. Some sorrowful faces are seen, two men missing, one lost in a rapid, the body never found; another carrying his two pieces over a rocky portage slipped and falling, crushed his chest; a rude cross now marks the spot.

[60] Commanding and powerful.
[61] French for 'Wake up'.
[62] The edge of a boat.
[63] The Ojibwe word for 'canoe', spelled phonetically. The modern standard romanization is 'jiimaan'.

Leaving two empty boats with me, the remainder of the Brigade pulled out that evening carrying the precious outfits for Forts Pelly, Ellis[64], Qu'Appelle[65] and many a far–off outpost.

This was the last time goods were brought to the Swan River district via Hudson's Bay and over many portages to their final destination. But history repeats itself. The route which to our forefathers was the chief means of access to the plains and forests of the North–West, has fallen into abeyance with the advent of the transcontinental railroads, now again, is re–asserting itself, and in the near future will again become a mighty factor in the transportation problems of Western Canada.

3. Chase of a Grizzly Bear – Love Philtres (Summer 1874)

In a former article entitled Swan River to York Factory I had described the picturesque situation of Shoal River House at the north end of Swan Lake, the Swan River emptying into the south side of the lake. Here at the mouth of the river was a small settlement of h———s[66] and Indians. It was the summer of 1874 and Mr. Angus MacBeth[67] whom I had succeeded in charge of the post, had advanced[68] some Indians rather heavily. These men were living at Duck Bay on Lake Winnipegosis and he did not see them before his departure, which was hurried. MacBeth had impressed on me before leaving about the importance of collecting these debts if at all possible, as there was an ugly rumor current in H.B.C. circles that postmasters were to be made responsible for outstanding accounts.

Being very busy getting the brigade of eight boats off to York, and then having other matters to attend to, it was finally well on in July before I was able to make the trip. There were no available men at the post, except my cook, Murdo[69], and after

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[64] Probably a mis–spelling of Fort Ellice, a "Hudson's Bay Co. fort on [the] Assiniboine river about 5 miles below [the] mouth of Qu'Appelle river. Built soon after the coalition of 1821. In 1862 it had declined to a "lone habitation," trade having disappeared. Its only purpose for some time had been to supply pemmican and dried meat for brigades and northern posts." Voorhis, E. (1930). *Historic Forts and Trading Posts of the French regime and of the English Fur Trading Companies*. Ottawa: Department of the Interior.

[65] A Hudson's Bay Company fort built before 1804 on the south bank of Qu'Appelle river. 'Qu'Appelle' means 'that calls' in French. "The name Qu'Appelle is derived from an Indian legend that the shores are haunted by a spirit that often wails during the night resembling a human voice." Voorhis, E. (1930). *Historic Forts and Trading Posts of the French regime and of the English Fur Trading Companies*. Ottawa: Department of the Interior.

[66] An offensive term for people of mixed heritage.

[67] Angus McBeath served the Hudson's Bay Company from 1869 until his retirement in 1909, primarily as a clerk in the Touchwood Hills district. Isaac Cowie, who served in the HBC's Swan River district in the 1870s, corroborates Beatty's statement: "Shortly after the seat of government was moved to Battleford, and Fort Pelly relapsed into the position of a fur–trading post under the careful management of Mr. Adam McBeath, whose place in charge of the fine post of Shoal River, near the final fall of the Swan River into Lake Winnipegosis, had been taken by his nephew, Mr. Angus McBeath." Cowie, I. (1913). *The Company of Adventurers*. Toronto: William Briggs.

[68] Provided goods in advance of payment.

[69] Possibly Murdo Campbell, a Scot from the settlement of Barvas on the Isle of Lewis. He is listed as having signed an HBC servant's contract in 1871, at the rate of £22 per year.

impressing on him to be extra careful of the company's property in my absence, I took my gun and paddled over to the mouth of Swan River. Here I was fortunate in securing a very dark Indian, known as Black Ba'tese, who knew the country, but was a little lame, which did not matter as there was no particular rush. We left my small bark and took his double canoe, paddled across to the east side of the lake, cached our canoe, made up two small packs of bedding and provisions and started across what was called a summer portage, but a faint trail only showed in places. Later that evening we reached the shores of Winnipegosis, and after firing a few shots to which there was no response, we made a thorough search and finally found an old canoe, which after the gum was patched a bit, would, Ba'tese thought, take us to the Indian camps. It was a leaky craft and I was kept busy between baling and paddling, but we made our destination all right and found the Indians at home. They did not look too well pleased at my appearance, for no doubt they thought with MacBeth leaving the debts might be forgotten. They were, however, hospitable enough, and we were guests of the headman whose name was A–ta–pis–ka–what. I noticed a smile on Ba'tese's face while dinner was being cooked, and in a hoarse whisper he asked me, "You like dog, you." "Dog, what to eat you mean? Good heavens, no!" "Well," was his grinning reply, "that is what we are going to have for dinner. Ba'tese was right, and in a short time we received bountiful helpings of what I must say looked like very nice meat, and gathering up courage I tasted it, and there was nothing wrong about that. Still, there was the idea, so I simply toyed with my share. Our host noticing that I was not enjoying my dinner spoke to one of the girls, who shortly entered the tepee and placed beside us a splendid dish of ripe raspberries, it being berry season. But the vessel that they were in fascinated me, and I gazed and gazed at it. White, with yellow stripes, handle and all, the kind of china that is generally kept under the bed[70]. Ba'tese, smiling again, whispered: "It is all right and has only been used for cooking; not what you think," and with that my suspicions were relieved and I made a hearty meal off the berries.

After our repast with all its surprises I went fully into the question of trade. The amount due the company was some £86[71], and to my surprise and delight nearly the whole amount was put up in furs. Bear skins, beaver, otter, mink, fisher and marten all figured in it as well as musquash[72]; prime furs all evidently killed in the spring. The fine fur alone made two bulky little packs, so we decided to leave the muskrats as they were heavy, with a promise that they would be brought in later to the post. They took us over to the mainland in the morning and, having arranged our packs (mine being a good deal the lightest) off we went for home. Ba'tese's lanterns and his heavy pack now began to tell and I could make very much better time. The walking was good, the soil being sandy, and there was little under–brush. On coming over we had noted many bear tracks as Bruin[73] no doubt had gathered in for a berry feast, for bears are proverbially fond of berries. In addition to raspberries the ridges

[70] A chamber pot.
[71] About £9,000 in 2019, adjusting for U.K. inflation.
[72] Muskrat.
[73] A name traditionally used for bears in folk tales.

were covered in places with blueberry bushes. I would walk fast, leave Ba'tese a good distance, then slip my pack and feast on berries until he caught me up.

The day had clouded over and a light drizzle commenced to fall. I was carrying my gun and had some bullets handy in a buckskin shot pouch in case of sighting any big game. I was some distance ahead making for a ridge which promised blueberries, when I noted a huge bear track going in our direction and evidently very fresh. The tracks are very much like a human foot, only the heel is narrower and the claws made deeper indents. Just as I reached the berries and was stooping down to gather a handful, something moved right ahead of me, and as I crouched and stared it resolved itself into a large grizzly colored bear with its hind quarters towards me and busy gathering in the berries with his forepaws. He was a monster, all right, and my hair stood up with excitement. Tugging at the strings of my shot pouch, I pulled them into a hard knot. While I was working at them so as to slip a bullet in my gun, Ba'tese was getting closer and I cautiously raised my hand for him to stop and crouch. He did so, but, alas, as he stooped down, on the top of his pack was our copper tea kettle with two pots, and these rattled. Up jumped the bear and stood facing me. Such a brute, taller than I was, and no doubt the same one I had just tracked. It was too late to get my bullets, so without putting my gun to my shoulder, I pulled both barrels, aiming at his heart. Snap, snap they went, the caps evidently damp with the rain, though I had the nipples covered. The bear wheeled and dashed off the ridge, and I, like a madcap, threw my gun down and ran after him. Ba'tese throwing off his pack ran after me shouting: "Stop, Ogemases, stop! Grey bear, bad bear!" For a hundred yards or so I ran him fairly even, but there was a thicket and into this he bolted and that was the last we saw of him. On walking back to meet Ba'tese, who came up breathless, he poured out a torrent of words in broken English and French, mixed with Cree, the tenor of which I gathered to be something like this: "What a mad fool you are! Don't you know if you had caught the bear he would probably have killed us both," again repeating the words, "Bad bear, grey bear." I replied that I had never heard of a grey bear. "Oh," he said, "white men have another name for it, plenty on the plains and in the mountains." "Grizzly bear," I suggested. "Yes, that is the kind," and then I began to feel frightened.

To follow up this bear's history, it was a bona fide grizzly all right. It had wandered in from the plains and was killed in a dramatic way shortly afterwards by an Indian named Schni who was paddling in Swan Lake with his young wife, and had been chasing a loon, so had his old flint lock gun loaded with ball. The day was very hot and the Indian's wife was thirsty. Close to them and a few yards in from shore was a beautiful spring of ice–cold water which formed a deep pool. Taking the gun and a birch bark Rogan[74] for the water, they made for the spring, and just as the Indian stooped down to fill the vessel he noted a reflection of a bear in the water, and looking up saw him standing on his hind legs just across the pool. The Indian fired and the bullet went right through his heart. Mr. Grizzly tumbled in the water, and he was such a size that they had to come for help to the post to get him out. I traded the skin, which was covered with scars, and being out of season was only fit for cart

[74] A rogan is a type of basket made from birch bark by the Atikamekw First Nations of Quebec.

coverings. It was the largest hide I had ever seen, and I secured his claws and sent them east to my father[75].

To return to Ba'tese, we boiled our kettle and had a good dinner on the site of the bear episode. He would look at me curiously at times and mutter, ,"He must be a little mad." "No Ba'tese," but my father's people were Irish, and we let it go at that. Late in the evening we reached our canoe and an hour's paddle took us to Ba'tese's cabin, where his wife (a very superior woman) kindly rigged me out in some dry clothes.

Next morning I settled up with him and the wind being fair, sailed home. My sail was an oddity, a seamless sack split down the centre with a light yard top and bottom, quite big enough for my small and cranky craft in a wind.

On reaching the post I found a number of women and children all feasting in the kitchen. This was strictly against the rules of the company, so I turned them out and rounded on Murdo, saying, "Is this the way you look after things in my absence?" His excuse was a queer one for these days. O–que–we–sez, an Indian widow, by no means a fascinating person, had bewitched him, and whatever she told him to do, that he had to do. I swore at his folly, told him to buck up and be a man and next time the lady called to try her games, kick her off the premises. He said he would try, in a doubtful sort of tone, but in a few days the same thing occurred, and I decided to send him to headquarters at Fort Ellis for his own good as well as the company's. So, exit Murdo.

LOVE PHILTRES

I had a handsome moose skin jacket trimmed with otter fur, long fringes, and in fact the very latest thing in s——dom[76]. That was getting soiled and I determined to have it washed and re–smoked, and thoroughly made over. Giving it to an old woman (named Mrs. Brass) who did my washing, which included moccasin making and mending, she took it carefully to pieces, and in doing so made a discovery. Sewed firmly in the facing of the coat was a packet of a silver–grey powder, and this she brought to me with a very shocked face, exclaiming: "Look, Ogemases, what I found in your coat," and shaking her head said, "Some bad girl tried to witch you and make you love her!" I laughed and said, "Well, she did not succeed, as I am quite fancy free at present and have no sweetheart." There was no sequel to this love philtre, nor did I ever discover who placed the powder in the coat.

ATTEMPT TO POISON

There was a much more serious attempt made on a worthy man's life in the spring at this post. It was just about sugar time and the natives were tapping some ash–maple trees and occasionally bringing me in a little sugar or syrup. We had a large boat shed here, and it was customary to build up at least two York boats yearly.

[75] Edward Beatty (1828 – 1882) lived in Peterborough, Ontario.
[76] An offensive term describing a group as being at a "lower" level of civilization.

On the last ice arrived Mr. Angus McLeod from Manitoba House, an experienced boat builder. He was a very fine fellow, married[77], with a nice little family, whom he had left at home. I did not wish to put Angus in the ordinary men's house, so had quarters fitted up for him in a small building just outside the gates of the post, where he was quite comfortable, and he at once got busy at the boats.

Some little time elapsed, and in one of my daily visits to the boathouse, I found Angus in low spirits, and on questioning him, found he was being bothered by an Indian woman of middle age who had entered his house on several occasions in the evening, and would evidently have liked him to pay her attention. He told her to go out, and this she did reluctantly, muttering to herself, and looking, Angus said, very wicked over it. I cheered him up and finally had him laughing over the incident. A day or two later we were walking down to the boathouse together when a little Indian girl approached, handed Angus a small piece of maple sugar and then ran off. Angus turned the sugar over and then handed it to me, saying: "It does not look very tempting." Just then a starved looking Indian dog passed us, and I whistled and chucked him the sugar. Like train–dogs he never stopped to taste it, but swallowed it in a gulp and ran on towards the boathouse. Next morning Angus called at my office with a very grave face and asked me to accompany him. We walked towards the boathouse, and on the other side of it, just in the bush was our dog friend of yesterday, laying dead. Evidently the sugar must have contained a violent poison to have acted so quickly.

Angus was quite upset. He said he knew that s———[78] would have his life and wanted me to send him home at once, with the boats half–finished. This, of course, was out of the question, and I finally decided to take him in my quarters and have him share my mess (though against rules), but it was most vital that the boats be ready for the trip to York at any cost.

On searching for the woman who had made overtures to him, she could not be found, having left hurriedly, and we all thought from a guilty conscience. It was a happy day for Angus McLeod when, having finished the boats, he left what he called the heathen hole.

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[77] An Angus McLeod appears in the Public Accounts of Canada for Fiscal Year 1877–78 as ordering 4 cords of wood for Manitoba House. This is possibly the same Angus McLeod who was married to Mary Ducharme, a Métis woman. Their son, Donald McLeod, was born at Shoal River in early 1872, and would claim land via Métis scrip after his marriage to Ida Mary Louisa McDonald in 1897 (Certificate Form E, no. 2936, claim no. 360).

[78] An offensive term for an Indigenous woman.

4. Indian Witchcraft (Winter 1874 – 1875)

In the early seventies, being in charge of a Hudson's Bay post on Lake Manitoba[79], where poisoning by native Indian[80] medicines was prevalent, evidence was brought before myself and the local missionary, making a serious charge against an old woman named Wus–ke–ninge who, it was claimed, had given poison to one of the tribe whereby he was in danger of losing his life and at that time was lying in a semi–paralysed condition. We considered the evidence justified us in laying the matter before the nearest magistrate, some 60 miles distant, and, if possible, procuring a warrant for her arrest. It was decided that I should go in with the papers. The time was dead of winter and the lake was frozen solidly from shore to shore.

I finally decided to start alone the next evening and being the fortunate possessor of a splendid train of dogs looked forward to the trip with enjoyment. My dog train, consisting of four, deserves some description. Part E———[81], part wolf hound, tall clean–limbed animals, their usual gait was some six miles per hour, but if pressed they could easily outrun a horse. Once having passed over a route, the foregoer never swerved from a direct course whether a trail showed or not. Herod, Nero, Hero and Moro were their names and I loved them with a great love. Kindly natured and devoted to me, still they would attack anything I wished and were as courageous as lions. Often when viewing a wolf or fox on the ice I would let them out of their harness and if far enough from shore they would catch it and kill it before I

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[79] Reginald Beatty was Apprentice Clerk in charge of Fairford House for the winter of 1874 – 1875. This was a "Hudson's Bay Co. post at [the] outlet of Manitoba lake on Portage Bay. It was established about 1856 [and was] visited by the Hind's Expedition of 1858." Voorhis, E. (1930). *Historic Forts and Trading Posts of the French regime and of the English Fur Trading Companies*. Ottawa: Department of the Interior. A Christian mission shared the post's location. An account from 1860 states that "Fairford is very prettily situated on the banks of the Partridge Crop River (a continuation of the Little Saskatchewan), about two miles from Lake Manitobah. […] There are one hundred and twenty Christians, adults and children, at this Mission. [..] The Hon. Hudson's Bay Company have a post at this mission, but it is a matter of deep regret that the heathen Indians who come to barter their furs here should be permitted to have access to rum. […] The post had been but recently established, and the distribution of intoxicating liquors to the Indians appeared to be a subject of deep anxiety and trouble to [the Mission]." Hind, H. Y. (1860). *Narrative of the Canadian Red river exploring expedition of 1857, and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan exploring expedition of 1858*. London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts.

[80] Fairford House is in the traditional territory of the Pinaymootang First Nation.

[81] The Canadian Inuit dog is the official animal symbol of the Nunavut Territory, and was traditionally a source of wool. "The external coating of long hair is underlaid in the E——— dog by a denser mat of closely interwoven fibres, which, though course, seem to have sufficient toughness to allow of its being spun into thread. […] In the summer time this wool may be easily pulled off in large patches provided the animal is kind enough to allow the handling, which is invariably not the case. This, with the dense covering of shorter hairs on their legs and feet, appears to make them indifferent to almost any degree of cold, as they frequently and habitually pass the bitterest nights and the fiercest storms of the arctic winter; with no other shelter than is afforded by the lee side of a native hut, and sometimes without even that." Bannister, H. M. (1869). The E——— Dog. *The American Naturalist*, 3(10), 522–530.

could reach them[82]. My cariole was, as usual, made from a birch toboggan with buffalo parchment sides and back, lined with fur, on its head a tripod with silver bells. On the collars of each dog were also tripods with bells, and Indian beaded saddle cloths made a very handsome outfit.

Amongst the hangers–on around the Post was a h———[83] named James Sinclair who, speaking both English and Cree fluently, was often employed by me as interpreter, my knowledge of the native language being at that time limited. Calling at the office before my departure he appeared to be uneasy in his mind and on my questioning him as to the trouble, he replied by a question: "Is it true, O–ge–mas–es (little clerk), that you are taking in law papers about that Indian witch?" When I replied in the affirmative, he begged me not to go, or, if I would, then to take a companion. After some further questioning the truth came out, he stating this woman was in league with bad spirits and that an evil influence would be sent with me or after me if I insisted on going. I naturally made light of this and, in fact, before starting out, had quite forgotten the matter. Evening came on and about 7:30 I whistled for my dogs which were trained to come to their places, hitched up and away we went. For some miles the trail ran through woods and then came the open lake, wind–swept and some twenty–five miles of a traverse to a point called the Bluff. While I lay back in my cariole, comfortably wrapped in furs, the miles slipped by until I was about half way across. By this time a few fleecy clouds had come up, but the moon, stars and the northern lights made the sky still very light. A feeling suddenly came over me that I was no longer alone. Loth to disturb my comfortable position I lay still for a few minutes until the feeling of a presence became stronger, and on sitting up in my cariole I saw to the left of the foremost dog about three feet above the ice, a ball of phosphorescent light dancing along and keeping pace with the dogs, not more than thirty feet from me. This kept changing in size. At times as large as a football and at others not much bigger than a cricket ball. My first impression was that I was asleep, but rubbing my eyes, and kneeling up for a more careful inspection, I was convinced of the reality of it. Some minutes elapsed, when my attention was drawn to the way my dogs were travelling. Instead of swinging along in their usual free fashion with tails waving, they appeared cowed, and on my speaking to them and endeavoring to draw their attention to this luminous light and setting them on it, for the first time in their lives they paid no attention to me, but simply trotted a little faster. I then tried to stop them (as old dog drivers know, no reins are used, the train being governed and guided by voice alone) by gently calling "whoa!" Always they were delighted at this, would look around, stop and gently turn to avoid entanglement in the harness and then lick my face and hands. This time no attention was paid to my call. I was rather afraid they might run away, which would probably mean upsetting of the cariole and being left in the middle of the lake with my uncanny companion.

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[82] "They supply themselves with fresh game, not only the smaller quadrupeds and grouse, but also occasionally running down a deer. Their hunting instincts are so strongly developed, that while travelling in the winter, if a reindeer or even a fox or rabbit is in sight, it is quite difficult to keep any control over the dogs". *Ibid.*

[83] An offensive term for a person of mixed heritage.

This light, after the lapse of an hour, as nearly as I could judge the time, became erratic in its movements, making dances in different directions, coming back quite close to the cariole and then flitting away. It struck me as remarkable, the dogs apparently would not look at it, and yet when it approached us closer I could see the hair bristling on their necks. Finally it began to move to the northeast towards a larger bay called the Dog Hung Bay[84], where a poor white man was found frozen the winter previous; and finally, appearing no larger than a cat's eye in the distance, disappeared.

Reaching the bluff I boiled the kettle and unloosing the dogs fed them a little dried buffalo meat; but they were not companionable, seemed oppressed and would not respond to my caresses. Hitching up again I made my destination at breakfast time and during the course of the meal related my experience with the mysterious light. Finally this was dropped and the conversation turned to the object of my visit. The magistrate, after carefully examining the evidence, submitted as to the poisoning, decided to issue a warrant for the detention of Wus–ke–ninge, and this I was to take back with me.

After attending to some other business I returned to my post, and found that the Indian woman had fled to parts unknown. The same evening James Sinclair called and congratulated me on my safe return from what he evidently considered a dangerous mission. He finally asked: "Did you have a good trip?" On my replying "Yes," he said: "Did you see anything?" and like a flash the thought of the mysterious light came to my mind. I then remembered his former prophecy and told him the facts. He did not appear at all surprised. "The light," he stated, "was an evil spirit sent by Wus–ke–ninge which, if you had followed, nothing more would have been heard of you."

Thinking it all over after Sinclair's departure; his first warning before I started, to the effect that some evil thing would be sent after me; again the extraordinary conduct of my usually fearless dogs and the uncanny appearance of the light which could not have arisen from the same cause as an "ignis fatuus"[85] for their

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[84] "East of Reed Island is a deep rounded bay, known as Dog–hung Bay […] The prominent points in this bay are all composed of boulders, piled in an even slope to a height of six or eight feet above the lake, while in between the points is a beach of rounded limestone gravel, on which is growing a narrow belt of poplar, elm and oak. Behind the points are often small ponds, and in rear of the whole beach is an extensive open marsh, stretching back to a forest of poplar and spruce." Geological Survey of Canada. (1893). *Annual Report 1890–1891*, V(I). Ottawa: S. E. Dawson.

[85] Also known as a will–o'–the wisp. In folklore is it a ghostly light that leads travelers astray. "Who has not heard of the will–o'–the wisp, jack–o'–lantern or ignis fatuus, as we say in Latin, meaning "foolish fire?" […] It usually appears in marshy districts, and the most plausible opinion is that it emanates from the decomposition of bones, generating gas charged with phosphorus, which ignites by contact with the atmospheric air. The trouble in solving the mystery arises from the fact that you can't capture a jack–o'–lantern and take it home for chemical analysis. No matter how carefully you approach the mysterious light, it will elude you and airily dance on ahead. The bubble of luminous gas is disturbed by the slight agitation of air caused by your approach, and hence the attempt to capture it is as impossible as to catch up with your own shadow." FOOLISH FIRES. (1907, September 25). *Red Deer News*, p. 9.

was from three to four feet of solid ice and a foot of snow all over the lake, made it one of the most uncanny experiences of my long residence in Northwest Canada.

I may add the old woman was not heard of again and we burnt her bark tepee with many medicine bags to the great satisfaction of all concerned. The poisoned Indian gradually recovered but never regained his former strength.

5. Old–Time Yarns in the West (Winter 1874 – 1875)

I was managing the Fairford Post of the Hudson's Bay Company in the winter of 1874–5 and was fortunate enough to own a splendid train of dogs that I have mentioned in former sketches. Mr. Isaac Cowie at Manitoba House[86] was my immediate chief, and at his request I took a young sleigh dog to train with my own as these had a peculiarly fast slinging trot which covered the ground in an amazing way.

I had occasion to visit Manitoba House, or the Post as it was commonly called, and started early one morning in the dead of winter, hitching up the strange dog with my own. As I was taking a cariole and travelling light, I intended riding all the way and dressed very warmly accordingly. My dogs were not at all pleased with the interloper and quite often would give him a sly nip behind, to which he would naturally retaliate, and this made the train go even at a faster pace than usual. We were about fifteen miles out from Fairford and well on towards the centre of the frozen lake, when feeling tired and cramped I called a halt and got out of the cariole for a few minutes to stamp around and bring the circulation back. Turning my back on the dogs for a minute I heard a clash of bells and off they went in a flash, fortunately in the right direction. Running at top speed, I managed to keep near them for several miles, but noted with dismay they were gradually gaining ground and I was blown, also sweating profusely, as I had far too many clothes on for a dog–runner. I stopped and rested a minute or two, then taking off my heavy coat jogged along at a steady pace. But gradually the train drew further and further away until lost to sight, and then I had only the marks of their claws on the hard snow for a guide, and even these gradually disappeared as some light snow was falling. My hard running at the start had been too much, and then it was a long time since breakfast, and naturally all my grub was on the sleigh. I began to feel very much exhausted, and an overpowering desire to rest at any cost came over me. Placing my capot on the ice I lay down on my back and stretched out my arms. My eyes closed and I verily believe I would have been fast asleep in two minutes, but I found my right hand holding something and on holding it to my sleepy eyes, lo and behold, it was a little frozen mouse, one of the kind with long noses. Goodness knows how he ever had got out here at least twelve miles from the shore, but on gazing at him a sudden conviction came over me that if

[86] "Hudson's Bay Co. establishment on Lake Manitoba, near the Narrows, on west shore south of entrance to Ebb and Flow lake. Built before 1850. Was in poor condition in 1858 and the old buildings, which had been a R. C. [Roman Catholic] Mission sold to the Company, were burnt in 1859. It was rebuilt very soon. Appears on the Company lists to 1894." Voorhis, E. (1930). *Historic Forts and Trading Posts of the French regime and of the English Fur Trading Companies*. Ottawa: Department of the Interior.

I once fell asleep I would be like the mouse in a few hours – frozen stiff. With that I stiffly regained my feet, piled up my heavy coat, muffler and mittens on the ice and started for the Narrows at a steady trot.

