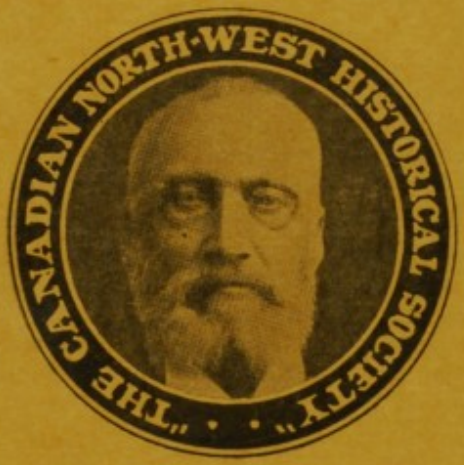
Canadian North-West Historical Society Publications

Chapters in the North-West History Prior to 1890 - - Related by Old Timers



Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan

BATTLEFORD
SASKATCHEWAN

Vol. I., No. V.
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Canadian North-West Historical Society

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THE AIMS OF THE SOCIETY

1. To collect and save the life sketches and historical stories of our pioneers, also the documents which throw light on the West's development prior to 1890.

2. The publication of historical works which contain the original stories of the pioneer. All the stories relating to an historical event will be edited in one publication and will provide an up-to-date source history of the Prairie Provinces. The members will receive the publications of Volume I, of five or six publications, on payment of the subscription of $5.00. A special offer of Life Subscription of $25.00 is being offered for a short time.

3. The Historical Archives at Battleford contain books, maps, pamphlets, relics, documents relating to North-West History, for use of the research student.

4. This society will assist in the publication of historical works for individuals and other societies, and it has secured the assistance of Western history men to assist in this research.

5. Historic spots are marked and historic interest in these is created. Public meetings are held to further this work.

6. This is the West's urgent problem. Save the Source History and Honor the Pioneer.

FIFTY YEARS ON THE SASKATCHEWAN

Being a history of the Cree Indian domestic life and the difficulties which led to serious agitation and conflict of 1885 in the Battleford locality as written by Robert Jefferson after fifty years' research and service.

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Foreword

A cultural manifestation such as that which has found expression in the movement to "Save the Source History and Honor the Pioneer", is a laudable and eminently gratifying thing in a young people and in a young province.

Saskatchewan's very youth suggests to the casual thinker a history brief and, therefore, colorless as recent history, in the distortion of near perspective, usually appears. But—there is another Saskatchewan antedating the formation of the province, whose soil bore the imprint of native and exploring feet; a soil smeared with the red blood of rebellion; a soil which gradually, if reluctantly, yielded its fruits to pioneer travail. It is this earlier Saskatchewan upon which, in the main, the Canadian North-West Historical Society focusses its attention and into which it probes the finger of research.

Some episodes in the history of this earlier Saskatchewan, elemental and romantic in character, still are of record in the memories of living men. It is part of the self-assumed task of the society to ensure the preservation of these records that posterity may benefit from the lesson they teach and the inspiration they give. Beyond these, however, are other passages in the history of the province lying in a period dating from the advent of the white man to the territory now known as Saskatchewan. The records relating to this period gradually are being revealed—and in this process of revelation the society is doing an inestimable service to present and succeeding generations.

More remote still is that primal period in the history of the province when the Saskatchewan prairie was ranged by nomadic, aboriginal tribes. Concerning this period the records, essentially, have been woven into tribal lore and can only be unravelled and preserved by enlightened and meticulous study of the customs, language and traditions of the tribes themselves.

The Cree Indians, perhaps more than any others, were identified with the early history of Manitoba and Assiniboia to the banks of the Saskatchewan. Consequently, the present study of the Cree Indian, published herewith by the society, is a valuable contribution to the historical background of the province of today. Given the stamp of approval by a competent

critic, declared by him to be an "important and authoritative work on the subject", the study now published under the title "Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan" should commend itself to all members of historical societies. Not only that, it should commend the work of the Canadian North-West Society to every resident of Saskatchewan who loves his homeland and particularly to those who revere the memory of those hardy pioneers who built so solidly the foundations upon which the province of today is erected. The Saskatchewan Government, appreciative of the work of the Society and in endorsation of it, is assisting in the publication of this booklet.

JAMES G. GARDINER.

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THE TRAIL FROM ENGLAND TO RED PHEASANT'S RESERVE, BATTLE RIVER 1876-1878

The Start—Manitoba—Pioneering—Off to the North-West—Battleford—Red Pheasant's Reserve—The Sun Dance.

THE START—

The importance of the beginning of any undertaking—of the time, the circumstances, and so forth, has been impressed on me by a life-long experience; so, that I may render this narrative complete and comprehensible, I will commence with a short sketch of the events that brought me to the Decision, the Time and the Place and rendered all that followed possible.

I was born in England—on Tyneside—of a family in good circumstances, sea-faring for many generations, and received a fair, indeed I may say a superior education, since it was intended I should learn Civil Engineering and was prepared accordingly.

