

# HAPPY DAYS

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## CANOE LIFE IN THE GREAT NORTH-WEST.

BY THE EDITOR.

What the horse is to the camel to the desert traveller, or the Eskimo, 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 thews of the juniper to sew together the separate pieces; red pine 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 overland 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 waddles through wood and swamp, and reedy shallow. Sitting in it he gathers his harvest of wild rice, or catches fish, or steals upon his game; 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 sedgy ponds, the birch-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

floats 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 phases. Just as the first faint tinge of coming dawn steals over the east, the canoe is lifted gently from its ledge 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 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 favoring breeze there falls upon the ear the rush and roar of water; and the canoe shoots toward a tumbling mass of 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



SHOOTING A RAPID.

is the birch-bark canoe; a type of speed and beauty. So light that one man can easily carry it on his shoulders overland where a waterfall obstructs his progress; and as it only sinks five or six inches in the water, few places are too shallow to

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 to a certain spot in the chaos of boiling water before him,