

# BY CANOE

By WALTER S. JOHNSON

**T**HERE have been, and there are still, thank heaven, certain unsophisticated folk whom we call conservative.

They are persons often of an old school, or trained amid conditions less complex than those which now obtain. Upstart schemes they abhor—that make of beauty, leisure, nerves, a continued sacrifice to time and speed. Old ways and things, old times and books and friends they love, because these appeal rather to the heart than to the head; they are a habit of life not easily put off, not a wearisome approximation to progress and fashion. They move slowly, read slowly—live slowly, in a confident endeavour to glean, as they live, carefully and thoroughly, all those quiet pleasures which, hidden along the by-paths of life, are revealed only to them. The treasures of the great world road had long ago been lost in garish undistinctive light, and its travellers too often confuse its pleasures and its pains.

Hazlitt, with his staff, and Ruskin, with his coach, are truly conservative. For there are three, and only three, ways of travelling, by coach, by foot, by canoe. Coaching and walking are peculiar to the more thickly populated countries, for both depend on good roads and on decent and frequent hostels. But in a new land where towns and villages are far apart, roads poor, and the cosy continental inn unknown, we are thrown back upon a less conventional, still more delightful means of locomotion. The holiday spent in the canoe is the ideal holiday. Drawing us away from our constant surroundings and from civilization to forests unmeasured and unblazed, and streams untraversed, it involves a primitive kind of life, and therefore very simple. Surpassing even the letter of the law, the canoeist can, whensoever the spirit moves him, take up at once his convey-

ance, shelter, bed and carry-all,—and walk.

To hie away from the roar of the great city and the inexorable pressure of its life, ending the journey beside some peaceful lake cradled among primeval hills and forests, is a pleasure indeed. One cannot but feel a thrill of freedom and exultation in coming thus into touch with nature in her wild simplicity. It is an opportunity for idealists to get back, if only for a short time, to simple, immemorial means of life, to experience its actualities, its positive needs. To early realize these needs means happiness, on the personal side at least. Nature does her part lavishly. These autumn days are hers—days flushed with beauty, grace and splendour, filling the mind with images of loveliness which, remembered with “a recollected love,” may be treasured through the coming years. Hills with their masses of colour flung together regardless of laws of art, banks of green picked out with intertwining wreaths of reddest vine leaves, gradations of maples with golden, brown and etiolated leaves, sumachs glowing with a deep rich wine-coloured red, pines dark and sombre, birches wan and leafless—the whole overspread by a pale blue sky flecked with clouds which cause wave after wave of succeeding light and shade, and bathed in the glow of an afternoon sun—these are nature’s appeal to you to be joyous. This health-giving pleasure of closer contact with nature, which is so abidingly ours, opens to the student of books and life a world of fresh thought and experience.

Stealing along dusky banks under old-time elms and maples which have nodded over many a war-party of Braves, over *coureurs de bois*, zealous Jesuit eager to save souls, or Frenchman aspiring to the conquest of a continent, we may be not of this present