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PREFACE

Sir Alexander Mackenzie was one of the most energetic and successful of the discoverers who have traversed the vast wilderness of British America. He did his work single-handed, with slender means, and slight encouragement, at a time when discovery was rare and the country almost *terra incognita*. The long and difficult route, so recently traversed by the Red River Expedition, was, to Sir Alexander, but the small beginning of his far-reaching travels. He traced the great river which bears his name to its outlet in the Polar Sea, and was the first to cross the Rocky Mountains in those latitudes and descend to the Pacific ocean.

Being a man of action, and not particularly enamoured of the pen, his journal [For a sight of which apply to the British Museum, London, or the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh]—full though it be of important and most interesting facts—is a bare and unadorned though valuable record of progress made, of work done, which is unsuited to juvenile minds, besides being bulky and scarce.

Having spent some years in Rupert's Land, and seen something of Red Indian and fur-trading life, I have ventured to weave the incidents of Sir Alexander's narratives into a story which, it is hoped, may prove interesting to the young—perchance, also, to the old.

I take this opportunity of acknowledging myself deeply indebted to Sir Alexander's daughter, Miss Mackenzie, and to his two sons, for kindly placing at my disposal all the information in their possession.

R.M.B.

EDINBURGH, 1872.

CHAPTER ONE

Shows How It Began

“The world is round,” said somebody in ancient times to somebody else.

“Not at all; it is flat—flat as a pancake,” replied somebody else to somebody; “and if you were to travel far enough you might get to the end of it and tumble over the edge, if so disposed.”

Ever since the commencement of this early geographical controversy, men have been labouring with more or less energy and success to ascertain the form and character of the earth; a grand, glorious labour it has been; resulting in blessings innumerable to mankind—blessings both spiritual and temporal.

We have heard some people object to geographical discovery, especially in the inclement parts of the earth, on the ground that it could be of no use, and involved great risk to life and limb. “Of no use!” Who can tell what discoveries shall be useful and what useless? “The works of God are great, sought out of all those that have pleasure therein,” saith the Scripture. There is no reference here to usefulness, but the searching out of God’s works, without limitation, is authorised; and those who “take pleasure therein,” will be content to leave the result of their labours in the hands of Him who sent them forth. As to “risk,”—why, a carpenter cannot ascend to the top of a house to put the rafters thereon without risk; a chemist cannot investigate the properties of certain fumes without risk; you cannot even eat your dinner without risk. Only this are we sure of—that, if man had never undertaken labour except when such was *obviously* useful and devoid of risk, the world would still be in the darkness of the Middle Ages.

Reuben Guff held these sentiments, or something like them; and Reuben was a man who had seen a great deal of life in his day, although at the time we introduce him to public notice he had not lived more than six-and-thirty summers. He was a bronzed, stalwart Canadian. His father had been Scotch, his mother of French extraction; and Reuben possessed the dogged resolution of the Scot with the vivacity of the Frenchman. In regard to his tastes and occupation we shall let him speak for himself.

Sitting under a pine-tree, in the wild wilderness that lies to the north of Canada with the drumstick of a goose in one hand and a scalping-knife in the other; with a log-fire in front of him, and his son, a stripling of sixteen, by his side, he delivered himself of the following sentiments:—

“I tell ‘ee what it is, Lawrence,” (the lad was named after the great river on the banks of which he had been reared), “I was born to be a pioneer. Ever since I was the height of a three-fut rule I’ve had a skunner at the settlements and a love for the wilderness that I couldn’t overcome nohow. Moreover, I wouldn’t overcome it if I could, for it’s my opinion that He who made us knows what He wants us to do, an’ has given us sitch feelin’s and inclinations as will lead us to do it, if we don’t run mad after *notions* of our own, as the folk in the settlements are rather apt to do.”

Here some of the “notions” referred to appeared to tickle the fancy of the backwoodsman, for he paused to indulge in a quiet chuckle which wrinkled up all the lines of good-humour and fun in his rough countenance. After applying himself for a few seconds with much energy to the drumstick,—he resumed his discourse in a slow, deliberate style of speech which was peculiar to him:—

“Yes, Lawrence, my lad, I’ve made it my business ever since I was fifteen to explore this here wilderness, livin’ by my gun and guidin’ the fur-traders on their v’yages, or consorting with the Injins, as you know very well; and, now that we’ve come to the big lake it is needful to tell ‘ee that I’m still bent on followin’ out my callin’. I’m goin’ away to the nor’ard to explore, and you’ll have to make up your mind to-night whether *you* will be my steersman or whether I’m to lay that dooty on Swiftarrow. I needn’t say which I’d like best.”

The hunter finished the drumstick at this point, threw the bone into the fire, lighted his pipe, and awaited his son’s answer in silence.

But the son appeared to be in no hurry to reply; for, after giving his father a glance and nod, which were meant to say, “I hear and I’ll consider, but I’m too much engaged just now to speak,” he continued his occupation of devouring venison steaks, the sauce to which was evidently hunger.

Having finished his supper and lighted his pipe he became more communicative.

“Father,” he said, “you have always advised me to think well before speaking.”

“I have, lad; it’s the natur’ of our forefathers an’ a very good natur’ too. I’d be sorry to see it go out of the family.”

“Well, then; I’ve thought my best about goin’ with ‘ee on this trip,” returned the youth, “an’ I’ve resolved to go on one condition—that Swiftarrow goes with us.”

“Why so, my son? we don’t need him.”

“Perhaps not, but I like him; for he has taught me all that I know of woodcraft, and I’m certain that if you and I both leave him he’ll be sure to return to the new settlement at the south end of Ontario, and you know what the end of that would be.”

“Death by drinkin’,” replied Reuben Guff shaking his head slowly, while he watched the upward flight of a ring of white smoke that had just issued from his lips.

“Well, I won’t leave him to *that*,” continued the youth, with sudden energy of manner and look, “as long as my name is Lawrence. You know that nothin’ would please me more than goin’ to explore the wilderness with you, father; but if Swiftarrow is to be left behind, there shall be no pioneering for me. Besides, three are better than two on such a trip, and the Injin will be sure to keep the pot full, no matter what sort o’ country we may have to pass through, for he’s a dead shot wi’ the gun as well as wi’ the bow.”

“I daresay you’re right, lad,” replied Reuben, in a tone of one who muses. “There’s room in the canoe for three, and it’s not unlikely that the Injin would go south to the settlement, for he is a lonely man since his poor mother died. I do believe that it was nothin’ but his extraor’nar’ love for that old ‘ooman that kep’ him from goin’ to the dogs. Leastwise it was that kep’ him from goin’ to the settlement, which is much the same thing, for

Swiftarrow can't resist fire—water. Yes, lad, you're right—so we'll take him with us. As you say, three are better than two on such a v'yage."

Some weeks after the foregoing conversation the pioneers arrived at the northern end of that great inland sea, Lake Superior, which, being upwards of four hundred miles long, and one hundred and seventy-five miles broad, presents many of the features of Ocean itself. This end of the lake was, at the time we write of, and still is, an absolute wilderness, inhabited only by scattered tribes of Indians, and almost untouched by the hand of the white man, save at one spot, where the fur-traders had planted an isolated establishment. At this point in the wild woods the representatives of the fur-traders of Canada were wont to congregate for the settlement of their affairs in the spring of every year, and from this point also trading-parties were despatched in canoes into the still more remote parts of the great northern wilderness, whence they returned with rich cargoes of furs received from the "red men" in exchange for powder and shot, guns, hatchets, knives, cloth, twine, fish-hooks, and such articles as were suited to the tastes and wants of a primitive and wandering people.

Here Reuben Guff and his son found Swiftarrow, as they had expected, and proposed to him that he should accompany them on their voyage north,—a proposal which he accepted with pleasure,—for the strong-boned Indian had an adventurous spirit as well as a healthy frame.

Swiftarrow was a brave and powerful Indian, and was esteemed one of the best hunters of his tribe; but no one seeing him in camp in a quiescent state would have thought him to be possessed of much energy, for he was slow and deliberate in his movements, and withal had a lazy look about his eyes. But the sight of a bear or moose—deer had the effect of waking him up in a way that caused his dark eyes to flash and his large frame to move with cat-like activity.

When Reuben Guff discovered him on the shore of Lake Superior, he was seated at the door of his skin lodge, anointing his hair, which was long and black, with bear's grease—the "genuine article," without even the admixture of a drop of scent!—so pure, in fact, that the Indian basted his steaks and anointed his hair with grease from the same box.

"Hallo! Swiftarrow," exclaimed Reuben, as he sauntered up to the savage, with his gun on his shoulder, "ye seem to be beautifyin' yerself to-day—not goin' to get married, eh?"

Swiftarrow, whose long hair hung over his face like a glossy curtain, tossed aside his locks and gazed earnestly at the hunter. A slight smile and a pleasant gleam lighted up his dark countenance as he wiped his greasy right hand on his legging and extended it, exclaiming, "watchee!" by which he meant, what cheer?

"What cheer? what cheer?" replied Reuben, with a broad but quiet grin, as he shook his friend's hand heartily.

Each man understood the other's language perfectly; but each appeared to prefer to talk in his own tongue; for while Reuben addressed the red man in English, Swiftarrow replied in Indian. This had been an understood arrangement between them ever since the time when, as lads, they had first met and formed a close friendship, on the shores of Lake Huron.

"Is my brother's trail to be through the woods or on the waters? Does he go hunting or

trading?" inquired the Indian, after the first salutations were over.

"Well, I may say that I'm neither goin' a-huntin' or tradin'—here, fill yer pipe wi' baccy from my pouch; it's better than yours, I'll be bound. In a manner, too, I'm goin' both to hunt an' trade in a small way; but my main business on this trip is to be diskivery."

The Indian uttered a sound, which meant that he did not understand.

"I'm goin' to sarch out new lands," explained Reuben, "away to the far north. I've heard it said by Injins that have wandered to the nor'ard that they've met in with red-skins, who said that there is a big river flowin' out o' a great lake in the direction o' the north pole, an' that it runs into the sea there. They may be tellin' truth, or they may be tellin' lies; I dun know; anyhow, I'm koorious to know somethin' about it, so I'm goin' north to see for myself, and I've comed to ask if Swiftarrow will go with me."

The hunter paused, but the Indian remained silently smoking his long stone-headed pipe, or calumet, with a countenance so grave and expressionless, that no idea of his sentiments could be gathered from it. After a brief pause, Reuben continued—

"It won't be altogether a trip of diskivery neither, for I've got some bales of goods with me, and as we go in a small birch canoe, we'll travel light; but I hope to come back sunk to the gunwale with furs, for the red-skins of the far north are like enough to have plenty of pelts, and they won't ask much for them. As to grub, you and I could manage to supply ourselves wi' lots o' that anywheres, and I've got plenty of powder and lead. Moreover, my boy Lawrence is goin' with me."

During the foregoing remarks, the Indian's countenance betrayed no sign of feeling until the name of Lawrence was mentioned, when a gleam of satisfaction shot from his eyes. Removing the pipe from his lips, he puffed a volume of smoke through his nostrils, and said:—

"Swiftarrow will go."

Backwoodsmen seldom take long to mature their plans, and are generally prompt to carry them into execution. Two days after the brief conversation above narrated, the three friends pushed off in their little birch-bark canoe and paddled up the stream which leads to the Kakabeka Falls on the Kamenistaquoia River. Surmounting this obstacle by the simple process of carrying the canoe and her lading past the falls by land, and relaunching on the still water above, they continued their voyage day by day, encamping under the trees by night, until they had penetrated far and deep into the heart of the northern wilderness, and had even passed beyond the most distant establishments of the adventurous fur-traders.

The world of forest, swamp, lake, and river, that still, however, lay between them and the land which they sought to reach, was very wide. Weeks, and even months, would certainly elapse before they could hope to approach it; one day, therefore, they buried their goods and stores in a convenient place, intending to dig them up on their return, and meanwhile turned aside into a country which promised to afford them a good supply of fresh provisions for the voyage north.

Here an adventure befell them which brought their voyage of discovery, at that time, to an abrupt close.

CHAPTER TWO

Terrible Discoveries and Altered Plans

“Ho!” ejaculated Swiftarrow.

“Smoke!” exclaimed Reuben Guff.

Both men spoke at the same moment,—their discovery having been simultaneous. At the same time Lawrence pointed with the blade of his paddle to a thin line of smoke which rose above the tree-tops into the blue sky, and was faithfully mirrored in the lake on which they floated.

“Injins!” said Reuben, resting his steering paddle across the canoe for a few seconds.

Swiftarrow assented with another “Ho,” and Lawrence moved his gun into a handy position to be ready for an emergency; but there was no other sign of man’s presence than the wreath of smoke. All was perfectly silent. The air too was quite still, and the surface of the lake resembled a sheet of glass.

“Strange,” observed Reuben, “red-skins ain’t usually so shy. If they mean mischief they don’t ever let smoke be seen, an’ when they don’t mean mischief they generally show themselves. Come, push on, lads; we’ll go see what’s i’ the wind.”

“I’ll show them the muzzle, father,” said Lawrence, laying down his paddle and taking up his gun: “it may be well to let ‘em see that we have arms.”

“No need for that, boy. If they know anything at all, they know that white men don’t go about in the wilderness empty-handed. Put down the piece, and use your paddle.”

Thus reproved, Lawrence flushed slightly, but obeyed the order and resumed paddling.

In a few minutes they were on shore. Still all was silent as the grave. Hauling the bow of the canoe on the beach to keep it fast, the three men took their weapons, and, entering the woods in single file, walked cautiously but swiftly in the direction of the smoke. They soon reached the spot, and the scene which met their eyes was one which, while it accounted for the silence that reigned around, filled their minds with sadness and horror.

In an open space, where a number of trees had been cut down, stood about a dozen skin tents or Indian lodges, some with the curtain-doors closed, others open, exposing the interiors, on the floors of which the dead bodies of Indian men, women, and children, lay in every attitude and in all stages of decomposition. Outside of the tents other corpses lay strewn on the ground, and most of these bore evidence of having been more or less torn by wolves. The travellers knew at a glance that these unfortunate people had fallen before that terrible disease, small-pox, which had recently attacked and almost depopulated several districts of the Indian country.

