

Otis James

Peter of New Amsterdam: A Story of Old New York



James Otis

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FOREWORD

The purpose of this series of stories is to show the children, and even those who have already taken up the study of history, the *home life* of the colonists with whom they meet in their books. To this end every effort has been made to avoid anything savoring of romance, and to deal only with facts, so far as that is possible, while describing the daily life of those people who conquered the wilderness whether for conscience sake or for gain.

That the stories may appeal more directly to the children, they are told from the viewpoint of a child, and purport to have been related by a child. Should any criticism be made regarding the seeming neglect to mention important historical facts, the answer would be that these books are not sent out as histories, – although it is believed that they will awaken a desire to learn more of the building of the nation, – and only such incidents as would be particularly noted by a child are used.

Surely it is entertaining as well as instructive for young people to read of the toil and privations in the homes of those who came into a new world to build up a country for themselves, and such homely facts are not to be found in the real histories of our land.

JAMES OTIS.

WHERE I WAS BORN

If I ever attempted to set down a story in words, it would be concerning the time when I was much the same as a slave among the Dutch of New Amsterdam, meaning a certain part of the world in that America where so many of my father's countrymen came after they left England, because of the King's not allowing them to worship God in the way they believed to be right.

It sounds odd to say that an English boy was ever held as slave by the Dutch, and perhaps I have no right to make such statement, because it is not strictly true, although there were many years in my life when I did the same work, and received the same fare, as did the negroes in the early days of New Amsterdam.

Before I was born, my father was clerk to the post-master of Scrooby, one William Brewster, and perhaps thus it was that when, because of troubles concerning religion, Master Brewster journeyed to Leyden with a company of people who were called Separatists, my parents went with him.

And so it was that I was born in Leyden, in the year of our Lord, 1612, but I never knew what it was to have a mother, for mine died while I was yet in the cradle. Thanks to the care of a loving, God-fearing father, however, I could do very much toward looking out for myself by the time I had come to the age of eight, when I was left entirely alone in the world. I love now to think that during the years of my life while the good man remained on this earth, I did not cause him any great anxiety, and required little care.

Within two months after my father died, which was in the year 1620, many of the congregation in Leyden set off with Master Brewster for the New World, there to build up a city where men might worship God in whatsoever fashion they pleased.

Those of the Separatists who were left behind, cared for me as best they might until a year had passed; but none of them were overly burdened with this world's goods, and, young though I was, I realized, in some slight degree, what a tax the care of a lad nine years old was upon them.

ALONE IN HOLLAND

Later, those who had in charity taken charge of me also set off to join Master Brewster's company in America, and I, an English boy, was left much the same as alone in Holland. I could speak the Dutch language, however, and was willing to work at whatever came to hand, so that I earned enough with which to provide me with food; as for clothing, I wore the cast-off garments of the Dutch boys, whose mothers, taking pity upon an orphan, freely gave them to me.

Among the few English then left in Leyden was Master Jan Marais, a professor in the University, whom my father had known; and he, so far as lay in his power, kept a watchful eye over me; but this was only to the extent of inquiring for my welfare when we met by chance, or in recalling my name to those among his Dutch friends who were in need of such services as so young a lad could render.

Now it seems, although I knew nothing concerning it at the time, that there had been formed in Holland, among the merchants, what was known as the West India Company, whose purpose was to make a settlement in that part of the New World which they had named New Netherland, claiming to own it, and there trade with the savages, or engage in whatsoever of business would bring in money.

Master Peter Minuit – whom I should call Heer Minuit, because such is the Dutch term for master, but the odd-sounding title never did ring true in my ear – had been appointed by this company, which had already sent out some people to the world of America, Director of the settlement that was to be made. He came on a visit of leave-taking to Master Jan Marais, and it so chanced, whether for good or for evil, that while the two were walking in the streets of Leyden, they came upon me, standing idly in front of a cook-shop, and saying to myself that if the choice were given to me I would take this or that dainty to eat.