It came to pass, however, when I was about eighteen years of age, that a connection of mine—a cousin—becoming engaged to be married, and seeing no suitable prospects open to him in England, determined to break the strings that bound him to the cut-and-dried and unpromising life in the Old Land, and try his fortune in some newer country. His family had of late years suffered severe reverses, and his parents had not long survived the changed conditions, so that he and his brother had none of the ties that make emigration a serious matter to the average person, and cause thoughtful weighing of "the ills we have" against those we "know not of". He chose the logical course. First, he thought of going to the Fiji Islands, which had been recently annexed. Some trivial thing, however, turned his attention to Canada, and more for the sake of adventure than anything else, and because he desired a companion, I agreed to join him. Before we were ready to start, a third lined up with us, and, it having fortunately occurred to us that we had a slight acquaintance with a young fellow supposed to be settled in Manitoba, we unanimously chose that province for our objective.

This idea of mine ran directly counter to the views my parents had fondly entertained as to my future, and they did everything to discourage the enterprise. Everything was against it—nothing was for it; not a single argument supported it. Obstinacy and confidence in myself were always said to be my dis-

tinguishing characteristics, and my father finally relented to the extent of providing funds little more than sufficient to carry me to my destination, hoping thereby that I would quickly become disillusioned, and be ready enough to return home. My excuse is that I was young and foolish, and it was so written in the book of fate.

Once decided, we wasted no time. We booked our passage by the "Allan Line", and, since we had determined on a strictly economical programme, took second class tickets—intermediate, it was called at that time. This was early in the spring of 1876. Our equipment was quickly got together, and included everything our imagination or reading suggested might come in useful, and it is unnecessary to say that rifles and revolvers and shotguns and bowie knives were not omitted. We were bound for a wilderness, and though my companions intended to "settle", game must be plentiful, and its pursuit provided for. Clothes, too, for Canada was a cold country, we took in great store.

We journeyed to Liverpool, and went on board the "Polynesian". We were "emigrants" and tried to live up to the part, but the inspection of our quarters brought to our notice various unpleasant conditions that had not occurred to us when we made up our minds to rough it. Eventually, we reconsidered the question, and resolved that, while very careful expenditure was both salutory and necessary for people in our situation, yet we must draw the line somewhere, and even economy warranted our giving two pounds each to two petty officers for the use of their cabin. These philanthropists also introduced us to somebody from the cook's department, who, for the consideration of a further two pounds each, undertook to provide us with cabin fare throughout the journey.

We were fourteen days between Liverpool and Quebec owing to trouble with an ice field, so, as it happened, we got value for our money. I may state, by the way, that what impressed me most during the sea voyage was the amount of food thrown overboard, and the cheapness of tobacco; the first accounted for by the low prices in Canada, where all supplies were bought, and the second owing to getting it out of Bond, duty free. I was not seasick during the voyage and enjoyed the trip immensely. Yet I could not forget the misery of those less fortunate; how they sprawled in every direction on the decks, not caring whether they lived or died.

But, for them as for us the voyage came to an end, and we landed at Quebec. We tarried there just long enough to

ascertain whether it were true that in the saloons one was perfectly free to fill one's glass with as much whiskey as it would hold for no greater a price than a small dose would cost. It was incomprehensible, but it was a fact. We were booked right through to Manitoba, and having committed ourselves to the charge of the corporation who undertook the job, the exigencies of our contract and the inexorable train hurried us off—and on—so that we rushed when we fain would have tarried, and saw nothing but scenery till we came to Sarnia, where we had to trans-ship to boat for the passage of the Great Lakes to Duluth. The line ran through a wooded wilderness for the most part, with an embryo city here and there, and everywhere a most depressing sameness, and a perpetual and monotonous chorus of frogs. Under the guidance of the well informed, we had laid in quite a store of eatables for the train journey—for it was an immigrant train—with which we amused ourselves during the long ride, yet we were quite ready for a good meal at the periodical stopping places along the road. We were young, and English, and just through a sea voyage.

A further proof that we were what, in the West are called "easy marks", was given at Sarnia, where we were again held up, and got better berths and improved service for a consideration. But fortune stood behind us still, for when we came almost in sight of Duluth, the boat, which was the first of the season, remained icebound with the shore on the near horizon, for ten days, so that, though we had to put up with reduced rations at the last, the steamboat company did not make very much out of us.

When the question of food became of consequence, the skipper talked of sending a party to the shore, apparently with the idea of lightening the demands on the commissariat, it was headed by one of the mates, and as I was dying for something to put a little variety into living, I volunteered to join the party. A stern wind for many days had drifted all the ice to the west end of the lake; this froze each night quite hard; the shore was reckoned about ten miles distant, and could be reached in a day. Every man carried a short board, for passing places where the ice was soft, and a start was made early in the morning. I entered on the undertaking with the light heart of the ignorant, and during that awful journey, I often wished I had left well enough alone. The shore was twenty miles or more instead of the estimated ten, and it took forty-eight hours to make the land. Also it was a very sorry party that made it, a wet, a hungry and a miserable party. On the fourteenth day of the trip, the west wind blew clear a passage and the boat came

to Duluth, which was then a mere outpost of civilisation. Here, was not much of interest, except that it gave us our first illustration of what is to be contended with in man's effort to subdue nature, and found a city in the wilds. Thunder Bay, we had seen, but that assemblage of huts showed no sign of ambition. It might always have been; it might continue to be, but it gave no indication to strangers of any aspiration to greatness.

