BUILDERS OF THE NATION

OR

From the Indian Trail to the Railroad

National Edition

Complete in Twelve Volumes


Frank Tenney Johnson
1905

NATIONAL EDITION

COMPLETE IN TWELVE VOLUMES

Builders of Nation

THE TRAITOR

A Traitor on this Guard.

A. T. Lee

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK

THE BRADDOCK SOCIETY

A Trapper on His Guard.

From an original painting by Frank T. Johnson.

NATIONAL EDITION

COMPLETE IN TWELVE VOLUMES

Builders of the Nation

THE TRAPPER

II

By

A. C. Laut

Author of Heralds of Empire, etc.

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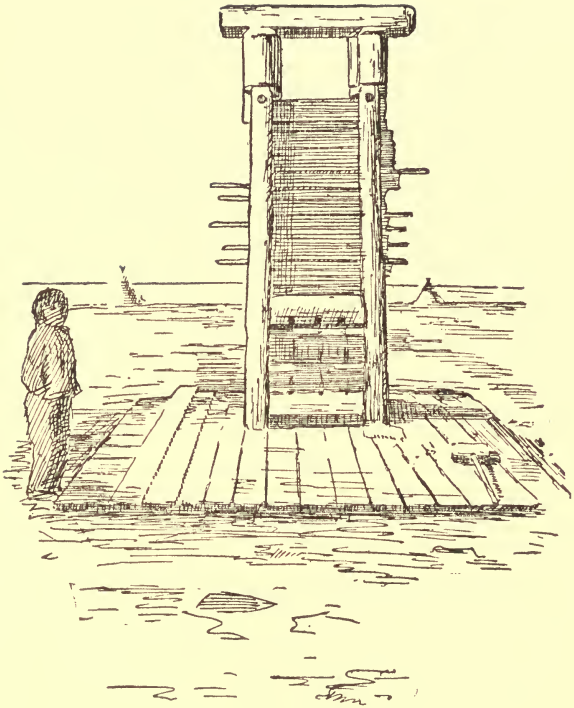
BA'TISTE, THE BEAR HUNTER

THE city man, who goes bear-hunting with a body-guard of armed guides in a field where the hunted have been on the run from the hunter for a century, gets a very tame idea of the natural bear in its natural state. Bears that have had the fear of man inculcated with longe-range repeaters lose confidence in the prowess of an aggressive onset against invisible foes. The city man comes back from the wilds with a legend of how harmless bears have become. In fact, he doesn't believe a wild animal ever attacks unless it is attacked. He doubts whether the bear would go on its life-long career of rapine and death, if hunger did not compel it, or if repeated assault and battery from other animals did not teach the poor bear the art of self-defence.

Grisly old trappers coming down to the frontier towns of the Western States once a year for provisions, or hanging round the forts of the Hudson's Bay Company in Canada for the summer, tell a different tale. Their hunting is done in a field where human presence is still so rare that it is unknown and the bear treats mankind precisely as he treats all other living beings from the moose and the musk-ox to mice and ants—as fair game for his own insatiable maw.



TYPE OF FUR PRESS.

Old wedge press in use at Fort Resolution, of the Sub-Arctics.

Old hunters may be great spinners of yarns—"liars" the city man calls them—but Montagnais, who squats on his heels round the fur company forts on Peace River, carries ocular evidence in the artificial ridge of a deformed nose that the bear which he slew was a real one with an epicurean relish for that part of Indian anatomy which the Indian considers to be the most choice bit of a moose.* And the Kootenay hunter who was sent through the forests of Idaho to follow up the track of a lost brave brought back proof of an actual bear; for he found a dead man lying across a pile of logs with his skull crushed in like an egg-shell by something that had risen swift and silent from a lair on the other side of the logs and dealt the climbing brave one quick terrible blow. And little blind Ba'tiste, wizened and old, who spent the last twenty years of his life weaving grass mats and carving curious little wooden animals for the children of the chief factor, could convince you that the bears he slew in his young days were very real bears, altogether different from the clumsy bruins that gambol with boys and girls through fairy books.

That is, he could convince you if he would; for he usually sat weaving and weaving at the grasses—weaving bitter thoughts into the woof of his mat—without a word. Round his white helmet, such as British soldiers wear in hot lands, he always hung a heavy thick linen thing like the frill of a sun-bonnet,

* In further confirmation of Montagnais's bear, the chief factor's daughter, who told me the story, was standing in the fort gate when the Indian came running back with a grisly pelt over his shoulder. When he saw her his hands went up to conceal the price he had paid for the pelt.

coming over the face as well as the neck—"to keep de sun off," he would mumble out if you asked him why. More than that of the mysterious frill worn on dark days as well as sunny, he would never vouch unless some town-bred man patronizingly pooh-poohed the dangers of bear-hunting. Then the grass strands would tremble with excitement and the little French hunter's body would quiver and he would begin pouring forth a jumble, half habitant half Indian with a mixture of all the oaths from both languages, pointing and pointing at his hidden face and bidding you look what the bear had done to him, but never lifting the thick frill.

It was somewhere between the tributary waters that flow north to the Saskatchewan and the rivers that start near the Saskatchewan to flow south to the Missouri. Ba'tiste and the three trappers who were with him did not know which side of the boundary they were on. By slow travel, stopping one day to trap beaver, pausing on the way to forage for meat, building their canoes where they needed them and abandoning the boats when they made a long overland *portage,* they were three weeks north of the American fur post on the banks of the Missouri. The hunters were travelling light-handed. That is, they were carrying only a little salt and tea and tobacco. For the rest, they were depending on their muskets. Game had not been plentiful.

Between the prairie and "the Mountains of the Setting Sun"—as the Indians call the Rockies—a long line of tortuous, snaky red crawled sinuously over the crests of the foothills; and all game—bird and

beast—will shun a prairie fire. There was no wind. It was the dead hazy calm of Indian summer in the late autumn with the sun swimming in the purplish smoke like a blood-red shield all day and the serpent line of flame flickering and darting little tongues of vermilion against the deep blue horizon all night, days filled with the crisp smell of withered grasses, nights as clear and cold as the echo of a bell. On a windless plain there is no danger from a prairie fire. One may travel for weeks without nearing or distancing the waving tide of fire against a far sky; and the four trappers, running short of rations, decided to try to flank the fire coming around far enough ahead to intercept the game that must be moving away from the fire line.

Nearly all hunters, through some dexterity of natural endowment, unconsciously become specialists. One man sees beaver signs where another sees only deer. For Ba'tiste, the page of nature spelled *B-E-A-R!* Fifteen bear in a winter is a wonderfully good season's work for any trapper. Ba'tiste's record for one lucky winter was fifty-four. After that he was known as the bear hunter. Such a reputation affects keen hunters differently. The Indian grows cautious almost to cowardice. Ba'tiste grew rash. He would follow a wounded grisly to cover. He would afterward laugh at the episode as a joke if the wounded brute had treed him. "For sure, good t'ing dat was not de prairie dat tam," he would say, flinging down the pelt of his foe. The other trappers with Indian blood in their veins might laugh, but they shook their heads when his back was turned.

Flanking the fire by some of the great gullies that

cut the foothills like trenches, the hunters began to find the signs they had been seeking. For Ba'tiste, the many different signs had but one meaning. Where some summer rain pool had dried almost to a soft mud hole, the other trappers saw little cleft foot-marks that meant deer, and prints like a baby's fingers that spelled out the visit of some member of the weasel family, and broad splay-hoof impressions that had spread under the weight as some giant moose had gone shambling over the quaking mud bottom. But Ba'tiste looked only at a long shuffling foot-mark the length of a man's fore-arm with padded ball-like pressures as of monster toes. The French hunter would at once examine which way that great foot had pointed. Were there other impressions dimmer on the dry mud? Did the crushed spear-grass tell any tales of what had passed that mud hole? If it did, Ba'tiste would be seen wandering apparently aimlessly out on the prairie, carrying his uncased rifle carefully that the sunlight should not glint from the barrel, zigzagging up a foothill where perhaps wild plums or shrub berries hung rotting with frost ripeness. Ba'tiste did not stand full height at the top of the hill. He dropped face down, took off his hat, or scarlet "safety" handkerchief, and peered warily over the crest of the hill. If he went on over into the next valley, the other men would say they "guessed he smelt bear." If he came back, they knew he had been on a cold scent that had faded indistinguishably as the grasses thinned.

Southern slopes of prairie and foothill are often matted tangles of a raspberry patch. Here Ba'tiste read many things—stories of many bears, of families, of cubs, of old cross fellows wandering alone. Great

slabs of stone had been clawed up by mighty hands. Worms and snails and all the damp clammy things that cling to the cold dark between stone and earth had been gobbled up by some greedy forager. In the trenched ravines crossed by the trappers lay many a hidden forest of cottonwood or poplar or willow. Here was refuge, indeed, for the wandering creatures of the treeless prairie that rolled away from the tops of the cliffs.

Many secrets could be read from the clustered woods of the ravines. The other hunters might look for the fresh nibbled alder bush where a busy beaver had been laying up store for winter, or detect the blink of a russet ear among the seared foliage betraying a deer, or wonder what flesh-eater had caught the poor jack rabbit just outside his shelter of thorny brush.

The hawk soaring and dropping—lilting and falling and lifting again—might mean that a little mink was "playing dead" to induce the bird to swoop down so that the vampire beast could suck the hawk's blood, or that the hawk was watching for an unguarded moment to plunge down with his talons in a poor "foolhen's" feathers.

These things might interest the others. They did not interest Ba'tiste. Ba'tiste's eyes were for lairs of grass crushed so recently that the spear leaves were even now rising; for holes in the black mould where great ripping claws had been tearing up roots; for hollow logs and rotted stumps where a black bear might have crawled to take his afternoon siesta; for punky trees which a grisly might have torn open to gobble ants' eggs; for scratchings down the bole of poplar or cottonwood where some languid bear had been sharp-

ening his claws in midsummer as a cat will scratch chair-legs; for great pits deep in the clay banks, where some silly badger or gopher ran down to the depths of his burrow in sheer terror only to have old bruin come ripping and tearing to the innermost recesses, with scattered fur left that told what had happened.

Some soft oozy moss-padded lair, deep in the marsh with the reeds of the brittle cat-tails lifting as if a sleeper had just risen, sets Ba'tiste's pulse hopping—jumping—marking time in thrills like the lithe bounds of a pouncing mountain-cat. With tread soft as the velvet paw of a panther, he steals through the cane-brake parting the reeds before each pace, brushing aside softly—silently what might crush!—snap!—sound ever so slight an alarm to the little pricked ears of a shaggy head tossing from side to side—jerk—jerk—from right to left—from left to right—always on the listen!—on the listen!—for prey!—for prey!

"Oh, for sure, that Ba'tiste, he was but a fool-hunter," as his comrades afterward said (it is always so very plain afterward); "that Ba'tiste, he was a fool! What man else go step—step—into the marsh after a bear!"

But the truth was that Ba'tiste, the cunning rascal, always succeeded in coming out of the marsh, out of the bush, out of the windfall, sound as a top, safe and unscratched, with a bear-skin over his shoulder, the head swinging pendant to show what sort of fellow he had mastered.

"Dat wan!—ah!—diable!—he has long sharp nose—he was thin—thin as a barrel all gone but de hoops—ah!—voila!—he was wan ugly garçon, was dat bear!"

Where the hunters found tufts of fur on the sage

brush, bits of skin on the spined cactus, the others might vow coyotes had worried a badger. Ba'tiste would have it that the badger had been slain by a bear. The cached carcass of fawn or doe, of course, meant bear; for the bear is an epicure that would have meat gamey. To that the others would agree.

And so the shortening autumn days with the shimmering heat of a crisp noon and the noiseless chill of starry twilights found the trappers canoeing leisurely up-stream from the northern tributaries of the Missouri nearing the long overland trail that led to the hunting-fields in Canada.

One evening they came to a place bounded by high cliff banks with the flats heavily wooded by poplar and willow. Ba'tiste had found signs that were hot—oh! so hot! The mould of an uprooted gopher hole was so fresh that it had not yet dried. This was not a region of timber-wolves. What had dug that hole? Not the small, skulking coyote—the vagrant of prairie life! Oh!—no!—the coyote like other vagrants earns his living without work, by skulking in the wake of the business-like badger; and when the badger goes down in the gopher hole, Master Coyote stands nearby and gobbles up all the stray gophers that bolt to escape the invading badger.* What had dug the hole? Ba'tiste thinks that he knows.

That was on open prairie. Just below the cliff is another kind of hole—a roundish pit dug between moss-

* This phase of prairie life must not be set down to writer's license. It is something that every rider of the plains can see any time he has patience to rein up and sit like a statue within field-glass distance of the gopher burrows about nightfall when the badgers are running.

covered logs and earth wall, a pit with grass clawed down into it, snug and hidden and sheltered as a bird's nest. If the pit is what Ba'tiste thinks, somewhere on the banks of the stream should be a watering-place. He proposes that they beach the canoes and camp here. Twilight is not a good time to still hunt an unseen bear. Twilight is the time when the bear himself goes still hunting. Ba'tiste will go out in the early morning. Meantime if he stumbles on what looks like a trail to the watering-place, he will set a trap.

Camp is not for the regular trapper what it is for the amateur hunter—a time of rest and waiting while others skin the game and prepare supper.

One hunter whittles the willow sticks that are to make the camp fire. Another gathers moss or boughs for a bed. If fish can be got, some one has out a line. The kettle hisses from the cross-bar between notched sticks above the fire, and the meat sizzling at the end of a forked twig sends up a flavour that whets every appetite. Over the upturned canoes bend a couple of men gumming afresh all the splits and seams against to-morrow's voyage. Then with a flip-flop that tells of the other side of the flap-jacks being browned, the cook yodels in crescendo that "Sup—per!—'s—read—ee!"

Supper over, a trap or two may be set in likely places. The men may take a plunge; for in spite of their tawny skins, these earth-coloured fellows have closer acquaintance with water than their appearance would indicate. The man-smell is as acute to the beast's nose as the rank fur-animal-smell is to the man's nose; and the first thing that an Indian who has had a long run of ill-luck does is to get a native "sweating-bath" and make himself clean.

On the ripple of the flowing river are the red bars of the camp fire. Among the willows, perhaps, the bole of some birch stands out white and spectral. Though there is no wind, the poplars shiver with a fall of wan, faded leaves like snow-flakes on the grave of summer. Red bills and whisky-jacks and lonely phoebe-birds came fluttering and pecking at the crumbs. Out from the gray thicket bounds a cotton-tail to jerk up on his hind legs with surprise at the camp fire. A blink of his long ear, and he has bounded back to tell the news to his rabbit family. Overhead, with shrill clangour, single file and in long wavering V lines, wing geese migrating southward for the season. The children's hour, has a great poet called a certain time of day? Then this is the hour of the wilderness hunter, the hour when "the Mountains of the Setting Sun" are flooded in fiery lights from zone to zenith with the snowy heights overtopping the far rolling prairie like clouds of opal at poise in mid-heaven, the hour when the camp fire lies on the russet autumn-tinged earth like a red jewel, and the far line of the prairie fire billows against the darkening east in a tide of vermilion flame.

Unless it is raining, the *voyageurs* do not erect their tent; for they will sleep in the open, feet to the fire, or under the canoes, close to the great earth, into whose very fibre their beings seem to be rooted. And now is the time when the hunters spin their yarns and exchange notes of all they have seen in the long silent day. There was the prairie chicken with a late brood of half-grown clumsy clucking chicks amply able to take care of themselves, but still clinging to the old mother's care. When the hunter came suddenly on

them, over the old hen went, flopping broken-winged to decoy the trapper till her children could run for shelter—when—lo!—of a sudden, the broken wing is mended and away she darts on both wings before he has uncased his gun! There are the stories of bear hunters like Ba'tiste sitting on the other side of the fire there, who have been caught in their own bear traps and held till they died of starvation and their bones bleached in the rusted steel.

That story has such small relish for Ba'tiste that he hitches farther away from the others and lies back flat on the ground close to the willow under-tangle with his head on his hand.

"For sure," says Ba'tiste contemptuously, "nobody doesn't need no tree to climb here! Sacre!—cry wolf!—wolf!—and for sure!—diable!—de beeg loup-garou will eat you yet!"

Down somewhere from those stars overhead drops a call silvery as a flute, clear as a piccolo—some night bird lilting like a mote on the far oceans of air. The trappers look up with a movement that in other men would be a nervous start; for any shrill cry pierces the silence of the prairie in almost a stab. Then the men go on with their yarn telling of how the Blackfeet murdered some traders on this very ground not long ago till the gloom gathering over willow thicket and encircling cliffs seems peopled with those marauding warriors. One man rises, saying that he is "goin' to turn in" and is taking a step through the dark to his canoe when there is a dull pouncing thud. For an instant the trappers thought that their comrade had stumbled over his boat. But a heavy groan—a low guttural cry—a shout of "Help—help—help Ba'-

tiste!" and the man who had risen plunged into the crashing cane-brake, calling out incoherently for them to "help—help Ba'tiste!"

In the confusion of cries and darkness, it was impossible for the other two trappers to know what had happened. Their first thought was of the Indians whose crimes they had been telling. Their second was for their rifles—and they had both sprung over the fire where they saw the third man striking—striking—striking wildly at something in the dark. A low worrying growl—and they descried the Frenchman rolling over and over, clutched by or clutching a huge furry form—hitting—plunging with his knife—struggling—screaming with agony.

"It's Ba'tiste! It's a bear!" shouted the third man, who was attempting to drive the brute off by raining blows on its head.

Man and bear were an indistinguishable struggling mass. Should they shoot in the half-dark? Then the Frenchman uttered the scream of one in death-throes: "Shoot! — shoot! — shoot quick! She's striking my face!—she's striking my face——"

And before the words had died, sharp flashes of light cleft the dark—the great beast rolled over with a coughing growl, and the trappers raised their comrade from the ground.

The bear had had him on his back between her teeth by the thick chest piece of his double-breasted buck-skin. Except for his face, he seemed uninjured; but down that face the great brute had drawn the claws of her fore paw.

Ba'tiste raised his hands to his face.

"Mon dieu!" he asked thickly, fumbling with both

hands, "what is done to my eyes? Is the fire out? I cannot see!"

Then the man who had fought like a demon armed with only a hunting-knife fainted because of what his hands felt.

. . . . . .

Traitors there are among trappers as among all other classes, men like those who deserted Glass on the Missouri, and Scott on the Platte, and how many others whose treachery will never be known.

But Ba'tiste's comrades stayed with him on the banks of the river that flows into the Missouri. One cared for the blind man. The other two foraged for game. When the wounded hunter could be moved, they put him in a canoe and hurried down-stream to the fur post before the freezing of the rivers. At the fur post, the doctor did what he could; but a doctor cannot restore what has been torn away. The next spring, Ba'tiste was put on a pack horse and sent to his relatives at the Canadian fur post. Here his sisters made him the curtain to hang round his helmet and set him to weaving grass mats that the days might not drag so wearily.

Ask Ba'tiste whether he agrees with the amateur hunter that bears never attack unless they are attacked, that they would never become ravening creatures of prey unless the assaults of other creatures taught them ferocity, ask Ba'tiste this and something resembling the snarl of a baited beast breaks from the lipless face under the veil:

"S—s—sz!—" with a quiver of inexpressible rage. "The bear—it is an animal!—the bear!—it is a beast!

—toujours!—the bear!—it is a beast!—always—always!" And his hands clinch.

Then he falls to carving of the little wooden animals and weaving of sad, sad, bitter thoughts into the warp of the Indian mat.

Are such onslaughts common among bears, or are they the mad freaks of the bear's nature? President Roosevelt tells of two soldiers bitten to death in the South-West; and M. L'Abbé Dugast, of St. Boniface, Manitoba, incidentally relates an experience almost similar to that of Ba'tiste which occurred in the North-West. Lest Ba'tiste's case seem overdrawn, I quote the Abbé's words:

"At a little distance Madame Lajimoniere and the other women were preparing the tents for the night, when all at once Bouvier gave a cry of distress and called to his companions to help him. At the first shout, each hunter siezed his gun and prepared to defend himself against the attack of an enemy; they hurried to the other side of the ditch to see what was the matter with Bouvier, and what he was struggling with. They had no idea that a wild animal would come near the fire to attack a man even under cover of night; for fire usually has the effect of frightening wild beasts. However, almost before the four hunters knew what had happened, they saw their unfortunate companion dragged into the woods by a bear followed by her two cubs. She held Bouvier in her claws and struck him savagely in the face to stun him. As soon as she saw the four men in pursuit, she redoubled her fury against her prey, tearing his face with her claws. M. Lajimoniere, who was an intrepid hunter, baited her with the butt end of his gun to make her let go her hold, as he

dared not shoot for fear of killing the man while trying to save him, but Bouvier, who felt himself being choked, cried with all his strength: 'Shoot; I would rather be shot than eaten alive!' M. Lajimoniere pulled the trigger as close to the bear as possible, wounding her mortally. She let go Bouvier and before her strength was exhausted made a wild attack upon M. Lajimoniere, who expected this and as his gun had only one barrel loaded, he ran towards the canoe, where he had a second gun fully charged. He had hardly seized it before the bear reached the shore and tried to climb into the canoe, but fearing no longer to wound his friend, M. Lajimoniere aimed full at her breast and this time she was killed instantly. As soon as the bear was no longer to be feared, Madame Lajimoniere, who had been trembling with fear during the tumult, went to raise the unfortunate Bouvier, who was covered with wounds and nearly dead. The bear had torn the skin from his face with her nails from the roots of his hair to the lower part of his chin. His eyes and nose were gone—in fact his features were indiscernible—but he was not mortally injured. His wounds were dressed as well as the circumstances would permit, and thus crippled he was carried to the Fort of the Prairies, Madame Lajimoniere taking care of him all through the journey. In time his wounds were successfully healed, but he was blind and infirm to the end of his life. He dwelt at the Fort of the Prairies for many years, but when the first missionaries reached Red River in 1818, he persuaded his friends to send him to St. Boniface to meet the priests and ended his days in M. Provencher's house. He employed his time during the last years of his life in mak-

ing crosses and crucifixes blind as he was, but he never made any *chefs d'œuvre.*"

Such is bear-hunting and such is the nature of the bear. And these things are not of the past. Wherever long-range repeaters have not put the fear of man in the animal heart, the bear is the aggressor. Even as I write comes word from a little frontier fur post which I visited in 1901, of a seven-year-old boy being waylaid and devoured by a grisly only four miles back from a transcontinental railway. This is the second death from the unprovoked attacks of bears within a month in that country—and that month, the month of August, 1902, when sentimental ladies and gentlemen many miles away from danger are sagely discussing whether the bear is naturally ferocious or not—whether, in a word, it is altogether *humane to hunt bears.*

CHAPTER XIII

JOHN COLTER—FREE TRAPPER

LONG before sunrise hunters were astir in the mountains.

The Crows were robbers, the Blackfeet murderers; and scouts of both tribes haunted every mountain defile where a white hunter might pass with provisions and peltries which these rascals could plunder.

