

of being told that we might go hungry until the issue of rations the following day. Crossing the Lake of the Woods was fraught with more danger than in any other place since we left Toronto, and it is almost a miracle that with such small boats and so badly equipped, some of them were not swamped. We camped on an island, not very far from the northwest angle, and the next morning was exceedingly calm and warm. We wended our way amongst innumerable uninhabited islands where no sound was heard but the dip of the oar in the waters at regular intervals, no sign whatever of man's handiwork anywhere. The surface of the water appeared to be covered over with a decomposed vegetable substance of a dark green color of convolvold growth, and which seemed to abound everywhere. When boiled it resembled pea soup. Before use we had to strain it through towels and such as had no towels used pocket handkerchiefs. Notwithstanding the straining process, the water was totally unfit for use and jeopardised the health of the troops to such an extent that its effects were felt for several days. Several of the boats got lost though the islands, and it took some time before all were brought together at Rat Portage. On the route from Shebandowan Lake the trees in the different islands, capes and projections were deprived of their bark, so that it was an easy matter even if there was no guide, for any one with a field glass to discover the proper route, but as it was originally intended to disembark at the northwest angle and march to Winnipeg, a distance of 110 miles this precaution was neglected. On the northern portion of the Lake of the Woods, it is probable that the barking of the trees was considered unnecessary. On account, however, of the Lake of the Woods road being impassable, the troops had no alternative but to make the detour by Rat Portage and the Winnipeg river.

The Lake of the Woods drains an immense area of country and its waters

flow into Lake Winnipeg, through Winnipeg river, whose outlet is some three miles from Rat Portage, a Hudson's Bay Company post, of some importance and managed by a Mr. McPherson. We were some time before we could discover the entrance from the Lake of the Woods into Winnipeg river. After considerable explorations, we came to a very high ridge of rocks, through a cleft of which, about 50 feet wide, water was running with great velocity. Through this narrow pass we propelled our boats and soon found ourselves in a broad expanse of lake or river about one mile and a half wide. Some few miles down the river were the falls of Rat Portage, which we approached with caution, believing that if Riel ever intended to oppose the progress of the expedition, this point would most likely be selected. And, indeed, if Riel had placed 200 men here under command of such a man as Dumont, of Batoche, Christmas day would likely have found the Red River expedition maneuvering around some island in the northern portion of the Lake of the Woods. Under such circumstances if an advance were successfully accomplished it would not be without a decimation in the ranks. Should ever war be declared between Canada and the United States, or trouble arise between the eastern and western provinces of this Dominion, Rat Portage, on account of its location, would be considered an important military point. By a glance at the map, it will be perceived that here communication may be maintained, or connection cut off between the eastern and western provinces of Canada. Whether peace continues to prevail, or war ensues, the writer predicts that before many years our military authorities will see the necessity of spending some money on fortifications and making Rat Portage a military stronghold. In case of an invasion of eastern Canada, possession of Rat Portage by the enemy would cut off communication with the great granaries of the prairie provinces.