

Wop  
9714  
R662

## A VOYAGE WITH THE VOYAGEURS.

## I.

INFINITELY picturesque was the starting of the boat-brigade for the Mission of the White Dog and beyond. Far down on the sandy beach, below the cyrie upon which was perched a Hudson's Bay Company's post—a veritable mediæval castle transplanted to the bluffs of the Northwest—lay the eight boats composing it. Just then they were in holiday apparel, and decorated for departure: small red flags; streaming ribbons, gaudy ensigns, and the spreading antlers of moose and elk, appeared everywhere above the square packages of freight. Congregated upon the beach, attired in their bravest apparel, and accompanied by wives and sweethearts, who had come to wish them a final *bon voyage*, were the seventy or more half-breed and Indian *voyageurs* who constituted their crews.

The crowd ran the gamut of color from the deep copper of the aboriginal to the pure white of the Caucasian. Many of the women were clearly of unmingled Indian blood. Tall and angular, long masses of straight black hair fell on their backs; blue-and-white cotton gowns, shapeless, stayless, uncrinolined, displayed the flatness of their unprojecting figures. Some wore a gaudy handkerchief on the head; the married also bound one across the bosom.

The half-castes were of better form, many of them being quite handsome. Smaller in figure, they were at once better rounded, and more lithe and willowy. Theirs was the rich, dark beauty of the creole type. It was not, however, their comeliness of feature that impressed the traveler; it was their grace—that supple shapeliness, that *svetlota*, for which the English tongue has no word. A comely half-breed woman's figure impresses one as a startling realization of the Greek ideal of grace—a statue by Phidias animated and garbed—a living Venus of flushed bronze. Beauty of feature with them is, perhaps, not a common gift; but, when one does find it, he straightway dreams of Titian, and Veronese, and Tintoretto.

The *voyageurs* themselves, if Indian, were generally young men, heavy-set, copper-colored, and highly ornamented; their black hair greased and plaited into small braids, from which depended bright-colored ribbons and feathers. About their thick necks were broad bands of wampum, from which hung suspended over the throat huge silver medals. These medals were not the rewards of valuable service, however, but may be purchased at any company's store. Their capotes were open at the throat, and revealed broad, uncovered chests, corded with muscles. In place of the customary variegated sash, they wore broad leather belts, in which were slung their fire-bags, beaded and quilted, and serving upon occasion as pocket-books.

If the *voyageur* were half-breed, however, he was a little above the medium height, with lithe, ac-

tive frame, enough of the aboriginal to impart suppleness, and sufficient of the white to add a certain solidity of frame lacking in the savage. His features, too, were regular to a fault; complexion nut-brown, eyes black, and long black hair hanging down in a straight mass over his shoulders. He wore a tasseled cap, and was also *en capote*, but of fine blue cloth ornamented with two rows of silver-gilt buttons; variegated sash and moccasins, of course.

As a rule, the *voyageurs* are of French extraction, descendants of the trappers and traders of the old fur-companies, though by long intermarriage the blood of four nationalities mingles in their veins. Their grandfathers have been French-Canadians, their grandmothers Crow squaws; English, and Cree, and Ojibway, have contributed to their descent on the mother's side. This mixture has produced, in most instances, a genial, good-humored, and handsome fellow; although, as a class, with some cleverness and cheerfulness, their faces generally betray a certain moodiness of temper, and lack the frank and honest respectability stamped upon countenances more purely Anglo-Saxon. Swarthy in complexion, with dark hair and eyes, their features are generally good and aquiline in character; and, although sometimes coarse, are invariably well-proportioned. Physically, they are a fine race; tall, straight, and well-proportioned, lightly formed but strong, and extremely active and enduring. Of more supple build, as a rule, than the Indian, they combine his endurance and readiness of resource with the greater muscular strength and perseverance of the white man.