The trappers circumvented their foes by setting the traps after nightfall and lifting the game before daybreak.

Night in the mountains was full of a mystery that the imagination of the Indians peopled with terrors enough to frighten them away. The sudden stilling of mountain torrent and noisy leaping cataract at sundown when the thaw of the upper snows ceased, the smothered roar of rivers under ice, the rush of whirlpools through the blackness of some far cañon, the crashing of rocks thrown down by unknown forces, the shivering echo that multiplied itself a thousandfold and ran "rocketing" from peak to peak startling the silences—these things filled the Indian with superstitious fears.

The gnomes, called in trapper's vernacular "hoodoos"—great pillars of sandstone higher than a house, left standing in valleys by prehistoric floods—were to

the Crows and Blackfeet petrified giants that only awakened at night to hurl down rocks on intruding mortals. And often the quiver of a shadow in the night wind gave reality to the Indian's fears. The purr of streams over rocky bed was whispering, the queer quaking echoes of falling rocks were giants at war, and the mists rising from swaying waterfalls, spirit-forms portending death.

Morning came more ghostly among the peaks.

Thick white clouds banked the mountains from peak to base, blotting out every scar and tor as a sponge might wash a slate. Valleys lay blanketed in smoking mist. As the sun came gradually up to the horizon far away east behind the mountains, scarp and pinnacle butted through the fog, stood out bodily from the mist, seemed to move like living giants from the cloud banks. "How could they do that if they were not alive?" asked the Indian. Elsewhere, shadows came from sun, moon, starlight, or camp-fire. But in these valleys were pencilled shadows of peaks upside down, shadows all the colours of the rainbow pointing to the bottom of the green Alpine lakes, hours and hours before any sun had risen to cause the shadows. All this meant "bad medicine" to the Indian, or, in white man's language, mystery.

Unless they were foraging in large bands, Crows and Blackfeet shunned the mountains after nightfall. That gave the white man a chance to trap in safety.

Early one morning two white men slipped out of their sequestered cabin built in hiding of the hills at the head waters of the Missouri. Under covert of brush-wood lay a long odd-shaped canoe, sharp enough at the prow to cleave the narrowest waters between rocks, so

sharp that French *voyageurs* gave this queer craft the name "*canot à bec d'esturgeon*"—that is, a canoe like the nose of a sturgeon. This American adaptation of the Frenchman's craft was not of birch-bark. That would be too frail to essay the rock-ribbed cañons of the mountain streams. It was usually a common dug-out, hollowed from a cottonwood or other light timber, with such an angular narrow prow that it could take the sheerest dip and mount the steepest wave-crest where a rounder boat would fill and swamp. Dragging this from cover, the two white men pushed out on the Jefferson Fork, dipping now on this side, now on that, using the reversible double-bladed paddles which only an amphibious boatman can manage. The two men shot out in mid-stream, where the mists would hide them from each shore; a moment later the white fog had enfolded them, and there was no trace of human presence but the trail of dimpling ripples in the wake of the canoe.

No talking, no whistling, not a sound to betray them. And there were good reasons why these men did not wish their presence known. One was Potts, the other John Colter. Both had been with the Lewis and Clark exploring party of 1804–'05, when a Blackfoot brave had been slain for horse-thieving by the first white men to cross the Upper Missouri. Besides, the year before coming to the Jefferson, Colter had been with the Missouri Company's fur brigade under Manuel Lisa, and had gone to the Crows as an emissary from the fur company. While with the Crows, a battle had taken place against the Blackfeet, in which they suffered heavy loss owing to Colter's prowess. That made the Blackfeet sworn enemies to Colter.

Turning off the Jefferson, the trappers headed their canoe up a side stream, probably one of those marshy reaches where beavers have formed a swamp by damming up the current of a sluggish stream. Such quiet waters are favourite resorts for beaver and mink and marten and pekan. Setting their traps only after nightfall, the two men could not possibly have put out more than forty or fifty. Thirty traps are a heavy day's work for one man. Six prizes out of thirty are considered a wonderful run of luck; but the empty traps must be examined as carefully as the successful ones. Many that have been mauled, "scented" by a beaver scout and left, must be replaced. Others must have fresh bait; others, again, carried to better grounds where there are more game signs.

Either this was a very lucky morning and the men were detained taking fresh pelts, or it was a very unlucky morning and the men had decided to trap farther up-stream; for when the mists began to rise, the hunters were still in their canoe. Leaving the beaver meadow, they continued paddling up-stream away from the Jefferson. A more hidden watercourse they could hardly have found. The swampy beaver-runs narrowed, the shores rose higher and higher into rampart walls, and the dark-shadowed waters came leaping down in the lumpy, uneven runnels of a small cañon. You can always tell whether the waters of a cañon are compressed or not, whether they come from broad, swampy meadows or clear snow streams smaller than the cañon. The marsh waters roll down swift and black and turbid, raging against the crowding walls ; the snow streams leap clear and foaming as champagne, and are in too great a hurry to stop and quarrel with the rocks. It is

altogether likely these men recognised swampy water, and were ascending the cañon in search of a fresh beaver-marsh; or they would not have continued paddling six miles above the Jefferson with daylight growing plainer at every mile. First the mist rose like a smoky exhalation from the river; then it flaunted across the rampart walls in banners; then the far mountain peaks took form against the sky, islands in a sea of fog; then the cloud banks were floating in midheaven blindingly white from a sun that painted each cañon wall in the depths of the water.

How much farther would the cañon lead? Should they go higher up or not? Was it wooded or clear plain above the walls? The man paused. What was that noise?

"Like buffalo," said Potts.

"Might be Blackfeet," answered Colter.

No. What would Blackfeet be doing, riding at a pace to make such thunder so close to a cañon? It was only a buffalo herd stampeding on the annual southern run. Again Colter urged that the noise *might* be from Indians. It would be safer for them to retreat at once. At which Potts wanted to know if Colter were afraid, using a stronger word—"coward."

Afraid? Colter afraid? Colter who had remained behind Lewis and Clark's men to trap alone in the wilds for nearly two years, who had left Manuel Lisa's brigade to go alone among the thieving Crows, whose leadership had helped the Crows to defeat the Blackfeet?

Anyway, it would now be as dangerous to go back as forward. They plainly couldn't land here. Let them go ahead where the walls seemed to slope down to

shore. Two or three strokes sent the canoe round an elbow of rock into the narrow course of a creek. Instantly out sprang five or six hundred Blackfeet warriors with weapons levelled guarding both sides of the stream.

An Indian scout had discovered the trail of the white men and sent the whole band scouring ahead to intercept them at this narrow pass. The chief stepped forward, and with signals that were a command beckoned the hunters ashore.

As is nearly always the case, the rash man was the one to lose his head, the cautious man the one to keep his presence of mind. Potts was for an attempt at flight, when every bow on both sides of the river would have let fly a shot. Colter was for accepting the situation, trusting to his own wit for subsequent escape.

Colter, who was acting as steersman, sent the canoe ashore. Bottom had not grated before a savage snatched Potts's rifle from his hands. Springing ashore, Colter forcibly wrested the weapon back and coolly handed it to Potts.

But Potts had lost all the rash courage of a moment before, and with one push sent the canoe into mid-stream. Colter shouted at him to come back—come back! Indians have more effective arguments. A bow-string twanged, and Potts screamed out, "Colter, I am wounded!"

Again Colter urged him to land. The wound turned Pott's momentary fright to a paroxysm of rage. Aiming his rifle, he shot his Indian assailant dead. If it was torture that he feared, that act assured him at least a quick death; for, in Colter's language, man and boat were instantaneously "made a riddle of."

No man admires courage more than the Indian; and the Blackfeet recognised in their captive one who had been ready to defend his comrade against them all, and who had led the Crows to victory against their own band.

The prisoner surrendered his weapons. He was stripped naked, but neither showed sign of fear nor made a move to escape. Evidently the Blackfeet could have rare sport with this game white man. His life in the Indian country had taught him a few words of the Blackfoot language. He heard them conferring as to how he should be tortured to atone for all that the Blackfeet had suffered at white men's hands. One warrior suggested that the hunter be set up as a target and shot at. Would he then be so brave?

But the chief shook his head. That was not game enough sport for Blackfeet warriors. That would be letting a man die passively. And how this man could fight if he had an opportunity! How he could resist torture if he had any chance of escaping the torture!

But Colter stood impassive and listened. Doubtless he regretted having left the well-defended brigades of the fur companies to hunt alone in the wilderness. But the fascination of the wild life is as a gambler's vice—the more a man has, the more he wants. Had not Colter crossed the Rockies with Lewis and Clark and spent two years in the mountain fastnesses? Yet when he reached the Mandans on the way home, the revulsion against all the trammels of civilization moved him so strongly that he asked permission to return to the wilderness, where he spent two more years. Had he not set out for St. Louis a second time, met Lisa coming up the Missouri with a brigade of

hunters, and for the third time turned his face to the wilderness? Had he not wandered with the Crows, fought the Blackfeet, gone down to St. Louis, and been impelled by that strange impulse of adventure which was to the hunter what the instinct of migration is to bird and fish and buffalo and all wild things—to go yet again to the wilderness? Such was the passion for the wilds that ruled the life of all free trappers.

The free trappers formed a class by themselves.

Other trappers either hunted on a salary of $200, $300, $400 a year, or on shares, like fishermen of the Grand Banks outfitted by "planters," or like western prospectors outfitted by companies that supply provisions, boats, and horses, expecting in return the major share of profits. The free trappers fitted themselves out, owed allegiance to no man, hunted where and how they chose, and refused to carry their furs to any fort but the one that paid the highest prices. For the *mangeurs de lard,* as they called the fur company raftsmen, they had a supreme contempt. For the methods of the fur companies, putting rivals to sleep with laudanum or bullet and ever stirring the savages up to warfare, the free trappers had a rough and emphatically expressed loathing.

The crime of corrupting natives can never be laid to the free trapper. He carried neither poison, nor what was worse than poison to the Indian—whisky—among the native tribes. The free trapper lived on good terms with the Indian, because his safety depended on the Indian. Renegades like Bird, the deserter from the Hudson's Bay Company, or Rose, who abandoned the Astorians, or Beckwourth of apocryphal

fame, might cast off civilization and become Indian chiefs; but, after all, these men were not guilty of half so hideous crimes as the great fur companies of boasted respectability. Wyeth of Boston, and Captain Bonneville of the army, whose underlings caused such murderous slaughter among the Root Diggers, were not free trappers in the true sense of the term. Wyeth was an enthusiast who caught the fever of the wilds; and Captain Bonneville, a gay adventurer, whose men shot down more Indians in one trip than all the free trappers of America shot in a century. As for the desperado Harvey, whom Larpenteur reports shooting Indians like dogs, his crimes were committed under the walls of the American Fur Company's fort. MacLellan and Crooks and John Day—before they joined the Astorians—and Boone and Carson and Colter, are names that stand for the true type of free trapper.

The free trapper went among the Indians with no defence but good behaviour and the keenness of his wit. Whatever crimes the free trapper might be guilty of towards white men, he was guilty of few towards the Indians. Consequently, free trappers were all through Minnesota and the region westward of the Mississippi forty years before the fur companies dared to venture among the Sioux. Fisher and Fraser and Woods knew the Upper Missouri before 1806; and Brugiere had been on the Columbia many years before the Astorians came in 1811.

One crime the free trappers may be charged with—a reckless waste of precious furs. The great companies always encouraged the Indians not to hunt more game than they needed for the season's support. And no Indian hunter, uncorrupted by white men, would molest

game while the mothers were with their young. Famine had taught them the punishment that follows reckless hunting. But the free trappers were here to-day and away to-morrow, like a Chinaman, to take all they could get regardless of results; and the results were the rapid extinction of fur-bearing game.

Always there were more free trappers in the United States than in Canada. Before the union of Hudson's Bay and Nor' Wester in Canada, all classes of trappers were absorbed by one of the two great companies. After the union, when the monopoly enjoyed by the Hudson's Bay did not permit it literally to drive a free trapper out, it could always "freeze" him out by withholding supplies in its great white northern wildernesses, or by refusing to give him transport. When the monopoly passed away in 1871, free trappers pressed north from the Missouri, where their methods had exterminated game, and carried on the same ruthless warfare on the Saskatchewan. North of the Saskatchewan, where very remoteness barred strangers out, the Hudson's Bay Company still held undisputed sway; and Lord Strathcona, the governor of the company, was able to say only two years ago, "the fur trade is quite as large as ever it was."

Among free hunters, Canada had only one commanding figure—John Johnston of the Soo, who settled at La Pointe on Lake Superior in 1792, formed league with Wabogish, "the White Fisher," and became the most famous trader of the Lakes. His life, too, was almost as eventful as Colter's. A member of the Irish nobility, some secret which he never chose to reveal drove him to the wilds. Wabogish, the "White Fisher," had a daughter who refused the wooings of all her

tribe's warriors. In vain Johnston sued for her hand. Old Wabogish bade the white man go sell his Irish estates and prove his devotion by buying as vast estates in America. Johnston took the old chief at his word, and married the haughty princess of the Lake. When the War of 1812 set all the tribes by the ears, Johnston and his wife had as thrilling adventures as ever Colter knew among the Blackfeet.

Many a free trapper, and partner of the fur companies as well, secured his own safety by marrying the daughter of a chief, as Johnston had. These were not the lightly-come, lightly-go affairs of the vagrant adventurer. If the husband had not cast off civilization like a garment, the wife had to put it on like a garment; and not an ill-fitting garment either, when one considers that the convents of the quiet nuns dotted the wilderness like oases in a desert almost contemporaneous with the fur trade. If the trapper had not sunk to the level of the savages, the little daughter of the chief was educated by the nuns for her new position. I recall several cases where the child was sent across the Atlantic to an English governess so that the equality would be literal and not a sentimental fiction. And yet, on no subject has the western fur trader received more persistent and unjust condemnation. The heroism that culminated in the union of Pocahontas with a noted Virginian won applause, and almost similar circumstances dictated the union of fur traders with the daughters of Indian chiefs; but because the fur trader has not posed as a sentimentalist, he has become more or less of a target for the index finger of the Pharisee.*

* Would not such critics think twice before passing judgment if they recalled that General Parker was a full-blood Indian; that

North of the boundary the free trapper had small chance against the Hudson's Bay Company. As long as the slow-going Mackinaw Company, itself chiefly recruited from free trappers, ruled at the junction of the Lakes, the free trappers held the hunting-grounds of the Mississippi; but after the Mackinaw was absorbed by the aggressive American Fur Company, the free hunters were pushed westward. On the Lower Missouri competition raged from 1810, so that circumstances drove the free trapper westward to the mountains, where he is hunting in the twentieth century as his prototype hunted two hundred years ago.

In Canada—of course after 1870—he entered the mountains chiefly by three passes: (1) Yellow Head Pass southward of the Athabasca; (2) the narrow gap where the Bow emerges to the plains—that is, the river where the Indians found the best wood for the making of bows; (3) north of the boundary, through that narrow defile overtowered by the lonely flat-crowned peak called Crow's Nest Mountain—that is, where the fugitive Crows took refuge from the pursuing Blackfeet.

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if Johnston had not married Wabogish's daughter and if Johnston's daughter had not preferred to marry Schoolcraft instead of going to her relatives of the Irish nobility, Longfellow would have written no Hiawatha? Would they not hesitate before slurring men like Premier Norquay of Manitoba and the famous MacKenzies, those princes of fur trade from St. Louis to the Arctic, and David Thompson, the great explorer? Do they forget that Lord Strathcona, one of the foremost peers of Britain, is related to the proudest race of plain-rangers that ever scoured the West, the *Bois-Brûles?* The writer knows the West from only fifteen years of life and travel there; yet with that imperfect knowledge cannot recall a single fur post without some tradition of an unfamed Pocahontas.

In the United States, the free hunters also approached the mountains by three main routes: (1) Up the Platte; (2) westward from the Missouri across the plains; (3) by the Three Forks of the Missouri. For instance, it was coming down the Platte that poor Scott's canoe was overturned, his powder lost, and his rifles rendered useless. Game had retreated to the mountains with spring's advance. Berries were not ripe by the time trappers were descending with their winter's hunt. Scott and his famishing men could not find edible roots. Each day Scott weakened. There was no food. Finally, Scott had strength to go no farther. His men had found tracks of some other hunting party far to the fore. They thought that, in any case, he could not live. What ought they to do? Hang back and starve with him, or hasten forward while they had strength, to the party whose track they had espied? On pretence of seeking roots, they deserted the helpless man. Perhaps they did not come up with the advance party till they were sure that Scott must have died; for they did not go back to his aid. The next spring when these same hunters went up the Platte, they found the skeleton of poor Scott sixty miles from the place where they had left him. The terror that spurred the emaciated man to drag himself all this weary distance can barely be conceived; but such were the fearful odds taken by every free trapper who went up the Platte, across the parched plains, or to the head waters of the Missouri.

The time for the free trappers to go out was, in Indian language, "when the leaves began to fall." If a mighty hunter like Colter, the trapper was to the savage "big Indian me"; if only an ordinary vagrant

of woods and streams, the white man was "big knife you," in distinction to the red man carrying only primitive weapons. Very often the free trapper slipped away from the fur post secretly, or at night; for there were questions of licenses which he disregarded, knowing well that the buyer of his furs would not inform for fear of losing the pelts. Also and more important in counseling caution, the powerful fur companies had spies on the watch to dog the free trapper to his hunting-grounds; and rival hunters would not hesitate to bribe the natives with a keg of rum for all the peltries which the free trapper had already bought by advancing provisions to Indian hunters. Indeed, rival hunters have not hesitated to bribe the savages to pillage and murder the free trapper; for there was no law in the fur trading country, and no one to ask what became of the free hunter who went alone into the wilderness and never returned.

Going out alone, or with only one partner, the free hunter encumbered himself with few provisions. Two dollars worth of tobacco would buy a thousand pounds of "jerked" buffalo meat, and a few gaudy trinkets for a squaw all the pemmican white men could use.

Going by the river routes, four days out from St. Louis brought the trapper into regions of danger. Indian scouts hung on the watch among the sedge of the river bank. One thin line of upcurling smoke, or a piece of string—*babiche* (leather cord, called by the Indians *assapapish*)—fluttering from a shrub, or little sticks casually dropped on the river bank pointing one way, all were signs that told of marauding bands. Some birch tree was notched with an Indian cipher—a hunter had passed that way and claimed the bark for

his next year's canoe. Or the mark might be on a cottonwood—some man wanted this tree for a dugout. Perhaps a stake stood with a mark at the entrance to a beaver-marsh—some hunter had found this ground first and warned all other trappers off by the code of wilderness honour. Notched tree-trunks told of some runner gone across country, blazing a trail by which he could return. Had a piece of fungus been torn from a hemlock log? There were Indians near, and the squaw had taken the thing to whiten leather. If a sudden puff of black smoke spread out in a cone above some distant tree, it was an ominous sign to the trapper. The Indians had set fire to the inside of a punky trunk and the shooting flames were a rallying call.

In the most perilous regions the trapper travelled only after nightfall with muffled paddles—that is, muffled where the handle might strike the gunwale. Camp-fires warned him which side of the river to avoid; and often a trapper slipping past under the shadow of one bank saw hobgoblin figures dancing round the flames of the other bank—Indians celebrating their scalp dance. In these places the white hunter ate cold meals to avoid lighting a fire; or if he lighted a fire, after cooking his meal he withdrew at once and slept at a distance from the light that might betray him.

The greatest risk of travelling after dark during the spring floods arose from what the *voyageurs* called *embarras*—trees torn from the banks sticking in the soft bottom like derelicts with branches to entangle the trapper's craft; but the *embarras* often befriended the solitary white man. Usually he slept on shore rolled in a buffalo-robe; but if Indian signs were fresh, he moored his canoe in mid-current and slept under hiding

of the drift-wood. Friendly Indians did not conceal themselves, but came to the river bank waving a buffalo-robe and spreading it out to signal a welcome to the white man; when the trapper would go ashore, whiff pipes with the chiefs and perhaps spend the night listening to the tales of exploits which each notch on the calumet typified. Incidents that meant nothing to other men were full of significance to the lone *voyageur* through hostile lands. Always the spring floods drifted down numbers of dead buffalo; and the carrion birds sat on the trees of the shore with their wings spread out to dry in the sun. The sudden flacker of a rising flock betrayed something prowling in ambush on the bank; so did the splash of a snake from overhanging branches into the water.

Different sorts of dangers beset the free trapper crossing the plains to the mountains. The fur company brigades always had escort of armed guard and provision packers. The free trappers went alone or in pairs, picketing horses to the saddle overlaid with a buffalo-robe for a pillow, cooking meals on chip fires, using a slow-burning wormwood bark for matches, and trusting their horses or dog to give the alarm if the bands of coyotes hovering through the night dusk approached too near. On the high rolling plains, hostiles could be descried at a distance, coming over the horizon head and top first like the peak of a sail, or emerging from the "coolies"—dried sloughs—like wolves from the earth. Enemies could be seen soon enough; but where could the trapper hide on bare prairie? He didn't attempt to hide. He simply set fire to the prairie and took refuge on the lee side. That device failing, he was at his enemies' mercy.

On the plains, the greatest danger was from lack of water. At one season the trapper might know where to find good camping streams. The next year when he came to those streams they were dry.

"After leaving the buffalo meadows a dreadful scarcity of water ensued," wrote Charles MacKenzie, of the famous MacKenzie clan. He was journeying north from the Missouri. "We had to alter our course and steer to a distant lake. When we got there we found the lake dry. However, we dug a pit which produced a kind of stinking liquid which we all drank. It was salt and bitter, caused an inflammation of the mouth, left a disagreeable roughness of the throat, and seemed to increase our thirst. . . . We passed the night under great uneasiness. Next day we continued our journey, but not a drop of water was to be found, . . . and our distress became insupportable. . . . All at once our horses became so unruly that we could not manage them. We observed that they showed an inclination towards a hill which was close by. It struck me that they might have scented water. . . . I ascended to the top, where, to my great joy, I discovered a small pool. . . . My horse plunged in before I could prevent him, . . . and all the horses drank to excess."

"*The plains across*"—which was a western expression meaning the end of that part of the trip—there rose on the west rolling foothills and dark peaked profiles against the sky scarcely to be distinguished from gray cloud banks. These were the mountains; and the real hazards of free trapping began. No use to follow the easiest passes to the most frequented valleys. The fur company brigades marched through these, sweeping up game like a forest fire; so the free trappers sought out the hidden, inaccessible valleys, going where neither pack horse nor *canot à bec d'esturgeon* could follow. How did they do it? Very much the way

Simon Fraser's hunters crawled down the river-course named after him. "Our shoes," said one trapper, "did not last a single day."

"We had to plunge our daggers into the ground, . . . otherwise we would slide into the river," wrote Fraser. "We cut steps into the declivity, fastened a line to the front of the canoe, with which some of the men ascended in order to haul it up. . . . Our lives hung, as it were, upon a thread, as the failure of the line or the false step of the man might have hurled us into eternity. . . . We had to pass where no human being should venture. . . . Steps were formed like a ladder on the shrouds of a ship, by poles hanging to one another and crossed at certain distances with twigs, the whole suspended from the top to the foot of immense precipices, and fastened at both extremities to stones and trees."