How the disease was introduced among the Indians at the time of which we write, it is impossible to say and useless to conjecture. The fact of its desolating effects is unquestionable. One who dwelt in the country at the time writes: [See Sir Alexander

Mackenzie's *Voyages*, page 14.] "The fatal infection spread around with a baneful rapidity which no flight could escape, and with a fatal effect that nothing could resist. It destroyed with its pestilential breath whole families and tribes; and the horrid scene presented, to those who had the melancholy opportunity of beholding it, a combination of the dead, the dying, and such as, to avoid the fate of their friends around them, prepared to disappoint the plague of its prey by terminating their own existence. To aggravate the picture, if aggravation were possible, the carcasses were dragged forth from the huts by the wolves, or were mangled within them by the dogs, which thus sought to satisfy their hunger with the putrid remains of their masters. It was not uncommon at this time for the father of a family, whom the infection had not reached, to call his household around him, represent the terrible sufferings and fate that awaited them, which he believed was owing to the influence of an evil spirit who desired to extirpate the race, and incited them to baffle death with all its horrors by at once killing themselves—at the same time offering to perform the deed of mercy with his own hand if their hearts should fail them."

That some of the dead before our pioneers had acted in this way was evident, for while most of the corpses bore marks of having been smitten with the disease, others were there which showed nothing to account for death save a knife wound over the region of the heart.

It was a sad and sickening sight, and drew forth one or two low-toned sorrowful remarks from Reuben, as he moved slowly towards the tent from which smoke still issued.

The three men paused before it because a sound came from within, and they felt reluctant to disturb the awful silence. The pause, however, was but momentary. Reuben lifted the covering and opened it wide. A small fire still burned on the hearth in the centre of the lodge; around it lay the bodies of dead men, women, and children. Only one figure, that of an old woman, remained in a half-reclining position, but she was motionless, and they thought her dead also. This, however, was not the case. The flood of light which streamed in on her appeared to rouse her, for she raised her grey head, and, gazing anxiously at the figures which darkened the entrance of the lodge, asked in a tremulous voice: "Is that you, my son?"

"No, mother, but it is a friend," said Swiftarrow, who understood her language.

"A friend," repeated the old woman, shaking her head slowly, "I don't want a friend. The Master of Life is my friend. My people said that an evil spirit was slaying them; but I know better. It was the Great Spirit who came to us. We have been very wicked. We needed punishment. But why has He spared me? I was the worst of them all."

There was something terrible in the tone and manner in which this was uttered, as if the breast of the speaker were torn with conflicting feelings.

"She must have met wi' the missionaries some time or other," whispered Reuben.

"Is the old woman the only one of all the tribe left alive?" asked Swiftarrow.

"Ay, the only one—no, not the *only* one; my son is yet alive. He went to set a bear-trap not *very* long since; but he should have come back before now. He will be back soon."

The deep sigh which followed proved that the poor old woman was hoping against hope.

“How long is't since he left you, mother?” asked Lawrence eagerly.

“Two suns have risen and set since he left, and he had not far to go.”

“Father, I'll go seek for this man,” said Lawrence; “something may have befallen him.”

Reuben made no objection, and the youth set off immediately in a direction which was pointed out by the old woman.

After he was gone his father and the Indian shifted one of the cleanest looking of the empty tents to a considerable distance from the spot where the terrible work of death had been done, and removing the old woman from the neighbourhood of the pestilential atmosphere, placed her therein, kindled a fire and cooked her a little food, of which she evidently stood much in need.

Meanwhile Lawrence sped through the pathless forest with the light step of a strong youth and the precision of a practised hunter. About four miles from the Indian camp he came upon the track of a bear, the footprints of which proved that it was an unusually large one. He followed it up closely, and was led by it to a spot where some trees had been cut down, and not far from which he saw what appeared to him to be the remains of a trap. Almost at the same moment of his making this discovery he heard a growl, and saw the bear itself—a monster of the brown species, which differs from the ordinary black bear of America in being more carnivorous and much larger, as well as more savage and bold. No sooner did it see the youth than it rushed upon him with great fury. A piece of broken line was drawn tight round its neck, and another piece round its fore-leg, while four arrows stuck in its shoulder and side, showing plainly that it had broken loose from a snare and had been attacked by man. But Lawrence had no time to think on these things. He had barely time to throw forward and cock his gun when the bear was upon him. It rose on its hind-legs, and in doing so towered high above the youth, who, whatever his feelings might have been, looked undismayed. With an unflinching eye he took aim at the monster's heart, and shot it dead. So close was it to him that he singed the hair on its breast and had to leap to one side to avoid being struck as it fell.

Reloading quickly, the young hunter advanced towards the trap, where his worst fears were realised, for near to it he found the body of an Indian torn limb from limb, and mostly eaten, except the head, which remained entire. It was evident that the poor man, having set several snares for bears, had gone to visit them, and found this brown bear caught by the head and leg. He seemed to have tried to kill it with arrows, but must have been afraid to go near enough to use his weapons with effect, and the enraged animal, having broken the snare, flew upon him and tore him to pieces.

Brown bears of this kind are very powerful. One traveller in these regions saw the footprints of a large one, which, having seized a moose-deer in a river, dragged it for a quarter of a mile along the sandy banks, and afterwards devoured it all except part of the hind-quarters; and the moose which had been treated in this unceremonious way, judging from the size and hardness of the bones, must have been upwards of a year old, when it would weigh as much as an ox of the same age.

Collecting the scattered remnants of the unfortunate Indian, who was no other than the old woman's son, Lawrence covered them over with leaves and sticks. He then skinned the bear and cut off its claws, which he carried away as trophies, along with one or two choice

steaks cut from the creature's flank. He also collected the weapons and part of the dress of the Indian, with which he returned to the camp.

"Heyday! Lawrence, what have you got there, lad?" said Reuben, as his son came up and threw the bundle on the ground.

"A brown bear, father."

"Well done!" exclaimed Reuben, with a look of pride, for although his son had shot many a black bear in the forest, he had never before stood face to face with such a monster as that whose skin and claws now lay at his feet.

"It would have been well, father," said Lawrence gravely, "if the man who first saw this had owned a gun. His arrows were no better than needles in such a hide. See here!"

He drew from his breast the bloody portions of dress which had belonged to the slaughtered Indian.

"The son of the old woman has gone to the happy hunting-grounds," said Swiftarrow, referring to the heaven of the Indian, as he lifted and examined the dress.

"Ay, ay," said Reuben sadly, "'tis the chances of the wilderness. You'd better tell the poor old creetur', Swiftarrow; you understand her ways and lingo better than me."

Silently the Indian went to the old woman, and laid the bloody garments before her. At first she did not understand what had happened. Suddenly the truth flashed upon her, and she looked quickly up into the grave countenance of the Indian, but death and sorrow appeared to have already done their worst on her, for she neither spoke nor wept for some time. She took up the shreds of cloth and turned them over tenderly; but neither sign nor groan escaped her. Evidently she had been already so stunned by the horrors which had surrounded her for some time, that this additional blow did not tell—at least, not at first—but Reuben observed, while trying to comfort her some time afterwards, that a few tears were coursing slowly down her withered cheeks.

That night, round the camp-fire, the pioneers held earnest counsel, and resolved, sadly but firmly, that their projected journey must be given up for that season.

"It's a hard thing to do," said Reuben, as he lay at full length before the fire after supper, "to give up our plans after comin' so far; but it ain't possible to carry that old 'ooman along with us an' it's not to be thought of to leave her behind to starve, so there's nothin' for it but to go back an' take her wi' us to the settlements. I would feel like a murderer if I was to leave one o' God's creeturs to perish in the wilderness. What think you, Lawrence?"

"I think you are right, father," replied the youth, with a deep sigh.

"An' what says Swiftarrow?"

"Go back," was the Indian's prompt and laconic answer.

"Well, then, we're all agreed, so we'll turn back on our trail to-morrow; but I shall try again next year if I'm above ground. I once know'd a Yankee who had what he called a motto, an' it was this, 'Never give in, 'xcept w'en yer wrong.' I think I'll take to that motto. It seems to me a good 'un."

In proof, we presume, of his sincerity, Reuben Guff rolled himself in his blanket, stretched his feet towards the fire, pillowed his head on a bundle of moss, and at once *gave in* to the seductive influences of sleep; an example which was so irresistible that his companions followed it without delay.

CHAPTER THREE

Introduces the King of Pioneers

Discarding space and ignoring time, we seize you by the hand, reader, and bound away with you still deeper into the northern wilderness, away into that remote region which, at the time we write of, was the *ultima thule* of the fur-traders of Canada,—beyond which lay the great unknown world, stretching to the pole. Here, amid the grand scenery of the Rocky Mountains, lies the Athabasca Lake, also styled the Lake of the Hills. We prefer the latter name, as being more romantic.

This is no pretty pond such as we in England are wont to visit and delight in during our summer holidays. It is a great sheet of water; a grand fresh-water sea, 200 miles long and 15 miles broad—a fitting gem for the bosom of the mighty region on which it glitters.

A year has fled since the period of our last chapter, and here, in a birch-bark canoe on the waters of the Lake of the Hills, we find our pioneers—Reuben Guff, his son Lawrence, and his Indian friend Swiftarrow. There is also a young Indian woman in the canoe—Swiftarrow's wife.

The kind-hearted red man adopted the old woman who had been rescued on their previous trip, but, not finding her a good substitute for his own mother, he bethought him of adding a young squaw to his establishment. While he meditated on this step, the old woman died. About the same time Reuben Guff made proposals to him to join him on a second “v'yage of diskivery.” The Indian agreed; got married off-hand, and took his bride along with him. We now find them all four at the Lake of the Hills.

It may be as well to observe, in passing, that Indian brides are usually more robust than those of civilised communities. They are quite competent to follow their lords on the most arduous canoe voyages, and, besides being able to wield the paddle with great dexterity, are exceedingly useful in managing what may be styled the domestic matters of the camp. They also keep up a constant supply of the Indian's indispensable foot-gear—moccasins—which are so slender in their nature that a pair may be completely worn-out in a single day of hard hunting.

The brown bride, therefore, was not a hindrance to the party, but a useful member of it, as well as a pleasant companion. True, her companionship consisted chiefly in answering “yes” and “no” when spoken to, and in smiling pleasantly at all times; but this was sufficient to satisfy the moderate demands of her male friends upon her intellectual resources.

“Fort Chipewyan at *last*,” said Reuben, resting his paddle across the canoe and looking earnestly towards the horizon; “I hope we ain't too late after all our pushin' on. It would be hard to find that Monsieur Mackenzie had started.”

“Too much ice in the lake,” said Swiftarrow. “He has not gone yet.”

“I'm not so sure o' that,” observed Lawrence. “If reports be true, Monsieur Mackenzie is

not the man to wait until the ice is all off the lakes and nothin' but plain sailin' lies before him."

"That's true, lad," replied Reuben, resuming his paddle. "I wonder," he murmured to himself, as he gazed wistfully towards the unknown north, "I wonder if the big river is really there, an' if it *do* jine the sea?"

That same question was put to himself that same evening—though not for the first time—by one of the inhabitants of Fort Chipewyan. The fort was a mere group of two or three log-huts. In the largest of these huts sat a man whose strongly-marked handsome countenance gave evidence of a bold enterprising spirit and a resolute will. He pored over a map for some time, carefully tracing a few pencil-lines into the blank spaces on the paper, and then murmured, in words which were almost identical with those of Reuben Guff, "I wonder if it joins the Polar Sea?"

This man was the true pioneer, or, rather, the king of pioneers, to whom Guff gave place without a murmur, for Reuben was a modest man; and the moment he heard that one of the gentlemen of the Canadian fur-trading company had taken up his favourite hobby, and meant to work out the problem, he resolved, as he said, "to play second fiddle," all the more that the man who thus unwittingly supplanted him was a mountaineer of the Scottish Highlands.

"It's of no manner of use, you see," he said to Swiftarrow, when conversing on the subject, "for me to go off on a v'yage o' diskivery w'en a gentleman like Monsieur Mackenzie, with a good education an' scienteefic knowledge and the wealth of a fur company at his back, is goin' to take it in hand. No; the right thing for Reuben Guff to do in the circumstances is to jine him an' play second fiddle—or third, if need be."

Alexander Mackenzie—while seated in the lowly hut of that solitary outpost poring over his map, trying to penetrate mentally into those mysterious and unknown lands which lay just beyond him—saw, in imagination, a great river winding its course among majestic mountains towards the shores of the ice-laden polar seas. He also saw the lofty peaks and snow-clad ridges of that mighty range which forms the back-bone of the American continent, and—again in imagination—passed beyond it and penetrated the vast wilderness to the Pacific, thus adding new lands to the British Crown, and opening up new sources of wealth to the fur company of which he was one of the most energetic members. He saw all this in imagination, we say, but he did *not*, at that time, see his name attached to one of the largest American rivers, classed with the names of the most noted discoverers of the world, and himself knighted. Still less, if possible, did he see, even in his wildest flights of fancy, that the book of travels which he was destined to write, would be translated into French by the order of Napoleon the First, for the express purpose of being studied by Marshal Bernadotte, with the view of enabling that warrior to devise a roundabout and unlooked-for attack on Canada—in rear, as it were—from the region of the northern wilderness—a fact which is well worthy of record! [See Appendix for an interesting letter on the subject.]

None of these things loomed on the mind of the modest though romantic and enterprising man, for at that time he was only at the beginning of his career of discovery.

It may not be out of place here to say a word or two as to the early career of the hero

whose footsteps we are about to follow.

He was a Highlander, to begin with; and possessed all the fire and determination peculiar to that race. At an early period of life he was led to engage in commercial enterprises in the country north-west of Lake Superior, joined the North-West Fur Company of Canada in 1784, and went into the Indian country the following spring. It is not necessary to say more than that Alexander Mackenzie proved himself to be a first-rate fur-trader at a time when the fur-trade was carried on under great difficulties and amid severe privations. For many years he was in charge of Fort Chipewyan, the remote establishment to which we have just conducted our reader. Seven years before his coming on the scene, the Lake of the Hills had not been visited by white men, and was known only through Indian report. When Mackenzie became ruler of the district, all beyond the lake was *terra incognita*. His spirit was one which thirsted to explore the unknown. He was eminently fitted both to hold an advanced post and to invade new regions, being robust in constitution, powerful in frame, inquisitive in mind, and enterprising in spirit. Frequently had he arrived at Fort Chipewyan with ninety or a hundred men without any provision for their sustenance for the winter save their fishing-nets and guns. He was therefore accustomed to live from hand to mouth, and to depend on his own exertions and resources in a country where the winter is upwards of eight months long and the severity of the climate extreme.

It was in June 1789 that he made preparations to start on his first voyage of discovery.

Rising from the table at which he had been studying his projected route, Mackenzie turned, with the air of a man who has made up his mind, and said to a clerk who was smoking beside the fireplace—

“Le Roux, if we cannot prevail on these Indians to accompany us, I have determined to start without them. Has the small canoe been gummed?”