Providentially for me an enterprising Yankee had built a log cabin right in the centre of the right–of–way of the old Canadian Pacific location which, as old–timers will remember, had decided on this route[87]. This cabin I struck just about sundown and I was about all in, no food during the day, the overheating in the morning and now chills had come on and my legs felt like lead. My hands were too numb to rap at the door, so I ran against it, and on its opening, collapsed on the floor. Like all pioneers he was extremely hospitable, and taking off my outer clothes placed me in a warm bed, rubbed my limbs and gave me small doses of whiskey and water, so in a short time I was able to sit up and eat some supper.

Next morning I was at the Post bright and early hoping to find the dogs there, but no signs of them. We at once sent out a search party, as there were some valuable furs at the back of the cariole, a silver fox amongst them, but the searchers returned in the evening, reporting no luck. Several days elapsed and I was disconsolate, as parties had been out daily but could find no trace of the dogs. One evening, as I was looking out over the lake, I saw a dog–train coming in from the northeast at an unusually fast rate, and, calling Cowie to bring the field glasses, we soon decided they were the missing dogs, but as they reached the landing there were only four, the stranger having disappeared.

A young Indian was riding in the cariole and told the following story: "I went out on foot to visit a line of wolf traps and on getting near the last one on the east side of the lake I noted some large animals walking round it. When they caught sight of me they came tearing in great bounds and thinking they were wolves I prepared to defend myself with an axe (the only weapon I carried). But when I saw they were dogs I then knew these were from the train that had ran away from Ogemases, and my, but they were glad to see me and licked my face and hands. On going up to the cariole I found Mr. Cowie's dog in my trap with a solidly frozen foot and the harness still on him. So, as he would be of no further use, I knocked him on the head for wolf bait."

On examining the dog harness I noted that three of the belly bands were chewed in half, and on his telling this I at once realized what had happened. Nero, my second dog, was a slim, thin haired creature with a very small head, and could get out of his traces at any time by simply slipping the collar over his head. Then, he apparently had set to work and released his brothers one by one, leaving the unfortunate stranger to his own devices.

The furs were untouched, being wrapped up in canvas, but half of a beautiful cow buffalo robe and half a rabbit skin robe were eaten. Never mind, I was too pleased to see the dogs again, so rewarded the boy handsomely and returned to Fairford in great style the next day, the dogs in as good a humor as myself; and then I promised never again would we admit a stranger to our ranks.

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[87] The Canadian Pacific Railway, completed around 1886, was originally planned to go through the Fertile Belt in the northern halves of the Prairie Provinces. It was only at the last minute that a southerly route was decided on.

When Chief Factor Archie McDonald ordered me to take charge of the Fairford Post, his instructions were to complete the new master's house as soon as possible. Then I was to remove everything of value in the old fort and burn the buildings, which had been up for many years. I was rather curious to know the why and wherefore as to burning the place, so asked him his reason. "Oh," was his reply, "there are some fool stories current at Fairford as to them being haunted, for some bloody rows took place there in the old drinking days."

Well, I reached Fairford all right and took possession of the place. I put an extra man or two on the new building and after settling down began making a few cautious inquiries as to what shape (if any) the spooks were supposed to take. Very little satisfaction was given me, but I noted that Indians and the usual hangers on did not like to be near or in the post after dark.

The establishment was built in the usual way in the form of a quadrangle and surrounded with a wall of hewed timber, at one end of the square the master's house and on each side various store houses, while the front was shut with the wall and large gates. The native men's houses stood at some distance away outside the enclosure. I and my cook, a Lewis man named Malcolm, were the only occupants of the fort at night; not though the only ones, as I always had my four famous dogs, Herod, Nero, Moro and Hero, who, if anyone touched me, would have had a bad time of it, as they were exceedingly fierce if set on to any person or animal. I forgot to mention that a platform of heavy sawn planks ran all 'round the square ,and most of these were old and rotten, so one had to be careful in stepping, for they would tip up and come down with a bang.

One evening, when the place was all quiet, Malcolm came in from the kitchen and I saw by his embarrassed manner that there was something on his mind. "Well, sir, master," and that was as far as he could get. However, I encouraged him, and bit by bit the truth came out. He wanted to go and sleep in the men's houses, and on asking his reasons, he said he kept hearing noises at night and also felt things moving, though he could see nothing. He hated to go and leave me alone, but he could not sleep the way things were going on. I finally told him he could go, and after his departure made a careful inspection of the whole premises and saw that all gates were closed and barred. Then, calling my dogs into the hall, I overhauled an old shot gun and loaded it heavily with powder and plenty of wadding, as I thought some attempt might be made through the night to scare me off the premises.

My room was at the front of the house, the window overlooking the square. This I left partly raised but pulled down the blind. Then, placing the gun handy, I blew out the candle and went to bed, the time being near midnight. Just as I was falling asleep I heard a heavy trampling noise coming round the square on the platforms, and I was out of bed like a flash, cocked my gun, and waited developments. The heavy tramping came right on past my window but there was nothing visible, though the night was light enough to see the other buildings plainly. It may have been imagination, but as the noise passed the window I thought I could detect a draught of cold air. Well, it is no use disguising the fact that I felt creepy, but just then I thought of my dogs. The noise in the meantime had stopped, so I waited quietly

for a repetition, and this came in a few minutes. The same heavy tramping started apparently close to the main fort entrance, then along past the Pemmican store, then turning and coming right in front of my window. With that I threw the front door open and set the dogs on it. Out they went with furious growls, and back they came again, hair bristling up, and evidently cowed, as they retreated into the corner and would make no response when I urged them out again. Again, as I had followed them out, I could see nothing, but this time distinctly felt a cold draught of air pass. The dogs either felt or saw something that scared them, and it may be the brute creation is more sensitive to non–visible auras or whatever name it or they might be called than the human kind, or civilization has dulled our perceptive faculties.

It was several weeks before the new residence was ready for occupancy, and during this time I constantly heard the same heavy tramplings and other noises, and there was no doubt the dogs were affected, as generally they were joyous creatures always ready to sport or play with me. However, as no ill–effects occurred, I became used to the racket and yet was glad enough after vacating the premises to put a torch to the old fort.

During the same winter a mysterious light accompanied me for some hours on Lake Manitoba, which by its presence, affected my fearless dogs in the same way, but this I have described fully in a former article, entitled Indian Witchcraft.

6. Crossing the Plains to Fort Carlton (Summer 1875)

I had wintered at Fairford on the north end of Lake Manitoba and had just closed up the business in the spring, when I received orders to report at Manitoba House and superintend a small sugar making plant which the Hudson's Bay Company had undertaken on an island in the lake just out from the post where there were several thousand ash–maple trees. Our methods were very primitive. An old pony and stone–boat with a barrel to gather the sap, birch bark rogans and a string of large–sized open copper kettles for boiling the sap. An old and wrinkled Indian woman attended to the boiling and sugar making, and when the season ended we had several thousand pounds of sugar, sugar–pitch and syrup. After keeping enough for home use, the orders were to send the balance up to Fort Qu'Appelle, and there it would be traded to the Plains Indians who were excessively fond of it, and the price to them was, I think, a skin a pound.

The officer in charge of Manitoba House at that time was the late Isaac Cowie, and he fitted out five Red River carts with ponies, detailed a h——— named Charlie Anderson (generally known as Charlie–Man) for guide, had the carts loaded up with sugar and syrup, and issued us rations for the trip. Unfortunately a gun was not included in the equipment and at that time I did not own one. He then gave orders for us to proceed direct to Fort Ellis. It was a wilderness we had to traverse, and in fact on the whole trip we never saw or tracked a human being. The ponies we were using had wintered out and as the green grass was only just coming in they were in poor shape for a long trip. Our progress was very slow, not more than eighteen to twenty miles a day, and at first we had to make a number of detours to avoid bush

and brush, but gradually as we got further away from the lake, the country became more open. We had no tent, but just a covering to sleep under. One night we had camped rather late on a dry looking knoll, and after supper soon went to bed, as we made point of starting early, spelling our poor ponies twice in the day to give them the best show possible.

Charlie–Man will now tell the story: "We had put up the usual willow frame and over this drew our covering and went to sleep, when in the night I was awakened by Ogemases grabbing me fiercely, moaning and shaking his head from side to side. Though I was considered a strong man it took me all my time to hold my own with the little clerk, and I thought he must have gone suddenly mad. In our struggles we smashed our rude camp to pieces, rolled some distance down the knoll, and at last I managed to hold him down firmly with my knee on his chest and asked what was the matter. He was not conscious of my voice, but still kept throwing his head from side to side and moaning. It struck me at last there was something in his ear, and dragging him slowly back to the camp, I found our dunnage sack, took out a bottle of Painkiller, pulled the cork with my teeth, turned him on his side, and poured the pure stuff into his ear. He collapsed as if you had hit him with a club, and I finally noticed a small red ant float out with the Painkiller. He remained unconscious until morning when he woke up all right, though for several days he was quite deaf on that side.

So much for Charlie–Man's yarn. And now I take up my narrative again. I was suddenly awakened that night by what I thought was a tremendous blow inside my head, followed by another, and another until I lost consciousness, and then you have heard Charlie–Man's story as to what happened. Talk about grizzly bears or timber wolves, a little tiny red ant is much more to be dreaded when in your ear, and for years afterwards when sleeping out on the prairie I stopped my ears with cotton wool.

Our rations consisted of Pilot bread biscuit, large and very hard, with a small amount of buffalo Pemican. Unfortunately, owing to the weakness of our ponies, the trip was taking us much longer than Mr. Cowie allowed for, so we had to limit our fare. Of course, there was plenty of maple sugar and syrup and we rather unwisely ate too much of this which caused dysentery. Finally, by Charlies's rough count, we should be within some thirty miles of Fort Ellis. But, alas, our ponies had played out entirely. Charlie was very much weaker than myself owing to the effects of too much sugar, and we held a council over night as to the best procedure. The question arose, should we kill one of the ponies, and after some discussion we decided against this, they of course being the company's property. There were only two large biscuits left, no Pemican, and then the sugar, which by this time we were afraid to touch. It was finally decided that I was to start out early next morning taking an easterly course, marking my trail constantly (so that Charlie could be easily found), and three or four hours should bring me to the main cart trail from Ft. Garry to Ft. Ellis.

I was pleased with the prospect and taking half a biscuit for my breakfast away I went, warning Charlie to eat no more sugar, and assuring him I would have assistance back as early as possible. After some three hours' steady walking I struck the main trail close to Bird Tail Creek. I was by this time hungry as a bear, and here on the light soil banks of the creek were hundreds of prairie gophers, fat and saucy,

the first we had seen. They looked good to eat and after vainly pelting them with stones an idea struck me. Sitting down I took off my moccasins, pulled out the long deer skin thongs and made a snare, and in a few minutes I had a couple of find big gophers. Making a fire I skinned and cleaned my game, fixed up what Indians call a Ponask, viz.: The game is stretched on a stick with skewers across and roasted before an open fire. I quickly polished one off. Very good and sweet it was, and I was just started on the other one when I heard a rig coming from the east, and who should it be but Molyneux St. John and his wife *en route* to Ft. Ellis on Indian Department business. Nothing would do but my having a good dinner on the spot and then a comfortable drive to The Fort, where I at once reported conditions and saw a relief party with provisions sent back to poor Charlie–Man, who arrived that night, and after a day or two's rest was all right again. The ponies were left to do their own recuperating and would be brought into the horse guard later.

Well, I at last had reached a real plain fort, and though I headed this article Fort Ellis[88] it has taken some time to get there. But my readers must understand when an old–timer sits down to recall old events, reminiscences pour over him like a flood, and he is apt to wander from his subject, so please forgive me when I do this, and don't expect too much from the "Men Who Showed the Way."

Fort Ellis was a thoroughly well–built post for defence against hostile Indians, having a sixteen–foot palisade with corner bastions and a walk–around near the top of the wall made it impervious to savage attack. It was very picturesquely situated on the high bank of the Assiniboia River and commanded a beautiful view on all sides. Chief Factor Archie McDonald, a stern old martinet, was in charge. His wife[89] was a sister of the well–known Sheriff Inkster[90] and I have pleasant recollections of her kindness to the young clerk. My rather dreaded interview with the chief was over, and I was told to make myself useful in the trading store until such time as council decided my fate. Then it might be James Bay or Hudson's Bay, Mackenzie River or New Caledonia, but what did we care, the Great West was before us and adventure filled our souls.

Shortly after my arrival some very unwelcome visitors arrived from across the American boundary in the shape of some three hundred Sioux Indians. They had been fighting with the Yankees as usual and retreated into British territory. Fierce–looking chaps, simply clad in a breech–clout and buffalo robe, well–armed and numbers of white scalps amongst them. One old devil had seven, several of which, judging by the long hair, had belonged to white women. But what interested one of the young McKays[91] (my fellow clerk) and myself was the fact of two white girls, both wives of the old interpreter, who were evidently of Scandinavian birth, having fair hair and blue eyes. Poor things, they were Sioux in everything but their birth, and

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[88] The title on publication was 'Old Fort Ellis and Sioux Indians,' with the titled used in this volume as its subtitle.

[89] Archibald McDonald Jr. married Helen Inkster in 1863. The couple had at least six children.

[90] Colin Inkster (1843 – 1934), a member of Manitoba's first Legislative Council. He was appointed Sheriff in 1876.

[91] Probably Henry McKay, who in 1875 was an Apprentice Postmaster at Fort Ellice (Ellis). He would be promoted to full clerk in 1877.

had evidently been stolen as babies, probably in the great Minnesota massacre[92], where no doubt their parents had been killed. They were certainly under twenty years of age and quite attractive in appearance. Mr. Interpreter, however, kept a very careful eye on them, so we had no opportunity even for a mild flirtation, and then we neither of us could speak a word of Sioux.

These Indians demanded provisions from the company, as they were living on dogs and gophers with an occasional pony for a feast. But the chief would not give them, as they had neither furs nor robes to trade. Finally he gave them some work in building a long causeway to a hay swamp, for which they were to receive pay daily in flour and Pemican. Several of the men bossed the job, but being warriors they considered it *infra dig*.[93] to work, so set the women at it, and famous workers they were. Every night it was McKay's duty and mine to weight out to each woman her individual pay in provisions, and there being a number of them this took some time.

Chief Factor McDonald had to leave on a short inspection trip, and before starting left strict orders with his second–in–command to be extremely careful in dealing with the Sioux, and this was needful, for we mustered only seven white men and of them there were three hundred, well named by the Kitche–Moko–mons (Indian name for Yankees, meaning Big Knives), the Tigers of the Plains. Fort Ellis was the headquarters of the large Swan River district with many posts, and one evening as the Indian workers had come in for their pay, a clerk rode in from an outpost, unfortunately under the influence of liquor. He had that failing when drink was available, and on this occasion he had met some miners on the trail who were too generous with some alcohol. Most of the Sioux women had been paid off, and one of these (a chief's wife), rather a handsome young creature, was standing in the square, no doubt waiting for her friends. Mr. ——— had tied up his horse, and seeing this woman alone reeled over to her, grabbed her by the heavy cloth skirt, pulled this over her head, and began to whip her bare person with his riding whip. Some of the other women ran to her help and managed to loose his hold. By this time, hearing the row, we had run out from the shop. The woman's face was a sight. She certainly looked murder and sudden death, while pouring out a torrent of Sioux words. Then with the others, away they went running for the Sioux encampment, giving what we knew afterwards to be the Sioux war cry. Out came the men like a swarm of bees, grabbing whatever weapon came to hand, her husband being prominent. As she met him, no doubt she told him of the dreadful insult (for there is no greater crime with an Indian either male or female than exposing their nakedness). Mr. Clark, in his drunken fashion, had run after the women, while the company's men who came hurrying up, were endeavoring to get the big gates closed. It was too late. Fortunately we had two old timers who had often wintered on the plains and they grabbed Mr. ———[94] and

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[92] Also known as the Dakota War of 1862. The United States had signed treaties with the Dakota, but violated the terms of these treaties. This led to starvation among the Dakota, who responded by raiding settler communities – sometimes with fatal results. In December of 1862, 38 Indigenous men were hanged after being found guilty of settler deaths by a military tribunal. Another 264 saw their death sentences commuted by the Lincoln government.

[93] *infra dignitatem*, or 'beneath their dignity' in Latin.

[94] This name was dashed out in the original, to protect the individual's identity.

hid him in a safe spot. Within a few moments the inside of the square was full of a yelling mob of armed and naked Sioux giving their thrilling war cry, "Yalllallala." One most ferocious looking devil grabbed me by the hair and swung me off my feet, while his tomahawk was playing circles round my head. Gouldie Harper[95], one of our old plainsmen, had told us on no account to resist, but to just put our hands down and take it. This I did, and finally some older heads amongst them came in and began to quiet the young warriors who were evidently thirsting for blood, especially for Mr. ———, who was the cause of the trouble.

The husband of the insulted woman was particularly bloodthirsty and quite mad with rage. The young braves backed him up and were searching everywhere for A———; no doubt it would have gone hard for him if his hiding place had been discovered. Our interpreter talked until he was hoarse trying to make some sort of settlement that night; they however would not treat. They would not smoke, but clamored for the guilty man and threatened to burn the fort over our heads. Of course we could on no account surrender him to their far from tender mercies. Next day, by good luck, Chief Factor McDonald returned sooner than expected and there was a Grand Council held in the large Indian room of the fort, some forty of the leading Sioux being present.

It was a fine sight and quite an education for us youngsters to see this thin spare Scotchman walking up and down before the assembled warriors and berating them as if they were a lot of school boys. I only remember the general tenor of his remarks which were chiefly delivered through an interpreter, though at times he would break into broken Sioux interspersed with Gaelic and Cree.

The speech follows:

"Did you never play the fool yourselves when full of fire water? The woman is not hurt. What is all this fuss about? You wait until my back is turned and then rush in here at night trying to scare everybody." Shaking his fist at them, "I tell you, Sioux, if you are not more civil I will report you to the Queen's Red Coat Soldiers at Fort Pelly. You cannot go back across the line as the Big Knives are waiting for you there. The Sioux nation will be wiped out like this" (clapping his hands together), and so on in much the same strain.

McDonald was right. The Mounted Police were being organized at Fort Pelly that summer and the very fact of their red coats (whose numbers of course were very much exaggerated) had created a tremendous impression amongst the Indian tribes.

After a long pow–wow, the damage to the Sioux husband's injured feelings was compensated by a substantial payment, which amount was duly charged to the guilty clerk's account, while he was smuggled out of the fort and sent back to his post with orders to stay there. Poor sinner, the company put up with his failings for some years and then dismissed him, and from that his course was downward.

A peculiar incident took place with the Sioux a little later on. A small band of Crees had come in from the plains and camped on the west side of the fort (the Sioux were on the east). They were well supplied with buffalo robes, dried meat and

[95] Also called Gauden, Gouden or Gowdie Harper, he worked for the H.B.C. in the Swan River district from 1864 to 1877. Gouldie Harper died in 1903.

pemican, also lots of ponies. This was very attractive to the Sioux who were as poor as the Crees were well off. They finally made friendly overtures to the Crees, which were accepted, and then challenged them to a great gamble, which was promptly taken up. I had never watched any Indian gambling so was very much interested and had young McKay explain the procedure, which was simply a matter of guessing right as to which hand held the button or whatever was used. The players, some eight or ten in number, sat opposite one another in a large tepee, their laps covered with a colored blanket. Tom–toms were beating gently, louder, then furiously, while a continued "Ah,ha, A,ha" song went on in chorus. The hands were concealed, then waved in the air, and finally held rigid when the opponent had made his choice. The stakes were all piled up in plain sight. I specially noted an elderly blind Sioux sitting behind their players. He they constantly referred to when big stakes were up and invariably won. So much so, that after playing all night the Crees were beaten to a finish, losing nearly all their wealth. The fame of the blind Sioux spread far and wide, and though many Indians came in to try their fortunes, they were invariably losers. Was it telepathy, mind reading, or what? Anyway, with his prophetic insight he revived the fortunes of the Sioux, and they shortly moved camp and I heard no more of them.

These Sioux, or Dacotah Indians, were not a pleasant people. Many of both sexes were handsome, but they nearly all had a hard, fierce expression, and a pleasant face was a rarity. Their tepees were scrupulously clean and tidily kept, and they were all very particular about their personal appearance. One could not forget in dealing with them that their hands were red with much innocent blood of white people, and when it came to torturing helpless prisoners the women, it was claimed, were the worst offenders.

The Grand Yearly Council of the Hudson's Bay Company had been sitting at Fort Carlton and we were all anxiously waiting for the return of Chief Commissioner Donald A. Smith[96], and at last he and his party, driving furiously as usual with relays of ponies all along the route making from eighty to one hundred and twenty–five miles daily, arrived at Ellis. They only stayed for dinner, handed over the minutes of the council affecting Swan River to Mr. McDonald, and then pushed on to Fort Garry. Next day I was summoned to the office and informed that I had been ordered by council to Fort Simpson on the Mackenzie River, Mr. McDonald, remarking drily, that the temperature up there would tend to cool my tropical blood. His last remark, however, made me furious. "You will leave your dogs here as they cannot go in the boats; and now you can go." Well, I loved these dogs as a brother, and the dogs they worshipped me, and to be separated from them was a heart–break. I had referred to this train in a former article. Part Husky, part Scotch Stag Hound, in shape and size they took after the Scotch father. Herod, Nero, Hero and Moro, a very famous train, and no doubt when I travelled in company with the chief factor last winter he had

[96] Donald Alexander Smith (1820 – 1914) became a governor of the H.B.C. in 1889, a post he held until his death. From 1897 he was Baron Stratchcona and Mount Royal. Beatty's recollection may be slightly off, as H.B.C. records list him as serving as Chief Commissioner from 1872 to 1874. In 1875, he would have been Land Commissioner.

noted their long swinging gait and staying qualities and desired to have them for his own. I had bought these dogs as pups, reared and trained them, speared fish enough to feed them in odd hours, and by hook or crook I intended keeping them.

Gradually some other clerks came in *en route* to their different appointments. H. B. Round[97], an Englishman for Peace River, Scott Simpson for British Columbia, and Count Von Beneki (Von Bernstorff is his correct name according to Isaac Cowie), an ex–Dragoon officer from Prussia who had got into trouble with Von Bismark and was therefore suffering semi–exile[98]. Fort Qu'Appelle was to be our starting point and there we all went, a brother of Mr. McDonald leader of the party. Mr. Chief Trader, Ewen McDonald[99], was bound for Isle la Crosse, he having his family with him. Our chief guide was a young French h——— named Jeune Homme. A splendid rider and an experienced plainsman. We had travelled together the previous winter and were chummy. Our first night out from Ellis we only made some ten miles and just about bedtime I and Jeune Homme sneaked out of camp, caught and saddled our ponies, and rode back to the fort, where my dogs had been chained up to the pickets. Cautiously entering by a side gate I soon had them loose with the aid of a new file, but had hard work checking their transports of joy at seeing me again. Next day Mr. Ewen remarked in a dry manner, "So your dogs followed after all?" and I innocently agreed to this.

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[97] Henry B. Round served the H.B.C. from 1873 to 1898, and, although retired, was Superintendent in Charge of Transport for Treaty 8 in 1899. According to H.B.C. records, in 1875 Round would have been *en route* to the Mackenzie River district, where he served from 1875 to 1879. It was only in 1879 that he was transferred to the Peace River district. His supervisor at the Mackenzie River post was very pleased with him, and in 1876 wrote that he "has the greatest capacity for work I have seen in the North for some time," suggesting that Round should be granted a higher salary "otherwise he might leave and join any opposition who may come to the District."

[98] "About 1874, a young German who went by the name of Henry Beneke, arrived at Fort Qu'Appelle to take service with the Hudson's Bay company as apprentice clerk. […] Later he was transferred to the new Caledonia district […] As a matter of fact, his name was not Beneke at all, but Von Bernstorff and he was the son of the haughty German of that name who was then Prussian Ambassador to England. […] This young man must have been an uncle to the Count von Bernstorff who achieved unenviable notoriety as German Ambassador to the United States during the first years of the [first world] war. […] The late Peter Hourie once told me an amusing story of young Bernstorff, which occurred during his sojourn on the Saskatchewan plains. He was a member of a party sent out […] to collect the furs of the season's trade at Wood Mountain. The German had a severe attack of toothache. […] At last the party met Mr. Hourie, who agreed to pull the offending tooth with a pair of pincers. At first the patient refused the ministrations of the amateur dentist but the pain persisting, he agreed to the operation. Mr. Hourie had Bernstorff blindfolded, held securely in the arms of two brawny Metis, and pried his jaws open with a piece of wood. First, however, he fortified him with a considerable shot of good Hudson's Bay rum. Then Mr. Hourie yanked out the suffering tooth. Before removing the blindfold, however, one of the [Metis], who was quite a joker in his own way, had provided himself with an immense tooth which he had shaken loose from the skull of a buffalo lying on the prairie. This he displayed to the astonished Bernstorff as the one which had just been removed from his jaw. He wrapped up the buffalo tooth in his handkerchief and doubtless took it back to Germany with him." The PERSONAL SIDE. (1920, April 22). *The Redcliff Review*, p. 2.

[99] Ewen McDonald (1839 – 1909) served the H.B.C. from 1858 to 1905. 1875 was his first year as Junior Chief Trader for Isle la Crosse.

Our trip to Qu'Appelle was un–enventful, but my surprise was great on reaching there to note the beauty of the site, and to add to the picturesqueness of the scene there were some fifteen hundred tepees of Plain Crees in the lovely valley and buffalo were reported only a day or two's ride to the southwest. Mr. MacLean was in charge, better known in later years as Fort Pitt MacLean, for in 1885 he and his family surrendered themselves to Big–Bear's[100] band. A Mr. McKinlay joined us here, fresh in from the plains and ordered to Peace River. The days passed busily as a large brigade of loaded carts were being sent to Carlton under our escort.

