

Brill Ethel Claire

**South from Hudson Bay: An
Adventure and Mystery Story for
Boys**



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E. C. Brill

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I THE NEW LAND

Before Walter Rossel was wholly awake, even before he opened his eyes, he realized that the ship was unusually quiet. There was only a slight rolling motion from side to side, a dead roll. Was she caught in the ice again, or had she reached Fort York at last? Could it be that the long voyage was really over? Walter hurried into the few clothes he had taken off, and ran up on deck, hoping to see land close by.

He was disappointed. He could see nothing but gray water, a line of white where waves were breaking on a long bar, and the dim, shadowy forms of the other ships, hulls, masts, and spars veiled in dense fog. There was no ice in sight, yet all three vessels were riding at anchor.

Eagerly the boy turned to a sailor who was scrubbing the deck. Walter's native tongue was French, but he had picked up a little English during the voyage, enough to ask why the ships were at anchor, and to understand part of the man's reply. They had crossed the bar in the night, the sailor said, and were lying in the shallow water of York Flats. Over there to the south, hidden in the fog, was the shore.

The news that they had arrived off Fort York spread rapidly among the passengers on the *Lord Wellington*. Men, women, and children crowded on deck, gazed into the fog, questioned one another and the sailors in French, German, and broken English, and talked and laughed excitedly. A little boy of seven and his older sister, a bright-faced girl of thirteen with hazel eyes and heavy braids of brown hair, joined Walter and poured out eager questions.

"They say we are at the end of our voyage," cried the girl, "but where is the land?"

Walter pointed to the south. "We'll see it when the fog lifts. Does your father know we are almost at Fort York?"

"Yes, he is coming on deck. There he is now."

A middle aged man, thin and somewhat stooped, was coming towards them, his pale face smiling and eager. "Well, my boy," he greeted Walter, "this is good news indeed. We shall soon be settled on our own farm. Think of that, children, our own farm, a far larger one than we could ever dream of having in Switzerland."

"Yes, Monsieur Perier," replied Walter, "the voyage is almost over, and –"

"Look, Walter," Elise interrupted. "The fog is thinner. See how red it is in the east. And look at that dark line, like a shadow. Can that be the shore?"

The fog was certainly thinning. A wider stretch of water had become visible, and the outlines of the other ships were clearer. Though steam power was coming into use for river navigation on both sides of the Atlantic, there were no ocean-going steamships in 1821. The *Lord Wellington*, the *Prince of Wales*, and the *Eddystone* were sailing vessels, sturdily built craft with extra heavy oak sheathing and iron-plated bows, suitable for cruising ice-strewn, northern waters. That all three had been in contact with the ice, their scraped and battered hulls betrayed. From each mizzen peak fluttered the British red ensign, and the mainmast head bore a flag with a red cross and the letters H. B. C., the flag of the Hudson Bay Company.

The immigrants aboard the *Lord Wellington* wasted scarcely a glance on the other ships. It was the land they were interested in. As the rising sun drank up the fog, and the shore line grew clearer, the

eager faces of Elise and Walter sobered with disappointment. A most unattractive shore was revealed. It was low, swampy, sparsely clad with stunted trees, a desolate land without sign of human dwelling. Fort York could not be seen. It was fifteen or twenty miles in the interior, on the Hayes River.

Unpromising as the land appeared, it was land nevertheless, and everyone longed to set foot upon it. To the one hundred and sixty Swiss immigrants, the voyage had seemed endless. On May 30 they had sailed from Dordrecht in Holland. Now it was the last of August. For nearly three months they had been on shipboard. Delayed by stormy weather and crowding ice, they had spent a whole month navigating Hudson Straits and Bay. Luckily for them they did not realize what a long and toilsome way they had yet to travel before they reached their destination, the Selkirk Colony on the Red River of the North.

Though many of the new colonists looked thin, worn, and even ill from the hardships of the long voyage, they appeared to be neat, self-respecting folk, intelligent and fairly well to do. Some wore the peasant dress of their native cantons, but the majority were townspeople, – shopkeepers and skilled workmen. Mr. Perier was a chemist and apothecary.

Walter Rossel had not one blood relation in the whole company, but he considered himself one of the Perier family. For the past two years, as an apprentice in Mr. Perier's shop, he had lived with them. When his master had decided to emigrate, he had offered to either release Walter from his apprenticeship or take the boy with him. Walter had decided quickly, and his father and stepmother had given their consent.

The Periers and Walter had breakfasted, packed their personal belongings, and were on deck again, when a small, open sailboat came in sight from the direction of the shore. It headed for the *Eddystone* and disappeared on the other side of that ship. Presently it reappeared, visited the *Prince of Wales*, and finally came on to the *Lord Wellington*.

As the little boat drew close, Elise, Walter, and Max looked curiously down on the crew of sun-tanned, bearded men, strangely dressed in hooded coats of bright blue or of white blanketing, bound about the waists with colorful silk or woolen sashes. The man in command came aboard, climbing the ladder up the side. He was broad shouldered and strongly built, with reddish hair, bristly beard, and skin burned red-brown. With his blue coat and bright red sash, he wore buckskin trousers fringed at the seams, and the queerest footgear Walter had ever seen, slipper-like, heel-less shoes of soft leather embroidered in colors. They were Indian moccasins ornamented with dyed porcupine quills.

After glancing about him and inclining his head slightly in a general greeting, the newcomer shook hands with the Master of the ship and with Captain Mai, the man in charge of the Swiss immigrants, who had hurried forward to greet him. He went below with them, but remained only a few minutes.

As soon as the red-haired man was overside again, the Swiss crowded around their conductor to ask when they were to go ashore. Captain Mai pointed to the other ships. Their sails were up and they were getting under way.

“A pilot has just gone aboard the *Eddystone*,” he said. “We are to follow her.”

Even before Captain Mai had finished speaking, the *Lord Wellington* was waking to activity. The anchors came up, the sails were set, and caught the breeze. In a few moments the immigrant vessel was following the supply ships towards the mouth of the Hayes River.

II FORT YORK

The first view of Fort York was as disappointing as the first glimpse of shore. To Elise and Walter a fort meant massive stone walls and towers, rising from some high and commanding position. A stretch of log fencing in a bog was not their idea of fortification. It had the interest of novelty, however, for it was very different from anything they had ever seen before. The logs were set upright and close together, and above this stockade rose the flat, leaded roofs of the buildings. Near the fort stood a cluster of strange dwellings, quite unlike the Eskimo summer huts of stones, sod, and skins, with which the Swiss had become familiar since reaching Arctic waters. These queer skin tents were roughly cone-shaped, and the ends of the framework of poles projected at the peak. They were Cree Indian summer lodges. Up the wide board walk from the dock to the fort gates, men were carrying sacks and boxes. The unloading of the supply ships had begun.

The Perier family were among the last of the immigrants to go ashore. Very much like a homeless wanderer, motherless Elise Perier felt as she stood on the river bank beside her father, with Max clinging to her hand, and their scanty belongings piled around them. It was good to be on land again of course, but this was such a strange land. In spite of cramped quarters, poor food, seasickness, and the other hardships of the voyage, the *Lord Wellington* seemed almost homelike compared to this wild, barren country. Elise tried bravely to smile at her father and Walter, but she felt as if she must cry instead.

Captain Mai was calling them. "Go right up to the fort, Perier. I want to get you all together."

Walter picked up as much of the luggage as he could carry. Mr. Perier was looking doubtfully at a heavy wooden chest, when a boyish voice at his shoulder said in French, "Let me help, M'sieu. If you will put that on my back, I will carry it for you."

Walter dropped his own load, and he and Mr. Perier lifted the chest and placed it so it rested on the portage strap, as the young Canadian directed. Then the latter led the way up the walk. He was a slender, supple lad, not as tall as Walter, but he carried the heavy load with apparent ease. The Swiss boy admired the young fellow's strength as much as he liked his face, with its bright brown eyes and clean-cut features.

The log stockade proved to be more imposing and fort-like than it had appeared from the river. It was about twenty feet high, with bastions at the corners pierced with openings for cannon. The massive entrance gates stood open, and in front of them was a tall flagstaff, bearing the Company flag with the letters H. B. C. and the curious motto, "*Pro pelle cutem*," – "Skin for skin." Entering the gates and passing within the double row of stockades, their guide led the Perier family among workshops and cabins to an inner court, which was surrounded with substantial log structures where the officers lived and where the merchandise and furs were stored. In this court the Swiss were gathered.

Mr. Perier tried to thank the friendly lad, but he shook his head. "It is nothing, nothing, M'sieu," he replied, a quick smile displaying his even, white teeth. "I must not linger. There is much to do." And he was off at a run.

When all of the Swiss were assembled, one of their leaders suggested that it was fitting they should give thanks to God that the dangerous ocean voyage was over and they were safe on land once more. They stood with bowed heads while he led the prayer. The lump in Elise's throat disappeared and she felt better.

In the meantime, Captain Mai had been arranging with the Chief Factor, – as the Hudson Bay Company officer in charge of the fort was called, – for quarters for the immigrants. There was not room for all in the buildings, so many of the men and boys would have to sleep in tents. A place in

one of the houses was found for the Periers, but Walter was assigned to a tent with Mr. Scheidecker and his sons, German Swiss from Berne.

That first night on land was a miserable one for Walter. Fort York stood in a veritable bog or muskeg, firm and hard enough the greater part of the year, when it was frozen, but wet and soft in the short summer season. The ground was damp of course, and Walter's one blanket did not keep out the chill. To make matters worse, he and his companions were pestered by the bloodthirsty mosquitoes that bred in inconceivable hordes in the swampy lowlands. But the discomfort of the night was quickly forgotten the next day.

A busy and interesting place the Swiss boy found York Factory, as the Hudson Bay men called the fort. It was not a factory in our common meaning of the word, – not a *manufactory*, – for nothing was manufactured there except boats for river traffic, dog sleds, wooden kegs, and such articles of use and trade as an ordinary carpenter, blacksmith, or tinsmith could make with simple tools. *Factory* in the fur trade meant a trading post in charge of an officer called a *factor*, a commercial agent who bought and sold.

For more than a century York Factory had been the principal port of entry for the Hudson Bay Company. There the Company's ships from England brought the supplies and trade goods destined for all the widely separated posts in the interior. To York Factory, in bark canoes and wooden boats, down rivers and lakes, from all parts of the Company's great domain, came the bales of costly furs to be sorted and repacked and shipped. A considerable staff was employed at the place, a Chief Factor, a Chief Trader, a surgeon, several clerks and apprentice clerks, a steward, a shipwright, a carpenter, a mason, a cooper, a blacksmith, a tailor, laborers, cooks, and servants. The boatmen or *voyageurs* who went to and fro into the interior were hired independently for each trip.