In disposition they are a merry, light-hearted race, recklessly generous, hospitable, and extravagant. When idle, they spend much of their time in singing, dancing, and gossiping from house to house, getting drunk upon the slightest occasion; and, when the *voyageur* drinks, he does it, as he says, *comme il faut*—that is, until he obtains the desired happiness of complete intoxication. Vanity is his besetting sin, and he will deprive himself and his family of the common necessities of life to become the envied possessor of any gewgaw that may happen to attract his fancy. Intensely superstitious, and a firm believer in dreams, omens, and warnings, he is an apt disciple of the Romish faith. Completely under the influence of his priest, in most respects, and observing the outward forms of his religion with great regularity, he is yet grossly immoral, often dishonest, and generally untrustworthy. No sense of duty seems to actuate his daily life; for, though the word *devoir* is often on the lips of this semi-Frenchman, the principle of *devoir* is not so strong in his heart as are the impulses of passion and caprice. But little aptitude for continuous labor, moreover, belongs to his constitution. No man will labor more cheerfully and gallantly at the severe toil pertinent to his calling; but these efforts are of short duration, and, when they are ended, his chief

desire is to do nothing but eat, drink, smoke, and be merry, all of them acts in which he greatly excels.

The ceremony of taking a wife, by which this mercurial race sprang into existence, in the old days of the fur-trade, cannot be regarded, in the light of the present days, as one much encumbered with social and religious preliminaries. If it failed in literally fulfilling the condition of force implied in the word "taking," it usually developed into a question of barter. When the French-Canadian wanted a wife, he took a horse, a gun, some cloth or beads, and, repairing to the lodge of his red brother in the wilderness, purchased the heart and hand of the squaw he desired of her stern parent. If she didn't love after "these presents," the lodge-poles were always handy to enforce that degree of obedience necessary to domestic tranquillity. This custom, by-the-way, has by no means fallen into desuetude, but is still in vogue along the border.

As a class, the *voyageurs* rank very low in the country. Their priests profess to have a certain influence over them, but confess that their flock is disreputable, and not to be relied upon in the faithful performance of a contract. As a consequence, it sometimes happens that the crews of a boat-brigade mutiny during the voyage and return home. This evil, it is true, might be obviated were it not for the system of advancing wages for the trip, necessary in dealing with the class of which, for the most part, the crews are composed. But, unfortunately, on the *voyageurs'* return from the regular summer trips, they do not betake themselves to any special modes of industry, but vary seasons of hunting and fishing with longer intervals of total idleness. Toward mid-winter a steady perseverance in this mode of life brings themselves, and their equally improvident families, to a condition closely allied to starvation. When the books are opened at the company's offices for the enrollment of men to serve in the trips of the ensuing season, a general rush of the needy crowd takes place. Upon their acceptance and enrollment, a small advance is made; and afterward, at stated intervals before the commencement of the voyage, further sums are paid. Toward spring, however, when the difficulty of obtaining food lessens in some degree, the men assume a higher tone, and demand larger sums in advance—threatening that, if their demands are not complied with, they will not proceed upon the voyage at all. Counter-threats of imprisonment are superciliously smiled away with the remark that the time will be more easily passed in durance than in labor. The result is that, when the day of embarkation arrives, some of the enrolled men do not appear, while those who do have already received half their wages. Once on the voyage, their wives and families draw as frequently as possible upon the amount "still coming to them," so that the sum forfeited by mutiny and breach of contract is insufficient to restrain the men from a premature return. The continuance of this system has been caused by the necessities of the men, whom it preserves from absolute starvation, and the undoubted fact that the laborious nature of the ser-

vice renders it difficult, if not impossible, to secure men in the spring, when many other opportunities exist of gaining a livelihood in less trying channels.

## II.

It is customary to distribute a small quantity of rum among the men immediately before starting, and this, together with the probably considerable amount previously surreptitiously obtained, materially increased the hilarity and excitement of our departure. The Pierres became more gratuitously profuse in their farewells, and returned again and again to clasp the hands of the crowd, and claim every one as a brother; the Antoines, violently gesticulative, declaimed with cheerful irrelevance some old *chanson* about the glory of their ancestors; while the Baptistes hung, limply lachrymose, upon the necks of their best friends, murmuring maudlin sentiment in their receptive ears. Here and there, sober, and with an air of great importance, stalked a sturdy steersman, getting his men well in hand and having an eye to the lading of his particular boat. Busy clerks and voluble porters varied with laughing, chatting women, in augmenting the babel of sound.

All things being at last ready, the boat of the guide swung into the stream, followed closely by the others in single file. Vociferous cheers greeted us from the well-lined banks, and the wild boat-songs of the *voyageurs*, sung in full chorus, began—a weird but pleasing melody. Steadily the oars were plied, and regularly the beat and rhythm of oar-lock and song resounded, until, sweeping round a projecting promontory, fort and friends were lost to view.