AN IMPORTANT INTRODUCTION

It may have been in a spirit of fun, or that perhaps Master Marais had in mind to do me a good turn, but however it came about, he said as gravely as if I were the burgomaster's son:

"Heer Peter Minuit, allow me to present to you Master Peter Hulbert, who has had the misfortune to lose both his father and his mother by death."

Master Minuit was not unlike many others whom I had met, save that there was in his face a certain look which bespoke a kindly heart, or so it seemed, while he gazed at me much as he would at a young calf that he had in mind to purchase.

I never did lay claim to being comely, either as boy or man; but yet it must have been that this sturdy visitor saw something about me which attracted either his closest attention or his charity, for he said with a kindly smile, as he patted me on the head: "Well, namesake Peter, since nearly all your English friends have gone to America, what say you to voyaging in the same direction?"

I failed to understand the meaning of the question, and probably stood staring at him like a simple; yet at the same time I noted a quick glance from Master Marais, as if the Director had said something which caught his attention. An instant later, he said with more of seriousness in his voice than seemed to me the matter warranted:

"It may not be well, Heer Minuit, to put into the lad's head a desire that cannot be gratified."

"And why may it not be?" Master Minuit asked, wheeling sharply about. "If namesake Peter has no friends in Holland who can take charge of him, why may he not go to that land on the other side of the world with me? A youngster of ten years might find many a meaner post than that of body servant to the Director of the new town in America."

I GO MY WAY

Whatever speech these two may have had together afterward, I know not; but certain it is that Master Marais, speaking to me hastily, as if it were not well I should hear what passed between him and his friend, directed that I go my way until nightfall, when I was to come into the University grounds with the intent of seeing him.

It was all very well to tell me to go my way; but I had none. One section of Leyden was the same as another to me, who was penniless and hungry, casting about in the hope of earning as much, by whatsoever employment came my way, as would buy what might serve for supper.

However, I was not so dull as to fail in understanding that Master rapidly, as though business in Leyden would come to a standstill if I did not make haste.

Then, once out of sight of these two, I looked about, keeping my eyes wide open in the hope of seeing one who required my services, but failing utterly, so that when night came, hunger had such a hold upon my stomach that I was like to have begged from whosoever passed me on the street.

Had I done so, it would have been the first time in my life, and since that afternoon I have had no reason to ask in charity aught of any one, for surely have I earned double that which I have ever received.

THE BARGAIN

Now lest you think I am given to using too many words, it is enough if I say that at the appointed time I met Master Marais at the University, and there learned from him that Master Peter Minuit had offered to take me as servant to that place in America which was called New Netherland, pledging himself, in due time, to set me on a path which would lead to honest manhood. He agreed to provide me with such an outfit as would be needed, and to bear the charge of my living while we remained in Holland.

Master Marais, after first stating that it was for me to decide, my future, perhaps, depended upon the answer to be given Master Minuit, advised that I accept gratefully the Director's offer.

And so I did. What other could a lad, who had neither father nor mother, say, when he was given a chance to earn honestly that which he needed for the care of his body?

To me, boy as I was, the long voyage overseas had no terrors; but was rather an inducement, for I would see strange sights before coming to the New World, and then who should say that I might not, one day, rise to be as great a man as was Master Minuit?

Master Marais told me I had decided well, when I said that I believed myself fortunate in having such an opportunity, and straightway took charge of my affairs, having been so instructed by my new master. I was given of clothing more than ever I had before, and fed until I was no longer hungry, during such time as I remained in Leyden.

Then came the day when Master Marais sent me to Amsterdam with a letter to Master Minuit's agent, and from that hour I was no more than any parcel of goods, which the West India Company counted to send into the New World.

It troubled me little, however, that I was considered of no importance, for in exactly that light did I look upon myself; yet I could not but wonder, if so be I was servant to the Director of the new country in America, that no one told me to do this or do that, but left me to my own will, save that I was ordered to keep strictly the rules laid down by the mistress of the house in which I lodged, until such time as the *Sea Mew* was ready to set sail.

Then it was that one of the sailors came to my lodgings to summon me, and I know not how it was he chanced to learn of my whereabouts, for I had had speech concerning my affairs with no person in Amsterdam, although it may well be that Master Marais had sent information concerning what was to be done with me.