Until he sailed for America, Walter had never even heard of the Hudson Bay Company or the fur trade. Everything in the fort was novel and interesting to him. A good-natured apprentice clerk, who spoke French readily, showed him the Indian store, a large room well filled with all sorts of goods used in the Indian trade, from bales of heavy blankets, blue and red woolens, calicos of every color, long-barreled trading guns, kegs of powder, and big iron and copper kettles, to drawers of useful little things, gun flints, fire steels, files, awls, needles, fish hooks, twine, beads of all imaginable tints, and ochre, vermilion, and other dry colors, used by the Indians to adorn both their handiwork and themselves.

“I never saw so many different things in one shop,” Walter commented.

The clerk laughed. “The worst of it is that we have to keep the closest account of it all. We must know what is in every package sent out and what post it goes to. Being a fur trader isn't all adventure I can tell you. There is a lot of office drudgery, with all the bookkeeping, invoicing, and checking of lists. We can't afford to make mistakes,” he added soberly. “The very lives of the men in some far-away post may depend on their getting the right supplies. Why, last year – ” He broke off suddenly, and switched to English. “I spoke to the Chief Trader about your proposal. He says it can't be done. It's not the policy of the Company to send voyageurs out to trade, especially on such long trips.”

Walter had turned to see to whom the clerk was speaking. He had heard no footsteps, but there, close behind him, was a tall man in blue coat, deerskin leggings, and moccasins. In his surprise, the boy drew back a little and stood staring. Of all the men he had seen since coming ashore, this one was the strangest and most striking. He was tall, powerfully built, and very dark of skin, with high cheek bones and high-bridged nose. His long, coarse black hair, slick and shining with grease, was worn in what seemed to the Swiss boy a curious fashion for a man, parted in the middle and plaited in two braids bound with deerskin thongs and hanging one over each shoulder.

“You not give me goods?” The man's voice was peculiarly deep, not unmusical but of a hard, metallic quality. His small, dark eyes looked straight into the clerk's large blue ones.

The young man shook his head. “No, your plan is too wild, too much risk in it. That sort of thing is against the Company's policy.”

The voyageur's brown face stiffened. His hard eyes seemed to catch fire as they rested first on the clerk and then, for a moment, on Walter. Without a word he turned and with long, soft-footed stride, left the room as noiselessly as he had entered it.

"Pleasant manners," commented the clerk. "He needn't have included you in his wrath."

"What did he want?" asked Walter. He had understood but little of the brief conversation.

"A lot of goods on credit. He claims to have great influence with the Sioux, and he wants an outfit to go and trade with them. Of course we can't let him have it."

"You don't trust him?"

"We don't know anything about him, except that he is a good voyageur. It's against the Company's policy to send voyageurs out to trade. And his scheme is a crazy one. The Sioux country is a thousand miles away. He said he would bring all the furs back here and take whatever commission we chose to give, but probably we should never hear of him or the goods again."

"Is he an Indian?"

"Half-breed I imagine. Finely built fellow, isn't he? Has the strength of a moose, they say. He is an expert voyageur."

"I don't like him," Walter commented.

"Neither do I, and I suppose he has a grudge against me now, though the refusal wasn't my doing of course. Well, I must stop talking and get to work checking this new stuff that has come in."

Thus dismissed, Walter wandered out into the court, through the open gates and down to the shore. Everywhere was bustle and activity. There was much to be done, and done quickly. With the least possible delay the ships must be unloaded and loaded again with the furs waiting packed and ready for the voyage to England. The little fleet must get away promptly while Hudson Straits were still open. All the goods and supplies received had to be checked, examined, and sorted. The things to be sent to trading posts in the interior were repacked for transport in open boats up the rivers, and every package was invoiced and plainly marked. Boats must be made ready and equipped and provisioned, not only to carry the supplies and trade goods, but the one hundred and sixty new settlers as well. The twelve hours a day that the employees of the Company were required to work in summer, if necessary, were not enough. Most of the men were simply doing all they possibly could each day until the rush should be over.

Down by the river Walter found the young fellow who had carried Mr. Perier's chest. He was putting a new seat in one of the large, heavily built boats ranged along the bank. Looking up from his work, he greeted the Swiss boy with a cheery "*Bo jou*," which the latter guessed to be the Canadian way of saying "*Bon jour*" or "Good day." Walter, who was handy with tools, offered his help.

As they worked they talked. His new acquaintance's French was fluent, but Walter found it puzzling. To a Swiss, the Canadian dialect seemed a strange sort of French, differing considerably in pronunciation and in many of its words from his own native tongue. Yet Walter and Louis Brabant managed to understand each other fairly well.

"I suppose this is your home, here at the fort," said Walter.

"My home? *Non*, I live at the Red River."

"Why, that is where we are going!"

"You go to the Selkirk Colony at Fort Douglas. It is not there that I live, but at Pembina, farther up the river."

"Is Pembina a town?"

"Not what you would call a town. It is a settlement and there are trading posts there, a Hudson Bay post and a Northwest Company post. Now the two companies have united, one of the forts will be abandoned I suppose. You may be glad the fighting between them is over. There will be better times in the Selkirk Colony now. They have had a hard time and much trouble, those poor settlers!"

“What do you mean by fighting, – and trouble?” asked the surprised Walter. “What is the Northwest Company? Isn’t the Hudson Bay the only trading company? Doesn’t it own all the country where the Indians and the fur bearing animals are?”

“Oh no,” returned Louis with a smile and a shake of his head. “Farther south there is fur country that belongs to the United States. The Hudson Bay Company has no power there. It is true that the Company claims all the northern fur country, but the Northwest Company said they had a right to trade and trap there too, and that was how the trouble began. Have you never heard of the Northwest Company, and how for years they have fought the Hudson Bay men for the furs, and how they drove the settlers from the Selkirk Colony and captured Fort Douglas and killed the Governor?”

Walter shook his head in bewilderment, and Louis went on to tell, briefly and vividly, something of the conflict between the two great trading companies, and the disasters that conflict had brought upon the settlers. The Swiss boy listened in amazement, understanding enough of the story to grasp its significance.

“But why didn’t Captain Mai tell us all that?” he cried. “Why did he let us think that everything was all right?”

“Perhaps he thought you would not come if you knew. But those old troubles are all over. Last spring the two companies became one.”

Louis’ story troubled Walter. He retold it to Mr. Perier and Mr. Scheidecker, and they carried it to other leading men of the prospective settlers. Several of them sought out Captain Mai and demanded to know why they had not been informed of all those wild doings in the colony. Unsatisfied by their conductor’s explanations, they asked for an interview with the Chief Factor, and put their questions to him. He confirmed the statement that the fur-traders’ rivalry and warfare were at an end. About five months before the arrival of the Swiss, the two great trading companies had united under the Hudson Bay name. The colony on the Red River would now have a chance to develop in peace.

In spite of this assurance, the Hudson Bay officer’s replies to some of their queries left the Swiss in no happy mood. Mr. Perier was stunned to learn that they still had some seven hundred miles to travel, all the way through untamed wilderness. But he had no thought of turning back. He had signed an agreement with Captain Mai, and had paid for his family’s passage, – a moderate sum, but he could ill afford to lose it. To pay their fare back again would leave him penniless. Fertile land, one hundred acres of prairie, – that would not have to be cleared, – had been promised him rent free for a year. After that he was to pay a rent of from twenty to fifty bushels of wheat from his crop, or he might buy the land outright for five hundred bushels. The offer was enticing, and he and Walter had made many plans for the future.

III

THE SELKIRK COLONY AND THE RIVAL FUR TRADERS

What was the Selkirk Colony, and how did it happen that this party of Swiss had come so far to join it?

When Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, one of the famous Douglas family of the Scottish border, planned the settlement on the Red River of the North, his purpose was to find homes and livelihood for the poverty-stricken Scotch Highlanders. Hundreds of those unfortunate people had been turned out of their homes through changes in the system of management of the great landed estates in Scotland, and there was little opportunity in the old country for them to make a living. Though a Lowlander himself, Lord Selkirk had often visited the Highland glens. He knew the people, and had learned their native Gaelic language. He sympathized with them in their misfortunes. Seeking for some way to help them, he realized that their only chance for prosperity and success lay in emigration to a country where land was cheap and plentiful. He had heard of the rich soil of the Red River valley, and decided that was the place to plant his colony.

The lower Red River valley was included in the vast domain of the Hudson Bay Company. The charter from King Charles II of England issued in 1670 had given to Prince Rupert and the “Company of Adventurers of England, trading into Hudson Bay” – “the whole trade of all those seas, streights, and bays, rivers, lakes, creeks, and sounds, – that lie within the entrance of the streights commonly called Hudson’s Streights, together with all the lands, countries, and territories upon the coasts and confines of the seas, streights, bays, lakes, rivers, creeks, and sounds aforesaid, which are not now actually possessed by any of our subjects, or by the subjects of any other Christian prince or State.” Not only did the royal charter grant the “Adventurers” the trade of that vast region, – which, in the widest interpretation of the terms, included a quarter or a third of the whole of North America, – but it conferred upon the Company the right to hold the land “in free and common socage” which means absolute proprietorship. Whether King Charles really had the right to give away this vast territory to anyone may be questioned, but the Hudson Bay Company claimed proprietorship under the charter.

The Red River empties into Lake Winnipeg, and the northern end of the lake drains into the Nelson River which flows to Hudson Bay. Accordingly the valley of the Red was included in the territory claimed by the Company. However, before the time of this story, the purchase from France by the United States of a vast extent of country west of the Mississippi River, – the Louisiana Purchase – and the boundary treaties with the British government, gave the greater part of the Red River to the United States. Only the stretch from what is now the northern limit of Minnesota and North Dakota to Lake Winnipeg remained in English possession. It was to this lower part of the valley that Lord Selkirk wished to take his colonists. He knew well enough that the Hudson Bay Company would not be inclined to part with any of its domain for such a purpose, but he had set his heart upon planting his colony in that particular spot.

Accordingly he laid his plans to get possession of the required land. Quietly, by buying shares himself and persuading his friends to buy also, he obtained control over a majority of the stock of the great trading company. Then he offered to purchase a wide strip of land on the Red and Assiniboine rivers. As he controlled the majority of votes in the Company, he got what he wanted, about one hundred and sixteen square miles, of which he became absolute proprietor.

The first settlers he sent over were of course Scotch Highlanders, with a few Irish. They arrived at Fort York in the autumn of 1811, too late to go to the Red River that year. The next summer they reached their new home on the Red, and were followed within three years by other parties, numbering in all a little more than two hundred, most of them Scotch.

The troubles of the settlers were many and discouraging. Had the Earl of Selkirk been a more practical man he would scarcely have undertaken to plant a farming colony in the midst of a wilderness, hundreds of miles from any other settlement, and without communication with the civilized world except by canoe and rowboat over long and difficult river trails. Not all of the colonists' troubles were due to natural conditions however.