The lower course of the Red River of the North presents, for the last thirty miles, a picture of grand simplicity—and, it must be confessed, monotony—which, magnificent as it appears at first, wearies the eye and tires the mind at last. Flowing, like all other prairie-streams, deep below the surface of the plain, there is nothing to be seen but the dead calm of an unruffled, mirror-like sheet of water glaring in the sun, and, as far as the eye can reach, two walls of dark-green foliage, with the dark-blue firmament above them. In the foreground, slender stems of cottonwood and gigantic oaks, with long festoons of moss hanging from their aged limbs, dip down into the turbid floods. No hill breaks the finely-indented line of foliage, which everywhere bounds the horizon; only here and there a half-breed's hut, or the *tepee* of a child of the prairie and stream, peeps out of the green. Happily, the novelty of a first voyage by boat-brigade was sufficient to engross the attention of the traveler, and attract his thoughts from the panorama offered by Nature to the vignette of northern boat-life embraced within the limits occupied by the eight boats speeding their way down the centre of the broad stream.

The comparatively limited season during which water transportation is available in the north, the nature of the cargoes to be transported, and the channels through which they must pass, render the strictly summer months a season of such bustle and activity. The loss of a few days in the departure of

boats destined for the interior may deprive some important district of the means of traffic for the ensuing year, and necessitate the holding over of immense stocks of goods, to the serious derangement of trade, and a heavy curtailment of the annual profits. The matter of transportation, then, is one of vital importance to the fur-company, and is conducted with a care and system devoted, perhaps, to no other branch of a trade in which a close attention to details and routine are distinguishing features. Though the actual duties of freighting occupy but about four months in the year, yet the preparation pertinent to its perfect performance engrosses to a great extent the remaining eight. The result is a system so perfect that over the long courses traversed by the boat-brigades their arrival may be calculated upon almost to the hour; and the anxious trader may ascend his lookout-post with the certainty of seeing sweeping round the nearest point the well-laden boats, with swarthy crews bending low to their oars, and singing their weird *chansons* in time to the measured stroke.

The freighting-season begins about the first week in June, when the ice has disappeared from the rivers, and the spring supplies of merchandise destined for the interior have reached the depot forts. At that period the advance brigade of seven or eight boats leaves Fort Garry—now the principal point of forwarding in the service—followed a week after by yet another. This interval is allowed in order to prevent the meeting of the boats at any post, thereby creating undue bustle and confusion. These boats tend north and northwest toward Methy Portage and York Factory, there to meet other brigades from the remote arctic districts, to whom they deliver their cargoes, receiving in exchange the furs brought down from the interior posts—the proceeds of the year's trade. When this exchange is effected, each brigade retraces its course. The time occupied by the longest trip—that of Methy Portage, the height of land from which the waters flow into Hudson's Bay and the Arctic Ocean—is about four months. Numerous shorter trips are also made, and the whole country is alive during this season with advancing and returning boats.

The peculiar nature of the transportation service of the company necessitates certain conditions in freight, boats and boatmen pertaining to it, not elsewhere to be found. The entire water-carriage of the country is performed by means of what are technically called "inland boats," of three and a half tons' burden, and requiring nine men as crew. Of the shape of the ordinary whale-boat, they carry a small mast, unstepped at will, upon which, in crossing lakes, should the wind prove favorable, a square sail is set. A small platform or deck covers the stern of the vessel, upon which is seated the steersman, using at times the ordinary lever-rudder; again a long sweep, with one stroke of which the direction of the craft is radically changed. The steersman is captain of the vessel, the eight men under him being ranged as "middle-men," or rowers. A number of these boats constitute a brigade, over which a guide, skilled in the intricacies of current and coast, is

placed, and who may be regarded as the commodore of the fleet. His duty is to guide the brigade through dangerous waters, to support the authority of the steersmen, and to transact the business of the brigade at the stations touched *en route*. The position is an important one when properly filled, and is generally held by the same person until advancing years necessitate its relinquishment.