At Duluth, we again trans-shipped to make the fourth stage of our journey by rail to Fisher's Landing, on the Red Lake River. Here we traversed a rough, unsettled country, gradually changing into docility from rocks and chasms to the fertile lands of northern Minnesota. Fisher's Landing was well named. It consisted of an improvised wharf, and what they called a "hotel". Red Lake River is a tributary of the Red River, narrow and winding, commandeered for the time being, to connect the end of the rails with the boat line on Red River. While we waited for the arrival of the boat, a plausible prestidigitator amused his leisure at our expense, for a couple of hours, illustrating the vagaries of the "three card trick". He looked rustic and simple, and handled the cards clumsily, but he knew a great deal more than we did. It cost us something to find that out. Indeed, one of my partners lost all his money and his watch and chain before his confidence waned sufficiently to allow himself to be dragged away from such a seductive opportunity. The trip hence to Winnipeg enabled me to make the acquaintance of Mennonites, who more than shared accommodations with us. As a people they were not prepossessing; they were a ragged, dirty lot. But time has proved their worth as settlers; they took up land in Manitoba and have since fought their peaceful way through despite and contumely to wealth and what is called civilisation.

At this period, Winnipeg, as a city, or indeed as a town, was not much to speak of. There was practically only the one street—Main Street—with one or two short offshoots towards the river, which winds a serpentine course through a long and wide plain of clay from the Boundary to Lake Winnipeg. The banks vary in height from twenty feet down to nothing, and seem almost to offer inducements to periodical floods. The streets were unpaved, native mud; like rock when dry, and next to impassible when wet. There were sidewalks of boards for foot passengers. I recollect one occasion, when I had to make my way on foot from the town to the "settlement". I started just after a thunder shower, and had to take off my shoes and stockings and tramp barefooted. The mud is of a gluey consistency,

and more and more adheres to the boot till lifting the foot means lifting pounds of dirt at each step. Though Winnipeg was not large, yet it numbered among its prominent citizens some enterprising persons. Everybody fastened upon us, to ask us questions, and to offer us advice, generally wanting to sell us something they said we could not do without. One man tried to sell me a lot on Main Street for eighty dollars, but it did not take much consideration to turn down the proposal. We had no other wish than to get to the end of our journey as quickly as possible, and these solicitous attentions took away any pleasure we might have got by making a stay in Winnipeg. We escaped eventually without much damage, and, as the person to whom we were going, in the first place, lived on Lake Winnipeg, we took passage on a small steamboat that plied on the river, and landed at Selkirk.

At this period, Selkirk was one of those improvised towns that mark a step in some corporate undertaking, and was distinguished only as the stepping off place for the trans-continental railroad that was slowly building west from Lake Superior. Here, apparently, the modified civilisation of Manitoba ended, and we were thrown on our own resources if we wished to penetrate further into the country. We were still sixty miles from our objective, and could get there only by water, so we hired a "skiff"—a small flat bottomed boat—with a man to row it, and embarked on the Red River. The "settlement" (that is the Red River Settlement) on each side of the river continues for six or eight miles below Selkirk, where the banks are too low, and the dry land merges into "swamp", which again merges into lake. We had left all our baggage behind us at Selkirk, and travelled light. It was a beautiful day, the river wide, smooth and impressive in its strangeness, and someone else was doing the work, so there was nothing to prevent us enjoying the trip, and we reached our destination just as the sun went down on a day in the beginning of June.

MANITOBA

What I expected to find at the end of my journey, I do not now know, indeed I doubt whether I had ever any definite ideas on the subject, but I well remember that all the pleasant feelings produced by the journey were rudely scattered by the sight of a man with nothing more than underclothes on, coming down to the shore to bid us welcome. This shock was closely followed by another, when, after the excitement of arrival had subsided, and we were invited to partake of refreshment—there was no sugar for the tea. There were minor disappointments

between these shocks, for the whole surroundings had such a bedraggled, uncared-for-look, that I wished I were safely out of it. This might be "settling", but certainly not the kind one boasts of or is envied. Virgin bush shut in the "shack" on all sides beyond the little clearing which served for a small garden. The soil was waterlogged, being but little above the level of the lake; and, so far as I could perceive during my short stay, our host was more of a fisherman than farmer, and lived on what he obtained from the water rather than from the earth. I had yet to accustom myself to an exclusively fish diet, and I was in no mood to start; one of my companions was similarly minded, so we left the first chance we got, and returned to "The Settlement". Here, at a boarding house much in vogue at the time, kept by a Halfbreed named Bird, we rusticated for the summer. This place was literally a nest of young Englishmen, fellows who hired with surveyors every summer, and returned to hibernate at this convenient stopping-place when work failed them. The Birds were good-natured, easy-going people, and their never failing welcome to all, money or no money, had, I suspect a good deal, to do with the popularity of the house. Here, plenty reigned, and their board bills troubled them little. They paid when they were able, or not at all.