He speaks of the worst places being where these frail swaying ladders led up to the overhanging ledge of a shelving precipice.

Such were the very real adventures of the trapper's life, a life whose fascinations lured John Colter from civilization to the wilds again and again till he came back once too often and found himself stripped, helpless, captive, in the hands of the Blackfeet.

It would be poor sport torturing a prisoner who showed no more fear than this impassive white man coolly listening and waiting for them to compass his death. So the chief dismissed the suggestion to shoot at their captive as a target. Suddenly the Blackfoot leader turned to Colter. "Could the white man run fast?" he asked. In a flash Colter guessed what was to be his fate. He, the hunter, was to be hunted. No, he cunningly signalled, he was only a poor runner.

Bidding his warriors stand still, the chief roughly

led Colter out three hundred yards. Then he set his captive free, and the exultant shriek of the running warriors told what manner of sport this was to be. It was a race for life.

The white man shot out with all the power of muscles hard as iron-wood and tense as a bent bow. Fear winged the man running for his life to outrace the winged arrows coming from the shouting warriors three hundred yards behind. Before him stretched a plain six miles wide, the distance he had so thoughtlessly paddled between the rampart walls of the cañon but a few hours ago. At the Jefferson was a thick forest growth where a fugitive might escape. Somewhere along the Jefferson was his own hidden cabin.

Across this plain sped Colter, pursued by a band of six hundred shrieking demons. Not one breath did he waste looking back over his shoulder till he was more than half-way across the plain, and could tell from the fading uproar that he was outdistancing his hunters. Perhaps it was the last look of despair; but it spurred the jaded racer to redoubled efforts. All the Indians had been left to the rear but one, who was only a hundred yards behind.

There was, then, a racing chance of escape! Colter let out in a burst of renewed speed that brought blood gushing over his face, while the cactus spines cut his naked feet like knives. The river was in sight. A mile more, he would be in the wood! But the Indian behind was gaining at every step. Another backward look! The savage was not thirty yards away! He had poised his spear to launch it in Colter's back, when the white man turned fagged and beaten, threw up his arms and stopped!

This is an Indian *ruse* to arrest the pursuit of a wild beast. By force of habit it stopped the Indian too, and disconcerted him so that instead of launching his spear, he fell flat on his face, breaking the shaft in his hand. With a leap, Colter had snatched up the broken point and pinned the savage through the body to the earth.

That intercepted the foremost of the other warriors, who stopped to rescue their brave and gave Colter time to reach the river.

In he plunged, fainting and dazed, swimming for an island in mid-current where driftwood had formed a sheltered raft. Under this he dived, coming up with his head among branches of trees.

All that day the Blackfeet searched the island for Colter, running from log to log of the drift; but the close-grown brushwood hid the white man. At night he swam down-stream like any other hunted animal that wants to throw pursuers off the trail, went ashore and struck across country, seven days' journey for the Missouri Company's fort on the Bighorn River.

Naked and unarmed, he succeeded in reaching the distant fur post, having subsisted entirely on roots and berries.

Chittenden says that poor Colter's adventure only won for him in St. Louis the reputation of a colossal liar. But traditions of his escape were current among all hunters and Indian tribes on the Missouri, so that when Bradbury, the English scientist, went west with the Astorians in 1811, he sifted the matter, accepted it as truth, and preserved the episode for history in a

small-type foot-note to his book published in London in 1817.

Two other adventures are on record similar to Colter's: one of Oskononton's escape by diving under a raft, told in Ross's Fur Hunters; the other of a poor Indian fleeing up the Ottawa from pursuing Iroquois of the Five Nations and diving under the broken bottom of an old beaver-dam, told in the original Jesuit Relations.

And yet when the Astorians went up the Missouri a few years later, Colter could scarcely resist the impulse to go a fourth time to the wilds. But fascinations stronger than the wooings of the wilds had come to his life—he had taken to himself a bride.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREATEST FUR COMPANY OF THE WORLD

In the history of the world only one corporate company has maintained empire over an area as large as Europe. Only one corporate company has lived up to its constitution for nearly three centuries. Only one corporate company's sway has been so beneficent that its profits have stood in exact proportion to the well-being of its subjects. Indeed, few armies can boast a rank and file of men who never once retreated in three hundred years, whose lives, generation after generation, were one long bivouac of hardship, of danger, of ambushed death, of grim purpose, of silent achievement.

Such was the company of "Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay," as the charter of 1670 designated them.* Such is the Hudson's Bay Company to-day still trading with savages in the white wilderness of the north as it was when Charles II granted a royal charter for the fur trade to his cousin Prince Rupert.

Governors and chief factors have changed with the

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* The spelling of the name with an apostrophe in the charter seems to be the only reason for the company's name always having the apostrophe, whereas the waters are now known simply as Hudson Bay.

changing centuries; but the character of the company's personnel has never changed. Prince Rupert, the first governor, was succeeded by the Duke of York (James II); and the royal governor by a long line of distinguished public men down to Lord Strathcona, the present governor, and C. C. Chipman, the chief commissioner or executive officer. All have been men of noted achievement, often in touch with the Crown, always with that passion for executive and mastery of difficulty which exults most when the conflict is keenest.

Pioneers face the unknown when circumstances push them into it. Adventurers rush into the unknown for the zest of conquering it. It has been to the adventuring class that fur traders have belonged.

Radisson and Groseillers, the two Frenchmen who first brought back word of the great wealth in furs round the far northern sea, had been gentlemen adventurers—"rascals" their enemies called them. Prince Rupert, who leagued himself with the Frenchmen to obtain a charter for his fur trade, had been an adventurer of the high seas—"pirate" we would say—long before he became first governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. And the Duke of Marlborough, the company's third governor, was as great an adventurer as he was a general.

Latterly the word "adventurer" has fallen in such evil repute, it may scarcely be applied to living actors. But using it in the old-time sense of militant hero. what cavalier of gold braid and spurs could be more of an adventurer than young Donald Smith who traded in the desolate wastes of Labrador, spending seventeen years in the hardest field of the fur company, tramping on snow-shoes half the width of a continent, camping

where night overtook him under blanketing of snow-drifts, who rose step by step from trader on the east coast to commissioner in the west? And this Donald Smith became Lord Strathcona, the governor of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Men bold in action and conservative in traditions have ruled the company. The governor resident in England is now represented by the chief commissioner, who in turn is represented at each of the many inland forts by a chief factor of the district. Nominally, the fur-trader's northern realm is governed by the Parliament of Canada. Virtually, the chief factor rules as autocratically to-day as he did before the Canadian Government took over the proprietary rights of the fur company.

How did these rulers of the wilds, these princes of the fur trade, live in lonely forts and mountain fastnesses? Visit one of the northern forts as it exists to-day.

The colder the climate, the finer the fur. The farther north the fort, the more typical it is of the fur-trader's realm.

For six, seven, eight months of the year, the fur-trader's world is a white wilderness of snow; snow water-waved by winds that sweep from the pole; snow drifted into ramparts round the fort stockades till the highest picket sinks beneath the white flood and the corner bastions are almost submerged and the entrance to the central gate resembles the cutting of a railway tunnel; snow that billows to the unbroken reaches of the circling sky-line like a white sea. East, frost-mist hides the low horizon in clouds of smoke, for the sun which rises from the east in other climes rises from

the south-east here; and until the spring equinox, bringing summer with a flood-tide of thaw, gray darkness hangs in the east like a fog. South, the sun moves across the snowy levels in a wheel of fire, for it has scarcely risen full sphered above the sky-line before it sinks again etching drift and tip of half-buried brush in long lonely fading shadows. The west shimmers in warm purplish grays, for the moist Chinook winds come over the mountains melting the snow by magic. North, is the cold steel of ice by day; and at night Northern Lights darting through the polar dark like burnished spears.

Christmas day is welcomed at the northern fur posts by a firing of cannon from the snow-muffled bastions. Before the stars have faded, chapel services begin. Frequently on either Christmas or New Year's day, a grand feast is given the tawny-skinned *habitués* of the fort, who come shuffling to the main mess-room with no other announcement than the lifting of the latch, and billet themselves on the hospitality of a host that has never turned hungry Indians from its doors.

For reasons well-known to the woodcraftsman, a sudden lull falls on winter hunting in December, and all the trappers within a week's journey from the fort, all the half-breed guides who add to the instinct of native craft the reasoning of the white, all the Indian hunters ranging river-course and mountain have come by snow-shoes and dog train to spend festive days at the fort. A great jangling of bells announces the huskies (dog trains) scampering over the crusted snow-drifts. A babel of barks and curses follows, for the huskies celebrate their arrival by tangling themselves up in their harness and enjoying a free fight.

Dogs unharnessed, in troop the trappers to the banquet-hall, flinging packs of tightly roped peltries down promiscuously, to be sorted next day. One Indian enters just as he has left the hunting-field, clad from head to heel in white caribou with the antlers left on the capote as a decoy. His squaw has togged out for the occasion in a comical medley of brass bracelets and finger-rings, with a bear's claw necklace and ermine ruff which no city connoisseur could possibly mistake for rabbit. If a daughter yet remain unappropriated she will display the gayest attire—red flannel galore, red shawl, red scarf, with perhaps an apron of white fox-skin and moccasins garnished in coloured grasses. The braves outdo even a vain young squaw. Whole fox, mink, or otter skins have been braided to the end of their hair, and hang down in two plaits to the floor. Whitest of buckskin has been ornamented with brightest of beads, and over all hangs the gaudiest of blankets, it may be a musk-ox-skin with the feats of the warrior set forth in rude drawings on the smooth side.

Children and old people, too, come to the feast, for the Indian's stomach is the magnet that draws his soul. Grotesque little figures the children are, with men's trousers shambling past their heels, rabbit-skin coats with the fur turned in, and on top of all some old stove-pipe hat or discarded busby coming half-way down to the urchin's neck. The old people have more resemblance to parchment on gnarled sticks than to human beings. They shiver under dirty blankets with every sort of cast-off rag tied about their limbs, hobbling lame from frozen feet or rheumatism, mumbling toothless requests for something to eat or something to wear,

for tobacco, the solace of Indian woes, or what is next best—tea.

Among so many guests are many needs. One half-breed from a far wintering outpost, where perhaps a white man and this guide are living in a chinked shack awaiting a hunting party's return, arrives at the fort with frozen feet. Little Labree's feet must be thawed out, and sometimes little Labree dies under the process, leaving as a legacy to the chief factor the death-bed pledge that the corpse be taken to a distant tribal burying-ground. And no matter how inclement the winter, the chief factor keeps his pledge, for the integrity of a promise is the only law in the fur-trader's realm. Special attentions, too, must be paid those old retainers who have acted as mentors of the fort in times of trouble.

A few years ago it would not have been safe to give this treat inside the fort walls. Rations would have been served through loop-holes and the feast held outside the gates; but so faithfully have the Indians become bound to the Hudson's Bay Company there are not three forts in the fur territory where Indians must be excluded.

Of the feast little need be said. Like the camel, the Indian lays up store for the morrow, judging from his capacity for weeks of morrows. His benefactor no more dines with him than a plantation master of the South would have dined with feasting slaves. Elsewhere a bell calls the company officers to breakfast at 7.30, dinner at 1, supper at 7. Officers dine first, white hunters and trappers second, that difference between master and servant being maintained which is part of the company's almost military discipline. In the large forts are libraries, whither resort the officers for the

long winter nights. But over the feast wild hilarity reigns.

A French-Canadian fiddler strikes up a tuneless jig that sets the Indians pounding the floor in figureless dances with moccasined heels till midday glides into midnight and midnight to morning. I remember hearing of one such midday feast in Red River settlement that prolonged itself past four of the second morning. Against the walls sit old folks spinning yarns of the past. There is a print of Sir George Simpson behind one *raconteur's* head. Ah! yes, the oldest guides all remember Sir George, though half a century has passed since his day. He was the governor who travelled with flags flying from every prow, and cannon firing when he left the forts, and men drawn up in procession like soldiers guarding an emperor when he entered the fur posts with *coureurs* and all the flourish of royal state. Then some story-teller recalls how he has heard the old guides tell of the imperious governor once provoking personal conflict with an equally imperious steersman, who first ducked the governor into a lake they were traversing and then ducked into the lake himself to rescue the governor.

And there is a crucifix high on the wall left by Père Lacomb the last time the famous missionary to the red men of the Far North passed this way; and every Indian calls up some kindness done, some sacrifice by Father Lacomb. On the gun-rack are old muskets and Indian masks and scalp-locks, bringing back the days when Russian traders instigated a massacre at this fort and when white traders flew at each other's throats as Nor' Westers struggled with Hudson's Bay for supremacy in the fur trade.

"Ah, oui, those white men, they were brave fighters, they did not know how to stop. Mais, sacré, they were fools, those white men after all! Instead of hiding in ambush to catch the foe, those white men measured off paces, stood up face to face and fired blank—oui—fired blank! Ugh! Of course, one fool he was kill' and the other fool, most like, he was wound'! Ugh, by Gar! What Indian would have so little sense?" *

Of hunting tales, the Indian store is exhaustless. That enormous bear-skin stretched to four pegs on the wall brings up Montagnais, the Noseless One, who still lives on Peace River and once slew the largest bear ever killed in the Rockies, returning to this very fort with one hand dragging the enormous skin and the other holding the place which his nose no longer graced.

"Montagnais? Ah, bien messieur! Montagnais, he brave man! Venez ici—bien—so—I tole you 'bout heem," begins some French-Canadian trapper with a strong tinge of Indian blood in his swarthy skin. "Bigosh! He brave man! I tole you 'bout dat happen! Montagnais, he go stumble t'rough snow—how you call dat?—hill, steep—steep! Oui, by Gar! dat vas steep hill! de snow, she go slide, slide, lak' de—de gran' rapeed, see?" emphasizing the snow-slide with illustrative gesture. "Bien, donc! Mais, Montagnais, he stick gun-stock in de snow stop heem fall—so—see? Tonnerre! Bigosh! for sure she go off wan beeg bang! Sacré! She make so much noise she wake wan beeg

* To the Indian mind the hand-to-hand duels between white traders were incomprehensible pieces of folly.

ol' bear sleep in snow. Montagnais, he tumble on hees back! Mais, messieur, de bear—diable! 'fore Montagnais wink hees eye de bear jump on top lak' wan beeg loup-garou! Montagnais, he brave man—he not scare—he say wan leetle prayer, wan han' he cover his eyes! Odder han'—sacré—dat grab hees knife out hees belt—sz-sz-sz, messieur. For sure he feel her breat'—diable!—for sure he fin' de place her heart beat—Tonnerre! Vite! he stick dat knife in straight up hees wrist, into de heart dat bear! Dat bes' t'ing do—for sure de leetle prayer dat tole him best t'ing do! De bear she roll over—over—dead's wan stone—c'est vrai! she no mor' jump top Montagnais! Bien, ma frien'! Montagnais, he roll over too—leetle bit scare! Mais, hees nose! Ah! bigosh! de bear she got dat; dat all nose he ever haf no mor'! C'est vrai messieur, bien!"

And with a finishing flourish the story-teller takes to himself all the credit of Montagnais's heroism.

But in all the feasting, trade has not been forgotten; and as soon as the Indians recover from post-prandial torpor bartering begins. In one of the warehouses stands a trader. An Indian approaches with a pack of peltries weighing from eighty to a hundred pounds. Throwing it down, he spreads out the contents. Of otter and mink and pekan there will be plenty, for these fish-eaters are most easily taken before midwinter frost has frozen the streams solid. In recent years there have been few beaver-skins, a closed season of several years giving the little rodents a chance to multiply. By treaty the Indian may hunt all creatures of the chase as long as "the sun rises and the rivers flow"; but the fur-trader can enforce a closed season by refusing to barter for the pelts. Of musk-rat-skins,

hundreds of thousands are carried to the forts every season. The little haycock houses of musk-rats offer the trapper easy prey when frost freezes the sloughs, shutting off retreat below, and heavy snow-fall has not yet hidden the little creatures' winter home.

The trading is done in several ways. Among the Eskimo, whose arithmetical powers seldom exceed a few units, the trader holds up his hand with one, two, three fingers raised, signifying that he offers for the skin before him equivalents in value to one, two, three prime beaver. If satisfied, the Indian passes over the furs and the trader gives flannel, beads, powder, knives, tea, or tobacco to the value of the beaver-skins indicated by the raised fingers. If the Indian demands more, hunter and trader wrangle in pantomime till compromise is effected.

But always beaver-skin is the unit of coin. Beaver are the Indian's dollars and cents, his shillings and pence, his tokens of currency.

South of the Arctics, where native intelligence is of higher grade, the beaver values are represented by goose-quills, small sticks, bits of shell, or, most common of all, disks of lead, tea-chests melted down, stamped on one side with the company arms, on the other with the figures 1, 2, $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, representing so much value in beaver.

First of all, then, furs in the pack must be sorted, silver fox worth five hundred dollars separated from cross fox and blue and white worth from ten dollars down, according to quality, and from common red fox worth less. Twenty years ago it was no unusual thing for the Hudson's Bay Company to send to England yearly 10,000 cross fox-skins, 7,000 blue, 100,000 red, half

a dozen silver. Few wolf-skins are in the trapper's pack unless particularly fine specimens of brown arctic and white arctic, bought as a curiosity and not for value as skins. Against the wolf, the trapper wages war as against a pest that destroys other game, and not for its skin. Next to musk-rat the most plentiful fur taken by the Indian, though not highly esteemed by the trader, will be that of the rabbit or varying hare. Buffalo was once the staple of the hunter. What the buffalo was the white rabbit is to-day. From it the Indian gets clothing, tepee covers, blankets, thongs, food. From it the white man who is a manufacturer of furs gets gray fox and chinchilla and seal in imitation. Except one year in seven, when a rabbit plague spares the land by cutting down their prolific numbers, the varying hare is plentiful enough to sustain the Indian.

Having received so many bits of lead for his furs, the Indian goes to the store counter where begins interminable dickering. Montagnais's squaw has only fifty "beaver" coin, and her desires are a hundredfold what those will buy. Besides, the copper-skinned lady enjoys beating down prices and driving a bargain so well that she would think the clerk a cheat if he asked a fixed price from the first. She expects him to have a sliding scale of prices for his goods as she has for her furs. At the termination of each bargain, so many coins pass across the counter. Frequently an Indian presents himself at the counter without beaver enough to buy necessaries. What then? I doubt if in all the years of Hudson's Bay Company rule one needy Indian has ever been turned away. The trader advances what the Indian needs and chalks up so many "beaver" against the trapper's next hunt.

Long ago, when rival traders strove for the furs, whisky played a disgracefully prominent part in all bartering, the drunk Indian being an easier victim than the sober, and the Indian mad with thirst for liquor the most easily cajoled of all. But to-day when there is no competition, whisky plays no part whatever. Whisky is in the fort, so is pain killer, for which the Indian has as keen an appetite, both for the exigencies of hazardous life in an unsparing climate beyond medical aid; but the first thing Hudson's Bay traders did in 1885, when rebel Indians surrounded the Saskatchewan forts, was to split the casks and spill all alcohol. The second thing was to bury ammunition—showing which influence they considered the more dangerous.

Ermine is at its best when the cold is most intense, the tawny weasel coat turning from fawn to yellow, from yellow to cream and snow-white, according to the latitude north and the season. Unless it is the pelt of the baby ermine, soft as swan's down, tail-tip jet as onyx, the best ermine is not likely to be in a pack brought to the fort as early as Christmas.

Fox, lynx, mink, marten, otter, and bear, the trapper can take with steel-traps of a size varying with the game, or even with the clumsily constructed deadfall, the log suspended above the bait being heavy or light, according to the hunter's expectation of large or small intruder; but the ermine with fur as easily damaged as finest gauze must be handled differently.

Going the rounds of his traps, the hunter has noted curious tiny tracks like the dots and dashes of a telegraphic code. Here are little prints slurring into one another in a dash; there, a dead stop, where the quick-eared stoat has paused with beady eyes alert for snow-

bird or rabbit. Here, again, a clear blank on the snow where the crafty little forager has dived below the light surface and wriggled forward like a snake to dart up with a plunge of fangs into the heart-blood of the unwary snow-bunting. From the length of the leaps, the trapper judges the age of the ermine; fourteen inches from nose to tail-tip means a full-grown ermine with hair too coarse to be damaged by a snare. The man suspends the noose of a looped twine across the runway from a twig bent down so that the weight of the ermine on the string sends the twig springing back with a jerk that lifts the ermine off the ground, strangling it instantly. Perhaps on one side of the twine he has left bait—smeared grease, or a bit of meat.

If the tracks are like the prints of a baby's fingers, close and small, the trapper hopes to capture a pelt fit for a throne cloak, the skin for which the Louis of France used to pay, in modern money, from a hundred dollars to a hundred and fifty dollars. The full-grown ermines will be worth only some few "beaver" at the fort. Perfect fur would be marred by the twine snare, so the trapper devises as cunning a death for the ermine as the ermine devises when it darts up through the snow with its spear-teeth clutched in the throat of a poor rabbit. Smearing his hunting-knife with grease, he lays it across the track. The little ermine comes trotting in dots and dashes and gallops and dives to the knife. It smells the grease, and all the curiosity which has been teaching it to forage for food since it was born urges it to put out its tongue and taste. That greasy smell of meat it knows; but that frost-silvered bit of steel is something new. The knife is frosted like ice. Ice the ermine has licked, so he licks the knife.

But alas for the resemblance between ice and steel! Ice turns to water under the warm tongue; steel turns to fire that blisters and holds the foolish little stoat by his inquisitive tongue a hopeless prisoner till the trapper comes. And lest marauding wolverine or lynx should come first and gobble up priceless ermine, the trapper comes soon. And that is the end for the ermine.

Before settlers invaded the valley of the Saskatchewan the furs taken at a leading fort would amount to:

Bear of all varieties...	400	Skunk.....	6
Ermine, medium.....	200	Wolf.....	100
Blue fox.....	4	Beaver.....	5,000
Red fox.....	91	Pekan (fisher).....	50
Silver fox.....	3	Cross fox.....	30
Marten.....	2,000	White fox.....	400
Musk-rat.....	200,000	Lynx.....	400
Mink.....	8,000	Wolverine.....	200
Otter.....	500		

The value of these furs in "beaver" currency varied with the fashions of the civilized world, with the scarcity or plenty of the furs, with the locality of the fort. Before beaver became so scarce, 100 beaver equalled 40 marten or 10 otter or 300 musk-rat; 25 beaver equalled 500 rabbit; 1 beaver equalled 2 white fox; and so on down the scale. But no set table of values can be given other than the prices realized at the annual sale of Hudson's Bay furs, held publicly in London.

To understand the values of these furs to the Indian, "beaver" currency must be compared to merchandise, one beaver buying such a red handkerchief as trappers wear around their brows to notify other hunters not to shoot; one beaver buys a hunting-knife, two an axe, from eight to twenty a gun or rifle, according

to its quality. And in one old trading list I found—vanity of vanities—"one beaver equals looking-glass."