### III.

RAPIDLY we sped down the waters of the turbid stream, and monotonously echoed the loud "ough!" of the *voyageurs* as they rose from their seats with each stroke of the oar, only to sink back again with a sudden jar as the broad blades left the water. Stately swans looking thoughtfully into the stream, tall cranes standing motionless on one leg, and ducks of every hue disappearing behind the foliage screening the mouth of some creek or coolie, were the only living things to be seen. The landscape was monotonously splendid, and the hours passed in unvarying succession. Ten minutes in every hour were allowed the hardy *voyageurs* for rest; the long oars were lifted from the flood, from every fire-bag came pipes and tobacco, and the bark of the gray willow, mingled in equal proportion with the Indian weed, lent its fragrance to the morning air. After such pleasant interlude the paddles were plied with renewed vigor, and soon the woods disappeared; and the banks, which gradually sank to a lower level, became covered with the long, recedy grass marking the delta of the stream. Farther on, even the semblance of vegetation afforded by the reeds ceased abruptly, leaving naught but a sandy bar submerged at high tide, and the waters of an immense lake extending northward out of sight—a lake which stretched away into unseen places, and on whose waters a fervid June sun was playing strange freaks of mirage and inverted shore-land.

Upon the sand-bar at the outlet of the main channel our boats were run along-shore, and preparations ensued for the mid-day meal. Generally speaking, while voyaging, it is only allowable to put ashore for breakfast, a cold dinner being taken in the boats; but, as no *voyageur* could be expected to labor in his holiday-apparel, a halt was necessary before setting out upon the lake. The low beach yielded ample store of driftwood, the relics of many a northern gale, and of this a fire was lighted, and the dinner-apparatus arranged in the stern-sheets of the boat. The functions of the *chef*, limited to the preparation of pemmican in some palatable way, were simple enough. For trip-men pemmican is the unalterable bill-of-fare. It is the favorite food of the half-breed and Indian *voyageurs*, and is nearly altogether composed of buffalo-meat. The fresh meat is first cut into thin slices, then dried over a fire or in the sun, after which it is beaten into a thick, flaky substance. In this state it is placed in a bag, manufactured from the raw-hide of the animal, and the pulpy mass soldered down by melted fat poured over it, the proportions of fat and pounded meat being about equal. The best pemmican usually has sugar and service-

berries added to it, and in this state is considered very delicious.

Pemmican tastes like nothing else in the world, but is very satisfying and nutritive. It may be prepared in many ways, and, to the unaccustomed traveler, it is a matter of difficulty to decide which method is the least objectionable. There is *rubeiboo*, and *richot*, and pemmican plain, and peamican raw, the former being the method most in vogue with the trip-men. *Rubeiboo* consists solely of pemmican and flour boiled into a sort of thick soup. Though not a delicate dish, it is, nevertheless, very nutritious, and the *voyageurs* are extremely fond of it. *Richot*, however, a composition of the same materials, but fried instead of boiled, meets the requirements of the civilized palate more nearly than any other. It is extremely rich food, and a very little of it will suffice for an ordinary man.

As to the consumption of tea by the *voyageurs*, it is simply enormous. The company's annual importation of that article for the northern department alone amounts to over one hundred thousand pounds. The delay which would be occasioned, were the desires of the men with reference to tea-drinking to be indulged, renders guides and steersmen peremptory in opposing the ever-renewed proposition that the boat should be hauled to and the kettle put on the fire whenever an inviting promontory extends itself along the route.

After dinner the *voyageurs* doffed the holiday-garments in which the start had been made, appearing thereafter in traveling-costume. This change made, the *ensemble* of the crews became rougher, but more picturesque. Corduroy trousers, tied at the knee with beadwork garters, incased their limbs; capotes were discarded, and striped shirts open in front, with cotton handkerchiefs tied sailor-fashion round their swarthy necks, took their place; a scarlet sash encircled the waist of each, while moos-skin moccasins defended their feet. Their head-dresses were as various as fanciful—some trusted to their thickly-matted hair to guard them from sun and rain; some wore caps of coarse cloth, others colored handkerchiefs twisted turban-fashion round their heads; while one or two sported tall, black hats covered so plenteously with tassels and feathers as to be scarcely recognizable. They were a wild yet handsome set of men, as they lay or stood in careless attitudes round the fires, puffing clouds of smoke from their ever-burning pipes.