The valley was a stirring place, and it was a fascinating study for me to watch the Indian braves and note the dancing, gambling and love–making which went on merrily. Little Fox, second war chief of the Crees, was here, and really the most magnificent–looking man I ever saw. Eagle–featured, over six feet in height, he was splendidly mounted on a handsome sorrel horse which looked like a thoroughbred. A Henry rifle[101] across his saddle bow, a splendid bow strengthened at the back with buffalo sinew, a quiver full of iron–pointed and feathered arrows over his shoulder, dressed from head to foot in buckskin richly ornamented with porcupine quills, he truly looked the ideal warrior from one of Fenimore Cooper's novels[102]. I gazed at him with admiration and walking up to him held out my hand. He looked down, smiled at the little clerk and gave me two fingers for a salute. At this time it was said the Crees could put seven thousand fighting men in the field. What a contrast from today, when there are only a few broken remnants of his tribe left.

All our arrangements were ready for a start next day and I was chuckling over the fact of still having my dogs with me. But, alas, that evening news arrived that Chief Factor McDonald was coming, and the flag was hoisted from the staff. My heart sank, and as he drove into the fort he spotted me and sarcastically remarked, "So you thought you were clever in stealing your dogs, but this time they will stay here." I was furious and that evening we had an awful row and I was threatened with all sorts of penalties if I did not shut up. There was no recourse and the dogs stayed, but they fretted and did not thrive after the separation, and next winter the three brothers died. It took me years to get over this, what I considered a high–handed piece of injustice.

Mr. McDonald was not through with me yet, as he detained the steady ponies we had ridden from Ellis and substituted a wild bunch of untrained ones just in from the plains, saying in his sarcastic way that wild clerks should have wild horses. I was no rider and consulted my friend Jeune Homme about the prospect. He counselled courage and lent me his Indian saddle with small stirrups. There was no doubt I was in an awful funk, and when everything was being hitched up next morning I dallied behind and was the last to mount my wild steed. The brigade, a good half mile long,

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[100] Mistahimaskwa (d. 1888), a Plains Cree leader best known for initially refusing to sign Treaty 6. Fort Pitt was taken by Mistahimaskwa's son and other warriors in 1885, but Big Bear himself warned the Mounted Police that these forces were on their way. Big Bear's history and accomplishments are on an epic scale and cannot even begin to be summarized in a footnote; this annotation provides only the most relevant details for the current reading.

[101] The Henry repeating rifle dates back to 1860. It is an ancestor of the famous Winchester rifle.

[102] The most famous of Fenimore Cooper's novels is *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826).

had crossed the bridge over the Qu'Appelle River when my mare was roped and led up, and I rather foolishly got on her inside the square. The ropes were taken off, but she simply stood trembling while Mr. McDonald and the spectators were grinning with amusement at the prospect of seeing the young Canuck bucked off. I gave her a crack with the whip, when up she went in the air, then tree times round the square like a Jack Rabbit. At the last round I heard a yell and crouched on her neck, and the bar over the big gate swept my hat off. On she flew after the party, jumped into the river, swam across and circled the brigade several times before they reached the opposite hill. Wonderful to say I kept my seat that day, but some little time afterwards she bucked me off right in front of Mrs. McDonald, much to her and the children's amusement and my own mortification. However, before we reached Fort Carlton she was tame enough.

Sunday came and a rest day was called. Count Von Beneki electrified us all by appearing in full dress with a top hat and was paying attention to a young woman who was with Mrs. McDonald. Needless to say the hat did not last long and was promptly made a football of, and in consequence we were challenged individually and collectively to a duel with either swords or pistols, he having both with him, and very handsome weapons. This we naturally refused, but Round, who was skilled in boxing, counter–challenged him with the gloves. This he accepted and was knocked out in short order. Poor Beneki was ordered to New Caledonia, somewhere near where Fort George is now. I heard from him twice, and then we lost track of each other.

On looking over my last article it may be that my readers will be left with the impression that Chief Factor Archie McDonald was a tyrannical, unjust man, but this was by no means the case. You, however, must understand that Hudson's Bay officers in charge of districts at the time had practically absolute powers. Truly, Canada had taken over the country, but her jurisdiction for all practical purposes ended when you left Fort Garry (now Winnipeg), and in the great realm of the Northwest the H. B. Co. ruled supreme. They had jails at many of their head posts, with handcuffs and irons for unruly servants, or law–breaking Indians, and they used them when required. Give absolute authority to any man and he is apt to become more or less of a despot. Shortly after leaving the Hudson's Bay service in 1883, and being at that time in poor health and circumstances, Mr. Archie McDonald was exceedingly kind and helped me to get a start on my own account.

To resume our trip across the plains, the rate of progress daily was governed by that of the loaded carts, whose squeals from wooden axles could be heard for miles, in spite of constant applications of grease. From twenty to twenty–five miles daily was a fair average and one must know that the ponies subsisted entirely on grass, as oats were unknown in the wilds. Consequently the men would start with the carts very early in the morning, while the bourgeois and us clerks would have breakfast much later and easily catch up with the train for dinner. Ahead of the party rode Chief Guide Jeune Homme, generally with me by his side, thirsting to imbibe all the plainsman's lore possible, and sometimes the other clerks were with us. Armed guards had to be set nightly, and the horses watched very carefully, for stealing was rife, and no doubt our large brigade was spied upon from time to time by scouting

Indians. The prairie was covered with fresh buffalo sign and the guide's opinion was that a large herd was just to the south of us. In fact a few old bulls were sighted by our riders, but Mr. Ewen would not allow any hunting for fear of laming or injuring the horses, and this much to the disgust of we youngsters who were all anxious to shoot a buffalo.

About the tenth day out we met a small war party of Saulteaux coming in from the great plains to the southwest, *en route* to Fort Qu'Appelle. They met us all marching on foot, with drums beating, their headmen rigged out in scarlet cloth, paint and feathers galore. There was the usual shake hands a smoke, then small presents were handed to them by Mr. McDonald and, in return, we received a welcome supply of tender young buffalo meat just killed the day before. They had no carts, only travois, that is the lodge poles, two of them lashed on each side of a pony, a parchment laced across behind the horse and on this robes, dressed buffalo leather, dried meat and pemican were piled, even their large split–eared dogs were laden in the same way. With the exception of a violent windstorm that made things lively for a while, nothing of importance happened until we reached the southern branch of the Saskatchewan, and here we had some fun in crossing the river, there being no ferry. We made rafts of the large wooden cart wheels over which buffalo parchments were laced securely, and in the centre of these rude craft were placed the women and children, all baggage, freight, etc. Swimmers were the motive power, and I could not say how many times I crossed the river. The large band of ponies were left to the last and Jeune Homme and I took them across, he explaining that on no account must we allow them to circle, but keep them going in a direct course, the remedy if one turned being to splash water in their faces. All went well but it took several days before the whole outfit was safely across. Another day's travel took us to Fort Carlton, which, unlike Ellis, was situated in the valley of the North Branch, close to the river, we arriving there without the loss of a pony or a pound of freight, much to the satisfaction of Chief Factor Lawrence Clarke[103] who ruled supreme over the Saskatchewan district with Carlton as headquarters. The fort was much on the same plan as Ellis, but in better order. This fine establishment was burnt in 1885 by accident, as the Mounted Police and Volunteers were evacuating it, after the defeat at Duck Lake[104].

I was detailed to lend a hand in the trading store and daily my erstwhile companions left for their various destinations. Some days after my arrival a packet arrived by canoe from Cumberland House[105] (down the river), and that evening I was

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[103] Lawrence Clarke (1831 – 1890) was made Chief Factor in 1875.

[104] During the Battle of Duck Lake on March 26, 1885. This first battle of the North–West Rebellion lasted half an hour and left 12 Mounted Police dead.

[105] "The first trading post on Cumberland lake was built by Joseph Frobisher 1772 free–trader at the time. […] This fort was built for the purpose of intercepting the Indians going to Fort Nelson. […] It was a temporary structure and was soon replaced. The second fort on Cumberland lake was built by Samuel Hearne for the Hudson's Bay Co., in 1774. It was called Cumberland House […] in honour of Prince Rupert, Duke of Cumberland, first Governor of Hudson's Bay Co. This fort has always been maintained since 1774. It is the oldest post of the Hudson's Bay Co. in the interior. […] It is a strategic point as two routes open thence to the interior, west and south by Saskatchewan river, northwest and

summoned to the office, where, in addition to Mr. Clarke, was Inspecting Chief Factor Robert Hamilton[106]. They informed me there was a pressing vacancy at Cumberland, and they were considering changing my appointment from Mackenzie River to that point, but they would like to hear my views. It was all one to me, and so I told them, and it was then decided that I go down the river on the first opportunity. Mr. Hamilton, who came from Peterboro, Ont., and was an old friend of my father's, gave me much wise and kindly advice as to my future in the service where he had spent practically his life time.

Several weeks passed in very pleasant company as Mr. Clarke had a lovely daughter and there were several other ladies at the fort. Picnics, duck shooting and boating were the principal amusements and we, as birds of passage, were not asked to work very hard. A York boat arrived from up the river, and I received orders to embark next morning. The crew were Red River h———s and I took up my place in the stern sheets after saying good–bye all 'round. We stopped at Ft. La Corne[107] for a short time, one Geo. Goodfellow[108] was in charge, and I did not think then we would have stirring times together later on, but that, to quote Kipling, is another story. Drifting at night and occasionally rowing in the daytime, four days took us to the mouth of the Big Stone River, which empties out of Cumberland Lake into the Saskatchewan. A short pull against a strong current took us up to Cumberland Lake, which is quite an extensive sheet of water, and in a few minutes more we were at the wharf of the old historic Cumberland House which, it is said, was the first post established by the Hudson's Bay Company on the Saskatchewan River. Here ruled supreme Factor Horace Belanger[109], a French–Canadian, a man of great girth and jovial temperament, very widely known and much liked. He was a half–brother of Letellier de St. Just, at one time Lieut.–Governor of the province of Quebec.

The month was July and shortly after my arrival five York boats arrived from the furthest north post in the district, Lac du Brochet, situated at the northern end of that lake and semi–arctic in climate. About half the boat crews were Chippewayan Indians. It was my first meeting with this tribe and certainly a greater contrast in appearance to that of the plain Indians could not be found. They were rather short, more Asiatic in looks, many of them blear–eyed, and they were not a pleasant looking lot, but by all accounts good hunters and industrious people. Brochet[110] was a famous fur post, and as many of these men were noted hunters, they nearly all had considerable credits with the company, goods having run short at their home post.

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north to the upper Churchill country." Voorhis, E. (1930). *Historic Forts and Trading Posts of the French regime and of the English Fur Trading Companies*. Ottawa: Department of the Interior.

[106] Robert Hamilton (1826 – 1891) was born in the County Down, Ireland, and served the Hudson's Bay Company from 1844 to 1876, when he retired to Peterborough, Ontario.

[107] One of many forts built at the same location from 1743 onward. The fort that Beatty visited dated back to 1848, and was relocated in 1887.

[108] George Goodfellow, a Scot from Inverness, served the H.B.C. from 1861 to 1887. In 1875 he was the Interpreter and Trader in Charge at Fort La Corne.

[109] Horace Belanger (1836 – 1892) served the H.B.C. from 1853 until his death by drowning. He was first appointed Factor in 1873, and would be promoted to Chief Factor in 1885.

[110] This post was also called Bedfont House.

These balances ran from fifty skins to two and three hundred a man, and fortunately for us Mr. Pierre Deschambeault[111] accompanied the brigade, he having succeeded his father before him in charge of that post and, moreover, speaking Chippewayan like a native. I and a young apprentice clerk named Jack Stewart, were detailed to the trading store and here we passed many hours settling up with these Indians who appeared to be very inferior to the Crees in intelligence.

Two or three were taken into the store at one time, Mr. Deschambeault being present, then goose–quills were solemnly counted out to them in accord with the number of skins to their credit. At first we tried to hurry the procedure, but soon found that the more haste the less speed with these primitive men, as once get them confused and they would have to commence at the beginning and go all over the performance. The old depot as it was called in which the trading store was situated, was over a hundred years old, built of massive square timber, which had been rafted down the Saskatchewan River. Down on the floor squatted each Chippewayan, and spread out before him were the quills, and as he kept sorting them out in various little lots, would exclaim in guttural accents his wishes. The language they spoke was very different from any of the other native languages I heard, and sounded as if it was uttered form the back of the throat. Mr. Deschambeault would answer him in the same clucking accents and so on until my patience was sorely tried, as we were very busy and working every night. But at last a list would be given us and we would fill the order. In due time they were all paid off and then we had the boatmen to settle with, also much stuff to pack for various posts, as boats had to leave at a certain time to get at their destination before freeze–up.

Madame Belanger, who had been a Miss Marion, was a lady of much refinement, very kind to us youngsters, and constantly entertained us. She had a beautiful garden in which cultivated roses formed a prominent feature, and these were quite equal to anything you would find in Eastern Canada. Madame Deschambeault, who had accompanied her husband to headquarters, was a gay young creature, and only too delighted to get away from the lone desolation of Lac Du Brochet to the comparative civilization of Cumberland House where dances were held several times weekly. Pierre himself detested so–called civilization, and counted the days until he could return to his beloved north country. He was known to be possessed of a considerable private income (which he took good care of) and in an incident sent down some years before, just after he was married, there was included with his private order one very indispensable article of China, that is generally kept under the bed. Some wag changed this to one dozen and again at the Fort Garry Depot the dozen was erased and gross written in, so that no less than twelve cases containing 144 of these articles were shipped to Brochet on Pierre's private account, the freight, of course, amounting to many times the prime cost. This was the first trip he had made to Cumberland since these goods were forwarded and as the story was well known we were all agog to hear the result, but Pierre remained discreetly silent in regard to it. He, however, finally produced a bale of most beautiful beaver and otter skins. "Hello,"

[111] Pierre Deschambeault served the H.B.C. from 1857 to 1885. His last position, which he held for seven years, would be that of Junior Chief Trader at Lac du Brochet.

was Factor Belanger's remark, "what is this? You well know private trade is not allowed." "Well," was his slow and cautious reply, "when kind friends sent me up so much china I let the fact be known to the Chippewayans that some entirely new vessels had just come in which were invariably used by white people, and they shortly became the rage, and the Indian family who could not serve up caribou soup in one of them was not counted among the elite of s——dom." There was a great laugh. Truly Pierre had one on the crowd, and credit was at once given to him for the total cost of the goods, while the company annexed the fur. A slow smile spread over his face, and he sure was not slow, now was he?

We at last had all goods ready for Lac Du Brochet, Pelican Narrows and other posts, and one fine day away they went on the long and arduous journey of many portages and rapid rivers, not to mention Lac Brochet itself, which is said to be some two hundred and eighty miles long and full of islands. In fact one year in foggy weather the boat brigade having got off their direct course, which was marked by lobsticks from island to island, got lost for a week. The whole lake is still a terra incognita and though geologists have reported valuable mineral veins it is even at this late date unexplored, like so much of the great north country.

Factor Belanger, having decided to go east for the winter on a visit to his people, The Pas was made headquarters for the district, and a Mr. Alex Matheson[112] (chief clerk), a very talented Scotchman, was placed in charge of the district, with myself as an assistant. Alas, all the district's accounts (covering a country extending from Grand Rapids at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River to a point midway between Brochet and Churchill, roughly speaking some seven hundred miles in length) came to The Pas for my edification, but these I have mentioned in a former article.

Mr. Matheson rose to be a chief factor in the service, his last charge being Fort William. His death occurred some years ago and was greatly lamented. He was very much beloved in the service by employees and Indians alike; in fact to know him was to love him, and personally, I owe him a deep debt of gratitude for helping to shape my future.

7. Winter at The Pas (Winter 1876)

We had the district accounts at The Pas that winter and if ever an H. B. clerk was sick of book–keeping I was the man. My Chief (dear A.M.) was a splendid fellow, but disliked all hardship and exposure, while this to me was meat and drink. By dint of much coaxing I had the remnants of what train dogs were left after six trains (four dogs to a train) had been picked by the native drivers – a wretched outfit. They would stop when I jumped on the toboggan, but by dint of good feeding and much running they were by no means the worst team in the spring. Corrieee was the foregoer, and I secured him in trade from Batese for a fat, lazy husky, and wondered at my own

[112] Alexander Matheson (1844 – 1904) served the H.B.C. from 1862 until his death. In 1875 he was Junior Chief Trader in charge of The Pas and Grand Rapids.

luck and also why he was fool enough to trade–even. I soon found out; for on a trip to the Mountain there was a long muskeg[113] traverse and just one decent spot to boil the kettle. On reaching this spot with an appetite sharper than a wolf, I sung out, "Whoa, Corrieee!" He turned his head, gave me a cunning look, then bolted like a Jack rabbit, and it was at least two hours before I got near the sleight again, with feelings too deep for words.

I realized then why Batese traded even (as this it appears was his usual game), but it was not until the following winter that I got even with Corrieee, when, with man against dog, I ran him down between Cumberland House and Fort La Corne, and that seemed to take the heart out of him. But I am a long way off from those plagued district accounts. It is always the way in the north; start any subject you like and it will always end in Dog, and yet again Dog. I have heard Donald A. Smith when he was Governor of the Company, with other high officials at the Fort Garry mess, when the dessert was put in the table and the wine glasses filled, all vying with one another as to the merits of their particular dog trains, and I think one must hand it to Donald A. for the best yarns. Perhaps that is why he was made top–dog.

We had several outposts from The Pas that winter and when the accounts got too much for me, A.M. would suggest that an inspection should be made and the native trader checked up. It was a good winter for fur and I thoroughly enjoyed the trips here and there. There was but one fault, and that was that they were too short. However, before spring, I had a ten–day tramp and that eased the tension for a while.

Along about the end of February we found there was likely to be a great shortage of ammunition in the spring, especially if the rat hunt was big, and all signs pointed that way. The nearest point to a further supply was Grand River Post at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River, something over 150 miles away by trail. The snow was deep and no trail broken through, but it was that or nothing. So A.M. decided to send six dog trains and I volunteered to lead the party. We started out early one day heavily loaded with dog–fish, as we had to catch on the trip down, there being no supply at The Rapids. It took us four days to reach the post, when we spelled a day, then loaded our sleds with 400 lbs. each, consisting of dog food, provisions and bedding on top of that, and started for home.

It had snowed I think every day since we left The Pas. The weather was awfully cold and windy, with no sign of the trail we had broken coming down. Cedar Lake was the only decent bit of going on the whole trip, but the river was over waist deep in soft heavy snow, and every driver had to use a pushing stick and work equally hard with his dogs. We had a spare man to break track ahead, but I soon found all must take turns, as one hour or less in front of the dogs was enough for any of us, and then you would be wet to the skin with the heavy exertion.

Five nights had passed on our homeward journey and our rations were about done, both for men and dogs. There will still some thirty miles to go yet and the men were getting out of hand and mutinous. My own feet were cut to pieces with the snowshoe lines, but I did not dare show any feeling in the matter, for at the least sign of weakening on my part the loads would have been chucked on the ice. There is only

[113] A type of bog. From the Cree word ᒪᐢᑫᐤ ("mashkiig"), meaning 'grassy bog'.

one cure that I know of for sore feet showshoeing, and that is to treat them like your hands, keep away from the fire and at every stop take off your moccasins and duffels, then wade in the snow till your feet get numb.

Next morning, and I hoped the last morning, as our breakfast was tea and crumbs from an empty provision sack, I was taking my spell ahead with lines on the head of my small snowshoes to help lift the weight of snow. I suddenly looked round and found that the party had stopped. On turning and marching back to investigate, I found one of the drivers (Mus–qui–a–tik) a hard young case with his sleigh pulled to one side and he busy unlashing it. I thought for a minute, then realized it had come to a show–down, for he was going to leave his load of invaluable ammunition on the ice and no doubt the others would follow suit. This was mutiny – rank mutiny.

All the men were watching me, as I was busy tramping down a cock–pit about twelve feet square. On finishing this I took off my L'Assomption belt and capot. Then, in a loud voice, I challenged Mus–qui–a–tik in these words: "We would fight. If he was the best man the load could stay on the ice, and if I was, the load would go on intact." A deep silence followed. Mus–qui–a–tik looked me up and down, and finally turning to his sleigh he commenced re–lashing it. A cheer broke from the rest of the men and the outfit went on, leader succeeding leader, and late that evening we reached The Pas.

Seeing every load unpacked and carried in the store houses, with rations and dog feed given out, I finally went to the office. Dear old Alick M. was like a hen with her chicks. "Such a trip you have had. How did you stand it?" and so on. While he talked I was loosing my moccasins and duffels (northern travellers know we wrap our feet in squares and do not use made socks). Every toe was cut and bleeding, matter had formed on the bottoms of both my feet, and on jerking off my wrappings a glance was enough for the Chief. He became violently sick at his stomach, and truly it was a nasty sight. I had hid them from the men for the last two days.

No doubt some of my readers have experienced the same pangs, but of all kinds of pain that is hard to endure, it is worst when the snowshoe lines have cut your feet and the next morning as the scabs are slowly rubbed off, you must still stand it and tramp on with an unconcerned air, nevertheless biting your lips till the blood comes. Over the top all right, with apologies to the boys from the front.

Before I wind up this article I must tell you another dog story and a good title for it would be "The Cannibal Dog." After the seven dog trains had been made up, there were, as usual, several misfits whom no one wanted, and these gained a precarious living by stealing the other dog's fish at feeding time. Notorious among these was a grey husky from Lac du Brochet, who showed the wolf strain plainly, and was bad to handle. He had to bite something, either you or his train–mates, so I christened him Wen–di–go, or "evil spirit." We all tried him, but he got worse, so was for the present chained up in the woodshed. One morning our French cook, Louis la Liberte, came in while we were at breakfast, with a very pale face, and addressing the Chief, said, "Please, sir, Master, Wendigo has turned cannibal." "What do you mean, Louis?" "Come and see, sir," and on both of us going out to the shed, here was Wendigo growling furiously, turning round and round, while biting mouthfuls of

living flesh out of his haunches and swallowing them, blood, hair and all. The sight was too much for the Chief, and turned him sick. "Kill the brute at once, and take him away," was the order. So, getting a small revolver I was very proud of, I fired six rounds into his head and told Louis to drag his body down on the ice.

That evening at dog feeding time, who should come staggering up the bank with his head as big as a pail, but unconquerable Wendigo. A council was held, execution was the sentence, and an axe and block obtained. Then the head was severed from his body and placed on the ice a distance apart. So ended Wendigo, and this article.

8. Passing the Spring Out (Spring 1876)

My last article ended with the death of Wen–di–go, that notorious Bolshevik amongst train dogs.

The Pas itself has now become well–known as about the centre of one of the biggest muskrat swamps in the west, and rats mean minks, but for fine fur such as martens, fisher, lynx and bear, the bulk of these were secured at the Mountain (Pasquia Hills) and here two bands of Indians divided the country into hunting grounds. One of these was headed by O–sow–usk, who was on friendly terms with the Company (note that when Company is written it always means the Hudson's Bay Co.) and most of whose followers were Christianized. The other band had for a leader Ki–say–the–nish, and they were all still Pagans, but mighty hunters before the Lord, like Nimrod[114] of old. They were on bad terms with the Company at that time and had a resident free–trader living with them named Daniel, from Red River.

I tackled the Chief late one night, after our usual chess game, to let me pass the spring out at the Mountain, and held forth as a bait the prospect of reconciliation with Ki–say–the–nish. Finally I obtained his consent, but he insisted that I take an old and experienced voyager with me in whom he placed great confidence, but whom I did not care for – one Pierre Marcelais, a French h———.

The plan was that we were to leave the Pas about the 20th of March with two trains of dogs and part of the outfit, the dogs to continue hauling as long as sleighing was good. Then we were to get two birch–bark canoes built up there and return to the Pas about the end of May when the fur season ended. In the meantime I had to work doubly hard at those district accounts. My, but the time dragged, but at last the day for departure came and we made a start, camping at Birch River that night. Next day we reached O–sow–usk's camp in good time. The old man was benevolent and kind and felt very flattered to have a Company's clerk camped beside him. He styled me Noo–sis–im (or Grandson), and I called him Moo–choom (Grandfather). We had a leather tepee made of smoked caribou skins from Lac du Brochet. Fresh spruce brush was constantly put down in the tent for a carpet. Our trading goods were all piled at the back, but edibles had to be staged higher than Haman, for train dogs are omnivorous as well as carnivorous. Next day I sent Pierre and an Indian boy back for

[114] The biblical king of Shinar, and a proverbially accomplished hunter.

two more loads and I busied myself calling at the various camps, trading where possible and hunting between times.

Most of the Ki–say–the–nish band were still far out on their wintering grounds and would only come in on the last ice, so I did not intend tackling them until open water. The first geese were just arriving from the south, and everyone was longing for a taste of fresh game after the eternal fish diet, when I met with a nasty accident. I took my dogs and old Moo–choom for company and visited a camp some few miles away. The winter trail cut straight across country, but ice on the rivers was now bad and in fact gone out in some cases, and one had to be careful and make detours when necessary. At one of these places the dogs bolted down the winter trail in spite of my yelling "cha, cha," at the top of my voice. Fortunately I had a long tail–line trailing of buffalo raw hide, which I at once grabbed. About the middle of the Man River the ice gave way and the dogs broke through. I, in the meantime, was keeping along the firmer ice on the side and but for a hanging tree which was partly in the water we might have come through all right. The first dogs went under, but the steer dog (Mokose, who was always in trouble) stuck his head up and the force of the current pinned him there. As the tree was rising and falling, it looked as if all the dogs would drown. I started in to try and clean up the mess, the old Indian praying for me to be careful. When I got close enough to Mo–kose I made a smash at his head with my fist. He dodged and I struck the collar irons at the back of his neck and drove them nearly through my hand. This cleared the dogs all right and away they went down stream. Just then the bottom ice I was standing on gave way, and I went down, and but for a knot in the tail–line it would have been all day for me, and I would have gone under the ice. By this time the dogs had reached firm ice and struggled out, assisted by the Indian, and their steady weight pulled me to safety. My hand swelled badly (the right one) and I was in great distress for fear it would stop my goose–shooting. Here is where Moo–choom came in, for when we got back to camp he took full charge of the treatment, and in a week I was as well as ever. Daily a fine powder of some precious root was applied to the wound, while I had to drink freely of a decoction of the same. Naturally the medicine man had to be compensated.