SAILING FOR THE NEW WORLD

It was in January, in the year of our Lord 1626, when the *Sea Mew*, set forth on her long voyage, and during a certain number of days after we left port, it seemed as if my end was near at hand. There are those who make light of the sickness of the sea; but I am not one, for verily my sufferings on board the *Sea Mew*, passed man's power of description.

I saw Master Minuit when I first went on board; but it was as if a cat had been looking at a king, for he remained in the after part of the ship where were the people of quality, while I, only a servant, was herded among the sailors, well up in the bow, where kicks and cuffs were the rule, and blessings the exception.

The life of a boy at sea, whether he be a servant in the employ of some passenger, or belonging to the ship's company, is at its best truly pitiable. No one has a good word for him; strive as he may, he is always in some person's road, and the end of a wet rope is ever ready to the hand of that person who, having lost his temper, would vent his spite upon the most helpless being near at hand, which is the boy.

I had counted on seeing much of the world during this voyage in the *Sea Mew*, believing that we should visit strange lands, where I could roam about feasting my eyes upon all manner of odd things; but none of this came to pass.

Twice during the voyage did the *Sea Mew*, cast anchor off some island, where it would have given me no little pleasure to go on shore that I might compare the land with the country I had known; but I lacked the courage to ask permission of my master, who as yet had not spoken to me since the ship left port, and no one, not even the friendliest among the seamen, had enough of charity in his heart to say "Come."

A VIEW OF NEW NETHERLAND

Because of all this, the voyage, which took up nearly four months, was one of discomfort, if not exactly of suffering, and when we came to anchor off that place in America which had been named New Netherland, I would have rejoiced even though it were the most desolate island, because of my life on shipboard having, for a time at least, come to an end.

But before I tell you what I saw when I gazed upon this part of the New World for the first time, to the end that you may the better understand what I am talking about, let me say that toward the close of the year of grace, 1624, a company of forty-five persons, men, women and children, with all their home belongings, their tools for the farms, and one hundred and three cows and sheep, had been sent out from Amsterdam in three large ships and a small boat, called by the Dutch a yacht, although in England it would have been spoken of as a pinnace.

Some of these people, who agreed with the West India Company to build at this place a trading post, had already set up such houses as would serve to shelter them from the weather.

And this is the picture which I saw on the fourth day of May, in the year of our Lord, 1626, when I stood on the forward part of the *Sea Mew* gazing shoreward with hungry eyes, for the one desire I had was to plant my feet once more upon the solid earth.

We were lying where two grand rivers came together, forming a harbor in which all the King's ships might ride in safety. In front of me was a range of small hills, whereon grew noble trees that had just put on their dress of green to mark the coming of the summer, and in the valleys, betwixt the forest and the shore, were small dwellings or huts built of the bark of trees, much as a child might make a house of twigs.

Beyond these huts were settlements like unto nothing I had ever seen, made up of buildings which looked not unlike gigantic logs that had been split in the middle, with the cleft side lying on the ground. Some of these half-round shelters were exceedingly long, others short, and all had one or more doors close to the ground, but no windows that I could see.

They were made, as I afterward learned, of the bark of birch trees laid over a framework of saplings, and fastened in place with the sinews of animals, or with small wooden pegs. From more than one of them came smoke, telling of fires and of cooking, but I saw no chimneys.

THE "BROWN MEN" OR SAVAGES

Here and there, either in this odd village, or near the bark huts of the Dutch people, wandered colored men, not black like those negro slaves we had on board the *Sea Mew*, but rather the color of a copper kettle that has been somewhat used over a fire. For clothing, they wore nothing more than a piece of skin tied around the waist, or leggings of hide.

Their heads were bare, with the hair shaven from off a goodly portion, leaving a long tuft directly on the top, which by means, as I afterward learned, of animal fat, was made to stand upright like a horn.

These were the savages, and I looked no longer at the dwellings built in the shape of a half-moon, or at the loosely stacked strips of bark which marked the home of some Dutchman who had come here at the bidding of the West India Company, for all my thoughts were centered upon these brown men, of whom I had heard as one hears a fairy tale, not believing in its truth.