At the command of the guide, however, they fell to readjusting the cargoes of the boats for the passage of the lake, and the portages immediately beyond. For on the waters traversed by these brigades navigation is seriously interrupted by rapids, waterfalls, and cataracts, to surmount which the boats with their cargoes have to be landed and carried round the obstruction, to be relunched at the nearest practicable point. Again, it occurs that a height of land is reached, across which the boats and cargoes must be dragged in order to descend the opposite stream. In either event the process is technically known as "making a portage," and

constitutes the hardest feature of the *voyageur's* labor.

It is owing to the vast amount of handling, necessitated by the numerous portages intervening between the depot-forts and even the nearest inland districts, that the packing of merchandise becomes a matter of so much importance. The standard weight of each package used in the fur-trade is one hundred pounds, and each boat is supposed capable of containing seventy-five "inland pieces," as such packages are called. It is the method of reckoning tonnage in the country. The facility with which such pieces are handled by the muscular trip-men is very remarkable—a boat being loaded by its crew in five minutes, and presenting a neat, orderly appearance upon completion of the operation.

In crossing a portage each *voyageur* is supposed to be equal to the task of carrying two inland pieces upon his back. These loads are carried in such a manner as to allow the whole strength of the body to be put into the work. A broad leather band, called a "portage-strap," is placed round the forehead, the ends of which strap, passing back over the shoulders, support the pieces which, thus carried, lie along the spine from the small of the back to the crown of the head. When fully loaded, the *voyageur* stands with his body bent forward, and, with one hand steadying the pieces, he trots nimbly away over the steep and rock-strewed portage, his bare or moccasined feet enabling him to pass briskly over the slippery rocks in places where boots would inevitably send both trip-man and load feet-foremost to the bottom. In the frequent unloading of the vessel the task of raising the pieces and placing them upon the backs of the muscular *voyageurs* devolves upon the steersman, and the process of raising seventy-five pieces of one hundred pounds' weight from a position below the feet to a level with the shoulders demands a greater amount of muscle than is possessed by the average man.

#### IV.

WINNIPEG, like all other great lakes, is liable to be visited with sudden storms, which, taking a boat by surprise while in the process of making a long traverse, might be attended with fatal consequences. The coasts, generally speaking, offer only a limited number of harbors for small boats, but those fortunately within a few hours' sail of each other. In the event of a boat being overtaken by a sudden tempest, it is sometimes necessary to make for the nearest land and "beach" her, carrying herself and cargo ashore by main force over a considerable length of breaker-washed shore. It was for this reason, perhaps, that our guide marched solemnly to and fro upon the shingle, curiously examining, with twisted neck and upturned eye, the signs of the weather, and presenting, with his long, blue capote and cautious gait, a somewhat quaint and antiquated spectacle. Having, after some difficulty, satisfied himself that the weather would hold good until we could reach the nearest harbor, he recalled the crews—who had scattered along-shore smoking their pipes—and loosed

from shore. The lake, as changeable as the ocean, was in its very calmest mood; not a wave, not a ripple, on its surface; not a breath of breeze to aid the untiring paddles. The guide held his course far out into the glassy waste, leaving behind the marshy headlands which marked the river's delta. The point at which we had dined became speedily indistinguishable among the low line of, apparently, exactly similar localities ranging along the low shore.

A long, low point, reaching out from the south shore of the lake, was faintly visible in the horizon, and toward it our guide steered. The traveler, comfortably seated upon the deck of the boat, indulged alternately in reading and smoking; the whole style of progress being more like the realization of a scene from "Télémaque" or the "Æneid" than a sober business voyage undertaken in the interests of a trading company of the present age.

The red sun sank into the lake, warning us to seek the shore and camp for the night, as we neared the point toward which we steered. A deep, sandy bay, with a high background of woods and rocks, seemed to invite us to its solitude. The boats were moored in a recess of the bank, or drawn bodily up on the beach; sails brought ashore and roofs extemporized as protection against possible storms. Driftwood was again collected, and active preparations for the evening meal ensued. Each boat's crew had a fire to itself, over which were placed gypsy-like tripods, from which huge tin kettles depended; while above them hovered numerous volunteer cooks, who were employed stirring their contents with persevering industry. The curling wreaths of smoke formed a black cloud among the numerous fleecy ones arising from the steaming kettles, while all around, in every imaginable attitude, sat, stood, and reclined the sunburned, savage-looking *voyageurs*, chatting, laughing, and smoking, in perfect happiness.