This was about the last of the sleighing, and indeed we all were delighted to see winter slowly relaxing its grasp on the land. I made a stand and put up some goose decoys. This was at the mouth of a small creek where a little pond of open water had formed. My best hunt was five in hand one day out of seven knocked down, but I had a glorious view of a large Arctic swan. It was evidently the male bird, who settled in the pond only some thirty yards or so from my stand. Such a handsome creature and so graceful, and what a neck and plumage. I was much too interested watching him to think of shooting and finally away he went. It appears his mate had been shot that day by one of the Indians and the poor fellow was lonely. It has been a matter of great satisfaction to me ever since that I spared his life.

At last spring arrived, with ducks and all summer birds and open water, thank goodness, so we were able to get two nets down again and feed our poor dogs who had been on very scant rations for some time. I heard that the Ki–say–the–nish band were in and camping along a small river some fifteen miles away, busy gathering in the

egg harvest, and also catching mink and muskrat. When I told Pierre we would start in a day or two for these Indians, I noted he was very sulky, but this I passed over. Our large canoe was just getting the finishing touches and was about ready for the gum. This is applied by the s———s, and I amused myself watching them. Finally we had a small trading outfit packed in bales, and placing the rest of the goods in charge of O–sow–usk, away we went one fine morning, I in the bow with my gun ready for anything in the shape of game. For, my dear reader, we had no ample store of provisions to draw on, but simply some tea and sugar with a very little flour for emergencies, so the task of supplying the larder was a daily one.

The Carrot river expands here to Red–Mud–Lake, so–called from a fine red clay found on its shores. Also ash and elm trees are found here, the only place I have seen them in Saskatchewan. We made straight across the middle of the lake, and just about half–way across the canoe was whirled round and I found myself facing homewards. "What is the matter, Pierre?" I asked. "I won't go to those Indians," he replied. "They are bad, and will poison us both. We are going back." Jumping round and facing Master Pierre I grabbed the gunwales, rocked the canoe violently and took in about a bucket of water. Then in a loud voice I said: "Turn 'round, you old scamp, unless you want to swim ashore," and in two minutes I had the old man at my mercy, for he could not swim and was nervous in a canoe. I happened to be brought up in Lakefield (close to Peterboro) where the famous canoes originated, and part of our boyish pleasures was testing the various models turned out by honest Tom Gordon of Lakefield, who was undoubtedly the inventor[115]. Pierre was now bowsman and a very quiet and obedient one. After a pleasant paddle we sighted the Indian camps, all moose skin tepees, I noted. "These are bushmen and fine fur hunters all right," was my inward comment. Running our canoe up the little creek, we landed right amongst them, and as the custom is, I went to shake hands with the Indians. Nothing doing – they simply paid no attention to us. No swells in the upper ten thousand could have treated us with more silent contempt than these unlettered s———s. I walked towards the canoe, and Pierre hissed out, "I told you so. Worse thing will happen yet." "Quiet, you dog," was my reply. Our chilly reception was made worse by noting black Daniel standing back of one of the groups and smiling to think O–ge–mas–es was being turned down. On passing through the camps I noted some of the older women scraping the meat and fat off some recently killed bear skins, and further on were groups of the younger women who gave me the first kindly glances I had received. I opened some of our bales and took a few of the choicest beads and some other fancy articles, and tackled [sic.] the girls to buy. As these were the very latest patterns in s———dom, buy they did, evidently to the disgust of their elders. Aided by my broken Cree, which always brought a smile, I started a small trade, which spread and before

[115] "The best modern canoe is made in Canada, and the craft known almost the world over as the 'Peterborough Canoe;' stands as the representative of the entire class – the highest type of the canoe family. It is now thirty–one years since the inauguration of the industry that has done much to make famous the city of Peterborough, Ont. The pioneer of the industry was Colonel J. Z. Rogers, who laid down the lines and constructed the models that, with slight variations, have been followed ever since." CANOES AND CANOE BUILDING. (1910, August 10). *The Western Globe*, p. 13.

bedtime I had taken in a good haul of fur and thoroughly broken the ice, much to the disgust of our opponent, Daniel.

Pierre and I slept under our canoe that night and next morning we were kept busy trading, so soon disposed of the bulk of our goods. I decided to return to our main camp, but first arranged a definite appointment with Ki–say–the–nish, saying that my next visit would see more goods and later styles. Shaking hands with all my new friends, and giving some trifles to the girls who helped start the campaign, away we went, Master Pierre in the bow as before. On reaching home, I found everything in good order, and on counting up our furs I finally decided to send Pierre back to The Pas with all returns of trade, and also an official letter to the Chief telling him the man was no more use to me, and I would prefer, now that I was on friendly terms with both bands of Indians, to remain alone for the balance of the spring. Pierre duly started and not in the best of humors. I visited the nearby camps, collected some small debts and picked up a good deal more fur.

The next excitement was an Indian feast to which I received a special invitation. Both bands were to meet at a specially selected spot about midway between the main camps. In the meantime hunters had to kill all game possible, as there was no doubt every one would attend. Finally, O–sow–usk moved camp (mine included) and we pitched again on the new community site. The name of the celebration was the Goose Dance, and a large oval enclosure was formed by sticking young green spruce in the ground at a slant inwards, about five feet in height. At one end was an elevated stage, and the whole oval was open to the sky. The feast was to start between four and five in the afternoon, weather permitting. Down the centre of the enclosure were a row of camp fires. At last the evening arrived, and sticking close to O–sow–usk, away we went, and from all sides came the men, women and children, each carrying a dish and a knife and spoon. I had a native–made wooden bowl, a wood spoon and my large sheath knife, my old companion the same. We duly entered the ring and were shown to special seats near the stage (on the ground of course), and here we sat cross–legged waiting for the ceremonies to begin.

At last all were seated and four of the older men, painted and feathered, came in with four long stemmed stone pipes. Each spoke, addressing Kitche Manitou (The Great Spirit), thanking him for the gifts of food and supplies to his Indian children. Each of the winds were given a smoke by presenting the pipes to the four quarters of the compass. Then with a stately walk around, the old men retired. The tom–toms struck up and four young girls came dancing into the ring, each with a bag of down or fine feathers. Keeping time to the music as they circled, a bunch of down was placed on each visitor's head. There was a pause, then bang went the tom–toms at full speed, large coverings which had been draping the stage were withdrawn, and here to the view of all beholders were moose and deer heads, beaver and lynx (whole bodies), geese and ducks. The meat cooked in each case and the skins or feather] were drawn over them and they looked very life–like. A general hum of applause went round. In addition to the stuffed birds and animals were buffalo and deer pemican, dried meat, bladders of moose marrow fat and other native luxuries. "Ho! Me–chi–soo, Me–chi–soo!" (eat, eat) was the cry, and every one was helped bountifully by the young girl

waiters, my share being half a beaver and half a goose, my old companion getting the other halves. Tea was served in quantities with plenty of loaf sugar (my contribution). The eating was not a steady performance, but went on at intervals all night, varied by dances weird songs and speeches, all hands joining in the dance at times, myself included.

It is considered a point of honor to eat all that is put before you at an Indian feast, but alas this was beyond my powers. So very quietly I, from time to time, transferred portions of my helping to the hold man's plate, and though he was a fairly wizened up old Indian when we sat down, by midnight he looked more like a London alderman.

About 2 p.m. I quietly slipped out and looking back at the scene from a few yards away it made a perfect picture of wild Indian life. The long camp fires gave sufficient light to see the dancers who followed one another in Indian file keeping time to the tom–toms with a sort of jig step. Most of the men had nothing on but a breechclout, while the women were naked from the waist up. Still their brown skins painted with various ochres did not strike one unpleasantly as white people would do, in fact they were quite in harmony with their wild surroundings, truly children of nature and so–far unspoiled by civilization.

My time was now getting short as I had promised the Chief to be home by the 24th of May. So making one grand round to all the various tepees, collecting some small debts, leaving some of my impediments to come down later, I was now saying goodbye. O–sow–usk was quite mournful, also Ki–say–the–nish. My Indian Grandfather's address was quite pathetic.

"My Grandson," he said, "you are young and I am old. We may never see one another again (and we never did), I wanted you to have a monument so all would remember O–ge–mas–es' residence amongst us. Some days ago I had my young men go down the Carrot River where stands a mighty spruce tree, a landmark for miles around, and this they made a lob–stick of in memory of you."

I thanked the old chap and really felt quite affected. Then my newer friend, Ki–say–the–nish, wished to establish relationship, so called me his Cha–Cha–Wow. This was a mutual name between us and meant that we were so related by our children having intermarried. Remarkable that an obscure tribe of Indians like the Crees would have a special name for a relationship which cannot be stated concisely in English. It is also remarkable to say that this fictitious relationship was of considerable benefit to me many years after, but, as Kipling says[116], "that is another story."

It was a spring of very high water and my little bark canoe was loaded down well to the gunwales, but thanks to careful pitching, tight as a bottle. The Indians had warned me not to descend the Carrot too far for fear of meeting drowned land. Away I went, waving my paddle in a last salute, and paddled steadily till noon, when I landed and boiled the kettle. I had shot a goose and had some fun chasing him in the afternoon. Forgetting all warnings, I paddled steadily ahead, only now noticing that the banks of the river were flooded. Common sense should have warned me to

[116] In *Soldiers Three* (1888).

turn back, but I was blessed with very little at that time, and thought, oh, I will soon come to high land again, so on I paddled. Finally it was evening and my legs were cramped enough in the narrow canoe, so water or not I determined to land and make a stage for the night. Selecting a good spot, I paddled close to the wooded bank. Planting my paddle firmly in the mud I cautiously put out one foot, deeper and deeper until it rested on the bottom, then, leaning my weight on it I was going to draw my other leg after it. One had to be cautious, as a small bark canoe is a ticklish thing to get out of. Alas, the ground gave way. I was too close to the edge of the bank and down I went to the bottom of the Carrot River, swallowing mud and water, quite forgetting that I could swim like a jackfish. The kick I had given sent the little canoe flying out in the river, but when I reached the surface a few strokes captured the craft and we landed where I had marked some good crotches[117] for a stage. Then followed an hour or two of hard work, and finally everything was snug for the night. My stage was about seven feet long by four feet wide with some mud at each end for a fireplace in case of a change of wind. A nice lot of firewood was cut up, my clothes were hanging to dry on limbs and I was graciously draped in a blanket, a la Indian. Such a supper, then a royal smoke and to bed. About daylight in the morning I was awakened by a mighty splash and my face plentifully sprinkled with water. Springing out of bed I found myself waist deep in the water and gradually realized my surroundings and strange camping place. On investigating I found traces showing that an old beaver had been examining his strange neighbor and suddenly catching the dreaded human scent, dived and hit the water a tremendous thump with his tail. A good laugh, a good breakfast, and on for The Pas, up–current now, as I was meeting the water from the big Saskatchewan. At last I reached the river and she was sure enough in flood, full of the usual drift wood. Looking down towards The Pas it only showed as a speck of dry land. As I went sweeping down with the strong current in my favor I could see a tall figure pacing the shore. He would look up at my tiny craft then away again, and I knew it was the Chief and that he was half afraid to look, for it was really dangerous enough as a touch of the drifting logs would have sent me to the bottom. Finally I swept into the Pas River, he grasping the bow of the canoe and exclaimed: "Thank God you are home safely. I have slept but poorly the last week thinking about your return alone and the very high water. Then that canoe is too ridiculously small for any sane man to risk his life in. Ah, Lord B., Lord B., (his nickname for me) you will never die in your bed." So loving and chiding in the same breath, O–ge–mas–es returned to The Pas and we celebrated the event by a mighty chess game that night.

[117] Crotch sticks are Y–shaped sticks.

9. Steamboating on Saskatchewan River (Summer 1877)

The Hudson's Bay Company had with much energy and considerable expenditure placed two steamers on Lake Winnipeg and several boats on the river above the Grand Rapids, and as this system was fairly successful for transportation of freight, it gradually replaced the Red River cart transport. Occasionally one of the river boats would reach Edmonton; twice I think in one season was the record of the Nor–West, which, by the way, was the most successful craft of them all, carrying two hundred tons on an exceedingly light draft of water.

American captains and mates from the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers were employed exclusively, but our own natives speedily took to piloting and some of them became experts. The crews were all Indians, chiefly drawn from The Pas and Grand Rapids, but a few plain Indians from above Prince Albert would occasionally engage for a trip or two.

I was receiving and shipping freight in the summer of 1877 at Grand Rapids (Mr. Alex Matheson, transport manager), and when loading the Nor–West on one occasion I noted the big fat Yankee mate who was standing on the deck at the gangway singing a rough chantee[118] song to the Indians passing him heavily loaded; from one to two hundred pounds a man being the general load. Occasionally, to hurry matters, he would kick an Indian in the posterior while passing, and break forth into "Come along! Come along! You sons of ———. Come a running," and so on. Amongst the Indians was a wild–looking big chap who hailed from Fort Pitt, with a long plait of jet black hair hanging to his waist, wearing a broad belt of parchment buffalo hide studded with brass tacks, and a big scalping knife, the sheath of which was decorated in the same way. His whole costume consisted of a cotton shirt, a pair of cloth leggings and a breechclout. I saw this Indian's eyes flash as the mate was doing his kicking stunt, and though he looked dangerous, so walking down the gangway, I tapped Mr. Mate on the shoulder and warned him that this was not a crew of southern n———s, but r— Indians, and dangerous men to monkey with. His reply was a stream of profanity. Let me attend to the freight checking and he would hustle the ——— and so on. I returned to the warehouse and kept my eye on the mate. The big Pitt Indian had a heavy load placed on his shoulders, and down the gangway he went with his shirt fluttering in the breeze. He received a tremendous kick behind, and in an instant Mr. Mate was on his back and the Indian furiously stabbing him. Several of us rushed to the rescue, and it took us all our time to hold the s———, who was in a mad fury, yelling that he had never been insulted before and only death would wipe out the stain. We noted some blood on the knife and thought it was all up with the mate, but fortunately he had managed to twist his body and dodge the knife and was only bleeding from scratches. Never was a man so changed. He was too scared to go back to his duty, as he felt certain either his opponent or the other Indians would scalp him, and we finally had to ship him into Fort Garry by the lake boat. Gradually

[118] Also called a 'shanty'. From the French *chantée*, 'sung'.

the Yankee mates were done away with and our steady Scotchmen replaced htem. These, though slower, had the faculty of getting on well with the native crews.

Indians dislike profanity, and the Crees, whose language is generally understood throughout the north, have no swear words in their vocabulary. The captain of the Northcote that summer was an artist in many and strange oaths, and when these failed him in moments of emergency, down went his hat on the deck and on it he jumped with both feet. His desperate language had made trouble on several occasions, and he was warned to guard his speech. We had just loaded the Northcote with 160 tons of freight for Prince Albert, working day and night; as usual at the depot, especially as the water was steadily falling in the Upper River, and away she went. On the evening of next day arrived a canoe with a letter from the captain stating he was tied up with a strike and all his crew on shore. The chief asked me to go up at once and try and settle the difference (as I had managed to do on other occasions), so within half an hour I was on my way up the river with an Indian and a bark canoe, and a heavy paddle ahead of us. The scene of the strike was at Chemahawin at the west end of Cedar Lake, and fortunately it being calm, we were able to make the long traverse safely and finally reached the steamer.

Captain ——— could hardly articulate for rage and every word was an oath. The poor beggar did not seem able to help it. I noted the men all sitting and smoking on the bank and grinning at the boss's discomfiture. I coaxed him into the cabin and told him the situation was a serious one and he was liable to lose his job if he did not cool down. Well, he was helpless, so asked what I would advise and I gave him this ultimatum.

He was to go into his cabin and remain there, and hand the boat over to me, with authority. Failing him doing this, I would return and report. He at once marched me round to the mate and steward and gave orders to this effect and disappeared. I walked on shore very leisurely and busied myself shaking hands with the malcontents. I told them the latest news and generally had a good gossip. Finally I say: "Boys, it is dry talking, and I want a lunch." So I yelled, "Steward," at the top of my voice. Then to him I said: "You see my friends here, we are hungry, get your waiters busy and serve us up a first–class lunch, and do it quick!" This was done at once and a merry scene followed. Jokes were made against the Big Knives (Yankees), and broad witticisms of all kinds flew from mouth to mouth. One huge Indian called "Sha–ke–mace" (Mosquito) was the strongest man on board, and evidently a ringleader in the strike. We had all lit our pipes, when I issued a challenge to Sha–ke–mace. We would divide the men, tossing up for first choice, and I bet him two sacks of flour to one that my gang could outwork him in a given space of time. The challenge was accepted, and though night had come, it made no difference, as there were plenty of flares. Never was freight unloaded and the boat wooded in quicker time. As all the dialogue had been carried on in Cree it was quite a mystery to the officers of the steamer, but I passed the buck to the chief engineer to start at once. I then visited the old man in the cabin and advised him to keep out of the way as much as possible until the men's anger had cooled down. So away they went, I returning to the Rapids at a much more leisurely gait than when we came up.

Poor old Captain W———, an able steamboat man, but when trouble of any kind arose he became wild with excitement and his language was unwritable. The Northcote made the Forks of the Saskatchewan all right, but there was not water enough to ascent the Cole's Falls, so the freight was unloaded there and hauled up to Prince Albert, a distance of about 50 miles.

A RUNAWAY CAR AT GRAND RAPIDS, PORTAGE

Three and a half miles of steel rails crossed the Portage, the height of land was about midway, and a down grade from there both ways. Small flat cars carrying from three to four tons were used, and mules were the motive power. Hauling up from the lake end to the start of the down grade, the mule's single tree was unhooked, the car ran on by its own weight, and the mule trotted behind, the driver regulating the speed by a chain brake. The brake chains were old and in poor shape, though new ones had been ordered but never supplied. Sitting at dinner one day at the fine residence at the upper end of the Portage, with a number of passengers waiting for a steamer up the river, a thundering noise was heard. I dashed out, and there, round the bend, came a heavily loaded car at a furious speed. In charge was a very black French h———, with his hair flying in the wind, twisting the brake with all his might. But the chain had broken, so his efforts were fruitless. There was a neat gravel walk from the track right up to our front door, and as poor Beardie came to this and noted the big warehouse doors were shut beyond, he gave a wild glance round, and, noting me, jumped the car and slid up the gravel walk, his feet hitting the step hard. He was half unconscious with excitement and shock, and on examination I found his legs and stern full of gravel pellets, which, as there was no resident doctor, I extracted with a pocket knife, using a log for an operating table.

The car hit some loose freight on the track and dashed through the doors of the warehouse. This fortunately was piled up with flour at that end, so this acted as a buffer and the damage was not extensive. On reporting the matter, new chains were promptly supplied, so there was some good came out of the accident. Mr. Mule had quietly trotted back to his stable at the lower end.

RETRIBUTION

It was rather righteous retribution on this man, as some time before when he had a lot of loose freight piled under tarpaulins at the lower end of the Portage, I caught him with both hands down to the elbows in a big firkin of butter. The time was about midnight, and his intention evidently was to pull the butter out and fill up the firkin with rubbish, so that it would not check short. I well remember it was flitting moonlight and the expressions on his face would have made a good picture. One was murderous, then fear, and so on. Firkin and all, I marched him round to a leather tepee where we slept, woke up the men, had his hands tied behind his back, and set a guard over him until morning. He kept begging and praying me for silence and forgiveness. I phoned the chief (for one of our clever mechanics had made a

telephone which actually worked, with empty cans and wire), to come over, which he did in the morning. We gave the culprit a summary trial; deferred sentence was the verdict, and a careful watch was to be kept on him throughout the summer.

While between his groans I was extracting the gravel and then using a strong mixture of carbolic acid, which no doubt smarted considerably, I reminded him of his fall from honesty and said no doubt the accident happened to him as a special punishment for his crime. For some time after this he slept on his face, much to the amusement of his comrades.

Like the cart transport, steamboating on the Saskatchewan had its day, and was gradually replaced by rail, the Canadian Pacific railway traversing the prairies and the Qu'Appelle and Long Lake running up to Prince Albert.

The Hudson's Bay Company, with their far–seeing vision, had sold out part of their interests in 1883 to a transportation company, retaining, however, the right of first shipments over all comers.

10. A Winter's Trapping: My First Silver Fox (Winter 1877 – 1878)

Wintering at Sturgeon River, a small outpost of the Hudson's Bay Co. in the Cumberland district, in '77–'78, time often hung heavy on my hands when my two men were away on trips to the Indian camps, there being no resident Indians close at hand. So after overhauling five nets (which was a daily task all winter), the proceeds of which constituted our principle food both for men and dogs, there was literally nothing to do, and this was killing to one of my active temperament.

On the men's return I tackled Francois for some instructions as to setting of traps, for up to this time, though I had been six years in the service, I had been kept so busy that the opportunity for trapping never offered, consequently I was quite green about the matter. Francois was very good and patient with his pupil, telling me to boil my traps with green spruce bush, then hang them out in the frost, and in setting a fox trap to keep along a beaten track if possible, reach forward and make a hole in the snow, place some down (off bull–rushes preferably) in this, then carefully place the trap in, with a very thin piece of paper to fit inside the jaws, fasten the chain firmly to a supple green willow five or six feet long, conceal this under the snow, then with a stick smooth all over the surface, scatter broken fish, like bread crumbs, for several feet round and then, if it will only snow a little, your job is complete. I followed instructions very carefully and noted some fresh fox tracks in the vicinity, these being particularly small and well shaped, so with a prayer for good luck I left two traps, one being quite close to our fishing pace. The stick to which the trap chain is fastened must be quite loose so that Mr. Fox can drag it away. If you fasten this solidly they will generally foot themselves, and a foot in the trap is poor fishing.

I followed instructions very carefully and luckily it snowed a little after I had set my traps. Then came my turn to go on a trip to the Indian camps, nearest of which was some thirty miles away, so it was some seven or eight days before I had an opportunity of visiting them.

Our winter quarters were two small log buildings, one opening into the other with big open mud chimneys in each, for this was before the days of cooking stoves. My residence was the inner cabin. Passing through the men's quarters with my capot and leggings on I was off for my first visit to the traps, remarking, *en passant*, "Look out for a silver fox on my return." This left them laughing; for mice, whiskey jacks or weasels are generally the first catches of a green trapper. On reaching my first set, both trap and stick had gone and after circling the spot a few times, each round a little further away, I found faint traces of where something had dragged and these I followed like a hound on a keen scent. The banks of the river were rather steep in places and several times where Mr. Fox had tried to get up into the woods he fell back on it, but at last came a more sloping bank and the track was fresher going up and over. Not ten yards away was a beautiful animal, black as a coal, not quite though, for there was a patch of silver hairs on his rump. I stared at it with amazement, and finally realized that it was a genuine silver fox and no other. In the meantime it was hissing and spitting at me like a cat. I did not want to club it for fear of injuring the skin (fox skins being very tender). After thinking a minute I took off my capot, threw it on the poor fox and smothered him to death, this without any blood to mar the skin.

I could hardly credit my good fortune; my first attempt at trapping of any kind, and here was a prize that many old trappers had never caught. Getting near the post I concealed the fox as well as possible under my coat, and walking in the cabin threw the beautiful animal down on the floor, remarking, "Did I not tell you that I was going to bring a silver fox back?" French h———s and their young wives clapped their hands on their mouths (a native habit when astonished) and ejaculated, "Wah, Wah!"

The news went far and wide that Ogemases had killed a silver fox. This was rather to my disgust as I was anxious to send the skin home to some relatives, but alas, on my next trip to headquarters the first question put by the Chief Factor was: "Where is the silver fox?" and willy nilly I had to surrender same at the going trade price of forty skins, which worked out at about $24.00, this being part and parcel of every clerk and servant's contract with the Hudson's Bay Company, viz.: That all furs caught by them be handed over at post prices to the company.

With such good luck in starting trapping I was now on fire for more of it, and so enthused an old Indian at one of the mountain camps that he gave me a small bladder of scent, so strong that if the stopper was taken out in the house, one could not stay in the room. This was a very special secret. Also the old chap instructed me for hours on the fur animals' habits and the methods of setting particular traps, all of which I felt very grateful for and rewarded him accordingly.

I had now purchased thirteen steel traps, all we had in store, and noting some marten tracks on the mountain trail, decided to try my luck. These are simply caught by building a little enclosure, setting the trap at the door, with bait inside, and a little stick dipped in my famous scent near the entrance. I was fortunate in getting five, when a wolverine got on my trail and deliberately tore several trapped martens to pieces. I vowed vengeance and took a big No. 4 double spring beaver trap on my next trip and fastened the chain to a heavy long ole. This was placed over a stout crotch,

and I then placed the end of the pole in a notch in a small tree so that a tug on the chain would release it, and I hoped Mr. Wolverine would swing.

Some time elapsed before I was able to look at these traps, but off I went at last and from some distance from the wolverine trap I could see something swinging. There was the Wolverine all right, caught by one paw, (which by the look of it was frozen), swinging in a circle with his hind feet only occasionally touching the ground, and everything within reach chewed off. My, but he was in a rage, with hair bristling on his back and ears flat to his head. He was one of the largest size, evidently a full grown male. Only being armed with a trapper's small tomahawk, I thought it advisable to cut a good long club, and as he swung round growling wickedly, I made a crack at him. He dodged it with his head, the stick struck his frozen paw knocking him loose from the trap, and for a while things were quite mixed. I finally clubbed him to death, but he tore my blue stroud leggings in ribbons with his claws, I being fortunately able to avoid his teeth. Home I went, very proud to have caught the robber, but his pelt at trade prices was only worth some two or three skins.

