

PLEASANT HOURS

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CANOE LIFE IN THE GREAT NORTH-WEST.

BY THE EDITOR.

WHAT the horse is to the Arab, the camel to the desert traveller, or the dog to the Esquimaux, the birch-bark canoe is to the Indian. The forests along the river shores yield all the material requisite for its construction; cedar for its ribs, birch-bark for its outer covering; the twigs of the juniper to sew together the separate pieces, and the resin of the spruce to give resin for the seams and crevices.

"And the forest life is in it—
All its mystery and magic,
All the lightness of the birch-tree,
All the toughness of the cedar,
All the larch's supple sinews,
Like a yellow leaf in autumn,
Like a yellow water lily."

During the summer season the canoe is the home of the red man. It is not only a boat, but a house; he turns it over him as a protection when he camps; he carries it long distances over land from lake to lake. Frail beyond words, yet he loads it down to the water's edge. In it he steers boldly out into the broadest lake, or paddles through wood and swamp and reedy shallows. Sitting in it he gathers his harvest of wild rice, or catches fish, or steals upon his game; dashes down the wildest rapid, braves the foaming torrent, or lies like a wild bird on the placid waters. While the trees are green, while the waters dance and sparkle, and the wild duck dwells in the edgy ponds, the birch-bark canoe is the red man's home.

And how well he knows the moods of the river! To guide his canoe through some whirling eddy, to shoot some roaring waterfall, to launch it by the edge of some fiercely-rushing torrent, or dash down a foaming rapid, is to be a brave and skilful Indian. The man who does all this, and does it well, must possess a rapidity of glance, a power in the sweep of his paddle, and a quiet consciousness of skill, not attained save by long years of practice.

An exceedingly light and graceful craft is the birch-bark canoe; a type of speed and beauty. So light that one man can easily carry it on his shoulders over land where a waterfall obstructs his progress; and as it only sinks five or six inches in the water, few places are too shallow to float it. In this frail barque, which measures anywhere from twelve to forty feet long, and from two to five feet broad in the middle, the Indian and his family travel over the innumerable lakes and rivers, and the fur-hunters pursue their lonely calling.

Canoe travel in the Fur Land presents many picturesque phrases. Just as the first faint tinge of coming dawn steals over the east, the canoe is lifted gently from its edge of rock and laid upon the water. The blankets, the kettles, the guns, and all the paraphernalia of the camp, are placed in it, and the swarthy voyageurs step lightly in. All but one. He remains on the shore to steady the barque on the water, and keep its sides from contact with the rock. The passenger takes his place in the centre, the outside man springs gently in, and the birch-bark canoe glides away from its rocky resting-place.

Each hour reveals some new phase of beauty, some changing scene of lonely

grandeur. The canoe sweeps rapidly over the placid waters; now buffets with, and advances against, the rushing current of some powerful river, which seems to bid defiance to further progress; again, is carried over rocks and through deep forests, when some foaming cataract bars its way. With a favouring breeze there falls upon the ear the rush and roar of water, and the canoe shoots toward a tumbling mass of

rapid is thus ascended, sometimes scarcely gaining a foot a minute, again advancing more rapidly, until at last the light craft floats upon the very lip of the fall, and a long smooth piece of water stretches away up the stream.

But if the rushing or breasting up a rapid is exciting, the operation of shooting them in a birch bark canoe is doubly so. As the frail birch-bark nears the rapid from

rush, then falls upon his knees again. Without turning his head for an instant, the sentient hand behind him signals its warning to the steersman. Now there is no time for thought; no eye is quick enough to take in the rushing scene. There are strange currents, unexpected whirls, and backward eddies and rocks—rocks rough and jagged, smooth, slippery and polished—and through all this the canoe glances like an arrow, dips like a wild bird down the wing of the storm.

All this time not a word is spoken, but every now and again there is a quick twist of the bow paddle to edge far off some rock, to put her full through some boiling billow, to hold her steady down the slope of some thundering chute.

MAKING DIMES.

THE United States mint in San Francisco is said to be the largest institution of the kind in the world. Just at the present time there is a lively demand for silver dimes, and two of the money presses have for some time been running exclusively on this coin. The process of dime making is an interesting one. The silver bullion is first melted and run into two pound bars. These in turn are run through immense rollers and flattened out to the thickness of the coin. These silver strips are then passed through a machine, which cuts them into proper size for the presses, the strips having first been treated with a kind of tallow to prevent their being scratched in their passage through the cutters. The silver pieces are then put into the feeder of the printing presses, and are fed to the die by automatic machinery at the rate of one hundred per minute, forty eight thousand dimes being turned out in a regular working day of eight hours.

As the smooth pieces are pressed between two ponderous printing dies, they receive the letters and figured impression in a manner similar to that of a paper pressed upon a form of type. At the same time the piece is expanded in a slight degree and the small corrugations are cut into its rim.

The machine drops the completed coin into a receiver, and is ready for the counter's hands. The instrument used by the counter is not a complicated machine. It is a simple copper coloured tray, having raised ridges running across its surface at a distance apart the exact width of a dime. From the receiver the money is dumped on a board or tray; and as it is shaken rapidly by the counter the pieces settle down into the spaces between the ridges. All these spaces being filled, the surplus coin is brushed back into the receiver, and the counter has exactly 1,250 dimes, or \$125, on his tray, which number is required to fill the spaces. The tray is then emptied into boxes, and the money is ready for shipment. The dime does not pass through the weigher's hands, as does the coin of a larger denomination. One and one-half grains is allowed for variation or "tolerance" in all silver coins from a dollar down, and the deviation from the standard in the case of the ten-cent piece is so trifling that the trouble and expense of weighing coins of this denomination is dispensed with.

Show your sense by saying much in a few words.



SHOOTING A RAPID.

spray and foam, studded with huge projecting rocks which mark a river rapid. As the canoe approaches the foaming flood, the voyageur in the bow—the important seat in the management of the canoe—rises upon his knees, and closely scans the wild scene before attempting the ascent. Sinking down again, he seizes the paddle, and pointing significantly to a certain spot in the chaos of boiling water before him, dashes into the stream. Yard by yard the

above, all is quiet. The most skilful voyageur sits on his heels in the bow of the canoe, the next best oarsman similarly placed in the stern. The bowsman peers straight ahead with a glance like that of an eagle. The canoe, seeming like a cockleshell in its frailty, silently approaches the rim where the waters disappear from view. On the very edge of the slope the bowsman suddenly stands up, and bending forward his head, peers eagerly down the eddying