The Hudson Bay Company had a strong trading rival in the Northwest Fur Company. The latter was a Canadian organization with headquarters at Montreal, while the Hudson Bay Company was strictly English, its chief offices in London. The Northwest men had established trading posts along the Great Lakes and far to the west and north beyond Lake Superior. They had penetrated farther and farther into the country claimed by the Hudson Bay Company. The Hudson Bay men themselves had done almost nothing to develop trade in the interior, until the Canadian traders began to go among the Indians and secure furs that might otherwise have been brought to the posts on the Bay. Awakening to the realization that the Northwest Company was actually taking away the trade, the Hudson Bay men also sought the interior. In this way began a race and a fight for the furs that grew hotter and fiercer with each year. Everywhere on the principal lakes and streams of the west and northwest, rival posts were established, sometimes within a few hundred rods of each other.

The rivalry between the fur traders was approaching its height when Lord Selkirk founded his colony. From the first, the Northwest Company opposed the scheme. The fur trader never likes to see the country from which the pelts come opened up to settlement. He knows that as the land is settled the wild animals disappear. Moreover Lord Selkirk was now the controlling power in the Hudson Bay Company, and the Northwesters suspected him of some deep laid plan to interfere with and ruin their trade. Several years before, they had established a post called Fort Gibraltar at the junction of the Red and the Assiniboine, and their route to the rich fur districts of the west lay up the latter river. They believed that the settlement was merely a scheme to cut off their trade. So they looked with unfriendly eyes upon the colony, and even persuaded a considerable number of the colonists to leave and settle on lands farther east in Canada. Most of the Northwest traders were of Scotch blood, many of them of Highland descent, and doubtless they honestly thought that their countrymen would find better homes elsewhere. The chance that the Red River settlement would ever succeed seemed, to practical-minded men, very slender indeed.

The ill feeling between the two great trading companies and between the Northwest Company and the Selkirk settlement grew stronger and bitterer as time went on. Mistakes and high handed acts on both sides, in a land where there was no law, led at last to open conflict. In 1815 the colonists were driven from their homes and obliged to flee to the shelter of a Hudson Bay post at the northern end of Lake Winnipeg. The Hudson Bay men made reprisals by capturing the Northwesters' posts and interrupting their trade. The settlers were rallied and taken back to their homes, only to face a worse disaster the next year. An open fight between the men of Governor Semple of the colony and a party of half-breeds in the employ of the Northwest Company resulted in the killing of the Governor and his twenty followers, and the capture of their stronghold, Fort Douglas.

Lord Selkirk was in America at the time seeking from the Canadian government some means of protection for his colonists. Failing to get satisfaction from a government whose sympathies were with the Northwest rather than with the Hudson Bay company, he had hired, to guard his colony, one hundred men from two regiments of mercenary soldiers that had been disbanded after the War of 1812. While he was traversing Lake Superior on his way west with these men, he met canoes bringing word of the disastrous fight of Seven Oaks, the death of Governor Semple, and the capture of Fort Douglas. Skirting the shores of the lake, Lord Selkirk went to Fort William, the headquarters of the Northwest Company on Thunder Bay. There he demanded the release of the prisoners who had been brought from the Red River. The controversy that followed finally led to his taking possession of the fort. The fact that he had been appointed a magistrate for the Indian country and sought the arrest of the Northwesters who had taken part in or instigated the troubles at Fort Douglas, gave his action

some color of legal right. From Fort William he went on to his disordered and devastated colony, and gathered together all the settlers who were willing to remain.

In spite of all the settlement had been through, Lord Selkirk had no intention of giving up his plans. So many of the colonists had been driven or enticed away and would not return, that he sought to find others to take their places. It was then that he hit upon the idea of bringing over the steady, hard-working Swiss, who would, he believed, make the very best of settlers.

Captain Mai or May, – the English spelling of his name, – a Swiss who had served as a mercenary soldier in the British army, and other agents were sent to Switzerland to secure settlers. Throughout the cantons of Neuchatel, Vaud, Geneva, and Berne, they traveled, explaining the advantages of emigration to the Red River country. The pamphlets they distributed, printed in French and German, gave a highly colored and alluring description of that country with its many miles of fertile soil to be had for the asking. Like all emigration agents, Captain Mai and his assistants told all the good things about both country and colony and left out the bad. About the civil war between the fur companies and the troubles it had led to, they said nothing.

Early in May 1821, about one hundred and sixty emigrants were gathered together at a small village on the Rhine near Basel. In great barges they were taken down the Rhine, a delightful trip on that famous river with its beautiful and striking scenery, to Dordrecht in Holland. There they embarked on the *Lord Wellington* for the trip to Hudson Bay. The voyage took far longer than they had realized it would take, the food provided was inferior to what they were used to, the drinking water became bad, and storms and ice caused delay. At Hudson Straits the *Lord Wellington* overtook the two Hudson Bay Company supply ships, and the three were held for three weeks in the ice with which the Straits were filled. The heavy swell coming in from the open ocean and rushing between the icebergs, caused rapid tides and currents in which sailing ships were almost helpless. Luckily the *Lord Wellington* escaped serious injury, but one of the supply ships was nearly wrecked and badly damaged by collision with a berg. Not far away were two other vessels also caught in the ice, the *Fury* and the *Hecla* carrying Captain Parry and his Arctic exploring expedition. The *Hecla* had one of her anchors broken and several hawsers carried away.

The Swiss emigrants were a hopeful, cheerful folk. They had been together so long they had become like a large family party, and they made the best of their hardships. When it was safe to do so, the young and active climbed down from the ship to the solid ice field, ran races, and even held a dance on a particularly smooth stretch. At last the ships succeeded in entering the bay. Skirting the barren shores, the three vessels destined for the Hudson Bay post reached anchorage off York Factory in safety.

IV

THE START FROM FORT YORK

Finding transport for so large a party of settlers taxed the resources of the Hudson Bay Company. Several new boats had to be built, and every one of the immigrants who could handle wood-working tools was called upon to help.

The boats were to be despatched in two divisions or brigades. Walter had taken for granted that he would travel with the Periers, but he found himself assigned to the first division, the Periers to the second. He asked to be transferred to their boat, but Captain Mai declared the change could not be made. Only young people were to go in the first brigade which was expected to make the best possible speed. Walter was young and strong and without family. The boy protested that he was one of the Perier family, he had come with them, and was to live with them in the settlement, but his protest was of no avail. Elise and Max were as much distressed as he was at the arrangement, and he had to comfort them with the assurance that they would all be together soon at the Red River.

It was well after noon on the day appointed for departure, when the start was made. The boat carrying the guide, who was really the commanding officer of the brigade, was propelled by oars out into the stream, and the square sail raised. With shouts, cheers, and farewells, the long, open craft, well laden with settlers, supplies, and goods, was away up the river.

When Walter took his place he was pleased to find himself in the same boat with Louis Brabant. In spite of his disappointment at not traveling with the Periers, the Swiss boy was in high spirits to be away at last, headed for the wonderful Red River country where his fortune, he felt sure, awaited him. He waved his hat and shouted himself hoarse in farewells to those on shore.

It was a picturesque crowd massed on the dock and fringing the river bank. Mingled with the Swiss were brown-skinned, long-haired post employees and voyageurs with bright colored sashes, beaded garters tied below the knees of their deerskin or homespun trousers, caps of fur or cloth, or gaudy handkerchiefs bound about their heads. A little to one side stood a group of Indians from the wigwams, in buckskin, bright calicos, blankets, feathers, and beadwork. One old Cree was proudly clad in a discarded army coat of scarlet with gold lace and a tall black hat adorned with feathers. The dress of the Swiss, though in general more sober, was brightened by the gay colors of shawls, aprons, and kerchiefs, of short jackets or long-tailed coats with metal buttons, and of home-knit stockings. As various as the costumes were the shouts and farewells and words of advice exchanged between boats and shore in a babel of tongues, English, Scots English, Swiss French, Canadian French, German, Gaelic, and Cree.

The sail was raised and caught the breeze. Sitting at his ease, Walter turned his attention to what lay ahead. The surrounding country was not very pleasing in appearance. Scantly wooded with a scrub of willow, poplar, tamarack, and swamp spruce, it was low and flat, especially on the west, where the York Factory stood between the Hayes and the Nelson rivers. The Nelson, Louis said, was the larger stream, but the Hayes was supposed to afford a better route into the interior. Certainly the latter river was not attractive, with its raw, ragged looking, clay banks, embedded with stones, its muddy islands, and frequent bars and shallows that interfered with navigation.

The immigrants were not suffered to sit in idleness all that afternoon. There were two or more experienced rivermen in each boat, but the new colonists were required to help. When the wind went down before sunset, Walter expected to be called upon to wield an oar. But the current of the Hayes was too strong and rapid to be stemmed with oars. The boat was brought close to the bank, and the sail lowered. Standing in the stern, the steersman surveyed his crew. Walter, in the other end of the boat, had not noticed the steersman before. Now, he recognized the tall man with the braided hair, who had come up behind him so noiselessly in the Indian trading room at the fort.

In his deep, metallic voice the steersman began to speak, pointing first at one man, then at another. When his bright, hard little eyes alighted on Walter, and his long, brown forefinger pointed him out, the boy was moved by the same strong, instinctive dislike, almost akin to fear, he had felt when he first looked into the half-breed's face. The fellow's French was so strange that Walter could not grasp the meaning. With a questioning glance, he turned to Louis Brabant.

"You are to go ashore," Louis explained. "Murray has chosen you in his crew. The tracking begins now."

Walter had no idea what tracking might be, but he rose to obey. With several others, including Louis, he jumped from the boat to the muddy bit of beach. The steersman handed each a leather strap, and Louis showed Walter how to attach his to the tow-line and pass the strap over his "inshore" shoulder. Like horses on a tow-path, the men were to haul the boat, with the rest of the party in it, up stream.

The steep, clay banks were slippery from recent rains. Fallen trees, that had been undermined and had slid part way down the incline, projected at all angles. The willing, but inexperienced tracking crew slipped, stumbled, scrambled, and struggled along, tugging at the tow-line. With maddening ease the tall steersman, in the lead, strode through and over the obstacles, turning his head every minute or two to shout back orders and abuse. He seemed to have the utmost contempt for his greenhorn crew, but he tried to urge and threaten them to a pace of which they were quite incapable. Every time a man slipped or stumbled, jerking the tow-line, Murray poured out a torrent of violent and profane abuse, in such bad French and English, so intermixed with Gaelic and Indian words, that, luckily, the Swiss could not understand a quarter of it.

Walter understood the tone, if not the words. He grew angrier and angrier, as he strained and tugged at the rope and struggled to keep his footing on the slippery bank. But he had the sense to realize that he must not start a mutiny on the first day of the journey. He held his tongue and labored on. The boy was thin, not having filled out to his height, but he was strong. He was mountain bred, with muscular legs, good heart and lungs. Nevertheless when at last Murray gave the order to halt, only pride kept Walter from dropping to the ground to rest.