“It has,” answered Le Roux, “but I would advise delay for a day or two. If we give them time, the Indians may change their minds; besides, the ice has not yet sufficiently cleared away.”

Mackenzie paced the room impatiently, and his eyes flashed for one moment with impatience. They were deep blue eyes that could beam with melting tenderness or sparkle with suppressed passion—it is but just to add that passion in his case was usually suppressed, for he was a lover of peace, as most truly great and powerful men usually are:

“Let us see now,” he said, sitting down in front of Le Roux, “how our resources stand. In my canoe there will be the four Canadians and the German. Then there’s our Indian friend, English Chief and his two wives, who will embark in the second-sized canoe. The two young Indians whom we want to accompany us with their wives must make up their minds to-night, else I will start without them. Your own canoe with goods for trade and provisions, will not be fully loaded; I shall therefore place in it the provisions that we can’t carry, and when we come to the place where you are to stop and trade, and where I shall bid you farewell, we shall doubtless have eaten our lading down sufficiently to take the whole on board. See, by the way, that the goods and trinkets to be given in presents as we go along are not placed in the wrong canoe.”

“They are already laid with the other goods, and also the nets and ammunition by themselves,” said Le Roux, rising and laying down his pipe.

At that moment Reuben Guff entered with his friends. The surprise of Mackenzie was great on beholding them, but greater still was his delight when he learned their errand. The young Indians were forthwith told that their services would not now be required, and our friends—including Swiftarrow's wife, Darkeye—were at once added to the exploring party.

Next day the expedition set forth from Fort Chipewyan and swept over the broad breast of the Lake of the Hills.

We will not trace their course over known ground. Suffice it to say that their troubles began at once. Soon after leaving the lake they came to a rapid part of the river which flows out of it, where they were obliged to land and carry canoes and goods to the still water further down, but here the ice was still unthawed on the banks, rendering the process of reloading difficult. Soon after they came to a place called the *Portage d'Embarras*, which is occasioned by driftwood filling up the channel of the river. There they entered the Slave River, where there is a portage or carrying-place named the Mountain, the landing at which is very steep and close to the fall. Below this fall there is a mile of dangerous rapids—and here they met with their first disaster.

Reuben and Swiftarrow having landed with part of the cargo of the small canoe, had left it in charge of Darkeye,—so named because of her large and lustrous eyes, which, however, were the only good points about her, for she was ill-favoured and clumsy, though strong of frame and a diligent worker. While she was moving from one point of rock to another that appeared to her more convenient for landing, the canoe was caught by an eddy and swept in a moment out into the strong current, down which it sped with fearful velocity towards the falls. Darkeye was quite collected and cool, but she happened to dip her paddle on the edge of a sunk rock with such vigour that the canoe overturned. Upon the heights above her husband saw the accident, and stood rooted for a moment in helpless dismay to the spot. It chanced that Lawrence Guff was at the time the only man near the unfortunate woman, who, although she swam like an otter, could not gain the bank. Seeing this, the youth sprang towards a jutting rock that almost overhung the fall, and entering the rushing stream so deeply that he could barely retain his foothold, caught the woman by the hair of the head as she was sweeping towards the edge of the fall. The two swayed for a few seconds on the verge of destruction; then Swiftarrow came bounding down the bank like a deer, and, catching Lawrence by the hand, dragged them both out of danger; but before they were fairly landed the canoe was carried over the falls, dashed to pieces, and in a few seconds its shreds were tossed wildly on the surging rapids far down the river.

This accident caused them little loss beyond the canoe, which was soon replaced by another, purchased from a party of Indians, with whom they fell in that same evening.

Passing through Slave River, they swept out on the bright waters of Great Slave Lake. Over these they sped during several days. This lake is one of the largest fresh-water oceans of the continent, about 250 miles long and 50 broad.

And here the work of exploration fairly began. Great Slave Lake was at that time imperfectly known from Indian report; and the river of which they were in search flowed, it was supposed, out of its western extremity. Here also Monsieur Le Roux was to be left behind with a party of men to prosecute the fur-trade.

CHAPTER FOUR

Vicissitudes of the Voyage—indians Met With, Etcetera

We have passed over the first three weeks of the voyage rapidly, but it must not be supposed that therefore it was all plain sailing. On the contrary, the travellers were delayed by thunderstorms, and heavy rains, and gales, and impeded by ice, which, even in the middle of June lay thick on the waters in some parts. They were also tormented by hosts of mosquitoes, and at times they found difficulty in procuring food— despite the ability of our friends Reuben, Swiftarrow, and Lawrence, who were constituted hunters to the expedition. At other times, however, the supply of food was abundant and varied. On one occasion the hunters brought in seven geese, a beaver, and four ducks, besides which a large supply of excellent trout and other fish was obtained from the nets; and on another occasion they procured two swans, ten beavers, and a goose. But sometimes they returned empty-handed, or with a single bird or so, while the nets produced nothing at all. Deer were also shot occasionally, and they found immense numbers of wild cranberries, strawberries, rasps, and other berries, besides small spring onions; so that, upon the whole, they fared well, and days of abstinence were more than compensated by days of superabundance.

One evening while they were coasting along this great lake, some Indians were discovered on the shore, and the travellers landed to make inquiries of them as to the nature of the country beyond. There were three lodges belonging to the Red-knife Indians, who were so named because their knives were made of the copper found in that region. To the leading man of these, English Chief, being interpreter, addressed himself.

English Chief, we may remark in passing, was one of the followers of the chief who conducted Hearne on his expedition to the Coppermine River; since which event he had been a principal leader of his countrymen who were in the habit of carrying furs to the English fur-traders at Churchill, on Hudson's Bay, and was much attached to the interest of the Hudson Bay Company, which, at that time, was in opposition to the Canadian or Nor'-West Company. These circumstances procured him the title of the English Chief. An able, active, but self-sufficient and somewhat obstinate chief he was, and caused Mackenzie a good deal of anxiety and much trouble to keep him with the party.

In answer to his queries, the principal man of the Red-knife Indians said that there were many more of his tribe a short distance off, and that he would send a man to fetch them. He also said that the explorers should see no more of them at that time, because the Slave and Beaver Indians, as well as others of the tribe, were about to depart, and would not be in that region again till the time when the swans cast their feathers.

“Ask him,” said Mackenzie, “if he and his friends have many furs to dispose of.”

To this the Indian replied by at once producing upwards of eight large packs of good beaver and marten skins; and added the information that his friends had plenty more.

“Now, then, Le Roux,” said Mackenzie, turning to his clerk, “here you and I shall part.

This seems a good spot and a good opportunity for opening up the trade with these Indians. When the rest of them arrive we shall have a palaver, and then you shall remain to look after them, so, open up your packs, and get ready a few small presents without delay.”

That day was spent in considerable bustle and excitement; the Indians being overjoyed that the white traders had at last penetrated into their country; and their joy being increased by the distribution of such trifling, but much-prized, gifts as glass beads, knives, small looking-glasses, etcetera. It rained in torrents all the time but this did not damp their spirits; and as for their bodies—they were used to it! In the afternoon Mackenzie assembled the whole tribe, and made them the following speech, which was translated by English Chief in a very pompous manner, for that excellent red-skin was fully alive to the dignity of his position.

“My friends,” began our explorer, “I am glad to meet with you. The white man and the Indians are always glad to meet—they can benefit each other mutually. Each has got what the other requires. I have come for the purpose of opening up trade with you. It is true that I myself will take my departure to-morrow, because I am in search of new lands; but some of my people will remain on the spot, and if you bring in a sufficient quantity of furs to make it answer, my men will return to Fort Chipewyan for more goods, and will spend the winter here. They will build a fort and continue to dwell among you as long as you shall be found to deserve it.”

At this point the speaker paused, and the dark-skinned audience gave vent to a loud “Ho!” which was equivalent to the British “Hear, hear!”

“In regard to my own work,” continued Mackenzie, “I intend to search for, and find the great river, which, it is said, flows out of this lake, and follow its current to the sea—or, as you call it, the great salt lake. Do my brothers know anything about this river? If so, let them speak.”

Hereupon an old chief, with hair like small iron wire, and a skin like shoe-leather, got up, and delivered himself as follows—

“We are glad to hear what our white brother says. It encourages us to know that you will make a trading fort in our country, for we have need of one. Hitherto we have had to travel far—very far—with our furs; or if, to save trouble, we intrusted our furs to the Chipewyans, they often pillaged us, or, at most, gave us very little for the fruits of our toil. For a long time we have been so discouraged that we had no motive to pursue the beaver, except to obtain a sufficiency of food and clothing. Now if you come to us, we shall be happy—wauch!”

The last word was equivalent to the expression—“There, think o’ that!” The old man paused as if to give his audience time for reflection.

“As to the great river,” he continued sententiously, “we know of its existence; but none of our tribe has ever followed its course down to the great salt lake. We earnestly advise our brother not to go there, for it is a dreadful river. It is said that there are two impassable falls in its course; and it is so long that old age will come upon you before the time of your return. You will also encounter monsters of horrid shapes and awful strength on the land and in the water—wauch!”

The old chief began to glare solemnly at this point, and the whole tribe followed his example.

“It is said,” he continued, “that there are bears which eat the trees as if they were grass; whose cubs, even at their birth, are strong enough to kill the stoutest man. There are monsters in the river so big that a canoe full of men would be but a mouthful to them. There are so few animals or fish fit for food, that you will all certainly be starved. And, besides all this, evil spirits dwell there, whose chief delight lies in attacking, killing, roasting, and devouring men—wauch!”

Here the Indian sat down with the decision of a man who has given unanswerable arguments for the overturning of foolish plans; nevertheless, Mackenzie’s plans remained unaltered. Not so, however, those of a young Indian, who had been engaged to guide the explorers to the other end of the lake, in order to save them from the loss of time which would be occasioned by the necessity of coasting round its numerous bays. The imagination of this youth—Coppernose, as Lawrence Guff facetiously styled him—was so wrought upon by the dreadful description of the great river, that he manifested a strong desire to draw back; but by the timely addition of a small kettle, an axe, a knife, and a few beads to the gifts already bestowed on him, he was eventually persuaded to venture.

Before departing, poor Coppernose took a ceremonious leave of his family. He cut off a lock of his hair, and divided it into three parts. One of these he fastened to the top of his wife’s head, and blew on it three times with the utmost violence, at the same time uttering certain cabalistic words. The other two portions he fastened with the same formalities to the heads of his two children.

Even at the last he hesitated, and was finally made to enter the canoe more by force than by persuasion!

A few days later, and our pioneers were fairly embarked on the great river, whose course to the mouth it was their object to explore.

The expedition was now somewhat reduced, owing to Monsieur Le Roux having been left behind. It consisted of three canoes—the large one with Mackenzie and five men; a small one, with English Chief and his two wives, and Coppernose; and another small one, containing Reuben, his son, Swiftarrow, and Darkeye. Two of the Canadians were also attended by their wives; so that the party numbered sixteen souls, five of whom were women. They all kept company as much as possible, but English Chief was frequently left behind by the large canoe; while Reuben and his friends, being the hunters as we have said, were necessarily absent for considerable periods in search of game.

One evening as they were descending a beautiful sweep of the river under sail in grand style, the English Chief—leaning composedly back in his canoe, while his right hand slightly moved the steering paddle, and his teeth grasped his beloved pipe—said quietly to Coppernose, of course in the Indian tongue—

“A pretty guide you are, not to know something more about a river so near to your own wigwam.”

Coppernose, who was a humble-minded man, smiled slightly, and shook his head as he said—

“All red men are not so adventurous as the English Chief. I never had occasion to travel in this direction, and do not know the way.”

“Boo!” ejaculated English Chief; meaning, no doubt, fiddlededee!

“But I know of a river,” continued Coppernose, “which falls into this one from the north, and comes from the Horn Mountain that we passed at the end of Great Slave Lake; it is the country of the Beaver Indians. My relations meet me frequently on that river. There are great plains on both sides of that river, which abound in buffaloes and moose—deer.”

“I don’t believe it—wauch!” said English Chief. As this was a discouraging reception of his remarks, Coppernose relapsed into silence.

Soon afterwards the large canoe was observed to make for a low grassy point; and as it was about the usual camping time, English Chief made for the same place. The hunters reached it about ten minutes later, and bore into camp two reindeer, four geese, and a swan, besides a large quantity of berries gathered by the fair (or brown) hands of Darkeye.

“There is plenty of game everywhere,” said Reuben, in answer to a query from his leader, “we might have killed much more if we’d had more time— but enough is as good as a feast, as the sayin’ goes in my country.”

“In *your* country?” said Mackenzie, with a smile.

“Ay, I claim to be a Scotchman—though I was born and raised in Canada— my father hailed from the land o’ cakes.”

“Does Lawrence claim the same nationality on the same ground, Reuben?”

“He does not!” answered Lawrence for himself, while busy cleaning his father’s gun.

“The lad loves the Canadians,” replied Reuben, with a chuckle; “besides, he couldn’t claim it on the same ground, seein’ that I am fully half a Scot, while he is at least three-quarters a Canadian.”

“More the better luck for him,” said one of the Canadians, who had already kindled a fire, before which one of his comrades was busily engaged setting up juicy venison steaks to roast.

“Oui,” observed another; “vraiment, Canada beats Scottish land altogether.”

“Ha! Faderland ees more best, den all ze world,” said the German, quaffing a can of water with as much zest as if it had been his own native Rhine wine.

“I warrant me,” said Mackenzie with a laugh, “that our trusty guide, Coppernose, would not give the wilderness here for Canada, Scotland, and Faderland put together. What say you, lad?”

Coppernose looked gravely at his questioner, but made no reply.

“Boo!” said English Chief; regarding his countryman with a look of contempt; “hims no onerstan’ Eengleesh.”

“He understands how to eat a rumpsteak of venison, however,” said Mackenzie, with a laugh, as Coppernose at that moment coolly appropriated a mass of half-roasted meat, and began to devour it. “You’d better follow his example, lads.”

The men were not slow to take this advice. In a short time all were more or less busily engaged with venison steaks, marrow–bones, goose drum–sticks, and fish; and comparative silence prevailed while the cravings of nature were being appeased. After supper, pipes were lighted, and conversation became animated for some time; but they were all too much fatigued to prolong this period, interesting though it was. One after another they spread their blankets under a convenient bush or tree, and, ere long, the whole party was in the land of Nod.