Skin currency, or made beaver currency, which was the Hudson's Bay Co. term, was invented by the Company for the convenience of trading with the Indians. A prime beaver was the standard, and rated as a skin. Then ten muskrats were one skin, a red fox one skin, a cross fox from two to five skins or more, a bear from five to ten skins and so on. Then all articles in the trading store were priced in skins, always bearing in mind one of the strict rules of the Company, that essential articles such as blankets, ammunition, clothing, etc., etc., were moderate in price, while beads, fancy shawls and belts, colored silks, were high in price. Generally when an unsophisticated Indian came in with some furs, these were counted and valued by the clerk. We will say they came to forty skins, then forty goose–quills were handed the Indian. He would think some time, then divide them up, such as five quills (representing five skins) for a blanket, four for ammunition, and so on. If you hurried him probably the whole business would have to be gone over again, as some important items would have been forgotten. So much for the skin way of trading, very dear to the heart of the older Indians, for it was an invariable rule, that both before and after trading a small gratuity, generally of tea and tobacco, was handed to him. With the introduction of the present currency system, or money way as it is styled in the north, all gratuities were cut out and the Indians resented this extremely.

To return to fox trapping. I had told the story in detail of my successful capture of a silver fox in many a camp, and on describing the small and well shaped tracks I had noticed, this the Indians said was characteristic of the better bred foxes. That is, the cross, silver or black, while the ordinary red fox had a larger, bushier foot; also I was told silver foxes were generally found in pairs, so I was naturally very keen to catch another. I had chosen my trapping grounds so as not to interfere with anyone, and except in one instance, which I am going to relate, never tracked a man all winter.

I had several fox traps set at the mouth of the Sturgeon River where it ran into a marshy lake, some nine miles from the post, and on going down to see these with my dog train, found one trap gone evidently some days before, as I circled a number of times before I could pick up the track. I tied my dogs up, took off my capot and

settled down for a heavy snowshoe tramp as the snow was quite deep, and held up by tangled grass and brush. Following the track carefully, about I would say some five days old, I at last came to Mr. Fox's first camp, a nice circular bed in the grass, with four rabbit feet in it, so evidently trap and all on his foot, Reynard had not starved. On carefully examining his bed I detected several long black hairs, this, as you may imagine, fired my footsteps and on I went at a hard pace for the thought of another silver fox was too good to be true.

I passed four more of his camps in several of which were more rabbit remains, and at last caught sight of my lord wearily dragging the heavy trap, and evidently about played out, as his tongue was out, and no doubt he knew he was hunted. To my amazement and disgust, he was as red as fire – a big dog fox, just worth one skin, and after tapping him on the head and looking him over, I noticed his tail was full of black hairs. Well I was very hungry, soaked with sweat and generally mad at the result, but I had to find my dogs and get dinner as soon as possible. Fortunately I found we had been travelling in a circle, so in a short time I reached my sleigh and was looking for a place to boil my kettle, when I caught sight of a smoke, very faint, some half a mile to the north. Tying my dogs again I made for it, and approaching the spot very cautiously, noted an Indian boiling his kettle, while beside him were two small dogs and sleigh. My suspicions were excited. What was he doing here, and striding up I asked him. His reply was evasive and he seemed very unhappy at my appearance. Noticing something bulky on his sleigh I kicked the wrapper open, and lo and behold there was the mate of my silver fox. I at once told him he had stolen it, for the villain had set a trap within a few yards of one of mine. He evidently knew he had a poor case, for in a cringing tone he said, "Oh, you can take it, but what will the Big Boss say, as I am heavy in debt to the company." I was in a quandary, for as a rule clerks are not supposed to trap furs, and after some consideration I threw the fox at him and with all the bad Indian terms I had acquired, abused him, his ancestors and posterity to the third and fourth generation, until he fairly cowered in the snow, holding his dirty hand to his ears. Alas for civilization, he was a Christianised Indian from Cumberland Lake. A good downright Pagan would never have done it. Well, it had been a poor day and I was too angry to wait for dinner, so home I went, with my silver fox turned to a red one; the mate of my fine fox stolen, no dinner, etc. Finally spring came and I made a glorious beaver hunt which I have described in another article. My total fur hunt for the winter ran about like this:–

	Skins
16 Beaver	16
5 Martens at 2	10
3 Lynx at 2	6
1 Wolverine	3
32 Minks at ½	16
7 Ermines	1
1 Silver Fox	40
1 Cross Fox	3
4 Red foxes at 1	4
2 Skunks at ½	1
	100

Not so bad for a greenhorn, was it?
These even sold as they all were at trade prices, amply supplied my wants, and I was able that year to save all my princely salary of £75 per annum.

11. On the River (Spring 1878)

After a hard winter at Sturgeon River, an outpost from Cumberland House, I at last shipped the winter's fur by York Boat to headquarters; and now for my holiday as I had planned, a hunting trip up the Sturgeon. The party was to consist of an Indian and his family in one large bark canoe and myself in a small bark just large enough for one man and his outfit.

At last we were off, and I looked back at the log shacks we had wintered in with delight at the thought of never seeing them again; for, gentle reader, it had been a hard winter, the chief diet being fish for both men and dogs. We tracked or killed no venison. One amusing incident helped to break the monotony. About the month of February, if my memory is correct, a dog–train with two weather beaten travellers arrived. One of these (Owen B. Hughes) was the first Sheriff of Prince Albert in later days and his companion, a native named Kennedy. At that time Mr. Hughes was in the employ of Stobart, Eden & Co., fur traders, and was travelling from Norway House to Duck Lake. Their snowshoes were worn out and needed re–netting, so the men's wives were set to work at this and Mr. Hughes became my guest. That first evening we had suckers, dried and smoked, nothing else but black tea with plenty of sugar, and I am sure he polished off at least half a dozen. For breakfast appeared a fine dish of plain boiled suckers, taken out of the nets that morning, for we kept five nets under the ice all winter, catching, however, nothing but large red suckers, until spring when sturgeon came in shoals. I could see Hughes casting hungry glances round the table, but he was too well–bred a man to say anything. For dinner a huge platter (of the old China Willow pattern) with at least twenty sucker heads on it, these, by the way, being much the best part of that fish. Hughes glared at me, shoved his chair back, used some strong western epithets as to the way the Hon. Co. fed their

clerks, then yelled, "John!" in stentorian tones. John duly appeared. "Go to our sleigh and bring such and such articles of food." My, but we did feast, and then I explained the situation. Flour being short that winter, I was limited to a clerk's allowance of two hundred pounds. This I would not eat alone, so I just used bread on Sundays, my two men and their families sharing it with me. In after years, meeting Hughes in Prince Albert, we had many a good laugh over this experience.

Our commissariat for the trip was very limited; a small stock of maple syrup which we had obtained by tapping the ash–maple trees in the vicinity, a bale of dried fish, four pounds of tea, a little salt and sugar, with a few pounds of flour for making soup. But our hearts were high and full and full of hope over the prospect of game, beaver especially, for no one had been up the river for years.

We camped the first night about ten miles out, having started late in the day. Fine paddling, smooth stretches of water with scarcely any current, then a small rapid, generally shoal, up which my small canoe would shoot like a jackfish, while Patrick often had to wade and lighten his heavily laden craft. Fish soup with a little syrup for supper, and then to kill something edible next day.

We were up again at 2 30 and called all hands; a hasty snack and by noon we had made twenty miles. Here we were lucky in capturing a large sturgeon who was trying to ascend a very shallow rapid. Pushing my canoe I threw myself on the fish and after an exciting struggle, landed him. Results – boiled sturgeon, very good for dinner. Another hard paddle and we camped at a rapid where bears had been fishing with much success, judging by the remains laying scattered about. The next day, about 4 p.m., we passed the mouth of three small creeks and here Patrick found beaver signs and our mouths watered at the prospect of fresh meat. Going about a mile up the main river we pitched our tepee among some large birch trees, there being no under–brush. This was a beautiful camping ground.

After helping to set the tent we returned to the little creeks to watch for beaver, both going in the large canoe; and watch we did until too dark to see to shoot. Having no luck we made for camp. A wireless system had been arranged between us – when game was sighted the gunwale of the canoe was shaken. Presently I felt the canoe shiver, and on looking closely at the bank which here somewhat overhung the water, I could see the dim outline of an animal, so quickly fired. An amazing splash followed and we were deluged with water. Hauling the bag on board, it turned out to be a large black timber wolf, valuable for his pelt, but alas, not edible.

We here crossed the river and this time it was my occasion to give the signal, as being in the bow gave me a better lookout. This time a strong wake was visible going ahead of us, and I at once fired where I guessed the head was. A tremendous splash followed and under the impression I had killed a beaver (who will never bite unless you put your hand in his mouth), I grabbed the soft fur and with some effort threw it into the canoe behind me. And then arose a battle din, for behold, it was a large buck otter. It was only stunned by the bullet which glanced on his skull, and it immediately attacked Patrick, who was in the stern. It was too close for him to shoot it, and then he might have got me. After a combat lasting some minutes, he managed to stun it with a large maul that we fortunately had in the canoe for landing sturgeon.

Pat was very mad and abused me in his best Cree, and it took us some time to sooth[e] his injured feelings. Finally, on reaching camp, we all had a hearty laugh over it. But the good wife was by no means pleased, as hearing the two shots she had visions of a nice beaver supper and here was only a wolf, which was bad eating, and otter which was worse. Fortunately she or Job (the son) had snared a partridge and a rabbit, and on these we fared frugally and then to bed with a deep vow that we would have something better on the morrow.

Making an early start next morning and taking along Pat's traps, we again made for the creeks. We left our canoe at the mouth and struck up stream. An hour's steady tramping brought us to a beaver dam, only roughly constructed; a little further up another dam slightly better made, and above these a splendid dam backing up quite a lake of water. Evidently the first two dams were only intended to relieve the pressure of high water on the principal one. At the far end of the lake were three large beaver lodges, with hard beaten trails on all sides and trees fallen in every direction, many of these being cut up in short lengths. There were piles of chips and every evidence of busy industry. Patrick's face was a sight, as he estimated there were from forty to fifty or even more beavers resident, and as he had a big debt with the H. B. Company, here was the means to pay it and also the choicest of food for the wife and little ones.

Walking round the lake very quietly, we selected two good stands for watching that evening, as beaver seldom come out before dusk. Then, after a hasty lunch we went further up the stream setting traps in the most likely places. Returning to the beaver village about sundown we very noiselessly took our places, and then followed a long wait. We were both armed alike, double barreled guns of the usual H. B. style, 28 bore muzzle loaders with percussion locks, the barrels being extra heavy, making them suitable for either ball or shot, and loaded at the present time with 3 1–2 drachms of powder, 1–2 oz. of shot, a tight fitting wad and a round bullet on top of all. This combination was a very deadly one at close quarters. At last I noticed the water heave close in front of my stand, and some ripples followed, again, and once again. Then up burst the head of a large beaver, which I immediately shot behind the ear and it at once sunk in some twelve feet of water. Stripping off my clothes and standing like Don Cupid on the bank, I was about to dive after my game, when Patrick appeared, smiling to see my unusual costume. On describing the facts, he told me to dress, and cutting a long dry pole, screwed a gun–worm on the end of it (twisted wire which we all carried for extracting wads), and after some prodding began to turn it and then hauled in. Joy, here was a large fine beaver, and I commenced to dance with delight as it was my first one. It was now quite dusk and we started for camp on the jog, and hearty was the welcome we received on reaching here, and before long we were enjoying a delicate dish from the choicest parts of the beaver, which, and I speak from experience, is very excellent food indeed, something between young pork and lamb.

Next day we were to visit the traps and repeat the watching in the evening. The first trap was not disturbed, but in the second was a beaver, which we soon despatched. This trap was set in a tiny affluent of the creek which was very shallow

with a stony bed, cut banks about four feet high, lovely soft moss on the bank, with scattered spruce and birch. As Pat specially looked after the traps, they being his own property, I lit my pipe and snuggled down in the moss for a quiet smoke, while he arranged everything in order and re–set the big double spring No. 4 beaver trap (no small task I can tell you). Nothing more to do now but destroy the traces of human scent; so finally he filled his mouth with water to spurt on the willows by which he was pulling himself up out of the creek. As he had a very hooked nose and round owl–like eyes, the sight of this apparition ascending from the creek, with his cheeks extended at their widest, was too much for my gravity, and I simply yelled with laughter. This so startled Pat that he left to go the willows and dropped into his own trap in the creek. Great was the splashing, and what sounded like Indian oaths filled the air. Rendered too weak by laughter to be of much assistance, I crawled to the edge of the bank and surveyed the scene. The chain to the trap allowed about two feet or more play and the Indian was caught fairly by his bare haunch, his costume at the time being breech–clout and leggings. He was in a most furious rage, and, finally giving up all struggles, he sat in the water with a most sulky countenance. After a number of ineffectual attempts, I at last succeeded in releasing him. His dignity was badly hurt, and though two more beaver rewarded our efforts, he sulked all day. When the story was repeated and acted in the lodge that night, his merry wife and boy howled with laughter, while Patrick sat and smoked with a most injured air, and for some days afterwards sat down very gingerly.

After spending several more successful and pleasant days, and securing sixteen beaver for my share of the hunt, it became time for me to return to duty. The hunting being still very good and pat doing so well with his traps, I decided to go alone. So one fine morning, after loading my small craft with the fur we had killed, also two beaver untouched for the Chief at Cumberland, I shook hands heartily with my late companions who looked sad at the parting. Then stepping cautiously into the canoe, away I went. On reaching the Saskatchewan I had to be extremely careful in navigation as my canoe was loaded to a few inches of the water, also the mighty river was full of drift–wood. I camped that night for the last time beside the mighty "Kisse–setche–wan–Se–pe," the big, swift flowing river, corrupted by the white man to Saskatchewan.

12. Cumberland House to Gaspe Basin (Summer 1878)

It was early summer of 1878 and rather to my disgust I was held up at Cumberland House (the headquarters for the H. B. Co. in that district), waiting for a passage to Grand Rapids. Every available able–bodied man had been engaged by the company, either for the arduous trip to Long Portage, with outfits for the Mackenzie River district, or else on the river steamers.

A missionary's wife with three little girls had just come in from the north *en route* for Red River; a poor Scotchman with a bee in his bonnet had been sent in from an outpost with a long report showing that the isolation had been too much for him, and though not dangerous he was considered a sort of mild lunatic. It was decided to

send him in to Fort Garry for medical examination. All of these people made extra mouths to feed, and the Chief Factor suggested that I take them down to Grand Rapids by York Boat and there connect with the steamer Colwil on Lake Winnipeg. I was quite agreeable to this, providing some sort of crew could be found, and after a good deal of enquiry, old Antoine Moran[119] turned up, he having come in by the Brochet boats. This French h——— had been poisoned several years before by the Indians and the effect still showed every summer in the peeling of the skin off his face and hands, the latter being so tender he could only do light work and that with gloves. However, I was glad to get him as he was an excellent steersman and knew the river. Then there was a young imp of an Indian named Kitche–mo–ko–mon – (Big Knife) a devil for mischief, and the bourgeois was only too glad to get rid of him. This was all my crew, but of course we had the current of the river in our favor, for we could not possible stem it. This was truly a motley crowd and I shuddered to think what would become of us all if we happened to take the wrong channel, as we simply had no power to return. It took eight good men to pull a York boat up–current on the Saskatchewan. As usual the issue of provisions for our trip was scanty enough, therefore I smuggled in an old fish net in case of being storm bound, as there was thirty miles of Cedar Lake to cross, and straight fish diet was a long way better than nothing.

Having been on the Lower Saskatchewan for some years I was well equipped against mosquitoes, and such mosquitoes – quite beyond the imagination of one who has not been there. The whole country for many miles is inundated in the spring, and as this recedes it is followed by a tremendous growth of rank grass, an ideal breeding ground for the plague. Once on a muggy, close evening, attempting to land with eight Indians from a York boat, the very weight and density of the mosquitoes drove us back into the boat; then, each taking a blanket and forcibly beating the swarms with them we managed to get the kettle boiled, but were only too glad to retreat to the middle of the river to eat in comparative peace. No one thinks of travelling in the summer months without a mosquito bar for each traveller and these hung inside a good tent makes living possible.

The reader can imagine my horror to find that Mrs. Missionary had no mosquito bar, having come from a rocky part of the country. Well, I could not see a woman and three little ones eaten alive, so I and the boy set a tent and bar up in the stern sheets and our first–class passengers had a good night of it, while us poor beggars in spite of two large smudges made in iron pitch kettles slept but a little or not at all and were only too thankful to see daylight come.

Our only hope of making connection with the lake steamer was to drift with the current day and night, so as Captain of the craft I had placed Antoine on night duty, I and the lad taking the sweep in the daytime. After another night of torment we were getting close to Chema–wa–win at the west end of Cedar Lake. The Saskatchewan River here divided into several channels, these often changing with different seasons and as night was approaching we had either to tie up and wait for daylight or take extra precautions to keep the right channel.

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[119] Antoine Morin worked as an H.B.C. labourer and fisher from 1870 to 1884.

There was fortunately a breeze which kept the flies away and we were nearly dead for want of sleep, so warning Antoine to keep a bright look–out we were sound asleep in two minutes. I was the first to waken, it being broad daylight and to my horror found we were out in a strange lake some distance from shore with no sign either of the Saskatchewan River or Cedar Lake. Calling all hands and reprimanding Antoine sharply for neglect of duty, which, indeed, might have very serious consequences, we held a council, that is the old man, boy and myself, right up in the bow, so as not to alarm our lady passengers. One thing certain we could not go back, and it was no use waiting for help, as no one might find us all summer. There was only one course – to go on. Then, in spite of Antoine's remonstrances, we hoisted the sail, there being a light breeze in our favor, and sailed on into the unknown. One comfort was that we were out of the dreadful marshes. There was a stony mainland to our right, no land visible to the westward and no mosquitoes, also a most beautiful morning, so I went aft and teased the little girls who were quite happy with the change from the river. We landed in a pretty bay for dinner and the family enjoyed a good wash. By this time the wind was freshening so away we went again, making famous time, the ladies quite unaware that we were off our course. After an hour or so of brisk sailing a narrows opened to the eastward and old Antoine crowed with delight, exclaiming, "There is Cedar Lake!" And sure enough it was. However our troubles were not yet over by any means as we would come out in the lake fairly close to the base of Rabbit Point, which nearly closes the east end of Cedar Lake, the route being along the east shore.

Stopping for a few minutes in the lee of the land we held another council. The wind had increased and white caps were beginning to show on the lake, also the wind which had been fair would now be on our broadside and the boat was light. Then again to weather the point our course must be south in place of east. After some discussion I decided to go on, and we placed a few stones in the bow of the boat for ballast. Then, putting two reefs in the sail, we sailed out close–hauled and found, alas, we made some leeway, there being not enough cargo on board to trim her properly. Still, by shifting the passengers mid–ships and I in the bow, the boy at the sheet, old Antoine steering, we thought though close enough, if the wind held steady we could make it. I forgot to mention that we had unshipped the big sweep in the morning and were now steering by rudder.

Occasionally spray would break over the boat and this seemed to excite our Scotchman who got his arm twisted in the sheet and nearly went overboard. I sat him down rather roughly on the thwart and told him not to stir, but when I went forward, hearing a shout from the boy, he was at the sheet again and within an ace of going over the side. We lost some ground here as Antoine was watching the antics of our looney; so yelling to keep her up to the wind, I fetched Mr. Scotty a crack on the head with a spare tiller, and down he went, quiet enough. This alarmed the little girls and they began to cry; also they were seasick as the wind was getting heavier, at times the boat showing half her keel. We were nearing the end of the point and the surf was breaking over the rocks to some distance out. It was an anxious time for me, and I told Antoine and the boy to take a child apiece if we struck, and I would help the wife

and baby, or rather youngest child who was about six, I should think. The Scot would have to help himself, as he was now sitting in the bottom of the boat looking very stupid. Then stretching along the bow I watched keenly for rocks, a wave of the had guiding the steersman. For twenty minutes we were in considerable danger and the noise of the surf was deafening. One could have chucked a biscuit on the rocks from the boat, and old Antoine said it was only our light draught saved us. Round the point we went into a beautiful little bay, the shores of which were lined with cedar (the only place they show in the course of the whole river) and landing, the whole party had a good rest and wash, even Scotty behaving more rational than usual.

It was now again fair wind and shaking the reefs out of our sail away we went for Grand Rapids, the wind blowing half a gale behind us. Never was better time made and, Cross Lake, though six miles in width, was crossed in a few minutes. Then on we went, tearing for the head of Grand Rapids itself where the upper post was situated. I could recognize the tall form of my friend and mentor, Alex. Matheson, anxiously pacing the shore and staring at our boat which was coming along at a tremendous speed, favored both by wind and current. He was at that time in charge of all steamboat transport. Antoine held her well and we kept full sail up to the last minute, then dropped the yard and ran the bow of the old boat a foot into the bank. Poor Matheson was shaking his head and saying, "Ah, Lord B. (his nickname for me), I was sure it was you, no one else would be reckless enough to run those rapids under full sail."

Glad I was to land my party, and I expect the trip would linger long in the memory of Mrs. Missionary and her little girls. Fortunately the Str. Colwill was not expected until next day so we had plenty of time to recover from the effects of our journey.

For the information of modern readers I might state the Grand Rapids are situated at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River where it enters Lake Winnipeg. There is a continuous rapid for over three miles, in which there are three drops over rocky ledges. The rapids can be run easily by experienced hands, and accidents can happen just as easily when the passage is undertaken by tenderfeet. The Hudson's Bay Company had two of their best river steamers hauled up these rapids by the help of many men and the n——— engines on the boats. These were the Nor–West and the Northcote. The Marquis was the largest boat, but rather too heavy for the river. A steel steamer called the Lily was tried for the navigation of the South Branch, but proved a failure. She was modelled on the plan of the African and Indian river boats, but did not work out on western rivers.

A steel tramway was laid by the H. B. Co. across the Portage and mule power was used to transport the freight from the lower warehouse to the large establishment at the head of the rapids. This still remains, but I believe is no longer used.

Myself and passengers all went aboard the Colwill next day, and the poor Scotch laddie, after a medical examination, was sent to the asylum for a few months. After seven years in the west I had been granted a year's furlough, and accompanied he valuable cargo of furs as far as St. Paul, these having come in by our steamer. We

ascended the Red River by steamer, thence by train to St. Paul. Taking a receipt for the furs I booked by the lake route east, sailing from Duluth and thence by water through the great lakes, down the rapids of the St. Lawrence out in the gulf to Gaspe Basin, where my people were living at the time.

13. Rebellion Days (1884 – 1885)

The winter of 1884–5 was my first experience as a free trader. I had located with my family close to the forks of Stony Creek, now in the Melfort district. On account of high prices in Prince Albert, I had made a trip to Fort Qu'Appelle (some 250 miles) and purchased a small trading outfit from the Hudson's Bay Company at that point.

Some two miles to the south of my location was an H. B. C. wintering post, also two h——— traders, one of whom was the well–known Xavier Batoche[120] from whom that settlement is named. Being the first genuine white settler to locate here, some of the Indians were violently opposed to this intrusion on their hunting grounds, and on two occasions armed parties of them warned me off the premises.

Well I remember my first interview with the Kinistin band[121]. I was looking over a line of traps I had on the east fork of the creek. It was a cold raw evening early in December, I was homeward bound and had just ran down the bank of the creek to look at a mink trap, and to my joy here was a big fellow. I at once knocked him on the head and put him in my hunting bag which by the way was nearly full and heavy. I re–set my trap and was climbing up the bank, when, turning my head, here was Mr. Mink within an inch of my ear and snarling like a wild dog. I slipped a lynx snare over his head, thinking if clubbing would not kill him, why hanging should. Being so busily engaged, I had not noticed a bunch of mounted Indians who were watching my proceedings with great interest. Boldness is always the best policy with s———s, and walking up to the leader (old Kinistin himself) I held out my hand with the usual "Wa–chea, Wa–chea." He took no notice, but in an angry voice, and speaking the broadest of Salteaux, asked, "What have you in that bag?" I remained silent, and again came the question, "What have you in that bag?" In reply I up–ended it. The contents were one beaver, which I had trapped at his lodge, one lynx, and five minks, one of which I was still dangling in my hand. The scene was a wild one. The Indians were all big men and their blankets and loose leggings made them look still bigger, painted with scarlet and green paint, feathers waving, all armed, five of them carrying repeating Winchesters. I sure had not much of a chance if it came to a racket, and their looks were hostile enough. Now the old man was speaking again, and pointing at the game, he said: "Don't you realize that you have stolen these furs; that you are a stranger and a trespasser here, with your white face? Go away and go quick, or worse will happen," and so on to this effect. It was rapidly getting dusk and I was some ten miles from home, so stooping down and gathering up my furs, I said:

[120] François Xavier Letendre (1841 – 1901), also called 'Batoche'.
[121] The Kinistin Saulteaux Nation.

"Grandfather, I am sorry you are feeling badly about my little hunt, but I also trade and hope to call at your camps through the winter, or see you if you bring in furs." "Go," was his reply, and so I did, glad enough at last to see the light in the window of our log cabin. This was my first meeting with the famous Kinistin and it could not be called a friendly one.

In the meantime I had made some friends among the Indians, especially with O–sow–win–is–su (The South Wind) and his band. We had been able to show some kindness towards one of his sons who was very ill from consumption. The old man and I found we were connected in the Indian way, as Ki–say–the–nish in the Pas Mountain was his Cha–Cha–Wow as well as mine. Then Cha–kas–ta–pa–sin had a few tents and was friendly. Some Nut–Lakers came in to trade during the winter, and I found them as a rule a saucy disagreeable bunch with a bad reputation; as twice since I came to the west they had robbed the H. B. Co. post at Nut Lake. Opposition in the fur trade was keen, especially from the French traders, one of whom, Maxime[122] – (afterwards sentenced to seven years in penitentiary) – was extremely surly whenever we met, and I soon found out that he was preaching active rebellion in every camp. Well I had not been trained in the Hudson's Bay service by some famous factors if I could not go one better than a French h———, so I became a strong counter influence in the cause of loyalty against Maxime, and with success in three of the closest bands. Kinistin's, however, remained sullenly neutral, while there was no doubt about the Nut Lakers' hostility.