The second shift was led by a fair-haired, blue-eyed man from the Orkney Islands, off the coast of Scotland, where the Hudson Bay Company recruited many of its employees. Before his crew were through with their turn at the tow-line, they came in sight, on rounding a bend, of the first two boats with bows drawn up on a stretch of muddy beach. Farther back on higher ground tents were going up and fires being kindled. Murray ordered out the oars, and boat number three was run in beside the others.

After the tent, bedding, and provisions for the night were unloaded, the tall steersman, without troubling to help with the camp making, took himself off. It was young Louis Brabant who took charge. He selected the spot for the one tent and helped to pitch it. Then he sent a man and a boy to collect fuel, and Walter and another into the woods to strip balsam fir branches for beds. Louis himself started the cooking fire, between two green logs spaced so that the big iron kettle rested upon them. From a chunk of dried caribou meat, – so hard and dry it looked a good deal like sole leather, – he shaved off some shreds. After he had ground the bits of meat between two stones, he put the partly pulverized stuff to boil in a kettle of water. This soup, thickened with flour, was the principal dish of the meal. Several handfuls of dark blue saskatoon or service berries, gathered near by, served as dessert. By the time supper was ready, the young Canadian's swift, deft way of working, his skill and certainty, his good nature and helpfulness, had won the good will of everyone.

Walter asked Louis how long it would be before the second brigade left Fort York.

"That I cannot tell. As soon as all is ready. You regret to be separated from your family?"

"They aren't really my family. I am apprenticed to Monsieur Perier."

"The young Englishmen who come over to be clerks for the Company," Louis remarked, "sign a paper to serve for five years. Is it so with you?"

“Something like that, and in return Monsieur Perier agrees to give me a home and teach me the business. When he decided to come to America, he really released me from the agreement though. He offered to treat me like his own son if I came with him.”

“If you are twenty-one you can get land of your own in the Colony.”

“I’m not sixteen yet.”

“Is it so?” cried Louis. “Then we are the same age, you and me. Fifteen years last Christmas day I was born. So my mother told Père Provencher when I was baptized.”

“My birthday is in February,” Walter replied. “I thought you must be older than that. How long have you been a voyageur for the Company?”

“For the Hudson Bay Company only this summer. This is the first time I have come to Fort York. Last year, after my father died, I went to the Kaministikwia with the Northwest men. But always since I was big enough I have known how to carry a pack and paddle a canoe. The birch canoe, – ah, that is the right kind of boat! These heavy affairs of wood,” Louis shrugged contemptuously. “They are so slow, so heavy to track and to portage. You have the birch canoe in your country? No? Then you cannot understand. When you have voyaged in a birch canoe, you will want no more of these heavy things.”

“Why does the Company use them?”

Louis shrugged again as if the ways of the Hudson Bay Company were past understanding. “The wooden boats will carry greater loads,” he admitted, “and they are stronger, yes. Sometimes you get a hole in a canoe and you must stop to mend it. Yet I think you do not lose so much time that way as in dragging these heavy boats over portages.”

The wavering white bands of the aurora borealis were mounting the northern sky before the camp was ready for the night. The one tent carried by boat number three was given up to the women and children. Walter rolled himself in a blanket and lay down with the other men on a bed of fir branches close to the fire. The air was sharp and cold, and he would have been glad of another blanket. But he had been well used to cold weather in his native country, and had become still more hardened to it during the long voyage in northern waters.

V THE BLACK MURRAY

Louis' voice, almost in Walter's ear, was crying, "*Leve, leve, – rise, rise!*"

Surely the night could not be over yet. Walter threw off his blanket, scrambled up, shook himself, and pulled out his cherished silver watch. It was ten minutes to five.

In a few moments the whole camp was stirring. Following the usual voyageur custom, the boats got off at once, without delaying for breakfast. After a spell of tracking, the Swiss boy was more than ready for the pemmican and tea taken on a small island almost in midstream. The Swiss lad had never tasted tea until he sailed on an English ship, but after the drinking water had turned bad, he had been driven to try the strange beverage and had grown accustomed to it. Tea was the universal drink of the northern fur country, where coffee was practically unknown. He was amazed at the quantity of scalding hot, black stuff the voyageurs could drink.

Pemmican, the chief article of food used in the wilderness, he had eaten for the first time at Fort York. The mixture of shredded dried meat and grease did not look very inviting, but its odor, when heated, was not unappetizing. He tasted his portion gingerly, and decided it was not bad. The little dark specks of which he had been suspicious proved to be dried berries of some kind. Walter had a healthy appetite, and the portion served him looked small. He was surprised to find, before he had eaten all of it, that he had had enough. Pemmican was very hearty food indeed.

That was a day of back-breaking, heart-breaking labor towing the heavy boats up the Hayes. The clay banks grew steeper and steeper. Sometimes there was a muddy beach at the base wide enough for the trackers to walk on. Often there was no beach whatever, and they were forced to scramble along slippery slopes, through and over landslips, fallen trees, driftwood, and brush. Where tiny streams trickled down to join the river, the ground was soft, miry, almost impassable. The forest crowning the bank had become thicker, the trees larger and more flourishing. Poplars and willows everywhere were flecked with autumn yellow. The tamarack needles, – which fall in the autumn like the foliage of broad leaved trees, – were turning bronze, and contrasted with the dark green of the spruce. There was more variety and beauty in the surroundings than on the preceding day, but Walter, stumbling along the difficult shore and tugging at the tow-line, paid little attention to the scenery. With aching back and shoulders and straining heart and lungs, he labored on. Each time his shift was over and he was allowed to sit in the boat while others did the tracking, he was too weary to care for anything but rest.

The boats were strung out a long way, some crews making better speed than others. Some of the leaders were more considerate of their inexperienced followers, though most of the voyageurs could scarcely understand why the Swiss could not trot with the tow-line and keep up the pace all day, as the Canadians and half-breeds were accustomed to. The steersman of boat number three drove his men mercilessly. When at the tow-rope himself, he kept up a steady flow of profane abuse in his bad French, almost equally bad English, occasional Indian and Gaelic. Even when seated in the boat, he grumbled at the slowness and lack of skill of those on shore, and shouted orders and oaths at them.

At noon, when a short stop was made for a meal of cold pemmican and hot tea, Walter said to Louis, "If our steersman doesn't take care he will have a mutiny on his hands. You had better tell him so. We have kept our tempers so far, but we can't stand his abuse forever."

Louis shrugged. "I tell him? No, no. I tell *le Murrai Noir* nothing, *moi*. It would but make more trouble. With a crew of voyageurs he would not dare act so. They will endure much, but not everything. Someone would kill him. As a voyageur the Black Murray is good. He is strong, he is swift, he knows how to shoot a rapid, he is a fine steersman. But as a man – bah! Being in charge of a boat has turned his head."

“He may get his head cracked if he does not change his manners.”

“We would not grieve, you and me, eh, my friend? But this is certain,” the Canadian boy added seriously. “*Le Murrain Noir* can hurt no one with his tongue. Heed him not, though he bawl his voice away. It is so that I do.”

Of all the men in the boat, the one who found the tracking hardest was a young weaver named Matthieu. He was a lank, high-shouldered fellow, who looked strong, but had been weakened by seasickness on the way over, and had not regained his strength. Matthieu did his best, he made no complaint, but he was utterly exhausted at the end of his shift each time. The weaver was next to Murray in line, and much of the steersman’s ill temper was vented on the poor fellow.

Late in the afternoon, Murray’s crew were tracking on a wet clay slope heavily wooded along the rim and without beach at the base. In an especially steep place Matthieu slipped. His feet went from under him. The tow-rope jerked, and Walter barely saved himself from going down too. Murray, his moccasins holding firm on the slippery clay, seized the rope with both hands and roared abuse at the weaver. Exhausted and panting, the poor fellow tried to regain his footing. Walter dug his heels into the bank, and leaned down to reach Matthieu a hand, just as the enraged steersman gave the fallen man a vicious and savage kick.

The boy’s anger flamed beyond control. He forgot that he was attached by the left shoulder to the towline. Fists doubled, he started for Murray. The rope pulled him up short. As he struggled to free himself and reach the steersman, one of his companions intervened. He was a big, strong, intelligent Swiss, a tanner by trade, who had assumed the leadership of the immigrants in boat number three. His size, his authoritative manner, his firm voice, had their effect on Murray. The half-breed paused, his foot raised for another kick.

“There must be no fighting here,” said the tanner, “and no brutality. Rossel, help Matthieu up. He must go back to the boat.”

Murray began to protest that he would allow no man to interfere with his orders. The Swiss was quiet, but determined. The steersman had no right to work a man to death, or to strike with hand or foot any member of the party. The settlers were not his slaves.

Murray growled and muttered. His hard little eyes glowed angrily. When Louis shouted to the Orkneyman to bring the boat to shore to receive the worn-out Matthieu, the steersman opened his mouth to countermand the order, but thought better of it and merely uttered an oath instead. He could recognize the voice of authority, – when numbers were against him.

After Matthieu had been put aboard, the work was resumed. Murray, very ugly, plodded sullenly ahead. He seized every opportunity to abuse Walter, but the boy, now that one victory had been scored over the Black Murray, did not heed his words.

The sky had clouded over, and rain began to fall, a chilly, sullen drizzle. Yet the trackers toiled on. The oars were used only when crossing from one side of the river to the other to find a possible tow-path.

As darkness gathered, camp was made in the rain. The pemmican ration was eaten cold, but by using under layers of birch bark shredded very fine, and chopping into the dry heart of the stub of a lightning-killed tree, Louis succeeded in starting a small blaze and keeping it going long enough to boil water for tea.

After supper the tanner asked Walter to go with him to talk to the voyageur in charge of the entire brigade. Laroque, the guide, a middle-aged, steady-eyed French Canadian, listened to the complaint in silence, then shook his head gravely.

“*Le Murrain Noir* is not the best of men to be in control of a boat, – that I know,” he admitted, “but it was hard to find men enough. He can do the work, and do it well, – and there is this to say for him. You settlers know nothing of voyaging. You are so slow and clumsy it is trying to the patience. I find it so myself. *Le Murrain Noir* has little patience. It is you who must be patient with him.”

“But he has no right to strike and abuse men who are doing their best, men who are not even employees of the Company,” protested the tanner.

Laroque nodded in agreement. “That is true.”

“Can’t you put someone else in as steersman of our boat?”

“No, there is no man of experience to be spared. Let the young man who is sick remain in the boat with the women and children, until he is strong again. I will speak to *le Murrain* in the morning, and I think things will go better. These first few days, they are the hardest for all.”

Wet, chilled, aching with weariness, and a bit discouraged, Walter trudged back to his own camping place. Louis and the Orkneyman had laid the mast and oars across the boat and had covered them with the sail and a tarpaulin. Under this shelter the men spent the night, packed in so closely there was scarcely room to turn over.