CHAPTER FIVE

Describes a Literal Wild-geese Chase and Other Matters

Time sped on its proverbially rapid wing; the summer advanced, and still Mackenzie and his men continued to descend the mighty river of the far north, encountering dangers and vicissitudes enough undoubtedly, but happily escaping those terrified monsters of the forest and the flood, which had been described by the Copper Indians of Great Slave Lake, and the thought of which caused poor Coppernose himself to grow terrified and desperate by turns. Fain would that unhappy son of the forest have bid the party farewell, and returned to his own wigwam alone; but this might not be, for his services were of some importance, and the leader of the expedition kept on him constantly an eye, which excelled in intense watchfulness the glare of the fiercest of those creatures which filled his imagination. He submitted, therefore, with the best grace he could assume; but, what between being watched by Mackenzie, haunted by ghosts, and bullied by English Chief, poor Coppernose had a sad time of it. He possessed, however, a naturally elastic and jovial spirit, which tended greatly to ameliorate his condition; and as time passed by without any serious mishap, or the appearance of any unusually dreadful creature, he became gradually reconciled to his position.

One day—perhaps we should rather say one night, for it was approaching midnight, although the sun was still above the horizon, owing to the high northern latitude to which they had attained, rendering the whole twenty-four hours round a continuous day—one day (or night) as the canoes were sweeping down a reach of the broad river, they saw a few wreaths of smoke rising above the tree-tops. The spot was very beautiful, being thickly wooded and backed by high land, on the slopes of which the trees and bushes hung like delicate fringes of green among masses of silvery grey rock.

“That looks like the smoke of an Indian wigwam, Louis,” said Mackenzie to his bowman.

“No, monsieur, it is the wood burning,” replied Louis, dipping his vermilion-painted paddle with great vigour.

Louis was right, for soon afterwards they turned a point which disclosed to their view a considerable tract of woodland which had been recently destroyed by fire. Several tracts of this kind had been already passed, some of which had been consumed long before, and forests of young poplars had grown up in their places—a curious circumstance this, which Mackenzie remarks on, namely, “That wherever land covered with spruce, pine, and white birch had been laid waste with fire, there poplars, and nothing else, were found to grow, even though none of that species of tree had existed there before.”

Passing this desolated tract they came to a part of the river which was studded with several islands, on one of which reindeer were seen.

“There’s your chance,” said Mackenzie to his hunters, who happened to range up alongside in their small canoe at that moment.

“We’ve seed ‘em, monsieur,” said Reuben, “but we must have some more ammunition afore startin’ after them, for the powder–horns of Lawrence and Swiftarrow are both empty.”

As soon as the horns were replenished, Reuben and his friends pushed out into the stream and made for the island. The other canoes continued to advance. They seldom waited for the hunters, for the latter being comparatively light, could act as a sort of flying artillery, falling behind, turning aside, or pushing ahead, as the case might require, in pursuit of game, and almost always returning to the main body about the camping hour, or soon after it. On this evening, however, the canoes reached a snug camping–ground before the usual time; they therefore determined to stop there and set the nets, as well as to overhaul the canoes, which stood much in need of repair. The cold of the ice–laden waters, through which they had recently passed, had cracked the gum off the seams, and collisions with the ice itself had made some ugly slits in the birch–bark of which the canoes were made.

That evening the nets, which were set in four fathoms water, produced an abundant supply of carp, whitefish, and trout.

“Now, lads,” said Mackenzie, when the canoe brought ashore the welcome provisions, “set the women to work to make pemmican, for we must leave a supply concealed here against our return.”

Louis Blanc superintended the making of this pemmican, which consisted of fish dried in the sun and pounded between two stones. Pemmican is also made of meat, in which case the pounded meat is put into a bag made of the raw hide of the animal; the bag is then filled with melted fat and the mouth sewed up with raw sinews. This style of pemmican will keep fresh for years.

“Where did English Chief go when we landed?” asked Mackenzie.

“Don’t know, monsieur,” replied Louis.

“After game, probably,” observed the leader, as he sat down on the stump of a fallen tree and began to make notes in his journal.

Some time thereafter, Reuben’s canoe returned laden with two deer, besides two swans, a number of ducks and hares, and several brace of ptarmigan, which latter were quite grey at that season, with the exception of one or two pure white feathers in the tail. They said that wild–fowl were innumerable among the islands; but this, indeed, was obvious to all, for everywhere their plaintive and peculiar cries, and the whirring or flapping of their wings, were heard even when the leafy screen over the encampment hid themselves from view. Darkeye also contributed her share to the general supplies, in the shape of several large birch–baskets full of gooseberries, cranberries, juniper–berries, rasps, and other wild berries, which, she said, grew luxuriantly in many places.

Meanwhile, the night (as regards *time*) advanced, although the daylight did not disappear, or even much diminish, but English Chief, with Coppernose and his two squaws, did not return, and their prolonged absence became at length a cause of no little anxiety to the leader of the expedition. The fact was that English Chief was fond of a little fun, and despite the dignified position which he held, and the maturity of his years, he could not resist availing himself of any little chance that came in his way of having what is more

pithily than elegantly styled “a spree.”

It happened to be the particular period at which the wild-fowl of those regions begin to cast their feathers. Knowing this, English Chief quietly slipped off with his canoe when Mackenzie landed, and soon found a colony of swans afflicted with that humiliating lack of natural clothing, which is the cause, doubtless, of their periodically betaking themselves to the uttermost ends of the earth in order to hide in deep solitude their poverty, and there renew their garments. Judge then, reader, if you can, the consternation with which these once graceful creatures discovered that their retreat had been found out by that inquisitive biped, man—that they were actually caught in the act of moulting!

Uttering a terrific “hoozoo!” or some such equally wild Red-Indian hunting cry, English Chief dashed his paddle into the water; squaws and comrade followed suit; the canoe shot in among the rushes, and the whole party leaped on shore. Thus taken by surprise the swans bounced up, extended their miserable wings, uttered a trumpet-blast of alarm, and sought to fly. Of course they failed, but although they could not fly, they fled on the wings of terror, and with straight necks, heads low, legs doing double duty, and remnants of wings doing what they could, they made for the interior of the island at a pace which at first defied pursuit.

The higher part of the island was level and open, with here and there a few stunted bushes. Arrived here the trumpeting crew scattered, like wise troops when pursued. English Chief set his heart and eyes on a particularly large bird, and dashed after it with upraised paddle. The swan made a desperate *detour*, apparently bent on gaining the water; it ran round a bush, and was almost caught in the arms of the younger squaw, who, leaving her senior in the canoe, had joined in the pursuit. A shriek from the squaw sent it off at a tangent to the left, pinions aloft, and terror depicted on its visage. English Chief also doubled, but a crooked stump caught his foot and sent him headlong into the bush. At that instant, Coppernose, having foiled a swan with a well-directed sweep of his paddle, came up and gave chase. English Chief, nettled at the interference, sprung up, followed and overtook him just as the hard-pushed swan turned at bay. Both men came upon it at the same moment, stumbled over it, and turned their wrath upon each other. The swan, recovering, ran wildly and blindly back towards the young squaw, who was so much alarmed by its look that she fairly turned and fled; but hearing the shouts of the Indians as they struggled, she turned towards them. Meanwhile, the elder squaw having landed, met the retreating swan just as it gained the rushes. Stooping down she allowed it to approach to within a yard of her—like a true heroine—and then, rising, hit it a neat blow on the back of the head and laid it low for ever.

After this she joined her sister-wife (if we may be allowed the expression) in trying to tear the Indians asunder. This was accomplished after a few seconds, but the two men still glared at each other. Fortunately they could do little more, having left their knives in the canoe. While they were still in a state of indecision, an unfortunate swan, which had taken refuge behind a bush, so far recovered its breath as to think it advisable to get still further away from such company. It was observed and followed as wildly as before by English Chief. This time Coppernose had the sense to confine his attentions to another part of the field, where, while prosecuting the chase, he suddenly came upon a flock of geese in the same helpless circumstances as the swans. Soon the swans were routed out of their places

of concealment, and the cries of men, women, and birds again resounded in the air. The way in which those swans behaved was quite marvellous. They dodged the blows aimed at them, and “jinked” round the bushes as if they had been trained to such work in a regular public school for human bipeds, and they struck out with their pinions, too, so deftly and with such force that the pursuers had to become extremely cautious as well as bold in their approaches.

At last, when the Indians were thoroughly exhausted, they gave up the chase. On conveying the fruits of their exertions to the canoe, they found that they had killed five swans and a like number of geese. With these they returned in triumph to camp, to the great relief of Mackenzie, who had begun to fear either that an accident had befallen them, or that they had deserted him.

At this place two bags of pemmican were concealed on an island, and here one of their leads was lost in taking soundings. The current of the river also was so violent that Mackenzie concluded they must be approaching the rapids, of which some of the natives had made mention. The strength of the current may be estimated from the fact that, when the lead just referred to caught on the bottom and held on, they attempted to clear it by paddling up stream; yet although they had eight paddles, and were held by the line, the strength of which was equal to four paddles, they were borne down with such force that the line snapped asunder.

Here the weather became very bad. They had frequent thunderstorms accompanied with violent rain, and, although it was at that time the beginning of July, ice lay in great quantities all along the banks of the river. On shore, the earth was thawed only to a depth of about fourteen inches. Indeed, the soil of those regions *never* thaws completely. At the hottest season of the year, if you were to dig down a few feet, you would come to a subsoil which is locked in the embrace of *perpetual* frost. Some signs of natives were discovered here, and, from the appearance of the cut trees, it was evident that they possessed no iron tools.

“Push forward,” was Mackenzie’s watchword more perhaps than it had been of any previous discoverer in Rupert’s Land. The Indians began ere long to complain bitterly of his perseverance. They were not accustomed to such constant and severe exertion, and it was with great difficulty that he prevailed on them to continue the voyage.

As they advanced, fresh signs of natives were observed, and at last, one evening, they came in sight of an encampment of them. It was at a place where the current of the great river was so strong that it was in actual ebullition, and produced a hissing noise like a kettle of water in a moderate boiling state. The region was mountainous, and just before them they perceived a high ridge covered with snow.

“They’re evidently not much used to visitors,” said Mackenzie, on observing that the natives were running about in great confusion, some making for the woods, and others hurrying to the canoes.

“They is used to be ‘tacked by inimis,” said English Chief, who was rather proud of his knowledge of the English language.

“Hail them in the Chipewyan tongue,” said Mackenzie, as the canoes touched the beach. English Chief and the hunters landed first, and addressed the few natives who had

ventured to remain, but they were so terrified as to be unable to reply. Seeing this, Mackenzie quietly landed, and gave orders for the pitching of the tents. While this was being done, the natives grew calm; they found that they understood Chipewyan; a few words relieved them of their apprehensions, and soon they not only came down to the tents, but were so gratified with their reception that they sent for those members of their tribe who had fled. Thus friendly relations were established.

There were five families, consisting of about thirty persons of two different tribes—the Slave and the Dog-rib Indians.

CHAPTER SIX

Indians Met With, and the Mouth of the Great River Reached

Heroes are not perfect. We deem it necessary to make this observation, because many modern biographers seem to imagine that their heroes *are* perfect, and even attempt to prove them to be so. We therefore feel it necessary to disclaim any such imagination or intention in regard to *our* hero. Alexander Mackenzie was indeed a hero, and a very fine specimen of a man—mentally as well as physically—if we are to credit the report of those who knew him best; but he was not perfect.

For instance, he evidently acted sometimes on the fallacious notion that whatever gave pleasure to himself must necessarily give pleasure to all other men. Acting on this idea in the present instance, he sought to delight the hearts of these Slave and Dog-rib Indians by presenting them with pipes and tobacco, and inducing them to smoke. To the credit of humanity be it recorded that they received the gift with marked dislike, although they were too polite to absolutely refuse it. Slaves though one section of them were in name, they were not slaves to tobacco; and the other section being Dog-ribs, had, we presume, too little of Adam's rib in them to find pleasure in smoke. Of course, they knew *something* about smoke, but it was chiefly as a nuisance, which was very troublesome to the eyes, and which usually issued from the tops of their wigwams—not from human lips. It must also be recorded that those estimable savages entertained a strong antipathy to grog when it was produced. Their hearts were reached, however, and their souls gladdened, when knives, beads, awls, firesteels, flints, and hatchets were presented to them; and we can fancy how animated and earnest would be their converse over the wigwam fires, for weeks and months, if not for years, afterwards, when they brought out, for the thousandth time, and feasted their wondering eyes on, those delightfully useful implements, which had been left by the mysterious white beings who had dropped upon them so suddenly, as if from the skies, and whom they felt half inclined at first to reverence as gods.

Having won their confidence and esteem, Mackenzie proceeded to question them as to that portion of the great river which yet lay before him. Their account was an exaggerated echo of that previously obtained from the Indians of Great Slave Lake. Being, therefore, of little or no value, our hero was obliged to advance, and solve the question for himself. As before, the effect of the Indian stories on the Indians of his party was very marked and discouraging. With great difficulty Mackenzie overcame their objections to proceed, and even succeeded in persuading one of the Dog-rib Indians to accompany him by the potent influence of a small kettle, an axe, a knife, and a few other gifts. This man was a stout young fellow, in a very dirty deerskin coat and leggings, with a double blue line tattooed on his cheeks from the ears to the nose, on the bridge of which it met in a blue spot. Hence Lawrence, following the natural bent of his mind, which he had already displayed in naming Coppernose, immediately addressed this new recruit as Bluenose.

These poor savages, although exemplary in the matters of grog and tobacco, were, we are constrained to admit, a very filthy set of creatures; very poor also, because utterly destitute

of such wealth as the fur-traders had carried to many of the less remote tribes of Indians. Nevertheless they possessed a considerable number of implements of their own manufacture, some of wood and others of bone, etcetera, which proved them to be possessed of much ingenuity and taste. The description of their weapons reminds one of those remains of prehistoric man which we find treasured in our museums, for they had arrows barbed with horn, flint, iron, and copper, spears shod with bone, daggers of horn and bone, and axes made of brown or grey stone. The latter were from six to eight inches long and two thick, having the inside flat and the outside round, and tapering to an edge, and were fastened by the middle to wooden handles with a cord of raw skin. They kindled fires by striking together a piece of white or yellow pyrites and a flint stone over a piece of touch-wood, and boiled water in water-tight baskets, by putting a succession of red-hot stones into them.

From these Indians the explorers learned that they had passed, on their voyage down the river, large bodies of Indians who inhabit the mountains.

“He’ll never make up his mind to go,” observed Reuben, as, when about to set forth again, he looked at the pale countenance of the Dog-rib who had agreed to join the party.