With one of these soldiers of fortune I had a real taste of adventure. The man's name was Ogilvie, and we were both spoiling for something to do, so a visit to our friends at the lake presented the appearance of a diversion. Our conveyance was a "dug-out"—a tree some eighteen inches thick, and ten or twelve feet long, hollowed out, sharpened at the ends, that is, roughly shaped to a boat. A blanket, and a few carrots, pulled, as one might say accidentally as we passed through the garden to the canoe, was all we took with us, since we expected to reach our destination that same night. Hardly had we started, when a thunderstorm came up; the rain fell in sheets, till we were not only wet through, but could hardly bale the water out of the canoe fast enough to keep it from sinking. The Red River, for twenty miles before it empties into Lake Winnipeg, flows through a low, flat country; all that separates the water in the river from the water on the land on each side of it, is the banks of sand, washed up by the tide, and only a few feet wide. The thunderstorm passed on, but the rain continued to pour steadily, so, as we were in constant danger of being swamped, we put to shore to await more clement weather. In the willows that stud these sandbanks, we sought shelter, hanging our blanket over a stick, roof-wise, to shed the water. We were soaked; the willows were too small and green to make a

fire; so we crouched on our haunches, silently munched a few carrots for pastime, and waited till better weather or daylight should come to release us. Needless to say, we did not sleep. At break of day, it still rained, and a strong wind from the north chilled us to the bones. There was nothing for us but to go on. The north wind, in this flat country, turns the tide up the river, and it was with infinite difficulty we reached the mouth of the west channel. The wind had churned the waters of the lake up so that it was impossible for negotiation by our little craft, so we perforce landed at the last point on the river, to wait till the water should be calm enough to allow us to make the remaining few miles of our journey. We finished the carrots for supper, and, after tying the canoe, so that it should not be washed away, slept as best we could under the willow bushes. Next morning, though it had ceased raining, the wind still raged, and, what was worse, the rising water had so encroached on our little camping place as to leave only room to turn round in, and we had to wade out to where our canoe was tied—fortunately, well tied—to bring it within reach in case we had to use it. A wind like this generally continues three days; this one followed the rule; and during our sojourn on that sand bank, we never got lonely. There was too much to think about. On the third day, the wind went down in the evening, but, as the heaving waters of Lake Winnipeg still forbade our taking the usual route; as we had eaten nothing for two days; and as we had stayed as long as we wanted to stay, we launched out into the swamp on the land side of the sand-bank, thus, partly wading through water two to six feet deep, and partly paddling or punting where the grass was not too thick, we came safely to firm ground some six or eight miles from our starting place. Whence, a short walk brought us to our destination; a short stay sufficed us; and we returned again to The Settlement, and to contented comfort.

About this time, one of my fellow adventurers, converted to the idea that pioneering was devoid of charm, left for the States; the other, who had no choice in the matter, picked out a place near the lake as a homestead, and started to work. For me, that object had no attraction, so I stayed in The Settlement, hoping for something to do. But, I was a stranger in the country, and did not know how or where to seek it.

In those days there was little or no accretion to the population of Manitoba. The Rebellion was still fresh in people's minds; the country was not advertised; and there was no easy way of getting there. The Canadian Government had taken hold of the trans-continental railway, and were making very slow

progress. A start, but not a very vigorous start, was made after the Rebellion, at getting the country surveyed, preparatory to settlement, and a number of young adventurers had drifted in with survey parties. But these had no intention of staying, they were so-journers merely, and when work stopped, drifted again to some other place. That summer, survey work had, for some reason or other, been halted and I could find nothing in that line to do, while other occupation there was none. I had quite a sum of money left yet, so I loafed the summer through, wearing my heart out in impatient impotence, but, at the same time assimilating a fair amount of experience.

The Red River Settlement of those days was an almost perfect Arcady. The land-level as a table on each side of the river was parcelled off into narrow strips, a few chains wide and two miles long, so that for sixty miles or so below Winnipeg the houses would be about seventy-five or a hundred yards apart. This made for sociability, which, under the system of land division throughout the West, is sadly wanting. Each family kept a cow or two, and was therefrom provided with butter, cheese, and beef; shoes, also, by the way, for they tanned their own leather. Each family also raised enough wheat for home consumption—in favorable years a little more—and there were several mills along the river, worked by water. Many families kept sheep; carded and spun the wool, and either made clothes for themselves or had them made by local artisans. During the summer, in a leisurely manner, they sowed, reaped and made hay for the winter's use. In the fall, they might go down to Lake Winnipeg, and in a week or so, kill their supply of whitefish. So, when the short days came, they gave themselves up to enjoyment—dancing and making merry—till spring and satiation made the change to more matter of fact occupations both needful and welcome. A few years before this, annual hunting parties left for the prairie to obtain buffalo meat but the big game had retired far to the West now, and was out of reach. The people appeared quite contented, because they had the best of everything they knew of; and none could acquire much more than his neighbor, no matter how thrifty or avaricious. They were poor, but only by comparison, and the means of obtaining a living always remained to even the laziest, when they should be sufficiently chastened by want. They had their virtues, and they had their faults, both regulated by surrounding circumstances.