VI TOILING UP STREAM

Things did go better next day, as the guide had foretold. What he had said to Murray in that early morning talk, no one learned, but the steersman attempted no more kicks and blows. He took his revenge upon those who had complained of him by riding in the boat all day, devoting his whole time and attention to steering. Not once did he touch the tow-line, Louis taking his place. All the men, except the two voyageurs, were lame and muscle sore from the unaccustomed work, but they were gradually learning the trick of it. In comparison with trained rivermen, they made slow time, but they got along better than on the day before. To Walter it was a great relief to be freed from Murray's brutality. He was on his mettle to show the steersman that just as good progress could be made without him.

On the fourth day of the journey a fork in the stream was reached, where the Shamattawa and the Steel rivers came together to form the Hayes. There Murray and Louis took down the mast and threw it overboard. There would be no more sailing for a long way, Louis explained.

Up the winding course of the Steel the boats were hauled laboriously. The banks were higher than those of the Hayes, but less steep, affording a better tow-path. In appearance the country was far more attractive than the low, flat desolation around Fort York, and the woods were at their best in full autumn color. Utterly wild and lonely was this savage land, but by no means devoid of beauty. It seemed to the Swiss immigrants, however, that they were but going farther and farther from all civilization. Towns and farms, the homelike dwellings of men, seemed almost as remote as though on some other planet.

Walter was surprised to see so little game in the wilderness, until he realized that the constant talking, laughing, and shouting back and forth must frighten every bird and beast. Wild creatures could not be expected to show themselves to such noisy travelers. Only the "whiskey-johneesh," as Louis called the bold and thievish Canada jays, dared to cry out at the passing boats and come about the camps to watch for scraps.

Just as the Swiss were growing used to the labor of the tow-rope, they were given a new task, portaging. Below the first really bad rapid, the boat was beached, everyone was ordered ashore, and the cargo unloaded. The traders' custom was to put all goods and supplies in packages of from ninety to one hundred pounds' weight. One such package was considered a light load. An experienced voyageur usually carried two. That the new settlers might help with the work, part of the food, clothing, and other things had, for this trip, been made into lighter parcels.

The Orkneyman was the first to receive a load. He adjusted his portage strap, the broad band across his forehead, the ends passing back over his shoulders to support his pack. Picking up a hundred pound sack of pemmican, Murray put it in position on the small of the Orkneyman's back, then placed another bulky package on top of the sack. The load extended along the man's spine to the crown of his head, and weighed nearly two hundred pounds, but the Orkneyman, his body bent forward, trotted away with it. It was the steersman's work to place the packages, and the ease with which Murray had swung the hundred pound sack into position revealed one reason why he had been chosen.

Walter's pack of forty or fifty pounds did not seem heavy. He felt confident that he could carry it easily enough, and imitated the Orkneyman by starting off at a trot. The portage trail was an unusually good one, neither very rough nor very steep, yet the boy soon found that he could not keep up the pace. He slowed down to a walk. His burden grew heavier. The muscles of his neck began to ache. He tried to ease them a little, and his pack twisted, pulling his head back with a wrench. He stumbled, went down, strove to straighten his load and get up again. One of his companions, plodding along, overtook him, stopped to laugh, tried to help him, and succeeded only in dislocating his own pack.

Louis had to come to the rescue of both. Walter's confidence in his own strength had diminished, and he had discovered several new muscles in his back and neck. Moreover he had learned that balancing a pack is an art not to be acquired in a moment.

Another forking of the streams had been reached, where the Fox and the Hill rivers joined to form the Steel. The Hill River proved shallower and more rapid than the Steel. Ledges, rocks, and boulders obstructed the current, and portages became so frequent that Walter got plenty of practice in carrying a pack. Sometimes the empty boats could be poled or tracked through the rapids or warped up the channel by throwing the line around a tree and pulling. In other places the men, standing in the water, lifted the heavy craft over the stones. Around the worst stretches they dragged it over the portage trails.

At Rock Portage, where a ridge extends across the river and the water rushes down in rapids and cascades between small islands, each boat and its cargo had to be carried clear over one of the islands. Then, to the great relief of the crews, they were able to row a short distance to Rock House, a storehouse for goods and supplies for the Selkirk Colony. There more pemmican, dried meat, flour, tea, and a little sugar were taken aboard. To make room for the provisions, some of the personal belongings of the settlers had to be unloaded, but the man in charge of Rock House promised to send the things to Fort Douglas at the first opportunity.

Traveling up stream had now become an almost continual fight with rapid waters through rough and rocky country. Walter's muscles were hardening and he was learning how to use his strength to the best advantage, but each night when camp was made, he was ready to roll in his blanket and sleep anywhere, on evergreen branches, on the hard planks of the boat, or on the bare ground.

How was Mr. Perier standing the tow-path and the portage, the boy wondered. The apothecary was far from robust. He had been so hopeful, too, looking forward so eagerly to the rich land of the Red River. He seemed to think of that land in the Bible terms, as "flowing with milk and honey." They would be too late to do any real farming this year, he had said, but they could plow their land and have it ready for seeding in the spring. Of course they would be provided with a house, fuel, and food for the winter. The contract he and Captain Mai, – in Lord Selkirk's name, – had signed, promised him such things on credit. He had brought with him some chemist's supplies; dried and powdered roots and other ingredients used in medicines. He and Walter would set up a shop and earn enough to buy whatever they needed during the cold weather. Walter had shared his master's hopefulness, but now, after questioning Louis about affairs in the Colony, he was beginning to doubt whether it would be so easy to make a fortune there as Mr. Perier believed.

September was advancing. Most of the time the weather held good, but the nights were chilly and the mornings raw, often with fog on the river. One night, after the boat had been dragged through several short rapids, or "spouts," and carried over two portages, – the whole day's progress less than two miles, – snow fell heavily. When Walter, stiff with cold, crawled out from under the tarpaulin in the morning, the ground was white.

"This looks more like Christmas than September," he grumbled between chattering teeth. "I'm glad of one thing, Louis, we're headed south, not north."

"Oh, the winter is not quite so long at the Red River as in this country," Louis returned with a cheerful grin, "but it is long enough, – yes, quite long enough, – and cold enough too, on the prairie."

So the journey went slowly on, rowing, poling, tracking, warping, and carrying the heavy boats up stream, and there was little enough rowing compared with the poling and portaging.

Five or six miles had become a fair day's progress. In the worst stretches only a mile or two could be made by working from dawn to dark. The Swiss would have been glad to rest on Sundays, and had expected to observe the day as they were accustomed to, but the guide and the voyageurs would not consent. It was too late in the season, the journey was too long, the food supply too scanty, to permit the losing of one whole day each week. The immigrants had to be content with a brief prayer service morning and evening. The Swiss were Protestants, while all of the voyageurs, except

two or three Orkneymen, belonged to the Roman Catholic church, so they worshiped separately. It surprised Walter at first to see the wild-looking rivermen kneeling with bowed heads repeating their “Aves” before lying down to rest. He never saw *le Murrai Noir* in that posture, however. He wondered if the steersman was a heathen.

There were accidents in the brigade now and then. Once when the Orkneyman’s shift were tracking, the rope broke and boat number three began to swing broadside to the current. At Murray’s fierce yell of command, the men in the boat jumped into the water nearly to their waists and held it headed straight, while Louis, keeping his footing with difficulty in the swift current, carried the remains of the line to shore.

The next day the boat ahead met with misfortune, while it was being poled through rapids. To avoid a great rock, the bowman turned too far out into the strong current. The rushing water swung the clumsy craft about and bore it down the rapids. It struck full on its side on a rock that rose well out of water, and was held there by the strength of the current. There were but two men in the boat, and it was separated from shore by a channel of rushing white water. The crew of number three turned their own craft in to shore, and ran to help. Walter, carrying the tow-line, reached the spot first and attempted to throw the rope to the imperiled boat. The end fell short. Then Louis tried his hand, but succeeded no better. He was preparing for another attempt, when the line was snatched from his hands, and Murray sent the coiled end hurtling out across the water and into the boat.

Growling and cursing, the half-breed took control of the rescue. Under his leadership, the men on shore succeeded in pulling the boat away from the rock, and warping it, half full of water, up the rapids. Walter’s fondness for the Black Murray had certainly not increased as the days went by, but he had to admit that the brutal steersman knew how to act in an emergency.

The toilsome ascent of Hill River was over at last when camp was made late one afternoon on an island which Louis called Sail Island. The reason for the name became apparent when Murray, after carefully examining the trees, selected a straight, sound spruce and ordered Louis and the Orkneyman to cut it down. The spruce was to be trimmed for a mast. If a mast was needed, thought Walter, the worst of the journey must be over. The night was cold and snow threatened, but there was plenty of fuel, and the camp on Sail Island was a cheerful one.

VII NORWAY HOUSE

The first thing Walter did when he woke the next morning was to notice the direction of the wind. Though light it was favorable. That made a day of easy, restful sailing. The weary men sat and lay about in as lazy positions as the well-filled boat would permit, while the women busied themselves with knitting and mending. The journey was a hard one on clothes, even of the stoutest materials, but by mending and darning whenever they had a chance, and by washing soiled things out at night and hanging them around the fire to dry, the Swiss managed to keep themselves fairly neat and clean. They had not been in the wilds long enough to grow careless.

The following day's journey commenced with a portage. The brigade was going up the Jack River, which was short but full of rapids. All the rivers in this country were made up of rapids, it seemed to Walter. Then came another period of ease on Knee Lake, so called from an angle like a bent knee. About twenty miles were made that day, one of the best of the trip.

The hard work was not over by any means. On Trout River were some of the worst portages of all. A waterfall, plunging down fifteen or sixteen feet, obstructed the passage. The boats were unloaded and dragged and carried up a rugged trail, to be launched again over steep rocks.

On Holey Lake, – named from a deep spot believed by the Indians to be bottomless, – was Oxford House, a Hudson Bay Company post. The boats made a short stop there, then went on to pitch camp on one of the islands. The waters abounded in fish. With trolling lines Walter and his companions caught lake trout enough for both supper and breakfast. The fish, broiled over the coals, were a luxury after days of pemmican and hard dried meat.

A narrow river, more portages, a little pond, a deep stream flowing through flat, marshy land, followed Holey Lake. In strong contrast was the passage called Hell Gates, a narrow cut with sheer cliffs so close on either hand that there was not always room to use the oars.

A whole day was spent in passing the White Falls, where everything had to be carried a long mile. Three of the crews made the crossing at the same time, crowding each other on the portage. The Swiss caught the voyageurs' spirit of good-natured rivalry and entered heartily into the contest to see which crew would get boat and cargo over in the shortest time. With a ninety pound sack of pemmican, Walter trotted over the slippery trail and won a grin from Louis.

"You will make a good voyageur when you have gone two or three voyages," said the young Canadian.