Mackenzie had already had a severe argument with him in order to induce him to fulfil his engagement, and had left him under the impression that he had been successful; but when the poor man had said farewell to the tribe, and was on the point of entering the canoe, his courage failed, and he drew back. Seeing this, Lawrence suddenly seized him by the nape of the neck, and exclaiming, “Come, look sharp, Bluenose, get in with ‘ee,” gave him a lift that put the matter at rest by sending him sprawling on board. Next moment they were off, and shooting down the rapid current of the river.

That night they encamped, amid heavy squalls of wind and rain, at the foot of a rocky hill, on the top of which their new guide said that it blew a gale every day of the year! Here the Dog-rib became very unhappy, and pretended to be ill, but a strict watch was kept on him so that he could not escape. The country around them was very wild and rugged, and they were informed by their guide that great numbers of bears and small white buffaloes (musk-oxen?) frequented the mountains; also some tribes of Indians. Here some of the party attempted to ascend a steep hill, but were almost suffocated and fairly driven back by clouds of mosquitoes.

Natives were sometimes seen and spoken with, although their first impulse on beholding the voyagers was almost invariably to flee. On one occasion a whole tribe fled save one old man, who came boldly forward and said that he was too old to run or to care much about the short time that yet remained to him of this life. At the same time he pulled out his grey hair by handfuls, and distributed them among the party, imploring their favour for himself and his relations. His mind was quickly relieved by Swiftarrow, who seemed to have a special desire, as well as talent, for comforting aged persons of both sexes.

Some of these tribes were named the Hare Indians—hares and fish being their principal means of support. While spending a night with these people a storm of thunder and rain came on, in the midst of which the Dog-rib, Bluenose, managed to make his escape. As it was important to have a guide, Mackenzie compelled a Hare Indian to fill his place; and, after carrying him off, took great pains to conciliate him—in which efforts he was happily

successful.

Next day they observed natives on the east shore of the river, and directed their course towards them. Their new guide began to call to them in an incomprehensible manner, and said that the natives did not belong to his tribe, but were a very wicked people, who would beat them cruelly, and pull out their hair, and maltreat them in various ways. Despite this warning Mackenzie advanced, and soon found them to be quite as willing to accept of gifts as other tribes. He found that they understood their guide, and that English Chief clearly comprehended one of themselves, although he could not make himself understood. Here the joyful information was obtained that in three days more they should meet with the Esquimaux, and in ten days at furthest reach the great salt lake—or the sea.

These natives were very superior to those whom the travellers had last met with, and one of them was engaged to take the place of Bluenose. This man, who was clad in a shirt made of the skins of the musk-rat, after which he was named, was a very lively individual. He sang the songs not only of his own tribe, but also those of the Esquimaux, with whom his tribe had been formerly at war, but were now at peace. He also undertook to perform an Esquimaux dance in Mackenzie's canoe, and would infallibly have upset that conveyance had he not been violently restrained. He commented on the tribe to which Bluenose belonged with great contempt, calling them by the strong names of cowards and liars.

During these brief visits to the natives our discoverer was not only troubled by the thievish propensities of the natives, but had to guard against the same tendencies in his own men, some of whom were much confused as to the true course of rectitude in regard to "mine and thine"; in addition to which he had to contend with a general propensity on the part of his men to quarrel not only with each other, but with the weather, the journey, and the decrees of fate generally. By a judicious mixture, however, of firmness and suavity, severity and kindness, he managed to keep the several parts of his discordant band together; and, in so doing, proved himself an able general for the highest generalship consists in making the most of existing circumstances and materials.

The river here ran through various channels formed by islands, some of which were without a tree, while others were covered with spruce, fir, and other trees. The banks, which were about six feet above the surface of the river, displayed a face of solid ice intermixed with veins of black earth, and as the heat of the sun melted the ice, the trees frequently fell into the river. The variety of channels in the river rendered it difficult to decide which should be followed. Muskrat, the new guide, recommended that which ran to the east; but his leader, not feeling sure of his wisdom or knowledge, preferred the middle channel.

Here Mackenzie put ashore and proceeded to engage in some cabalistic pursuits which utterly confounded Muskrat.

"What is he doing?" asked the savage of English Chief.

"Taking the sun," replied the interpreter, with immense pomposity.

"What does that mean?" asked the savage.

English Chief tried to explain, but failed for this good reason—that he himself was totally

ignorant of the subject beyond the phrase, which he had picked up after the manner of a parrot.

It was found that the latitude was 67 degrees 47 minutes north. This was further north than Mackenzie had expected to make it, but the difference was owing to the variation of the compass. From this it became evident that the river emptied itself into the Polar Sea. Not satisfied, however, with the apparent certainty of this, our pioneer resolved to have ocular demonstration—to push on to the mouth of the river, even although, by so doing, he should risk not being able to return to Fort Chipewyan for want of provisions.

But now his men became so much discouraged that they did their utmost to induce him to turn back, and he felt convinced that if they had had it in their power, some of them would have left him to his fate. As Columbus did of old, in somewhat similar circumstances, he assured them that he would now advance only a specified number of days—seven, adding that if he did not then reach the sea he would return. Indeed the low state of their provisions alone formed a sufficient security for the maintenance of his engagement.

That evening (the 11th July) they pitched their tents near to a spot where there had been three encampments of the Esquimaux, and here Mackenzie sat up all night to observe the sun, being now in that realm of bright unchanging day, which in winter becomes a region of continuous night.

At half-past twelve he called up Reuben Guff and his son and Swiftarrow, who were the most intelligent members of his party, to view a spectacle which they had never before seen. They thought, on observing the sun so high, that it was the signal to embark, and were about to rouse their comrades, when Mackenzie checked them, and it was with difficulty he persuaded them that the sun had not descended nearer to the horizon, and that it was then but a short time past midnight!

It is but justice to Reuben and his party to say that they offered no opposition to their leader during the whole voyage. In regard to this, one speech made by Reuben will suffice to describe the spirit that animated him.

“It don’t do, Lawrence,” said he, “to go for to interfere wi’ them as leads. Be they wise or be they foolish it on’y makes matters wus to interfere wi’ leaders, my lad; therefore it’s best *always* to hold your tongue an’ do yer dooty. What Monsieur Mackenzie is, it ain’t for the likes of you and me to pretend for to judge. He *seems* to me an able, brave, and wise man, so my colours is nailed to the mast, d’ye see—as was said by the immortal Lord Nelson—an’ I’ve made up my mind to follow him to the end, through thick and thin. It’s little right I would have to claim to be a pioneer if I didn’t hold them sentiments.”

“Them sentiments,” we need scarcely add, were heartily echoed by his Indian friend and his son.

The appearance of deserted native encampments still further confirmed Mackenzie in his belief that he had at length reached the land of the Esquimaux. Round their fireplaces were found scattered pieces of whalebone, and spots were observed where train-oil had been spilt. The deserted huts also corresponded in construction with those which were known to be built elsewhere by the denizens of the far north. Several runners of sledges were also found, and the skulls of a large animal, which was conjectured to be the walrus. Here the land was covered with short grass and flowers, though the earth was not thawed above

four inches from the surface; beneath that all was frozen hard.

The pioneers had now at last reached the entrance of what appeared to be a lake, which was in the neighbourhood of the Polar Sea, if not that sea itself; but the variety of channels, the strength of currents, the shallowness of the water and quantity of ice with which it was beset, with the ignorance of their guide, rendered it impossible to make any further advance that season. The object of the expedition, however, had been accomplished. The largest northern river of America, estimated at 2000 miles in length, had been traced from its source to its outlet in the Polar Sea; the nature of the country and its inhabitants had been ascertained; coal and copper ore had been discovered; the region had been wrenched from the realms of *terra incognita*, and the energetic pioneer fixed the position of his most northerly discoveries in 69 degrees 7 minutes north latitude. Another fact which proved that they were within the influence of the sea was the rise and fall of the water, which could be nothing else than the tide.

They caught a fish, also, resembling a herring, which none of the party had ever seen except English Chief who declared it to be of a kind that abounds in Hudson's Bay, and finally they beheld what settled the question, a shoal of white whales, which their Indian guide said was the principal food of the Esquimaux.

It was no wonder that the discoverers found the navigation very intricate, because that great river, now named the Mackenzie, is known to empty its waters into the Polar Sea by innumerable mouths which form a delta of about forty miles in width. Storms, rain, and fogs, threw additional hindrances in their way. There was, therefore, nothing left for it but to erect a post and take possession of the land in the name of the King.

Homeward! after that, was the order of the day. But what a mighty distance off that home was! And, after all, when reached it was but a log-hut or two in a part of the vast wilderness which, regarded from a civilised-land point of view, was itself the very confines of the known world. Our space forbids us to follow Mackenzie and his men on their arduous and interesting return voyage. Suffice it to say that they dragged the canoes by means of lines against the strong current for a large portion of the way; and, after incurring innumerable dangers from natives, rapids, storms, and starvation, they reached the Lake of the Hills and landed at Fort Chipewyan on the 12th of September 1789, having been absent for the long period of one hundred and two days.

That our hero was not content to rest upon the laurels thus gathered in the far north, but longed to act the part of pioneer over the Rocky Mountains into the far west, shall be made plain in our next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Voyage of Discovery to the Far West Planned and Begun

Three years passed away, during which period Mackenzie, being busily occupied with his arduous duties as a fur-trader, could not carry out the more noble purposes of discovery on which his heart was set. But a time at length arrived when circumstances permitted him to turn his eyes once more with a set purpose on the unknown wilderness of the West. Seated one fine morning about the beginning of spring, in his wooden residence at Fort Chipewyan, he observed Reuben Guff passing the window with an axe on his shoulder, that worthy, with his son and Swiftarrow, having engaged in the service of the fur-traders at the end of the late expedition. Opening the door, Mackenzie called him in.

“Where are you bound for just now, Reuben?”

“To dinner, monsieur.”

“Reuben,” said Mackenzie, with a peculiar look, “has all your pioneering enthusiasm oozed out at your finger ends?”

“No, monsieur,” replied the man, with a slight smile, “but Lawrence and I have bin thinkin’ of late that as Monsieur Mackenzie seems to have lost heart, we must undertake a v’yage o’ diskivery on our own account!”

“Good. Then you are both ready, doubtless, to begin your discoveries with a canoe journey of some extent on short notice?”

“At once, monsieur, if it please you.”

“Nay, Reuben, not quite so fast as that,” said Mackenzie, with a laugh; “you may have your dinner first. But to-morrow you shall become a genuine pioneer by preceding me towards the far west. You know the position of our most distant settlements on the Peace River?”

“Perfectly,” said Reuben, whose eye kindled as he began to see that his master was in earnest.

“Well, I intend to visit these settlements this fall, and push on towards the Rocky Mountains. It will take me to the end of the season to accomplish this, so that our real voyage of discovery will not begin until the following spring. Now, there is a certain locality beyond our most distant outpost, which I shall describe to you afterwards, where I intend to build a fort and spend next winter, so as to be on the spot ready to begin the moment the ice breaks up. Preparations must be made there for the building of the fort. Timber must be felled, cut, and squared for the houses and palisades, and two able and willing, as well as experienced men, must go there to begin this work without delay. It occurs to me that the two best men I have for such work are Reuben Guff and his son. Are they prepared for this duty, think you?”

“Say the word, monsieur,” was Reuben’s laconic but significant reply.

“Well, then, it is said. Come back here after dinner with Lawrence, and I will give you instructions: you shall start to-morrow at daybreak.”

Reuben bowed and left the hall with a light step. Next day he and his son started on their journey in a small birch-bark canoe; on the 10th of October Mackenzie followed in a canoe of larger dimensions. He visited several establishments of the district of which he had charge; ascended the Peace River towards its unknown sources, gave good advice to the several bands of Indians whom he met with by the way, and generally strengthened the hearts and hands of his agents. Passing the last outpost on the river, he pushed on, until, finally, he reached his intended winter-quarters on the 1st of November—not a day too soon, for the river was already being covered with its winter coat of ice.

Here he found Reuben and Lawrence, bronzed and hardened with toil and exposure. They had done good service during the previous summer, for all the timber was prepared, a space marked out for the fort, and a deep trench dug for the palisades. Here also were found a band of natives, amounting to about seventy men, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Chief, as they styled Mackenzie, and thirsting especially for tobacco and rum, both of which—unlike the natives of the far north—they were particularly fond of.

To build a fort in a few weeks, consisting of a dwelling-house and several stores, with palisades eighteen feet high, in the midst of frost so intense that their axes sometimes became as brittle as glass, and living in tents the while, exposed to the storms of wind and snow peculiar to a hyperborean clime, was a feat which, if detailed, would fill a volume. We are constrained to dismiss the subject in a line. Thus curtly, also, must we treat the winter. Yet some points we cannot forbear to touch on, illustrative as they are of some curious experiences of the fur-traders.

The Indians there were unusually ignorant of medical science, and when ill applied to Mackenzie, believing, with childlike simplicity, that he certainly knew everything and could do anything!

One woman came to him with a swelled breast, which her friends had lacerated with flints in order to cure it; this failing, they had blown on it, but with similar want of success. Mackenzie knew not what to do, but, bringing common sense to bear on the case, he made the poor creature keep it clean (she was naturally dirty), poulticed it several times, and anointed it with healing salve. In a short time a perfect cure was effected. After that an Indian while at work in the woods was attacked with a sudden pain near the first joint of his thumb, which disabled him. He appealed to Mackenzie, who, to his surprise, found a narrow red inflamed stripe about an inch wide, extending from the man's thumb to his shoulder. The pain was very violent, and accompanied with chilliness and shivering. Mackenzie admits that the case was quite beyond his skill; but as it was necessary to relieve the Indian's mind, he attempted a cure. He prepared a kind of volatile liniment of rum and soap, with which he ordered the arm to be rubbed. The success of this treatment was doubtful, because at first it drove the man mad, and the red stripe not only increased but extended in the form of several blotches on the body, and was accompanied by pains in the stomach. Seeing this, our amateur doctor fell back on the old plan of bleeding, an operation which he had never before performed. The result was marvellous. The following night the man was much better, and ere long was restored to his former health, and filled with gratitude.

Again, on another occasion, a young Indian's gun burst and maimed his hand so that the thumb hung by a mere strip of flesh. When he came to the fort his wound was in a very offensive state. His friends had done their best for him, but as their panacea for everything consisted in singing or howling, and blowing on the affected part, he was not perceptibly the better for their exertions. The youth's life being in danger, Mackenzie once more tried his skill. He applied to it a poultice of bark stripped from the roots of the spruce fir, having first washed the wound with the juice of the bark. This proved to be a very painful dressing, but it cleaned the wound effectually. He then cut off the pendent thumb, and applied a dressing of salve composed of Canadian balsam, wax, and tallow dropped from a burning candle into the water. As before, the treatment was successful, insomuch that the young red-skin was soon in the hunting-field again, and brought an elk's tongue as a fee to his benefactor.