The lower part of the settlement—that is from Selkirk downstream—was supposed to be an Indian Reserve, but the

land, at the time of the appropriation had nearly all passed by purchase into private hands, so that trouble occasionally crept in, even here. The Indians were Swampies—a sort of cross between Saulteaux and Cree-Northern Indians, fish-eaters and fur-catchers, hunters and boatmen. These people supplied the Hudson's Bay Company with crews for their annual summer trips. They were sturdy and faithful voyageurs, without much taste for an agricultural life. But, the waters teemed with fish and the woods with fur, and "sufficient to the day is the evil thereof".

When immigration crept into the country, the Halfbreeds wilted before it; they could not go the pace. Temptation overwhelmed them; they gradually sold out and took the remnant of their possessions to the Saskatchewan Valley, where the lure of extravagance and dissipation promised to leave them undisturbed for a while.

In the settlement, I remained all summer, paying board at the rate of three dollars a week. The approach of winter, and the necessity of thoroughly re-organising my scale of living, led me to determine to spend the idle months down on Lake Winnipeg along with my cousin. He was anxious to get a house built, and I was quite willing to help him, since I was thoroughly tired of idleness; also, by pooling our resources, we could put in the winter much more cheaply than each alone. Thither accordingly, I went, and, after we had obtained a supply of provisions and cold weather necessities, started work on his house.

PIONEERING—

While Manitoba is practically a prairie province, yet there are parts of it that are thickly covered with bush. From the Red River, eastward; the valley of the Assiniboine, and some distance south of that stream; also the northern districts were covered with dense forests. It was on the edge of this bush that I received my initiation into the mysteries of pioneering. The reason why my cousin had determined on such an unsuitable location, when all the prairie was at his disposal, he could never explain, and I put it down to the determining influence of circumstance. Certain it is that he could never have made a farm out of it, but this, at the time, he did not know. A great part of the land was poplar bush, which, at least simplified the question of building.

We had to begin at the beginning, for though he had put in the summer right there, there was nothing to show for it. Unfortunately, my cousin had very decided ideas as to the kind

of building that would suit him, and those ideas no consideration would induce him to modify. The "shack", he scorned: he had seen too many of them, and knew their inadequacy. He wanted a "house"—a dwelling. Logs, there were plenty, right on the spot, and we laid out the foundation of a house that would have taxed the skill of expert builders, while neither of us knew how to handle an axe. So, it came to pass that before we had the place anyway near ready for occupation, the cold weather was upon us. We hastily fitted a small part with a temporary roof of poles with a little hay spread over them, and just enough dirt over all to keep the hay from blowing away. Two cotton sacks served as substitutes for window panes; the chinks between the logs were stopped with wet mud, that froze as it was thrown; while roughly flattened logs partially floored the room and blocked the doorway. We finished up by building a fireplace after the fashion of the country as nearly as we could. The fireplace was decidedly picturesque, but sadly inefficient. It was of stone, chinked with mud, while the chimney consisted of a framework of four poles set on end on the fireplace and fastened into a long square by small sticks a foot long set into the poles like the rungs of a ladder and about nine inches apart. Over these rungs were hung strips of long grass well plastered with mud, which served as a groundwork for more mud both inside and out. But we were too inexperienced, and the result of our handiwork was a failure. We could cook our food, but if we made enough fire to warm ourselves, the chimney would catch, and the house was in danger. And, do what we could, it became no better. Before the winter was half spent, the wind had blown all the dirt and grass off the roof, leaving the bare poles as our only protection from the cold and the snow. We never took off our clothes all winter; with these we were well provided. When we went to bed, we donned our overcoats; when we had sat around the small fire circumstances allowed us, till we became cold from inaction, we ran about outside till circulation was restored. This collation of facts may be taken without a grain of salt; nothing is in the slightest exaggerated. Take this winter all in all, it was a pretty hard lesson for youths as green as we were; but it left no mark, except on our memories. We had plenty to eat, and youth and health were on our side.

We had other things to think of beside our hardships. An epidemic of smallpox broke out in an Icelandic settlement a few miles north of us, and we happened to be within the district shut off from the outside world. We made no attempt to guard ourselves from contagion, indeed we helped to nurse the sick,

and were in and out of the infected houses all through the visitation, but escaped without harm.

Our provisions began to run short, and a trip to the barrier —six or eight miles—was necessary in order to obtain a further supply. The two of us walked to the Post, arriving at dusk, and were shown into a "tepee", where we were told we must spend the night. I must explain that this style of tent is warmed by a fire built on the ground in the middle, the smoke from which is supposed to curl out through an opening in the top, and, as I found out long afterwards, when properly fixed, such a tent affords a very comfortable shelter. But neither of us knew how to fix it; neither did the officer in charge, and we could not get this particular tent to act properly, although we tried everything we could think of; nor could we get the smoke to go out, either at the top, or anywhere else. Shifting the flap at the top, which governs the draft, made no difference. We would stay inside till we could stay no longer, then, choked and blinded with smoke, we would rush out, gasping, into the open air. When we got cold right through, we would try the tent again. The quarantine officers had good tents, with stoves, but these officials were in a chronic semi-comatose state, from continuous overdosing in the "preventative treatment", and no efforts of ours availed to induce them to take pity on us. Next morning, my companion was so blind from the effects of the smoke, that I had to lead him home at the end of a stick, and it was some time before he recovered his normal sight. I often have thought, in the light of later experience, that it was sheer good luck that neither of us was badly frozen, and my memories of the gentlemen in charge are not at all charitable in consequence.