By the time Walter had helped to drag the heavy boat across three rock ridges, which caused three separate waterfalls, he felt that one voyage would be quite enough. Yet he was not too tired to dance a jig when he learned that his boat had won.

Small lakes, connected by narrow, grassy streams, gave relief from portaging, tracking, and poling. Muskrat houses, conical heaps of mud and débris, rose above the grass in the swamps, and ducks flew up as the boats approached. The sight of those ducks made Walter's mouth water. His regular portion of pemmican or dried meat left him hungry enough to eat at least twice as much. He had not had a really satisfying meal since leaving Holey Lake. Yet he could do a harder day's work and be far less tired than at the beginning of the trip. His muscles had hardened, and he carried not one pound of extra weight. During the cold nights he would have been glad of a layer of fat to keep him warm.

The boat was sailing along a sluggish, marshy stream, when Louis, who was in the bow picking the channel, raised a shout. "The Painted Stone," he cried, pointing ahead.

"I don't see any stone, painted or not," Walter returned, gazing in the same direction.

Louis laughed. "There used to be such a stone, – so they say. The Indians worshiped it."

“But why make such a fuss about a stone that isn’t there?”

Again Louis laughed. “Do you see that flat rock? Perhaps it was painted once, I do not know, but it marks the Height of Land. All the way we have come up and up, but from there we go down stream, – until we come to Sea River, which is a part of the Nelson and takes us to Lake Winnipeg. Isn’t that something to make a fuss about?”

“It’s the best news I have heard in many a day,” Walter agreed.

A short portage at the Height of Land brought the boats to the Echemamis River, where they were headed down stream into a rush-grown lake, connected by a creek with the Sea River. This stream is a part of the Nelson, which rises in Lake Winnipeg, so the brigade had to go against the current to Lower Play Green Lake and Little Jack River.

From a log cabin on the shore of Little Jack, a bearded, buckskin-clad man came down to the water’s edge. Louis called to ask if he had any fish. The man shook his head. The first boat had taken all he could spare. The fisherman, Louis explained, supplied trout and sturgeon to Norway House.

Many a time during the trip Walter had heard of Norway House, an important Hudson Bay Company post. “Isn’t that on Lake Winnipeg?” he cried. “Are we so near the lake?”

“We shall be there to-morrow.”

Before sunrise next morning, the voyageurs bathed and scrubbed in Little Jack’s cold, muddy-looking water. They appeared at starting time in clean, bright calico shirts, and new moccasins elaborately embroidered. Louis and the Orkneyman wore gaudy sashes. A broad leather belt girt the steersman’s middle and held his beaded deerskin pouch. Around his oily black hair he had bound a scarlet silk handkerchief. The Orkneyman had trimmed his yellow beard. No hair seemed to grow on Murray’s face. Possibly it had been plucked out, Indian fashion.

Little Jack River is merely a channel winding about among the islands that separate Lower and Upper Play Green lakes, extensions of Lake Winnipeg. Louis told Walter that the “play green” was on one of the islands, where two bands of Indians had been accustomed to meet and hold feasts and games of strength and skill.

Not a hundred yards behind the guide’s boat, number three came in sight of Norway Point, the tip of the narrow peninsula separating Upper Play Green Lake from Lake Winnipeg proper. Shouts and cheers greeted the log wall of Norway House and the flag of the Hudson Bay Company. The Swiss were in high spirits. Once more they were nearing a land where men dwelt. Their journey would soon be over, they believed. Not yet could they grasp the vastness of this new world.

As the boats drew near the post, dogs began to bark and men came running down to the shore. Voices shouted greetings in English and French, not merely to the voyageurs, but to the immigrants as well. Though the fur traders, trappers, and voyageurs were reluctant to see their wilderness opened up to settlement, yet the arrival of the white strangers, even though they were settlers, was too important a break in the monotony of life at the trading post for their welcome to be other than cordial. Moreover the white men and half-breeds at Norway House, and even the Indians camped outside the walls, were curious to see these new immigrants. So the Swiss were welcomed warmly by bronzed white men and dusky-faced mixed bloods, while the full blood Indians looked on with silent but intent curiosity.

The first boats to arrive made a stay of several hours at the post, and Walter, conducted by Louis, had a good chance to see the place. Like York Factory, Norway House consisted of a group of log buildings within a stockade, but it stood on dry ground, not in a swamp, and its surroundings were far more attractive than those of the Hudson Bay fort.

As the two boys were coming out of the big gate, after their tour of inspection, Walter, who was ahead, caught sight of a tall figure disappearing around one corner of the stockade. He glanced towards the shore. The boats were deserted. The voyageurs had sought friends within the stockade or in the tents and cabins outside the walls. The Swiss were visiting the fort or wandering about the point.

“Do we take on more supplies here?” Walter asked his companion.

“If we can get them,” Louis returned. “They can spare little here, they say. Are you so starved that you think of food all the time?” he questioned smilingly.

“No, I’m not quite so hungry as that. I just saw Murray carrying a sack, and I wondered what he had.” Louis looked towards the boats. “Where is he? I don’t see him.”

“He didn’t go to the boat. He was coming the other way. He went around the corner of the wall.”

“With an empty sack?”

“No, a full one.”

Louis stared at the corner bastion. “He was going around there, carrying a full sack? You are sure it was Murray?”

“I saw his back, but I’m sure. He has that red handkerchief around his head, you know.”

“Well, it was not anything for us he was taking in that direction,” Louis commented, “and we brought nothing to be left at Norway House. It is some affair of his own. He – ”

“Ho, Louis Brabant! What is the news from the north?”

Louis had swung about at the first word. Two buckskin-clad men, one old, the other young, were coming through the gate. Louis turned back to reply, and Walter followed him to listen to the exchange of news between the newly arrived voyageur and these two employees of the post. The Swiss boy was growing used to the Canadian French tongue, and during the conversation he learned several things that surprised him.

Walter had taken for granted that the journey would be nearly over when Lake Winnipeg was reached. Now he was amazed to learn that he had still more than three hundred miles to go to Fort Douglas, the stronghold of the Red River colony.

“But how far have we come?” he cried.

“About four hundred and thirty miles the way you traveled,” the leather-faced old man answered promptly.

“The rest of the voyage will not be so hard though,” Louis said reassuringly. “There are few portages. If the wind is fair, we can sail most of the way. Of course if there are storms on the lake – ”

“There are always storms this time of year,” put in the old voyageur discouragingly.

The prospect of bad weather on Lake Winnipeg did not disturb Walter so much, however, as a piece of news which the old man led up to with the question, “How is it that settlers are still coming to the Colony on the Red River now that Lord Selkirk is dead?”

“Lord Selkirk dead?” cried Walter and Louis together.

“But yes, that is what people say. I was at Fort Douglas in June, and everyone there was talking about it, and wondering what would happen to the settlement.”

“They did not tell us that at Fort York,” cried Walter. “When did he die? Since we left Europe in May?”

“No, no, the news could not come to the Red River so quickly. It was last year some time he died.”

“You haven’t heard of this before, Louis?” Walter turned to his companion.

“No, I heard nothing of it when I came down the Red River in the spring. I left Pembina as soon as the ice was out, and at Fort Douglas I took service with the Company, but I did not stay there long. They sent me on here to Norway House. I heard no such story. Perhaps it is not true, but only a false rumor started by someone who wishes to make trouble in the colony.”

“That must be it,” agreed Walter. “If Lord Selkirk died last year they would surely have heard it at Fort York. Captain Mai would have known it anyway before we left Switzerland. No, it can’t be true.”

But the old voyageur shook his head. “Everyone at Fort Douglas believed it,” he said.

VIII

THE MISSING PEMMICAN

About the middle of the afternoon, Laroque the guide began to round up crews and passengers. His shout of “Embark, embark” was taken up by one man after another, and the idle sled dogs, that wandered at will about the post and the Indian village, added their voices to the chorus.

Walter and Louis ran down to the shore at the first call. Most of the Swiss obeyed the summons promptly. Their fear of being left behind was too great to permit taking risks. Several of the voyageurs, however, were slow in appearing. When they did come, they gave evidence of having been too generously treated to liquor by their friends at the post. After everyone else was ready to start, Laroque had to go in search of Murray. Carrying a bundle wrapped in a piece of old canvas, Black Murray came back with the guide, his sullen face set and heavy, his small eyes shining with a peculiar glitter. He showed no other sign of drunkenness, but walked steadily to the boat, placed his bundle in the stern, and stepped in.

Laroque sprang to his own place, oars were dipped, sails raised, and the boats were off, amid shouts of farewell and the howling of dogs. Leaving the handling of the sail to the Orkneyman, Murray remained stolidly silent in the stern. His steering was careless, even erratic, but no one ventured to try to take the tiller. Luckily the wind was light, the lake smooth, and the boats had not far to go. Camp was pitched on a beach of the long point, where the travelers had an unobstructed view down the lake to the meeting place of sky and water.

“It seems as if we had come to another ocean,” Walter confided to Louis. “Why do they call this Norway Point, and the trading post Norway House? What has Norway to do with Lake Winnipeg?”

“I have heard,” Louis replied, “that some men from a country called Norway were brought over by the Company and stationed here. Then too I have heard that the point was named from the pine trees that grow here, because they look like the pines in that country of Norway. Which story is true I know not. The post has been here a long time, and always, I think, it has been called Norway House. When the Selkirk colonists were driven from the Red River by the Northwesters, they came this way and camped on the Little Jack River.”

That night’s camp was one of the most comfortable of the whole journey. The evening was fine, there was plenty of wood, and an abundance of fish for supper. The Swiss sat about their fires later than usual, talking of the journey, speculating on what was to come, and planning for the future. Nearly three weeks they had been on the way from Fort York. Now they looked out over the starlit waters stretching far away to the south, and cheered their hearts with the hope and belief that the worst was over. At least they would not have to track up stream and portage around rapids for some days to come.

“How long will it take us to reach the Red River?” The question was asked over and over again, with varying replies from the voyageurs. Walter asked it of Louis, and the young Canadian shook his head doubtfully. If the weather was good, the winds favorable, they might go the whole length of Lake Winnipeg in a week, but if the weather should be bad, no one could tell how long they might be delayed.

The autumn weather showed its fickleness that very night. The wind shifted, the sky clouded over, and the morning dawned raw and threatening. The breeze was almost directly east, however, a favorable direction for the travelers, whose route lay along the north and west shores. So the boats got away early, and, with sails raised, held to the southwest, well out from land. They made good progress before the brisk wind, but as it grew stronger the lake roughened. Along the north shore high cliffs towered, with narrow stretches of beach here and there at the base. Safe landing places

were few, but the waves were growing dangerously high, and the open boats were too heavily laden to ride such rough water buoyantly.

Laroque changed his course, tacking in towards a bit of beach. Murray's boat was not far behind, and the half-breed handled it with skill and judgment. At just the right instant, he ordered the sail down, the oars out. The boat was run up on the sand without shipping a drop of water.