Many rumors were flying about all winter. Riel was in the country holding meetings both against the white settlers and natives, making his headquarters both at Duck Lake and Batoche. Runners were being sent by him to the various Indian camps throughout Saskatchewan. I only went for my mail once a month, so was largely dependent on Indian and traders' reports for news. March came in blustery and cold with deep snow, trade was good, and I was busy enough attending to it. Early in April, We–ah–gun, a son of The South Wind, came in from his camp and as usual asked at once for news, and I could see he was excited and had heard no doubt much more than myself. After a quiet chat, I gathered they had heard of fighting near Duck Lake, in which report said, the whites were defeated. His father did not wholly credit this, so sent him in to me for further news. But as I was quite in the dark, we decided to ride up to the Hudson's Bay post and get further particular. The last half mile was through heavy timber, and I was riding ahead. On coming out at the site of the trading shanties, here was evidently a hurried abandonment, empty boxes were lying around and the place apparently deserted. While we were looking over the scene, the door of the H. B. shack was partly opened, and out stuck an Indian's head – a stranger, and in full war paint. My companion with dilated nostrils gave one glance at him, gathered up his bridle reins and whipping his pony went off east at a mad gallop. The head was withdrawn and the door closed. I tied my horse up and went in. One Indian and his s——— were the only occupants, with a bundle of bedding. His

[122] Maxime Pierre Théodore Lépine (1837 – 1897), Métis trader and close friend of Louis Riel. Although sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for his role in the 1885 Rebellion, he served less than a year (from August 1885 to March 1886).

powder horn was hanging close to me and I gave it a shake and noted it was empty. Also glancing at the tea kettle hanging in the chimney, I saw it only contained water. Evidently this pair were very poor and out of both ammunition and grub. I asked them at once to come down and camp at my house, saying we had a native nurse girl who thoroughly understood Salteaux. But they would not speak. Finally, tiring of their silence, I said, "Well, the distance is only two or three miles. I will carry your bundle on the saddle and you can follow." So out I went and after riding slowly for a little distance, glanced back and saw they were following. After a night at the house and two good meals, Mr. Indian thawed out a little and began to talk. His wife had opened her heart to our girl and verified the Indian news about the Duck Lake fight. This they both claimed had been started by the whites, and he further went on to say that his own brother was the first Indian shot by Joe McKay (police interpreter), and that he was on his way to join Riel's men and try and avenge his brother's death, a project, however, which his wife was very much opposed to. The reason, he explained, of their poverty, was that they started out with a pony which drowned while crossing a river and they lost their effects.

Here was war upon us with a vengeance and an active hostile for a guest, or prisoner – which? On thinking the matter over I told Mr. Indian he must stay at the house until my return, putting him on his honor to take care of my wife and children, and this they both faithfully promised.

Next morning early I started in for the Carrot River settlement, and as the ridges were bare of snow, burnt the grass *en route*, this being the usual native custom in the spring, as later on the sloughs were burnt round. Thus no old bottom could accumulate, and that is the great danger in a fall fire, as with several years' collection, both timber and soil will be destroyed, and, naturally, very great injury done to all fur–bearing animals.

On reaching the crossing at Carrot River, I found a number of the settlers busily engaged in fortifying a log house. One of them dashed up to me, catching my bridle rein and shouting, "Indians in every bluff." My reply was dry and short to the effect that I had not seen them. A number gathered round, and certainly the news was bewildering if half of it was true. Indians reported in active rebellion on all sides. Much murder and massacre amongst lone settlers and ranchers and our side badly defeated. Fort Carlton was burnt and every settler for many miles round had taken refuge in Prince Albert. They had formed a committee of defence under Capt. Myers and these gentlemen I went to see at once. I related the facts as to the Indian at my house and asked as to what disposition had better be made of him. I also stated if they wished him brought in as a prisoner I would undertake to do it. The committee retired for a consultation, and I took a look round the premises. A small enclosure of building logs was being place in position round the house to act as a stockade. The place swarmed with women and children. Downstairs in the house were a number of old guns and rifles, all loaded and standing loosely in the corner. Picking up one, the stock fell off. "Ah," was the remark, "you should have had the head of the nail up." The nail evidently acting as a key. There was little to no attempt at discipline, and I could by no means consider placing my family here for protection.

I was asked to come in by the committee, whose decision was that after carefully considering the question of my captive Indian who had openly declared himself a rebel, that I was to use my own judgment in the matter, but to warn him not to pass close to this fort or he would be liable to be shot. Capt. Myers then kindly offered me the position of second in command, but this I was compelled to decline. When he pressed me for a reason I gave him several, the principal one being that his fort was not defensible.

There was no water supply, no bastions, no lookouts, in fact it was a wooden trap, and I would be much safer with my family in a bluff. Also I was of the opinion that the active part of this war was not against the settler, but against the government. The captain then asked for supplies and I told him I would be happy to bring in all surplus ammunition and food that I had in stock and take his receipts, and this he was quite pleased with.

Before I leave this brief reference to the famous fort in Carrot River, Tom McKay[123], that well–known loyalist, told me the ponies were hitched up and a strong party of heavily armed French h———s were just starting to raid this post when news of Middleton's army advance reached them and the plan was dropped. It appeared the French knew there were a number of Orangemen in the Carrot River company, and these were particularly disliked by them, for in the old H. B. governing days this society was unknown. In fact, extreme toleration of all forms of religion was an outstanding feature of the company's rule.

I camped at Finlasson's that night, two fine Ontario men who, poor chaps, afterwards perished in a vain attempt to reach the north end of Lac Du Brochet on a trading expedition, this in 1887–8. I spent the best part of one night in trying to dissuade them from trying, for they were very green as to northern conditions, but without success. These men, like myself would not go in the fort, and later on drove their fine herd of cattle out through the hills and sold them well to Middleton's army. If conditions got worse they intended going away in the hills with their cattle, but like myself they concluded victory would rest with our side sooner or later.

On reaching home I found the Indian had behaved well, so I had a heart to heart talk with him and advised him strongly to go back to Nut Lake or Touchwood Hills where he came from. I told him that if he went on, his life was not worth a rush (for in the excited state of the settlers they would shoot at anything in the shape of an Indian); if he decided to return I could not give him any ammunition, but I would spare a few rations of flour, tea, sugar and tobacco, also some snaring twine which

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[123] From a contemporary account of McKay's actions during the Rebellion: "Mr. Thomas McKay is one of the seven sons of Mr. William McKay, who died a year ago last December at Fort Pitt, after a long life spent in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, during which he had gained the affection and esteem of all who knew him. […] Mr. Thomas McKay […] by his many excellent qualities, moral as well as mental, ennobles all who like himself are more or less nearly connected with the aborigines by ties of consanguinity. To a kindly, frank and general nature, invariably the same, he adds a cheerful gentlemanly manner, while his breadth of view, extent of information on most topics, and capacity for business astonish those who know what until quite recently have been the condition of the country in which he has been brought up and so far passed his life." THE REBELLION. (1885, June 26). *The Prince Albert Times*, p. 4.

would see him safely home. His wife joined with me in coaxing him and finally he promised to start back next morning, which he did – so exit Nut Laker. A short digression may be pardoned here to show (that contrary to Yankee opinion) even Indians will show gratitude; in fact I have known many instances of them doing so, and this is one of them. In March, 1886, nearly all the settlers throughout Northern Saskatchewan went down to Qu'Appelle station for seed grain and grub, there being a dearth of both in the country. This was supplied by the government and I was one of the crowd. On our homeward journey we passed through the Touchwood Hills, our ponies were heavily loaded and frequent spells at the steep hills were in order. At one of these we pulled up quite close to some Indian tepees. I noted an Indian scanning both me and my team very closely, shading his eyes with his hands, and jumping up on a waggon box he took one more look, then diving into his tepee, he came running out with a new rabbit skin robe which he threw on my sleigh. Standing up on the box he called out in a loud voice, "Look at this man, he saved my life. Now my new robe will keep him warm in the snow" (and it did). Sure enough, it was our Nut Lake friend, Sos–coo–pi–toon, I think they called him. A great shake hands all round followed, and I had to tell my companions the story that night. All our camps were made in the snow, 32 days for me, the round trip being five hundred miles.

To revert to my diary. On proposing to my wife that I could take her and the children to Prince Albert, also our furs and that I would go either scouting or on the transport, she absolutely refused to consider any separation, and said we must all stay together no matter what happened. On scouting 'round the place a day or two later I found a body of some forty Indians, evidently from Nut Lake, had camped for a night a mile or so south of my house, and then struck southwest in the direction of Batoche. No doubt they were rebels, or going to join the rebel forces. This decided me that it was no longer safe for an isolated settler to stay on his farm, and I told my family as soon as we could pack up we would trek for Ft. La Corne. (A year or so after the rebellion an Indian told me that a council had taken place with this war party as to whether they would raid my place or not, and it was only decided by a narrow majority that I should be left alone.)

Some six miles south of old Ft. La Corne was a retired H. B. C. clerk named Geo. Goodfellow[124], an old–timer and absolutely fearless where Indians were concerned, and I felt convinced he would still be on his ranch and there we would head for. Between us both we could probably arrange a safe way out of the country if there was a general Indian uprising as reported.

While we were preparing for a start, Xavier Batoche called about noon as he was riding past, and we were very glad to see him as he had remained steadily loyal in spite of much pressure being brought on him by Riel and his compatriots. He would not, he said, fight against his misguided countrymen, so had a hiding place in the Pasquia Hills with some friendly Indians. He stayed to dinner and the fare was poor enough, simply bannock, potatoes and black tea, no meat or butter. With his natural

[124] George Goodfellow, a Scotsman from Inverness, served the H.B.C. from 1861 to (early?) 1885. His final post was as clerk in charge at Stoney Creek.

French politeness he made things very pleasant and was very much taken with my three fair–haired little girls.

He thought my move was a wise one, and though his large assortment of furs were safely cached at present, he might eventually send them down the Saskatchewan River. I went out with him as he saddled up and after thanking me for my hospitality, handed me what he called a trifle for Madame in a cotton sack, which proved to be some ten pounds of very choice bacon, which was a noble gift considering conditions. Poor Batoche, or Ka–Kak, so styled by the Indians (meaning raven, as he had very black hair) made a good deal of money fur trading, but took to drinking heavily, which no doubt shortened his days.

Leaving our pictures hanging on the walls and quite a number of other household goods, including seed potatoes, off we started. The order of travel was myself on horseback well armed with a fourteen shot Winchester and a heavy six shooter, my wife driving a team of ponies in a buckboard with two kiddies, and our girl with the oxen and waggon and two older children, behind which came three head of stock (all we owned at that time). I would ride ahead for a mile or two and then circle the party. We had the usual trouble in crossing some five creeks, which delayed us so that it was well on in the evening when we made Carrot River. And here an old settler, Mr. Chas. Robertson, very kindly took us all in for the night.

After an early start next morning, and when we were about halfway to La Corne, in one of my rides ahead I caught sight of three mounted men riding in a southwesterly direction, and after studying them through my field glasses I came to the conclusion they were Riel's men, as I could detect the fine cloth capots with gilt buttons, also gilt crosses sewn on their breasts. Their arms were evidently single barrel muzzle loaders, and after a moment's thought I rode to intercept them. On meeting them I gave the usual Cree salutation, "Wa–chea, Wa–chea," to which they cheerfully replied (the mother tongue of nearly all the French Metis was Cree). We all got off our horses, took our fire bags and settled down for a smoke and a talk. As I had thought, Riel had sent them down, their errand being to corral all the government cattle, but in this they had failed as the Indians very wisely hid them, so they were returning empty handed. I asked whether they were bothering settlers. "No," was the reply, "we passed close to Nees–wa–pi–tis's (Goodfellow's) house and saw the children playing at the door." They were evidently not at all enthusiastic over the prospect of war. All they wanted was their rights from the government, and they had no quarrel with the new settlers. After a few more remarks we parted and I returned to our teams, finding one of the oxen quietly lying down in a slough, and the women very angry at my long absence. A prod or two, some strong and vigorous language, and behold Mr. Ox climbed out of the mire like a cat, rather to the disgust of the ladies.

A couple of hours brought us to Goodfellow's, and here we received the heartiest of welcomes and heard the rather astounding news that the postmaster at Ft. La Corne had skipped down the river, taking his winter's furs, but leaving all goods and ammunition behind with no one to look after them. Goodfellow, though he

had retired some years back[125], was on fire to save what he could of the company's property, but he had been alone, as all the surrounding residents had fled likewise. Now, with two of us, we decided to visit the fort next morning and stay the day. We received some very good news also as to a safe escape from the country (but the time for that was not yet) as he had a York boat hidden in a creek, and our united stocks would amply provision us. In addition we had four or five fish nets and plenty of hooks and ammunition. His cattle, of which he had a large band, worried him as to their final disposal, and we finally decided on the quiet that one of us would have to stay with them with his oldest boy and drive them to a safe retreat in the hills to the east. He was in great spirits over my arrival, and said that we were now good for a regiment of rebels. We made a famous night of it, he telling stories of wintering on the plains amongst the buffalo where they had often to defend the company's property against hostile Indians. And the ladies who saw one another very seldom in those days equally enjoyed themselves. Mrs. Goodfellow, who was a member of the well–known Turner family, was the soul of hospitality, and our children were at once petted and made much of by their fine youngsters.

Breakfasting early next morning and seeing to our arms, we drove down to old Ft. Lar Corne, at that time situated about two miles down the river from the present post and within easy reach of the water, all imported supplies coming there by boat at that time. We found a number of Indians very much interested in the valuable goods laying about, but Mr. Goodfellow had been master of La Corne for a number of years[126] and immediately ordered them all across the Saskatchewan River. Away they went at once, being a peaceable crowd, and Christianized for many years back, this being the site of one of the oldest Church of England Missions in Saskatchewan.

As we were liable to be visited by hostiles at any time, to whom the supplies would be very acceptable, our first thought was of the ammunition, there being a considerable stock of flints, for flint lock guns were still in use. We finally disposed of these in an old dry well, packing them carefully against dampness and removing all traces on the surface. We then carried all valuable things that were lying about into the store, put different classes of goods together, padlocked the place and went back home for the night. It took several days of steady work to take in an exact inventory of all goods on hand, and the last day, while we were figuring up totals (which ran well into the thousands) the door of the shop opened and in filed four French h———s. I thought we were in for trouble and backed up against the shelves where my six–shooter was laying loaded, then looked at Goodfellow. Not a word was spoken. I could note that his beard was curling, and finally he said in sharp tones, "What do you want?" With that, the leader, evidently, produced a letter to him from Chief Factor Clarke at Prince Albert, asking him to take an inventory of all goods he could find and ship the same down to Cumberland House, further stating that these men were loyal French h———s and anxious to get away from the fighting. The tension was then relaxed. I asked George afterwards what he would have done if they had proved

[125] According to H.B.C. records, he would have been retired for only a few months at the time of the Rebellion.

[126] George Goodfellow was in charge of Fort La Corne from 1874 to 1884.

hostile. “I would have called to them to pitch their hands up,” was his instant reply. “I was over forty years in the company’s service[127] and never had anything taken from me yet; also I noted you had your big pistol handy.” The letter also instructed that a careful copy of the inventory was to be sent up to Mr. Clarke[128] by a trustworthy hand. Poor Lawrence Clarke. For many years he could have been called the uncrowned King of Northern Saskatchewan, with everyone obedient to his dictates. Now he had seen some of his good friends shot down at Duck Lake by rebels, and the shock was too much for him. One of the few Irishmen in the company’s service, a finer fellow never stepped, and I owe him much gratitude for many acts of kindness.

We at once commenced packing and made a good start, then arranged a camp for the men and went back home, intending to freight my furs down in the morning. This we did, and after some hours’ hard work, saw the boat off with its valuable cargo. This meant safety, as the rebels never attempted reaching the lower Saskatchewan. Running to the mouth of this river at Grand Rapids was the steamer Colvill on Lake Winnipeg, which took all cargoes on to Fort Garry.

After fair copies had been made of the inventory and shipping bills, I volunteered to take them to Prince Albert, so started next morning in the saddle, by way of the Forks. This is a wild and beautiful spot where the waters of the north and south branches unite, having very high banks clothed with dark spruce, and whirling, eddying waters. I could see a house on the far banks and fired several shots to attract attention but without success; so after careful search up and down the bank in search of a boat or canoe and finding none, I rather recklessly determined to swim it. Riding up the south branch for half a mile, taking a small dry log along for a rest and placing valuables and papers on my head, into the water we went. Wow, but it was cold, and it took the little mare and myself all we knew to make the other bank, and we were both very much exhausted on reaching there. In fact but for the log I doubt our having done so. On going up to the house I found it deserted, the cellar trap open and a young heifer lying dead at the foot of the stairs. After some search I found plenty of fresh eggs, lit a monster fire, had a good supper and dried my clothes. The pony was quite comfortable in the stable, with lots of hay, and there I also slept.

Next morning I was away bright and early and passed many deserted dwellings, especially as I reached the Lower Flat, which even at that date was a well settled farming district. My thoughts were, if even the threat of war makes this desolation, what must it be like in a country where actual armies had passed and re–passed? I stopped for dinner at a fine looking farm house and the ownerless hens again supplied me with fresh eggs. Both mine and my little pony’s appearance was tough; muddy and travel stained after our long swim the night before. I was dressed in Hudson’s Bay style, wearing a duffle capot with hood, which I had up, the weather having turned cold. I had a Winchester rifle across my saddle and a large revolver in my holster, which with long stroud leggings, made me look very much like I would imagine the South African Boers appeared.

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[127] According to H.B.C. records, he served for 24 years (1861 – 1885).

[128] Lawrence Clarke (1831 – 1890) served the H.B.C. from 1851 until his death. He was named Chief Factor in 1875.

On reaching the top of Miller's Hill I struck the first pickets, who were two fine looking mounted policemen with their accoutrements polished and their fine horses groomed to a finish. The contrast was so great between them and myself that it annoyed me and when they rode up and asked my business and destination I made no reply. My pony evidently felt like myself, and as one of them approached rather closely, she let him have both heels with a squeal, much to my suppressed amusement. On we rode down the hill, my escorts on each side, but keeping a cautious distance. On reaching Goschen (H. B. C. Reserve) the police had a brick building there for an outpost, and one of the riders caught my bridle rein and told me in military tones that I must wait inspection by the officer in command. Out came the officer, when I threw back my hood and grinned at him. "Why," he said, "it is Mr. Beatty!" Nothing would do but I must come in, tell him the news and have a refresher, which by the way was most acceptable, for I was stiff and sore with the long ride and exposure. The guards looked rather silly at the result of their capture. I told the officer all I could think of in reference to the state of the north country, also that I was carrying despatches to the Hon. Lawrence Clarke from Ft. La Corne. "How did you cross the river?" was his question. "I swam it," was my reply, and that meant another refresher.

Up to the Mission I rode, found Mr. Clarke's residence, and met himself noting with much regret that he looked a broken man (he was present at the Duck Lake fight and lost some close friends). I handed over my papers and he thanked both Goodfellow and myself with tears in his eyes at our loyalty to the old company and the saving of so much valuable property.

Here an interlude may be in order to show the great contrast between those days and our own, as at present when you ask a man to do anything the question is, "How much is there in it?" Later on at the close of the rebellion I sent in my account for time served in the company's interests at Ft. La Corne. The amount was, I think, five or six days at $2.00 per day, and Goodfellow's was only a trifle larger, for he put in a little more time. Some of my friends remarked, "What a fool you were B., you and George might have both made your pile, and the government would have compensated the company just the same." But that was not the way business was done in the old H. B. days.

It was freely rumored that some prominent citizens obtained their start by loot secured in the upturn.

After an interesting conversation with Mr. Clarke, he said, "I have a favor to ask. Will you be one of the guards round the old establishment tonight?" and to this I consented. It appeared that Middleton was hourly expected to attack Batoche and if he had been repulsed, Prince Albert would have been attacked.

There was a jolly crowd on guard that night. A long table was set in a store which was loaded with solid and liquid refreshments, and though I felt tough enough, the night passed pleasantly and quietly. I had symptoms of a sore throat coming on, no doubt due to my ducking, so started back next morning for La Corne, going by way of the Indian Reserve where there were one or two men living, and I swam the pony but was crossed over with a canoe. On reaching Goodfellow's I was seized with a

violent attack of quinsy[129] which reached a dangerous stage for some days. While I was convalescing, news of Middleton's victory and Riel's capture reached us, and there was much rejoicing. So away we went back home to Stony Creek in the same order as our arrival. I found on reaching our lone house that the Indians had been in, evidently friendly, for though there were moccasin tracks everywhere, nothing was touched, not even our seed potatoes.

A little explanation as to the prime causes of this outbreak amongst the French h———s and Indians may be of interest to the more recent settlers in the northwest. At first be it understood that with the exception of a few government pets, the whole country in 1884 from Fort Garry to the Rockies was seething with agitation. Petition after petition had been sent to Ottawa for redress of grievances and these were as regularly filed away and little or no notice taken of them. The Canadian Pacific Railway was an iron monopoly, very much worse than the Hudson's Bay Company had ever been. They held the whole country in their grasp. No other roads could enter the country and exorbitant freight rates absorbed the small earnings of the scattered settlers. Talk of annexation with the United States was rife, and no doubt often encouraged by local American settlers. Land laws were rotten, and after you had put in three years' full time in proving a homestead it was often more than that time before you could secure a patent. The h———s living along the Saskatchewan since the early seventies had petitioned Ottawa again and again asking for the old Red River system of river frontage for their farms, but this was refused, and in the meantime white men were coming in and squatting on what they considered their lands. Very much the same causes existed that helped to make the first rebellion of '69–'70, the French, with their excitable natures, going much further than the more stolid British. The latter were willing to agitate for their rights, but when it came to actual rebellion they would not be a party to it.

At last it was decided by majority vote at a large meeting held that a deputation be sent to Louis Riel, at that time in Montana. The delegates selected were Gabriel Dumont[130], an old leader amongst the plainsmen, Moïse Ouellette[131], M. Dumas and Jas. Isbister[132], the latter a Scotch h——— of a well–known and much respected old northwest family. Many of the British settlers disapproved of sending for Riel, and took little or no further part in the agitation. But there were a number who thought it was a good move and that the Ottawa Government would promptly

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[129] An abscess in the area around the tonsils (peritonsillar abscess).

[130] Gabriel Dumont (1837 – 1906) was a prominent Métis leader who engaged in occupations as diverse as buffalo hunting, farming and operating a ferry across the South Saskatchewan River.

[131] Moïse Napoléon Ouellette (1840 – 1911)

[132] "Prince Albert was really the first town established in the north west. I think the first settler there was James Isbister, the descendant of an Orkneyman in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company. This man was afterwards one of the delegation who went to Montana to bring Riel to the Saskatchewan prior to the rebellion of 1885. It was some time in the sixties that Isbister built his first shack where the city of Prince Albert now stands. Shortly afterwards he was joined by some native families, and a little later a Presbyterian mission was established there, and the place took on the semblance of a town." Hamilton, J. M. (1920, September 29). PEOPLE, BOOKS AND THINGS. *The Gleichen Call*, p. 7.

remedy the grievances of the settlers. Riel accompanied the delegates back and began to hold meetings in the different settlements. Amongst other places he spoke to a crowded meeting in Prince Albert, which, however, broke up with a row. At first, Riel took a mild tone, but latterly, becoming more firmly seated as a leader, he began to preach open rebellion, especially among his own countrymen. Even worse, runners were sent to all Indian encampments telling them all sorts of yarns. That a new era was coming and its leader and prophet was Louis Riel. That the good old days with swarms of buffalo would return and that the position of the Indians would be immensely improved and so on.

About this time, or rather before, Mr. Jas. Isbister became alarmed at Riel's actions and he, with some other settlers of moderate views, decided it would be a good plan to get some able Britisher to associate with Riel and try to hold him in check as much as possible. Very much to my surprise I received a visit during the winter of 1884–5 from Mr. Isbister and two companions, whose names I have forgotten, but all three were English–speaking. They made the proposition to me, knowing as they said my sympathy with the natives of the country, that I would go back with them, visit Riel, and endeavor to turn his views from a proposed rebellion to a loyal agitation. Needless to say, I refused, and moreover plainly pointed out to them, that it was the greatest mistake bringing Riel into the country, that his hands were still red with blood from the first rebellion with the murder of Thomas Scott, that he was a fanatic, and would not listen to anyone, not even to the priests of his own faith. In fact during the height of the rebellion he went back on the Roman Catholic religion and attempted to start a new one, with himself as the inspired prophet of it. We had a good talk until well on in the night, and before leaving next morning the poor simple chaps thanked me with tears in their eyes for good advice, assured me of their loyal sentiments and stated they intended in future remaining quietly at their homes.

It was fortunate for the settlers in the west that Riel led the rebellion, for if it had been Gabriel Dumont there would have been a very different story to relate. He was never in favor of making a decided stand against the troops either at Batoche or elsewhere. His aim was guerilla warfare and cutting off supply trains. With perfect knowledge of the country and numbers of Indian scouts, no doubt this method would have met with considerable success and probably at a much greater cost to Canada both in lives and money before it would have been finally subdued. So all's well, that ended well.

The pity of it is that, as an armed rebellion was quite uncalled for, any good man given sufficient authority (such as Donald A. Smith in the first rebellion where he acted as a special commissioner and did untold good), could have settled the grievances both of settlers and Indians without any bloodshed and at a very moderate outlay compared to the actual cost of the final quelling of the insurrection.

One other incident will close my brief sketches of personal reminiscences in rebellion days. Shortly after the close of the fighting I had occasion to drive into Prince Albert, and between the rivers I came to an Indian encampment of eight or nine tepees. Slowing up my team to see if I knew any of them, I was met with an outcry from the women and children and finally recognized them as Stony Creek Indians, or

Beatty's Indians as they were known later. At first they all talked at once, but on quieting them down I finally gathered the following: A day or two before some mounted police with a h——— visited their camps and took all the men prisoners as rebels, in spite of much protestation as to their loyalty. The women cried and begged me to see the authorities and get them set free as soon as possible or they would all starve. This I promised to do, and drove on to Prince Albert, going direct to the Indian Agent's Office. I at once asked him to have these Indians released, stating I could bring positive proof as to their loyalty and further could account for their movements throughout the rebellion. He said his interpreter had recognized most of them in the Batoche fight. I demanded to be confronted with him, but this he would not have. Finally, after some discussion, we had some words and he ordered me out of his office in a very pompous matter. I kept the wires hot to Ottawa and the Indians were released immediately, much to the delight of their families. He probably meant well, but it was a very unwise move on the part of any Indian agent to treat Indians unjustly who had remained loyal, and if his action had been sustained it would have cost the country a lot more trouble.