During the winter he was visited by a few Rocky Mountain Indians, who gave him some important information; namely, that the Peace River in the mountain districts was interrupted by numerous bad rapids and falls, and that, towards the mid-day sun, there was another great river whose current *ran in an opposite direction*, the distance between the sources of the two rivers being short.

The winter, with its dreary storms and bitter colds, at length passed away, and genial spring returned. As soon as the ice broke up, preparations were made for an immediate start. Their large birch-bark canoe had been overhauled and repaired. Her dimensions were twenty-five feet long inside, two feet two inches deep, and four feet nine inches wide. She carried goods for presents, provisions, arms, ammunition, baggage, etcetera, to the extent of three thousand pounds weight, with a crew of ten men, including their chief; yet she was so light that two men could carry her when empty for three or four miles without resting. They had no small canoe on this voyage. Their hopes, and, it may be truly said, their lives, were dependent on this solitary and frail conveyance.

As we have said, Mackenzie took nine men with him on this occasion, our friends Reuben, Lawrence, and Swiftarrow being among the number, and two of them being young Indian hunters of that region, who were supposed to be acquainted with at least part of the route they were about to pursue, and who were to act as interpreters. English Chief had long before left his former master, and no women were allowed to go with the party—even Darkeye was left behind! There was one other member of the party whom we must not omit to mention—namely, a large dog named Wolf.

On the 9th of May 1793, Mackenzie left the fort in charge of his interpreter, pushed off into the waters of the Peace River, turned the canoe's bow westward, and the voyage of discovery began.

A few days afterwards they passed through scenery which all confessed was the most beautiful they had ever beheld.

“‘Tis like a glimpse o' paradise,” exclaimed Reuben, as the whole party rested on their paddles for a few minutes to gaze upon it.

“Ho!” exclaimed Swiftarrow, with a nod to his friend, which evidently was meant for assent.

“Betterer nor the Hudson,” said Ducette, one of the Canadians, with a look of admiration.

“Does it beat Scottisland, monsieur?” asked Lawrence, with a somewhat sly expression.

“Well, ahem,” replied Mackenzie with hesitation, “it’s not exactly—that is, it is vastly different and truly magnificent—they won’t compare, Lawrence; they won’t compare!”

The region did indeed merit all that could be said in its praise. The ground on the west side of the river—which was wide and full of lovely wooded islets—rose at intervals to a considerable height, and stretched inwards to a great distance; at the foot of every slope there was a soft, grassy lawn, broken here and there by abrupt precipices, which were fringed with exuberant verdure. Shrubs and trees of every kind, in clumps and in groves, crested the heights or nestled in the hollows: among them were groves of poplar, with the white spruce and soft birch, and other trees; while the banks abounded with alders and willows. Those that bore blossom were just opening their bright buds, and the setting sun cast a rich golden light over all, as though the glory of the beneficent Creator were shining on His gorgeous handiwork. But that beautiful wilderness did not blossom and bloom in solitude. It was tenanted and enjoyed by countless numbers of living creatures. Wherever the travellers turned their eyes, vast herds of elk and buffaloes were to be seen, the latter sporting with their young ones on the plains, the former preferring to browse on the slopes and uplands; and innumerable birds of all shapes and sizes enlivened the scene with their varied gyrations, and filled the air with melody.

It seemed, indeed, a species of paradise; but not far from it the travellers were painfully reminded of its terrestrial nature by the sight of a wide-spread conflagration, which carried fierce destruction over the whole plain, and left black ruin behind; and still further on Mackenzie was robbed of the pleasurable feelings due to the influence of sweet scenery, by the baleful influence of man in the shape of a chief of the Beaver Indians with a hunting-party. He tried to push on past these Indians, but they kept up with the canoe, running along shore, and when night approached he was compelled to encamp with them. The consequence was, as he had feared, that these people attempted to terrify his young Indian interpreters with dreadful accounts of the land beyond, and succeeded so far that it was with the utmost difficulty that they could be persuaded to remain with the expedition.

Next night they encamped at a spot where a stream fell into the Peace River from the north.

“Voila! w’at is dis?” exclaimed Ducette, as he leaped on shore.

“The fut-print of a grizzly bar,” said Reuben, stooping to examine and measure the mark; “an oncommon big ‘un, too—full nine inches wide. I wouldn’t like to embrace that bar.”

The den, or place where this monster or some of its kindred had spent the winter, was also found not far-off. It was ten feet deep, horizontally, five feet high, and six feet wide.

“I wish we could find him,” said Lawrence as he kindled the camp-fire.

“Ha! Swiftarrow has found something better,” said Mackenzie, as the Indian strode into camp laden with the tongue, marrow-bones, and other choice portions of an elk which he had killed a short distance down the river.

Lawrence had his wish next day, for they found a grizzly bear so fierce-looking and large that it was well for him he was in the canoe struggling with rapids at the time, for he was reckless enough to have attacked it single-handed—a very dangerous proceeding, and a

thing that the Indians never do. They appear to think that at least three men are necessary to the destruction of this much and justly feared monster of the mountains.

Lawrence looked at Bruin with a feeling of bloodthirsty desire; Bruin looked at Lawrence with an expression of stupid curiosity; and then slowly, not to say sulkily, retired into his native forest. Next day they beheld a more gratifying sight,—namely, the snow-capped Rocky Mountains themselves, within the rugged portals of which their canoe passed not long afterwards. Here, as was to be expected, the river became narrower and more turbulent, and ere long the explorers had to face dangers and difficulties which tested their courage and endurance to the uttermost.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Difficulties and Dangers Faced and Overcome

Their entrance on the difficult navigation of the mountains was inaugurated by an accident to the canoe. It was a slight one, however,—a rub against a rock which cracked the bark, and compelled them to land and spend an hour or so in mending it.

The current here was very strong, and creeping up along the banks was dangerous, owing to the masses of rock that frequently fell from the cliffs.

At one turn of the river in particular, a loud noise was heard, “Look out!” cried Mackenzie.

Before any one could well understand what danger threatened them, an enormous mass of rock was seen to bound down the banks right abreast of them, crashing through trees and bushes, and sending down showers of smaller stones. The men paddled with all their might, but the rock came straight at them, struck a flat piece of the cliff; and bursting like a bombshell, descended round them in a shower of small pieces, none of which, however, touched them, although many fell very near.

Coming one afternoon to a place where the current was stronger than usual, Mackenzie landed with Reuben, Lawrence, and Ducette, in order to lighten the canoe. They ascended the hills, which were covered with cypress, and but little encumbered with underwood. Here they found a beaten path, made either by Indians or wild animals. After walking a mile along it, they fell in with a herd of buffaloes with their young ones.

“Hist!” whispered Reuben, throwing forward the muzzle of his gun with the instinct of a hunter.

“Don’t fire,” said Mackenzie, arresting his arm; “it may alarm the natives, if any should chance to be within earshot. Send Wolf at them, Ducette.”

Wolf, who belonged to Ducette, and had followed his master, was a splendid fellow,—not unlike the animal after which he had been named. He was well trained too, and kept foot and tongue equally under command, until his master’s wishes were made known. Hearing his name mentioned, he cocked his ears and gazed up in Ducette’s face.

“Allons donc, Wolf,” said Ducette.

Instantly the dog made a magnificent rush into the midst of the herd, which scattered right and left, and seized a young calf by the nose! The creature, though young, was powerful, and for some time struggled bravely; but the hound held on with deadly firmness, and worried the calf—to such an extent that in a short time Ducette was able to run in and despatch it.

To skin and dismember the carcass was a matter of little difficulty to these hunters, who were all expert butchers. They had just completed the work, and were congratulating each other on this accession of veal to the larder when a shot was heard in the direction of the

canoe. It was immediately followed by another.

“The signal to recall us,” said Mackenzie. “Gather up the meat, lads; come, be smart. Give them a couple of shots, Reuben, in reply.”

The shots were fired, and, pushing down the hill through very close underwood, they soon came upon the canoe at the foot of a rapid which it was deemed impossible to ascend. What seemed impossible to some of his men, however, was by no means impossible to Mackenzie himself. He surveyed their position, saw that the succession of rapids above were indeed impracticable on that side of the river, but observed that on the other side it seemed possible to continue the ascent. The chief danger lay in attempting to cross with a heavily-laden canoe; but the attempt was made, and proved successful.

The dangers and mishaps which now assailed them in succession were enough to have damped the ardour of the most resolute pioneer; but there are some natures which cannot be quelled, whose motto in all circumstances seem to be “Victory or death!” Of such a spirit was Alexander Mackenzie, although some of his men would fain have turned back. Indeed, the overcoming of their objection to proceed sometimes cost him more trouble than overcoming the difficulties of the navigation.

On reaching the other side of the river, they towed the canoe along an island, and advanced well enough till they reached the extremity of it, when the line had to be exchanged for the paddles. In attempting to clear the point of the island, they were driven with great violence on a stony shore, and the frail canoe received considerable injury. To land and unload was the work of a few minutes; but it took a long time to repair the damage, by fitting in new pieces of bark and re-gumming the exposed seams. Part of the cargo, also, had to be opened and dried. This accomplished, they carried the whole across the point which had damaged them, reloaded and embarked. But it was now seen that it was not possible to advance farther up that side of the river either by paddling, hauling with the line, or pushing with poles. There remained only the alternative, therefore, of returning by the way they had come, or recrossing the river despite the strength of the current and the fact that there were several cascades just below them, to get into which would have involved canoe and men in certain destruction.

“Ve can nevair do it. Monsieur dare not!” whispered Ducette to Reuben, as they floated for a few moments in an eddy.

Reuben glanced at his leader, who stood up in the canoe surveying the boiling rapids with a stern, intent gaze, and said quietly, “He’ll try.”

“Now, my lads, shove out with a will—ho!” said Mackenzie, sitting down.

Lawrence, who was steering, dipped his paddle vigorously, the men followed suit, the canoe shot into the stream, and in a moment gained the sheltering eddy below an island, which was shaped somewhat like a table with a thick centre leg—or a mushroom. There were several such islands of solid rock in the river. They had been formed apparently by the action of the current—doubtless also of ice—cutting away their lower part, and leaving the mushroom-like tops, on which numbers of geese found a convenient breeding-place. From one to another of these islands the canoe shot in this way, thus decreasing the width of the final traverse. They paused a little longer at the last island, then shot into the stream, and, with a splendid sweep, gained the other side.

But here their case was little improved, for the current was almost as violent as that from which they had escaped. The craggy banks being low enough, however, to admit of the tracking—line being used, the men landed and towed the canoe till they came to the foot of the most rapid cascade they had yet seen. To ascend being impossible, they unloaded and carried everything over a rocky point; relaunched, reloaded, and continued to track with the line: but the dangers attending this operation had now seriously increased, for stones both small and great came continually rolling down the bank, and the steepness of the ground was such that the risk of the men slipping and falling into the water became imminent; besides which they had frequently to pass outside of trees which overhung the precipices; at such times a false step or a slip might have proved fatal. Presently they came to a sheer impassable precipice, where the men had to embark and take to poling up the stream; but ere long they got into water too deep for the poles, and recourse was again had to the tracking—line. Coming to another precipice, they were again checked; but Mackenzie, finding that the rock was soft, cut steps in it for the distance of about twenty feet, and thus passing along, leaped, at the risk of his life, on a small rock below, where he received those who followed him on his shoulders. Thus four of them passed, and managed to drag up the canoe, though they damaged her in doing so. They had now reached a spot where the canoe could be repaired, and fortunately found a dead tree which had fallen from the cliffs above. But for this, fire could not have been kindled there, as no wood was to be procured within a mile of the place; in which case the repairs could not have been accomplished.

Thus yard by yard these hardy pioneers advanced by means of the line, the paddle, or the pole, sometimes carrying the lading, sometimes the canoe as well, and often within a hairbreadth of destruction. Indeed, nothing but the coolness, courage, and skill of all concerned could, under God, have brought them safely through the fatigues and dangers of that tremendous day.

But they had not yet done with it. Having surmounted these and many other difficulties, they reached a place where it became absolutely necessary to make a traverse across an unusually strong current. Here the men silently showed their estimate of the danger by stripping themselves to their shirts, that they might be the better prepared to swim for their lives, in case of accident to the canoe! Fortunately the traverse was made successfully, and then at noon Mackenzie stopped and went ashore to take an altitude. While he was thus engaged, the men fastened the canoe and left it; but so insecure was the fastening that the current sheered her off, and if it had not happened that one of the men had remained in her and held on to the line, they would then and there have been deprived of every means of advancing or returning, as well as of present subsistence!

Despite the alarming nature of this incident, and the interference of a cloud that sought to neutralise the sun, our persevering traveller completed his observations, and proved the luckless spot to be situated in 56 degrees north latitude.

The rapidity of the current increased so much here, that in the distance of two miles they were compelled to unload four times and carry everything except the canoe; and even when thus light they found it difficult to prevent her being dashed to pieces against the rocks by the violence of the eddies.

The last danger they encountered was the worst. They came to a place where the river was

nothing less than one continuous rapid, and they took everything out of the canoe, intending to tow her up with the line, only a few of the men being left in her. At length, however, the tumultuous heaving of the water was so great that a wave struck the canoe's bow and broke the line. The dismay of those on shore may be imagined, for now it seemed as if nothing could save their comrades from destruction; and certainly no human power did save them on that occasion; for, while they grasped the sides of the canoe helplessly, another wave drove them with a wild surge out of the tumbling water; so that the men were enabled to thrust her ashore; and, strange to say, though the frail vessel had been carried by tossing swells over rocks which were left naked a moment later, she had received no material injury.

This last accident, coupled with the fact that the river as far as they could see was a sheet of white foaming water, induced the leader of the band to give up all idea of advancing farther at that point by water.

But do not imagine, good reader, that this implied the desertion of the canoe. On the contrary, that accommodating vessel having hitherto carried our pioneers, they now proposed to carry it—as shall be related presently.

Mackenzie met the grumbling discontent of his men with an order to ascend the hill and encamp there for the night.

“Vraiment—it all very easy to say go up dere and camp for de noit,— mais I will go not farder!” growled Ducette, as he threw a heavy bag of provisions on his back and trudged sulkily up the hill.

The two young Indians evidently approved of this sentiment, and one or two of the other men seemed inclined to echo it; but Reuben and Lawrence laughed as they each shouldered a burden,—and the former said it was his firm conviction that nothing would, could, or should stop Monsieur Mackenzie but the Pacific Ocean.