The rest of the brigade were some distance behind. They were forced to put in close under the cliffs, but by using the oars managed to reach the beach.

"We'll have to open that last bag of pemmican," said Walter to Louis who was kindling a fire.

"Yes, but we must make it last through the voyage."

Walter brought the rawhide sack, and Louis cut the leather cord with which it was sewed. An exclamation of surprise and anger escaped him. "What devil's trick is this? Look, Walter!"

Walter looked, in amazement. "Why, it's not pemmican. How on earth –"

"It is a fraud, a cheat." Walter had never seen Louis so angry. "Some fiend has filled this sack with clay and leaves and sold it to the Company for good pemmican."

"See here, Louis." Walter lowered his voice. "This isn't the bag I carried over the portage at the White Falls." He turned the sack over and examined the other side. "There is no Company mark. Our pemmican has been stolen and this trash left in its place."

"No one from the other boats would steal our supplies." Louis was puzzled. "It must have been done at Norway House. Yet I think the Indians would hardly dare to steal from a Company boat under the very walls of the post. And they did not take the tea. The Indians like tea so well they can never get enough."

"Murray had a sack on his shoulder when I saw him dodge around the corner of the wall, and the sack had the Company mark." Walter's voice had sunk to a whisper. "But why in the world should he steal the provisions from his own boat?"

Louis was thoughtful. "There might be a reason, yes," he said. "*Le Murrain* might sell that pemmican for something he wanted. He has a bundle that he did not have before."

"But how could he?" Walter objected. "They would know at Norway House that there was something wrong if the steersman of one of the boats offered to sell them a sack of pemmican."

"That is true, but he might have traded it to the Indians, or some Indian friend of his might have sold it for him. I would like to know what is in that bundle. He slept with his head on it last night."

"Shall we tell Laroque about this?"

"That this sack is not good, yes, but not about *le Murrain*, no, not yet. We can prove nothing. It may not have been the pemmican he had."

"I'm sure it was," Walter insisted stubbornly.

Louis shrugged. "I am no coward, Walter, but I will not accuse *le Murrain* of stealing and then voyage in the same boat with him. We have yet far to go."

Louis was right and Walter knew it. Together they went to Laroque and told him of the fraud, but said nothing about their suspicions of Murray.

The guide was much disturbed. He examined the sack of clay, and questioned Murray and the Orkneyman. Both disclaimed any responsibility. The Orkneyman agreed with the boys that the sacks brought from Fort York had all borne the Company mark. Murray said he had not noticed. He had had nothing to do with provisioning the boats. If the Company had been cheated, that was no affair of his.

From his own supplies, Laroque lent boat number three a little pemmican for supper. The Swiss were indignant at the fraud. Some of them even wanted to return to Norway House and seek for the culprit.

Before the scanty meal was over, rain began to fall. The beach was not a good camping ground. If the wind shifted to the south, the waves would wash over the narrow margin of sand and break against the perpendicular cliffs. To find a better place was impossible, for the lake was far too stormy to venture out upon. The boats were pulled well up, the tents pitched with one wall almost against

the cliff, and the sails, masts, and oars converted into additional shelters. Luckily the campers were protected from the strong wind, which had become more northerly. But the water came down the cliffs in cascades, digging pools and channels in the sand and shingle.

Fortunately the worst of the storm did not last long. The rain became fine and light like mist driven by the wind, and before sundown ceased entirely. As the wind shifted farther towards the north, the water receded from the base of the cliff, leaving a wider stretch of sand. The lake was still too rough for the boats to go out, but as long as the wind remained in the north, the beach was a safe camping place.

A little dry driftwood had been collected and put under shelter before the rain began. So everyone was able to warm and dry himself before creeping between his blankets. Laroque assigned the voyageurs to watches, and cautioned each man to walk the beach while on guard and keep an eye on wind and waves.

IX HUNGER AND COLD

The guide aroused the camp before daylight. Wind and waves had fallen, and the boats got away quickly. All day they went ahead under sail or oars along the north shore. Camp was made on a narrow ridge of sand separating a large bay from the main body of water. A contrary wind kept the boats at Limestone Bay, – as it was called from the fragments of limestone strewn along its shores, – until late the following day.

Among the reeds and wild rice ducks were feeding. The voyageurs succeeded in shooting a number of the birds, made a stew of some, and buried the rest, unplucked, in ashes and hot sand. A fire was kept going above them for several hours until they were well cooked. When they were taken out and the skins stripped off, Walter found his portion very good eating indeed.

Two days later the mouth of the Saskatchewan River was reached. Walter was beginning to understand why the length of time required to traverse Lake Winnipeg could not be foretold. The lake is about two hundred and sixty miles long in a direct course, but the open boats were obliged to keep well in towards shore, making the journey upwards of three hundred. When the weather was favorable, sails were raised and good speed made, but the autumn gales had set in, and contrary winds were frequent. Skirting the shore in head winds and high waves was both slow and dangerous. Sometimes the boats had to be beached through surf, the men jumping into the water and dragging them above the danger line. By the time camp was pitched, both voyageurs and settlers were not only tired and hungry, but usually wet and chilled to the bone.

October came with unseasonable cold, even for that northern country. With darkness the temperature sank far below the freezing point. One night Matthieu the unfortunate went to sleep without drying his wet shoes and stockings, and frosted both feet so that they were sore for the rest of the journey.

Whenever it was possible to go on, whether at daybreak, noon, or midnight, the boats were away. Meals were irregular and food scanty. Much of the time the lake was too rough for fishing, but sometimes ducks were shot. To Murray's boat the loss of the sack of pemmican was serious. The supplies were reduced to tea and a little barley meal.

The boats did not always make the same camping ground, though they tried to keep together. How far behind the second brigade might be, no one could guess. Walter worried about the Periers. Surely this must be a hard experience for Elise and little Max, and for Mr. Perier also.

For two days the guide's boat and Murray's were windbound on an exposed beach where everything had to be carried well above the water line.

Fishing was impossible in this open, wind-swept spot, but Louis shot a white pelican. The clumsy looking bird with its great pouched beak was a curiosity to Walter. If he had not been so very hungry he could not have eaten its fishy-tasting flesh.

Suddenly the weather changed for the better. In less than eight hours after the boats got away from their enforced camping ground, the lake looked as if it had never been disturbed. There was not a breath of wind to catch the sail, not a wave, or even a ripple. Plying the oars, the crews held a course far out across the mouth of a bay. On and on they rowed, watching the sunset and the afterglow reflected in still water and the stars coming out one by one.

The southern half of Lake Winnipeg is very broken in outline, with many points and islands. One night, reaching the sheltered head of a deep, sandy bay with a high background of rocks and forest, the travelers found the sands covered thick with the dead bodies of insects.

“Grasshoppers!” exclaimed Louis. “They have come again!”

Walter was gazing up and down the beach in amazement. “I never knew there could be so many grasshoppers in the world,” he said. “Where did they all come from?”

“From the prairie to the south. They’re not ordinary grasshoppers like the big green ones. These are smaller and a different color, and their horns,” – Louis meant their antennæ, – “are short. I never saw this kind till three years ago, and then they came all of a sudden. They ate up everything. Ugh, how they smell! We can’t camp here.”

The place was indeed impossible as a camping ground. The boats put off again to seek a spot where the waves had washed the shores clean of the remains of the dead insects. Louis was right when he said that they were not ordinary grasshoppers. They were the dread locust, – the Rocky Mountain locust. At the camp fire that night, the Canadian boy told Walter and his companions how the locusts had come to the Red River valley.

“I was at Fort Douglas with my father,” he began. “We had just come down from Pembina with some carts. Everything looked well on the settlers’ farms. The grain was in the ear and ripening. Then came the grasshoppers. These short-horned grasshoppers fly much higher than the ordinary kind. Their wings are stronger. They came in great clouds that darkened the air as if real clouds were passing across the sun. Late in the afternoon they began to alight, such hordes of them you can’t imagine. Men, women, and children ran out into the fields, crushing grasshoppers at every step, the flying creatures dashing against them like hailstones. The poor settlers could do nothing against such an army. They saved a few half ripe ears of barley, the women hiding them under their aprons, but that was all. By the next morning everything was gone.”

“Do you mean that the grasshoppers ate the crops?” asked Walter, scarcely able to believe what he had heard.

“They ate everything green,” Louis replied impressively, “not only the grain and the gardens, but every green blade of grass on the prairie.”

“And they have come again this year,” said Matthieu the weaver slowly, “and perhaps they have again taken everything.” His voice sounded discouraged.

“I fear it,” was Louis’ grave response.

“What did the settlers do for food?” asked Walter. “Did Lord Selkirk supply it?”

Louis shook his head. “That was a hard winter. Most of the colonists went to Pembina, where they could hunt the buffalo. They got some food from the Company and some pemmican from the Indians. But they had almost no seed for the next year. In the spring they sowed the little barley they had saved, and it came up and promised well. Then the young grasshoppers hatched out from the eggs left in the ground the year before, and ate it all. So again the settlers were without meal for the winter. The Governor sent M’sieu Laidlaw and other men into the Sioux country, up the Red River and down the St. Peter to the great Mississippi where there is a settlement called Prairie du Chien. It was a hard journey in winter on snowshoes, but they came back in June with more than three hundred bushels of seed wheat, oats, and peas. The seeding was too late for a good crop last year, but this year they hoped for a big one.”

“And the grasshoppers have come again,” Matthieu repeated dully.

Around points and among islands the boats threaded their way, hugging the shore most of the time, risking traverses across the mouths of bays when the weather permitted.

No food was left in Murray’s boat, nothing but a little tea. Fishing had to be resorted to, often with poor luck. Few animals were seen, though the howling of wolves had come to be a familiar sound at night. Flocks of ducks and geese passed high overhead, but to shoot them the hunters had to seek the marshy places in bays or at stream mouths. Bad weather caused so much delay that to take advantage of calm water or favorable wind everyone was compelled, more than once, to go breakfastless or supperless. Walter was reduced to skin, muscle and bone. He felt a constant gnawing hunger, was seldom warm except when exercising, and found his hard-won muscular strength diminishing. An hour’s pulling at the oar almost exhausted him. He wondered at Murray, on whose strength and

endurance starvation seemed to have no effect. Even Louis admitted weakness and had lost some of his cheery high spirits.

At last the low shore at the south end of the lake, a long point of shingle and sand, came in view. When the water was high and the wind from the north, much of the long sand bar was covered, but luckily the lake was calm when the guide's boat reached the point. Murray's craft followed Laroque's closely.

Sharing one gun between them, Louis and Walter went, with some of the others, hunting for their supper. They rowed along the sand spit to the marsh which was alive with birds, – ducks, geese, tall herons, and many other smaller kinds. In a little pond several graceful, long-necked swans were feeding. Walter did not think of firing at swans, but Louis had no scruples. He brought one down with his first shot.