Again, my memory is treacherous, but I am of the opinion Mr. Agent's services were dispensed with very shortly after this.

14. True Bear Stories (c. 1884 – 1890)

An old Indian friend of mine named Robert Bear[133] (still living), with whom I passed the spring on two neighboring stages in the flooded lands of the lower Saskatchewan many years ago, used to chat with me over his hunting experiences round the camp fire; same fire being built on a clay bottom, on the poles which formed the floor of each stage, and I have known the water rise very close to the floor, but this only for a short time and when the ice had jammed at the elbow of the Big River.

Robert was a sincere Christian and a devout member of the English Church which had done so much towards the work amongst the Indian tribes of the Northwest; his grandmother was, it is said, an E———[134], while he was born and brought up amongst the swampy Crees of the lower Red River settlement.

At my request for a story one evening, Robert said, "I was in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fairford Post, situated at the north end of Lake Manitoba, and the master there had occasion to send an express packet of importance to Fort Garry; this I was to take alone and on foot, and I decided to strike a direct course through the bush and swamps. It was in the spring of the year and I was travelling light; a H. B. blanket 3 point; two spare pair of moccasins; a single barrel flint lock gun; tomahawk and scalping knife with some tea, tobacco and matches made up the outfit. I took no provisions, but would depend on game killed *en route*. The distance roughly speaking would be about 160 miles, and on my second morning out I started

[133] Probably the Robert Bear listed as an 82–year–old, Indian, Anglican hunter in the 1916 census of the Prairie Provinces. At that time he was living on 'John Smith's Indian Reserve' under the Duck Lake agency of Saskatchewan. This reserve is home to the Muskoday First Nation.

[134] An offensive exonym for the Inuit people.

as usual at the first peep of daylight and after an hour or so walking came out on the bank of a small round lake, about a long stone throw across; on the other side directly opposite me were two black bears standing on their hind legs and wrestling. I at once slipped a trading bullet on top of the shot charge in my gun, opened the pan and tapped the stock to show the powder well up; just as I was occupied in this the bears dropped on their four feet, looked across at me and each taking different directions started at a clumsy gallop round the lake. One thinks quick in a moment of this kind and I was not prepared with my single barrel to meet both bears at once so I started to run and meet one of them, he came on at the same pace and when within a few feet I fired and killed him dead, then with my foot on his body I loaded as quickly as possible, but none too soon as the other bear was very close; taking careful aim I fired and killed him dead within a few feet of his mate."

"And then, Robert, what did you do?"

"I knelt down and thanked God for mercifully preserving my life (truly here was a lesson from an Indian, how few white men would have thought of their Maker). Well, my hunt was a good one, the bears were both young males and in prime condition; I decided to camp for a while and dry the skins so that I could put them in my pack and it would mean pocket money in Fort Garry; while the skins, after being carefully scraped, were drying, I cut a quantity of the meat up in thin strips, and hung it on stakes in the smoke, this meaning grub for the trip. There was still a quantity of meat left over and I did not want to waste the good food; fortunately there was a muskeg close and on pulling upon a lot of moss I came to ice and on that I piled the spare meat, then placed heavy logs over the cache to keep off Mister Wolverine.

This was the only exciting occurrence on the trip, but the next evening I struck a small Indian encampment and was received with the greatest hospitality as usual and in return I directed them to my bears' meat cache and told them they were very welcome to the meat."

Many years after this Robert moved with his family to the south branch of the Saskatchewan and located on a small farm, where from this base he would go on extended hunts in the winter and crop his land in the summer time. About the same time or a year or so later I had started fur trading in the Stony Creek district (now Melfort), and on a trading trip to Cha–kas–ta–pa–sin's bands at Wa–we–a–ge–mow I was offered parts of three black bear skins and at once inquired what had happened to the rest of the skins. Their story told me by Ne–soo–pa–tin–cyniew was that a huge old grizzly had wandered in from the plains (and not hibernating like the local bears) had found the winter dens of these unfortunates, dug them out, feasted on the meat and thus mutilated the hides; he had followed the track for some distance northwards and then dropped it. In the meantime the news of Mr. Grizzly's arrival had spread far and wide as they were rare visitors in the north country; Robert Bear was one of the first to hear of it and never having shot a grizzly he determined to track him if at all possible.

He was, I think, some three days on the trail, armed as before with a single barrel gun, axe and knife, but at this date percussion locks had replaced the old–time flint, and after considerable circling he found the track at the main Saskatchewan

River below the Forks; the bear crossed the river here and took to the dense bush; finally the track freshened and Robert stopped, overhauled his gun, replaced the cap and then with a determination that it was either him or the bear to cross the Great Divide, he waited for a favorable wind, and then, stepping like a ballet dancer, he crept along the trail.

While he realized that if this shot was not a fatal one his chances were slim, still he went on with dauntless courage, though as he told me his heart beat a little faster than usual. At last he noted a huge dead spruce tree fallen across the track, and stopping and studying the situation he felt convinced that Mr. Bear was either concealed behind this or very close to it. Creeping up to within a few feet of the tree, full cocking his smooth bore gun, he broke a dry stick sharply and on the instant over the tree came the grizzly, mane bristling like an angry dog, mouth wide open with huge fangs exposed, growling savagely he charged right at Robert; he, waiting until the bear was so close the powder burnt his flesh, shot him right through the brain and killed him instantly. Robert camped beside his victim that night and carefully skinned him, but like so many of his kind the skin was in poor shape, scars and cuts from many fights, also traces of several old bullet wounds. He was very thin and, as Robert quaintly expressed himself, mighty hard chewing.

The inroad of the grizzly into our country caused much excitement amongst the Indian as their huge claws are much coveted by the young warriors as signs of their prowess in hunting. Old Kinistino, however, was the only one who had a necklace of these and it was exciting enough to hear him tell of his fights with them when on buffalo hunting and horse stealing excursions to the Great Plains.

In my own case there was food for thought as most of the winter on trips to Indians I was sleeping out and invariably alone, hardly ever carried fire arms and would certes have been an easy prey for a wandering grizzly.

It was the fifth night out after a trip on my homeward journey, with a game little mare named Nellie, who was wise beyond description; I had a flat sled with a bulky load of furs; the weather was intensely cold, in February, I think, and I had selected a camping place somewhat earlier than usual; this in the middle of a small green poplar bluff, with a bunch of dry reeds in the centre; near at hand was a dry hay–swamp well sheltered by scrub and timber and in this I tethered my pony to a green pole about the size of a fence rail, notching the centre slightly so that the tie would not slip; she could drag this about the swamp and keep herself warm by pawing the snow for the fresher grass underneath, but if she attempted to leave the swamp the pole would at once catch the trees.

About an hour's hard axe work gave me a camp; a nice little clearing with two large piles of wood on each side of the fire, wood cut to about five foot lengths and you can then stretch your length and enjoy the heat front and back, for in spite of severe cold you are bound to sweat more or less while travelling. Unloading the sleigh I piled the bales at the back, and this, with the snow shovelled (by snowshoe), made a break from any wind on three sides while the front was filled with a glorious fire. After a good supper and a final trip to my pony in which the tether was carefully inspected, also a quart of oats placed on the ground for her feed, I wished her goodnight,

remarking at the time, "Well, Nellie, we have about forty–five miles to make tomorrow and we must start early if we intend reaching home. I think I will get up at half past two." She gave a wise little nicker and back to camp I went. My large fire had burnt down to glowing coals so I at once made my bed and a description of this may interest readers.

The snow had been well cleaned off and on the ground I spread fine willows (there being no spruce), over this came a huge armful of hay cut with my sheath knife in the swamp, and there is nothing warmer to sleep on; on this my deer skin, killed late with the winter hair on and only scraped, not tanned as then it would be too soft and one would feel the lumps below; this is laid tail up so that you lay against the hair and do not slip off. For covering a 3 ½ point Hudson's Bay blanket, always white, as they are so much warmer than colored blankets, over this my rabbit skin robe and over all my duck sled wrapper which protects the bedding from any stray sparks. The fire goes out, but no matter how low the thermometer goes down, and it must have been 40 below zero that night, one can sleep warm and comfortable.

Covering up my head as is customary and necessary when exposed to such low temperatures I was soon fast asleep, and after some hours' sound repose I was awakened by a tug at my bedding. Was I dreaming? No, I could both feel and hear the animal moving. My thoughts flew back to the grizzly bear, the only weapon I had was a light axe and fore the life of me I could not recollect just where I had placed this overnight. Well, I was up against it and could either feel or imagine the hot breath of the brute, so summoning up all my resolution I threw the bedding back and here was Nellie's wise little head within a foot of my own. Such a relief. Looking at my watch it was twenty minutes to three, so I at once rose with the blankets gracefully draped round me and made a huge fire. My, but the little mare did enjoy it as I stripped her blanket off, it being covered with frost, and she, carefully stepping, would turn first one side and then the other to the heat. I found on examination that she was fast tethered to the pole and wondered how she could have dragged it through the narrow path I had cut to the swamp. On looking at the tracks I decided that when the pole would catch she had nosed it straight again and continued doing this until her line allowed her to reach my camp. At breakfast, which I always shared with her, she being very fond of bread and sugar, I made a promise, and it was that I would never part with her, and when she got beyond work she would be pensioned off. This in due time happened and she passed a serene old age surrounded by her off–spring, some of whom can be seen driving into Melfort today, handsome enough, but I doubt if any could show the same lion–like courage and hardiness which little Nellie proved on many a long trip.

15. The Past and the Present (1884 – 1892)

On the installing of the first Linotype[135] mechanism in the printing office of "The Melfort Moon," Editor Babington has asked me to write a few lines commemorating that event and comparing the old days of Melfort with the new.

Something over three decades ago[136], or to be precise, in the year 1884, an outfit of five Red River Carts could be seen making their way eastward towards Stony Creek (the old name of the settlement); these contained my young family and worldly goods, and a birch–bark canoe formed part of the lading. This district was then the hunting ground of three small bands of Indians known as Willow Crees, some forty tepees in all, also a few stragglers not connected with any band. Kinistin's was the chief band and the leader of this, old "Kinistin" himself, was a remarkable Indian. All furs trapped were sold by him, and he purchased all supplies needed; ruling his wives (three) and the band with an iron hand. None of these Indians had yet accepted Treaty with the Canadian Government, and I was present in their tents when many a hot discussion was held as to the advisability of doing this, or not. Nearly all these Indians were first–class hunters, and the country abounded with game and fur–bearing animals.

Competition was keen in the fur trade, and the following parties all had wintering posts at the forks of Stony Creek, sec. 10–44–18 w2, (now Melfort Creek): The Hudson's Bay Co. (an outpost from Ft. La Corne); Xavier Batoche, well known as a loyal French h———; Solomon Venn; and Baptiste Boyer, when I arrived, as the first settler and a permanent resident. My arrival was not at all popular and on three different occasions I was ordered to leave by bodies of armed Indians, no doubt in some cases incited by other parties, for these were the '85 rebellion days and the north country was in a state of unrest. Fortunately, a long training in the Hudson's Bay Co.'s service had given me some acquaintance with the language of the Indians and a thorough knowledge of Indian ways, and by degrees we became good friends.

The years went by and in 1892 came the first inroad of settlers, many of whom I am glad to say are now prosperous farmers and business men. By degrees schools were established and a Post Office with a weekly mail. Still, the long distance from a market prevented any marked advance in settlement until the advent of the Canadian Northern Railway from the east, some fourteen or fifteen years ago. The country then began to settle quickly, while villages and towns grew up at various stations throughout the length and breadth of the Carrot River Valley; this gave us a good cash market for all products and today it keeps three chartered banks busy to attend to the monetary affairs of Melfort alone.

It was not by any means a blind venture for me when I pioneered in the Melfort District, as I was much struck with the report made by Professor Macoun[137] in 1879 on the Carrot River Valley, which district he remarked contained from three to four

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[135] An early typesetting machine.

[136] This article was originally published in August, 1918.

[137] John Macoun (1831 – 1920) was officially appointed "Explorer of the Northwest Territories" by the Canadian government in 1879.

and a half million acres of probably the richest soil in Western Canada. Large areas of good soil mean good towns, and Melfort is a shining example. I have naturally unbounded faith in the future of this whole valley and consider development as yet only in its infancy; the opening of Hudson's Bay to steam navigation will put us on the front and provide a short railway haul to the sea.

To return to our Linotype; I heartily congratulate "The Moon" on its enterprise, which shows they have also faith in our future, and long may it shed its gentle light over our town and district.

16. A Remarkable Prophecy (1884 – 1890)

In the Prince Albert Herald of April 19th[138], there is an interesting paragraph as to a Lac la Rouge Indian who foretold his death to the day, a week in advance, though apparently quite well at the time of his prediction. This reminds me of a similar incident right here in the old days which may interest some of our readers.

Ki–nis–tin was by far and away the leading Indian in this locality when I settled here in 1884 and a man of very strong character. He had a following of some fourteen braves amongst whom, his eight sons were notable as fine big men, skilled hunters and splendid shots, and they were all armed at that time with repeating Winchesters. Ki–nis–tin purchased all supplies, sold all furs trapped by the band and personally transacted all their business; his trade alone had practically enriched Zavier Patoche, who was their favorite trader. At that time he was not on friendly terms with the Hudson's Bay Company, towards whom he held a grudge, as parties who had sold the Indians' birthright.

On several occasions he gave me warning that I was encroaching on his hunting grounds by settling down on my old farm and warned me to leave before worse would happen. I made several attempts to get on good terms with him but it was not until the year 1887 that I was successful, and we finally became great friends; the first white man, he informed me, that had been honored by his friendship.

Neither he nor his small band had accepted the treaty with the Government. In fact, being wealthy in horses, furs and supplies of all kinds, he looked on the $5.00 per annum (which each treaty Indian received from the Government) with contempt.

Ki–nis–tin had many chats with me by the camp fire, over the future of his band and what would become of them after his death. After having had pleasant and profitable trading relations with him for some years, one of the sons (Taas–ko–tup–e–tung) came in from their wintering camp, at that time some seventy–five miles to the northeast, with an urgent message to me to come out at once. The month was February, weather cold and lots of snow. Packing up a small trading outfit I started back with the young Indian next morning, reaching their main camp about noon on the third day out. As usual I was a guest of Ki–nis–tin and after the customary trading had taken place he sent all his people out of the tepee and turning to me, said

[138] April 19, 1920.

"You wondered why I sent for you." "Yes," was my reply. "I thought perhaps you were sick, so I brought along my medicine chest."

He laughed, said he never felt better but his time was growing short. "In what way?" I asked. "Well," he replied, "when the buds come on the poplar trees, just before they break into leaf, I will go to join my Fathers." Still, I did not quite understand him, so asked him again to explain his meaning, and then he told me clearly and simply that he had received warning from the spirit world and that his death would take place at the time stated, "early spring." I felt distressed as I was really fond of the old man; not that he was so very old, between sixty and sixty–five I would say, and apparently in perfect health. I endeavored to shake his belief and told him he never looked better but he simply refused to discuss the matter.

He then went on to say that I was the first white man he had ever made a friend of; that he trusted me fully and had a grave charge to leave me. "Look at my children and followers, what will become of them when the head dies. On thinking deeply over the matter I have decided it is useless to kick against the pricks, the day of the Red Indian is gone; it will be better for them to follow the example of other bands; take the small government pittance and become reserve Indians; but for myself, Ki–nis–tin will never take their treaty money."

Here the old man stood up in the tepee, dropped his robe and stood upright before me; only a breech–clout covering his nakedness. A fine specimen of a s———, truly; six feet in height and handsome aquiline features; a number of scars on his broad breast made by arrows and bullet wounds in old–time fights with Blackfeet on the plains.

Pagans, we call them, but the secrets of the other world, that noted scientists like Sir Oliver Lodge[139] and Conan Doyle[140] are now trying to explain to humanity, were no secrets to Ki–nis–tin as he was constantly in touch with the world of spirits and felt no fear; rather, in fact, rejoiced that he would soon join their numbers.

Now, he went on to say, "I want you after I am gone to get the land, where our graves are, and where I will be buried, for a Reservation." My reply was, that a promise of this kind was not in my power, but I could, and would, try my best to get this land reserved for them. "Very well," he said, "keep your word in this and long shall be your life and prosperous your days in the future. Break your word to me and evil spirits shall haunt your existence and make your life miserable." He then went on at length on other points regarding his people, finally, calling his family, we all retired for the night.

The weeks went by and just at the time indicated, before the poplars burst into leaf, my children came running into the house calling, "Daddy, there are two big Indians outside and they look very miserable." On going out a glance told me that Ki–nis–tin's prophecy had come true for these were two of his sons; their hair dishevelled and blackened faces told the story, and sitting down quietly beside them, they gradually related the facts of their father's death and how peacefully he had passed

[139] Sir Oliver Lodge (1851 – 1940), British physicist and spiritualist. He is best known for his scientific work on radio transmissions.

[140] Author of the Sherlock Holmes stories and prominent spiritualist.

away – literally slept with his fathers – in full confidence of a happy hereafter (and who can gainsay it).

Thus was the old man's prophecy literally fulfilled, and I thought to myself, many things are revealed unto the simple and concealed from the wise.

Ki–nis–tin's legacy proved a heavy one, as it took some years heavy correspondence with Ottawa; this was made more complicated by lumber–men, keen after some spruce timber on the proposed reserve. Finally, thanks largely to Hon. David Laird who was Indian Commissioner at the time (who like King Arthur's men was a very perfect knight; no personal wires to pull, like, alas, many of our modern politicians) the reservation became a fact, but the name of Ki–nis–tin, which I wished commemorated, had an O added to it by some red tape clerk. Kinistino Reserve came into being and my old friend Ki–nis–tin's bones rest in peace.

Some years ago it was again my privilege to assist one of the old man's sons, "Ne–pan–a–qua–nip," known to many old timers as Nipi. He was rapidly going blind and evidently needed expert treatment. After a spirited fight with the authorities I received permission to take him to Winnipeg where the services of a good oculist partially saved his sight.

17. The Life of Ne–Gua–nan–I–sew (1884 – 1894)

Such a handsome, good natured, bright young Cree Indian when he first traded with me in 1884 and we soon became fast friends and called one another Neshtow, meaning brother–in–law, an Indian term of endearment. He camped at my house a number of times and was the delight of my young children; in fact he always had an interested audience of old and young when telling Indian fables of the beginning of things, most of which I regret to say I have forgotten. How the loon received its handsome coat and power of diving, and the beaver was granted almost human powers of intelligence. In regard to the beaver it was a tradition among the Crees that at one time they were human beings but having offended the Great Spirit, loss of speech and the human form was taken away from them. Then there was a history for the bear, wolf and worst of all criminals the dreaded wolverine who is the terror both of the white man and the Indian trapper.

Neshtow at this time, so he gradually informed me, was very much in love with a pretty Indian maiden called Tannis, a daughter of the South–Wind, and on his visits to my trading store I could tell at once if the course of true love had been running smoothly or not, by his good spirits or the reverse. It appeared there was a rival named A–ke–a–penas who, though a good deal older, was much better off in this world's goods, and consequently appealed more to the young girl's mother. His appearance, however, did not appeal to Miss Tannis at all, as owing to the bursting of a gun his cheek bone had been broken which gave him a sinister expression, and further he was a dour natured Indian at the best of times, in fact a complete contrast to sunny tempered Neshtow.

Mrs. South–Wind, however, like many mothers, was anxious to see her pretty daughter make a good match so there was the opposition of the parents to contend

with. Tannis, however, finally brought matters to a show–down by telling Neshtow if he was a man at all they must elope as she positively refused to consider marrying Broken Face, as the rival was commonly called. He came in and told me the whole story and asked what I would do under the same circumstances. Why, take the girl of course, was my reply.

It was the height of the berry season and all the Indian women were busily engaged in picking and drying Saskatoon berries for winter use. The plan was arranged that Tannis was to steal away from her comrades and meet her sweetheart at a place selected, he to have two ponies there. Everything went off smoothly and some days afterwards the newly married couple paid me a visit. There was no wedding ceremony, my dear reader, as these were both Pagan Indians; simply living together made the bond quite as secure; in fact, very much more secure than many white weddings. Tannis made a very pretty bride and, in fact, they were a handsome couple, but as yet did not even own a home in the shape of a tepee, so they had simply spent their honeymoon like our first parents in the open air of heaven. Neshtow finally appealed to me for some advances, notably sufficient duck [sic.] to make a tepee, and then various other necessities. Though my stock of trading supplies was very low at the time I could not refuse, and advanced them debt to a moderate extent, all of which was eventually repaid.

Time went on and in due course a baby arrived and this proved the means of reconciliation with the old folks who had missed their daughter extremely and could not help liking her husband (as everyone did) for his sunny bright ways. He was not a star hunter by any means but a most cheerful worker, and his little mate being very tidy it was a pleasure to visit and camp in their well–kept tepee. The little grandchild lived and thrived for a year or so and then died, much to the grief of all the relatives. The medicine man had used all his remedies for months without effect, and they finally brought the child to me, but my medical skill was not sufficient to diagnose the disease. No less than three children were born to this fine young couple in the next four or five years, all of whom lived and thrived for a few months or so, then faded and died. In vain were Pagan rattles and offerings to appease the Mutchi–Manitou (Evil Spirit) and the young parents became very sad and despondent, thinking they were under an evil spell.

With the last baby they lost I had them camp close to my house when the child was about six months old, and after much persuasion made the mother wean the babe and bring it up on cow's milk diluted and some other infants' food which my wife had procured. Alas, it all led to the same result, and when they both came into me with their hair dishevelled, their faces blackened, and literally in sack–cloth and ashes, my heart went out to them in great sympathy and we wept together.

It is one of the saddest things to live alone in the wilderness and to be unable to help in times of severe illness, when one realizes with the resources of civilization precious lives might often be saved. Not only when sympathizing with poor Neshtow, but when my own family needed better medical skill than I could give them I took a vow and it was this: That if ever a town grew up in the vicinity of my land there were two things I would try and get built as soon as possible. First, a church for the worship

of the only true God, and then a hospital. I am thankful to say I have lived to see them both established.

About this time, now in the nineties, a young colored doctor[141] from Chatham, Ontario, had settled in Kinistino, some thirty miles west of my homestead, and was practising his profession there and visiting the scattered settlers with much success. This was glad news for me and I drove up and called on him at the first opportunity, and we soon became fast friends. He was much interested in the Indians and when I told him of the deaths of Ne–gua–nan–i–sew's children and described the symptoms, he made me promise that if another child was born to this couple it was to be brought up to him for examination. On my next visit to Neshtow and his poor sad wife they listened with the greatest eagerness to my tale of the new doctor, and it was rather amusing when I described his color. Ah, they said, if a white doctor's medicine is strong, why a black doctor's must be stronger. However, they promised faithfully if a new baby came they would surely follow my advice. A year or so elapsed and they came with a fine little baby girl tied in the Moss Bag and resembling her mother very much. Both were anxious to see the new medicine man, so we all went up to Kinistino, I going as an interpreter. After a careful examination the doctor gave certain instructions and these they promised faithfully to carry out. Then in three months' time, and in fact every three months for at least a year, they were to bring the babe for another medical examination. At about the age of two the doctor performed a slight operation for tubercular gland. The child throve, the parents were immensely grateful, and this girl baby gradually developed into a fine handsome young woman who went to Emmanuel College. She was the pride and delight of her parents and through her efforts they both became converted to Christianity. In the meantime, two other children were born to Neshtow and being duly treated by Dr. Shadd, grew up fine youngsters. A happier, more contented Indian family you could not find, but alas, the sequel of this true tale proves that in the midst of life we are in death.

The season was early fall, following an extremely dry summer, and Neshtow and all his family were camping in the hills south of Edmonton. The country was broken and brule, with a tremendous growth of grass and much dead old bottom. For days the atmosphere had been smoky. Suddenly a heavy gale of wind arose and Neshtow finally decided to make for the open country, but in every direction they tried to proceed, fire or dense smoke headed them back. Finally, in despair, he set all hands to make as big a clearing as possible, also to dig a hole (axes the only tool) to shelter them if the fire swept over the camp. Then he hobbled and threw his two ponies and covered their heads up with a blanket. How they all worked in spite of the awful heat and suffocating smoke, then with a roar the actual fire was on them and one by one he saw his dear ones perish, reckless of his own life he clasped them in his arms to extinguish the burning garments, but his loved wife, his brilliant daughter and the two young children all perished.

[141] Dr. Alfred Schmitz Shadd (1870 – 1915). He was not only a physician, but also a politician, cattle breeder, newspaper editor and founder of associations such as the Melfort Agricultural Society and the Farmers' Elevator Company.

When a rescue party arrived he was still conscious, though very badly burned. They insisted on taking him down to the doctor, but his wish was to die and join his loved ones, the quicker the better.

I was not present when they brought the poor maimed child of nature into Dr. Shadd and laid him on a couch. After a short examination he pronounced the case hopeless, and when they told poor Neshtow this, he thanked God and calling his friends who had rescued him he dictated his last wishes. He asked that sufficient of his goods be sold to meet his debts, and sent a special message of goodwill to me. Then, folding his poor burnt arms across his chest, and with a cheery, "Goodbye, doctor," thus perished Ne–gua–nan–i–sew, a gallant Indian gentleman.

Fortunately some years before the date of the wiping out of this family, old South–Wind and his wife had died so they were spared much grief.

INDIAN PREVENTION OF BUSH FIRES

Old South–Wind was my first Indian friend in the Stony Creek country (now Melfort district), and not only selected my first location, but gave me much kind and sound advice as, to me, it was a new district. His forefathers, for generations back, had made this district their hunting grounds and he pointed out to me with pride, the fact that all the first growth timber was still standing untouched by fire. When asking him what I should do in regard to this preservation of the green woods (which of course meant saving the fur), he replied as follows:

Just as soon as the snow goes off in the spring and the grass on the ridges is dry, put out your fires. The snow is still in the woods and no harm will result. Then later on as the hay swamps dry up and you have the ridges surrounding them burnt off, why do the same to the hay.