Now although the land was goodly and fair to look upon, a veritable garden of pleasure, to those who had come from a long voyage on the angry waters, as had we of the *Sea Mew*, yet there came into my mind the fear that these brown men who wandered here and there, giving little heed to us who were so lately arrived, and who were the owners of this New World, might come at some future time to say to themselves that it were better the Dutch had never landed in their midst. If that day ever did arrive, woe unto us whose skins were white!

Little did I believe, even as I dreamed, that such would come to be the truth; that the day was not far distant when these savages who made even of their hair a seeming weapon, would come to thirst for the blood of us who hoped to find fame or fortune, or both, in this New World of America.

At a mile or more from the point where we had anchored, we were told there was a strip of marshy ground, stretching across from river to river, and lying so low that when the tide was at its height, the streams were united, making of this settlement an island, which the Indians called Manhattan.

There were trees in the forest before me enough to make all the masts that could be used by the people of the world, and in such a wilderness how abundant must be the game! In these huge rivers how great in number the fish!

I panted to leave the narrow space of ship; to go on shore where I could wander among the trees and amid the flowers; where I could see these strange, brown people, whose huts were to me much like hills thrown up by ants; to come in contact with all these things which God had made, and in so doing rejoice that I lived.

SUMMONED TO THE CABIN

Now it was as if Master Minuit, who had given no heed during all the voyage as to whether I might be alive or dead, suddenly remembered that somewhere on board the *Sea Mew*, he had a servant by the name of Peter Hulbert, and straightway sent one of the serving men from the great cabin to hunt me out.

From the time of leaving Amsterdam until this moment, no one had shown any desire to have speech with me, while all had acted as if believing I was of no more use in this world than to cumber their path; thus it came near to startling me when my name was called, so that I hung back, hardly knowing if I was expected to go forward or aft, until one of the seamen, hearing the serving man vainly shouting, asked me if that was not my name which was being spoken so loudly.

Whereupon I awoke to my senses, and went toward the stern to meet this fellow, who was bawling at the full strength of his lungs, as if he would make his tongue do the work of a trumpet, and by him was led into the great cabin where stood my master, as if he had been awaiting my coming.

From that moment until this I have never sought for employment; there has ever been something which I should do for others, or was in duty bound to do for myself, until I am come to think that he who goes into a new world to help in building there a city, much the same as fastens himself into a treadmill in such a fashion that he may not contrive his own escape.

Now did I learn what it meant to act the part of body servant to such as Master Minuit, and was not a little surprised at finding that he had two others, one a man grown, and a second who was three or four years my elder, both of whom took advantage of every opportunity to lord it over me when the master was not within hearing.

TOYS FOR THE SAVAGES

During the long voyage I had tried time and again to picture to myself what would be expected of me when I began to serve Master Minuit, and fancied the duties would be to look after his belongings, perhaps his weapons, or his clothing, or to serve him while he sat at meals.

Therefore it was that my surprise was exceeding great when the first task which he set me, was that of taking from certain huge boxes, which had been brought into the great cabin, what appeared like toys for children, rather than things such as grown men would set a value upon.

A stout chest, fitted with handles, so that it might the more readily be carried, had been placed nearby these big boxes, and, under Master Minuit's direction, I took out these fanciful things, laying some upon the floor, and stowing others in the chest.

There were strings of beads such as young Dutch girls wear around their necks; short lengths of bright red, or blue, or yellow cloth of wool; ornaments for the ears, made of Dutch brass, and fashioned so rudely that none save the poorest in the land would covet them; belts of gaudily colored leather, and small axes and knives formed of iron so badly worked that but little rough usage would serve to turn the edges.

I cannot well name all the useless trinkets which I handled that day, working as deftly as I might, to the end that my new master should lay no blame upon me for clumsiness; but all the goods were of so little value that, poor though I was, there came into my heart no desire to possess them.

As I worked, and while the other two servants were busily engaged making into packages the belongings of my master, that they might the more readily be carried on shore, I could not fail of hearing, even though making no effort to play the part of eavesdropper, the conversation which was going on between Master Minuit and those Dutch gentlemen who had come out with him to build up this new land.