This was not our sole encounter with the quarantine station. Some time afterwards, my partner borrowed a team of dogs to go up for provisions. His visit was made the occasion of a hot time at the station. It lasted a night and a day. Someone sat down on a red hot stove, and the tent was knocked over. One man wanted to fly, but he found he could not. When my cousin finally got off on the road home, he was so full of medicine that he dropped off to sleep in the sleigh. He arrived in the middle of the night, singing gaily. I had to help him out of the sleigh, he was so stiff. His hands and feet were frozen, and I had the job of rubbing them with melting snow until they thawed out. The palms of his hands and the soles of his feet peeled off nearly to the bone, so that for some time I was afraid he would be permanently injured, but by spring he was able to

walk about, and also to use his hands to a certain extent. The experience left serious scars, both physical and mental. It taught him a lesson. Apart from the stirring incidents, the winter passed in calm but not unpleasant monotony. Stopping up holes in the roof; mudding up the chimney after its periodical burnings, getting wood, melting snow and cooking, prevented me from "thinking long" as the natives say.

The man Ogilvie, with whom I was marooned at the mouth of the river, had built him a little shack, about six by eight, in the bush a few miles from our habitation, and I would frequently walk up to see if he were still alive. He had a small tin stove, an improvised packing box table, and a bunk of poplar poles, and as long as he had enough to eat, he appeared perfectly happy. He was Scotch, and evidently well brought up, but he had got used to this kind of life, and saw nothing unpleasant or incongruous in it. I also did not omit to visit the Icelandic settlement. These were people who had been accustomed to hardships, and knew the best ways of alleviating them. They had settled on Lake Winnipeg on account of the fish, but, to offset this advantage, all their land required clearing, and it would take years of hard labor to bring a decent sized farm under cultivation. But the abundance of fish of every kind, certainly made things a little easier for them in the beginning. The lake was full of fish. A short net set out would more than provide for a large family, and in the fall of every year, the Settlement people would come down, and in a fortnight or so would kill thousands for their winter supply. When the quarantine was "lifted" in the spring, I bade "Goodbye" to Lake Winnipeg, and never saw it again till forty years had changed the place where we wintered into a gay summer resort, and I sought in vain for traces of our short residence.

My objective was Selkirk—then a small village, but with prospects. It was, and still is, on the west bank of the Red River, about thirty miles down from Winnipeg, and, now that activities had started on the coming railway, it was enjoying the excitement of being the point from which departure was made for the ever nearing contractor's camps. The surveyed line ran through endless bush punctuated by muskeg and rocks from the river eastward, and progress was slow. I had no money left, and had made up my mind to take the first job that should offer, even though it should be "section" work. And, such a job very nearly fell to my lot. I chanced to get in touch with a man who was starting out east—the camp was fifty miles off as yet—the next day at noon. This left me just twenty-four hours

to bring up my little luggage from the boarding place. I made the time, all right, but the party had already crossed the river and was out of sight when I arrived, and my life was deflected into other channels. In my search for other employment, I dropped into a store, and got into talk with the man who kept it. He mentioned that there was a school vacant a few miles down the river, and that if I could get a permit from the Minister of Education, it would be no hard matter for me to get the appointment. After an interview with one of the trustees, I made my way to Winnipeg and succeeded in satisfying the authorities as to my qualifications, which, though English, were satisfactory. The Inspector of Schools gave me a permit, and I was installed in St. Peter's as teacher. This was on the Reserve and the teacher's salary was supplemented by a Government grant, on account of the Indian children attending. Those who were not in the treaty, were almost as poor as the Swampies, and had great difficulty in raising their quota of the teacher's salary, so that the Government grant was all that one could be sure of. Here, I put in a year and a half, boarding with one of the people and living on a diet of fish, bannock and tea. The whole settlement lived on the same plane, and there was little choice. The river teemed with fish; sturgeon, catfish, sunfish, whitefish, and gold eyes, all the choicest of their species. The mode of catching cat fish was novel to me. Two long sticks are stuck down into the mud, one close to shore, the other far out in the water. Between these two poles a line is stretched, to which, every few feet, are hung short lines, weighted and baited. A small bell is fastened to the top of the pole furthest out. When the bell tinkles, the fisherman goes out in his skiff, and unhooks the catfish, and brings it to shore after baiting afresh the line. Should the fisherman not be hungry, he will visit the line only twice a day. The Red River catfish, except that it is a little too fat, is most delicious eating.

Teaching school, I regarded only as a makeshift, and good only so far as it might lead to something more stable, and with a brighter prospective—in short, till something should turn up. So, when I fell in with a couple of Halfbreeds who were about to start for the North-West, I was quite ready for a change, which, at least promised uncommon experience, if not adventure. My cousin had by this time got married, and disgusted with roughing it on an unpromising homestead, had got a school further up the settlement, and was earning a decent living. He afterwards became connected with St. John's College, where he held a position till the end of his life. I never saw him again.

