

CAMP FIRE AND PINE WOOD.

HOW A BRITISHER FELT THEIR CHARM.

By DENIS CRANE. Author of "John Bull's Surplus Children," etc.

Strange how the spirit of adventure lurks in those who were born and bred in the city, and how the desire to penetrate and conquer wild nature sometimes possesses those who seemed destined to nothing more exciting than the cultivation of a garden plot.

Strange, but true. A woman delicately reared in the heart of Toronto, accompanied her husband at the call of business up into North Ontario. The summons put her loyalty to the test; friends and social pleasures were hard to leave. After some months in a prosperous settlement, duty took them a hundred miles or more into the bush. Here, for three years, among rough but honest men, they lived in a log hut, watching, across a silver lake, the sun each day mount up the opal skies of dawn and sink in crimson splendour behind the shadowy pines. Then the husband sent the wife on a five weeks' visit to the old home.

Back Alone.

"Within a week," said he, relating the story, "she wrote and asked me to fetch her back. Of course, I couldn't: I just told her to wait. Ten days later she had started back alone."

Something, perhaps, in this case, must be ascribed to Canadian blood. But the same holds true of men of British birth whose whole horizon until they reached maturity was bounded by a Leeds factory or a South-wark tenement.

Nor is the man of bookish and sedentary habit any more immune. I have known these pine woods, these unnavigated rivers, these still lakes, these gold and purple camp-fires, hold me with an ecstasy almost painful. Not comfort, not friends, not ambition, but wife and children only, have kept me sometimes from forsaking all for this siren call of the wild. And there are those whom even these sacred ties will not hold.

I remember once sitting on the high balcony of a little hotel, facing the setting sun. Right and left, fading away into purple haze, was pulp-wood and forest, dusky green the one, gorgeous the other in autumnal colouring.

The hotel stood in a clearing. Dwellings and business houses, from the first crude shack to the building of steel and concrete, were dotted everywhere; roads were cut, side-walks laid, churches built; all where five years before the moose and the black bear had roamed. The newness of the clearing was evidenced by the tree-stumps, whose fallen timbers the droning saw-mill behind me was cutting into beams and scantling.

My impressions are still so vivid that I lapse into the present tense. My eye dwells on a double line of steel that gleams, converging, to the west. Along it what a ride I had. Six of us, and a dog, for sixty miles, on a motor-trolley, with guns, a camera, and a provision bag.

At that time, the line was not yet open for traffic. It was part of the great Trans-continental, the Government-built line, that now links ocean to ocean. From Cochrane, the future metropolis of this fertile Northland, it pushed through forest and bush to join the portion creeping East. Just a few miles to the West, near McPherson, are those splendid acres which the Ontario Government has set aside for settlement by returned soldiers and sailors—settlement on "easy terms," if ever there were such, preceded by a period of free training at the Government Experimental Farm at Monteith.

Have you ever ridden on one of these gasoline speeders, that on four wheels and half a dozen planks will hustle eight men along at five-and-thirty miles an hour? A tonic to the venturesome, but to the nervous a protracted shock, it is an experience not to be forgotten, whether for its discomforts or for its delights.

It gives unrivalled opportunities of studying the country, for what it lacks in elevation it gains in facility for dismounting. Our view is shut in on either hand—with the exceptions to be presently spoken of—by spruce, cedar, jack pine and other growths valuable for fuel, for pulp, and for construction work. Right back they stretch, north and south, for hundreds of miles.

We are not so concerned with these, however, precious though they are to the settler as shelter-belts and for other purposes, as with the nature of the soil. The construction gangs have laid it bare in section—a super-soil of rich blackish quality, resting on a bed of alluvial clay.

Twenty million fertile acres, known as the Great Clay Belt, stretch through these Ontario northlands; though "northlands" is misleading. We are not away up near the Pole. "North" is a comparative term. These soldier farms are, in latitude, thirty miles south of Winnipeg, and nearly three hundred south of Edmonton; and hundreds of miles nearer than the Prairies to the Home Country.

