

boats destined for the interior may deprive some important district of the means of traffic for the ensuing year, and necessitate the holding over of immense stocks of goods, to the serious derangement of trade, and a heavy curtailment of the annual profits. The matter of transportation, then, is one of vital importance to the fur-company, and is conducted with a care and system devoted, perhaps, to no other branch of a trade in which a close attention to details and routine are distinguishing features. Though the actual duties of freighting occupy but about four months in the year, yet the preparation pertinent to its perfect performance engrosses to a great extent the remaining eight. The result is a system so perfect that over the long courses traversed by the boat-brigades their arrival may be calculated upon almost to the hour; and the anxious trader may ascend his lookout-post with the certainty of seeing sweeping round the nearest point the well-laden boats, with swarthy crews bending low to their oars, and singing their weird *chansons* in time to the measured stroke.

The freighting-season begins about the first week in June, when the ice has disappeared from the rivers, and the spring supplies of merchandise destined for the interior have reached the depot forts. At that period the advance brigade of seven or eight boats leaves Fort Garry—now the principal point of forwarding in the service—followed a week after by yet another. This interval is allowed in order to prevent the meeting of the boats at any post, thereby creating undue bustle and confusion. These boats tend north and northwest toward Methy Portage and York Factory, there to meet other brigades from the remote arctic districts, to whom they deliver their cargoes, receiving in exchange the furs brought down from the interior posts—the proceeds of the year's trade. When this exchange is effected, each brigade retraces its course. The time occupied by the longest trip—that of Methy Portage, the height of land from which the waters flow into Hudson's Bay and the Arctic Ocean—is about four months. Numerous shorter trips are also made, and the whole country is alive during this season with advancing and returning boats.

The peculiar nature of the transportation service of the company necessitates certain conditions in freight, boats and boatmen pertaining to it, not elsewhere to be found. The entire water-carriage of the country is performed by means of what are technically called "inland boats," of three and a half tons' burden, and requiring nine men as crew. Of the shape of the ordinary whale-boat, they carry a small mast, unstepped at will, upon which, in crossing lakes, should the wind prove favorable, a square sail is set. A small platform or deck covers the stern of the vessel, upon which is seated the steersman, using at times the ordinary lever-rudder; again a long sweep, with one stroke of which the direction of the craft is radically changed. The steersman is captain of the vessel, the eight men under him being ranged as "middle-men," or rowers. A number of these boats constitute a brigade, over which a guide, skilled in the intricacies of current and coast, is

placed, and who may be regarded as the commodore of the fleet. His duty is to guide the brigade through dangerous waters, to support the authority of the steersmen, and to transact the business of the brigade at the stations touched *en route*. The position is an important one when properly filled, and is generally held by the same person until advancing years necessitate its relinquishment.

III.

RAPIDLY we sped down the waters of the turbid stream, and monotonously echoed the loud "ough!" of the *voyageurs* as they rose from their seats with each stroke of the oar, only to sink back again with a sudden jar as the broad blades left the water. Stately swans looking thoughtfully into the stream, tall cranes standing motionless on one leg, and docks of every hue disappearing behind the foliage screening the mouth of some creek or coolie, were the only living things to be seen. The landscape was monotonously splendid, and the hours passed in unvarying succession. Ten minutes in every hour were allowed the hardy *voyageurs* for rest; the long oars were lifted from the flood, from every fire-bag came pipes and tobacco, and the bark of the gray willow, mingled in equal proportion with the Indian weed, lent its fragrance to the morning air. After such pleasant interlude the paddles were plied with renewed vigor, and soon the woods disappeared; and the banks, which gradually sank to a lower level, became covered with the long, reedy grass marking the delta of the stream. Farther on, even the semblance of vegetation afforded by the reeds ceased abruptly, leaving naught but a sandy bar submerged at high tide, and the waters of an immense lake extending northward out of sight—a lake which stretched away into unseen places, and on whose waters a fervid June sun was playing strange freaks of mirage and inverted shore-land.

Upon the sand-bar at the outlet of the main channel our boats were run along-shore, and preparations ensued for the mid-day meal. Generally speaking, while voyaging, it is only allowable to put ashore for breakfast, a cold dinner being taken in the boats; but, as no *voyageur* could be expected to labor in his holiday-apparel, a halt was necessary before setting out upon the lake. The low beach yielded ample store of driftwood, the relics of many a northern gale, and of this a fire was lighted, and the dinner-apparatus arranged in the stern-sheets of the boat. The functions of the *chef*, limited to the preparation of pemmican in some palatable way, were simple enough. For trip-men pemmican is the unalterable bill-of-fare. It is the favorite food of the half-breed and Indian *voyageurs*, and is nearly altogether composed of buffalo-meat. The fresh meat is first cut into thin slices, then dried over a fire or in the sun, after which it is beaten into a thick, flaky substance. In this state it is placed in a bag, manufactured from the raw-hide of the animal, and the pulpy mass soldered down by melted fat poured over it, the proportions of fat and pounded meat being about equal. The best pemmican usually has sugar and service-