Trading over, the trappers disperse to their winter hunting-grounds, which the main body of hunters never leaves from October, when they go on the fall hunt, to June, when the long straggling brigades of canoes and keel boats and pack horses and jolting ox-carts come back to the fort with the harvest of winter furs.

Signs unnoted by the denizens of city serve to guide the trappers over trackless wastes of illimitable snow. A whitish haze of frost may hide the sun, or continuous snow-fall blur every land-mark. What heeds the trapper? The slope of the rolling hills, the lie of the frozen river-beds, the branches of underbrush protruding through billowed drifts are hands that point the trapper's compass. For those hunters who have gone westward to the mountains, the task of threading pathless forest stillness is more difficult. At a certain altitude in the mountains, much frequented by game because undisturbed by storms, snow falls—falls—falls, without ceasing, heaping the pines with snow mushrooms, blotting out the sun, cloaking in heavy white flakes the notched bark blazed as a trail, transforming the rustling green forests to a silent spectral world without a mark to direct the hunter. Here the woodcraftsman's lore comes to his aid. He looks to the snow-coned tops of the pine trees. The tops of pine trees lean ever so slightly towards the rising sun. With his snow-shoes he digs away the snow at the roots of trees to get down to the moss. Moss grows from the roots of trees on the shady side—that is, the north. And simplest of all, demanding only that a wanderer use his eyes—which the white man seldom does—the limbs of the northern

trees are most numerous on the south. The trapper may be waylaid by storms, or starved by sudden migration of game from the grounds to which he has come, or run to earth by the ravenous timber-wolves that pursue the dog teams for leagues; but the trapper with Indian blood in his veins will not be lost.

One imminent danger is of accident beyond aid. A young Indian hunter of Moose Factory set out with his wife and two children for the winter hunting-grounds in the forest south of James Bay. To save the daily allowance of a fish for each dog, they did not take the dog teams. When chopping, the hunter injured his leg. The wound proved stubborn. Game was scarce, and they had not enough food to remain in the lodge. Wrapping her husband in robes on the long toboggan sleigh, the squaw placed the younger child beside him and with the other began tramping through the forest drawing the sleigh behind. The drifts were not deep enough for swift snow-shoeing over underbrush, and their speed was not half so speedy as the hunger that pursues northern hunters like the Fenris Wolf of Norse myth. The woman sank exhausted on the snow and the older boy, nerved with fear, pushed on to Moose Factory for help. Guided by the boy back through the forests, the fort people found the hunter dead in the sleigh, the mother crouched forward unconscious from cold, stripped of the clothing which she had wrapped round the child taken in her arms to warm with her own body. The child was alive and well. The fur traders nursed the woman back to life, though she looked more like a withered creature of eighty than a woman barely in her twenties. She explained with a simple unconsciousness of heroism that the ground had

been too hard for her to bury her husband, and she was afraid to leave the body and go on to the fort lest the wolves should molest the dead.*

The arrival of the mail packet is one of the most welcome breaks in the monotony of life at the fur post. When the mail comes, all white habitants of the fort takes a week's holidays to read letters and news of the outside world.

Railways run from Lake Superior to the Pacific; but off the line of railways mail is carried as of old. In summer-time overland runners, canoe, and company steamers bear the mail to the forts of Hudson Bay, of the Saskatchewan, of the Rockies, and the MacKenzie. In winter, scampering huskies with a running postman winged with snow-shoes dash across the snowy wastes through silent forests to the lonely forts of the bay, or slide over the prairie drifts with the music of tinkling bells and soft crunch-crunch of sleigh runners through the snow crust to the leagueless world of the Far North.

Forty miles a day, a couch of spruce boughs where the racquets have dug a hole in the snow, sleighs placed on edge as a wind break, dogs crouched on the buffalo-robes snarling over the frozen fish, deep bayings from the running wolf-pack, and before the stars have faded from the frosty sky, the mail-carrier has risen and is coasting away fast as the huskies can gallop.

Another picturesque feature of the fur trade was the long caravan of ox-carts that used to screech and creak and jolt over the rutted prairie roads between

* It need hardly be explained that it is the prairie Indian and not the forest Ojibway who places the body on high scaffolding above the ground; hence the woman's dilemma.

Winnipeg and St. Paul. More than 1,500 Hudson's Bay Company carts manned by 500 traders with tawny spouses and black-eyed impish children, squatted on top of the load, left Canada for St. Paul in August and returned in October. The carts were made without a rivet of iron. Bent wood formed the tires of the two wheels. Hardwood axles told their woes to the world in the scream of shrill bagpipes. Wooden racks took the place of cart box. In the shafts trod a staid old ox guided from the horns or with a halter, drawing the load with collar instead of a yoke. The harness was of skin thongs. In place of the ox sometimes was a "shagganippy" pony, raw and unkempt, which the imps lashed without mercy or the slightest inconvenience to the horse.

A red flag with the letters H. B. C. in white decorated the leading cart. During the Sioux massacres the fur caravans were unmolested, for the Indians recognised the flags and wished to remain on good terms with the fur traders.

Ox-carts still bring furs to Hudson's Bay Company posts, and screech over the corduroyed swamps of the MacKenzie; but the railway has replaced the caravan as a carrier of freight.

Hudson's Bay Company steamers now ply on the largest of the inland rivers with long lines of fur-laden barges in tow; but the canoe brigades still bring the winter's hunt to the forts in spring. Five to eight craft make a brigade, each manned by eight paddlers with an experienced steersman, who is usually also guide. But the one ranking first in importance is the bowman, whose quick eye must detect signs of nearing rapids, whose steel-shod pole gives the cue to the other

Carrying goods over long *portage* in MacKenzie River region with the old-fashioned Red River ox-carts.

paddlers and steers the craft past foamy reefs. The bowman it is who leaps out first when there is "tracking"—pulling the craft up-stream by tow-line—who stands waist high in ice water steadying the rocking bark lest a sudden swirl spill furs to the bottom, who hands out the packs to the others when the waters are too turbulent for "tracking" and there must be a "*portage*," and who leads the brigade on a run—half trot, half amble—overland to the calmer currents. "Pipes" are the measure of a *portage*—that is, the pipes smoked while the *voyageurs* are on the run. The bowman it is who can thread a network of water-ways by day or dark, past rapids or whirlpools, with the certainty of an arrow to the mark. On all long trips by dog train or canoe, pemmican made of buffalo meat and marrow put in air-tight bags was the standard food. The pemmican now used is of moose or caribou beef.

The only way to get an accurate idea of the size of the kingdom ruled by these monarchs of the lonely wastes is by comparison.

Take a map of North America. On the east is Labrador, a peninsula as vast as Germany and Holland and Belgium and half of France. On the coast and across the unknown interior are the magical letters H. B. C., meaning Hudson's Bay Company fort (past or present), a little whitewashed square with eighteen-foot posts planted picket-wise for a wall, match-box bastions loopholed for musketry, a barracks-like structure across the court-yard with a high lookout of some sort near the gate. Here some trader with wife and children and staff of Indian servants has held his own against savagery and desolating loneliness. In one of these forts Lord Strathcona passed his youth.

Once more to the map. With one prong of a compass in the centre of Hudson Bay, describe a circle. The northern half embraces the baffling arctics; but on the line of the southern circumference like beads on a string are Churchill high on the left, York below in black capitals as befits the importance of the great fur emporium of the bay, Severn and Albany and Moose and Rupert and Fort George round the south, and to the right, larger and more strongly built forts than in Labrador, with the ruins of stone walls at Churchill that have a depth of fifteen feet. Six-pounders once mounted these bastions. The remnants of galleries for soldiery run round the inside walls. A flag floats over each fort with the letters H. B. C.* Officers' dwellings occupy the centre of the court-yard. Banked against the walls are the men's quarters, fur presses, stables, storerooms. Always there is a chapel, at one fort a hospital, at others the relics of stoutly built old powder magazines made to withstand the siege of hand grenades tossed in by French assailants from the bay, who knew that the loot of a fur post was better harvest than a treasure ship. Elsewhere two small bastions situated diagonally across from each other were sufficient to protect the fur post by sending a raking fire along the walls; but here there was danger of the French fleet, and the walls were built with bastion and trench and rampart.

Again to the map. Between Hudson Bay and the Rocky Mountains stretches an American Siberia—the Barren Lands. Here, too, on every important water-

* The flag was hoisted on Sundays to notify the Indians there would be no trade.

way, Athabasca and the Liard and the MacKenzie into the land of winter night and midnight sun, extend Hudson's Bay Company posts. We think of these northern streams as ice-jammed, sluggish currents, with mean log villages on their banks. The fur posts of the subarctics are not imposing with picket fences in place of stockades, for no French foe was feared here. But the MacKenzie River is one of the longest in the world, with two tributaries each more than 1,000 miles in length. It has a width of a mile, and a succession of rapids that rival the St. Lawrence, and palisaded banks higher than the Hudson River's, and half a dozen lakes into one of which you could drop two New England States without raising a sand bar.

The map again. Between the prairie and the Pacific Ocean is a wilderness of peaks, a Switzerland stretched into half the length of a continent. Here, too, like eagle nests in rocky fastnesses are fur posts.

Such is the realm of the Hudson's Bay Company to-day.

Before 1812 there was no international boundary in the fur trade. But after the war Congress barred out Canadian companies. The next curtailment of hunting-ground came in 1869–'70, when the company surrendered proprietary rights to the Canadian Government, retaining only the right to trade in the vast north land. The formation of new Canadian provinces took place south of the Saskatchewan; but north the company barters pelts undisturbed as of old. Yearly the staffs are shifted from post to post as the fortunes of the hunt vary; but the principal posts not including winter quarters for a special hunt have probably not exceeded two hundred in number, nor fallen

below one hundred for the last century. Of these the greater numbers are of course in the Far North. When the Hudson's Bay Company was fighting rivals, Nor' Westers from Montreal, Americans from St. Louis, it must have employed as traders, packers, *coureurs,* canoe men, hunters, and guides, at least 5,000 men; for its rival employed that number, and "The Old Lady," as the enemy called it, always held her own. Over this wilderness army were from 250 to 300 officers, each with the power of life and death in his hands. To the honour of the company, be it said, this power was seldom abused.* Occasionally a brutal sea-captain might use lash and triangle and branding along the northern coast; but officers defenceless among savage hordes must of necessity have lived on terms of justice with their men.

The Canadian Government now exercises judicial functions; but where less than 700 mounted police patrol a territory as large as Siberia, the company's factor is still the chief representative of the law's power. Times without number under the old *régime* has a Hudson's Bay officer set out alone and tracked an Indian murderer to hidden fastness, there to arrest him or shoot him dead on the spot; because if murder went unpunished that mysterious impulse to kill which is as rife in the savage heart as in the wolf's would work its havoc unchecked.

Just as surely as "the sun rises and the rivers flow" the savage knows when the hunt fails he will receive help from the Hudson's Bay officer. But just

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* Governor Norton will, of course, be recalled as the most conspicuous for his brutality.

as surely he knows if he comm its any crime that same unbending, fearless white man will pursue—and pursue—and pursue guilt to the death. One case is on record of a trader thrashing an Indian within an inch of his life for impudence to officers two or three years before. Of course, the vendetta may cut both ways, the Indian treasuring vengeance in his heart till he can wreak it. That is an added reason why the white man's justice must be unimpeachable. "*Pro pelle cutem,*" says the motto of the company arms. Without flippancy it might be said "Ay eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," as well as "A skin for a skin"—which explains the freedom from crime among northern Indians.

And who are the subjects living under this Mosaic paternalism?

Stunted Eskimo of the Far North, creatures as amphibious as the seals whose coats they wear, with the lustreless eyes of dwarfed intelligence and the agility of seal flippers as they whisk double-bladed paddles from side to side of the darting kyacks; wandering Montagnais from the domed hills of Labrador, lonely and sad and silent as the naked desolation of their rugged land; Ojibways soft-voiced as the forest glooms in that vast land of spruce tangle north of the Great Lakes; Crees and Sioux from the plains, cunning with the stealth of creatures that have hunted and been hunted on the shelterless prairie; Blackfeet and Crows, game birds of the foothills that have harried all other tribes for tribute, keen-eyed as the eagles on the mountains behind them, glorying in war as the finest kind of hunting; mountain tribes—Stonies, Kootenais, Shoshonies—splendid types of manhood because only the fittest can survive the hardships of the mountains;

coast Indians, Chinook and Chilcoot—low and lazy because the great rivers feed them with salmon and they have no need to work.

Over these lawless Arabs of the New World wilderness the Hudson's Bay Company has ruled for two and a half centuries with smaller loss of life in the aggregate than the railways of the United States cause in a single year.

Hunters have been lost in the wilds. White trappers have been assassinated by Indians. Forts have been wiped out of existence. Ten, twenty, thirty traders have been massacred at different times. But, then, the loss of life on railways totals up to thousands in a single year.

When fighting rivals long ago, it is true that the Hudson's Bay Company recognised neither human nor divine law. Grant the charge and weigh it against the benefits of the company's rule. When Hearne visited Chippewyans two centuries ago he found the Indians in a state uncontaminated by the trader; and that state will give the ordinary reader cold shivers of horror at the details of massacre and degradation. Every visitor since has reported the same tribe improved in standard of living under Hudson's Bay rule. Recently a well-known Canadian governor making an itinerary of the territory round the bay found the Indians such devout Christians that they put his white retinue to shame. Returning to civilization, the governor was observed attending the services of his own denomination with a greater fury than was his wont. Asked the reason, he confided to a club friend that he would be *blanked* if he could allow heathen Indians to be better Christians than he was.

Some of the shiftless Indians may be hopelessly in debt to the company for advanced provisions, but if the company had not made these advances the Indians would have starved, and the debt is never exacted by seizure of the hunt that should go to feed a family.

Of how many other creditors may that be said? Of how many companies that it has cared for the sick, sought the lost, fed the starving, housed the homeless? With all its faults, that is the record of the Hudson's Bay Company.

CHAPTER XV

KOOT AND THE BOB-CAT

Old whaling ships, that tumble round the world and back again from coast to coast over strange seas, hardly ever suffer any of the terrible disasters that are always overtaking the proud men-of-war and swift liners equipped with all that science can do for them against misfortune. Ask an old salt why this is, and he will probably tell you that he *feels* his way forward or else that he steers by the same chart as *that*—jerking his thumb sideways from the wheel towards some sea gull careening over the billows. A something, that is akin to the instinct of wild creatures warning them when to go north for the summer, when to go south for the winter, when to scud for shelter from coming storm, guides the old whaler across chartless seas.

So it is with the trapper. He may be caught in one of his great steel-traps and perish on the prairie. He may run short of water and die of thirst on the desert. He may get his pack horses tangled up in a valley where there is no game and be reduced to the alternative of destroying what will carry him back to safety or starving with a horse still under him, before he can get over the mountains into another valley—but the true trapper will literally never lose himself. Lewis and Clark rightly merit the fame of having first

explored the Missouri-Columbia route; but years before the Louisiana purchase, free trappers were already on the Columbia. David Thompson of the North-West Company was the first Canadian to *explore* the lower Columbia; but before Thompson had crossed the Rockies, French hunters were already ranging the forests of the Pacific slope. How did these coasters of the wilds guide themselves over prairies that were a chartless sea and mountains that were a wilderness? How does the wavey know where to find the rush-grown inland pools? Who tells the caribou mother to seek refuge on islands where the water will cut off the wolves that would prey on her young?

Something, which may be the result of generations of accumulated observation, guides the wavey and the caribou. Something, which may be the result of unconscious inference from a life-time of observation, guides the man. In the animal we call it instinct, in the man, reason; and in the case of the trapper tracking pathless wilds, the conscious reason of the man seems almost merged in the automatic instinct of the brute. It is not sharp-sightedness—though no man is sharper of sight than the trapper. It is not acuteness of hearing—though the trapper learns to listen with the noiseless stealth of the pencil-eared lynx. It is not touch—in the sense of tactile contact—any more than it is touch that tells a suddenly awakened sleeper of an unexpected noiseless presence in a dark room. It is something deeper than the tabulated five senses, a sixth sense—a sense of *feel*, without contact—a sense on which the whole sensate world writes its records as on a palimpsest. This palimpsest is the trapper's chart, this sense of *feel*, his weapon against the instinct of the

brute. What part it plays in the life of every ranger of the wilds can best be illustrated by telling how Koot found his way to the fur post after the rabbit-hunt.

When the midwinter lull falls on the hunt, there is little use in the trapper going far afield. Moose have "yarded up." Bear have "holed up" and the beaver are housed till dwindling stores compel them to come out from their snow-hidden domes. There are no longer any buffalo for the trapper to hunt during the lull; but what buffalo formerly were to the hunter, rabbit are to-day. Shields and tepee covers, moccasins, caps and coats, thongs and meat, the buffalo used to supply. These are now supplied by "wahboos—little white chap," which is the Indian name for rabbit.

And there is no midwinter lull for "wahboos." While the "little white chap" runs, the long-haired, owlish-eyed lynx of the Northern forest runs too. So do all the lynx's feline cousins, the big yellowish cougar of the mountains slouching along with his head down and his tail lashing and a footstep as light and sinuous and silent as the motion of a snake; the short-haired lucifee gorging himself full of "little white chaps" and stretching out to sleep on a limb in a dapple of sunshine and shadow so much like the lucifee's skin not even a wolf would detect the sleeper; the bunchy bob-cat bounding and skimming over the snow for all the world like a bouncing football done up in gray fur—all members of the cat tribe running wherever the "little white chaps" run.

So when the lull fell on the hunt and the mink trapping was well over and marten had not yet begun, Koot gathered up his traps, and getting a supply of

provisions at the fur post, crossed the white wastes of prairie to lonely swamp ground where dwarf alder and willow and cottonwood and poplar and pine grew in a tangle. A few old logs dovetailed into a square made the wall of a cabin. Over these he stretched the canvas of his tepee for a roof at a sharp enough angle to let the heavy snow-fall slide off from its own weight. Moss chinked up the logs. Snow banked out the wind. Pine boughs made the floor, two logs with pine boughs, a bed. An odd-shaped stump served as chair or table; and on the logs of the inner walls hung wedge-shaped slabs of cedar to stretch the skins. A caribou curtain or bear-skin across the entrance completed Koot's winter quarters for the rabbit-hunt.

Koot's genealogy was as vague as that of all old trappers hanging round fur posts. Part of him—that part which served best when he was on the hunting-field—was Ojibway. The other part, which made him improvise logs into chair and table and bed, was white man; and that served him best when he came to bargain with the chief factor over the pelts. At the fur post he attended the Catholic mission. On the hunting-field, when suddenly menaced by some great danger, he would cry out in the Indian tongue words that meant "O Great Spirit!" And it is altogether probable that at the mission and on the hunting-field, Koot was worshipping the same Being. When he swore—strange commentary on civilization—he always used white man's oaths, French *patois* or straight English.

Though old hermits may be found hunting alone through the Rockies, Idaho, Washington, and Minnesota, trappers do not usually go to the wilds alone; but there was so little danger in rabbit-snaring, that Koot

had gone out accompanied by only the mongrel dog that had drawn his provisions from the fort on a sort of toboggan sleigh.

The snow is a white page on which the wild creatures write their daily record for those who can read. All over the white swamp were little deep tracks; here, holes as if the runner had sunk; there, padded marks as from the bound—bound—bound of something soft; then, again, where the thicket was like a hedge with only one breach through, the footprints had beaten a little hard rut walled by the soft snow. Koot's dog might have detected a motionless form under the thicket of spiney shrubs, a form that was gray almost to whiteness and scarcely to be distinguished from the snowy underbrush but for the blink of a prism light—the rabbit's eye. If the dog did catch that one telltale glimpse of an eye which a cunning rabbit would have shut, true to the training of his trapper master he would give no sign of the discovery except perhaps the pricking forward of both ears. Koot himself preserved as stolid a countenance as the rabbit playing dead or simulating a block of wood. Where the footprints ran through the breached hedge, Koot stooped down and planted little sticks across the runway till there was barely room for a weasel to pass. Across the open he suspended a looped string hung from a twig bent so that the slightest weight in the loop would send it up with a death jerk for anything caught in the tightening twine.

All day long, Koot goes from hedge to hedge, from runway to runway, choosing always the places where natural barriers compel the rabbit to take this path and no other, travelling if he can in a circle from his

cabin so that the last snare set will bring him back with many a zigzag to the first snare made. If rabbits were plentiful—as they always were in the fur country of the North except during one year in seven when an epidemic spared the land from a rabbit pest—Koot's circuit of snares would run for miles through the swamp. Traps for large game would be set out so that the circuit would require only a day; but where rabbits are numerous, the foragers that prey—wolf and wolverine and lynx and bob-cat—will be numerous, too; and the trapper will not set out more snares than he can visit twice a day. Noon—the Indian's hour of the short shadow—is the best time for the first visit, nightfall, the time of no shadow at all, for the second. If the trapper has no wooden door to his cabin, and in it—instead of caching in a tree—keeps fish or bacon that may attract marauding wolverine, he will very probably leave his dogs on guard while he makes the round of the snares.

Finding tracks about the shack when he came back for his noonday meal, Koot shouted sundry instructions into the mongrel's ear, emphasized them with a moccasin kick, picked up the sack in which he carried bait, twine, and traps, and set out in the evening to make the round of his snares, unaccompanied by the dog. Rabbit after rabbit he found, gray and white, hanging stiff and stark, dead from their own weight, strangled in the twine snares. Snares were set anew, the game strung over his shoulder, and Koot was walking through the gray gloaming for the cabin when that strange sense of *feel* told him that he was being followed. What was it? Could it be the dog? He whistled—he called it by name.

In all the world, there is nothing so ghostly silent, so deathly quiet as the swamp woods, muffled in the snow of midwinter, just at nightfall. By day, the grouse may utter a lonely cluck-cluck, or the snow-buntings chirrup and twitter and flutter from drift to hedge-top, or the saucy jay shriek some scolding impudence. A squirrel may chatter out his noisy protest at some thief for approaching the nuts which lie cached under the rotten leaves at the foot of the tree, or the sun-warmth may set the melting snow showering from the swan's-down branches with a patter like rain. But at nightfall the frost has stilled the drip of thaw. Squirrel and bird are wrapped in the utter quiet of a gray darkness. And the marauders that fill midnight with sharp bark, shrill trembling scream, deep baying over the snow are not yet abroad in the woods. All is shadowless—stillness—a quiet that is audible.

Koot turned sharply and whistled and called his dog. There wasn't a sound. Later when the frost began to tighten, sap-frozen twigs would snap. The ice of the swamp, frozen like rock, would by-and-bye crackle with the loud echo of a pistol-shot—crackle—and strike—and break as if artillery were firing a fusillade and infantry shooters answering sharp. By-and-bye, moon and stars and Northern Lights would set the shadows dancing; and the wail of the cougar would be echoed by the lifting scream of its mate. But now, was not a sound, not a motion, not a shadow, only the noiseless stillness, the shadowless quiet, and the *feel*, the *feel* of something back where the darkness was gathering like a curtain in the bush.