Twenty million acres, capable of producing wheat equal to "Manitoba hard." Proof of its fertility is the abundance of clover found on the farmlands everywhere. Oats and barley are as full and heavy as those in Old Ontario, while timothy I have seen full six feet high. As to swedes, who can complain when they turn the scale anywhere from thirteen to eighteen pounds? For nothing tests the strength of soil like turnip growing. And what is to be said against cabbages weighing twenty pounds, potatoes three pounds, parsnips and field carrots twenty-six inches long, and blood beets measuring sixteen inches? These, however, on farms farther east and a few miles to the south. Along this line at present the settler is but beginning to move in, and hundreds of thousands of acres are available, near the line, for the man of stout heart and strong arm. Here and there we speed by clearings, right by the track-side, where pioneers and their families are already "making good."

Roads and Bridges.

The Government has expended large sums—upwards of half-a-million dollars yearly—in the construction of roads and bridges; and in addition to this expenditure from current revenue, a special appropriation of five million dollars was lately made for the development of the country, the major portion having been spent in cutting and grading great highways through the bush, so that the settler may the more easily reach his farm from the railway and the railway from his farm.

We alight at one of these roads running due north from the line, some dozen miles west of the hotel where I am sitting. It is a new avenue into a new world twenty-thousand square miles larger than the British Isles; and it thrills us with all the magic of new possibilities and a new escape from the tyranny of an artificial life.

Over rivers, too, we rush along—the Frederick House and the Mattagami, and

many smaller streams, and by lakes of great size and beauty, for the whole of the Northland is plentifully watered. Wild duck rise from the glassy surface of the lakes as we approach; the guns crack sharply, and, with furious tail and loudly vocal joy, Jess plunges in to fetch the quarry.

Our destination is a lumber camp, west of the Mattagami. The shadows have begun to gather when we run the speeder into a siding and thread our way through the bush to where a teamster is calling to his team. A big fellow he, in green jersey and buff-coloured pantaloons, the latter terminating in high-laced moose-skin boots. His throat is bare and a soft hat is jauntily set on his head. His pair of greys are taking a log to the riverside over a splendid road of sawdust and clay.

This road we follow into camp. No pen can describe the scene. A partial clearing has been made and in among the slender standing trees are timber eating-halls and dormitories, with residences for the overseers and sheds for the stores. In the precincts of the mill are stacks of pulp-wood; closer in, heaps of grubbed up roots for burning.

The Camp Fire.

Other heaps are already kindled. As the darkness deepens they give the scene an exquisite beauty. The fiercely glowing embers send up swirling streams of sparks, as weird figures stagger up with ponderous roots and fling them on the pile; and pellucid vapours, of everchanging hue, merge with the milky smoke against a background of purple-green, tipped with the last effulgence of the sunken sun.

We sit around on logs and eat a meal—chunks of bread and beef, and hunks of cake, that the cook has sent us. And as we eat we watch and hearken.

The men are coming in from work, their hairy breasts and arms abare, their axes on their shoulders. Young and hefty they are, in charge of an old soldier, "an officer and a gentleman." Listen! Round their camp-fire yonder they sing old folk songs, and the music swells, and dies, and swells again, making us somehow lift our eyes to the stars that begin to glisten palely through the boughs.

Reluctantly we slip away, not marvelling that men love solitude rather than cities, but understanding how it is that, when the camp becomes a town site, the old campaigner slings his axe and pushes again into the bush. And so we start upon our long ride in the dark-silent, huddled against the piercing rush of air, but exultant with the joy of life.

THE POPPY'S ANSWER.

By D. D. WINGET.

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In Flanders' fields we poppies grow
That all the passing world may know
We herald peace, surcease of pain.
For those who fought now live again,
Not in cold stone or mortal arts,
But in the depths of loving hearts.
We bloom afresh above our dead,
Our blossoms deck our heroes' bed
In Flanders' fields.

Our Father called us into bloom
To deck and shield each soldier's tomb,
To bask and glint in glory's gleam,
And fashion every soldier's dream,
As 'neath our roots he sweetly sleeps,
Each poppy true her vigil keeps,
And gently to the breeze she yields
Her soothing breath

In Flanders' fields.