OFF TO THE NORTH-WEST

I came to terms with the leader of the party, and lost no time in getting ready to make the trip in their company. The party consisted of two elderly men, one young fellow about my own age, and a woman, the wife of the leader. This man had made the trip the year before, and was therefore conversant with the road. He was taking out some goods to trade with the Indians. During my sojourn in Red River, mostly among Swampies, I had necessarily seen a good deal of the aborigines, but nearly all spoke English, and were anything but what my imagination had conjured up as characteristic savages. Generations of contact with Hudson's Bay officials had civilised them as far as they could be civilised. Even those I had seen down on the lake were quite mild and friendly. Out West, where I was going, I would see the savage in his native lair, and could judge whether the tales I had read and heard had any truth in them.

Starting took some time. With four carts drawn by ponies, loaded up ready for departure, we lay just outside the city of Winnipeg for six weeks, waiting till these two voyageurs should be sober enough to face a six hundred mile journey with only one five gallon keg of whiskey. Ever they would make arrangements for leaving, and ever the lure of the city would prove too strong for them. The woman was as bad as the men. I must except the young man; he was as anxious to get off as I was, and as thoroughly disgusted. Neither of us drank, so that was denied us as refuge.

Eventually, at a time when they were too overcome to realise what was doing, we hitched up, and "hit the trail". Intermittent application to the keg kept their minds from dwelling on what they were leaving behind till we were too far on the road to go back, and, when the keg was found to be dry, they settled down to travelling, and proved themselves to be good, companionable fellows, never downcast when trouble was encountered, but full of expedients for all imaginable difficulties.

The level land of Manitoba extends about sixty miles to the westward of The Portage. Just before we commenced to mount to the first plateau, our way lay through low, almost swampy land, a district which made an indelible mark on my mind by reason of the myriads of mosquitoes we encountered there. Their numbers were beyond belief. Round our little camp-fire of an evening, we could scoop them up in handfuls; no sleep was possible in the circumstances under which we

travelled; the horses nearly went crazy, and gave us a lot of trouble to find in the morning, though they were always hobbled by tying together the two front feet, and had what amelioration a dense smoke could give them. Near Birtle or Bird-tail Creek we passed the last settler's house. He must have been a man with a great deal of faith in the future, for his only means of communication with the outside world was through occasional travellers or a hundred mile journey. The road was merely a cart trail worn by the horses and cart-wheels that continuously made their way, summer after summer, between Winnipeg and Edmonton. All streams had to be forded, and tremendous ravines negotiated, down and up, till we came near Qu'Appelle, where the last hardwood tree and the short prairie grass told us we had reached the plateau that stretches to the foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains.

It has always seemed to me a misnomer to apply the word prairies to the bare country of the North-West. The Indians call it "the bare land"—the barrens would be a more appropriate designation. The grass is very short, owing to the limited rain-fall, and there is not a little danger of dying of thirst if the traveller be unacquainted with regular watering places. It is desolate, bleak and inhospitable.

The next time we saw residents was at the Indian Reserve of Touchwood Hills. A number of Indians were gathered at the Hudson's Bay Company's store there, and treated me to my first sight of the wild aborigines of the West. They were wild enough, dressed in every imaginable style, and noticeable for incongruity and truculence. The chief wore an old pot-hat with two scarlet pom-poms stuck on either side, a long coat, shirt, and breech-clout. Most of his followers had little more than a blanket, gaudy as possible, breech-clout and leggings made out of a discarded blanket. All wore moccasins. They were as impudent as picturesque. Most were on horseback, and the amusement that afforded great fun was riding full tilt at a person, as though to ride him down, but checking the horse in time to avoid an accident. It was great fun for the crowd to witness the fright of the victim of this trick, as he scurried away.

Our road ran through the Reserve, and swept down through the Great Salt Plain. Flat, low and barren, with spots here and there white with mineral salts, this stretched for forty miles without water fit to drink. Its deposits are what is termed "alkali" land. It is not really alkali that has impreg-

nated the soil to its detriment, but here and there all over the plains, is sulphate of soda—when crystallised, Glauber's Salts. Where it is found, the soil is white and bare—nothing will grow. Many lakes are covered with the crystals two or three feet deep, and invariably the water found in the permanent lakes on the plains is unfit for use. We got safely across this unwholesome region, and passed the Government telegraph office at Humboldt into the rolling lands that extend to the South Saskatchewan. There are several crossings of this river. That which we made for was called "Gabriel's Crossing." For many miles along the South Branch, as it is called, the land is settled by Halfbreeds, refugees from Red River, fugitives before the encroaching white man, with his ordinances and his regulations, his restlessness, his sophistications and his temptations. These people had realised their inability to cope with coming conditions, and had launched out into the wilderness, asking only to be let alone, and live their own life in their own way. Into the lower end of this settlement we came at Gabriel's Crossing. Here was a ferry; a novel one to me. It was a good-sized scow, with two big oars, for it had to be rowed across, backward and forward, by those who used it. In order to reach the proper landing place and counterbalance the force of the current, the scow had to be towed up stream a good way before each passage. This was done by tying the ferry rope to a horse's tail, and driving him up the river, while a man on the scow poled the vessel off the bank. It was a long, tedious job, but was finally accomplished. The person who owned the scow probably made an appreciable addition to his income by the fees he earned in this way.