CLAIM OF THE WEST INDIA COMPANY

And what I thus heard, without being minded to play the listener, was that among the orders given by the West India Company, was one to the effect that before Master Minit should do anything toward taking upon himself the governing of the country, the land of Manhattan Island was to be bought of the brown men, and these useless trinkets were to serve in the stead of purchase money.

To the better understanding of this order, let me go back in the tale to where I have said that the West India Company claimed to own the land which was called New Netherland. Their reasons for making such claim were that the Dutch government had, many years before, sent out the ship Half Moon, commanded by an Englishman named Henry Hudson, who believed himself to be the first white man that ever saw these rivers; and afterward that famous Dutch seaman, Adrian Block, had followed Master Hudson, stopping at this same island of Manhattan. Therefore it was, because of their vessels being supposed to have come to this place first, that the people of Holland claimed the land as their own.

As I came to know later, however, a certain sailor from Florence had been sent to America by the French king, near ninety years before Master Hudson's coming, and, on landing nearabout where we then were, claimed all the country in the name of France.

Perhaps the West India Company knew somewhat of this, and, fearing the French king might set up ownership to the island of Manhattan, had decided to buy it of theirs, first because of having been discovered by them, and again because of being bought in fair trade.

All this which I have just told you came to me afterward, when I knew more of the great world and of the manner in which the nations of the earth struggled one against another to increase their possessions.

MAKING READY FOR TRADE

At the time, however, there was no thought in my mind save that if Master Minit should buy this island of Manhattan with all the trumpery goods he had in the great cabin, then would he be paying a price far too small for even the least portion of it.

You can well fancy that I did not neglect my work while thus looking with contempt upon the goods before me. My duty was to make quick despatch of the task set me, and at the same time take good heed that it was done in such a manner as to win the approval, if not the praise, of Master Minit.

Many a long hour did I spend putting the childish things into the chest, and in taking them out and exchanging for others, when those in company with my master believed we were gathering too much of value, if indeed there could be value to such goods. When it was done, I had the idea that Master Minit was pleased with me, for he said that from then on I was to hold myself close to his person, going where he went, and stopping where he stopped.

I make but a poor attempt at telling the tale, otherwise I would have said that when we were first come to anchor, some of those people who had been sent over by the West India Company in advance of our ship, came on board the *Sea Mew*, to speak with my master; and, as each in turn was done with his business, or with his pleasure, as the case might be, orders were given him that the savages be told they were to meet Master Minit on the shore nearby where we were then lying at anchor, to the end that he might have speech with them.

It puzzled me not a little to understand how he could have speech with the brown men, when they did not speak in the same tongue as did he; but I had enough of wit to understand that it did not concern me. Master Minit most like had considered well the matter.

HANS BRAUN AND KRYN GILDERSLEEVE

When I was done with my task, instead of going into the forward part of the ship where I had lived from the time we left Amsterdam, my master gave orders that I should remain nearby where were his own quarters, and sent me with his other servants, of whom I have already told you somewhat.

The elder, who might have been thirty years of age, was named Hans Braun. He was as sour-visaged, square-jawed, thick-headed a Dutchman as ever stepped foot in Holland; one who knew not the meaning of the word friendship, and cared for his own comfort and his own pleasure more than he did for the master he served, or for anything whatsoever.

When I came to have a good look at him, as he beckoned me to follow to that portion of the ship where he and his mate found lodgings, I said to myself that there at least was one in this New World who would never lend a helping hand, and would not hesitate to do a wrong if thereby he could compass his own ends.

The other servant was Kryn Gildersleeve, who, mayhap, was three or four years my elder; a dull, heavy lad, who did not give promise of being a cheerful comrade, and yet I would have put faith in him under the same conditions that I would have suspected Hans of working me harm.

If I have been overly careful in speaking of these two fellow servants, it is because of our being at a later day so placed that they could do me much of evil, or of good.

I had rather an hundred times over have gone into my meaner lodgings in the forward part of the ship, than spend the night in what were most comfortable quarters, with such as Hans, and yet it was not for me to say whether I would come here or go there, after the command had been given. Before another day was very old, however, I understood that, without having spoken a wrong word or done anything against him whatsoever, Hans Braun would never be my friend.