It might, of course, be only a silly long-ears loping

under cover parallel to the man, looking with rabbit curiosity at this strange newcomer to the swamp home of the animal world. Koot's sense of *feel* told him that it wasn't a rabbit; but he tried to persuade himself that it was, the way a timid listener persuades herself that creaking floors are burglars. Thinking of his many snares, Koot smiled and walked on. Then it came again, that *feel* of something coursing behind the underbrush in the gloom of the gathering darkness. Koot stopped short—and listened—and listened—listened to a snow-muffled silence, to a desolating solitude that pressed in on the lonely hunter like the waves of a limitless sea round a drowning man.

The sense of *feel* that is akin to brute instinct gave him the impression of a presence. Reason that is man's told him what it might be and what to do. Was he not carrying the snared rabbits over his shoulder? Some hungry flesh-eater, more bloodthirsty than courageous, was still hunting him for the food on his back and only lacked the courage to attack. Koot drew a steel-trap from his bag. He did not wish to waste a rabbit-skin, so he baited the spring with a piece of fat bacon, smeared the trap, the snow, everything that he had touched with a rabbit-skin, and walked home through the deepening dark to the little log cabin where a sharp "woof-woof" of welcome awaited him.

That night, in addition to the skins across the doorway, Koot jammed logs athwart; "to keep the cold out" he told himself. Then he kindled a fire on the rough stone hearth built at one end of the cabin and with the little clay pipe beneath his teeth sat down on the stump chair to broil rabbit. The waste of the rabbit he had placed in traps outside the lodge. Once

his dog sprang alert with pricked ears. Man and dog heard the sniff—sniff—sniff of some creature attracted to the cabin by the smell of broiling meat, and now rummaging at its own risk among the traps. And once when Koot was stretched out on a bear-skin before the fire puffing at his pipe-stem, drying his moccasins and listening to the fusillade of frost rending ice and earth, a long low piercing wail rose and fell and died away. Instantly from the forest of the swamp came the answering scream—a lifting tumbling eldritch shriek.

"I should have set two traps," says Koot. "They are out in pairs."

Black is the flag of danger to the rabbit world. The antlered shadows of the naked poplar or the tossing arms of the restless pines, the rabbit knows to be harmless shadows unless their dapple of sun and shade conceals a brindled cat. But a shadow that walks and runs means to the rabbit a foe; so the wary trapper prefers to visit his snares at the hour of the short shadow.

It did not surprise the trapper after he had heard the lifting wail from the swamp woods the night before that the bacon in the trap lay untouched. The still hunter that had crawled through the underbrush lured by the dead rabbits over Koot's shoulder wanted rabbit, not bacon. But at the nearest rabbit snare, where a poor dead prisoner had been torn from the twine, were queer padded prints in the snow, not of the rabbit's making. Koot stood looking at the telltale mark. The dog's ears were all aprick. So was Koot's sense of *feel*, but he couldn't make this thing

out. There was no trail of approach or retreat. The padded print of the thief was in the snow as if the animal had dropped from the sky and gone back to the sky.

Koot measured off ten strides from the rifled snare and made a complete circuit round it. The rabbit runway cut athwart the snow circle, but no mark like that shuffling padded print.

"It isn't a wolverine, and it isn't a fisher, and it isn't a coyote," Koot told himself.

The dog emitted stupid little sharp barks looking everywhere and nowhere as if he felt what he could neither see nor hear. Koot measured off ten strides more from this circuit and again walked completely round the snare. Not even the rabbit runways cut this circle. The white man grows indignant when baffled, the Indian superstitious. The part that was white man in Koot sent him back to the scene in quick jerky steps to scatter poisoned rabbit meat over the snow and set a trap in which he readily sacrificed a full-grown bunny. The part that was Indian set a world of old memories echoing, memories that were as much Koot's nature as the swarth of his skin, memories that Koot's mother and his mother's ancestors held of the fabulous man-eating wolf called the loup-garou, and the great white beaver father of all beavers and all Indians that glided through the swamp mists at night like a ghost, and the monster grisly that stalked with uncouth gambols through the dark devouring benighted hunters.

This time when the mongrel uttered his little sharp barkings that said as plainly as a dog could speak, "Something's somewhere! Be careful there—

oh!—I'll be *on* to you in just one minute!" Koot kicked the dog hard with plain anger; and his anger was at himself because his eyes and his ears failed to localize, to *real*-ize, to visualize what those little pricks and shivers tingling down to his finger-tips meant. Then the civilized man came uppermost in Koot and he marched off very matter of fact to the next snare.

But if Koot's vision had been as acute as his sense of *feel* and he had glanced up to the topmost spreading bough of a pine just above the snare, he might have detected lying in a dapple of sun and shade something with large owl eyes, something whose pencilled ear-tufts caught the first crisp of the man's moccasins over the snow-crust. Then the ear-tufts were laid flat back against a furry form hardly differing from the dapple of sun and shade. The big owl eyes closed to a tiny blinking slit that let out never a ray of tell-tale light. The big round body mottled gray and white like the snowy tree widened—stretched—flattened till it was almost a part of the tossing pine bough. Only when the man and dog below the tree had passed far beyond did the pencilled ears blink forward and the owl eyes open and the big body bunch out like a cat with elevated haunches ready to spring.

But by-and-bye the man's snares began to tell on the rabbits. They grew scarce and timid. And the thing that had rifled the rabbit snares grew hunger-bold. One day when Koot and the dog were skimming across the billowy drifts, something black far ahead bounced up, caught a bunting on the wing, and with another bounce disappeared among the trees.

Koot said one word—"Cat!"—and the dog was off full cry.

Ever since he had heard that wailing call from the swamp woods, he had known that there were rival hunters, the keenest of all still hunters among the rabbits. Every day he came upon the trail of their ravages, rifled snares, dead squirrels, torn feathers, even the remains of a fox or a coon. And sometimes he could tell from the printings on the white page that the still hunter had been hunted full cry by coyote or timber-wolf. Against these wolfish foes the cat had one sure refuge always—a tree. The hungry coyote might try to starve the bob-cat into surrender; but just as often, the bob-cat could starve the coyote into retreat; for if a foolish rabbit darted past, what hungry coyote could help giving chase? The tree had even defeated both dog and man that first week when Koot could not find the cat. But a dog in full chase could follow the trail to a tree, and a man could shoot into the tree.

As the rabbits decreased, Koot set out many traps for the bob-cats now reckless with hunger, steel-traps and deadfalls and pits and log pens with a live grouse clucking inside. The midwinter lull was a busy season for Koot.

Towards March, the sun-glare has produced a crust on the snow that is almost like glass. For Koot on his snow-shoes this had no danger; but for the mongrel that was to draw the pelts back to the fort, the snow crust was more troublesome than glass. Where the crust was thick, with Koot leading the way snow-shoes and dog and toboggan glided over the drifts as if on steel runners. But in midday the crust was soft and the dog went floundering through as if on thin ice, the sharp edge cutting his feet. Koot tied little buckskin sacks round the dog's feet and made a few more

rounds of the swamp; but the crust was a sign that warned him it was time to prepare for the marten-hunt. To leave his furs at the fort, he must cross the prairie while it was yet good travelling for the dog. Dismantling the little cabin, Koot packed the pelts on the toboggan, roped all tightly so there could be no spill from an upset, and putting the mongrel in the traces, led the way for the fort one night when the snow-crust was hard as ice.

The moon came up over the white fields in a great silver disk. Between the running man and the silver moon moved black skulking forms—the foragers on their night hunt. Sometimes a fox loped over a drift, or a coyote rose ghostly from the snow, or timber-wolves dashed from wooded ravines and stopped to look till Koot fired a shot that sent them galloping.

In the dark that precedes daylight, Koot camped beside a grove of poplars—that is, he fed the dog a fish, whittled chips to make a fire and boil some tea for himself, then digging a hole in the drift with his snow-shoe, laid the sleigh to windward and cuddled down between bear-skins with the dog across his feet.

Daylight came in a blinding glare of sunshine and white snow. The way was untrodden. Koot led at an ambling run, followed by the dog at a fast trot, so that the trees were presently left far on the offing and the runners were out on the bare white prairie with never a mark, tree or shrub, to break the dazzling reaches of sunshine and snow from horizon to horizon. A man who is breaking the way must keep his eyes on the ground; and the ground was so blindingly bright

that Koot began to see purple and yellow and red patches dancing wherever he looked on the snow. He drew his capote over his face to shade his eyes; but the pace and the sun grew so hot that he was soon running again unprotected from the blistering light.

Towards the afternoon, Koot knew that something had gone wrong. Some distance ahead, he saw a black object against the snow. On the unbroken white, it looked almost as big as a barrel and seemed at least a mile away. Lowering his eyes, Koot let out a spurt of speed, and the next thing he knew he had tripped his snow-shoe and tumbled. Scrambling up, he saw that a stick had caught the web of his snow-shoe; but where was the barrel for which he had been steering? There wasn't any barrel at all—the barrel was this black stick which hadn't been fifty yards away. Koot rubbed his eyes and noticed that black and red and purple patches were all over the snow. The drifts were heaving and racing after each other like waves on an angry sea. He did not go much farther that day; for every glint of snow scorched his eyes like a hot iron. He camped at the first bluff and made a poultice of cold tea leaves which he laid across his blistered face for the night.

Any one who knows the tortures of snow-blindness will understand why Koot did not sleep that night. It was a long night to the trapper, such a very long night that the sun had been up for two hours before its heat burned through the layers of his capote into his eyes and roused him from sheer pain. Then he sprang up, put up an ungantled hand and knew from the heat of the sun that it was broad day. But when he took the bandage off his eyes, all he saw was a black

curtain one moment, rockets and wheels and dancing patches of purple fire the next.

Koot was no fool to become panicky and feeble from sudden peril. He knew that he was snow-blind on a pathless prairie at least two days away from the fort. To wait until the snow-blindness had healed would risk the few provisions that he had and perhaps expose him to a blizzard. The one rule of the trapper's life is to go ahead, let the going cost what it may; and drawing his capote over his face, Koot went on.

The heat of the sun told him the directions; and when the sun went down, the crooning west wind, bringing thaw and snow-crust, was his compass. And when the wind fell, the tufts of shrub-growth sticking through the snow pointed to the warm south. Now he tied himself to his dog; and when he camped beside trees into which he had gone full crash before he knew they were there, he laid his gun beside the dog and sleigh. Going out the full length of his cord, he whittled the chips for his fire and found his way back by the cord.

On the second day of his blindness, no sun came up; nor could he guide himself by the feel of the air, for there was no wind. It was one of the dull dead gray days that precedes storms. How would he get his directions to set out? Memory of last night's travel might only lead him on the endless circling of the lost. Koot dug his snow-shoe to the base of a tree, found moss, felt it growing on only one side of the tree, knew that side must be the shady cold side, and so took his bearings from what he thought was the north.

Koot said the only time that he knew any fear was on the evening of the last day. The atmosphere boded

storm. The fort lay in a valley. Somewhere between Koot and that valley ran a trail. What if he had crossed the trail? What if the storm came and wiped out the trail before he could reach the fort? All day, whisky-jack and snow-bunting and fox scurried from his presence; but this night in the dusk when he felt forward on his hands and knees for the expected trail, the wild creatures seemed to grow bolder. He imagined that he felt the coyotes closer than on the other nights. And then the fearful thought came that he might have passed the trail unheeding. Should he turn back?

Afraid to go forward or back, Koot sank on the ground, unhooded his face and tried to *force* his eyes to see. The pain brought biting salty tears. It was quite useless. Either the night was very dark, or the eyes were very blind.

And then white man or Indian—who shall say which came uppermost?—Koot cried out to the Great Spirit. In mockery back came the saucy scold of a jay.

But that was enough for Koot—it was prompt answer to his prayer; for where do the jays quarrel and fight and flutter but on the trail? Running eagerly forward, the trapper felt the ground. The rutted marks of a "jumper" sleigh cut the hard crust. With a shout, Koot headed down the sloping path to the valley where lay the fur post, the low hanging smoke of whose chimneys his eager nostrils had already sniffed.

CHAPTER XVI

OTHER LITTLE ANIMALS BESIDES WAHBOOS THE RABBIT—BEING AN ACCOUNT OF MUSQUASH THE MUSK-RAT, SIKAK THE SKUNK, WENUSK THE BADGER, AND OTHERS

I

Musquash the Musk-rat

EVERY chapter in the trapper's life is not a "stunt."

There are the uneventful days when the trapper seems to do nothing but wander aimlessly through the woods over the prairie along the margin of rush-grown marshy ravines where the stagnant waters lap lazily among the flags, though a feathering of ice begins to rim the quiet pools early in autumn. Unless he is duck-shooting down there in the hidden slough where is a great "quack-quack" of young teals, the trapper may not uncase his gun. For a whole morning he lies idly in the sunlight beside some river where a roundish black head occasionally bobs up only to dive under when it sees the man. Or else he sits by the hour still as a statue on the mossy log of a swamp where a long wriggling—wriggling trail marks the snaky motion of some creature below the amber depths.

To the city man whose days are regulated by clockwork and electric trams with the ceaseless iteration of

gongs and "step fast there!" such a life seems the type of utter laziness. But the best-learned lessons are those imbibed unconsciously and the keenest pleasures come unsought. Perhaps when the great profit-and-loss account of the hereafter is cast up, the trapper may be found to have a greater sum total of happiness, of usefulness, of real knowledge than the multi-millionaire whose life was one buzzing round of drive and worry and grind. Usually the busy city man has spent nine or ten of the most precious years of his youth in study and travel to learn other men's thoughts for his own life's work. The trapper spends an idle month or two of each year wandering through a wild world learning the technic of his craft at first hand. And the trapper's learning is all done leisurely, calmly, without bluster or drive, just as nature herself carries on the work of her realm.

On one of these idle days when the trapper seems to be slouching so lazily over the prarie comes a whiff of dank growth on the crisp autumn air. Like all wild creatures travelling up-wind, the trapper at once heads a windward course. It comes again, just a whiff as if the light green musk-plant were growing somewhere on a dank bank. But ravines are not dank in the clear fall days; and by October the musk-plant has wilted dry. This is a fresh living odour with all the difference between it and dead leaves that there is between June roses and the dried dust of a rose jar. The wind falls. He may not catch the faintest odour of swamp growth again, but he knows there must be stagnant water somewhere in these prairie ravines; and a sense that is part *feel*, part intuition, part inference from what the wind told of the marsh smell, leads his

footsteps down the browned hillside to the soggy bottom of a slough.

A covey of teals—very young, or they would not be so bold—flackers up, wings about with a clatter, then settles again a space farther ahead when the ducks see that the intruder remains so still. The man parts the flags, sits down on a log motionless as the log itself—and watches! Something else had taken alarm from the crunch of the hunter's moccasins through the dry reeds; for a wriggling trail is there, showing where a creature has dived below and is running among the wet under-tangle. Not far off on another log deep in the shade of the highest flags solemnly perches a small prairie-owl. It is almost the russet shade of the dead log. It hunches up and blinks stupidly at all this noise in the swamp.

"Oho," thinks the trapper, "so I've disturbed a still hunt," and he sits if anything stiller than ever, only stooping to lay his gun down and pick up a stone.

At first there is nothing but the quacking of the ducks at the far end of the swamp. A lapping of the water against the brittle flags and a water-snake has splashed away to some dark haunt. The whisky-jack calls out officious note from a topmost bough, as much as to say: "It's all right! Me—me!—I'm always there!—I've investigated!—it's all right!—he's quite harmless!" And away goes the jay on business of state among the gopher mounds.

Then the interrupted activity of the swamp is resumed, scolding mother ducks reading the riot act to young teals, old geese coming craning and craning their long necks to drink at the water's edge, lizards and water-snakes splashing down the banks, midgets

and gnats sunning themselves in clouds during the warmth of the short autumn days, with a feel in the air as of crisp ripeness, drying fruit, the harvest-home of the year. In all the prairie region north and west of Minnesota—the Indian land of "sky-coloured water"—the sloughs lie on the prairie under a crystal sky that turns pools to silver. On this almost motionless surface are mirrored as if by an etcher's needle the sky above, feathered wind clouds, flag stems, surrounding cliffs, even the flight of birds on wing. As the mountains stand for majesty, the prairies for infinity, so the marsh lands are types of repose.

But it is not a lifeless repose. Barely has the trapper settled himself when a little sharp black nose pokes up through the water at the fore end of the wriggling trail. A round rat-shaped head follows this twitching proboscis. Then a brownish earth-coloured body swims with a wriggling sidelong movement for the log, where roosts the blinking owlet. A little noiseless leap! and a dripping musk-rat with long flat tail and webbed feet scrabbles up the moss-covered tree towards the stupid bird. Another moment, and the owl would have toppled into the water with a pair of sharp teeth clutched to its throat. Then the man shies a well-aimed stone!

Splash! Flop! The owl is flapping blindly through the flags to another hiding-place, while the wriggle-wriggle of the waters tells where the marsh-rat has darted away under the tangled growth. From other idle days like these, the trapper has learned that musk-rats are not solitary but always to be found in colonies. Now if the musk-rat were as wise as the beaver to whom the Indians say he is closely akin, that

alarmed marauder would carry the news of the man-intruder to the whole swamp. Perhaps if the others remembered from the prod of a spear or the flash of a gun what man's coming meant, that news would cause terrified flight of every musk-rat from the marsh. But musquash—little beaver, as the Indians call him—is not so wise, not so timid, not so easily frightened from his home as *amisk*,* the beaver. In fact, nature's provision for the musk-rat's protection seems to have emboldened the little rodent almost to the point of stupidity. His skin is of that burnt umber shade hardly to be distinguished from the earth. At one moment his sharp nose cuts the water, at the next he is completely hidden in the soft clay of the undertangle; and while you are straining for a sight of him through the pool, he has scurried across a mud bank to his burrow.

Hunt him as they may, men and boys and ragged squaws wading through swamps knee-high, yet after a century of hunting from the Chesapeake and the Hackensack to the swamps of "sky-coloured water" on the far prairie, little musquash still yields 6,000,000 pelts a year with never a sign of diminishing. A hundred years ago, in 1788, so little was musk-rat held in esteem as a fur, the great North-West Company of

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* *Amisk*, the Chippewyan, *umisk*, the Cree, with much the same sound. A well-known trader told the writer that he considered the variation in Indian language more a matter of dialect than difference in meaning, and that while he could speak only Ojibway he never had any difficulty in understanding and being understood by Cree, Chippewyan, and Assiniboine. For instance, rabbit, "the little white chap," is *wahboos* on the Upper Ottawa, *wapus* on the Saskatchewan, *wapauce* on the MacKenzie.

Canada sent out only 17,000 or 20,000 skins a year. So rapidly did musk-rat grow in favour as a lining and imitation fur that in 1888 it was no unusual thing for 200,000 musk-rat-skins to be brought to a single Hudson's Bay Company fort. In Canada the climate compels the use of heavier furs than in the United States, so that the all-fur coat is in greater demand than the fur-lined; but in Canada, not less than 2,000,000 musk-rat furs are taken every year. In the United States the total is close on 4,000,000. In one city alone, St. Paul, 50,000 musk-rat-skins are cured every year. A single stretch of good marsh ground has yielded that number of skins year after year without a sign of the hunt telling on the prolific little musquash. Multiply 50,000 by prices varying from 7 cents to 75 cents and the value of the musk-rat-hunt becomes apparent.

What is the secret of the musk-rat's survival while the strong creatures of the chase like buffalo and timber-wolf have been almost exterminated? In the first place, settlers can't farm swamps; so the musk-rat thrives just as well in the swamps of New Jersey today as when the first white hunter set foot in America. Then musquash lives as heartily on owls and frogs and snakes as on water mussels and lily-pads. If one sort of food fails, the musk-rat has as omnivorous powers of digestion as the bear and changes his diet. Then he can hide as well in water as on land. And most important of all, musk-rat's family is as numerous as a cat's, five to nine rats in a litter, and two or three litters a year. These are the points that make for little musquash's continuance in spite of all that shot and trap can do.

Having discovered what the dank whiff, half ani-

mal, half vegetable, signified, the trapper sets about finding the colony. He knows there is no risk of the little still-hunter carrying alarm to the other musk-rats. If he waits, it is altogether probable that the fleeing musk-rat will come up and swim straight for the colony. On the other hand, the musk-rat may have scurried overland through the rushes. Besides, the trapper observed tracks, tiny leaf-like tracks as of little webbed feet, over the soft clay of the marsh bank. These will lead to the colony, so the trapper rises and parting the rushes not too noisily, follows the little footprint along the margin of the swamp.

Here the track is lost at the narrow ford of an inflowing stream, but across the creek lies a fallen poplar littered with—what? The feathers and bones of a dead owlet. Balancing himself—how much better the moccasins cling than boots!—the trapper crosses the log and takes up the trail through the rushes. But here musquash has dived off into the water for the express purpose of throwing a possible pursuer off the scent. But the tracks betrayed which way musquash was travelling; so the trapper goes on, knowing if he does not find the little haycock houses on this side, he can cross to the other.

Presently, he almost stumbles over what sent the musk-rat diving just at this place. It is the wreck of a wolverine's ravage—a little wattled dome-shaped house exposed to that arch-destroyer by the shrinking of the swamp. So shallow has the water become, that a wolverine has easily waded and leaped clear across to the roof of the musk-rat's house. A beaver-dam two feet thick cannot resist the onslaught of the wolverine's claws; how much less will this round nest of

Fort MacPherson, now the most northerly post of the Hudson's Bay Company, beyond tree line; hence the houses are built of imported timber, with thatch roofs.

reeds and grass and mosses cemented together with soft clay? The roof has been torn from the domed house, leaving the inside bare and showing plainly the domestic economy of the musk-rat home, smooth round walls inside, a floor or gallery of sticks and grasses, where the family had lived in an air chamber above the water, rough walls below the water-line and two or three little openings that must have been safely under water before the swamp receded. Perhaps a mussel or lily bulb has been left in the deserted larder. From the oozy slime below the mid-floor to the topmost wall will not measure more than two or three feet. If the swamp had not dried here, the stupid little musk-rats that escaped the ravager's claws would probably have come back to the wrecked house, built up the torn roof, and gone on living in danger till another wolverine came. But a water doorway the musk-rat must have. That he has learned by countless assaults on his house-top, so when the marsh retreated the musk-rats abandoned their house.

All about the deserted house are runways, tiny channels across oozy peninsulas and islands of the musk-rat's diminutive world such as a very small beaver might make. The trapper jumps across to a dry patch or mound in the midst of the slimy bottom and prods an earth bank with a stick. It is as he thought —hollow; a musk-rat burrow or gallery in the clay wall where the refugees from this house had scuttled from the wolverine. But now all is deserted. The water has shrunk—that was the danger signal to the musk-rat; and there had been a grand moving to a deeper part of the swamp. Perhaps, after all, this is a very old house not used since last winter.

Going back to the bank, the trapper skirts through the crush of brittle rushes round the swamp. Coming sharply on deeper water, a dank, stagnant bayou, heavy with the smell of furry life, the trapper pushes aside the flags, peers out and sees what resembles a prairie-dog town on water—such a number of wattled houses that they had shut in the water as with a dam. Too many flags and willows lie over the colony for a glimpse of the tell-tale wriggling trail across the water; but from the wet tangle of grass and moss comes an oozy pattering.