From the South Saskatchewan, westward, the land is level for fifty miles, cut up only by buffalo runs, made by countless numbers when moving from place to place, the deepest leading to the river. No better testimony to their immense numbers is needed than these runs, often a foot deep. One misadventure we had was more laughable than awkward. On this trail—as on most trails—the watering places are to either side of the road, and the traveller must turn in to them. It is generally advisable, when unhitching, to keep the front of the cart facing in the right direction. Once, along the road, we failed to do this, and, the next morning being cloudy, we journeyed quite a distance on our back trail, before we discovered our error. We were careful not to repeat it. Crossing the precipitous Eagle Creek, we wound our way to the south of the Eagle Hills, a longer route, but preferable to the river road by reason of the number of difficult creeks to be there encountered.

We had now been about six weeks on the trip, and the weather showed signs of breaking, so we were glad when we came upon a collection of shacks, which our leader said belonged to the Red Pheasant Indians, who, that fall had been installed on a Reserve. He had some acquaintanc with a few of them, from his former residence in the district, and we were glad of a few days' rest for ourselves and the horses. This sojourn was forced upon us, because there was a foot of snow on the ground when we woke up next morning. Also there was something else that interfered with our immediate departure; one of our horses had a great part of his thigh eaten off by a wolf during the night, and we had to bargain with the Indians for another one to replace it. This attack by a wolf is not uncommon, the Indians informed us, especially when the animal attacked is worn both in spirit and body with unremitting labor. A horse in good condition would never allow a beast of prey to approach to dangerous proximity.

We stayed three days on the Reserve, and I poked about among the houses and people, in search of the peculiar and the interesting. But there is nothing that immediately appeals to either the mind or the imagination in the average, ordinary Indian in his average, ordinary home, and I had no premonition that I should, for years, be intimately associated with these same unprepossessing people.

The snow melted, and on the fourth morning we started on the last lap of our six hundred mile journey. Our way led through a hilly country of park-like appearance; bluffs and prairie with luxuriant grass, studded here and there with gem-like lakes and ponds that swarmed with wild fowl, which formed a most welcome addition to our homely bill of fare, for our larder was getting low. The young fellow and I had walked every step of the way, and many steps to either side, each time we camped, hunting the horses who took all their pleasure in not being found. Our appetites were enormous and hard to satisfy, while the food was plain even to bareness, and unvaried at that. Two of us, therefore hailed the approaching end of our journey with delight. Once, during the latter part of our trip, I found a small sheet of "dry meat" on the road. It was almost like a piece of leather, and did not look appetizing in the least, but it served me to munch for many a mile. This comestible, if it be not expedient to crisp it on a fire—when it is much improved—must simply be gnawed like a piece of raw hide. But it proved comforting to me.

BATTLEFORD—

On the sixth of October, 1878 we wound our way down the hill into the flats of Battle River, crossed at the ford, near the Hudson's Bay store, and camped on the other side, which promised better feed for the horses.

Battleford was at that time, the Capital of the North-West Territories; Portage La Prairie was the last little aggregation of houses between Winnipeg and the Rockies; all west of the Portage was a wilderness. The projected line of the trans-continental railway had been surveyed, and the telegraph wires strung as far as Edmonton—at that period no more than a trading post of the "Company".

The summer before our arrival, gangs of men had been at work putting up buildings, making the wilderness echo to the hammer and the saw. A residence for the Lieutenant Governor had been completed; a Judge's house; a Land Titles office and a house for the Registrar; these and other buildings had been erected on the bank above the south side of the river a short distance west of its junction with the North Saskatchewan, while on the plain between the rivers, as a better strategic position, extensive barracks for the Mounted Police occupied a picturesque and prominent place. A number of log shacks, big enough to hold a bed, a packing-case or two, and a mud fireplace, had been thrown up, as it were, on the south flat, to accommodate the semi-permanent native population and the employees of the two stores—the Hudson's Bay Co., and a trader named Mahoney. A newspaper plant had but just arrived and the "columns" of the "Saskatchewan Herald" recorded, and, to a certain extent perpetuated the news of the West.

The country to which I had come differed greatly from Manitoba. There, the land is almost dead level, inclining to swamp. Sixty miles or so west of Winnipeg, the country rises, not into hills, but into plateaus, which, though diversified by ranges of hills, is more or less level, with a gradual elevation westward, and dry and treeless. Water is so scarce that missing a water-hole, from ignorance or carelessness, means considerable inconvenience, if not something worse. Fuel for cooking is generally carried from where it can be found, and one may travel hundreds of miles and not find wood enough to warm one's self with. Besides the Indians, there were the native Halfbreeds, people ousted from Red River by civilisation, hardy, and mostly inclining to the Indian mode of life. They