Meanwhile, the bedding of the traveler, after being untied from its protecting oil-cloth, was spread upon the ground. "Bedding" consists of, say, three blankets and a pillow. The former are folded lengthwise, and arranged on the oil-cloth which, when camp is struck in the morning, is so rolled about them as to form a compact, portable bundle, when properly corded, practically impervious to weather.

All occupations ceased at the call of the cooks, and the crews gathered round the camp-fire with their scant supply of tin-ware. The bill-of-fare was limited, as before, to pemmican and tea. As the brigade penetrates the interior, wild-fowl become abundant, and the stews more savory and fragrant. Supper over, half a dozen huge log-fires are lighted round about, casting a ruddy glow upon the surrounding foliage, and the wild, uncouth figures of the *voyageurs*, with their long, dark hair hanging in luxuriant masses over their bronzed faces. They warm themselves in the cheerful glow, smoking and chatting with much carelessness and good-humor of the day's adventures—or, rather, of what are regarded as such—unusual good or ill luck at hunting or fishing, the casual meeting of some aboriginal canoe, or the sight of some lone Indian's leather lodge. Only the

dense swarms of mosquitoes, which set in immediately after sunset, remind the traveler that he is not realizing a scene from tropical life.

To be appreciated, the pain and inconvenience caused by the attacks of these insects must be felt. They swarm in the woods and marshes, and, after lying in the shade of the bushes during the heat of the day, come abroad in the cool of the evening and make night hideous where no grateful breeze blows for the protection of the traveler. They form, in fact, the principal drawback to the pleasure of summer travel in the north. The *voyageur*, after working hard through the long, hot day, simply spreads the single blanket he is allowed to carry on the ground, and, with no other covering than the starry firmament above him, sleeps undisturbed till dawn, only occasionally brushing off, as if by way of diversion, the most obtrusive of the little fiends. But the more refined and less case-hardened traveler suffers severely. In vain are trousers tied tightly about the ankles, and coat-sleeves at the wrist, while mosquito-veils surround the head. The enemy finds his way in single file through apertures unseen by human eyes, and bites without mercy; while his personal escape is secured by the impossibility of hunting him up without making way for the surrounding hosts of his *confères*. For the victim, feeding under such circumstances is no easy matter. Independent of the loss of appetite occasioned by the nature of the malady, the veil must be removed to obtain access to the mouth, and the hands must be uncovered to work knife, fork, and spoon. Sleep is also to be obtained only for a few short, feverish moments at long intervals. Any attempt to gain repose by concealing one's self beneath the blankets is in vain; and long before sleep can come the baffled experimenter is compelled to emerge, half smothered, to breathe the sultry air.

The traveler can, however, often have an awning fitted up over the stern-sheets of the boat and sleep on board. By this arrangement, and in the event of a favorable breeze blowing at daybreak, the crews can pursue their journey without disturbing him. On the other hand, the traveler is often called upon to give up the boat to the men during the night, so that they may be further removed from the mosquitoes and better prepared for work on the ensuing day, when the passenger may make up for the night's sleeplessness. Under this system, then, the steersman occupies the stern-sheets, while the crew, by arranging the mast and oars lengthwise over the boat, and stretching oil-cloths over the framework so formed, turn the vessel into one long, snug tent, in which they can rest in comfort. This device is called a "tanley," the word being corrupted from the French *tendre-le*.

#### V.

IN the early morning, before the mists had risen from the waters, the loud "Lève! lève! lève!" of the guide roused the camp. Five minutes sufficed to finish the traveler's toilet, tie up his blankets, and embark. The prows of the boat-brigade swung into

the lake, and the day's voyage began. Usually a short sail is made until a favorable camping-spot is reached, when the boats are again beached, and breakfast prepared. Then succeeds a renewed plying of the oars, or, if the wind prove favorable, the sails are set and the little fleet glides smoothly on its way. When the wind is fair and the weather fine, boats make very long traverses, keeping so far out that, about the middle of the run, neither the point from which they started nor the one toward which they are steering is visible. In calm weather, however, when the oars are used, it is usual to keep closer in-shore and make shorter traverses. The pursuit of game and wild-fowl, daily indulged in, tends to vary the monotony of the voyage. Occasionally the breeding-places of the latter are found, in which event the crews lay in a stock of eggs and young birds sufficient for the trip. Again, returning boats are encountered, and a short season devoted to the exchange of news and compliments.