If it were winter, the trapper could proceed as he would against a beaver colony, staking up the outlet from the swamp, trenching the ice round the different houses, breaking open the roofs and penning up any fugitives in their own bank burrows till he and his dog and a spear could clear out the gallery. But in winter there is more important work than hunting musk-rat. Musk-rat-trapping is for odd days before the regular hunt.

Opening the sack which he usually carries on his back, the trapper draws out three dozen small traps no larger than a rat or mouse trap. Some of these he places across the runways without any bait; for the musk-rat must pass this way. Some he smears with strong-smelling pomatum. Some he baits with carrot or apple. Others he does not bait at all, simply laying them on old logs where he knows the owlets roost by day. But each of the traps—bait or no bait—he attaches to a stake driven into the water so that the prisoner will be held under when he plunges to escape till he is drowned. Otherwise, he would gnaw his foot free of the trap and disappear in a burrow.

If the marsh is large, there will be more than one musk-rat colony. Having exhausted his traps on the first, the trapper lies in wait at the second. When the moon comes up over the water, there is a great splashing about the musk-rat nests; for autumn is the time for house-building and the musk-rats work at night. If the trapper is an Eastern man, he will wade in as they do in New Jersey; but if he is a type of the Western hunter, he lies on the log among the rushes, popping a shot at every head that appears in the moonlit water. His dog swims and dives for the quarry. By the time the stupid little musk-rats have taken alarm and hidden, the man has twenty or thirty on the bank. Going home, he empties and resets the traps.

Thirty marten traps that yield six martens do well. Thirty musk-rat traps are expected to give thirty musk-rats. Add to that the twenty shot, and what does the day's work represent? Here are thirty skins of a coarse light reddish hair, such as lines the poor man's overcoat. These will sell for from 7 to 15 cents each. They may go roughly for $3 at the fur post. Here are ten of the deeper brown shades, with long soft fur that lines a lady's cloak. They are fine enough to pass for mink with a little dyeing, or imitation seal if they are properly plucked. These will bring 25 or 30 cents—say $2.50 in all. But here are ten skins, deep, silky, almost black, for which a Russian officer will pay high prices, skins that will go to England, and from England to Paris, and from Paris to St. Petersburg with accelerating cost mark till the Russian grandee is paying $1 or more for each pelt. The trapper will ask 30, 40, 50 cents for these, making perhaps $3.50 in all. Then this idle fellow's day has totaled up to $9, not a

bad day's work, considering he did not go to the university for ten years to learn his craft, did not know what wear and tear and drive meant as he worked, did not spend more than a few cents' worth of shot. But for his musk-rat-pelts the man will not get $9 in coin unless he lives very near the great fur markets. He will get powder and clothing and food and tobacco whose first cost has been increased a hundredfold by ship rates and railroad rates, by keel-boat freight and pack-horse expenses and *portage* charges past countless rapids. But he will get all that he needs, all that he wants, all that his labour is worth, this "lazy vagabond" who spends half his time idling in the sun. Of how many other men can that be said?

But what of the ruthless slaughter among the little musk-rats? Does humanity not revolt at the thought? Is this trapping not after all brutal butchery?

Animal kindliness—if such a thing exists among musk-rats—could hardly protest against the slaughter, seeing the musk-rats themselves wage as ruthless a war against water-worm and owlet as man wages against musk-rats. It is the old question, should animal life be sacrificed to preserve human life? To that question there is only one answer. Linings for coats are more important life-savers than all the humane societies of the world put together. It is probable that the first thing the prehistoric man did to preserve his own life when he realized himself was to slay some destructive animal and appropriate its coat.

II

Sikak the Skunk

Sikak the skunk it is who supplies the best imitations of sable. But cleanse the fur never so well, on a damp day it still emits the heavy sickening odour that betrays its real nature. That odour is sikak's invincible defence against the white trapper. The hunter may follow the little four-abreast galloping footprints that lead to a hole among stones or to rotten logs, but long before he has reached the nesting-place of his quarry comes a stench against which white blood is powerless. Or the trapper may find an unexpected visitor in one of the pens which he has dug for other animals—a little black creature the shape of a squirrel and the size of a cat with white stripings down his back and a bushy tail. It is then a case of a quick deadly shot, or the man will be put to rout by an odour that will pollute the air for miles around and drive him off that section of the hunting-field. The cuttlefish is the only other creature that possesses as powerful means of defence of a similar nature, one drop of the inky fluid which it throws out to hide it from pursuers burning the fisherman's eyes like scalding acid. As far as white trappers are concerned, sikak is only taken by the chance shots of idle days. Yet the Indian hunts the skunk apparently utterly oblivious of the smell. Traps, poison, deadfalls, pens are the Indian weapons against the skunk; and a Cree will deliberately skin and stretch a pelt in an atmosphere that is blue with what is poison to the white man.

The only case I ever knew of white trappers hunting the skunk was of three men on the North Sas-

katchewan. One was an Englishman who had been long in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company and knew all the animals of the north. The second was the guide, a French-Canadian, and the third a Sandy, fresh "frae oot the land o' heather." The men were wakened one night by the noise of some animal scrambling through the window into their cabin and rummaging in the dark among the provisions. The Frenchman sprang for a light and Sandy got hold of his gun.

"Losh, mon, it's a wee bit beastie a' strip't black and white wi' a tail like a so'dier's cocade!"

That information brought the Englishman to his feet howling, "Don't shoot it! Don't shoot it! Leave that thing alone, I tell you!"

But Sandy being a true son of Scotia with a Presbyterian love of argument wished to debate the question.

"An' what for wu'd a leave it eating a' the oatmeal? I'll no leave it rampagin' th' eatables—I wull be pokin' it oot!—shoo!—shoo!"

At that the Frenchman flung down the light and bolted for the door, followed by the English trader cursing between set teeth that before "that blundering blockhead had argued the matter" something would happen.

Something did happen.

Sandy came through the door with such precipitate haste that the topmost beam brought his head a mighty thwack, roaring out at the top of his voice that the deil was after him for a' the sins that iver he had committed since he was born.

III

Wenusk the Badger

Badger, too, is one of the furs taken by the trapper on idle days. East of St. Paul and Winnipeg, the fur is comparatively unknown, or if known, so badly prepared that it is scarcely recognisable for badger. This is probably owing to differences in climate. Badger in its perfect state is a long soft fur, resembling wood marten, with deep overhairs almost the length of one's hand and as dark as marten, with underhairs as thick and soft and yielding as swan's-down, shading in colour from fawn to grayish white. East of the Mississippi, there is too much damp in the atmosphere for such a long soft fur. Consequently specimens of badger seen in the East must either be sheared of the long overhairs or left to mat and tangle on the first rainy day. In New York, Quebec, Montreal, and Toronto—places where the finest furs should be on sale if anywhere—I have again and again asked for badger, only to be shown a dull matted short fawnish fur not much superior to cheap dyed furs. It is not surprising there is no demand for such a fur and Eastern dealers have stopped ordering it. In the North-West the most common mist during the winter is a frost mist that is more a snow than a rain, so there is little injury to furs from moisture. Here the badger is prime, long, thick, and silky, almost as attractive as ermine if only it were enhanced by as high a price. Whether badger will ever grow in favour like musk-rat or 'coon, and play an important part in the returns of the fur exporters, is doubtful. The world takes its fashions from European capitals; and European capi-

tals are too damp for badger to be in fashion with them. Certainly, with the private dealers of the North and West, badger is yearly becoming more important.

Like the musk-rat, badger is prime in the autumn. Wherever the hunting-grounds of the animals are, there will the hunting-grounds of the trapper be. Badgers run most where gophers sit sunning themselves on the clay mounds, ready to bolt down to their subterranean burrows on the first approach of an enemy. Eternal enemies these two are, gopher and badger, though they both live in ground holes, nest their lairs with grasses, run all summer and sleep all winter, and alike prey on the creatures smaller than themselves—mice, moles, and birds. The gopher, or ground squirrel, is smaller than the wood squirrel, while the badger is larger than a Manx cat, with a shape that varies according to the exigencies of the situation. Normally, he is a flattish, fawn-coloured beast, with a turtle-shaped body, little round head, and small legs with unusually strong claws. Ride after the badger across the prairie and he stretches out in long, lithe shape, resembling a baby cougar, turning at every pace or two to snap at your horse, then off again at a hulking scramble of astonishing speed. Pour water down his burrow to compel him to come up or down, and he swells out his body, completely filling the passage, so that his head, which is downward, is in dry air, while his hind quarters alone are in the water. In captivity the badger is a business-like little body, with very sharp teeth, of which his keeper must beware, and some of the tricks of the skunk, but inclined, on the whole, to mind his affairs if you will mind yours.

Once a day regularly every afternoon out of his lair he emerges for the most comical sorts of athletic exercises. Hour after hour he will trot diagonally—because that gives him the longest run—from corner to corner of his pen, rearing up on his hind legs as he reaches one corner, rubbing the back of his head, then down again and across to the other corner, where he repeats the performance. There can be no reason for the badger doing this, unless it was his habit in the wilds when he trotted about leaving dumb signs on mud banks and brushwood by which others of his kind might know where to find him at stated times.

Sunset is the time when he is almost sure to be among the gopher burrows. In vain the saucy jay shrieks out a warning to the gophers. Of all the prairie creatures, they are the stupidest, the most beset with curiosity to know what that jay's shriek may mean. Sunning themselves in the last rays of daylight, the gophers perch on their hind legs to wait developments of what the jay announced. But the badger's fur and the gopher mounds are almost the same colour. He has pounced on some playful youngsters before the rest see him. Then there is a wild scuttling down to the depths of the burrows. That, too, is vain; for the badger begins ripping up the clay bank like a grisly, down—down—in pursuit, two, three, five feet, even twelve.

Then is seen one of the most curious freaks in all the animal life of the prairie. The underground galleries of the gophers connect and lead up to different exits. As the furious badger comes closer and closer on the cowering gophers, the little cowards lose heart, dart up the galleries to open doors, and try to escape

through the grass of the prairie. But no sooner is the badger hard at work than a gray form seems to rise out of the earth, a coyote who had been slinking to the rear all the while; and as the terrified gophers scurry here, scurry there, coyote's white teeth snap!—snap! He is here—there—everywhere—pouncing—jumping—having the fun of his life, gobbling gophers as cats catch mice. Down in the bottom of the burrow, the badger may get half a dozen poor cooped huddling prisoners; but the coyote up on the prairie has devoured a whole colony.

Do these two, badger and coyote, consciously hunt together? Some old trappers vow they do—others just as vehemently that they don't. The fact remains that wherever the badger goes gopher-hunting on an unsettled prairie, there the coyote skulks reaping reward of all the badger's work. The coincidence is no stranger than the well-known fact that sword-fish and thrasher—two different fish—always league together to attack the whale.

One thing only can save the gopher colony, and that is the gun barrel across yon earth mound where a trapper lies in wait for the coming of the badger.

IV

The 'Coon

Sir Alexander MacKenzie reported that in 1798 the North-West Company sent out only 100 raccoon from the fur country. Last year the city of St. Paul alone cured 115,000 'coon-skins. What brought about the change? Simply an appreciation of the qualities of 'coon, which combines the greatest warmth with

the lightest weight and is especially adapted for a cold climate and constant wear. What was said of badger applies with greater force to 'coon. The 'coon in the East is associated in one's mind with cabbies, in the West with fashionably dressed men and women. And there is just as wide a difference in the quality of the fur as in the quality of the people. The cabbies' 'coon coat is a rough yellow fur with red stripes. The Westerner's 'coon is a silky brown fur with black stripes. One represents the fall hunt of men and boys round hollow logs, the other the midwinter hunt of a professional trapper in the Far North. A dog usually bays the 'coon out of hiding in the East. Tiny tracks, like a child's hand, tell the Northern hunter where to set his traps.

Wahboos the rabbit, musquash the musk-rat, sikak the skunk, wenusk the badger, and the common 'coon—these are the little chaps whose hunt fills the idle days of the trapper's busy life. At night, before the rough stone hearth which he has built in his cabin, he is still busy by fire-light preparing their pelts. Each skin must be stretched and cured. Turning the skin fur side in, the trapper pushes into the pelt a wedge-shaped slab of spliced cedar. Into the splice he shoves another wedge of wood which he hammers in, each blow widening the space and stretching the skin. All pelts are stretched fur in but the fox. Tacking the stretched skin on a flat board, the trapper hangs it to dry till he carries all to the fort; unless, indeed, he should need a garment for himself—cap, coat, or gantlets—in which case he takes out a square needle and passes his evenings like a tailor, sewing.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RARE FURS—HOW THE TRAPPER TAKES SAKWASEW THE MINK, NEKIK THE OTTER, WUCHAK THE FISHER, AND WAPISTAN THE MARTEN

I

Sakwasew the Mink

THERE are other little chaps with more valuable fur than musquash, whose skin seldom attains higher honour than inside linings, and wahboos, whose snowy coat is put to the indignity of imitating ermine with a dotting of black cat for the ermine's jet tip. There are mink and otter and fisher and fox and ermine and sable, all little fellows with pelts worth their weight in coin of the realm.

On one of those idle days when the trapper seems to be doing nothing but lying on his back in the sun, he has witnessed a curious, but common, battle in pantomime between bird and beast. A prairie-hawk circles and drops, lifts and wheels again with monotonous silent persistence above the swamp. What quarry does he seek, this lawless forager of the upper airs still hunting a hidden nook of the low prairie? If he were out purely for exercise, like the little badger when it goes rubbing the back of its head from post to post, there would be a buzzing of wings and shrill lonely callings to an unseen mate.

But the circling hawk is as silent as the very personification of death. Apparently he can't make up his mind for the death-drop on some rat or frog down there in the swamp. The trapper notices that the hawk keeps circling directly above the place where the waters of the swamp tumble from the ravine in a small cataract to join a lower river. He knows, too, from the rich orange of the plumage that the hawk is young. An older fellow would not be advertising his intentions in this fashion. Besides, an older hawk would have russet-gray feathering. Is the rascally young hawk meditating a clutch of talons round some of the unsuspecting trout that usually frequent the quiet pools below a waterfall. Or does he aim at bigger game? A young hawk is bold with the courage that has not yet learned the wisdom of caution. That is why there are so many more of the brilliant young red hawks in our museums than old grizzled gray veterans whose craft circumvents the specimen hunter's cunning. Now the trapper comes to have as keen a sense of *feel* for all the creatures of the wilds as the creatures of the wilds have for man; so he shifts his position that he may find what is attracting the hawk.

Down on the pebbled beach below the waterfalls lies an auburn bundle of fur, about the size of a very long, slim, short-legged cat, still as a stone—some member of the weasel family gorged torpid with fish, stretched out full length to sleep in the sun. To sleep, ah, yes, and as the Danish prince said, "perchance to dream"; for all the little fellows of river and prairie take good care never to sleep where they are exposed to their countless enemies. This sleep of the weasel arouses the

man's suspicion. The trapper draws out his field-glass. The sleeper is a mink, and its sleep is a sham with beady, red eyes blinking a deal too lively for real death. Why does it lie on its back rigid and straight as if it were dead with all four tiny paws clutched out stiff? The trapper scans the surface of the swamp to see if some foolish musk-rat is swimming dangerously near the sleeping mink.

Presently the hawk circles lower—lower!—Drop straight as a stone! Its talons are almost in the mink's body, when of a sudden the sleeper awakens—awakens—with a leap of the four stiff little feet and a darting spear-thrust of snapping teeth deep in the neck of the hawk! At first the hawk rises tearing furiously at the clinging mink with its claws. The wings sag. Down bird and beast fall. Over they roll on the sandy beach, hawk and mink, over and over with a thrashing of the hawk's wings to beat the treacherous little vampire off. Now the blood-sucker is on top clutching—clutching! Now the bird flounders up craning his neck from the death-grip. Then the hawk falls on his back. His wings are prone. They cease to flutter.

Running to the bank the trapper is surprised to see the little blood-sucker making off with the prey instead of deserting it as all creatures akin to the weasel family usually do. That means a family of mink somewhere near, to be given their first lesson in bird-hunting, in mink-hawking by the body of this poor, dead, foolish gyrfalcon.

By a red mark here, by a feather there, crushed grass as of something dragged, a little webbed foot-print on the wet clay, a tiny marking of double dots where the feet have crossed a dry stone, the trapper

slowly takes up the trail of the mink. Mink are not prime till the late fall. Then the reddish fur assumes the shades of the russet grasses where they run until the white of winter covers the land. Then—as if nature were to exact avengement for all the red slaughter the mink has wrought during the rest of the year—his coat becomes dark brown, almost black, the very shade that renders him most conspicuous above snow to all the enemies of the mink world. But while the trapper has no intention of destroying what would be worthless now but will be valuable in the winter, it is not every day that even a trapper has a chance to trail a mink back to its nest and see the young family.

But suddenly the trail stops. Here is a sandy patch with some tumbled stones under a tangle of grasses and a rivulet not a foot away. Ah—there it is—a nest or lair, a tiny hole almost hidden by the rushes! But the nest seems empty. Fast as the trapper has come, the mink came faster and hid her family. To one side, the hawk had been dropped among the rushes. The man pokes a stick in the lair but finds nothing. Putting in his hand, he is dragging out bones, feathers, skeleton musk-rats, putrid frogs, promiscuous remnants of other quarries brought to the burrow by the mink, when a little cattish *s-p-i-t!* almost touches his hand. His palm closes over something warm, squirming, smaller than a kitten with very downy fur, on a soft mouse-like skin, eyes that are still blind and a tiny mouth that neither meows nor squeaks, just *spits!—spits!—spits!*—in impotent viperish fury. All the other minklets, the mother had succeeded in hiding under the grasses, but somehow this one had been left. Will he take it home and try

the experiment of rearing a young mink with a family of kittens?

The trapper calls to mind other experiments. There was the little beaver that chewed up his canoe and gnawed a hole of escape through the door. There were the three little bob-cats left in the woods behind his cabin last year when he refrained from setting out traps and tied up his dog to see if he could not catch the whole family, mother and kittens, for an Eastern museum. Furtively at first, the mother had come to feed her kittens. Then the man had put out rugs to keep the kittens warm and lain in wait for the mother; but no sooner did she see her offspring comfortably cared for, than she deserted them entirely, evidently acting on the proverb that the most gracious enemy is the most dangerous, or else deciding that the kits were so well off that she was not needed. Adopting the three little wild-cats, the trapper had reared them past blind-eyes, past colic and dumps and all the youthful ills to which live kittens are heirs, when trouble began. The longing for the wilds came. Even catnip green and senna tea boiled can't cure that. So keenly did the gipsy longing come to one little bob that he perished escaping to the woods by way of the chimney flue. The second little bob succeeded in escaping through a parchment stop-gap that served the trapper as a window. And the third bobby dealt such an ill-tempered gash to the dog's nose that the combat ended in instant death for the cat.

Thinking over these experiments, the trapper wisely puts the mink back in the nest with words which it would have been well for that litle ball of down to have understood. He told it he would come back for it next

winter and to be sure to have its best black coat on. For the little first-year minks wear dark coats, almost as fine as Russian sable. Yes—he reflects, poking it back to the hole and retreating quickly so that the mother will return—better leave it till the winter; for wasn't it Koot who put a mink among his kittens, only to have the little viper set on them with tooth and claw as soon as its eyes opened? Also mink are bad neighbours to a poultry-yard. Forty chickens in a single night will the little mink destroy, not for food but —to quote man's words—for the zest of the sport. The mink, you must remember, like other pot-hunters, can boast of a big bag.

The trapper did come back next fall. It was when he was ranging all the swamp-lands for beaver-dams. Swamp lands often mean beaver-dams; and trappers always note what stops the current of a sluggish stream. Frequently it is a beaver colony built across a valley in the mountains, or stopping up the outlet of a slough. The trapper was sleeping under his canoe on the banks of the river where the swamp tumbled out from the ravine. Before retiring to what was a boat by day and a bed by night, he had set out a fish net and some loose lines—which the flow of the current would keep in motion—below the waterfall. Carelessly, next day, he threw the fish-heads among the stones. The second morning he found such a multitude of little tracks dotting the rime of the hoar frost that he erected a tent back from the waterfalls, and decided to stay trapping there till the winter. The fish-heads were no longer thrown away. They were left among the stones in small steel-traps weighted with other stones, or attached to a loose stick that

would impede flight. And if the poor gyrfalcon could have seen the mink held by the jaws of a steel-trap, hissing, snarling, breaking its teeth on the iron, spitting out all the rage of its wicked nature, the bird would have been avenged.

And as winter deepened, the quality of minks taken from the traps became darker, silkier, crisper, almost brown black in some of the young, but for light fur on the under lip. The Indians say that sakwasew the mink would sell his family for a fish, and as long as fish lay among the stones, the trapper gathered his harvest of fur: reddish mink that would be made into little neck ruffs and collar pieces, reddish brown mink that would be sewed into costly coats and cloaks, rare brownish black mink that would be put into the beautiful flat scarf collars almost as costly as a full coat. And so the mink-hunt went on merrily for the man till the midwinter lull came at Christmas. For that year the mink-hunt was over.

II

Nekik the Otter

Sakwasew was not the only fisher at the pool below the falls. On one of those idle days when the trapper sat lazily by the river side, a round head slightly sunburned from black to russet had bobbled up to the surface of the water, peered sharply at the man sitting so still, paddled little flipper-like feet about, then ducked down again. Motionless as the mossed log under him sits the man; and in a moment up comes the little black head again, round as a golf ball, about the size of a very large cat, followed by three other little bobbing

heads—a mother otter teaching her babies to dive and swim and duck from the river surface to the burrows below the water along the river bank. Perhaps the trapper has found a dead fish along this very bank with only the choice portions of the body eaten—a sure sign that nekik the otter, the little epicure of the water world, has been fishing at this river.

With a scarcely perceptible motion, the man turns his head to watch the swimmers. Instantly, down they plunge, mother and babies, to come to the surface again higher up-stream, evidently working up-current like the beaver in spring for a glorious frolic in the cold clear waters of the upper sources. At one place on the sandy beach they all wade ashore. The man utters a slight "Hiss!" Away they scamper, the foolish youngsters, landward instead of to the safe water as the hesitating mother would have them do, all the little feet scrambling over the sand with the funny short steps of a Chinese lady in tight boots. Maternal care proves stronger than fear. The frightened mother follows the young otter and will no doubt read them a sound lecture on land dangers when she has rounded them back to the safe water higher up-stream.