I followed the old Indian's advice from 1883 to 1893 without losing a stick of green timber, but in the year 1893 a number of settlers came in and when I was burning the ridges in the spring of 1894, one of these men, a man from North Dakota, warned me that he had been appointed a fire guardian and that I would be pulled if I did not stop putting out spring fires. I tried to show the new men the folly of this but without success, so for two or three years the old grass collected until it formed a mat on the ground over a foot thick, then one of their number let a fire out in a dry fall. Many of these new settlers lost their buildings, several barely escaped with their lives, and two young Indians perished in the hills. Millions of feet of good green timber were burnt, and some thousands of acres of black soil were burnt off clean down to the clay sub–soil and, naturally, the fur–bearing animals were wiped out.

This law from Regina may have suited southern ranchmen but it was a positive evil in this country where more grass grows on one acre than on ten or twenty in the south. Our legislators should have had old South–Wind at their councils.

We few settlers became exhausted in trying to check this awful fire so appealed to the Mounted Police for assistance. Help was promptly and effectively given us, as usual, with that noble body of men.

18. Almighty Voice (1897)

Some twenty years ago, more or less, our scattered settlement was thrown into a great state of excitement with the shooting of a Northwest Mounted Policeman by an Indian, about fourteen miles west of where Melfort now stands. This was the first mention of Almighty Voice[142], that famous outlaw, who kept this section of Saskatchewan in an uproar for a couple of years. This young Indian was a Saulteaux of the Duck Lake band, and noted for his swift running. He was imprisoned at Duck Lake by the Mounties, pending trial on the supposed theft of a steer; broke jail that night, crossed the south branch of the Saskatchewan through drifting Ice, secured a pony, cart and single barrelled gun from some of his Indian friends and struck north towards Fort la Corne, a young woman accompanying him.

The police were on his track next morning, and the sergeant (an ex–Life Guardsman) with a French h——— interpreter, caught him up just about where the village of Beatty now stands. The Indian stopped his pony, got out, knelt down and holding up his right hand, called out, "Stop, or I will shoot!" Bravely the old soldier rode the outlaw down, but a single shot struck him dead. And now, with an empty gun and a muzzle–loader at that, was the opportunity for Mr. Metis to capture him. But alas he turned tail and rode back as hard as he could pelt to Joe McKay (that famous scout) who was bringing up the rear with a buck–board, and was some twelve miles back at a settler's house, waiting for their return with their prisoner. If Joe had been along, Mr. Almighty Voice's career would have ended right there, for the sergeant was greatly beloved b his comrades.

The winter passed and small bodies of police were constantly traversing the district, visiting Indian camps and settlers' houses, but without success, though rumors were plentiful as blackberries in regard to his whereabouts. The outlaw had sworn he never would be taken alive, and stated to his Indian friends that he was innocent of the crime he was imprisoned for. His success in eluding the Mounted Police and also wounding one or two of the men in civilian search parties had made him a hero in the eyes of his countrymen, and there was no doubt he constantly received food, clothes and shelter from the various Indian camps, for after all blood is thicker than water.

About a year after his escape, one of Kinistin's sons called at my house and hung around Indian fashion until my wife lost patience and said for goodness sake ask what that Indian wants and get rid of him. I was no longer engaged in the fur trade, as my farm and cattle kept me busy, but I still kept up my interest in the Indians. Coaxing Ne–pen–a–qua–nip out to the barn, we sat down for a good smoke, that grand preliminary to all peace parleys. Finally, I said, "My brother, something is troubling you; tell me all, and relieve your heart." His face lighted up, and laying his hand on my breast he thanked me and said, "Oh, my brother, how good it was that when my Father was dying he told us all that for the first and only time in his

[142] Kitchi–Manito–Waya (c. 1875 – 1897). The history of Almighty Voice is too rich for a footnote. I have included a detailed account as an appendix to this volume.

life he had taken a white man for his son and a brother to his children." I agreed with him, but we were making no progress, though I half suspected his errand.

Ne–pen–a–qua–nip then proceeded: "This is very bad having soldiers constantly visiting our tents looking for the one who has done wrong. (It is very seldom an Indian will mention names.) Do you think it is a good thing having this man wandering from tent to tent?"

"No, I do not," was my reply.

"Do you remember how you made all our band promise not to take the law into their own hands when the white men began to come in, and when the lumberman struck me in the face and I ran for my gun with only the thought of revenge in my heart, then my promise to you came back to me and I caught a pony and rode right in to see you and you came right out and saw justice was done for the Indian as well as the white?"

"I remember, oh, my brother. You did well, but don't forget after you had the gun in your hand it was your good wife reminded you of the promise made to me."

"True; well this Almighty Voice is our cousin, but he is wrong. He kills an innocent man and wounded two others. Perhaps other Indians will join him and there will be more bloodshed. It would be a good thing to stop him. Is there any reward offered for his capture?"

"Not that I have ever heard of," I answered.

"Well, if there is a good reward, you and I could catch him." And he then detailed his scheme, which was that I was to start trading again and engage him for my man. Start on the usual trips from encampment, gradually draw near his hiding place, where in the dead of night it would be easy to throw a blanket on him, tie him up and hand him over to the police. I cannot say I was much in love with the scheme. Rather a dangerous one, I thought. No doubt the man was desperate. But after the Indian telling me he was getting sympathizers, I finally consented to write the Commissioner of the Mounted Police and report results to him.

The reply came in due course, and after the usual official verbiage, the pith of it was that this prisoner had escaped from the Northwest Mounted Police and they were quite capable of capturing him without any outside assistance. On the Indian's next visit I repeated this to him and he at once dropped the scheme. Alas! three or four more men were killed or wounded before he was finally disposed of.

Time went on, and I had occasion to visit Kinistino, going by Mount Nebo, that splendid farm lately owned by Thos. Sanderson[143], ex–M.L.A. There I met a famous little Mountie nicknamed, Docky, with a neighbor, both on horseback and armed to the teeth.

Docky was well–known in the force and district for his most impressive way of imparting even minor matters of news, but here was something really big and ranging alongside, he hissed out in tragic tones, "Almighty Voice is surrounded in a bluff near Batoche by a small army of men." Then, letting the effects of that news sink in, he

[143] Thomas Sanderson (1849 – 1922) was the member for Kinistino in Saskatchewan's Legislative Assembly from 1905 to 1908.

went on to say, "I am awfully glad to meet you, and perhaps you can help me out?" "Only too glad if I can, old man. In what way?"

"Well, orders are to corral all Indians on their reserves, and I note three tepees down by Waterhen Lake and I am wondering how I can induce them to go back to La Corne, our instructions being to avoid any force in the matter."

"Well, I will take a hand, Docky, but only on one condition, that I run the business entirely."

He had been quartered with me for some time and knew I had considerable experience with the wily natives so gladly consented.

The tepees were only two or three miles away, and on we rode, "Doc" leading, then Tim, while I brought up the rear, the only one of the party unarmed. I well knew every movement of the police had been watched, though as we passed close to the tents there was no sign of life. I whispered for them to ride on quicker and wait for me a half a mile or so away in a sheltered place. This while I slowed my pony down, and then finally turned him and rode back to the tepees. I called to a kid who was peeping out, "Who is camping here?" "Ne Moo–chom," was the reply, meaning his Grandfather Coup. This was a nickname for a wily old Indian whose real name was "Oop–wy–ah–a–ghe."

Pardon a little digression here as Coup's memory deserves a few lines. In the first place, he was a typical likeness of Lord Beaconsfield[144] and in profile the resemblance was startling. Secondly, he was no lover of the white race, but hid this with a coat of slyness. I had sized him up years before and had absolutely no use for him, as I considered his influence (which was considerable) had a bad effect upon the Indians. I tied up my pony and entered the tepee. Here was Coup as large as life, Blue–Skin and Assin–e–cappo, and the usual cordial shake hands took place. "What's the news," I asked, which is always the first question in an Indian country. "There is none here," was the reply. Silence and lots of smoke. "But you," said Coup, "what is your news?"

Well, I was full of it and gabbed away at generalities for half an hour, giving all small details from Nut Lake, the Bay of the Mountain, We–na–ga–mi, and so on, but I could detect a gleam of suspicion in the old diplomat's eyes.

"Has anything been heard of the unfortunate?" (meaning Almighty Voice) who by the way was his nephew.

"Well," I said, and may God forgive me for lying, "it is reported that he has struck south for the boundary."

Silence, and then: "Well, they knew better."

Finally after finishing our smoke and again shaking hands all round I started out, but just at the entrance I stopped, slapped my leg and said, "Well, I nearly forgot, but there is news, big news!" And now indeed they crowded close to hear it.

"What is it, Ogemases?" Why I replied, "Gordon is being moved." Gordon was the Farm Instructor at Ft. La Corne, and was very popular with the Indians and very generous with Governor Grub. "Yes, he is ordered to The Pas, but is giving a feast to

[144] Benjamin Disraeli (1804 – 1881), 1st Earl of Beaconfield and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1874 to 1880.

the whole band before going," and I started counting on my fingers to get the date. "Why, it is tomorrow. Yes," counting again, "no doubt it is tomorrow, and you fellows won't see him and you will miss the feast."

A short council followed, the women were told, and before I left the tepee packing had started, and by the time I had joined my companions the tents were down and the boys after the ponies. Docky was thunderstruck and wanted to know the why and wherefore, but I simply told him to keep a discreet distance in the rear and follow them to La Corne. Naturally, when they reached the Reserve they heard the truth, no doubt with feelings too deep for words. I told my Indians the story on returning home and they enjoyed the joke tremendously and the news went far and wide how Ogemases had outwitted Oup–why–ah–a–ghe (alias Coup) that famous and sly old Medicine Man, not to mention diplomat.

I did not see the old fellow until the following summer, when, walking with Doctor Shadd, I passed Coup sitting on the Carrot River bridge. He looked at me and shook his head several times, as much as to say "This man is beyond redemption." "Requiescat in Pace," Coup, for he joined his fathers some years ago.

Just at the time that Coup, Blueskin and Assin–e–cappo were trekking to the feast at La Corne, Almighty Voice and a young Indian who used to trade with me, named I–ah–sao, were being shelled and shot at by a small army of men surrounding the green bluff in the centre of which the outlaw had dug a rifle pit. His old mother sat on a high hill close at hand singing his war song and death chant. They were both dead when the pit was rushed.

A sad finale to this true yarn is that the report was general to the effect that the missing steer turned up and poor Lo was innocent after all, but I cannot vouch for this.

19. No Greater Faith (1919)

Indians are varied in character much like white men, but I have known intimately a number of the older men who were spiritually minded though Pagan in religion. One instance comes back to me while writing. Essa–wa–pum–o, an elderly Saulteaux, was my steady friend for many years and it was a real grief to hear of his death in the spring of 1919. A fine hunter, his specialty was bears, especially finding their dens in winter. He did not disclose his methods, but I always insisted, that he smelt them out, much to the old man's amusement.

On one occasion in March of a long steady winter, word came in that they were short of food at his camp some thirty miles to the southeast. Loading a dog–sled with some provisions and trading supplies, I started early next morning for Mik–e–su Pe–mat–to–ga–win (lake where the eagle swims) where he was camped, and reached there in good time. Three teepees were standing in a well–sheltered spot, but no one was in sight. I noted three freshly killed bear skins on stretchers, one large and two small, and was pleased to think the hunter's skill had again saved the little band from hunger. Approaching the centre tent, home of Essa–wa–pum–o, I could hear him praying to the Great Spirit, giving thanks for being guided to the winter den of bears;

taking no credit for his own skill, but giving "Kitche Manitou" all the praise. I peeped in the tepee. Pots of bear meat were cooking over the small fire in the centre, and all the little band were devoutly listening to the old man's prayer and grace, though some of the younger ones were casting hungry glances at the food, which evidently they had not yet tasted. Finally grace was over and I called "How" from the entrance to the teepee. They came out like a swarm of bees delighted to see the trader with his load of good things to eat.

Camping in the old man's tent as usual, and after a famous supper in which tender young bear meat figured on the menu, I had him describe the finding of the bears, which he did most graphically, and further said, that when starting out early that morning he prayed long and earnestly to Manitou for guidance and success in his hunt, and you can see for yourself the reply: Bear meat in plenty and furs to purchase the flour, tea, bacon and sugar our good trader has brought us.

"What condition were these bears in?" I asked. "Very fat," was his reply. "A she bear and two large cubs, the latter suckling their mother."

"As they had been in the den since late October or early November, where on earth did the old she bear get milk for her cubs, as they store up no food in their winter quarters?"

"Why," was Essa–wa–pum–o's reply, "you know all about that."

"How is that?"

"Why, your Big Book tells you."

"What book?"

"Oh, you are stupid. Why, Kitche Mussi–na–e–gun of course" (meaning Bible).

"But what does the Bible say about it?"

"Why, God gives her the milk!"

And verily the old pagan Indian's reply made me speechless, for I could think of no other solution.

Appendix: The Last Stand of Almighty Voice[145]

Events of wide significance have been decided by the merest trifles. Rome was saved by the cackling of geese; the Danes lost Scotland through the sting of a thistle; Robert Bruce owed his life and later kingship to a spider's web, and a pair of handcuffs precipitated one of the grimmest tragedies known in the tragedy–laden North.

Around the firesides of Prince Albert they still tell the story of Almighty Voice. It is a tale bald and terrible as a Greek epic: the tale of an Indian whose honor was as white and precious to him as if it had been his one asset in the crowded marts of the world, who defended it to the last, taking terrible toll of those whose man–made laws would have be–smirched it.

"But what did Almighty Voice do that started all the trouble?" I asked one of the actors in the tragedy that is now ten years old.

"Do?" he repeated, infinite scorn in his voice. "Do? He didn't do anything. They said he killed a calf."

In the days to which Prince Albert refers now only to show how far she has left them behind, Field Day was the most important event in the summer calendar. There is no one in Prince Albert now who can recall a Field Day up to 1895 at which Almighty Voice was not easily the champion shot and runner.

He was the fastest runner ever seen in the North, and none was ever known to be a surer shot. Year after year he came to the Field Day contests, and year after year he went away the acknowledged champion. He was six feet tall, perfectly proportioned, the handsomest Indian known among the Crees, comely though they are as a tribe. And with it all he was industrious, peace–loving, law–abiding, a commendable citizen, and a thoroughly good Indian. His word was good with every man in Prince Albert. He made no claims to equality, social or otherwise; but bore himself always with a dignity that commanded respect.

And so, when word flew from end to end of Prince Albert, in 1895, that a boy from the reservation had confessed to seeing Almighty Voice kill a heifer calf that had recently been found with all the choicest cuts gone, Prince Albert to its last man refused to believe in his guilt. Yet cattle killing had been done so by the wholesale that the country for miles was wrought up to the highest pitch. Not a soul believed Almighty Voice was guilty; but he was the only one who had been accused, and a posse went out to bring him in.

They found him peacefully plowing. He quietly denied that he had killed any cattle. The men in the party were all his friends, at least he always had so considered them. Hitherto, his mere word with them had been sufficient. He maintained his dignity even when they explained that according to the white man's law he must go with them to Prince Albert, and prove his innocence. Not until someone flashed a pair of handcuffs before his eyes did his Indian stoicism desert him. Then his dignity was thrown to the winds. He stormed and pleaded; he threatened; he gave them his sacred promise that he would go with them peacefully, if they would not put the handcuffs

[145] Originally published in 1908. Written by Mae Harris Anson (1865 – 1934)

on him. In vain. Yet, though he made no forcible resistance, though he merely grew sullen when he realized the inevitable, the men in the party sensed the tragedy of the moment when they heard the steel click on his wrists.

For in that moment a thoroughly good Indian was changed into the worst of the bad; by that simple act every man in the posse helped to set in motion the grim tragedy that was not to be ended until two years later, and only then after Almighty Voice had taken a dreadful toll in human life.

So they took Almighty Voice back to Prince Albert, handcuffed, and the on–time champion, who had been accustomed to hear his progress greeted with a roar of cheers, rode as a felon through the long stretch of River avenue, amid silence as profound as it was full of pity.

But in the morning he was gone. While his jailer slept in the same room with him, Almighty Voice had picked his pocket of the key and fled. They brought him in again, this time not only with handcuffs on his wrists, but with shackles on his legs. But again they could not keep him. In the dead of night, a white man, who is to–day a respected citizen of Prince Albert, stole in, and with his own hands filed off his bonds, and with his own hands opened the door and sent him out into the night.

It was nine months before they found him. And in that time Almighty Voice broke every law of God and man that thwarted the flood of his newly awakened evil desires.

Everywhere he went he left a trail of trouble behind him – yet before the North West Mounted Police could arrive on the scene, his fleetness of foot and his Indian cunning, reinforced by the natural sympathy of his tribe, as well as of many a white settler, had carried him far from the scene and successfully covered his trail.

Late in the fall of 1895, word was received at the barracks of the Mounted Police at Prince Albert that Almighty Voice was in hiding not far from Duck Lake. Without delay, Sergeant Colebrook set out with a h——— scout to arrest Almighty Voice and bring him back to the jail at Prince Albert.

Until one has bunked with these riders of the plains, or eaten of their bread and sat 'round their fires, whether in camp or in barracks, he cannot understand nor appreciate this most wonderful patrol in the world. The Mounted Police is the hardest of all services to get into, and the easiest to leave – and for the rest, the man permitted to wear the red tunic and the crest with the buffalo head must understand that his first duty is to arrest and not to kill; he must face danger unarmed without flinching and with a smile.

Sergeant Colebrook rode so fast and hard toward Duck Lake that not even the mysterious news channels of the s———s could get word of his coming to Almighty Voice. They rode down upon him over a rise of land, just after he had shot a prairie chicken. Almighty Voice knew only too well what the presence there meant of the man in the red tunic. He began running, backward, loading his gun as he ran, and crying out:

"Keep back! Keep back, or I will shoot!"

Without slackening his pace, Sergeant Colebrook rode on, without so much as attempting to undo the holster of his revolver.

"Tell him that if he advances another step I will kill him!" Almighty voice cried out to the h———, as though he thought Colebrook could not hear. Colebrook never even swerved in his course; but still advanced, smiling. Almighty Voice raised his gun, and without apparently taking aim shot him through the heart.

The h——— fled to town to give the alarm, he himself being a member of the force; but by the time a rescue party arrived on the scene, Almighty Voice had disappeared again. And for all the trace they found of him for eighteen months, he might have been a blind mole burrowing in the bowels of the earth.

On May 27, 1897, the barracks at Prince Albert received word by telephone that Almighty Voice was hiding in the Minnichinas Hills, seventeen miles from Duck Lake. There it was, thirty–six hours later, that Almighty Voice, with two followers, Little Salteaux and Doubling, sat on the side of a hill, and in grim enjoyment watched a detail of the Mounted Police ride by. The Indians were thinking they were safe, when, without warning, another detail swooped over the hill and almost rode them down before either side realized what had happened.

When the smoke cleared away, the captain lay wounded, and two men were dead and the three Indians had apparently melted away.

Before the police had recovered from the surprise into which the ambush had naturally thrown them, two civilians appeared on the scene – Richard Cook, now Mayor of Prince Albert, and George Grundy. They were returning from a trip to Battleford, and the sound of firearms guided them to the scene. Cook is a veteran of the Riel rebellion of 1885, and knows Indian tactics in a scrimmage.

"Sweep the bush before it gets dark," he said to the sergeant who had assumed command when the captain fell. "If you wait until morning, they will slip away from you again."

The little party quickly formed in a thin red line, and gamebeaters for royalty never swept covert cleaner than they did; yet never a trace of the Indians could they find. Had they looked behind them with half the interest with which they looked ahead, they probably would have seen their prey creeping stealthily along in their rear. When they reached the outer edge of the wood, Cook and the sergeant turned and looked at each other in puzzled wonder.

"Are you sure they are in this bush?" asked Cook.

"As sure as I am that the Aurora Borealis'll be tearing things up six months hence," the sergeant said.

"Better call in your men, then," said Cook, "and give it a back sweep."

The sergeant turned to give the order, when there came a blinding flash from out of the gloom, and he fell dead, another victim to the marksmanship of Almighty Voice.

Cook and Grundy wheeled in their tracks as one man, and as they did shot at Almighty Voice and Little Salteaux, whom they saw racing up the hill. Four days later, when all was over, Cook found that he and Grundy had both caught Almighty Voice in the same leg. It was a wound that would have dropped an ordinary man; but with hardly diminished speed Almighty Voice kept on. Cook and Grundy were hardly twelve feet behind him when the two Indians suddenly disappeared from sight. Cook

knew what that meant, and threw himself on the ground. Grundy did not comprehend the situation, and before Cook could so much as give a warning cry, the rifle of Almighty Voice spoke from the rifle pits where he and Little Salteaux had taken refuge, and Grundy fell, pierced through the heart.

Cook raised himself and looked up the hill in the gloom to locate the enemy – and gazed straight into the barrel of a gun, behind which blazed the eyes of Almighty Voice. For several seconds they looked at each other. "It seemed minutes to me," Cook said, in telling the story, "and dashed long ones, too!" And then both shot at the same instant. Cook felt the sting of a bullet, as it ploughed across his shoulder, and had the chagrin of seeing his own shot fly over the head of Almighty Voice. As he strained his eyes toward the rifle pit, he saw what looked like the blanketed back of one of the Indians rise a few inches above the earthwork. He fired, and again, to his chagrin, knew that he had been tricked by a blanket hoisted on a rifle, as he heard the ping of a bullet on metal, and even the satisfaction at having put one of the rifles out of commission was swallowed up in his disappointment at having been outwitted.

Before another shot could be fired, a policeman came crashing through the wood, his scarlet tunic making him a glowing target in the gloom. All unknowingly, he halted directly between the guns of Almighty Voice and Richard Cook, crying to his companions some distance away:

"Here he is! I see him! I see him!"

"For God's sake, get away from there, or he will get you!" Cook cried; but before the sentence was finished Almighty Voice fired again, and the policeman fell with his head not three feet outside the rifle pit. For half an hour Cook tried to draw the fire of Almighty Voice, to permit the wounded man being dragged away out of reach of the Indians trapped in the pit. The ruse was in vain; for though there was only one rifle in commission between the two Indians, the rapidity of fire that came from the pit was something fairly devilish. Perhaps, had Cook been supplied with battle rounds of ammunition, he might have won out; but before he could make any impression on the rapid firer in the pit, his ammunition gave out, and they were obliged to leave the poor fellow to his fate, while they made their way back to the camp for help. They had hardly slipped over the first rise of land, however, before there came one more rifle crack from the pit, and they knew that Almighty Voice was a true Indian in his fighting tactics, and had decided to give no quarter.

That night when the camp had settled down, Richard Cook could not sleep. He knew that Almighty Voice and Little Salteaux had not the ghost of a chance in their fight; for orders had gone to Prince Albert for the seven pounder to be brought out to the hills, and a message to Regina had already started reinforcements and a nine–pounder north by special train. He recalled the pride of Almighty Voice in his happier days, his self–respecting life, his popularity with the sport–loving people of Prince Albert, and though Almighty Voice had killed his dearest friend that day, and there were half a dozen other deaths to his credit, Richard Cook was human enough to understand the Indian's original burning sense of injustice.

In the silence of the sleeping camp, Cook crept out again within hail of the rifle pit, and as a warning click came through the darkness he called softly:

"A friend, Almighty Voice, a friend!"

All was silent, as if the refugee in the pit could not accept as friend any member of the party that held him in a stage of siege.

"Give up and come in, Almighty Voice," Cook went on. "You have broken the white man's law, and they have trapped you at last. There is no possible escape. It is surrender for you or death within a few hours. Take my advice and come in."

There was silence for a moment, after he had finished, and if Cook had not known the ways of the Indians he might have thought that his voice had not carried to the rifle pit. Then, out of the darkness, Almighty Voice spoke in tones tense with feeling:

"I fought well to–day," he said. "I think they might bring me some supper."

"You shall have food and drink, all you want, Almighty Voice, and your wounds shall be dressed, if you will yield and come into camp," was Cook's reply.

There was no answer, and even Richard Cook's steady nerves began to tingle in the tension of suspense as to what the next moment might bring out of the darkness; when suddenly the silence was broken by a chant, weird and strident, a death chant that turned Richard Cook cold; a chant such as he never heard before, and he had heard many.

Without another word, he turned and made his way back to the camp, knowing that Almighty Voice had chosen death in whatever form it might come, rather than surrender. This was on Thursday. Friday passed with a little desultory firing. Saturday came and went, bringing with it the seven–pounder from Prince Albert, and the reinforcements with the nine–pounder from Regina, while civilians had swelled the besieging force to one hundred. And still there came no sign of surrender from the two Indians who had been in the rifle pit for seventy–two hours.

On Sunday morning it was decided that the siege must end, and the order was given to shell the rifle pit. Think of it! One hundred men, with a seven–pounder and a nine–pounder, pitted against two, one of whom was disabled by wounds, with only a single rifle between them, and both weakened by a four–day fast!

What followed is something that hardly one of those hundred men likes to talk about, even though law and order decree that the end justified the means. The rifle pit was located by landmarks, and the gunner told where to sight his gun. They fired ten rounds.

"It was the best shooting I ever saw," Richard Cook said, in telling the story. "Every shot went where it was intended to go. Trees went down like nine–pins, and great holes were burrowed in the earth. Every one of those shots changed the landscape in a way that shows, even now, ten years later."

Two hours after the last shot, the one hundred policemen and civilians charged up the hill, yelling and cheering. And what a sight met their eyes! The Indians dead, and in the pit the mute evidences of their ghastly struggle for life – bark of trees stripped and chewed, a hunting knife bound to a stick to dig a hole two feet deep, in a vain search for water.

Canada's fine–grained sense of law and order had been appeased; but there are those even to–day who question if that single heifer was worth it.