The wind springing up, the guide ordered all sail set, and stood far out into the middle of the lake. The boats of the brigade proving very unequal sailors, from difference in build and unequal lading, the white sails soon lost all semblance of line, and straggled over the placid waters of the lake, each upon its own tack. Nor did they meet again until we entered the mouth of the Winnipeg River, shortly after mid-day, and prepared to force its twenty-seven portages, the first of which began but eight miles above the company's fort, at its delta.

The Winnipeg River, with twice the volume of water the Rhine pours forth, descends three hundred and sixty feet in a distance of one hundred and sixty miles. This descent is not effected by a continuous decline, but by a series of terraces at irregular distances from each other, thus forming innumerable lakes and wide-expanding reaches, bound together by rapids and perpendicular falls of varying altitudes. It was over this broken pathway of rock and stream, of terrace and lagoon, that the course of the boat-brigade now lay. To describe the forcing of one barrier is only to iterate that of the one preceding or following it.

Passing through lonely lakes and island-studded bays, there sounds ahead the rush and roar of falling water; and, rounding some pine-clad island or projecting bluff, a tumbling mass of foam and spray, studded with rocks and bordered with dark-green shores, bars the way. Above the falls nothing can be seen; below, the waters boil in angry surge for a moment, then leap away in maddened flight, threatening to toss the well-laden boats like corks upon their sweeping surface. But against this boiling, rushing flood comes the craft and skill of the intrepid *voyageurs*. They advance upon the fall as if it were an equally subtle enemy with themselves; they steal upon it before it is aware.

The immense volume of water after its wild leap lingers a moment in the huge caldron at the foot of the fall; then, escaping from the circling eddies and whirlpools, sweeps away in rushing flood into the calmer waters below. But this mighty rush

in mid-stream produces a counter-current along-shore, which, taking an opposite turn, sweeps back nearly, if not quite, to the foot of the fall. Into this back-current the stealthy *voyageurs* steer their well-laden boat. On one side the rocky bank towers overhead, slender pine and fir trees finding precarious foothold in its crevices; and on the other, ofttimes but a yard from the advancing boat, sweeps the mad rush of the central current. Up the back-current goes the boat, driven cautiously by its oarsmen, until, just in advance of its bow, appears the whirlpool in which it ends, at the foot of the fall. To enter that revolving mass of waters is to be wrecked in a twinkling; to turn into the broad current of the mid-stream is, apparently, to be swept away in a moment of time. What next?

For a moment there is no paddling, the bowsman and steersman alone keeping the boat in position as she rapidly drifts into the whirlpool. Among the crew not a word is spoken; but every man is at his utmost tension, and awaiting the instant which shall call every nerve, muscle, and intelligence, into play. Now the supreme moment has come; for on one side begins the mighty rush of the mid-current, and on the other circle and twist the green, hollowing curves of the angry whirlpool, revolving round its axis of air with a mighty strength that would overturn and suck down the stanch whale-boat in the twinkling of an eye. Just as the prow touches the angry curves, a quick shout is given by the bowsman, and the boat shoots full into the centre of the rushing stream, driven by the united efforts of the crew, supplemented by extra oarsmen from the other boats. The men work for their very lives, and the boat breasts across the stream full in the very face of the fall. The waters foam and dash around her; the mad waves leap over the gunwale; the *voyageurs* shout as they dash their oars like lightning into the flood; and the traveler holds his breath amid this war of man against Nature. But the struggle seems useless. Man can effect naught against such a torrent; the boat is close against the rocks, and is driven down despite the rapid strokes of the oarsmen. For an instant she pauses, as if gathering strength for her mad flight down the mid-current. The dead strength of the rushing flood seems to have prevailed, when lo! the whole thing is done. A dexterous twist of the oars, and the boat floats suddenly beneath a little rocky isle in mid-stream, at the foot of the fall. The portage landing is over this rock, while a few yards out on either side the mighty flood sweeps on its headlong course. A *voyageur* leaps out on the wet, slippery rock, and holds the boat in place while the others get out. The cool fellows laugh as they survey the torrent they have just defeated, then turn to carry the freight piece by piece up the rocky stairway, and deposit it upon the flat landing ten feet above. That accomplished, the boat is dragged over, and relaunched upon the very lip of the fall.