THE GATHERING OF THE SAVAGES

It seemed, as I afterward learned, that Master Minit had given orders for me to follow him on shore, while the other two were to remain aboard the ship, and this it was, most like, which displeased Hans.

However that may be, it has nothing to do with my tale, and perhaps I am giving overly many words to it; yet would I have you know how I, the youngest body servant of Master Minit, Director of the West India Company's lands in America, came to see so much of that which was, in fact, important business, such as a lad would not be likely to have any part in.

We were yet on board the *Sea Mew*, when I, who was standing by the rail on the quarter-deck, where I could hear the slightest summons from my master, saw the brown men gathering on shore and verily it was a sight to cause wonder.

These brown men, with their hair standing upright on the middle of their heads, and naked to the waist, but wearing leggings fringed with strips of hide, and queer, soft shoes ornamented with colored quills of the porcupine, which I afterwards learned were called moccasins, seated themselves on the sand of the shore, gazing out toward the *Sea Mew*.

Below, in the great cabin, I could see that my master and his companions were arraying themselves as if about to set out for an audience with the king, and why this should be I failed to understand, save that they counted to surprise the savages by their bravery of attire.

Master Minit wore a long coat of blue cloth, which was fastened around his waist with a silken sash, and black velvet breeches, gathered in at the knee with a knot of blue ribbon, while his low shoes, ornamented with huge silver buckles, set off, as it seemed to me, the shiny blackness of his silken hose.

He had on a broad-brimmed hat of felt, in which was a plume of blue, and over his shoulder was a blue sash, which, coming to a point under the left arm, gave a hanging for his sword.

The gentlemen with him were decked out in no less brave apparel, and I said to myself that if the savages of Manhattan Island gave heed to gay adorning then they were like to be pleased on this day.

GOING ASHORE

I was the one sent ashore in charge of the chest of trinkets, and that I was thus given a position of trust did not serve to sweeten the sour look on Hans' face, for he acted much as if believing he was the only one of Master Minuit's following who could be depended upon for any service of note.

It is impossible for me to say in such words as would be understood, how delighted I was to be on dry land once more. The scent of the flowers, the odors that came from the forest, and the songs of the birds, so filled me with delight that it was indeed a difficult matter to act as if I still held possession of my wits. Perhaps, if the savages had not been seated nearby, noting every movement made by those concerned in the care of the chest, I should not have succeeded so well.

Before these half-dressed, brown men, who watched intently, with never the ghost of a smile or show of interest on their faces, one could not but act in a dignified manner, and I held myself as if I, not Peter Minuit, were the Director of New Netherland come to take possession of my office.

Save for long reeds, at one end of which was a small stone vessel, which I afterward learned was a contrivance used for burning that Indian weed, tobacco, the savages had nothing in their hands. It seemed to me that it would have been only natural had they brought with them some of their weapons, and I was disappointed because of their not having done so, for my curiosity was great regarding what sort of bloodletting instruments were in use among them.

During a full hour I sat on the chest, while two of the seamen loitered near at hand to make certain the brown men did not attempt to find out what we had brought ashore, and then came my master, followed by all the gentlemen of the *Sea Mew*.

Every one was dressed in his bravest garments, and on stepping out of the small boat on the sand, all gave particular respect to my master, as if to show the savages that he was the man who had been sent to rule over this country of New Netherland.

This company of gentlemen walked gravely in procession to where the chest was standing, giving no heed to the savages until they were gathered around the useless trinkets, and then they bowed as if each brown man before them were a king.

BUYING THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN

I had again been puzzling my brain to figure out how any trading of land could be carried on, since it was not reasonable to suppose the savages had knowledge of the Dutch tongue, or that Master Minit had understood such words as the brown men spoke.

It was all made plain, however, when one of the white men who had come from Amsterdam the year before, stepped forward, bending low before my master as he began making odd sounds to the Indians, which must have been words of some kind, since they answered him in the same manner, after which the whole crowd of top-knotted, half-naked savages rose to their feet.