The precipitous bank of the river, or “hill,” up which they were desired to carry the tents, provisions, etcetera, necessary for their encampment, was so steep and encumbered with wood and scrub, that it might of itself have formed a sufficiently disheartening obstacle to men less accustomed to hardships; nevertheless, they braced themselves to it with wonted vigour, pushed through the scrub, felled trees to facilitate their ascent, and climbed like monkeys by the stems, until they gained the summit, where very soon a roaring fire was covered with bubbling kettles and broiling steaks and marrow-bones.

Meanwhile Mackenzie, accompanied by Swiftarrow, went off on foot to survey the river ahead. He walked as long as daylight permitted, but found that there seemed to be no end to the rapids and cascades, and returned to camp with worn-out moccasins and wounded feet. During the excursion he came on several old encampments of the Knisteneaux Indians, which must have been formed during war expeditions, a decided proof, he thought, of the savage and bloodthirsty nature of that people, seeing that their natural hunting-grounds were very far removed from those almost inaccessible regions.

It now became too apparent to the leader of the expedition that the mountain at this place must be crossed on foot, with the canoe and its heavy lading on the shoulders of himself and his men; but before deciding on this course, he resolved to despatch Reuben and three men with the two Indian interpreters to proceed along the line of the river until they

should reach a navigable part of it. Accordingly, next day this party set out. Mackenzie remained in camp to superintend the repairing of the canoe and take observations. He was successful in obtaining correct time, and found the latitude to be 56 degrees 8 minutes.

At sunset the exploring party returned. They had penetrated the thick woods, ascended hills, descended valleys, and had finally got above the rapids, a distance of about three leagues; but their account of the difficulties in the way of advancing was very discouraging indeed. Mackenzie had foreseen this, and had made suitable preparations to counteract the evil effects thereof. In their absence he had prepared for them an enormous kettle of wild rice highly sweetened with sugar. When the tired, hungry, and footsore men sat down to this they became quite willing to listen to their leader's arguments in favour of a bold advance, and when the hearty supper was washed down with a liberal allowance of rum, and finished off with a pipe, they avowed themselves ready to face *anything!* In this satisfactory state of mind they retired to rest, while their leader sat up in the hope of obtaining an observation of Jupiter and his first satellite, which laudable aim was frustrated by cloudy weather.

CHAPTER NINE

Deeper and Deeper Into the Unknown Wilderness

Next day the arduous work of cutting a road through the forest and up the mountainside was begun.

At daybreak their leader assembled the men. "Now, my lads," said he, "the work before us for the next two or three days will be very stiff, but it would be a disgrace to us if after having come so far, we were so soon—only a little beyond the middle of May—to give in because of a few difficulties. Besides, I am strongly of opinion that we cannot now be far from the height of land, and you know well enough that the moment we set foot on the other side of the topmost ridge of the mountains it will be all down stream. Let us set to work, then, with a will. Take your axes and cut your way through everything. The trees here are, as you see, of small growth. Cut those of them that stand conveniently in such a way as that they shall fall parallel with the intended road, but don't sever them quite through so that they make a sort of railing on each side. Come, Lawrence, I'm glad to see that you are ready to begin, like a good pioneer—show them an example."

Lawrence, who was the only one of the listening band who chanced to have his axe on his shoulder, smiled when thus addressed, and, turning round, exclaimed "Voila!" as he swayed the axe aloft and sent it sweeping at one stroke through a young tree, which fell with a crash and covered half of the party with its branches.

A general laugh followed, and immediately the whole band set to work with their axes, headed by Mackenzie himself.

From early morning till sunset they toiled during the next three days, almost without cessation, except for meals. They cut their way from the margin of the river, where the rocks and ground shelved so steeply that one false step of any of the men would have been followed by a headlong plunge into the water. Over the ridge, and down into a hollow beyond, and up the mountain farther on, they hewed a broad track, by which they conveyed the baggage and then carried up the canoe. This latter was an extremely difficult operation at the first part of the road, requiring the united efforts of the whole party. Being lifted on the shoulders of some of the men, the tracking-rope was fastened to the bow, and others of the party went in advance and took a couple of turns of the rope round a stump. The bearers then advanced steadily up the steep side of the mountain till they reached those who, by holding on to the rope, relieved them of any downward weight. The rope was then shifted to a stump farther up, and the advance was continued. Thus they may be said to have warped the canoe up the mountain! By two in the afternoon everything was got to the summit. Then Mackenzie, axe in hand, led the way forward. The progress was slow, the work exhausting. Through every species of country they cut their way. Here the trees were large and the ground encumbered with little underwood; there, the land was strewn with the trunks of fallen timber, where fire had passed with desolating power years before, and in its place had sprung up extensive copses of so close a growth, and so choked up with briars, that it was all but impossible to cut through them. Poplar, birch,

cypress, red-pine, spruce, willow, alder, arrow-wood, red-wood, hard, and other trees,—all fell before the bright axes of the *voyageurs*, with gooseberry-bushes, currant-bushes, briars, and other shrubs innumerable. It must not be supposed that they did this heavy work with absolute impunity. No, there was many a bruise and blow from falling trees, and even the shrubs were successful not only in tearing trousers and leggings, but also in doing considerable damage to skin and flesh. So toilsome was the labour, that at the close of one of the days they had advanced only three miles.

On the afternoon of the third day they finally came out in triumph on the banks of the river above the cascades, having cut a road of about nine miles in extent.

Once again, then, behold them afloat and paddling up stream—still westward—with hopes animated and fortune smiling, or, as Reuben put it, with “a gale of luck blowin’ right astarn.” Reuben, be it observed, had consorted with sailors in his day down the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and had picked up a little of their slang.

But their good fortune never lasted long at a time. Their progress being very slow, it was found advisable to send the young Indian interpreters on shore to lighten the canoe and to hunt as they advanced. They frequently killed elk and other game. On one of these occasions Swiftarrow was nearly killed. He had been sent to fetch the choice parts of an elk which they had shot, when a big rock fell from the cliffs above, and was dashed to pieces at his very feet. Just after this incident a violent fall of rain took place, obliging them to remain in camp for a day. Then driftwood barred the river, and an opening had to be forced through it. Then more cascades appeared to check their advance; and, worst of all, just as they began to hope that the height of land was gained, an opening in the hills revealed a range of blue mountains far ahead of them, running south and north as far as the eye could reach. To add to their perplexities, they came to a fork in the river, one branch running due west, the other in a southerly direction.

“Follow the westerly branch,” said one; “that must be the right one.”

“Not so sure o’ that,” observed Reuben; “the end of a track don’t needsesarily p’int out the gin’ral run of it.”

“You are right, Reuben,” said Mackenzie; “besides, I have been warned of this very branch by an old Indian whom I met last winter, and who said he had been up here in his youth. Therefore, though appearances are against it, I shall follow the southern branch.”

Mackenzie was right in this determination, as it afterwards proved, but most of his men grumbled very much at the time, because the southerly branch, besides appearing to be the wrong one, was a very rapid and dangerous stream. They knew by that time, however, that nothing could bend their leader’s will, so they submitted, though with a bad grace.

Here an immense number of beaver were seen, and a gladsome sight it was to the fur-trader, because beaver skins at that time were in great repute—silk hats not having, as yet, beaten them off the field and reduced their value to almost nothing. In some places these sagacious and busy animals had cut down several acres of large poplars. At this place, too, they had an alarm, some of the men declaring that they had heard shots fired by Indians in the woods. A whole night was therefore spent on the *qui vive*, although it turned out to be a false alarm.

One morning, the weather being fine and the river more manageable than usual, Mackenzie landed with Reuben and the two Indians, to ascend an adjacent mountain, telling his men to proceed in the canoe diligently, and directing them to fire two shots if they should require his return, agreeing that he would do the same if he should wish them to wait for him. Nothing was gained by this attempt to obtain a better prospect. On descending to the river they fired two shots, as agreed on, but no answer was received. Again they tried it, but the deep silence was only broken by an echo and by the rushing of the river.

“They’re behind us,” suggested Reuben.

“They’ve overshot us,” said the Indians.

Again two shots were fired, but still no reply came. Mackenzie’s mind was at once filled with anxious fears lest some accident should have befallen his canoe, while he reproached himself for having left them even for a brief period in such dangerous navigation.

In these circumstances he turned to consult with his men.

“It’s my opinion,” said Reuben, “that they’ve discovered more rapids than they bargained for, and are out of earshot behind us; so we’d better make tracks down stream till we find ‘em.”

“Not so,” said the elder of the Indians; “without doubt the canoe is dashed to pieces, and our comrades are even now with their forefathers. We shall see them no more; and my advice is that we construct a raft and try to return on it to the lands whence we came.”

Anxious though he was, Mackenzie could scarce refrain from laughing at the prompt way in which the red man had consigned his comrades to destruction. “Come,” said he, “we won’t give them up quite so readily as you seem inclined to. We shall make at least one effort to find them.”

It was now arranged that Reuben and one of the Indians should remain at the spot where they then were, kindle a large fire, and send branches down the stream from time to time, as a signal to their comrades if they chanced to be below, and that Mackenzie with the other Indian should walk up the bank of the river several miles. This was done; but they returned after some hours to the fire, having seen nothing of the canoe.

As evening was now approaching, they became thoroughly alarmed, and a more rigorous plan of search was instituted. Reuben was sent off with one Indian to proceed down the river as far as he could go before night came on, with directions to continue the journey in the morning as far as to the place where they had encamped the preceding evening. Mackenzie with the other Indian again went off up the river, intending to make a thorough search in that direction. They had no food with them, but, having their guns and the means of making fire, they had no anxiety on that score, except in regard to an immediate meal, for game was scarcer than usual at that particular spot.

It was agreed that if both should fail of success, they were to return to the place where they then separated. But their anxieties were brought to an end sooner than they had hoped for. Not very long after parting, Mackenzie heard a very far-off shot, and then another, and in a few minutes an answering double shot at a still greater distance. These being the concerted signals, he knew that the canoe party must have been discovered by Reuben; he

therefore retraced his steps with a light heart, despite the fact that he had worn the moccasins off his feet, and was completely drenched with rain. It turned out that the delay had been occasioned by the breaking of the canoe, and the consequent necessity of landing to repair damages. Indeed, the sorely-battered craft had become almost a wreck. As a fitting climax to this disastrous day, the night finished off with thunder, lightning, and rain.

While thus forcing their way to the head-waters of the river, they met with a small party of miserable-looking natives, who received them at first with violent demonstrations of an intention to immolate them on the spot if they should dare to land. It was evident that the poor creatures had been subjected to bad treatment and deception by other and more powerful tribes, because they remained in a state of great suspicion and anxiety even after the interpreter had stated earnestly that the intentions of the white men were friendly, and after gifts had been presented to them. By degrees, however, they became more confident, and as their anxieties diminished their curiosity increased.

“I do believe,” said Lawrence, “that the critters have never seen white folk before.”

To most people it might have seemed ridiculous to have heard that bronzed *voyageur* calling himself and his brown-faced, smoke-dried, weather-worn companions, by the title of white people; but Lawrence referred to the natural colour of the race to which he belonged.

“They do seem rather koorious,” observed Reuben, as one of the Indians timidly touched his arm and looked wonderingly up into his blue eyes.

It was found, however, that these natives had heard of white people, though they had not seen them; moreover, they displayed a number of knives and iron implements which they said had been procured from people inhabiting the banks of a river which might be reached over a carrying-place of “eleven days in length,” and which river flowed in an *opposite direction* from the Peace River. These people, they said, travelled during a moon to get to the country of another tribe who dwelt in houses, and these again extended their journeys to the sea, or, as they called it, the “Stinking Lake,” where they exchanged their furs with white people, like our pioneers, who came to the coast of that lake in canoes as big as islands!

Here, then, at last, was definite information, and the enterprising discoverer was not long in availing himself of it. After gratifying his new friends with sundry little gifts, a feed of pemmican, which they relished amazingly, and a taste of sugar to tickle their palates, he gained their confidence so much as to induce one of them to be his guide, and immediately pushed forward.

In the course of the following week they gained the much-longed-for height of land, and found two lakelets within a quarter of a mile of each other, from one of which the waters find their way through Peace River, on the east side of the mountains, into the Arctic Sea, while from the other the waters flow south and west through the great River Columbia to the Pacific Ocean.

But the succession of disasters that befell them here, and the difficulties of the route—for it could not be called navigation—threw all their previous experiences into the shade. One day, having made a portage, they relaunched the canoe and began the well-nigh forgotten process of *descending* stream. They had not gone far when they struck a rock and were

driven down sideways with great violence, Mackenzie, followed by his men, jumped into the shallow to turn the canoe straight, but in a moment the water deepened and they had to scramble inboard again hurriedly. Swiftarrow by some mischance was left behind to struggle on shore as best he might. Before they could resume their paddles they struck again; the stem of the canoe was shattered like an egg-shell and hung only by the gunwales, so that Lawrence, who was steering, had to quit his place. The violence of the stroke drove them to the opposite side of the river, where the bow met with the same fate. At that moment Reuben seized the branches of a small overhanging tree in a desperate hope of checking the canoe, but the tree proved so elastic that he was jerked on shore in an instant as if by magic, and the canoe swept over a cascade, where several holes were broken in her bottom and nearly all the bars started. At the same moment the wreck fell flat on the water; all the men jumped out, and Ducette, whose courage forsook him, shouted, "Save yourselves!"

"Not so! Hold on to the canoe, men," cried Mackenzie sternly. The men obeyed, and thus prevented the total loss of everything. Yard by yard, on the verge of destruction they waded down the rapid, and guided the wreck into shallow water, where some held her fast while the others, who were quickly joined by Reuben and Swiftarrow, carried the lading safely ashore. On this occasion several things were lost, the chief of these being their whole stock of bullets, but they had plenty of shot left from which ball could be made.

One might have thought this was at last sufficient to have turned them back—so at least thought most of the men, who began to look rebellious—but Mackenzie partly compelled, partly encouraged them to advance. The canoe was dragged ashore and repaired, or rather reconstructed, and eventually through indescribable difficulties he reached the navigable stream which forms the head-waters of the Columbia River. This he descended a considerable distance, and met with many of the natives, who told him that the country below abounded with game and the river with fish; but as the course of the latter ran towards the south, and the distance by it to the sea was described as being extremely great, he deemed it advisable to retrace his course a short way and then strike westward overland to the Pacific.

The old canoe being now little better than a wreck, birch-bark was procured and a new canoe built, after which the stream was ascended until a spot was reached where the natives were in the habit of starting overland for the sea coast. Here the canoe was hidden, an Indian guide procured, and then these indomitable pioneers prepared to cross the wilderness on foot.