But slightly different was the ascent of many of the rapids encountered from time to time. Upon arriving at one, advantage was taken of the back-

water near the banks, to run up as far as the eddy would permit; then the bowsman rose in his seat and craned his neck forward to take a look before attempting the passage. Signaling the route he intended to pursue to the steersman, the boat was at once shot into the chaos of boiling waters that rushed swiftly by. At first it was swept downward with the speed of an arrow, while the mad flood threatened to swamp it in a moment. To the traveler, unaccustomed to such perilous navigation, it seemed utter folly to attempt the ascent; but a moment more revealed the plan, and brought the stanch craft into a temporary harbor. Right in the middle of the central current a huge rock rose above the surface, while from its base a long eddy ran, like the gradually-lessening tail of a comet, for nearly a score of yards. It was just opposite this rock that the *voyageurs* had entered the rapid, and for which they paddled with all their might. The current, sweeping them down, brought the boat just to the extreme point of the eddy by the time mid-stream was reached, and a few vigorous strokes of the oars floated it quietly in the lee of the rock. A minute's rest, and the bowsman selected another rock a few yards higher up, and a great deal to one side. Another rush was made, and the second haven reached. In this way, yard for yard, the boat-brigade ascended for miles, sometimes scarcely gaining a foot; again, as a favoring bay or curve presented a long stretch of smooth water, advancing more rapidly.

In rapids where the strength of the current forbade the use of oars, progress was made by means of the tracking-line. Tracking, as it is called, is dreadfully harassing work. Half the crew go ashore, and drag the boat slowly along, while the other half go asleep. After an hour's walk, the others then take their turn, and so on alternately during the entire day. As the banks about the rapids were generally high, and very precipitous, the *voyageurs* had to scramble along, now close to the water's edge, again high up the bank, on ledges where they could

hardly find a footing, and where they resembled flies on a wall. The banks, too, composed of soft clay and mud, increased the labor of hauling; but the light-hearted *voyageurs* seemed to think nothing of it, and laughed and joked as they toiled along, playing tricks upon each other, and plunging occasionally up to the waist in mud and water, with a reckless carelessness all their own.

So, day after day, the boat-brigade journeyed on: through island-studded bays, over long reaches of limpid water whose placid surface not a ripple stirred, over turbid floods thick with the ooze of muddy banks, breasting fierce rapids, climbing thundering waterfalls; sometimes making a fair day's travel; again, after a day of weary toil, bivouacking almost within sight of last night's camp-fire.

One day the traveler became aware of an undue excitement and bustle among the swarthy crews of the brigade. The pointed prows were turned shoreward, and ran upon a pebbly beach, affording easy access to the limpid water, and facing the warm rays of the sun. The *voyageurs* brought forth all the soiled clothing worn upon the journey, and a general scrubbing took place. Soon the bushes in the vicinity, the branches of trees, and the flat rocks, bore plentiful burdens of gaudy apparel waving in the breeze to dry. Copious baths were next administered to their persons, capped by each man donning the bravest garments of his outfit. Ribbons were braided in their hair, flashy sashes encircled their waists, and moccasins of bewildering beadwork incased their feet. Then, with a dash and wild chorus of boat-song, the oars were plied with quickly-measured stroke. Soon the sharp point of a headland was turned, and the Mission of the White Dog appeared, perched upon the precipitous banks of the stream. It was the end of the traveler's voyage: a few huts, a company's trading-store, a few Indians, and an aroma of decaying fish, which, amalgamating with the slight mist from the river, surrounded the traveler's head like an aureole.

### THE MINSTREL-TREE.

MAJESTIC sovereign of his fadeless kind,  
 Hill-born, hill-nurtured, to our minstrel-tree,  
 Swept by the breeze, or mightier winds from sea,  
 Chants through the sunshine clear, the vapors blind!  
 Forever, to all moods of heaven resigned,  
 He makes ineffable music! to our ears  
 Now grand as trumpet-calls from knightly years,  
 Now sweet as memories of a loving mind!

O woodland bard! heart-open to all skies,  
 Thy resonant branches and thy leaves that sing  
 Have seemed to mock me in their gentlest sway;  
 Thy rhythms survive for ages—mine, a day.  
 Yon heaven (thy Muse), through thee, O forest-king!  
 Breathes epic storms and south winds' lyrical sighs!