

what, in our excitement, we had omitted to observe—that not one of the savages was armed.

The relief from the tension of mind experienced by men nerved for a desperate encounter, who suddenly find that the enemy has vanished into smoke, can be better imagined than described. The ludicrousness of the situation struck us so forcibly that we gave way to prolonged peals of the heartiest laughter that have ever rung on the quiet bosom of the great Yukon.

It has been my lot to meet many Indians roaming the vast tracts from British Columbia to Labrador; but, of all the miserable creatures I ever saw, these were, without exception, the worst, the poorest, and the most unintelligent. It is needless to say that none of our party understood anything they said, as they could not speak a word of any language but their own. As an instance of their stupidity, I may mention that, wanting to buy some tea and other provisions from me, they tendered in payment the tin stamps that are put by some manufacturers on plugs of tobacco. These they signified to me had been given to them by the coast Indians in exchange for furs. It is possible they had taken them off the tobacco brought to them by these Indians, and were trying to swindle me, but I am inclined to think not.

They were engaged in salmon fishing at the mouth of the Tatshun, and I tried by signs to get some information from them about the stream they were fishing in, but I failed. I tried, in the same way, to learn if there were any more Indians in the vicinity, but again I utterly failed. I then tried by signs to find out how many days it took to go down to Pelly River, but, although I have never known these signs to fail in eliciting information in any other part of the territory, they did not understand.

One thing, however, they did comprehend. Thinking that my men

would relish some fresh fish, and knowing that these Indians are expert fishers, I took some silver from my pocket and, holding it in my hand, went through a little pantomime performance. The Indians gravely watched me pointing to their nets and to the river, and making the motion of giving the coins. Two of them understood what was wanted, and catching up their nets, sprang down the bank with great alacrity. They were gone about ten minutes, returning with three fine salmon.

As their mode of catching salmon is identical with that mysterious process witnessed by Schwatka further down the river, and which appears to have puzzled him greatly, I may describe it briefly.

The fish, in their long journey up from the sea—nearly two thousand miles—naturally follow the slack current in the shallow water near the shore, and they swim generally about two feet below the surface. One can easily trace their passage through the water by the slight ripple which they make on the surface, and, as they cannot see in the muddy water, they may, with care, be taken by gently placing a scoop-net in their way and lifting them out when they enter it. *Voilà tout le mystère?* The Indian judges the depth by the size and character of the advancing ripple, and simply moves his net to and fro, keeping it always directly in front of the unsuspecting fish. The salmon are passing constantly, thousands every day, so that an Indian youth has plenty of practice and soon becomes expert in this peculiar mode of fishing. No picturesque watcher on the bank was seen, nor was any extraordinary power of vision necessary, the ripple being plainly visible to every one. On the way down the Lewes, the first of these "salmon ripples" noticed by us was about twenty-five miles above Five Finger Rapids. I have frequently seen them on the Thompson and Fraser rivers and