At sunset the hunters returned to camp with four fat geese, one of which Walter had killed, two swans, and eighteen or twenty ducks. A party from one of the other boats brought in almost as many. For the first time in many days Walter had a chance to really satisfy his appetite. Wrapped in his blanket, he slept soundly on his bed of sand, untroubled by hunger dreams.

X

THE RED RIVER AT LAST

The mouth of the Red River divides into several channels that wind through the marsh. The guide chose one of the main waterways, of good depth and gentle current, and the oarsmen, eager to reach the settlement, pulled with a will. They had some forty miles, by water, yet to go.

“Why do they call it *Red River*?” Walter asked Louis. “Not from the color of the water?”

“It is from the Indian name, *Miscousipi*,” was the reply. “I have heard that when the Saulteux and the Sioux fought a great battle on the banks, the water ran red with blood. Both nations claim the valley as a hunting ground.”

“Then it can hardly be a good place for settlers if the Indians fight over it,” Walter said doubtfully.

“There are only Saulteux and Crees on the lower river now. The Sioux no longer dare venture here. The upper river is the dangerous country.”

Where the marsh gave way to firmer ground, in an open space on the low bank of a creek coming in from the west, stood a group of Indian lodges. As the boat passed, the Swiss boy looked with interest at the low, round topped structures of hides and rush mats.

“Those are Saulteur wigwams,” Louis explained.

“No one seems to be at home to-day.”

“No, but they intend to come back or they would have taken down the lodges. There was a fight in this place many years ago. A band of Crees came down that stream, and the old people and children camped here, while the young men went to Fort York with their furs. That was before the Hudson Bay Company had posts in this part of the country. While the braves were all away, the Sioux came and killed the old people and took the children captive. So the stream is called *Rivière aux Morts* – the river of the dead.”

“What a fiendish thing to do,” Walter exclaimed, “and cowardly.”

Louis shrugged expressively. “It is the Indian way of fighting. The Sioux are not cowards, but fiends, yes. And so are the Crees and the Saulteux in war. I say it though my grandmother was an Ojibwa.”

“Have you Indian blood, Louis?” Walter asked in surprise. “I supposed you were pure French.”

“I am *bois brûlé*, as we mixed bloods are called from our dark skins, and I am not ashamed of it. My father, he was pure French, and my mother is half French, but her mother was Ojibwa, Saulteur. Perhaps I do not look so Indian as *le Murrain Noir*.” Louis lowered his voice. “They say he is at least half Sioux.”

“Sioux! Well, he certainly doesn’t act like a white man.”

“He has the worst of both the white man and the Indian I think.”

As the boats went on up stream, the banks became higher and covered with trees, not willows and aspens only, but elms and oaks and maples. The frosty weather had practically stripped the trees of what leaves the locusts had left, yet no wide view was possible, for the river ran through a narrow trench with steep sides.

At the foot of a stretch of rapids camp was made, and a number of small fish caught for supper. Early in the morning the ascent was begun. The fall was slight, but the current was strong, and the channel sown with boulders and interrupted by ledges. After the boats had been tracked through, the voyageurs delayed for the scrubbing and hair trimming that preceded their approach to the dwellings of men. Again they put on their best and brightest shirts, sashes, and moccasins, which they had carefully stowed away after leaving Norway House.

After he was washed and dressed, Louis, with an air of secrecy, drew Walter aside. “I have seen the inside of Murray’s big package,” he whispered.

“You have? How did that happen?”

“He left the package in the boat. I opened it.”

“What did you find?”

“Little things, – awls, flints, fish hooks, net twine, beads, all wrapped in red or blue handkerchiefs. I had no time to unwrap them, but I could feel some of them. I wonder what he wants of all those things.”

Walter remembered the conversation in the Indian room at Fort York. “Can’t he sell them to the Indians for furs?” he asked.

“The Company will not permit a voyageur to trade. Sometimes, it is true, they may send a man out to buy skins. Perhaps they might send Murray, but I do not think so, and he would need more goods, a whole canoe or cart or sled load.”

“But the Company refused to let him have them,” Walter explained. “At Fort York he asked for a lot of goods, on credit, so he could go trade with the Sioux.”

“The Sioux?”

“Yes, I heard the clerk tell him that the Chief Trader wouldn’t give him the goods. The clerk said it was a crazy scheme. Murray must have stolen our pemmican and exchanged it, or got someone else to do it for him, at Norway House. He must have wanted those things badly to be willing to go hungry for them.”

“He can endure hunger like an Indian,” Louis returned, “and one of the voyageurs in Laroque’s boat has been sharing his food with him. I saw him do it. He is afraid of Murray for some reason. It may be you are right about his selling the pemmican. The Indians want all those little things. They are eager to get them. He might begin – ”

“Embark, embark!”

The two boys hurried towards the boat. As they went, Walter whispered, “Are you going to tell about that package?”

“I think so. Not to Laroque, but to the Chief Trader at Fort Douglas.”

When Murray stepped into the boat, he stooped to examine his bundle. Would he discover that it had been opened? It was an anxious moment for Louis and Walter, but the steersman took his place without even looking in their direction. Walter would not have thought of opening Murray’s package. But the Canadian boy’s upbringing had been different.

The banks bordering the rapids were gravelly, the growth thinner and smaller. Then came lower, muddy shores, and Walter got his first glimpse of the prairie. On the west side, only a few trees and bushes edged the river. The country beyond stretched away flat and open, but it was not the fertile, green land the Swiss boy had heard about. The plain was yellow-gray, desolate and dead looking. In one place a wide stretch was burned black. Could this be the rich and beautiful land Captain Mai had described?

Walter’s disappointment was too deep for expression. All he said was, “I thought the prairie would be like our meadows at home. It doesn’t look as if anything could grow here.”

“Oh, things grow very fast, once the ground is broken,” Louis assured him. “Wheat, barley and oats, peas and potatoes, everything that is planted. And the prairie grass is fine pasture. The buffalo eat nothing else. It is as I feared though. The grasshoppers have taken everything. But the grass will grow again. It is coming now. Look at that low place. It is all green. Wait until spring and then you will see. The prairie is beautiful then, the fresh, new grass, and flowers everywhere.”

“And the grasshoppers come and eat it all up,” Walter added dejectedly.

“They may never come again. No one at Fort Douglas or Pembina had ever seen the short horned grasshoppers till three years ago. And they didn’t come last year. Perhaps we shall never see them again.”

Walter knew that Louis was trying to cheer him, and he felt a little ashamed of his discouragement. He put aside his disappointment and forebodings, and tried to share in his friend's good spirits. In a few hours the long journey would be over, and that was something to be thankful for. He hoped it was nearly over for Elise and Max and their father. The second brigade could not be very far behind.

The current was not strong and there were no rocks, so making their way up stream was not hard work for the boat crews. The first person from the settlement who came in sight was a sturdy, red-haired boy of about Walter's own age, fishing from a dugout canoe. He raised a shout at the appearance of the brigade, and snatching off his blue Scotch bonnet or Tam-o'-Shanter, he waved it around his head. Then he paddled to shore in haste to spread the news.

Log houses came in view on the west side of the river at the place Louis called the Frog Pond. Lord Selkirk himself, when he had visited the settlement four years before, had named that part of his colony Kildonan Parish, after the settlers' old home in Scotland. The little cabins were scattered along the bank facing the stream, the narrow farms stretching back two miles across the prairie. From the river there was but little sign of cultivation and scarcely anything green to be seen.

From nearly every house folk came out to watch the brigade go by. Roughly clad, far from prosperous looking they were, in every combination of homespun, Hudson Bay cloth, and buckskin. Some of the men wore kilts instead of trousers, and nearly all waved flat Scotch bonnets. Walter's heart warmed to these folk. Like himself they were white and from across the ocean, though their land and language were not his own. One bent old woman in dark blue homespun dress, plaid shawl, and white cap reminded him of his own grandmother.

All the Swiss were waving hats and kerchiefs, and shouting "*Bon jour*" and "*Guten Tag*," the women smiling while the tears ran down their cheeks. The long journey with all its suffering and hardships was over, – so they believed. At last they had reached the "promised land." As yet it did not look very promising to be sure, but they would soon make homes for themselves. The thin face of Matthieu, the weaver, who had been so disheartened when he heard about the grasshoppers, was shining with happiness.

XI

FORT DOUGLAS

“Where do we land, Louis?” asked Walter.

“At Fort Douglas, where Governor Sauterelle lives.”

“I thought the Governor’s name was Mc-something.”

“It is McDonnell, but people call him Governor Grasshopper because, they say, he is as great a destroyer as those pests.”

“What do they mean?”

“They do not like their Governor, these colonists. You will soon hear all about him.”

A few cabins, set down hit or miss, less well kept than those on the west bank, and interspersed with several Indian lodges, came in view on the east shore. Black haired, dark skinned men and women, and droves of children and sharp nosed dogs were running down to the river.

“*Bois brulés*,” Louis explained, using the name he had given himself. It means “burnt wood” and is descriptive of the dark color of the half-breed.

The boat made a turn to the east, following a big bend in the river. “This is Point Douglas, and there is the fort,” said Louis, pointing to the roofs of buildings, the British flag and that of the Hudson Bay Company flying over them. Point Douglas had been burned over many years before, and was a barren looking place. The fort, like York Factory and Norway House, was a mere group of buildings enclosed within a stockade.

When Laroque’s boat reached the landing, the shore was lined with people; Hudson Bay employees, white settlers, and *bois brulés*. As each craft drew up to the landing place, the boatmen sprang out to be embraced and patted on the back by their friends. The new settlers’ warmest reception came from a group of bearded, bold eyed, rough looking, white men. When one of these men spoke to Walter in German, and another in unmistakably Swiss French, the boy’s face betrayed his astonishment.

The first man, a red-faced fellow with untrimmed, sandy beard, laughed and switched from German to French. “Oh, I am a Swiss like you,” he explained, “though I have not seen Switzerland for many a year. I am a soldier by trade, and I served the British king. We DeMeurons are the pick of many countries.”

Walter did not like the man’s looks. He had seen swaggering, mercenary soldiers of fortune before, and he was not sorry when his bold-mannered countryman turned from him to make the acquaintance of his companions.

The voyageurs were hastily unloading. They had reached the end of the journey and were in a hurry to be paid off. Murray did not even wait for the unloading. Carrying his big bundle, he strode quickly towards the fort. Louis looked after him, swung a bale of goods to his back, and trotted up the slope.

Seeing no reason why he should stand idle when there was work to do, Walter shouldered a package and followed. As he reached the gate, three men came through, and he stepped aside to let them pass. The leading figure, a red-faced man of middle age and important air, cast a sharp glance at the boy. Walter’s clothes betrayed him.

“Ye’re na voyageur.” The man spoke peremptorily in Scotch sounding English. “Put down that packet and follow me. I’ve a few words to say to a’ of ye.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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