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more information than he was forced to. One point only the constable had satisfied himself upon, namely, that the lost man had been at Fort St. John several times since he had been reported on the Buffalo; coming like an Arab in the night and departing as silently ere he was noticed.

For Fort St. John then Merrill steered his course. Sometimes he seemed in a sort of mental stupor, sitting for hours thinking, yet having no definite recollection of his thoughts, nor of what he saw as he passed. When the steamer arrived at the mouth of Lesser Slave Lake, he welcomed the heavier work of the sixteen mile portage; manual labor was a relief, for the enforced inaction had chafed him.

In the North, one is not of the elect until one has challenged the rigors of at least one winter. He had had several years' service in northern detachments and so was the better fitted to undertake a search of this nature. From a chance conversation overheard on the steamer, he came back from Fort St. John to the Little Buffalo River, having heard that the man he sought had again been seen there. Through two of the portages on this river the canoes had to be pushed, and the third one, which was three miles long, was through wet, swampy ground, where he sank to his knees in water and mud, and packing was rendered very hard work. Then he came to the banks of a beautiful slough which seemed as if at one time it had been a river. Merrill spent two days searching the slough and the country adjacent. He was rewarded and at the same time baffled by finding a box and the remains of a camper's outfit marked with the lost man's name.

Time after time, through many weary months, was he baffled in the same way. He followed in the dark or light, wherever the slightest clue offered, showing always the self-reliance and good judgment which men in lonely and isolated positions of responsibility often develop, for the human intellect has the power of enlarging itself to the height and compass of the emergencies by which it is forced.

Often as he paddled along some river, with a staid half-breed guide, or searched faint trails, he thought of the legend of the artist who used his life-blood in his palette and thus produced

masterpieces of coloring. It is heart work that tells and Merrill's whole heart and soul were in his quest. Sometimes he sat and pictured the future, and dreamed he saw the face of the girl who had inspired him.

The search had its pleasant aspects at times, however, for Merrill, thorough lover of nature as he was, saw much to admire. Once in crossing a bridge which the guide had informed him had been built long before the memory of any living Indian, he had an odd feeling that the girl was crossing with him. It was a real cantilever bridge, very old and frail and unsafe, built of fir, tied together with willow bark and very old rope, hanging over a canon about seventy feet wide.

Some days after this incident, he was paddling on the Peace. In the twilight its broad waters glided along with a low purring murmur; the horizon line was outlined by a fluctuating rim of the Northern Lights, the headland was bare save for a few squat poplars, but long and black and undulating, and as it grew darker, the half-revealed face of the moon creeping up behind one of the hills, making silver rays across the water. He had covered over a thousand miles and while he fought on with Anglo-Saxon tenacity which by some immutable law refused to allow him to acknowledge himself beaten, yet hope was low within him.

Peering along the shore he dipped, but the paddle did not touch the water, on the side of Bald Hill he had noticed something bent over, something which very much resembled a man with a pack. Instantly he drew into the shadows and watched. Yes, it moved, it crept up the side of the hill; it acted as if fearful of discovery, crouching and turning, sometimes even going on all fours. Merrill waited with quivering nerves and strained attention. He lay till he thought it safe to follow. Step by step up the trail he went, with only a broken twig or a footprint here and there to guide him. Day after day he still took the trail, finding papers and other things thrown away by the fugitive, which aroused every ounce of energy in him.

Then he was balked. All traces disappeared; he was in a strange country, with his provisions almost exhausted, so he painfully retraced his steps as nearly as possible. When about half way back,



He advanced to the tepee and tent and covered its occupants.

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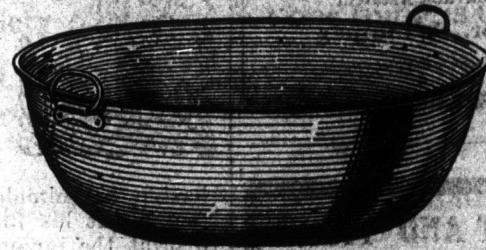
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