Then our Dutchman would repeat the Indian words in English to Master Minit, though no one could say whether he repeated exactly that which the savages had told him, and thus a full hour was spent in telling of the greatness of Holland, the good intent of the West India Company toward the brown people, and the advantage it would be to have white men in the land.

Master Minit was not the only one who could deal out soft words, for the chief savage of the company was quite his match in such business, and made it appear as if this island of Manhattan were the one place in all the great world, while at the same time he claimed that the Manhattan Indians were the only real men ever born.

Finally Master Minit got at the kernel of the nut by telling the savages that he was ready to buy, and to pay a good price for their island, at the same time letting it be understood that they need not move away so long as it was their desire to be neighbors and friends with the white men, who would pay all kinds of prices for furs, or whatsoever they had to sell.

This was the time when the chest was opened, and I looked to see the brown men walk away angrily, believing Master Minit was making fools of them when he offered such trumpery stuff for good, solid land; but much to my surprise the savages hung over the beads and cloth as if they were worth their weight in gold.

Had I owned the island, and Master Minit was trying to buy it from me for what he had in the chest, I would not have given him as much of the soil as he stood on, for a shipload of the stuff; but these savages seemed to think they were getting great wealth in exchange for the land, and he who was acting as mouthpiece had need to keep his tongue wagging lively in order to repeat all that was said.

By noon the bargain had been made; the savages kept a tight grip on all they had received, even when they were invited on board the *Sea Mew*, where writings of the trade were to be made, and I had hard work not to laugh outright when I saw how gingerly they stepped into our staunch longboat, as if fearing it would overset.

BOATS USED BY THE SAVAGES

This fear of so seaworthy a craft as ours, was all the more comical after I had seen such boats as the savages themselves used, and you may believe that I am stretching the truth to the point of breaking it, when I say that they put off in toy vessels that were little better than eggshells.

What is more, they showed no fear in so doing even when the waves ran high, and it seemed as if no human power could prevent the frail craft from being swamped.

These canoes, as the savages called them, were given shape by thin splints of wood, bent something after the fashion of a bow, with the forward and after ends, although one looked the same shape as the other, rising high above the midship portion. They were covered with bark from the birch tree, sewn together with sinews of deer, or of such like animals, and smeared plentifully with balsam from the pine trees. Where in another craft would have been the rail, were strips of wood not thicker than my smallest finger, but of such toughness as to give shape to the boat.

I could easily, and have done so many times since, toss the largest of these canoes on my shoulder and carry it without feeling that I was burdened. Yet four or five of the brown men would get inside one of these drowning machines, as Kryn called them, kneeling in the bottom, since there was no chance to sit squarely down, and dart over the waves with greater speed than our crew could row the longboat.

WANDERING OVER THE ISLAND

When Master Minit was about to go on board the *Sea Mew*, with the savages whose land he had just bought, he graciously gave me permit to wander at will over the island, with the understanding, however, that I was to be on the shore, ready to come aboard ship, before nightfall.

It can well be understood that I took advantage of the permission without delay, and before I had finished with my roaming, I came to believe that my master had not driven as hard a bargain as at first sight appeared.

In England, or in Holland, the land would not have been looked upon as of much value to a farmer. There were some spots where a kind of wheat was growing, but these were few and far between. A goodly portion of the upper part was swampy, and beyond that were ledges, covered with creeping vines, over which one could not make his way even if he felt so disposed.

One of the Dutchmen who had come over before we did, told me that he did not dare let his cows or sheep wander beyond the marshes, because of the forest's being filled with bears, wolves, and other ravening creatures which would make speedy end of them.

When I asked as to the outlook for a farmer, he turned up his thick nose, saying that save for the fact of the land being rich, never having been planted, he could not raise enough to keep his family and his cattle from starving.

Then it was he told me that the West India Company did not give great heed to what might be grown in the earth, but counted on building here a town in order that they might make much money by buying furs of the savages.

It seemed that there were animals in the forest nearabout, the skins of which were valuable in many of the other countries of the world, and it was Master Minit's business, if he would please those who had made him Director of New Netherland, to exchange toys and beads for furs.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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