



LAND TRAVEL IN ATHABASCA.

Chipewyan, I will invite your readers to accompany the others on their way to the western part of the diocese.

Embarking on board the twin-wheeler "Athabasca" on a bright, sunny afternoon of June 22, we steamed steadily up stream. The river here is almost unbrokenly flanked by pine, poplar, and birch-covered heights, and the more even tenor of its current broken by rapids of a minor character. About 9.30 p.m., the steamer draws in to the bank and is tied up for the night. Between 3 and 4 a.m., the sleeping passengers are disturbed by the harsh raking of the boilers, the splitting of huge billets of cordwood on the resounding deck, the blowing off of steam, the orders from the pilot-house to "let go the head-line," the tramp of hurrying feet, the short, peremptory rings of the pilot's bell; till, fairly under way, they are shaken to sleep again, like refractory children by the lively vibrations of the loose-jointed craft. About 8 p.m., Sunday morning, June 24th, saw us at the mouth of the Slave River, the connecting link between the Athabasca River and Lesser Slave Lake, and the outlet of the lake waters. Rapids in rather a narrow and tortuous channel prevent the steamer ascending. Six "inland boats" and "sturgeon heads" (*i.e.*, scows with rounded ends) were waiting to relieve the steamer of her load.

Short but hearty services were held by the kind permission of Mr. Leveck, of the Hudson Bay Co., in the steamer's saloon, at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. Early on Monday the din of unloading and loading commenced.

Our mission party had landed soon after arrival, and pitched their tents amid the thick, luxuriant grass, heavy with wet from frequent thunder showers. After dinner all was ready for a start. We took the places assigned us on the different boats. Their passenger accommodation is barely sitting room—a space, scant as it is, kept by no means free from the chance thrust of clumsy oars or the sawing motion of dripping ropes coming into unexpected and unpleasant contact with one's person.

The steamer had not been left much more than an hour before crew and passengers were exposed to a heavy storm of rain. As it seemed to have set in for a thorough night of rain, a

halt was called an hour earlier than usual. The line of boats, each pulling eight heavy oars, drew into the bank. The guide-boat picked out the best landing and the best camping spot. The rest had to take their chance. Soon the soaking wet grass, that seemed to bristle with threats of rheumatism at every point, was trampled down in all directions. Tents went up, and the tentless made temporary shelters with oars and sails. Axes were hard at work; fires sprung up where a "greenhorn" would have said that with such a soaking rain it was impossible to make fire. Fry-pans with huge chunks of ham were soon hissing over the blaze. Rough cakes consisting of flour, water, and baking powder were baking before the fire. The ruddy glare of the fires, the gleam of tents, laughter, talk, and merriment, enlivened what one brief hour before was a dripping, rain-soaked solitude in the gloaming of a wet night.

Each day saw the crews, now hauling on the line, now battling with poles and line against the strong rapids that are encountered on the earlier stages of this narrow, but picturesque river; each night saw a repetition of the first night, though, as a rule, made easier and fraught with less discomfort through the absence of rain.

Thursday night we encamped on the low, willow-grove flat through which, with a sluggish current, in strong contrast to the rapids and swift currents of its later course, the Slave River twists and turns in bends that cause the stream at times to run almost parallel and in the opposite direction to its course through a previous reach.

Next day the brigade swept out into the open lake; the all absorbing topic of conversation being the prospect of a fair, and therefore sail, wind.

The propulsion of these clumsy, heavy-laden boats, with rough, heavy, and ill-adjusted oars, is unpleasantly suggestive of what a sentence to the galleys must have been.

And though the half-breed men of Lesser Slave Lake are inured to the hardships and exposure of these trips, the seeds of weakness and consumption are often too fatally sown. They are, however, a light-hearted race, and are quick to make fun out of anything. They work in relays when tracking, and those in the boat are on the lookout for any misfortune or extra tough piece of work for those on the line.

Nothing amuses them so much as an involuntary ducking or sudden plunge into the mud by some unwary tracker. Nor, if opportunity offers, are the passengers exempt as a source of amusement.

On one occasion, on this route, I was accompanied by a student, fresh from St. John's College. He was commendably careful of his personal appearance, its culminating point being a helmet, at that time something gazed upon for the first time by these natives of the