Of all wild creatures, none is so crafty in concealing its lairs as the otter. Where did this family come from? They had not been swimming up-stream; for the man had been watching on the river bank long before they appeared on the surface. Stripping, the trapper dives in mid-stream, then half wades, half swims along the steepest bank, running his arm against the clay cliff to find a burrow. On land he could not do this at the lair of the otter; for the smell of the

man-touch would be left on his trail, and the otter, keener of scent and fear than the mink, would take alarm. But for the same reason that the river is the safest refuge for the otter, it is the surest hunting for the man—water does not keep the scent of a trail. So the man runs his arm along the bank. The river is the surest hunting for the man, but not the safest. If an old male were in the bank burrow now, or happened to be emerging from grass-lined subterranean air chambers above the bank gallery, it might be serious enough for the exploring trapper. One bite of nekik the otter has crippled many an Indian. Knowing from the remnants of half-eaten fish and from the holes in the bank that he has found an otter runway, the man goes home as well satisfied as if he had done a good day's work.

And so that winter when he had camped below the swamp for the mink-hunt, the trapper was not surprised one morning to find a half-eaten fish on the river bank. Sakwasew the mink takes good care to leave no remnants of his greedy meal. What he cannot eat he caches. Even if he has strangled a dozen water-rats in one hunt, they will be dragged in a heap and covered. The half-eaten fish left exposed is not mink's work. Otter has been here and otter will come back; for as the frost hardens, only those pools below the falls keep free from ice. No use setting traps with fish-heads as long as fresh fish are to be had for the taking. Besides, the man has done nothing to conceal his tracks; and each morning the half-eaten fish lie farther off the line of the man-trail.

By-and-bye the man notices that no more half-eaten fish are on his side of the river. Little tracks of

webbed feet furrowing a deep rut in the soft snow of the frozen river tell that nekik has taken alarm and is fishing from the other side. And when Christmas comes with a dwindling of the mink-hunt, the man, too, crosses to the other side. Here he finds that the otter tracks have worn a path that is almost a toboggan slide down the crusted snow bank to the iced edge of the pool. By this time nekik's pelt is prime, almost black, and as glossy as floss. By this time, too, the fish are scarce and the epicure has become ravenous as a pauper. One night when the trapper was reconnoitring the fish hole, he had approached the snow bank so noiselessly that he came on a whole colony of otters without their knowledge of his presence. Down the snow bank they tumbled, head-first, tail-first, slithering through the snow with their little paws braced, rolling down on their backs like lads upset from a toboggan, otter after otter, till the man learned that the little beasts were not fishing at all, but coasting the snow bank like youngsters on a night frolic. No sooner did one reach the bottom than up he scampered to repeat the fun; and sometimes two or three went down in a rolling bunch mixed up at the foot of a slide as badly as a couple of toboggans that were unpremeditatedly changing their occupants. Bears wrestle. The kittens of all the cat tribe play hide and seek. Little badger finds it fun to run round rubbing the back of his head on things; and here was nekik the otter at the favourite amusement of his kind—coasting down a snow bank.

If the trapper were an Indian, he would lie in wait at the landing-place and spear the otter as they came from the water. But the white man's craft is deeper.

He does not wish to frighten the otter till the last has been taken. Coming to the slide by day, he baits a steel-trap with fish and buries it in the snow just where the otter will be coming down the hill or up from the pool. Perhaps he places a dozen such traps around the hole with nothing visible but the frozen fish lying on the surface. If he sets his traps during a snow-fall, so much the better. His own tracks will be obliterated and the otter's nose will discover the fish. Then he takes a bag filled with some substance of animal odour, pomatum, fresh meat, pork, or he may use the flesh side of a fresh deer-hide. This he drags over the snow where he has stepped. He may even use a fresh hide to handle the traps, as a waiter uses a serviette to pass plates. There must be no man-smell, no man-track near the otter traps.

While the mink-hunt is fairly over by midwinter, otter-trapping lasts from October to May. The value of all rare furs, mink, otter, marten, ermine, varies with two things: (1) the latitude of the hunting-field; (2) the season of the hunt. For instance, ask a trapper of Minnesota or Lake Superior what he thinks of the ermine, and he will tell you that it is a miserable sort of weasel of a dirty drab brown not worth twenty-five cents a skin. Ask a trapper of the North Saskatchewan what he thinks of ermine; and he will tell you it is a pretty little whitish creature good for fur if trapped late enough in the winter and always useful as a *lining*. But ask a trapper of the Arctic about the ermine, and he describes it as the finest fur that is taken except the silver fox, white and soft as swan's-down, with a tail-tip like black onyx. This difference in the fur of the animal explains the wide variety of

prices paid. Ermine not worth twenty-five cents in Wisconsin might be worth ten times as much on the Saskatchewan.

So it is with the otter. All trapped between latitude thirty-five and sixty is good fur; and the best is that taken toward the end of winter when scarcely a russet hair should be found in the long over-fur of nekik's coat.

III

Wuchak the Fisher, or Pekan

Wherever the waste of fish or deer is thrown, there will be found lines of double tracks not so large as the wild-cat's, not so small as the otter's, and without the same webbing as the mink's. This is wuchak the fisher, or pekan, commonly called "the black cat"—who, in spite of his fishy name, hates water as cats hate it. And the tracks are double because pekan travel in pairs. He is found along the banks of streams because he preys on fish and fisher, on mink and otter and musk-rat, on frogs and birds and creatures that come to drink. He is, after all, a very greedy fellow, not at all particular about his diet, and, like all gluttons, easily snared. While mink and otter are about, the trapper will waste no steel-traps on pekan. A deadfall will act just as effectively; but there is one point requiring care. Pekan has a sharp nose. It is his nose that brings him to all carrion just as surely as hawks come to pick dead bones. But that same nose will tell him of man's presence. So when the trapper has built his pen of logs so that the front log or deadfall will crush down on the back of an intruder tugging at the bait inside, he overlays all with

leaves and brush to quiet the pekan's suspicions. Besides, the pekan has many tricks akin to the wolverine. He is an inveterate thief. There is a well-known instance of Hudson's Bay trappers having a line of one hundred and fifty marten traps stretching for fifty miles robbed of their bait by pekan. The men shortened the line to thirty miles and for six times in succession did pekan destroy the traps. Then the men set themselves to trap the robber. He will rifle a deadfall from the slanting back roof where there is no danger; so the trapper overlays the back with heavy brush.

Pekan do not yield a rare fur; but they are always at run where the trapper is hunting the rare furs, and for that reason are usually snared at the same time as mink and otter.

IV

Wapistan the Marten

When Koot went blind on his way home from the rabbit-hunt, he had intended to set out for the pine woods. Though blizzards still howl over the prairie, by March the warm sun of midday has set the sap of the forests stirring and all the woodland life awakens from its long winter sleep. Cougar and lynx and bear rove through the forest ravenous with spring hunger. Otter, too, may be found where the ice mounds of a waterfall are beginning to thaw. But it is not any of these that the trapper seeks. If they cross his path, good—they, too, will swell his account at the fur post. It is another of the little chaps that he seeks, a little, long, low-set animal whose fur is now glistening bright on the deep dark overhairs, soft as down in the thick fawn underhairs, wapistan the marten.

When the forest begins to stir with the coming of spring, wapistan stirs too, crawling out from the hollow of some rotten pine log, restless with the same blood-thirst that set the little mink playing his tricks on the hawk. And yet the marten is not such a little viper as the mink. Wapistan will eat leaves and nuts and roots if he can get vegetable food, but failing these, that ravenous spring hunger of his must be appeased with something else. And out he goes from his log hole hunger-bold as the biggest of all other spring ravagers. That boldness gives the trapper his chance at the very time when wapistan's fur is best. All winter the trapper may have taken marten; but the end of winter is the time when wapistan wanders freely from cover. Thus the trapper's calendar would have months of musk-rat first, then beaver and mink and pekan and bear and fox and ermine and rabbit and lynx and marten, with a long idle midsummer space when he goes to the fort for the year's provisions and gathers the lore of his craft.

Wapistan is not hard to track. Being much longer and heavier than a cat with very short legs and small feet, his body almost drags the ground and his tracks sink deep, clear, and sharp. His feet are smaller than otter's and mink's, but easily distinguishable from those two fishers. The water animal leaves a spreading foot-print, the mark of the webbed toes without any fur on the padding of the toe-balls. The land animal of the same size has clear cut, narrower, heavier marks. By March, these dotting foot-tracks thread the snow everywhere.

Coming on marten tracks at a pine log, the trapper sends in his dog or prods with a stick. Finding

nothing, he baits a steel-trap with pomatum, covers it deftly with snow, drags the decoy skin about to conceal his own tracks, and goes away in the hope that the marten will come back to this log to guzzle on his prey and sleep.

If the track is much frequented, or the forest overrun with marten tracks, the trapper builds deadfalls, many of them running from tree to tree for miles through the forest in a circle whose circuit brings him back to his cabin. Remnants of these log traps may be seen through all parts of the Rocky Mountain forests. Thirty to forty traps are considered a day's work for one man, six or ten marten all that he expects to take in one round; but when marten are plentiful, the unused traps of to-day may bring a prize to-morrow.

The Indian trapper would use still another kind of trap. Where the tracks are plainly frequently used runways to watering-places or lair in hollow tree, the Indian digs a pit across the marten's trail. On this he spreads brush in such roof fashion that though the marten is a good climber, if once he falls in, it is almost impossible for him to scramble out. If a poor cackling grouse or "fool-hen" be thrust into the pit, the Indian is almost sure to find a prisoner. This seems to the white man a barbarous kind of trapping; but the poor "fool-hen," hunted by all the creatures of the forest, never seems to learn wisdom, but invites disaster by popping out of the brush to stare at every living thing that passes. If she did not fall a victim in the pit, she certainly would to her own curiosity above ground. To the steel-trap the hunter attaches a piece of log to entangle the prisoner's flight as he rushes through the underbush. Once caught in the

steel jaws, little wapistan must wait—wait for what? For the same thing that comes to the poor "fool-hen" when wapistan goes crashing through the brush after her; for the same thing that comes to the baby squirrels when wapistan climbs a tree to rob the squirrel's nest, eat the young, and live in the rifled house; for the same thing that comes to the hoary marmot whistling his spring tune just outside his rocky den when wapistan, who has climbed up, pounces down from above. Little death-dealer he has been all his life; and now death comes to him for a nobler cause than the stuffing of a greedy maw—for the clothing of a creature nobler than himself—man.

The otter can protect himself by diving, even diving under snow. The mink has craft to hide himself under leaves so that the sharpest eyes cannot detect him. Both mink and otter furs have very little of that animal smell which enables the foragers to follow their trail. What gift has wapistan, the marten, to protect himself against all the powers that prey? His strength and his wisdom lie in the little stubby feet. These can climb.

A trapper's dog had stumbled on a marten in a stump hole. A snap of the marten's teeth sent the dog back with a jump. Wapistan will hang on to the nose of a dog to the death; and trappers' dogs grow cautious. Before the dog gathered courage to make another rush, the marten escaped by a rear knot-hole, getting the start of his enemy by fifty yards. Off they raced, the dog spending himself in fury, the marten keeping under the thorny brush where his enemy could not follow, then across open snow where the dog gained, then into the pine woods where the trail ended on the

snow. Where had the fugitive gone? When the man came up, he first searched for log holes. There were none. Then he lifted some of the rocks. There was no trace of wapistan. But the dog kept baying a special tree, a blasted trunk, bare as a mast pole and seemingly impossible for any animal but a squirrel to climb. Knowing the trick by which creatures like the bob-cat can flatten their body into a resemblance of a tree trunk, the trapper searched carefully all round the bare trunk. It was not till many months afterward when a wind storm had broken the tree that he discovered the upper part had been hollow. Into this eerie nook the pursued marten had scrambled and waited in safety till dog and man retired.

In one of his traps the man finds a peculiarly short specimen of the marten. In the vernacular of the craft this marten's bushy tail will not reach as far back as his hind legs can stretch. Widely different from the mink's scarcely visible ears, this fellow's ears are sharply upright, keenly alert. He is like a fox, where the mink resembles a furred serpent. Marten moves, springs, jumps like an animal. Mink glides like a snake. Marten has the strong neck of an animal fighter. Mink has the long, thin, twisting neck which reptiles need to give them striking power for their fangs. Mink's under lip has a mere rim of white or yellow. Marten's breast is patched sulphur. But this short marten with a tail shorter than other marten differs from his kind as to fur. Both mink and marten fur are reddish brown; but this short marten's fur is almost black, of great depth, of great thickness, and of three qualities: (1) There are the long dark overhairs the same as the ordinary marten, only darker, thicker,

deeper; (2) there is the soft under fur of the ordinary marten, usually fawn, in this fellow deep brown; (3) there is the skin fur resembling chicken-down, of which this little marten has such a wealth—to use a technical expression—you cannot find his scalp. Without going into the old quarrel about species, when a marten has these peculiarities, he is known to the trapper as sable.

Whether he is the American counterpart to the Russia sable is a disputed point. Whether his superior qualities are owing to age, climate, species, it is enough for the trapper to know that short, dark marten yields the trade—sable.

CHAPTER XVIII

UNDER THE NORTH STAR—WHERE FOX AND ERMINE RUN

I

Of Foxes, Many and Various—Red, Cross, Silver, Black, Prairie, Kit or Swift, Arctic, Blue, and Gray

WHEREVER grouse and rabbit abound, there will foxes run and there will the hunter set steel-traps. But however beautiful a fox-skin may be as a specimen, it has value as a fur only when it belongs to one of three varieties—Arctic, black, and silver. Other foxes—red, cross, prairie, swift, and gray—the trapper will take when they cross his path and sell them in the gross at the fur post, as he used to barter buffalo-hides. But the hunter who traps the fox for its own sake, and not as an uncalculated extra to the mink-hunt or the beaver total, must go to the Far North, to the land of winter night and midnight sun, to obtain the best fox-skins.

It matters not to the trapper that the little kit fox or swift at run among the hills between the Missouri and Saskatchewan is the most shapely of all the fox kind, with as finely pointed a nose as a spitz dog, ears alert as a terrier's and a brush, more like a lady's gray feather boa than fur, curled round his dainty toes. Little kit's fur is a grizzled gray shading to mottled

fawn. The hairs are coarse, horsey, indistinctly marked, and the fur is of small value to the trader; so dainty little swift, who looks as if nature made him for a pet dog instead of a fox, is slighted by the hunter, unless kit persists in tempting a trap. Rufus the red fellow, with his grizzled gray head and black ears and whitish throat and flaunting purplish tinges down his sides like a prince royal, may make a handsome mat; but as a fur he is of little worth. His cousin with the black fore feet, the prairie fox, who is the largest and strongest and scientifically finest of all his kind, has more value as a fur. The colour of the prairie fox shades rather to pale ochre and yellow that the nondescript grizzled gray that is of so little value as a fur. Of the silver-gray fox little need be said. He lives too far south—California and Texas and Mexico—to acquire either energy or gloss. He is the one indolent member of the fox tribe, and his fur lacks the sheen that only winter cold can give. The value of the cross fox depends on the markings that give him his name. If the bands, running diagonally over his shoulders in the shape of a cross, shade to grayish blue he is a prize, if to reddish russet, he is only a curiosity.

The Arctic and black and silver foxes have the pelts that at their worst equal the other rare furs, at their best exceed the value of all other furs by so much that the lucky trapper who takes a silver fox has made his fortune. These, then, are the foxes that the trapper seeks and these are to be found only on the white wastes of the polar zone.

That brings up the question—what is a silver fox? Strange as it may seem, neither scientist nor hunter

can answer that question. Nor will study of all the park specimens in the world tell the secret, for the simple reason that only an Arctic climate can produce a silver fox; and parks are not established in the Arctics yet. It is quite plain that the prairie fox is in a class by himself. The uniformity of his size, his strength, his habits, his appearance, distinguish him from other foxes. It is quite plain that the little kit fox or swift is of a kind distinct from other foxes. His smallness, the shape of his bones, the cast of his face, the trick of sitting rather than lying, that wonderful big bushy soft tail of which a peacock might be vain—all differentiate him from other foxes. The same may be said of the Arctic fox with a pelt that is more like white wool than hairs of fur. He is much smaller than the red. His tail is bushier and larger than the swift, and like all Arctic creatures, he has the soles of his feet heavily furred. All this is plain and simple classification. But how about Mr. Blue Fox of the same size and habit as the white Arctic? Is he the Arctic fox in summer clothing? Yes, say some trappers; and they show their pelts of an Arctic fox taken in summer of a rusty white. But no, vow other trappers—that is impossible, for here are blue foxskins captured in the depths of midwinter with not a white hair among them. Look closely at the skins. The ears of one blue fox are long, perfect, unbitten by frost or foe—he was a young fellow; and he is blue. Here is another with ears almost worn to stubs by fights and many winters' frosts—he is an old fellow; and he, too, is blue. Well, then, the blue fox may sometimes be the white Arctic fox in summer dress; but the blue fox who is blue all the year round, varying

only in the shades of blue with the seasons, is certainly not the white Arctic fox.

The same difficulty besets distinction of silver fox from black. The old scientists classified these as one and the same creature. Trappers know better. So do the later scientists who almost agree with the unlearned trapper's verdict—there are as many species as there are foxes. Black fox is at its best in midwinter, deep, brilliantly glossy, soft as floss, and yet almost impenetrable—the very type of perfection of its kind. But with the coming of the tardy Arctic spring comes a change. The snows are barely melted in May when the sheen leaves the fur. By June, the black hairs are streaked with gray; and the black fox is a gray fox. Is it at some period of the transition that the black fox becomes a silver fox, with the gray hairs as sheeny as the black and each gray hair delicately tipped with black? That question, too, remains unanswered; for certainly the black fox trapped when in his gray summer coat is not the splendid silver fox of priceless value. Black fox turning to a dull gray of midsummer may not be silver fox; but what about gray fox turning to the beautiful glossy black of midwinter? Is that what makes silver fox? Is silver fox simply a fine specimen of black caught at the very period when he is blooming into his greatest beauty? The distinctive difference between gray fox and silver is that gray fox has gray hairs among hairs of other colour, while silver fox has silver hair tipped with glossiest black on a foundation of downy gray black.

Even greater confusion surrounds the origin of cross and red and gray. Trappers find all these different cubs in one burrow; but as the cubs grow, those

pronounced cross turn out to be red, or the red becomes cross; and what they become at maturity, that they remain, varying only with the seasons.* It takes many centuries to make one perfect rose. Is it the same with the silver fox? Is he a freak or a climax or the regular product of yearly climatic changes caught in the nick of time by some lucky trapper? Ask the scientist that question, and he theorizes. Ask the trapper, and he tells you if he could only catch enough silver foxes to study that question, he would quit trapping. In all the maze of ignorance and speculation, there is one anchored fact. While animals turn a grizzled gray with age, the fine gray coats are not caused by age. Young animals of the rarest furs—fox and ermine—are born in ashy colour that turns to gray while they are still in their first nest.

To say that silver fox is costly solely because it is rare is sheerest nonsense. It would be just as sensible to say that labradorite, which is rare, should be as costly as diamonds. It is the intrinsic beauty of the fur, as of the diamonds, that constitutes its first value. The facts that the taking of a silver fox is always pure luck, that the luck comes seldom, that the trapper must have travelled countless leagues by snow-shoe and dog train over the white wastes of the North, that trappers in polar regions are exposed to more dangers and hardships than elsewhere and that the fur must have been carried a long distance to market—add to the first high value of silver fox till it is not surprising that little pelts barely two feet long have sold for prices ranging from $500 to $5,000. For the

* That is, as far as trappers yet know.

trapper the way to the fortune of a silver fox is the same as the road to fortune for all other men—by the homely trail of every-day work. Cheers from the fort gates bid trappers setting out for far Northern fields God-speed. Long ago there would have been a firing of cannon when the Northern hunters left for their distant camping-grounds; but the cannon of Churchill lie rusting to-day and the hunters who go to the sub-Arctics and the Arctics no longer set out from Churchill on the bay, but from one of the little inland MacKenzie River posts. If the fine powdery snow-drifts are glossed with the ice of unbroken sun-glare, the runners strap iron crampets to their snow-shoes, and with a great jingling of the dog-bells, barking of the huskies, and yelling of the drivers, coast away for the leagueless levels of the desolate North. Frozen river-beds are the only path followed, for the high cliffs—almost like ramparts on the lower MacKenzie—shut off the drifting east winds that heap barricades of snow in one place and at another sweep the ground so clear that the sleighs pull heavy as stone. Does a husky fag? A flourish of whips and off the laggard scampers, keeping pace with the others in the traces, a pace that is set for forty miles a day with only one feeding time, nightfall when the sleighs are piled as a wind-break and the frozen fish are doled out to the ravenous dogs. Gun signals herald the hunter's approach to a chance camp; and no matter how small and mean the tepee, the door is always open for whatever visitor, the meat pot set simmering for hungry travellers. When the snow crust cuts the dogs' feet, buckskin shoes are tied on the huskies; and when an occasional dog fags entirely, he is turned adrift from the

traces to die. Relentless as death is Northern cold; and wherever these long midwinter journeys are made, gruesome traditions are current of hunter and husky.

I remember hearing of one old husky that fell hopelessly lame during the north trip. Often the drivers are utter brutes to their dogs, speaking in curses which they say is the only language a husky can understand, emphasized with the blows of a club. Too often, as well, the huskies are vicious curs ready to skulk or snap or bolt or fight, anything but work. But in this case the dog was an old reliable that kept the whole train in line, and the driver had such an affection for the veteran husky that when rheumatism crippled the dog's legs the man had not the heart to shoot such a faithful servant. The dog was turned loose from the traces and hobbled lamely behind the scampering teams. At last he fell behind altogether, but at night limped into camp whining his joy and asking dumbly for the usual fish. In the morning when the other teams set out, the old husky was powerless to follow. But he could still whine and wag his tail. He did both with all his might, so that when the departing driver looked back over his shoulder, he saw a pair of eyes pleading, a head with raised alert ears, shoulders straining to lift legs that refused to follow, and a bushy tail thwacking—thwacking—thwacking the snow!

"You ought to shoot him," advised one driver.

"You do it—you're a dead sure aim," returned the man who had owned the dog.

But the other drivers were already coasting over the white wastes. The owner looked at his sleighs as if wondering whether they would stand an additional

burden. Then probably reflecting that old age is not desirable for a suffering dog in a bitingly keen frost, he turned towards the husky with his hand in his belt. Thwack—thwack went the tail as much as to say: "Of course he wouldn't desert me after I've hauled his sleigh all my life! Thwack—thwack! I'd get up and jump all around him if I could; there isn't a dog-gone husky in all polar land with half as good a master as I have!"

The man stopped. Instead of going to the dog he ran back to his sleigh, loaded his arms full of frozen fish and threw them down before the dog. Then he put one caribou-skin under the old dog, spread another over him and ran away with his train while the husky was still guzzling. The fish had been poisoned to be thrown out to the wolves that so often pursue Northern dog trains.

Once a party of hunters crossing the Northern Rockies came on a dog train stark and stiff. Where was the master who had bidden them stand while he felt his way blindly through the white whirl of a blizzard for the lost path? In the middle of the last century, one of that famous family of fur traders, a MacKenzie, left Georgetown to go north to Red River in Canada. He never went back to Georgetown and he never reached Red River; but his coat was found fluttering from a tree, a death signal to attract the first passer-by, and the body of the lost trader was discovered not far off in the snow. Unless it is the year of the rabbit pest and the rabbit ravagers are bold with hunger, the pursuing wolves seldom give full chase. They skulk far to the rear of the dog trains, licking up the stains of the bleed-

ing feet, or hanging spectrally on the dim frosty horizon all night long. Hunger drives them on; but they seem to lack the courage to attack. I know of one case where the wolves followed the dog trains bringing out a trader's family from the North down the river-bed for nearly five hundred miles. What man hunter would follow so far?