CHAPTER TEN

The Last

We follow our travellers now over the last portion of their trying journey. Well would it have been for them if they could have followed their route as easily as you and I, reader, follow them in imagination. Over mountain and swamp, through forest and brake, in heat and in cold, sunshine and rain, they plodded wearily but resolutely on towards the far west, until they reached the farthest west of all, where the great continent dips into the greater Pacific.

At starting on this overland route they buried some provisions, and putting in a place of security their canoe and such stores as they did not require or could not carry, they set out, each man laden with a burden varying from forty–five to ninety pounds weight, besides arms and ammunition. They were led by an Indian guide with several of his relations, and followed by their dog Wolf. This guide was deemed necessary, not so much to show the way as to introduce them to the various tribes through whose territory they should have to pass.

It takes a large portion of a quarto volume to recount their interesting adventures by the way. How then, can we presume to attempt a fair narrative in a few pages? The thing is impossible. We can but refer our readers to Mackenzie's ponderous journal, in which, embedded amongst a mass of important details, will be found a record of one of the most interesting voyages ever undertaken.

As a matter of course difficulties assailed them at the outset. This would seem to be the universal experience of pioneers. Game latterly had begun to grow scarce, so that, their provisions being low, they were obliged to go on short allowance—two meals a day. Their food, being pemmican, required no cooking. Mingled heat, mosquitoes, sandflies, and a rugged country, with short commons, and danger, as well as worry from savages, was the beginning—and pretty much the middle and end—of their experience. They were soon joined by an elderly man and three other natives, and not only did these three Indians, but all the others along the route, harass them by their caprice, unfaithfulness, and childish petulance, and self–will.

One day their guide resolved to leave them; then, without being solicited to stay, he changed his mind and went on with them. Again, one night, at a time when they were anxious not to lose him, Mackenzie, who knew he meant to take leave quietly, asked him to sleep with him. He willingly consented, the white man's cloak being a snug covering, and thus was he guarded! but his guardian suffered severe consequences owing to the filthy state of the Indian, whose garments were indescribable, his body being smeared with red earth, and his hair with fish–oil!

Coming to a lake they observed the sky grow very black. "A thunder–storm brewin'," suggested Reuben.

"Encamp, and up with the tent, boys," said Mackenzie.

The tent! It was a misnomer, their only shelter being a sheet of thin oiled cloth and the overhanging trees. Down came a deluge that kept them very close for a time; then, on resuming the march, the guide was requested to go in advance and brush the water off the bushes, but he coolly declined. Mackenzie himself therefore undertook the duty. During this storm the ground was rendered white with hailstones as large as a musket ball. The third day they met natives who received them well. These were going to the great river to fish, and seemed—unlike many other tribes—to venerate age, for they carried on their backs by turns a poor old woman who was quite blind and infirm. Farther on they met other Indians on their way to the same great river, which abounded with salmon. These told them that they would soon reach a river, neither large nor long, which entered an arm of the sea, and where a great wooden canoe with white people was said to be frequently seen!

“Here is encouragement for us; let us push on,” said Mackenzie. “Push on,” echoed Reuben and Lawrence and some of the other men; but some grumbled at the hardships they had to endure, and the short allowance of provisions, while the Indians threatened to desert them.

Mackenzie must have had something very peculiar in his look and manner, for he seemed to possess the faculty of saying little in reply to his men, and yet of constraining them to follow him. Doubtless, had some one else written his journal we should have learned the secret. It seems as if, when rebellion was looking blackest and the storm about to burst, instead of commanding or disputing, he calmly held his tongue and went off to take an observation of the sun, and on that process being completed, he almost invariably found his men in a more tractable condition! Occasionally we read of quiet remonstrance or grave reasoning, and frequently of hearty encouragement and wise counsel, but *never* of violence, although he was sorely tried. Perchance they knew that he was dangerous to trifle with! We cannot tell, but certainly he seems to have been a splendid manager of men.

At last they reached an Indian village where they were hospitably entertained, and presented with as much roasted salmon as they required. These people lived almost exclusively on fish and berries; were more cleanly than other tribes, and apparently less addicted to war or hunting. Here two new guides were obtained, and the people conciliated with gifts of beads, knives, and other trinkets.

Leaving them they spent a wretched night on the shores of a lake, deluged with rain and tormented with sandflies and mosquitoes—the former being perhaps the greatest pests of the country. Soon the guides grew tired of their mode of travelling, and the allowance of provisions had to be still further reduced. Fearing that they might run short altogether, Mackenzie ordered Reuben and his son to fall behind, bury some pemmican in reserve for their return, and make a fire over the spot to conceal the fact that it had been dug into. They were now on two-thirds of their regular allowance. Soon afterwards they came to a river too deep to ford, but one of their guides swam across and brought over a raft that lay on the other side. This ferried most of them over, but Swiftarrow and some of the others preferred to swim across.

At length, after many days of suffering and toil they crossed the last range of mountains and began to descend. Here magnificent cedars and other trees were seen, some of the former being fully eighteen feet in circumference. The natives whom they met with were

sometimes stern, sometimes kind, but always suspicious at first. The soothing effects of gifts, however, were pretty much the same in all. Still the party had several narrow escapes.

On one occasion Mackenzie, when alone, was surrounded and seized, but he soon freed himself, and just at that moment when his life seemed to hang on a hair, Reuben Guff happened to come up, and the natives took to flight. Some of these natives were very expert canoe-men, caught salmon by means of weirs, dwelt in wooden houses elevated on poles, boiled their food in water-tight baskets by putting red-hot stones into them, made cakes of the inner rind of the hemlock sprinkled with oil, and seemed to have a rooted antipathy to flesh of every kind. Some of the salmon they caught were fully forty pounds' weight. The chief of one tribe said that, ten years before, he had gone down to the sea in a large canoe, and there had met with two large vessels full of white men who treated him very kindly. These, Mackenzie concluded, must have been the ships of Captain Cook, an opinion which was strengthened by the discovery that the chief's canoe was ornamented with sea-otters' teeth, which bear some resemblance to human teeth, for which they had been mistaken by the great navigator. At last, on the 20th of July, the heroic perseverance of Mackenzie met with its reward. On that day he obtained a canoe, and descending a river, entered an arm of the Pacific! He did not himself, indeed, deem the object of the expedition attained until he had battled on for a couple of days longer—in the face of the opposition of his own men and hostility of the natives—and had obtained reliable observations which settled beyond all dispute, his exact position on the globe. But to all intents and purposes he had accomplished his great object on that day,—namely, the crossing of the American Wilderness to the Pacific Ocean.

Even in the midst of his triumph this long-enduring man was worried by petty trials, for one of the Indian guides took it into his head to desert. As he was the son of a chief, and, it was to be feared, might prejudice the natives against them, Reuben Guff was directed to pursue him. That worthy took with him Swiftarrow, and exerting his long sinewy legs to the utmost, soon overtook the fugitive and brought him back. But it was no part of Mackenzie's plan to tyrannise over men. He received the deserter kindly, gave him a pair of moccasins, some provisions, a silk handkerchief, and some good advice, and then sent him back to his friends. The other Indian who remained with them succeeded about the same time in killing a large porcupine, which was very acceptable to all—especially to its captor, who ate so largely of it as to be obliged to undergo a prolonged period of repose in order to sleep it off.

At length, being in a state of semi-starvation, with a leaky canoe, and unfriendly natives around, Mackenzie took a last observation, which gave 52 degrees 20 minutes 48 second North latitude and 128 degrees 2 minutes West longitude.

Then he turned his face eastward. Before quitting the coast, however, a smooth rock was selected and thereon was written, in large letters, with a mixture of melted grease and vermilion, this brief memorial—"Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three."

The return journey was scarcely less arduous than the outward, but they undertook it with the knowledge that every step carried them nearer home, and with the exhilarating consciousness that their labours had been crowned with success. Besides this, they now

knew what lay before them each day—as far as the route was concerned—and at the various places where provisions had been secreted the party was strengthened and enabled to advance with greater vigour. On arriving at the Great River they found their canoe, goods, and provisions just as they had left them about five weeks before. Here they made preparations for proceeding to the head-waters of the Columbia River, crossing over to those of the Peace River, and so returning by the way they had come. In order to mark this happy point in the expedition, Mackenzie treated himself and men to a dram, “but,”—observe that I quote his words, reader,—“we had been so long without tasting any spirituous liquor, that we had *Lost all relish for it!*” Rejoice in *that* testimony, ye teetotallers. Think of it, ye toppers. Put it in your pipes, ye smokers—and make the most of it!

“Nearing home at last, boys,” said Mackenzie many weeks afterwards, as, having descended the turbulent Peace River, they rounded a point of land and came in sight of their old winter-quarters; “shake out the flag, and give them a volley and a cheer.”

The men obeyed, and were in such high spirits, and made such active use of their paddles, that they reached the landing-place before the two men who had been left there in the spring, could recover their senses sufficiently to answer their questions! But *this* was not home yet. Some days had still to elapse ere these toil-worn men could lay aside their paddles and rest their wearied limbs.

At last, after an absence of eleven months, they reached Fort Chipewyan, where their leader resumed the duties of the fur-trade, and Swiftarrow once more kissed the brown cheek of Darkeye, who filled his heart with grim delight by placing in his paternal arms a soft, round, fat, little brown female baby, with eyes as dark and bright as her own, and a nose which was a miniature facsimile of its father’s.

One week after their arrival, Reuben and Lawrence, Swiftarrow and Darkeye, entered Mackenzie’s room to bid him farewell.

“I’m sorry you are bent on leaving me,” said their former leader; “but you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have contributed greatly to the success of our two expeditions. You have indeed proved yourselves able pioneers.”

“Thank’ee, sir,” said Reuben, while a quiet smile of satisfaction lighted up his grave features. “It was all along a hobby o’ mine, an’ of Lawrence too, to do a bit o’ diskivery; an’ now we’re content—for it ain’t possible, I fancy, to do much more in that line than push your canoe into the Frozen Sea on the one hand, or the Pacific on the other. It’s harder work than I thowt it would be—though I didn’t expect child’s play neither; an’ it’s our opinion, sir, that you are the only man in the country as could have done it at all. We intend now to go back to the settlements. As for the red-skin,” he added, glancing at Swiftarrow, “he ha’n’t got no ambition one way or another as to diskivery; but he’s a good and true man, nevertheless, you’ll allow. And now, sir, farewell. May a blessing from above rest on you and yours.”

Saying this the bold backwoodsman shook Mackenzie by the hand and left the room. Every one in the fort was on the bank to bid them farewell. Silently they stepped into their canoe, and in a few minutes had paddled out of sight into the great wilderness of wood and water.

Reader, our tale, if such it may be styled, *is* told. As for the hero whose steps for a time we have so closely followed, he became one of the most noted traders, as he was now one of the most celebrated discoverers, in North America. He afterwards became for a time the travelling companion in America of the Duke of Kent, father of Queen Victoria; was knighted in acknowledgment of his great and important achievements; married one of Scotland's fair daughters; and finally died in the midst of his native Highland hills, leaving behind him a volume which—as we said at the beginning—proves him to have been one of the most vigorous, persevering, manly, and successful pioneers that ever traversed the continent of North America.

THE END.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Extract of Letter Referred to on Page 85

From William Mackenzie, Esquire, of Gairloch, to George Mackenzie, Esquire, of Avoch, dated Leamington, 24th May 1856.

When in Stockholm in 1824, Lord Blomfield, our Minister there, did me the honour of presenting me to the King, *Bernadotte*, father of the present King of Sweden.

At the King's special request, the audience was a private one, and I was further especially requested to oblige by coming in my full Highland dress. The audience lasted fully an hour. Such an interest did Napoleon's first and most fortunate Marshal take in everything that was Highland, not even the skiandhu escaped him.

I now come to *your* family portion of the audience.

As we chatted on, old Bernadotte (leaning familiarly upon my O'Keachan claymore) was pleased to say in that *suaviter in modo* for which his eagle eye so fitted him, "Yes, I repeat it, you Highlanders are deservedly proud of your country. Your forefathers and your people are a race apart, distinct from all the rest of Britain in high moral as well as martial bearing, and long, I hope, may you feel and show it outwardly by this noble distinction in dress. But allow me to observe, Sir, that in your family name, in the name of Mackenzie, there is a very predominant lustre, which shall never be obliterated from my mind. Pray, are you connected in any way with Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the celebrated North American traveller, whose name and researches are immortalised by his discoveries in the Arctic Ocean, and of the river which since then does honour to his name?" I informed His Majesty that as a boy I had known him well, and that our family and his were nearly connected. This seemed to give me still greater favour with him, for, familiarly putting his hand on my shoulder—brooch, he replied that *on that account alone* his making my acquaintance gave him greater satisfaction. He then proceeded to tell Lord Blomfield and me how your father's name had become familiar to him, and so much valued in his eyes. He said that at one time Napoleon had arranged to distract the affairs of Britain by attacking her in her Canadian possessions—not by a direct descent upon them, but by a route which men expected would take England quite by surprise and prove infallible.

That route was to be up the Mississippi, Ohio, etcetera, up to our Canadian border lakes. For this arrangements were to be made with America, New Orleans occupied as a *pied a terre* by France, etcetera, etcetera. The organisation and command of this gigantic enterprise, as Bernadotte said, "was given to me by the Emperor, with instructions to make myself master of every work which could bear upon it, and the facilities the nature of the country afforded. Foremost amongst these the work of your namesake (Sir Alexander Mackenzie) was recommended, but how to get at it, with all communications with England interdicted, all knowledge of English unknown to me, seemed a difficulty not easily to be got over. However, as every one knows, my *then* master, l'Empereur, was not the man to be overcome by such small difficulties. The *book*, a huge quarto, was procured

through the smugglers, and in an inconceivably short space of time most admirably translated into French for my especial use. [A copy of this translation was found in Napoleon's library at St. Helena.] I need hardly say with what interest I perused and reperused that admirable work, till I had made myself so thoroughly master of it that I could almost fancy myself," this he said laughing heartily, "taking your Canadas *en revers* from the upper waters; and ever since I have never ceased to look upon the name and think of the author with more than ordinary respect and esteem."

After a short pause and a long-drawn breath, almost amounting to a sigh, accompanied by a look at Blomfield and a most expressive "Ah, milord, que de changes depuis ces jours-la," Bernadotte concluded by saying that the Russian campaign had knocked that of Canada on the head until Russia was crushed! but it had pleased God to ordain it otherwise, "et maintenant me voila Roi de Suede"—his exact words as he concluded these compliments to your father.