The farther north the fox hunter goes, the shorter grow the days, till at last the sun, which has rolled across the south in a wheel of fire, dwindles to a disk, the disk to a rim—then no rim at all comes up, and it is midwinter night, night but not darkness. The white of endless unbroken snow, the glint of icy particles filling the air, the starlight brilliant as diamond points, the Aurora Borealis in curtains and shafts and billows of tenuous impalpable rose-coloured fire—all brighten the polar night so that the sun is unmissed. This is the region chiefly hunted by the Eskimo, with a few white men and Chippewyan half-breeds. The regular Northern hunters do not go as far as the Arctics, but choose their hunting-ground somewhere in the region of "little sticks," meaning the land where timber growth is succeeded by dwarf scrubs.

The hunting-ground is chosen always from the signs written across the white page of the snow. If there are claw-marks, bird signs of Northern grouse or white ptarmigan or snow-bunting, ermine will be plentiful; for the Northern birds with their clogged stockings of feet feathers have a habit of floundering under the powdery snow; and up through that powdery snow darts the snaky neck of stoat, the white weasel-hunter of birds. If there are the deep plunges of the white hare, lynx and fox and mink and marten and pekan

will be plentiful; for the poor white hare feeds all the creatures of the Northern wastes, man and beast. If there are little dainty tracks—oh, such dainty tracks that none but a high-stepping, clear-cut, clean-limbed, little thoroughbred could make them!—tracks of four toes and a thumb claw much shorter than the rest, with a padding of five basal foot-bones behind the toes, tracks that show a fluff on the snow as of furred foot-soles, tracks that go in clean, neat, clear long leaps and bounds—the hunter knows that he has found the signs of the Northern fox.

Here, then, he will camp for the winter. Camping in the Far North means something different from the hastily pitched tent of the prairie. The north wind blows biting, keen, unbroken in its sweep. The hunter must camp where that wind will not carry scent of his tent to the animal world. For his own sake, he must camp under shelter from that wind, behind a cairn of stones, below a cliff, in a ravine. Poles have been brought from the land of trees on the dog sleigh. These are put up, criss-crossed at top, and over them is laid, not the canvas tent, but a tent of skins, caribou, wolf, moose, at a sharp enough angle to let the snow slide off. Then snow is banked deep, completely round the tent. For fire, the Eskimo depends on whale-oil and animal grease. The white man or half-breed from the South hoards up chips and sticks. But mainly he depends on exercise and animal food for warmth. At night he sleeps in a fur bag. In the morning that bag is frozen stiff as boards by the moisture of his own breath. Need one ask why the rarest furs, which can only be produced by the coldest of climates, are so costly?

Having found the tracks of the fox, the hunter sets out his traps baited with fish or rabbit or a bird-head. If the snow be powdery enough, and the trapper keen in wild lore, he may even know what sort of a fox to expect. In the depths of midwinter, the white Arctic fox has a wool fur to his feet like a brahma chicken. This leaves its mark in the fluffy snow. A ravenous fellow he always is, this white fox of the hungry North, bold from ignorance of man, but hard to distinguish from the snow because of his spotless coat. The blue fox being slightly smaller than the full-grown Arctic, lopes along with shorter leaps by which the trapper may know the quarry; but the blue fox is just as hard to distinguish from the snow as his white brother. The gray frost haze is almost the same shade as his steel-blue coat; and when spring comes, blue fox is the same colour as the tawny moss growth. Colour is blue fox's defence. Consequently blue foxes show more signs of age than white—stubby ears frozen low, battle-worn teeth, dulled claws.

The chances are that the trapper will see the black fox himself almost as soon as he sees his tracks; for the sheeny coat that is black fox's beauty betrays him above the snow. Bushy tail standing straight out, every black hair bristling erect with life, the white tail-tip flaunting a defiance, head up, ears alert, fore feet cleaving the air with the swift ease of some airy bird—on he comes, jump—jump—jump—more of a leap than a lope, galloping like a wolf, altogether different from the skulking run of little foxes, openly exulting in his beauty and his strength and his speed! There is no mistaking black fox. If the trapper does not see the black fox scurrying over the snow, the tell-tale char-

acteristics of the footprints are the length and strength of the leaps. Across these leaps the hunter leaves his traps. Does he hope for a silver fox? Does every prospector expect to find gold nuggets? In the heyday of fur company prosperity, not half a dozen true silver foxes would be sent out in a year. To-day I doubt if more than one good silver fox is sent out in half a dozen years. But good white fox and black and blue are prizes enough in themselves, netting as much to the trapper as mink or beaver or sable.

II

The White Ermine

All that was said of the mystery of fox life applies equally to ermine. Why is the ermine of Wisconsin and Minnesota and Dakota a dirty little weasel noted for killing forty chickens in a night, wearing a mahogany-coloured coat with a sulphur strip down his throat, while the ermine of the Arctics is as white as snow, noted for his courage, wearing a spotless coat which kings envy, yes, and take from him? For a long time the learned men who study animal life from museums held that the ermine's coat turned white from the same cause as human hair, from senility and debility and the depleting effect of an intensely trying climate. But the trappers told a different story. They told of baby ermine born in Arctic burrows, in March, April, May, June, while the mother was still in white coat, babies born in an ashy coat something like a mouse-skin that turned to fleecy white within ten days. They told of ermine shedding his brown coat in autumn to display a fresh layer of iron-gray fur that turned sulphur

white within a few days. They told of the youngest and smallest and strongest ermine with the softest and whitest coats. That disposed of the senility theory. All the trapper knows is that the whitest ermine is taken when the cold is most intense and most continuous, that just as the cold slackens the ermine coat assumes the sulphur tinges, deepening to russet and brown, and that the whitest ermine instead of showing senility, always displays the most active and courageous sort of deviltry.

Summer or winter, the Northern trapper is constantly surrounded by ermine and signs of ermine. There are the tiny claw-tracks almost like frost tracery across the snow. There is the rifled nest of a poor grouse—eggs sucked, or chickens murdered, the nest fouled so that it emits the stench of a skunk, or the mother hen lying dead from a wound in her throat. There is the frightened rabbit loping across the fields in the wildest, wobbliest, most woe-begone leaps, trying to shake something off that is clinging to his throat till over he tumbles—the prey of a hunter that is barely the size of rabbit's paw. There is the water-rat flitting across the rocks in blind terror, regardless of the watching trapper, caring only to reach safety—water—water! Behind comes the pursuer—this is no still hunt but a straight open chase—a little creature about the length of a man's hand, with a tail almost as long, a body scarcely the thickness of two fingers, a mouth the size of a bird's beak, and claws as small as a sparrow's. It gallops in lithe bounds with its long neck straight up and its beady eyes fastened on the flying water-rat. Splash—dive—into the water goes the rat! Splash—dive—into the water goes the

ermine! There is a great stirring up of the muddy bottom. The water-rat has tried to hide in the undertangle; and the ermine has not only dived in pursuit but headed the water-rat back from the safe retreat of his house. Up comes a black nose to the surface of the water. The rat is foolishly going to try a land race. Up comes a long neck like a snake's, the head erect, the beady eyes on the fleeing water-rat—then with a splash they race overland. The water-rat makes for a hole among the rocks. Ermine sees and with a spurt of speed is almost abreast when the rat at bay turns with a snap at his pursuer. But quick as flash, the ermine has pirouetted into the air. The long writhing neck strikes like a serpent's fangs and the sharp fore teeth have pierced the brain of the rat. The victim dies without a cry, without a struggle, without a pain. That long neck was not given the ermine for nothing. Neither were those muscles massed on either side of his jaws like bulging cheeks.

In winter the ermine's murderous depredations are more apparent. Now the ermine, too, sets itself to reading the signs of the snow. Now the ermine becomes as keen a still hunter as the man. Sometimes a whirling snow-fall catches a family of grouse out from furze cover. The trapper, too, is abroad in the snow-storm; for that is the time when he can set his traps undetected. The white whirl confuses the birds. They run here, there, everywhere, circling about, burying themselves in the snow till the storm passes over. The next day when the hunter is going the rounds of these traps, along comes an ermine. It does not see him. It is following a scent, head down, body close to ground, nose here, there, threading the maze which

the crazy grouse had run. But stop, thinks the trapper, the snow-fall covered the trail. Exactly—that is why the little ermine dives under snow just as it would under water, running along with serpentine wavings of the white powdery surface till up it comes again where the wind has blown the snow-fall clear. Along it runs, still intent, quartering back where it loses the scent—along again till suddenly the head lifts—that motion of the snake before it strikes! The trapper looks. Tail feathers, head feathers, stupid blinking eyes poke through the fluffy snow-drift. And now the ermine no longer runs openly. There are too many victims this time—it may get all the foolish hidden grouse; so it dives and if the man had not alarmed the stupid grouse, ermine would have darted up through the snow with a finishing stab for each bird.

By still hunt and open hunt, by nose and eye, relentless as doom, it follows its victims to the death. Does the bird perch on a tree? Up goes the ermine, too, on the side away from the bird's head. Does the mouse thread a hundred mazes and hide in a hole? The ermine threads every maze, marches into the hidden nest and takes murderous possession. Does the rat hide under rock? Under the rock goes the ermine. Should the trapper follow to see the outcome of the contest, the ermine will probably sit at the mouth of the rat-hole, blinking its beady eyes at him. If he attacks, down it bolts out of reach. If he retires, out it comes looking at this strange big helpless creature with bold contempt.

The keen scent, the keen eyes, the keen ears warn it of an enemy's approach. Summer and winter, its changing coat conceals it. The furze where it runs

protects it from fox and lynx and wolverine. Its size admits it to the tiniest of hiding-places. All that the ermine can do to hunt down a victim, it can do to hide from an enemy. These qualities make it almost invincible to other beasts of the chase. Two joints in the armour of its defence has the little ermine. Its black tail-tip moving across snow betrays it to enemies in winter: the very intentness on prey, its excess of self-confidence, leads it into danger; for instance, little ermine is royally contemptuous of man's tracks. If the man does not molest it, it will follow a scent and quarter and circle under his feet; so the man has no difficulty in taking the little beast whose fur is second only to that of the silver fox. So bold are the little creatures that the man may discover their burrows under brush, in rock, in sand holes, and take the whole litter before the game mother will attempt to escape. Indeed, the plucky little ermine will follow the captor of her brood. Steel rat traps, tiny deadfalls, frosted bits of iron smeared with grease to tempt the ermine's tongue which the frost will hold like a vice till the trapper comes, and, most common of all, twine snares such as entrap the rabbit, are the means by which the ermine comes to his appointed end at the hands of men.

The quality of the pelt shows as wide variety as the skin of the fox; and for as mysterious reasons. Why an ermine a year old should have a coat like sulphur and another of the same age a coat like swan's-down, neither trapper nor scientist has yet discovered. The price of the perfect ermine-pelt is higher than any other of the rare furs taken in North America except silver fox; but it no longer commands the fabulous

prices that were certainly paid for specimen ermine-skins in the days of the Georges in England and the later Louis in France. How were those fabulously costly skins prepared? Old trappers say no perfectly downy pelt is ever taken from an ermine, that the downy effect is produced by a trick of the trade—scraping the flesh side so deftly that all the coarse hairs will fall out, leaving only the soft under-fur.

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT THE TRAPPER STANDS FOR

WAGING ceaseless war against beaver and moose, types of nature's most harmless creatures, against wolf and wolverine, types of nature's most destructive agents, against traders who were rivals and Indians who were hostiles, the trapper would almost seem to be himself a type of nature's arch-destroyer.

Beautiful as a dream is the silent world of forest and prairie and mountain where the trapper moves with noiseless stealth of the most skilful of all the creatures that prey. In that world, the crack of the trapper's rifle, the snap of the cruel steel jaws in his trap, seem the only harsh discords in the harmony of an existence that riots with a very fulness of life. But such a world is only a dream. The reality is cruel as death. Of all the creatures that prey, man is the most merciful.

Ordinarily, knowledge of animal life is drawn from three sources. There are park specimens, stuffed to the utmost of their eating capacity and penned off from the possibility of harming anything weaker than themselves. There are the private pets fed equally well, pampered and chained safely from harming or being harmed. There are the wild creatures roaming

natural haunts, some two or three days' travel from civilization, whose natures have been gradually modified generation by generation from being constantly hunted with long-range repeaters. Judging from these sorts of wild animals, it certainly seems that the brute creation has been sadly maligned. The bear cubs lick each other's paws with an amatory singing that is something between the purr of a cat and the grunt of a pig. The old polars wrestle like boys out of school, flounder in grotesque gambols that are laughably clumsy, good-naturedly dance on their hind legs, and even eat from their keeper's hand. And all the deer family can be seen nosing one another with the affection of turtle-doves. Surely the worst that can be said of these animals is that they shun the presence of man. Perhaps some kindly sentimentalist wonders if things hadn't gone so badly out of gear in a certain historic garden long ago, whether mankind would not be on as friendly relations with the animal world as little boys and girls are with bears and baboons in the fairy books. And the scientist goes a step further, and soberly asks whether these wild things of the woods are not kindred of man after all; for have not man and beast ascended the same scale of life? Across the centuries, modern evolution shakes hands with old-fashioned transmigration.

To be sure, members of the deer family sometimes kill their mates in fits of blind rage, and the innocent bear cubs fall to mauling their keeper, and the old bears have been known to eat their young. These things are set down as freaks in the animal world, and in nowise allowed to upset the influences drawn from animals living in unnatural surroundings, behind iron

bars, or in haunts where long-range rifles have put the fear of man in the animal heart.

Now the trapper studies animal life where there is neither a pen to keep the animal from doing what it wants to do, nor any rifle but his own to teach wild creatures fear. Knowing nothing of science and sentiment, he never clips facts to suit his theory. On the truthfulness of his eyes depends his own life, so that he never blinks his eyes to disagreeable facts.

Looking out on the life of the wilds clear-visioned as his mountain air, the trapper sees a world beautiful as a dream but cruel as death. He sees a world where to be weak, to be stupid, to be dull, to be slow, to be simple, to be rash are the unpardonable crimes; where the weak must grow strong, keen of eye and ear and instinct, sharp, wary, swift, wise, and cautious; where in a word the weak must grow fit to survive or—perish!

The slow worm fills the hungry maw of the gaping bird. Into the soft fur of the rabbit that has strayed too far from cover clutch the swooping talons of an eagle. The beaver that exposes himself overland risks bringing lynx or wolverine or wolf on his home colony. Bird preys on worm, mink on bird, lynx on mink, wolf on lynx, and bear on all creatures that live from men and moose down to the ant and the embryo life in the ant's egg. But the vision of ravening destruction does not lead the trapper to morbid conclusions on life as it leads so many housed thinkers in the walled cities; for the same world that reveals to him such ravening slaughter shows him that every creature, the weakest and the strongest, has some faculty, some instinct, some endowment of cunning, or dexterity or caution, some gift of concealment, of flight, of semblance, of

death—that will defend it from all enemies. The ermine is one of the smallest of all hunters, but it can throw an enemy off the scent by diving under snow. The rabbit is one of the most helpless of all hunted things, but it can take cover from foes of the air under thorny brush, and run fast enough to outwind the breath of a pursuer, and double back quick enough to send a harrying eagle flopping head over heels on the ground, and simulate the stillness of inanimate objects surrounding it so truly that the passer-by can scarcely distinguish the balls of fawn fur from the russet bark of a log. And the rabbit's big eyes and ears are not given it for nothing.

Poet and trapper alike see the same world, and for the same reason. Both seek only to know the truth, to see the world as it is; and the world that they see is red in tooth and claw. But neither grows morbid from his vision; for that same vision shows each that the ravening destruction is only a weeding out of the unfit. There is too much sunlight in the trapper's world, too much fresh air in his lungs, too much red blood in his veins for the morbid miasmas that bring bilious fumes across the mental vision of the housed city man.

And what place in the scale of destruction does the trapper occupy? Modern sentiment has almost painted him as a red-dyed monster, excusable, perhaps, because necessity compels the hunter to slay, but after all only the most highly developed of the creatures that prey. Is this true? Arch-destroyer he may be; but it should be remembered that he is the destroyer of destroyers.

Animals kill young and old, male and female.

The true trapper does not kill the young; for that

would destroy his next year's hunt. He does not kill the mother while she is with the young. He kills the grown males which—it can be safely said—have killed more of each other than man has killed in all the history of trapping. Wherever regions have been hunted by the pot-hunter, whether the sportsman for amusement or the settler supplying his larder, game has been exterminated. This is illustrated by all the stretch of country between the Platte and the Saskatchewan. Wherever regions have been hunted only by the trapper, game is as plentiful as it has ever been. This is illustrated by the forests of the Rockies, by the No-Man's Land south of Hudson Bay and by the Arctics. Wherever the trapper has come destroying grisly and coyote and wolverine, the prong horn and mountain-sheep and mountain-goat and wapiti and moose have increased.

But the trapper stands for something more than a game warden, something more than the most merciful of destroyers. He destroys *animal* life—a life which is red in tooth and claw with murder and rapine and cruelty—in order that *human* life may be preserved, may be rendered independent of the elemental powers that wage war against it.

It is a war as old as the human race, this struggle of man against the elements, a struggle alike reflected in Viking song of warriors conquering the sea, and in the Scandinavian myth of pursuing Fenris wolf, and in the Finnish epic of the man-hero wresting secrets of life-bread from the earth, and in Indian folk-lore of a Hiawatha hunting beast and treacherous wind. It is a war in which the trapper stands forth as a conqueror, a creature sprung of earth, trampling all the

obstacles that earth can offer to human will under his feet, finding paths through the wilderness for the explorer who was to come after him, opening doors of escape from stifled life in crowded centres of population, preparing a highway for the civilization that was to follow his own wandering trail through the wilds.

APPENDIX

When in Labrador and Newfoundland a fews years ago, the writer copied the entries of an old half-breed woman trapper's daily journal of her life. It is fragmentary and incoherent, but gives a glimpse of the Indian mind. It is written in English. She was seventy-five years old when the diary opened in December, 1893. Her name was Lydia Campbell and she lived at Hamilton Inlet. Having related how she shot a deer, skinning it herself, made her snow-shoes and set her rabbit snares, she closes her first entry with :

"Well, as I sed, I can't write much at a time now, for i am getting blind and some mist rises up before me if i sew, read or write a little while."

Lydia Campbell's mother was captured by Eskimo. She ran away when she had grown up, to quote her own terse diary, "crossed a river on drift sticks, wading in shallows, through woods, meeting bears, sleeping under trees—seventy miles flight—saw a French boat—took off skirt and waved it to them—came—took my mother on board—worked for them—with the sealers—camped on the ice.

"As there was no other kind of women to marrie hear, the few English men each took a wife of that sort and they never was sorry that they took them, for they was great workers and so it came to pass that I was one of the youngest of them." [Meaning, of course, that she was the daughter of one of these marriages.]

. . . . . .

"Our young man pretended to spark the two daughters of Tomas. He was a one-armed man, for he had shot away one

arm firing at a large bird. . . . He double-loaded his gun in his fright, so the por man lost one of his armes, . . . he was so smart with his gun that he could bring down a bird flying past him, or a deer running past he would be the first to bring it down."

. . . . . .

"They was holden me hand and telling me that I must be his mother now as his own mother is dead and she was a great friend of mine although we could not understand each other's language sometimes, still we could make it out with sins and wonders."

. . . . . .

"April 7, 1894.—Since I last wrote on this book, I have been what people call cruising about here. I have been visiting some of my friends, though scattered far apart, with my snow-shoes and axe on my shoulders. The nearest house to this place is about five miles up a beautiful river, and then through woods, what the french calls a portage—it is what I call pretty. Many is the time that I have been going with dogs and komatick 40 or 50 years ago with my husband and family to N. W. River, to the Hon. Donald A. Smith and family to keep N. Year or Easter."

. . . . . .

"My dear old sister Hannah Mishlin who is now going on for 80 years old and she is smart yet, she hunts fresh meat and chops holes in the 3 foot ice this very winter and catches trout with her hook, enough for her household, her husband not able to work, he has a bad complaint."

. . . . . .

"You must please excuse my writing and spelling for I have never been to school, neither had I a spelling book in my young day—me a native of this country, Labrador, Hamilton's Inlet, Esquimaux Bay—if you wish to know who I am, I am old Lydia Campbell, formerly Lydia Brooks, then Blake, after Blake, now Campbell. So you see ups and downs has been my life all through, and now I am what I am—prais the Lord."

"I have been hunting most every day since Easter, and to

some of my rabbit snares and still traps, cat traps and mink traps. I caught 7 rabbits and 1 marten and I got a fix and 4 partridges, about 500 trout besides household duties—never leave out morning and Evening prayers and cooking and baking and washing for 5 people—3 motherless little children—with so much to make for sale out of seal skin and deer skin shoes, bags and pouches and what not. . . . You can say well done old half-breed woman in Hamilton's Inlet. Good night, God bless us all and send us prosperity.

"Yours ever true,

"LYDIA CAMPBELL."

. . . . . .

"We are going to have an evening worship, my poor old man is tired, he has been a long way today and he shot 2 beautyful white partridges. Our boy heer shot once spruce partridge."

. . . . . .

"Caplin so plentiful boats were stopped, whales, walrusses and white bears."

. . . . . .

"Muligan River, May 24, 1894.—They say that once upon a time the world was drowned and that all the Esquimaux were drownded but one family and he took his family and dogs and chattels and his seal-skin boat and Kiak and Komaticks and went on the highest hill that they could see, and stayed there till the rain was over and when the water dried up they descended down the river and got down to the plains and when they could not see any more people, they took off the bottoms of their boots and took some little white [seal] pups and sent the poor little things off to sea and they drifted to some islands far away and became white people. Then they done the same as the others did and the people spread all over the world. Such was my poor father's thought. . . . There is up the main river a large fall, the same that the American and English gentlemen have been up to see. [Referring to Mr. Bryant, of Philadelphia, who visited Grand Falls.] Well there is a large whirlpool or hole at the bottom of the fall. The Indians that frequent the place say that there is three

women—Indians—that lives under that place or near to it I am told, and at times they can hear them speaking to each other louder than the roar of the falls." [The Indians always think the mist of a waterfall signifies the presence of ghosts.]

"I have been the cook of that great Sir D. D. Smith that is in Canada at this time. [In the days when Lord Strathcona was chief trader at Hamilton Inlet.] He was then at Rigolet Post, a chief trader only, now what is he so great! He was seen last winter by one of the women that belong to this bay. She went up to Canada. . . . and he is gray headed and bended, that is Sir D. D. Smith."

. . . . . .

"August 1, 1894.—My dear friends, you will please excuse my writing and spelling—the paper sweems by me, my eyesight is dim now——"

(3)

THE END